

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning

**WILEY**

---

An Artistic Expedition to the North Pole

Author(s): Julius v. Payer

Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Feb., 1895), pp. 106-112

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773566>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 02:43 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), Wiley* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Geographical Journal*

this evening to keep very much to geographical details, I of course made, during my stay on Kolgueff, many observations in natural history, and have many notes on the birds. When I have an opportunity of publishing these, I shall hope to describe the big goose-catch to which Mr. Seebohm refers.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Trevor-Battye has given us a very clear and, I should suppose, exhaustive account of the physical aspects of the flora and fauna, and of the interesting Samoyedi inhabitants of the island of Kolgueff. To students of Arctic history, Kolgueff is a classic name. When Sir Hugh Willoughby undertook his voyage in 1553, and discovered the coast of Novaya Zemlya, he plied to the north for two days, and then south-south-west, until he sighted low land, which I have no doubt was Kolgueff Island. We then read of Stephen Burrough, the future chief pilot of England, passing the shores of Kolgueff Island to his left, when on his way to the strait, now often called the Kara Strait, but which ought to bear the name of its discoverer, Burrough. If I remember rightly, he mentions having seen a great number of curious wooden idols, like those obtained by Mr. Trevor-Battye, and it would be interesting to think that one of the images now brought home was seen by Stephen Burrough, possibly handed down from father to son. Then we read how Arthur Pett and Charles Jackman, in returning from Pett Strait, managed to get their little vessels of 20 and 40 tons respectively on the sand of the southern coast of Kolgueff Island. There are many other incidents in Arctic history connected with this island. I think we should also remember that in his interesting description of these northern shores our great poet Milton mentions the island of Kolgueff. Many memories are connected with it, yet it was only a classic name to us until it was clothed with living interest in the charming paper we have just heard read. I now propose a vote of thanks to Mr. Trevor-Battye, and I feel sure it will be carried by acclamation.

I have an impression in my own mind that Mr. Trevor-Battye has the stuff in him which goes to make a great traveller. I feel sure that if he is spared it will not be many years before he comes back to us, and appears before us in this room after having achieved some other greater geographical piece of work. I shall have that belief in my mind when I convey to him your thanks. I have now great pleasure in thanking Mr. Trevor-Battye, in the name of this meeting, for the very interesting paper he has read to us.

---

## AN ARTISTIC EXPEDITION TO THE NORTH POLE.

By JULIUS v. PAYER.

PAINTERS are asking for new material on which to exercise their art. What can there still be that has remained hidden, as by a miracle, during two thousand years of skilled workmanship? This material must all belong to the earth; is it yet completely explored from an artistic point of view? No. This is only the case with its civilized states; beyond them some great master has now and again ventured a step, not without a misgiving that he has thereby quitted the legitimate sphere of art. And yet how small is the matter for artistic reproduction in the old civilized world compared with the rest of the globe! Has the desert been depicted in such a manner as it undoubtedly deserves to be? Or the Tundra, the primeval forest of the Dark Continent, the swampy shores of Lake Chad, the bridle-path of the Cordilleras, the

Tibetan mountain-lake, or the Coral Islands? What of the animal world, if we except our domestic animals and some wild game—the Indian beasts of prey, the African pachyderms, the troops of monkeys or tortoises of Brazil? And then the scenes of human activity—the negro battles, the dreamy still-life of the South Sea Islanders, the buffalo-hunters, Yakuts so hardened as to sleep almost naked in the snow, indiarubber-collectors on the Amazons, Patagonian giants, Niam-Niam dwarfs, etc. Here is material enough for the twentieth century, which will perhaps bring us discoveries which may facilitate the world's intercourse in a manner still undreamed of.

Whether the aerial ship, for the construction of which so many have striven in vain, will be a *fait accompli* in the coming epoch, is still doubtful; and yet in my opinion it is only by an aerial route that a region can be explored which remains less known and less accessible than any other part of the earth—the North Pole. The few navigators who have penetrated into those regions have been so occupied with the details of ice-navigation, that they have been able to pay no attention to the artistic beauties of the North Pole, surpassing though they be. The impressions which I received there were overpowering, and caused me deep regret that I was unable to reproduce them. The drawings with which I illustrated the account of my voyage, though of some use as an explanation, could give but a remote idea of the phenomena to be depicted. I have, therefore, devoted myself to painting, and have been so fortunate as to achieve some success with my North Polar pictures, "Starvation Cove," the Franklin series, "Never again" (a tribute to the memory of my deceased friend Weyprecht), and others. But even in the execution of these pictures, I experienced an oppressive feeling of insufficiency, of inability to worthily depict the richness of nature in the Polar Regions. The conviction forced itself upon me that this is to be represented in all its variety—known to but few—only by actual inspection.

Long had the erroneous idea prevailed, with regard to the nature of that region, that it was formed of nothing but snow; that, "white, ever white," it formed a frozen plain, over which a grey sky brooded. Whence is this description derived? In the first instance, from the repetition of the Old-World tale of Herodotus, of the horrors of the Scythian winter, and the land of the Anthropophagi, wrapt in a murky snow-filled atmosphere. Of just such a frightful aspect did the Arabs picture to themselves even the south of Siberia; the would-be voyagers to the Indies through the ice heaped up new prejudices; and if these had remained without confirmation, it was supplied by the illustrations of English and American North Polar navigators. Who had manufactured these illustrations? Draughtsmen in London and New York, who had never seen the lands to be depicted, and who, therefore, could but depend on tradition, according to which even the Alps were held

to be without beauty, and even hideous. Thus the belief crystallized more and more, that the North Pole was a frightful desert, devoid of every artistic charm, almost of life. Times without number have I encountered the utmost astonishment, even among educated men, when I have unfolded the true picture of the far North.

What I could do by word of mouth with individuals—without thereby shaking the general prepossession—I could only partially accomplish with the paint-brush. I felt my inability to conjure up from fading memories that which I had admired merely as a layman; as a layman, that is, unpractised in analytical methods, which are possible to an adept alone. Never, therefore, did I satisfy my craving to picture the vast, the mysterious, the fantastic, or the tragic (though these still remained fixed in my memory), and I confined myself, without thereby deviating from the truth, to the dull, featureless day, which to be sure is common enough, and was of use for my historical pictures—and the artistic variety of the North vanished meanwhile. Thus even I helped by my pictures to intensify the prevalent notion as to the appearance of the Polar Regions, and not without self-reproach did I hear, as the echo of the impression conveyed, “Well, monotonous and desolate it is up there, even as it is here depicted, nothing but ice and snow.”

The artistic consists in change, not in gayness of colouring, and the greatest effect is produced by little colour, even a monotonous view gaining life from charm of light. Yet there is no monotony at the North Pole. I have spent nearly four and a half years in those regions, ever entranced by the change in the picture of nature. What a magic spell, for instance, is produced even by the twilight—that of spring, but especially of autumn; the time without bright light, almost without shade; that of the soft, dreamy silhouettes, of the clear green sky, and the pale silvery tone of the mountains! The snow is now melted, and the blue sea-ice lies bare, scarcely tinged with red by the setting sun. Even the long winter night possesses its artistic charm from the midday arch of light, or the moon which changes the channels beneath into rivers of silver. The arctic sky alone would enrapture the painter. As the returning sun nears the horizon, every colour glows forth, a border of light dividing the part of the atmosphere still in the shadow of the earth from that already lighted up; while the sun's return is accompanied by those refractions of rays and atmospheric reflections, or *Fata morgana*, about which we still know so little.

Before a change of weather, or a storm following on severe cold, the refraction is such that no confidence can be placed on the apparent size or position of any object. Ice-blocks may present the appearance of tall pillars or ruined towns; ships beyond the range of direct vision may appear twice, thrice, or four times repeated, and mountains are seen double or treble their real height, and constantly changing their form. The sun is visible days or even weeks before it actually reaches the

horizon, and exhibits remarkable appearances, the most seldom being that in which numerous false suns are grouped round the true sun in the centre, as many as twenty being sometimes seen in concentric circles, all connected by glowing rays with the central point. All these phenomena display prismatic colours in an atmosphere filled with ice-needles and frost-nebulæ. If the temperature sinks to 40°–60° below zero, the red disc of the sun, enormously exaggerated in size, hardly breaks through the vapour; everything appears far off; men are in a moment covered with hoar-frost, and their breath envelops them in clouds of mist, on which their shadow is distinguishable edged with yellow. If a rift opens in the ice, white pillars of frozen vapour arise like a huge fountain, scattering snow-dust around. In the midst of it all prowls the ice-bear, aroused from his winter sleep, a never-resting wanderer.

The sun mounts higher. The snow-fall ceases, and the moisture arising from the sea condenses on the mountains into a covering of ice, tinged by the sun, still low in the sky, with a wonderful orange and rose—an alpine glow lasting for weeks! All is warmth and luxuriance, the exact converse of the autumn twilight. As the temperature passes the zero-point, dusky water-vapour broods everywhere over the icy sea, dark as in a total eclipse of the sun. The snow-covering of the ice-blocks melts, and large cold ice-lakes are formed, traversed by dim phantoms of snow-ridges. It is a good picture of the nether world, often sublime, but at the same time desolate and depressing to the ship-wrecked mariners, who drag their sledges, up to the hips in the water of a shallow sea, surrounded by unseen chasms.

The “ice-blink,” a refracted light from impenetrable pack-ice, while it gives warning to travellers in search of open water, serves also to enhance the beauty of the scene. When the sun has reached its culminating point, a dazzling clearness of the atmosphere ensues, light fleecy clouds float across the deep blue sky, the sea becomes ultramarine, and above it icebergs rear their heads aloft, sea-birds hovering round in swarms, while their whole mass glows at times in the northern light. Only at the margin of the ice does the restless surf beat, audible even when invisible.

The land, they say, is never free from snow, for so have the illustrations always represented it. But, though the so-called snow-line is said to coincide with the sea-level in the Polar lands, wherever in summer the temperature rises ever so little above the freezing-point, there is no snow covering, however low the mean for the year may be. By April the sugar-like covering of the rocks disappears; in May no more snow lies on the plains; and in June there are extensive pastures, which supply food to herds of reindeer and musk-oxen. Although there is never the thick flora of our meadows, yet one meets with limited areas, either yellow with *Papaver nudicaule* or *Ranunculus*, or garmine with *Silene* or *Saxifraga*, or blue with forget-me-not, or white

with *Cerastium*. Owing to the long Polar day, altitude affects the vegetation much less than in Europe, and the mountain slopes, on which the sun's rays fall almost perpendicularly, often show the richest carpet of flowers. It is not so much the cold *per se*, as its long duration, which limits the Arctic flora. As soon as the sun ceases to set, the snow melts as by magic, the plains are converted into bogs, while the hot oppressive air is filled of an evening with swarms of mosquitoes. The greenery imported by the vegetation lasts late into the autumn, the temperature of which far exceeds that of spring.

East Greenland, in particular, is of great beauty. Its huge Kaiser-Franz-Josef Fiord surpasses Norway, and may be compared to the Pennine Alps, supposing the valleys were filled with water. With a greenish landscape on the margin, rocky walls above reaching to over 6000 feet, and mountains behind to 13,000 feet, it forms one of the most majestic scenes in the world, whose beauty I have never seen surpassed. South of Cape Franklin are mountains just like our famous Dolomites. North-east Greenland, too, is an Arctic alpine land; Spitzbergen has a profile like a saw; Novaya Zemlya is a tableland, buttressed by mountain cones; and all these lands enjoy the most delicious invigorating atmosphere, free from miasma and germs of disease.

In this sketch I have not exhausted, but only indicated, the variety of Arctic natural phenomena. I have said nothing of the life added to the picture by the animal world, or the peculiar mode of existence of man in those regions. But enough has been said to support the conclusions I wish to draw.

The above scenes have never been depicted by an artist; nay, we know almost as little of them as if they belonged to the moon. Shall it never be otherwise? Would an exploration by the paint-brush be less glorious than the discovery of new lands? Would not a scheme be worthy of recognition and patronage, which should be devoted to the faithful representation by pictures of an unknown world, serving thereby knowledge and science? Yet this end could never be attained without an expedition sent expressly for the purpose.

Filled for years with the idea of a picturesque exploration of the Polar Regions, I have set myself the task of calling into being a *new North Polar expedition* with artistic objects in view. It is Count Wilczek who, by commissioning me with the execution of a colossal picture of the North Pole, has again, as in 1871, caused my ideas to take a tangible shape. It is planned that such an expedition as I have described shall be sent out by Austria-Hungary.

By far the most tempting objective of such an expedition would be North-east Greenland, the most picturesque region of the North, and by pushing on along the coast of East Greenland towards the Pole, one would reach a region of the greatest contrasts and effects, which increase

with the latitude. And as we did not before explore further than the 77th degree, each step beyond would at the same time be a geographical discovery. It is true that for this a great expenditure would be necessary, so that I must also keep before me a less distant goal, and perhaps set on foot a sort of preliminary expedition, the results of which might still be important. No one can recognize the difficulties more clearly than I do myself; but I do not consider them insurmountable, and my previous experience will guard me from entering on the task insufficiently equipped. I have the fullest confidence that this new Austro-Hungarian expedition will take definite shape, even with the ambitious programme which I have suggested.

The plan of the expedition which I propose to lead would be somewhat as follows. A new steamer of 400 tons (200 horse-power) would be built, and manned with Dalmatian seamen, with three qualified officers, besides experts, engineers, Tyrolese marksmen, etc. To carry out the main object, painting, I would take also two landscape-painters, one animal-painter, and a photographer. A central studio would be erected at the winter quarters, and movable glass studios would also be taken for use both on deck during the summer and at special localities. All would be capable of being heated, and of being lighted by electricity supplied by benzine or petroleum motors. A captive balloon might also be used as an aid to study. Studies and pictures would be taken in great numbers. Drawing I have found possible by the hour even at a temperature of 50° below zero, and by moonlight, the northern light, etc., as well as by daylight. Painting is more difficult. When impossible on deck, I used to descend into the cabin after each inspection of the view; but with a suitable studio this would be avoided. An oil which remains liquid at very low temperatures would be used instead of oil-colours. The studies would remain unaltered, but their subjects would be worked up into pictures on the spot while the impression remained fresh. The work would be more difficult, but not impossible, on extended sledge-expeditions. At times one would be limited to putting down the proper colours, while photographs taken at the same time would show their proper arrangements. Hunting and other episodes would naturally be depicted afterwards on board ship. The glass studios would have to be tested beforehand in an exposed situation as regards their power of resisting snow-storms. A large proportion of all the studies would be taken, however, at a temperature above the freezing-point.

The naval officers would carry out the meteorological and magnetic observations, while a naturalist (a doctor at the same time) would collect everywhere. Cape Franklin, at the entrance of the little-explored Kaiser-Franz-Josef Fiord, would recommend itself as the first winter quarters. A mass of rock nearly 6000 feet high is surrounded for miles by a grass-covered undulating country, in which I have seen herds of

fifty or even a hundred head of reindeer. The fiord could be explored in summer and, if means allowed, a detached winter station could be erected in the interior in telephonic communication with that of the ship. Nowhere else in the Arctic regions is the chase so productive as at the mouth of this fiord, a bear, reindeer, musk-ox, or walrus, or perhaps all four, being probably met with in the course of a few hours' stroll, and there should be no lack of fresh meat. Besides shooting the game, the Tyrolese marksmen might do good service by ascents of mountain peaks, which help so much to a knowledge of the configuration of the country.

The crossing of the stream of pack-ice in order to reach East Greenland is best accomplished in about  $74^{\circ}$  N. lat., as was done by Clavering in 1823 and Koldewey in 1869-70. It is true the ice of that stream is the heaviest in the world. There are masses along which one may steam a whole day together, and whose lofty surface cannot be seen from the ship. On whatever coast seals or walruses are found, there Eskimo can live, and though no one but Clavering has seen them in East Greenland, it is quite possible that they may be still settled there.

The cost of the expedition, which is to start in June, 1896, is only in part covered, and it will not be slight. There will be no lack of volunteers, for happily there are always men ready to incur risk to serve a great end. The dangers and hardships are great, and more than a passing enthusiasm is needed to induce men to encounter them—the steadfast purpose of the scientific inquirer, and the irresistible impulse of man to become acquainted with the globe in every direction. My expedition is inspired by this ever-fresh ideal, the same which influenced Holzendorff when he wrote to me respecting "Starvation Cove:" "North Polar voyages are among the most striking manifestations of human civilization."

---

## CRATER-LAKES NORTH OF LAKE NYASA,

WITH A SUGGESTION AS TO THE ORIGIN OF CENTRAL AFRICAN LAKES.

By Dr. D. KERR-CROSS.

LAST year (1893), accompanied by my wife, it was my privilege to travel for a month on the hills north of Lake Nyasa, in British and German Central Africa, and to visit some new country, and to see some small volcanic lakes of which I had for long heard. The country to the immediate north of this lake is not only interesting in itself, but it is the border country between the spheres of influence of these two great European Powers.

The Songwe river, which divides the two spheres, is quite an arbitrary division, and runs through the country occupied by *one* great tribe. This tribe is known to the outer world as the *Wa-nkonde*, but by