

**SHIPWRECK AT CAPE FLORA:
THE EXPEDITIONS OF BENJAMIN LEIGH SMITH,
ENGLAND'S FORGOTTEN ARCTIC EXPLORER**
P.J. Capelotti

ISBN 978-1-55238-712-2

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



THE AWAKENING TO A NEW LIFE, 1874–1879



On September 29th, 1873, the General noted with approval that *The Times* of that morning contained “tidings of the arrival of the *Diana* at Dundee – all well including 21 sailors.”¹ A few days later, Leigh Smith returned home. His niece Mabel was putting on an amateur family play, of the kind that Leigh Smith himself had acted in with Barbara and Bella twenty years earlier. The play was rewritten at the last minute to include a scene where a page played by Willy’s son rushes in with the news of the return from the Arctic of the famous Benjamin Leigh Smith, to the vast amusement of The Explorer himself.² By November, the photographic imagery from the expedition had been developed and Leigh Smith proudly displayed them for his extended family.

After three major forays into the Arctic, Leigh Smith now made an attempt to return to his former life as a wealthy squire, dividing his life between his estate at Glottenham in East Sussex and his townhouse on Gower Street in London. Much of this duty – for now it must have seemed – revolved around parties and politics. When Mabel had her birthday in December of that year, it was Leigh Smith as head of the family who decreed that she should have her grandmother’s watch. In May of 1874, Leigh Smith gave a ball for his nieces and nephews at Gower Street. At another gathering later that year, the General noted that Leigh Smith was “the spirit of our party,” letting a governess know that he was “game for anything.”³ He attended another ball as the escort of Herbert Cherm-side’s younger sister, an age difference that must have fallen somewhere in the range of two and a half decades. He made a trip to California and returned with a bagful of seeds from the giant *Wellingtonia* trees of

Yosemite. These he planted on his estates as well as on the property of the General. The giant sequoias, extremely tall though still in their relative infancy, can be seen there today.

He was asked to stand again for Parliament but did not. It seemed that the more Leigh Smith tried to focus on a return to his former life, on the gardens and trees at Glottenham and the political arguments in London, the more matters in the Arctic refused to sit still. For a man who had watched as a ghost ship drifted towards the North Pole from the Sjuøyane, politics must have by now lost whatever attractions they once held.

Moreover, those events in the north were moving rapidly, and they involved both new expeditions and Leigh Smith himself. In the spring of 1874, in recognition of his relief of Nordenskiöld, Oscar II, the King of Sweden and Norway, conferred upon him the knighthood of the Order of the Polar Star. The General, who would have clearly understood the transcendent magnitude of such an international honor, wrote to Barbara asking whether Leigh Smith would ask the Queen to recognize his Swedish knighthood. Such a request, however, was never on the cards, not least given Leigh Smith's reticence to accept public accolades for his work. In the end, there was no ceremony accompanying the decoration: the medal and brooch were simply mailed to Leigh Smith from the Swedish Legation in London.⁴

The royal honor must have touched a nerve, as it was one his own country would never bestow upon him and his pioneering work. Soon thereafter, to make matters worse, a more serious threat to Leigh Smith's work arrived by way of a cutting review article in the influential quarterly, *Edinburgh Review*.⁵ This anonymous essay took an easy shot at Leigh Smith's oceanographic results from the 1872 expedition, "in a way," noted the General, "that cannot fail to displease him."⁶ The startling observations that showed higher temperatures in the deep-ocean than at the surface were dismissed as the failure of instrumentation. This jab ignored the fact that Leigh Smith noted such results in two consecutive years, data corroborated by similar observations by Weyprecht and Payer. But with all else it was enough to keep one away from medal ceremonies.

Some of the sting of this criticism must have been ameliorated later that same summer. Jane, Lady Franklin, who had spent the last thirty

years of her life successfully agitating for one expedition after another to go in search of her husband and his crew, passed away in mid-summer, 1875, and Leigh Smith, as a newly and internationally recognized polar explorer, was asked to serve as one of the pallbearers. Once again, the General recognized the importance of the request and the event. He was quick to note that such a request, given Lady Franklin's enduring fame in British society, was a high compliment indeed.

As in all such commemorations, great and small, there was an unspoken subtext at work. In a greater context, the *Edinburgh Review* article, combined with the death of Lady Franklin, highlighted what had been obvious for some time: the British Government had abandoned the field of Arctic exploration and the pursuit of the North Pole for more than twenty years. Robert McClure, who led the HMS *Investigator* on a search for John Franklin in 1850, was awarded credit for the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Though he did not actually sail through the passage and, moreover, lost his ship in the process, McClure's subsequent sledging work near Banks Island confirmed its existence. In the view of many, there were no remaining objectives in Arctic exploration worth the price that would have to be exacted to gain them. With the passing of Lady Franklin, a three-decade saga of British misery in Arctic exploration seemed at last at an end.

As the Royal Navy left the field, explorers from other nations took up the challenge of the North Pole. While Leigh Smith explored the northern coast of Svalbard in 1871, Charles Francis Hall followed Kane's route between Greenland and Baffin Island. Throughout the years of the American Civil War, Hall had lived with Inuit in Arctic Canada, hoping to learn from them the fate of Franklin. Through his ground-breaking ethnographic studies, Hall made several major discoveries by way of local knowledge, including the location of the remains of an encampment from Martin Frobisher's Northwest Passage expedition of three hundred years earlier. And by interviewing Inuit on King William Island, Hall came as close to certain knowledge of Franklin's fate as any explorer before or since.

In recognition of his expertise, Hall in 1871 was placed in command of a U.S.-sponsored vessel called *Polaris*, with the express mission of reaching the North Pole. Unlike Kane's difficulties in the same area,

Hall breezed through Kennedy Channel and on into a wider basin beyond that he named after himself. Hall and *Polaris* eventually reached the very northern shores of Greenland, the highest point attained by any ocean vessel to that date. At this point, as a highly experienced Arctic traveler, Hall was poised for a meaningful strike for the Pole in the spring of 1872.

At the moment of his expected triumph, however, Hall was taken violently ill. Before he died that October, he complained that he was being poisoned by, among others, the Smithsonian Institution scientist on board the ship. In fact, nearly one hundred years later, a Dartmouth College English professor and biographer of Hall's by the name of Chauncey Loomis, decided to test Hall's suspicions. He received permission to exhume Hall's body from the frozen shoreline of Polaris Harbor, in far north-western Greenland, where the explorer had been buried. From the frozen corpse, Loomis took small clippings of Hall's hair and fingernails. When these were tested, the world learned that Hall had indeed been poisoned. Unfortunately, the results were not dispositive, as Hall could have done the deed himself, overdosing on the arsenic that was used at the time as both medicine and poison.⁷

For Leigh Smith, as interesting as these events were, they paled next to a new polar expedition being launched from northern Norway. Just as Hall lay dying in Greenland, the Austro-Hungarian North Pole Expedition on board the three-masted ship *Tegetthoff* departed from the fjord at Tromsø. The expedition was led by his old friends Julius Payer and Karl Weyprecht, the same men who had dined on fresh cod on board *Sampson* with Leigh Smith in Tromsø harbor in 1871. The day after the crew of *Sampson* discovered the coal lying about Grønfjorden, Weyprecht and Payer made the much more stunning discovery of a previously unknown landmass east of Svalbard. They immediately named it for their emperor: Kaiser Franz-Josef's Land. As Payer later wrote: "That day brought a surprise, such as only the awakening to a new life can produce."⁸

At the time of this momentous discovery, in August of 1873, Weyprecht was thirty-five years old and had served in the Austrian navy from the age of eighteen. The *Tegetthoff* had been named after a prominent admiral in that navy, under whom Weyprecht had served. Weyprecht had volunteered in 1868 to lead the first German North Polar Expedition, but ill-health forced him to pass command to Captain Karl Koldewey.

Koldewey then led the small expedition around Svalbard in the vessel *Grönland*, but did not succeed in advancing further than Parry in 1828. The following year, with two vessels, *Germania* and *Hansa*, Koldewey made another attempt to reach the pole, this time along the coast of northeastern Greenland. *Hansa* was caught and sunk by the ice, and the *Germania* reached only a bit north of Shannon Island at lat. 75°30' N in mid-August. There the expedition was forced to overwinter. But Koldewey's surveyor, a twenty-eight-year-old from the spa town of Teplitz in Bohemia by the name of Julius Payer, succeeded in mapping Shannon Island and much of the surrounding coastline, including an inlet later named Kaiser Franz-Josef Fjord.

In the spring of 1871, after Weyprecht had regained his health and was placed at the head of a new Arctic expedition, Payer joined him as a kind of co-commander and geographic surveyor. The failure of Koldewey's expeditions to penetrate very far toward the pole from either the north coast of Svalbard or the east coast of Greenland, led Weyprecht and Payer to seek a new way northwards much further to the east, along the coast of Novaya Zemlya. This is how they came to be in the same harbor in Tromsø as Leigh Smith in June of 1871, while following much the same plan as the Englishman, being based on the prevailing and influential geographical ideas of August Petermann.

Petermann had written hundreds of articles on the development of polar exploration and as a result became known as the father of German polar exploration. Like U.S. Navy oceanographic researcher Matthew Fontaine Maury, Petermann was both a nineteenth-century expert in the study of ocean currents and an indefatigable theorist on the causes and effects of such currents, especially in the Arctic. Petermann espoused these theories through the geographical research journal he founded, the *Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes' Geographischer Anstalt über wichtige neue Erforschungen auf dem Gesamtgebiete der Geographie* (Reports from Justus Perthes' Geographical Institution upon Important New Investigations in the Whole Subject of Geography) – known ultimately and more popularly as *Petermann's Geographische Mitteilungen*. Though his reputation in his later years and after his suicide in September of 1878 suffered as it became clear that his support for such ultimate Arctic chimeras as an “Open Polar Sea” was mistaken, he is credited with advancing polar research not only

in Germany but in Russia, Sweden, Norway, America, France and, in the case of Weyprecht and Payer, in Austria-Hungary.

After training as a cartographer in Germany, Petermann worked from 1845 to 1848 as a mapmaker in Edinburgh, coincidentally the same three disastrous years of the Franklin expedition. The search for Franklin became the touchstone for many of Petermann's ideas and hypotheses about the Arctic, and his *Historical Summary of the Search for Sir John Franklin* (1853), typified Petermann's collation of vast amounts of data – much of it collected by the captains of Norwegian *jakts* – in an apparently neutral essay, which he then diverts in support of Arctic expeditions designed to test his hypotheses.⁹ The *Summary* is nominally a history of all the attempts to find Franklin between 1848 and 1853. But it moves at length from the primary object of these relief expeditions, to a discussion of the immediate geographic and future expeditionary benefits of the search. These are defined as the location and character of newly discovered coastlines and Arctic Ocean currents, as well as the seeming paradox of the survival of relatively small overwintering vessels like the American Grinnell expedition ships *Advance* and *Rescue*, as compared to the mounting evidence that Franklin's much larger ships *Erebus* and *Terror* had been destroyed.

The Franklin disaster eventually led Petermann to conclude that the North Pole would not be reached from the American side of the Arctic, where the highest latitude reached by any of the Franklin searchers was Inglefield's lat. 78°35' N. He proposed instead a route to the pole from the European high Arctic. There, in the ice-covered seas north of Svalbard, Parry had already pushed beyond the 82nd parallel. Petermann also made the rather fantastic suggestion that the search for Franklin be extended further west from the Canadian Arctic to the north coast of Siberia, and this became one of the few suggestions regarding polar exploration that the British Admiralty wisely tabled.

Petermann, who after Edinburgh worked as a cartographer in London for several years, returned to Germany in 1854 to become director of Perthes Geographical Institution in Gotha. It was there, a year later, that he founded the *Mitteilungen*. His view of polar geography, in particular of a warm ocean current flowing into the Arctic Ocean from the Gulf Stream as well as his notion of a far northern extension of the landmass of Greenland, were published on his map, *Karte der arktischen und antarktischen*

Regionen zur Übersicht des geographischen Standpunktes in J. 1865, der Meeresströmungen (Map of the Arctic and Antarctic Regions Reflecting the Geographical Points of View in 1865, [and] the Sea Currents)¹⁰

Petermann's belief in an Open Polar Sea derived from more than his study of ocean currents. Early nineteenth-century expeditions such as those of the Finnish-Russian Matvey Hedenström and the Baltic-German Ferdinand Wrangell had discovered areas of open water, so-called *polynya*, in the Arctic Ocean north of Siberia. It was this term for an area of open water within an ice pack, borrowed from the Russian ПОЛЫНЬЯ, that Captain Wells used when he wrote that Leigh Smith's 1872 expedition was in search of *The Gateway to the Polynia*.

Elisha Kent Kane's account of the Second Grinnell expedition in search of Franklin describes how two of his men stood at lat. 81°22' N, a point Kane later named Cape Constitution, and heard "the novel music of dashing waves; and a surf."¹¹ Petermann did not believe in an Arctic Ocean completely free of ice, as Kane did after he heard this oceanic music, but Petermann did suggest that explorers would find a sea around the pole that was at least partially filled with manageable levels of navigable ice, broken by wind, storms, currents, rain, fog, and especially by the continuous summer light.

Petermann divided his polar sea into two roughly equal sectors. He created isothermal maps, traced the drift of glass bottles around the polar basin, and followed the reported presence of animals on various islands. All these data allowed him to hypothesize a far northern extension of Greenland. This extension, which he thought might exist as either an undersea ridge or as a land bridge into the central Arctic, bisected the polar basin and created in effect two polar oceans, one north of Canada and eastern Siberia, and the other north of Svalbard, Franz Josef Land and western Siberia. To the barrier of ice discovered by expeditions like Kane's that searched north from Baffin Bay, Petermann ascribed the name "Pack-Ice Sea." The route to the pole, he was convinced, would be found in the sea north of Svalbard, which he fashioned as the "Floating-Ice Sea."

To investigate these hypotheses, Petermann had personally sponsored the 1868 German geographic expedition led by Koldewey on board the *Grönland*. The following year, the track of the second German polar expedition led by Koldewey with the *Germania* was based on Petermann's

belief the ice northeast of his imagined Greenland extension might loosen enough to allow a passage to the North Pole. Instead, this same ice pinned *Germania* to the East Greenland coast for ten months in 1869–70.

Petermann extended his dual-sea theory to anthropology, arguing that the East Greenland Inuit must have migrated out of Asia westwards, not eastwards. In his later years, even as he came to question many of his own ideas, Petermann clung to the idea that peninsulas leading northwards from both Greenland and Franz Josef Land converged somewhere near the North Pole. Indeed, an Arctic mirage that Payer mistook for a landmass north of Franz Josef Land he named for Petermann. By the time polar explorers discovered the non-existence of Petermann Land, Petermann himself was long dead and so was the theory of the *polynya* and the Open Polar Sea.

In the spring of 1871, Petermann had placed his blessing upon the first expedition of Weyprecht and Payer in the *Isbjørn*, an Austro-Hungarian effort financed by Count Johann Nepomuk Wilczek. Payer stressed that this initial journey was to be “a voyage of reconnaissance” and “a pioneer expedition to the seas of Novaya Zemlya.”¹² It was in fact a kind of proving expedition that had to be undertaken before any kind of serious request could be undertaken to the Austrian government for a major expedition involving multiple years in a more powerful vessel. The governing objective would be Gillis’ Land, that mystical island somewhere in the eastern sector of Svalbard, but the rationale for choosing the eastern coast of Svalbard was Petermann’s belief that a warm tendril of the Gulf Stream would clear the way for any expedition adopting this route. No attempt would be made to reach the North Pole, because the budget the expedition had at its disposal would preclude the charter of a vessel large enough for any such ambition. But they would be able to study the prevailing environmental conditions to see if a larger ship and more ambitious plan might be seized in 1872.

The ship Weyprecht and Payer settled on, the *Isbjørn*, was a new, 55-foot cutter commanded by an experienced Norwegian skipper named Johan Kjeldsen. With bows protected from pack ice by a four-foot band of sheet iron, the vessel drew six feet of water. Like *Sampson* in 1871, she sailed with an all-Norwegian crew from the Arctic port of Tromsø. The Norwegians would run the ship, while Weyprecht and Payer gave

general directional desires and then stood back and made their geographical observations with instruments supplied by the Imperial Geographical Institute. The Tromsømen warned the nominal expedition leaders that, Petermann notwithstanding, approaching Gillis' Land from the south was a losing proposition. They had sailed in that area and let the Austro-Hungarians know that the seas there were as unfavorable as they were unforgiving. To compound matters, the spring of 1871 had been a harsh one, and when Weyprecht and Payer arrived in Tromsø in June they found northern Norway still covered in snow. Rumor had it that the ice was pressing down on mainland Norway itself, as close as twenty nautical miles from North Cape.

But the lure of Gillis' Land would not be denied. The expedition would try to reach the southern coast of Hope Island (Hopen) and then sail eastwards, probing the ice barrier in hopes of finding Petermann's Gulf Stream-induced corridor northwards.

The expedition left Tromsø, appropriately enough, in a snow-storm on June 20th. The ship ran aground on the way out of the fjord and soon met with vessels that had preceded *Isbjørn* by several weeks but because of unfavorable winds had yet to reach their sealing grounds. Payer thought the area was "indescribably bleak ... secluded ... lonely."¹³ He describes fishing villages of magnificent isolation whose impoverished inhabitants looked upon modest towns like Tromsø and Hammerfest as the two great cities of their world. It was not until June 26th that *Isbjørn* shook free of this remote world of rocky outports and reached the sea proper, and just two days after that came into the ice. For the seasoned Payer, the sight of the ice was like coming home.

Isbjørn sailed through forty nautical miles of drift ice before hitting the main pack at lat. 74°30' N, southeast of Bjørnøya. The small sailing vessel was quickly beset and, in heavy seas lasting more than a week, as the ice continued to press in, one of the small boats was destroyed and the rudder was made fast to prevent it from being torn loose. Then, just as suddenly, the skies cleared and the seas softened.

Payer writes:

The day broke: what a change in the ice! The sea was calm, and a long swell died out on its outer edge. Piles of ice all around

us – a weird and deathlike calm! The heavens were cloudless; the countless blocks and masses of ice stood out against the sky in blue neutral shadow, and the more level fields between them sparkled like silver as they shone in the sun. The movement of the sea beyond the ice abated, “leads” within the floes, hitherto scarcely perceptible, widened out.¹⁴

By the 10th of July, just as Leigh Smith on *Sampson* was reaching the west coast of Svalbard for the first time, *Isbjørn* put on all sail and for several days pounded through a variable sea of young ice. Ten days later, the expedition had gained the 75th parallel. As their respective Norwegian sailing vessels struggled with the ice throughout the summer, Payer and Leigh Smith were having many of the same ideas about future exploration. As Payer writes: “Though drift-ice lay on every side, a steamer would have found nothing to arrest her progress.”¹⁵ And both were ready to ditch their recalcitrant Norwegian crews in favor of their own countrymen, who would both speak the same language and respond to the demands of authority when ordered to pursue a nebulous geographic target.

Realizing the hopelessness of maneuvering very far northwards given the weaknesses of *Isbjørn* and its crew, Weyprecht turned northwestwards in hope of finding a harbor on the eastern coast of Svalbard that might serve as a future staging area for a proper expedition. They cruised along the coast of Hopen, again trying to reach Gillis’ Land, before being blown westwards. They made for Walter-Thymen’s Straits (now Freemansundet), at the same moment that Leigh Smith was almost directly north of them and beginning his penetration into Hinlopenstretet. Winds blew them past South Cape (Sørkapp) and into Hornsund. There the expedition was trapped for the better part of two weeks before *Isbjørn* escaped and again attempted to sail northwestwards.

They were off Edgeøya on August 14th and six weeks of grinding in the ice had taken a toll on the ship. As Payer writes, *Isbjørn* “was in so bad a condition, that part of the bows under the water-line was shattered, and some timbers of the hull were forced in... [The iron plating] had been broken off like so many chips.”¹⁶ An attempt to cruise along the southeastern coastline of Nordaustlandet until they found a harbor (perhaps Vibebukta) where *Isbjørn* could be anchored and the surviving

small boat launched in search of Gilles' Land was abandoned when the expected ice-free coastal waters along Nordaustlandet never materialized. There was no warm tendril waiting to carry them north.

Hoping to salvage something of what had been to that point a rather desultory effort at pioneering the icy seas east of Svalbard, they retreated to the unknown western coast of Storfjorden and began a geological investigation of that area. Turning southwestwards, they landed the whale boat at Hopen, where they found equal measures of brown coal and Siberian driftwood. They tried to explore Kong Karls Land but adverse winds forced them back. Weyprecht and Payer wanted to press on, even as the sun set for the first time on August 24th, and it was clear that Captain Kjeldsen and his men had had enough. The Austro-Hungarians prevailed on them to push eastwards for a few more days, and it was then that they at last found some open water which they sailed through all the way to long. 42° E, and all the way north to the 78th parallel. By August 31st, they had penetrated deeply into the Barents Sea, farther than any ship before them in those longitudes and, at lat. 78°38' N, saw no serious ice before them. A run along the ice brought them on September 5th to long. 56° E. They were groping in the right area for new lands in the Arctic, for there was an unseen and undiscovered Arctic country just over their northern horizon.

But the new land remained out of their vision. The lateness of the season, the increasingly battered condition of *Isbjørn*, and the opposition of Kjeldsen to going any farther in such high latitudes soon to be filled with ice, compelled them to turn southeast. Had they possessed a steam vessel, Weyprecht and Payer likely would have discovered Franz Josef Land during their 1871 reconnaissance expedition, instead of the following year as they did. Instead, they veered southeast until *Isbjørn* was off Novaya Zemlya on September 12th. Once again unfavorable winds kept them from a landing, and at last they were compelled to make for Norway, much to the relief of Captain Kjeldsen, who now had a heavily damaged ship and a sick crew, including one man suffering from scurvy.

On September 20th, *Isbjørn* regained Nordkapp in northern Norway, where Payer and a Lapp sailor who could speak Norwegian left the vessel so he could journey overland back to Tromsø, using a small boat to cross shallow rivers and a reindeer sleigh to cross open ground. The heavily

damaged *Isbjørn*, carrying its remaining polar explorer Weyprecht, was towed back into port at Tromsø on October 4th.

In Tromsø, Weyprecht again met Leigh Smith and shared his disappointment at the meager results of the Austro-Hungarian efforts. For Payer, the results were not a complete loss. The observed variability of the ice encouraged him in the belief that a route to the North Pole from the seas east of Svalbard was still a possibility. The seas around Novaya Zemlya, especially, seemed a favorable ground for further exploration. Payer believed they could maneuver as far as lat. 78° N without encountering serious opposition from the ice. In a year otherwise marked by horrendous ice conditions in and around Hopen and Storfjorden, the open areas in the longitudes between 42° and 59° E were a revelation. On the other hand, if Gillis' Land existed, it seemed by now that it was only an island – and perhaps a small one at that – and not the continental land mass some had long suspected.

In all, the results were just enough to organize a new and much larger expedition the following year. On June 13th, 1872, twenty-three expedition members arrived at the docks at Bremerhaven to stow their gear on board the *Tegetthoff*, a 220-ton three master with an auxiliary steam engine. The crew was made up of Croatians from the Dalmatia. The supercargo consisted of Germans, Italians, Slavs, and Hungarians; the common language of the expedition became Italian.

The progress of the expedition was exceedingly slow. *Tegetthoff* dropped anchor in Tromsø only on July 3rd, where divers examined the leaky hull and the seams were re-caulked. A Norwegian named Elling Carlsen came on board as harpooner and icemaster. A French priest conducted a Saturday morning mass for the crew on July 13th, and *Tegetthoff* slipped out of Tromsø the following morning. It was, as Payer writes, “the first and last voyage, which the *Tegetthoff* was destined to make...”¹⁷

After ten days of lolling in unfavorable winds, the ship encountered the ice on July 25th, far south of even where it had lain in 1871. It soon became clear that 1872 would not be a repeat of 1871 in the Barents Sea. For ten days, the crew warped *Tegetthoff* through a belt of pack ice more than one hundred miles thick. Open water along the coast of Novaya Zemlya allowed the expedition to sail northwards until, on August 8th, they ran into ice so thick that the ship could not move even under its auxiliary



Fig. 27. Tegetthoff and Isbjørn amid the ice, summer, 1872 (from Payer 1876).

steam power. The ice shifted and moved from day to day, and allowed *Tegetthoff* to slowly crab its way northwards.

The crew received a welcome if somewhat embarrassing reprieve on August 12th, when out of the mist the creaky *Isbjørn* appeared with the maligned Captain Kjeldsen at the helm. He was sailing from Svalbard with yet another Austro-Hungarian charter, this time Weyprecht and Payer's expedition patron, Count Wilczek. When they came upon *Tegetthoff*, *Isbjørn* was en route to lay in a relief cache for Weyprecht and Payer at Cape Nassau on Novaya Zemlya. Together they sailed northward, and together on August 18th they celebrated the birthday of the Austro-Hungarian emperor and king, Franz Josef I. Two days later, and not a moment too soon, *Isbjørn* parted company with *Tegetthoff*.

Weyprecht and Payer continued on their meandering way through the ice northwards but their progress soon came to a halt. *Tegetthoff* was

completely hemmed in by ice and, as Payer later wrote, the ship would never again see open water. On Christmas Eve, even as they were sharing out presents brought for the occasion and enjoying the bottles of wine that had not frozen solid, Weyprecht and Payer could only look back on “a year of disappointments.”¹⁸

The outlook was bleak indeed. The ship was trapped in the middle of nowhere and the only recourse was to wait on the summer of 1873. The crew read a lot: Milton, Shakespeare, a collection of romance novels, and, according to Payer, a run of Petermann’s *Mittheilungen*, which seems to have been last on the reading list.

Across the mess table spilled a Berlitz of languages:

The clatter of the tongues of so many vehement Southerners was like the sound made by the smaller wheels of a machine, while the naïve simplicity of the grave Tyrolese came in between times, like the steady beat of a great cog-wheel. It was a miniature reproduction of the confusion of tongues of Babel. Lusina speaks Italian to the occupants of the officers’ cabin, English with Carlsen, French with Dr. Kepes, and Slavonic with the crew. Carlsen has adopted for the ‘Slavonians,’ as he called our people, a kind of speech compounded of Norwegian, English, German, Italian, and Slavonic. The crew, with the exception of the two Italians, speaks Slavonic among themselves.¹⁹

When the summer of 1873 finally arrived, it carried no hope. The ship remained stuck fast. Then, at midday on August 30th, just as the men despaired of another winter trapped in the ice, they received a jolt of excitement. *Tegetthoff* was drifting in a seemingly perpetual and disorienting mist at 79°43′ N, 59°33′ E, when for a moment the mist lifted to reveal a startling land of Alpine peaks and enormous glaciers. All of the men shook off their torpor and raced on deck to see the miracle with their own eyes.

Even trapped as they were and for the moment unable to reach the new land before them, they now knew that, no matter what else happened, the expedition would be considered a success. As Payer writes: “For thousands of years this land had lain buried from the knowledge of men,

and now its discovery had fallen into the lap of a small band, themselves almost lost to the world, who far from their home remembered the homage due to their sovereign, and gave to the newly-discovered territory the name Kaiser Franz-Josef's Land."²⁰

The dramatic headland they had seen Weyprecht and Payer named Cape Tegetthoff after the ship, but for a month the new land remained tantalizingly out of their grasp as northerly winds blew *Tegetthoff* away from its namesake point. The wind turned in late September, pushing the ship to its farthest north at lat. 79°58' N, where the crew spied a small piece of land they named Hochstetter Island. Six of the men made a mad rush at the island in the hopes of stepping ashore before the ice pushed them too far away. Halfway there, after running and crawling across broken floes, a heavy mist descended and threatened to cut them off from the ship, to which they were forced to reluctantly return. Throughout the fall, as *Tegetthoff* remained fast in the ice, the unexplored Franz Josef Land remained out of reach. As if taunting the men, the high cliffs were illuminated by the aurora.

Finally, on November 1st, 1873, the ship drifted close enough to an island that the men felt safe in making a dash for solid land. Scrambling over barriers of ice fifty feet high, they raced ashore. There, the men stood at last upon "a land more desolate [than any] on earth.... [yet] To us it was paradise; and this paradise we called Wilczek Island."²¹ The men rejoiced even in the island's utter bleakness. It was, after all, a totally new experience after months of boredom on board *Tegetthoff*. "We had become exceedingly sensitive to new impressions," writes Payer, and so the following day they trooped back to the crenellated shore to build a cairn around a pole and place a flag atop it.²² The Norwegian crew member Carlsen was so taken with the solemnity of the occasion that beneath his fur coat he made sure to wear the medal from his decoration with the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav.

On November 6th, another flying expedition brought the men to the northwest corner of Wilczek Island. From there they could see larger landmasses to the north. Throughout the winter that followed, Payer contented himself with frequent visits to the nearby island, all the while laying plans for a sledge expedition into the country to the north as soon as conditions allowed in the spring. In February, Weyprecht and Payer

concluded that the ship would have to be abandoned as soon as they concluded the sledging expedition. The men would then attempt to escape through the ice pack in the ship's small boats.

Was the land to the north a continent-sized landmass, an island split by glaciers, or a group of islands? It certainly offered at least the possibility that Petermann had been correct, that a northwards-setting landmass could take one all the way to the North Pole. Payer set out to answer these questions with a party of six men and three dogs on March 10th, 1874. In two hours they had reached the southwest corner of Wilczek Island. The temperatures hovered around -14° F. Payer set a course toward what turned out to be two islands.

In discovering what would become a tangled paradise for Arctic nomenclature, he began a series of generous nods towards the international fraternity of polar explorers. The first island he named for Charles Francis Hall and the second for the Royal Navy officer and polar explorer Francis Leopold McClintock, the man who had finally answered the Franklin mystery with the *Fox* expedition. The fjord adjacent to Cape Tegetthoff they named for Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld. Another small island was named for Koldewey, and then a broad sound after the imposing secretary of the Royal Geographic Society and itinerant supporter of polar exploration, Clements Markham.

From the tallest point on Hall Island, Payer could see more mountainous land to the north, a glacial landscape split by a large body of water he named Austria Sound. It was increasingly clear that they had discovered an Arctic land at least as large as Svalbard, and the urge to learn its extent was overpowering. The lands to the east Payer named, again, after Count Wilczek, perhaps fearing that the small Wilczek Island the expedition had originally discovered simply did not match the Count's generosity. The land to the west they named after another expedition patron, Count Ödön Zichy. They returned to the ship from this preliminary reconnaissance on March 15th, in time to hear the final wheezing breaths of the ship's engineer, Otto Krisch, who died from scurvy the following day and became the first human to be buried in Franz Josef Land, on a high cliff on the southern edge of Wilczek Island.

With his experiences from his week of explorations, Payer drew up a plan for an extended foray northwards. He left the ship again – this time

with a party of seven men and three dogs – on March 26th, with the thermometer reading -6° F. By April 1st, Payer's team was running up the ice-filled Austria Sound, along the coast of Wilczek Land on their right and Zichy Land on their left. A small island at lat. 81° N Payer named for Elisha Kent Kane, while a small cluster of islands was named for Kane's compatriot and fellow Pennsylvanian, Isaac Israel Hayes.

By April 5th, they were nearing the northern terminus of the scatter of islands along Austria Sound. It was a bleak prospect. Ascending the highest point of Becker Island, Payer recorded a scene to the north of "indescribable waste, more utterly desolate than anything I had ever seen, even in the Arctic regions.... The whole, at a distance, presented the appearance of a chaos of icehills and icebergs scattered over a frozen sea."²³

Four days later, at Hohenlohe Island, Payer divided his small band in order to mount a flying expedition to a seemingly large landmass to the north, which he named Crown Prince Rudolf's Land. With three companions and two dogs, Payer started off with enough supplies to last eight days. He soon realized that Rudolf's Land was in fact another island, the whole western coast of which was alive with flocks of little auks. Passing a cape that Payer named for the birds, he came into an indentation in the western shoreline that he named Teplitz Bay after his hometown.

On April 12th, Payer reached the northern terminus of his march, a spot on the northern edge of Rudolf Island he named Cape Fligely after an Austrian general and geographer, August von Fligely. From this impossibly bleak spot, Payer's eyes deceived him and he made a massive geographic error. He thought he saw an extension of Rudolf Island to the northeast, toward a cape he named after Sherard Osborne, another prominent Royal Navy figure from the search for Franklin. Payer then thought he saw a series of blue mountain ranges even further to the north, the first he named King Oscar Land. The second chimera he named, appropriately, Petermann Land, and there is every chance that Payer's judgment was affected by what Petermann had led him to believe *ought* to be there, in a theoretic way. The furthest point of "Petermann Land" Payer named Cape Vienna, "in testimony of the interest which Austria's capital has ever shown in geographical science, and in gratitude for the sympathy with which she followed our wanderings, and finally rewarded our humble merits."²⁴

As Payer stood atop the icy, stony soil of Cape Fligely, gazing northwards, he knew he was experiencing the most important day of his life. His small band had reached the limits of their supplies, and this was fortunate indeed. While Payer was irritated that all the points he thought he had counted north of Cape Fligely were out of his reach, every one of them was in fact a mirage. Had they attempted to march further north, they would all soon be cut off from land on a lethal sea of shifting ice. In the event, they had to be content with planting the Austro-Hungarian flag and leaving behind a message testifying to their achievement, a feat that – Nansen and Johansen coming from the north notwithstanding – would not be bested in Franz Josef Land for thirty years, and then only by a few steps. Then they turned for the south.

The *Tegetthoff*, if she was still floating, lay in the ice 160 nautical miles due south of Cape Fligely. Even suffering from exhaustion and snow-blindness and with their dogs played out, with their sledge fractured and split and the snow turned to spring slush, the men were sky high. And despite the misidentification of lands north of Rudolf Island, they had every reason to feel immense pride in what they had accomplished. As Payer writes: “The utter loneliness of our position could not suppress the satisfaction we felt.”²⁵

Ten days later, they had regained the ship. With the ship still immobile in the ice and with the snow still firm, the indefatigable Payer immediately set out on a third sledge journey, as he sought to fill in some of the archipelago’s geographic details to the west of Wilczek Island. On April 30th, Payer and three men and two dogs set out for one final week of exploring.

Payer and his companions sledged to the island he had named for McClintock and climbed to the highest peak at Cape Brünn. From there they surveyed the land that fell off toward the northwest. These lands included the southern reaches of Zichy Land and they included a Matterhorn-like mountain Payer named Richthofen Peak. It was so impressive that Payer wildly overestimated its altitude as 5,000 feet. Payer desperately wanted to explore this vast land “intersected by fjords and covered with glaciers” since he was sure that it must extend close to mythical Gillis’ Land and then to Svalbard.²⁶ His guesses in this direction were as conservative as his estimations of “Petermann Land” had been generous. He suspected that

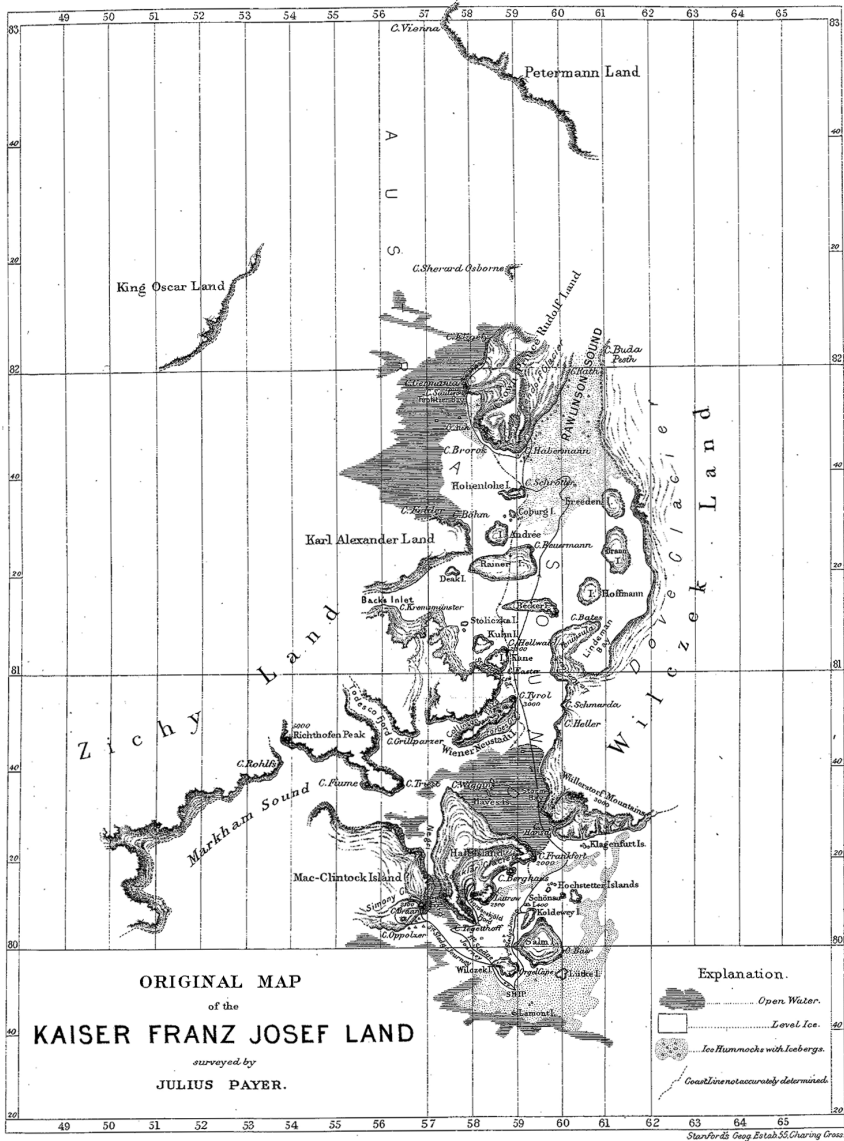


Fig. 28. The state of geographic knowledge in 1875 about the new archipelago of Franz Josef Land (from Payer 1877).

Franz Josef Land extended westwards to long. 50° E, maybe even as far as 48° E. What he could not know, from his cold perch atop Cape Brünn, was that the archipelago extended all the way to long. 45° E, a fact that Leigh Smith would demonstrate six years later when he cruised to the islands on board his oceanographic research vessel *Eira*.

Payer and his small team reached *Tegetthoff* again on May 3rd after sledging 450 miles through entirely new lands. The view to the south, however, was still dismal. *Tegetthoff* was still stuck fast and not going anywhere. There was only one thing to do and that was to abandon the ship to its fate. Payer made copies of all his records and put them in a sealed trunk. Weyprecht took the ship's logbooks and the originals of Payer's hard-won records and placed them in a tin-lined sea chest, and then soldered it closed. The chest is now in Vienna.

The men were divided into three groups, with three small boats and three sledges between them. On May 20th, 1874 – which, as Payer with his excellent knowledge of polar history noted, was the same day Elisha Kent Kane abandoned his ship in 1855 – they left the *Tegetthoff* to its fate. A week later, during which time they crawled southwards as little as half a mile a day, they reached an islet Payer named Lamont Island – likely for Leigh Smith's wealthy Scottish contemporary and Arctic sailor. But there the progress ceased. Two months later, they could still see Cape Tegetthoff behind them and Payer calculated that in all that time they had advanced less than ten miles from the ship.

Only by mid-August had the men advanced far enough so they could hear the sound of the open ocean beating against the line of the pack ice. Launching into the swell, they shaped a course for the cache of supplies that Count Wilczek on board *Isbjørn* had left for them at Novaya Zemlya. On August 17th, 1874, the men watched the sun set for the first time that summer and, the next day, they stood at last upon solid ground. They located a small freshwater pond and bathed. Soon after, sailing southwards, they came upon two Russian schooners. After producing official letters that required any inhabitant of the Russian Empire to assist them, Weyprecht and Payer and their men received their first proper food in the ninety-six days since they had left the doomed *Tegetthoff* behind.

News of the triumphal Austro-Hungarian expedition quickly found its way to the savants of the Royal Geographic Society. Clements Markham

included a long chapter on the discoveries and implications of the expedition in his 1875 history-cum-British-national-polar-expedition-promotional *The Threshold of the Unknown Regions*. An Arctic landmass of potentially massive proportions had just been discovered – Payer himself even hinted strongly that it held every possibility of reaching to the pole itself, since to him “Petermann Land” appeared to extend at least to the 83rd parallel.

The Austro-Hungarian success built momentum for a new national expedition in the United Kingdom. Britain had not mounted a major expedition to the Arctic in thirty years, despite the more or less constant agitation for one by the RGS. On October 24, 1874, Henry Rawlinson, President of the RGS, sent a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, pointing out Weyprecht and Payer’s success and asking after the status of the Society’s 1873 application for a new polar expedition.

A report from the Hydrographer of the Royal Navy for Parliament pointed out that the government had organized six polar expeditions between Phipps in 1773 and Franklin in 1845. After 1848, another fourteen expeditions, give or take, were sent after Franklin, and once they had learned “of the fate of Franklin’s expedition in 1859, Great Britain withdrew from the field of Arctic research. Not so other nations; emulous of the knowledge so honourably gained by British enterprise...”²⁷

Even so, and despite the success of the Austro-Hungarian expedition, no nation had yet to best Parry’s 1827 mark. And because Payer’s report was completely unfavorable to the operations of large naval vessels in the pack ice of Franz Josef Land, the Admiralty chose to put its faith in the musical sound of open water Kane heard north of Smith Sound between Ellesmere Island and Greenland, as well as a description from Charles Francis Hall’s crew, which noted that Hall’s *Polaris* had sailed through an ice-free Smith Sound all the way to lat. 82°16′ N.

All that was required to successfully push through Smith Sound to the North Pole was the application of steam power to whaling vessels, vessels manned by competent Royal Navy tars and not the “undisciplined crews” employed by the foreigners, especially the Americans.²⁸ The formula was simple: Smith South + steam power + Royal Navy crews = North Pole. You could have the whole lot for about £56,000. The port of Dundee, with its jute mills and their reliance on whale oil from the Arctic, was

all for it. So were the other Scottish and Yorkshire ports of Peterhead, Aberdeen, Whitby, and Hull, which promised to offer up their “most intelligent among the experienced mates, harpooners, and foremast men.... Take this course,” the report confidently concluded, “and the safety of a Government expedition is thus assured.”²⁹

The report dismissed the efficacy and efficiency of mere private attempts at polar exploration, which were invariably “undertaken with totally inadequate means and resources....” Only a national expedition would as a matter of course concern itself not only with the geographic and hydrographic problem of the North Pole but with gathering the latest data regarding Arctic geodesy, meteorology, magnetism and physics, geology, botany, and zoology. Nor was anthropology forgotten: “The condition of an isolated tribe, deprived of the use of wood or metals, and dependent entirely upon bone and stone for the construction of all implements and utensils, is also a subject of study with reference to the condition of mankind in the Stone age of the world....”³⁰

With a sanguine disregard of why the British government had not launched an Arctic expedition in a generation – and no doubt to the amusement of men like James Lamont – the report concluded that:

Under Dr. Kane and Dr. Hayes and Captain Hall, the sufferings, the hardships, insubordination, and small results, in comparison with the expenditure and expectations of these American private expeditions, fully confirm the opinions of all British Arctic authorities as to the necessity for the officers and seamen in such expeditions being always under naval control and discipline, and strengthen us in saying that no amount of private enterprise, enthusiasm, or funds will justify the risk to lives or the success of an expedition, such as the Royal Geographic Society contemplates, except under Government auspices and Government control. That conceded, the safety of an expedition is comparatively guaranteed....³¹ (Admiralty Arctic Report 1875: 14)

Faced with such a barrage, and with an array of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Sweden, and the United States all challenging the British sense of

priority in the Arctic, the government finally relented. Disraeli wrote to Rawlinson on November 17th, 1874, that he would have his polar expedition through Smith Sound. Two vessels, *Alert* and *Discovery*, both five times the displacement of *Tegetthoff*, were fitted for contact with ice. Placed under the command of George Nares and Henry Stephenson, the ships and their crew of 120 men left England the following May.

Nares succeeded in besting Hall's farthest north for a ship, reaching lat. 82°27' N, before placing *Alert* into a winter harbor. There, surrounded by firm ice and with little indication of open water anywhere to the north, Nares spent the winter nurturing extreme doubts as to the existence of an open polar sea. The following spring, to settle the matter, Nares organized a sledge expedition under the leadership of twenty-five-year-old Albert Markham, younger cousin of Clements. Half a century after Parry, Albert Markham led a group of fifty-three officers and men in dragging two heavy boats mounted upon sledges towards the North Pole.

Compared with Parry's difficult experience, Markham's sledge expedition was a living nightmare. Clothing, food, gear, all were substandard, and the toll on the men was rapid. By the time the sledge expedition managed to crawl back to *Alert*, only nine of the original party were fit for duty. The rest were suffering from the accumulations of snow-blindness, scurvy, frostbite, and malnutrition. The ships were extricated from the ice later that summer and the 'guaranteed' government expedition beat a blessed retreat back to Portsmouth.

The failure of the Nares expedition was so discouraging to the Royal Navy that it turned away from the North Pole for nearly a century, until the arrival at that very spot of the nuclear submarine *HMS Dreadnought* in 1971. But the exploration of the poles was not abandoned altogether. By the end of the nineteenth century, again largely at the instigation of Clements Markham, the Royal Navy would begin dragging their heavy sledges towards the South Pole, leaving several more sailors and a soldier dead on the ice. But after the return of Nares, British exploration of the Arctic would be left to the private explorer.

One of those private explorers was none other than James Lamont, who by 1876 had become James Lamont, F.G.S., F.R.G.S. In that year he published his second volume of Arctic hunting and scientific banter, *Yachting in the Arctic Seas*. Subtitled *Notes of Five Voyages of Sport and*

Discovery in the Neighborhood of Spitzbergen and Novaya Zemlya, the book was designed not only to document his explorations in the *Diana* but to “stimulate many men of leisure and means to continue the exploration” of the north.³²

Making no secret of his views of the Government’s evident bumbling, he remained a determined advocate for private exploration:

A Government expedition may happen to hit off an open season, and will then accomplish a great deal. But any Government is with difficulty persuaded to increase the estimates for the mere discovery of valueless regions of sea and land; and it is only by the pressure of public opinion, headed by the Scientific Societies, that they are at last compelled to do something for the honour of the nation. Finally, after much writing in the newspapers, much agitation in the scientific world, and much contemptuous criticism of the opinions of whalers (who alone really know something about the matter), an Arctic expedition under Government auspices is resolved on. Double pay, liberal rations, and the chance of excitement, attract crowds of volunteers – a Royal personage or two wave their hands as the ships, gay with flags, weigh anchor – a great many guns are fired, and the nation for a year or two forgets all about the Arctic expedition.³³

That Victorian naval explorers backed by the full weight of the British government could do no right has become a familiar refrain since the end of the (later) Heroic Era of polar exploration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Fergus Fleming’s description fits here. The Victorian explorer was, he writes, “a brave, patriotic chap, steadfast but daring, manly but emotional, confident but modest, willing to carry the banner of queen and country to the furthest reaches of the world; ready not only to face the void but to stare it down, and do so in blind, cheerful ignorance.”³⁴

For Lamont, the private explorer was a different breed altogether; he possessed “means, inclination, and courage to give this object ten or twelve years of his life” and absolutely no ties to the government of the United

Kingdom.³⁵ It is certainly possible that much of Lamont's venom toward government-sponsored exploration derived from his service as laird of the Lamont clan. He would have known all too well of that clan's destruction by the Campbells and its abandonment by the government during the civil wars of England two hundred years earlier. Even so, as if suddenly realizing his churlishness, he made clear that he was not impugning the massive British government *Alert* expedition that was underway even as he was writing his Arctic memoirs in 1875.

As if to prove his point, the next disastrous attempt on the North Pole was a quasi-governmental operation sponsored by a newspaper. In 1869, James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the *New York Herald*, had sent his reporter Henry Morton Stanley to Africa to locate the British missionary Dr. David Livingstone, a man many considered long dead. When Stanley found Livingstone, alive and well, in 1871, his dispatches from Africa triggered a rise in the circulation of the *Herald*, just as Bennett had hoped it would. Having found a formula for gaining readership for his newspaper, Bennett in succeeding years exploited it at every turn.

Bennett was even more fascinated with the Arctic than he was with Africa, having already sent two of his reporters on board a vessel that went to look for the survivors of Hall's expedition in 1873. Five years later, Bennett sent a reporter along with an American Geographic Society expedition that went to the Canadian Arctic on a rumor that John Franklin's diary would be found on King William Island. No diaries were found, but the expedition did retrieve several relics and skeletal remains of Franklin sailors who had died on the island. Once again, *Herald* circulation received a boost from the stories published about these finds.

In 1879, Bennett sponsored his greatest venture in the Arctic, an attempt by U.S. Navy Captain George Washington DeLong to reach the Pole in a vessel called *Jeannette*, and named after Bennett's sister. DeLong and Bennett, like Weyprecht and Payer, were heavily influenced by the ideas of Petermann. Bennett thought that the way to reach Petermann's open water around the pole was through the Bering Strait separating Alaska from Russia. A warm Pacific Ocean current flowing north from Japan would carve a path north through the ice, and meet with the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, flowing north between Greenland and Svalbard. Where these two currents met, at the top of the world, there, at long

last, DeLong would find the Open Polar Sea. The captain and many of the U.S. Navy sailors who signed on to the expedition would die bitter deaths disproving this theory. That the U.S. Navy agreed to man the ship, while Bennett paid for the expedition and issued what amounted to orders to the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, speaks as well to the enormous power that a newspaper publisher could command when the subject was geographic exploration in the late nineteenth century.

At the same moment, Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld was searching for a Northeast Passage across the top of Russia. When a few months passed without word from him, Bennett decided that Nordenskiöld, like Livingstone, was in dire need of rescue, just as he had been in Svalbard in 1873 when Leigh Smith came to his rescue. In this scene, DeLong would play the part of Stanley and Leigh Smith.

DeLong sailed from San Francisco in the summer of 1879, but before the *Jeannette* even reached the Arctic, Nordenskiöld and his ship *Vega* broke through the ice and reached the Bering Sea. With no dramatic rescue to report, DeLong turned north towards the Pole and a search for Petermann's open sea.

Two months out from San Francisco, *Jeannette* became stuck in the ice north of the Siberian coast near the Lena Delta. After two years of drifting in this trap, the ice crushed DeLong's ship once and for all. He and his men took to their small boats and made a desperate retreat toward the Siberian coast. One of the three boats reached safety; one vanished with all hands; and DeLong's own small boat made it to shore where he and all but two of his men starved to death as they waited in vain for relief. To intensify the disaster, a U.S. Navy vessel sent to find DeLong, the steamer *Rodgers*, was itself abandoned after it burned while keeping winter quarters at St. Lawrence Bay, Siberia. Bennett had not solved the polar problem, but the dramatic publicity became oxygen for his newspapers.

Leigh Smith spent the second half of the 1870s as a witness to these cascades of incompetence. Combined with the Austro-Hungarian triumph in Franz Josef Land and Lamont's exhortations ringing in his very wealthy ears, these all set the scene for Leigh Smith's return to Arctic exploration in 1880. David Gray had written to him in the fall of 1876 with the wish that Leigh Smith would soon "have another chance of getting a ship and that you will try once more to get north if you do not receive

favorable news from the Arctic expedition this month [the disastrous government-sponsored Nares expedition, which would return to England in November having fallen far short of the North Pole]. I think it would be well worth your trouble to try again.”³⁶ Gray advised Leigh Smith that if the Peterhead-built Arctic vessel *Windward* came up for sale he would let him know.

In the summer of 1876, just as Lamont published his *Yachting in the Arctic Seas* and Nares’ British Arctic Expedition limped homewards, Leigh Smith offered £4,500 for the vessel *Norvegen*, owned by the Deutsche Polar Schiffahrts Gesellschaft in Hamburg.³⁷ For unknown reasons the transaction did not come to pass and so Leigh Smith went back to the drawing board. The General wrote in his diary in early June that Leigh Smith had even traveled to Hamburg intent on buying the steamer, with which he wanted to explore the coast of Greenland.³⁸ But by the first week of July, he had changed his mind, evidently fearing he was being swindled.³⁹

Other contacts would send letters to Leigh Smith whenever a potential vessel for Arctic exploration came onto the market. In 1877, Gray sent along a note that new engines installed on his *Eclipse* were giving more than nine knots and that he was ready “for a dash at the Pole should a favorable opportunity occur...”⁴⁰

On March 8th, 1878, Leigh Smith suffered a badly cut left hand when a Hansom cab he was riding in overturned and his hand went through the window. It was many weeks before he was feeling up to receiving visitors or taking a draught of Bass beer with his lunch. When the General finally saw him in London in mid-April, Leigh Smith was surrounded by potted flowers sent him by his cousin Florence Nightingale.⁴¹ The General’s notes suggest that Leigh Smith may have suffered from a bacterial infection, if not typhus, following this injury, since he was forced back into bed throughout the summer of 1878. By August, the General found Leigh Smith increasingly impatient with his enforced confinement and “pining for sea air.”⁴²

Leigh Smith began to feel better again in early 1879, though he still had only limited use of his injured left hand. From his Gower Street townhome in London, he escorted his niece Mabel to several plays, including HMS *Pinafore* and *She Stoops to Conquer*.⁴³ By September he was

in Glasgow looking at ships,⁴⁴ and in November contemplating another run for Parliament.⁴⁵ But the pain in his hand continued, until in October he finally despaired and had his wrist opened and the tendons cut. He told the General that “he was tired of no amendment in the usefulness of the limb.”⁴⁶

He was now fifty-one. With his body starting to betray him, he was beginning to see that the chances to get back to the Arctic and to do some meaningful work would only grow longer each year. After the operation, he made up his mind. Word spread quickly around the family at the end of the year. On New Year’s Eve, 1879, the General records in his diary that Leigh Smith had decided to build his own ship for Arctic exploration.⁴⁷

In the end, Leigh Smith had decided that a charter would not do, nor would the purchase of an existing vessel satisfy his requirements. What he needed was a purpose-built oceanographic research vessel, one built to his specific needs and based on his experiences with *Sampson* and *Diana*. The ship, he decided, would be constructed by a yard in the whaling port of Peterhead and supervised by his close Arctic confidant David Gray. It would not be a hand-me-down from one of his wealthy countrymen; it would be his and his alone. With the Royal Navy gone from the field and all the talk of national polar expeditions at an end, with Lamont content to manage his estates and Payer now working as an artist in Vienna, and with his injury healed, his time had come. The door to the north, maybe even to the North Pole itself, had opened for him once again and possibly for the final time.