

**SHIPWRECK AT CAPE FLORA:
THE EXPEDITIONS OF BENJAMIN LEIGH SMITH,
ENGLAND'S FORGOTTEN ARCTIC EXPLORER**
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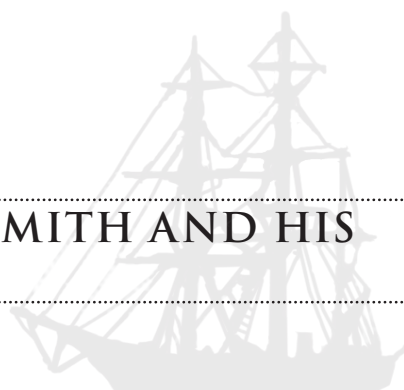
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BENJAMIN LEIGH SMITH AND HIS TIMES, 1828–1871



When Benjamin Leigh Smith was born amid the rolling countryside of East Sussex on March 12, 1828, the British naval officer William Edward Parry was publishing the results of his attempt to reach the North Pole from the islands north of Svalbard the previous summer. Parry, one of the most active Arctic explorers of his generation, had served as junior officer for John Ross's search for the Northwest Passage in 1818, and then commanded three expeditions of his own in search of a solution to the mystery of the passage, before turning his attention to the North Pole.

The area of Svalbard from which Parry based his explorations, which for fifty years had been seen as a promising starting point for an expedition to the North Pole, would not see another Englishman for nearly another half-century. It would not be a cumbersome, flags-and-pennants-flying naval expedition of the type led by Parry, but instead would consist of a tiny civilian expedition on a small chartered sailing vessel and led by a polar neophyte, the now forty-three-year-old Benjamin Leigh Smith. Venturing reverently into the same area as Parry, Leigh Smith would eclipse the geographic work of his countrymen's full-fledged Royal Navy expedition.

One might wonder how a well-to-do, middle-aged country squire like Leigh Smith, who could have lived out his days collecting rents and making a run for Parliament, found himself in a position to challenge the polar geographic research of the largest navy in the world. The reasons can be found in the great transformational polar event of the intervening years between Leigh Smith's birth in 1828 and his first Arctic expedition in the summer of 1871. Ever confident in the discipline and organization of its

navy to accomplish any task, Britain in the 1840s and 1850s experienced the massive cultural and institutional shock of the Royal Navy's Franklin polar expedition catastrophe.

John Franklin, a career naval officer, was no stranger to polar exploration, having commanded a vessel in search of the North Pole as early as 1818. In 1845, in what was planned as the crowning achievement of a long and distinguished career, Franklin was ordered to solve, once and for all, the long-standing geographic problem of the Northwest Passage. Placed in command of two naval vessels heavily-reinforced for work in the Arctic, HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, Franklin left Greenhithe in mid-May and his expedition was last seen station-keeping in Baffin Bay, awaiting favorable conditions to enter Lancaster Sound.

What happened next took the better part of the next century and a half and the efforts of at least twenty separate expeditions to find out. Franklin led his fleet into the thicket of islands that comprise the Canadian Arctic, pausing for the winter at Beechey Island, where three sailors died and were buried. The following spring of 1846, the ships turned south into Peel Sound and Franklin Strait, where *Erebus* and *Terror* were eventually frozen into the ice about twelve nautical miles northwest of King William Island. Beset in the ice, they would never leave it. Franklin himself died in 1847 at the age of 61, and, after a further eighteen months of increasing hopelessness, his surviving commanders abandoned their ships and led their remaining crew members in a desperate attempt to walk out of the Arctic.

Of the 134 officers and men who began the expedition at Greenhithe, five were invalided home from Greenland and the rest vanished into the North American Arctic. Their story was eventually worked out largely through the superhuman efforts of four men: the Scottish long-distance walker John Rae who learned some of the details from the Inuit of Boothia Peninsula in 1854; the Royal Navy's Francis Leopold McClintock, whose 1857–59 expedition on board *Fox* discovered a brief written record on King William Island left by the survivors; the American explorer Charles Francis Hall, who recorded Inuit testimony about the fate of the sailors during his second expedition to the Arctic in 1864–69; and forensic anthropologist Owen Beattie and others in the 1980s, who found evidence

to support a theory that Franklin's men had had their reason impaired by the effects of lead poisoning from improperly sealed food tins.

The many years and even decades of news produced by the many expeditions sent in search of possible Franklin expedition survivors dominated Benjamin Leigh Smith's formative years. During and just after his time at Jesus College at the University of Cambridge, no less than twelve separate expeditions involving hundreds of sailors were sent to scour the North American Arctic for any trace of Franklin, his men and his ships. Each of these searches was national news and almost every expedition made some contribution to filling in the complex geographic details and changing climatic conditions of the archipelago. And when the full extent of the catastrophe became apparent by the mid-1850s, it had the effect of dampening any further enthusiasm for polar exploration by the Royal Navy or any other national institution for the better part of the next twenty years.

It is an open question how this protracted spectacle of government incompetence affected Leigh Smith's world view. His was a wealthy life almost nakedly devoid of the need for government at any level. At the same time, the public history of Leigh Smith's young adulthood was marked, not by a collective British pride in triumphant national geographic expeditions, but by a series of dramatic and largely private polar expeditions led by men from countries other than England, notably the United States, Sweden, Germany, and Austria-Hungary.

This atmosphere, during his college years, of private expeditions succeeding where public efforts had failed, was the exact opposite of the time Leigh Smith was born and in the decades preceding his birth. Then, from the Pacific explorations of James Cook to the exploits of Nelson at Trafalgar, there was very little, it seemed, that the Royal Navy could not achieve. One could even argue that it was this misplaced sense of technological and cultural superiority that made a tragedy like the Franklin expedition all but inevitable.

Yet such nationalistic feelings had been on the ascendant for at least half a century before Benjamin Leigh Smith was born. The 1827 explorations of Parry north of Svalbard mirrored a similar British naval expedition of half a century earlier. In 1773, Constantine John Phipps, a British naval commander and Member of Parliament who in 1766 had sailed to

Newfoundland with naturalist Joseph Banks, led the first British attempt to reach the North Pole since 1615. The expedition consisted of two specially-strengthened shore bombardment vessels, *Carcass*, commanded by Skeffington Lutwidge, and *Racehorse*, a former French privateer captured by the British in 1757 and commanded by Phipps. The expedition's total complement was 170 officers and men, with extra rations of spirits for each ship "to be issued at the discretion of the commanders, when extraordinary fatigue or severity of weather might make it expedient"¹ Phipps's mission was to reach the North Pole via the waters off the northwest coast of Svalbard. Prevailing geographic theory followed that he would encounter open water somewhere in that area and be able to follow that open water all the way to the pole. In the event of a wreck, there was even good hope of survival in the area, as there existed "three or four small settlements of Russians in Spitzbergen for the sake of the skins of quadrupeds."²

Phipps received a typical set of instructions directing him to make useful observations "of every kind,"³ be they natural or navigational. That the Admiralty was supremely confident in the success of the mission can be seen in its admonition to Phipps, once he had reached the pole, to go no farther! He was ordered to have his expedition back at the Nore, a Royal Navy anchorage in the Thames estuary, before the onset of winter.

Phipps had a considerable amount of existing data on which to shape his course. For decades, the logbooks of whalers operating around Svalbard had recorded the changing nature of the polar ice in those northern waters. The edge of the mass of permanent ice would shift from summer to summer, some years crushing down upon the islands off the northern coast of Svalbard or the coast of the main archipelago island of Spitsbergen itself, in other years wending offshore and leaving an ice-free passage that trended northeast from the whaling stations of Amsterdam Island (Amsterdamøya) and Danes Island (Danskøya) all the way to the Seven Islands (Sjuøyane). Despite such occasional open waters, however, the pack ice above lat. 81° N always remained as an impassable barrier to the ice-covered waters around the North Pole.

Such seasonal variations in the permanent polar pack ice were used by a British dilettante named Daines Barrington in 1773 to argue that a ship need only force a bit further north before an ice-free corridor was located that would open a passage directly to the Pole. Barrington convinced the

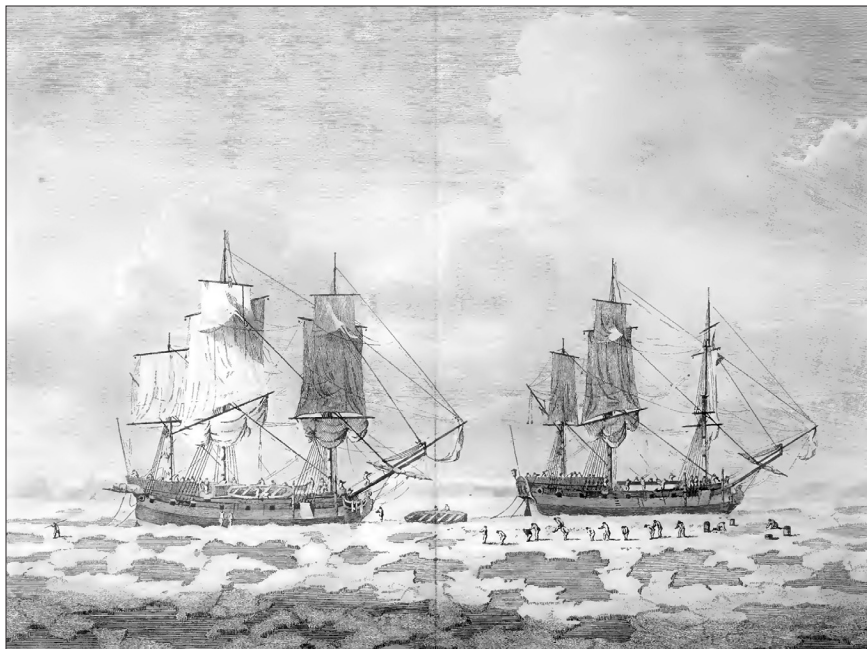


Fig. 3. Racehorse and Carcass in the ice north of Svalbard, 1773 (from Phipps 1774).

Council of the Royal Society to ask the Earl of Sandwich to importune the King to order the Admiralty to mount a polar expedition north from Svalbard. With a fine bureaucratic disregard of a century and a half of whaling experience showing nothing but a continuous wall of ice north of Svalbard, the Admiralty agreed.

Phipps's expedition left England in late May, 1773, and by early July the ships had gained Magdalena Bay (Magdalenafjorden) in northwest Svalbard. En route, Phipps made a series of deep-ocean temperature observations using a "thermometer invented by Lord Charles Cavendish"⁷⁴ There, in the final safe stopping point before entering a tangle of historic islands that mark the northwest corner of the Svalbard archipelago and the beginning of the truly adventurous sailing, the ships were watered.

On July 5th, Phipps was called to the deck to see pack ice for the first time. As Phipps writes, he "perceived something white upon the bow, and heard a noise like the surf upon the shore; I hauled down the studding

sails, and hailed the *Carcass* to let them know that I should stand for it to make what it was, having all hands upon deck ready to haul up at a moment's warning: I desired that they would keep close to us, the fog being so thick, and have every body ready to follow our motions instantaneously, determining to stand on under such sail as should enable us to keep the ships under command, and not risk parting company.”⁵

Phipps's prudence was tested immediately, as the ships were forced to dodge in and out and around several large masses of drift ice. For several days they continued in this manner, waiting for the expected “opening [that] might be found to get through to a clear sea to the Northward.”⁶ The crews were soon tired of the continuous ship-handling in Arctic conditions, but found some comfort in “the spirits which had been allowed for extraordinary occasions.”⁷ Clearly, the titanic effort required to sail a tall ship through the maze of polar pack ice north of Svalbard classified as extraordinary when it came to the Royal Navy's daily ration of rum.

The two vessels reached the historic roadstead of Fair Haven in mid-July and anchored there in eleven fathoms. The area was given its amicable name centuries earlier by English mariners. They had found it the only anchorage in northwest Svalbard that – on account of several surrounding islands, like Vogelsang (Fuglesangen), Cloven Cliff (Klovningen) and the Norway islands (Norskøyane) – offered reasonable protection from the ice that drifted in from the east. While the ships were again watered, Phipps went ashore and saw to the northeast that the ice extended in an almost unbroken, uniform field. Unable to maneuver northwards, Phipps turned east along the coast until he encountered loose ice north of Woodfjorden, then turned north again.

On the 25th, Lutwidge from the *Carcass* went ashore on Møffen Island, a fascinating Arctic lagoon where, a century later, Leigh Smith would find the skeleton of a whale carved with centuries of ship's names. The island, about two miles in diameter, encircled a large pond of water in its middle. The nearly circular land surrounding the lagoon was about a quarter of a mile wide. Lutwidge found it covered with gravel and small stones, “without the least verdure or vegetation of any kind.”⁸ He also found a lone piece of driftwood on shore, and an inscription covering the grave of a Dutchman who had been buried alongside the lagoon two years earlier. It was easily the furthest north a human being had ever been

interred to that moment. When Phipps learned of it, he thought it extraordinary that no one had ever mentioned the place before, since such an Arctic lagoon was highly unusual. He concluded that it might be because it had only recently been formed from the ocean currents that plied up the western coast of Svalbard.

On July 27, 1773, the expedition attained a new furthest north of lat. 80°48' N. There the vessels were blocked by a line of ice extending nearly east to west, but Phipps had achieved a record that would stand for more than three decades, until the whalers William Scoresby, *père et fils*, gained it at lat. 81°30' N on board the vessel *Resolution* in 1806.

Phipps continued to force his vessels east, occasionally entering narrow openings in the ice wall that extended a few nautical miles north. But each time, such promising leads invariably closed and forced Phipps to retreat. The ships continued eastward and on August 3rd reached the Sjuøyane, the seven northernmost islands in the Svalbard archipelago. They were then farther north and east than any exploring expedition before them. They were also beset by ice, which at some points seemed to rise higher than the mainmasts of the ships themselves. The pressure of the ice for a time led Phipps to contemplate abandoning the vessels. On the 5th, Phipps sent a midshipman named Walden to a high island about twelve nautical miles west of their position to gain a better view of the expedition's predicament. Walden returned the following day without any good news as to the state of the ice but his brief flying expedition was immortalized by Phipps, who named the rocky islet he had ascended Walden Island (Waldenøya).

With northward progress halted, Phipps nevertheless continued a program of scientific research, using such instruments as a thermometer designed for measuring water temperature and an apparatus invented for distilling fresh water from salt water. Phipps's log of the voyage contained much new data on Svalbard, including the first European description of the ivory gull and the polar bear ("much larger than the black bear ..."). Men in the small boats who fired on a walrus soon found the walrus attacking them in turn. There was also a magical foreshadowing incident between a large polar bear and a fourteen-year-old midshipman on board the *Carcass* named Horatio Nelson, who was almost killed when his rifle jammed during a failed attempt to secure the white bear's skin for his

father. Paintings of the encounter would later be produced that extended the legend of the future hero. Two of the Sjuøyane would later be named for officers on the expedition, one for Nelson (Nelsonøya) and one for Phipps (Phippsøya).

For a week, Phipps combined his attempt to free the ships from the pack with a simultaneous effort to haul the ship's boats over the ice in case the mother ships became permanently trapped and the small boats became the only means of escape. By the 9th, however, the ships had overtaken and recalled the boats and the next day, with all sails set, the *Racehorse* and *Carcass* smashed through to the open sea. When one final attempt on August 22 failed to locate a workable opening in the ice to the north, Phipps quit the waters around Svalbard. On September 7, the expedition reached the Shetlands and from there fought through a succession of gales until regaining the Thames on September 24. Phipps hadn't reached the pole but he had indeed followed the Admiralty's prescribed timetable to the letter.

The Phipps expedition demonstrated that a direct open sea route to the North Pole from the waters between Svalbard and Greenland or from the waters directly north of Svalbard was unlikely to the point of impossibility. The many years of Arctic experience of the commercial whaler William Scoresby the Younger served, in the main, to further this impression. Eventually, Scoresby suggested – with the full support of an aging Joseph Banks – that his vast experience in the ice made him the perfect candidate to lead an expedition to solve the twin problems of the North Pole and the Northwest Passage once and for all. He was blocked in this ambition by one John Barrow, a professional bureaucrat who for forty years served as the Second Secretary to the Admiralty. Barrow warmly thanked Scoresby for his interest and then liberally borrowed most of Scoresby's ideas while making it plain that the Royal Navy was more than up to those two great Arctic tasks.

Scoresby and his father were from the same generations that had produced the father and grandfather of Benjamin Leigh Smith. Unlike the Scoresbys, however, the Smiths were not men of the sea.

Leigh Smith's grandfather, William Smith (1756–1835), was born into a family that traced its geographic roots to the Isle of Wight and its philosophical underpinnings to the religious conflicts that had torn

England apart for the better part of two hundred years. The Smiths were Dissenters, nonconformist members of the Protestant faith who had turned away from the predominant Anglican Church. William Smith has been variously described as a Unitarian¹⁰ and a Congregationalist,¹¹ the latter affiliation conjoined at the time to the term Independent. It was a term as appropriate as any to describe both Smith himself and the generations of Smiths that would follow him.

The price the Smiths paid for their religious independence in eighteenth-century England was a steep one. Dissenters, along with Catholics and Jews, were barred from work in important government jobs and could not become officers in the army or attend Oxford unless they renounced their faith and took an oath accepting the Anglican creed. A Dissenter could attend certain of the colleges of Cambridge but would not be allowed to actually take a degree.

With the doors to employment in the government, the clergy, and the military largely closed to them, the Smith family, like many other Dissenters and nonconformists, turned instead to creating their own educational institutions and to making their livings in banking and in trade. Once established, William Smith would spend nearly half a century in Parliament in an attempt to reverse these historic discriminations, along with the great transnational sin of the age, human slavery.

William Smith's father, Samuel, was a grocer, a partner in a firm known as Smith, Travers & Kemble. The house imported tea from China and India and sugar from the West Indies, and through it Samuel Smith made a fortune. In 1754 he had married a woman named Martha Adams, the daughter of another nonconformist family of tradesmen. Over the next five years, Martha gave birth to William and to three daughters. Not one of the daughters survived beyond the age of four. The final daughter died at birth in 1759 and Martha, at the age of twenty-five, followed her in death a few weeks later. William, now the only surviving child, was only three when his mother passed: he would live until he was nearly eighty. Samuel Smith, who valued education above all, made certain that William received an excellent training prior to his expected participation in the family business.

A revealing portrait, painted in 1770 by Mason Chamberlain, shows William at the age of fourteen, standing before a table, looking through

several books, as his father, “resplendent in periwig, knee breeches and frogged coat,”¹² has seemingly put his own reading aside to guide his son’s interests. It is, as their descendent Charlotte Moore writes, “a classic illustration of the Age of Enlightenment.”¹³

William completed a course of study at the Daventry Academy, a respected school for children of dissenting families, where he would have enjoyed the same liberal education that led Joseph Priestley to his Rational Dissent twenty years earlier. The belief in new fields of scientific inquiry, the belief that “minor differences in theology were much less important than a desire to discover truth,”¹⁴ a belief in natural human rights, the rejection of mysticism and a government tied too closely to the dogmas of a dominant religion, each of these intellectual guideposts would mark William Smith’s life and career.

In 1772, Samuel remarried and moved his reconstituted family south of the Thames to the enclave of Clapham Common. There they would soon be joined by a host of like-minded reformers. Within two decades, through groups like the Clapham Sect, the Common would become the staging area for the campaign to abolish slavery and, through such just causes, be seen as the harbinger of what would later become Victorian morality. Between his intellectual development at Daventry and the stimulation of his Clapham surroundings, William could be forgiven for a lack of attention to the grocery business, in which he became a partner at the age of twenty-one.

Not long after, in 1780, a legacy from an uncle made William financially independent. It allowed him to transfer his partnership in the firm and set off on an independent life of his own. The following year he married Frances Coape, another nonconformist whose family had made their money refining sugar imported from the West Indies. They began their life together by writing and traveling, making visits to manufacturing towns and art galleries throughout England. In 1784 they journeyed throughout Wales and two years later traveled through the Lake District, Scotland, and Ireland, riding in a phaeton drawn by two horses and guided by a postilion, moving from the estates of one acquaintance to the estates of another. They admired the scenery around Loch Ness and Urquart Castle and William climbed Ben Nevis. Throughout their lives they would rarely travel apart from one another. His biographers note that he

was still writing affectionate poems to Frances fifty years into their marriage.¹⁵ In between these trips they purchased a country estate in Little Parndon near Harlow.

In addition to their literary and geographic adventures, William and Frances were also busy producing children, thirteen of them. As if to illustrate the health and hereditary lottery of the age, their fourth child, a girl named Frances, died of smallpox at the age of four months in 1787; a second Frances, born the following year, would live to be ninety-two. In 1818, this second Frances married William Nightingale and it was their daughter Florence, born two years later, who herself would live to be ninety and world famous. The eldest son of William and Frances was named Benjamin Smith (1783–1860), and he would have been thirty-five and in the middle of an energetic life of finance and politics in the year of Florence Nightingale's birth.

Eighteen-eighteen was also the same year that John Barrow, with a portfolio full of William Scoresby's ideas for Arctic exploration, sent the first of the Royal Navy's many expeditions and ships in search of the Northwest Passage and the North Pole. Each was carefully stage-managed by the energetically misguided Barrow and occupied three decades of increasingly futile Arctic explorations by the Royal Navy and the British government. As historian Fergus Fleming writes: "When [Barrow] had a geographical opinion it was frequently the wrong one."¹⁶

To the commanders of the four vessels he dispatched in two separate expeditions in the spring of 1818, Barrow's instructions were as clear as they were impossible: attack the centuries-old problems of the Northwest Passage and the North Pole and resolve them by the end of the summer. The commanders of the North Pole effort, David Buchan and John Franklin, accomplished as much as could be expected. They led the ships *Dorothea* and *Trent* as far as an exploration of northwestern Svalbard, where, like Phipps and Nelson a half-century earlier, they found no obvious sea route to the North Pole.

To this brief thrust to the northwards was joined the vessels *Isabella* and *Alexander* under the commands of John Ross and William Parry, tasked with finding the long-sought Northwest Passage through the maze of islands of the North American Arctic. After some truly remarkable (and notably peaceful) encounters with Greenlandic Inuit, Ross turned

the ships for England without fully exploring any of the inlets on the Canadian side of Baffin Bay that might have led to a solution of the Northwest Passage problem. By the end of 1818, the Admiralty was right back where it had started when the four ships left for the Arctic in April, and no closer to the North Pole than they were after the Phipps expedition nearly half a century earlier.

Parry returned to the North American Arctic the following year, 1819, in command of two vessels named the *Hecla* and the *Griper*. This expedition succeeded in penetrating halfway across the arctic archipelago to the Bering Strait and on his return Parry was promoted to commander and wrote the first of his accounts of Arctic exploration. A second Northwest Passage expedition under Parry from 1821 to 1823 in the *Hecla* and *Fury* fared less well, as did a third expedition with the same vessels in 1824. When *Fury* was wrecked in 1825 off Somerset Island, just north of King William Island, Parry doubled his crews on board *Hecla* and escaped back to England.

The following year, 1826, Parry and the Admiralty agreed to launch another attempt at the North Pole by means of a return to the same waters north of Svalbard explored by Phipps and Franklin. Again Parry commanded *Hecla* into the Arctic but this time with a new plan. He would not risk losing another ship in the ice. Instead, he would search along the northern coast of Svalbard for a suitable anchorage for *Hecla* and then lead two small boats northwards to the ice. There, he and his men would attempt to drag these boats northwards in the hope and expectation that an open sea around the pole would materialize and the boats could be sailed the remaining miles to their goal, which might even be the mountainous island many thought crowned the top of the world.

In crafting this plan, Parry was reaching back to an observation made by Skeffington Lutwidge during the Phipps expedition. Lutwidge had noted that, for a distance of thirty to forty nautical miles north of the Sjuøyane, there appeared to be “one continued plain of smooth unbroken ice, bounded only by the horizon.”¹⁷ Phipps’s chart of the area showed flat, unbroken ice north of the islands. Parry then approvingly quotes Scoresby, where the whaler writes that he “once saw a field that was so free from either fissure or hummock, that I imagine, had it been free from snow, a

coach might have been driven many leagues over it in a direct line, without obstruction or danger.”¹⁸

Parry took these isolated and localized data of Lutwidge and Scoresby and from it devised a plan to slide two purpose-built small boats across the reputedly smooth and glassy ice field until they reached open water somewhere between the Sjuøyane and the Pole. The boats would be twenty feet long and have an extreme breadth of seven feet carried far forward as well as aft, with hulls made of ash and hickory covered with canvas. The canvas was coated with tar, which was then covered with a layer of fir, then a layer of felt and, finally, a layer of oak. The whole construction was closely fastened with iron nails and fitted with bamboo masts and duck sails. Running below and nearly the length of each side of the keel were steel runners meant to simulate a sledge, along with two large wheels on each side in the event progress could be had by rolling the boats northwards.

These unique boats, named *Enterprise* and *Endeavour*, were meant to be large enough to accommodate crews of two officers and twelve men along with all of their gear, yet small enough for these same fourteen men to hop onto the ‘continuous plain of smooth unbroken ice,’ don leather shoulder harnesses, and pull the boats behind them. This proved a faint hope, as the boats as constructed were massively heavy (Parry puts their empty weight at three quarters of a ton). Fully-loaded, each boat was near two tons, or nearly 300 pounds of dead weight for every man jack. Parry’s instructions from Viscount Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, were to find a suitable anchorage on the north coast of Svalbard, secure *Hecla* within it, and then move off northwards with his twenty-three companions in the small boats.

On Sunday, March 25, 1827, *Hecla* departed Greenwich. A few days later, after visits from Melville himself and with the crew given three month’s pay in advance, *Hecla* was on her way northwards. She reached Hammerfest in northern Norway two weeks later, dressed the ship and fired a royal salute on the King’s birthday on April 23rd, and took on board eight reindeer that Parry hoped to employ in pulling the boats.

The expedition encountered its first ice on May 5th at about lat. 73°30’ N, and four days later, at lat. 77° N, fell in with two whaling vessels, the *Alpheus* and the *Active* out of the Scottish port of Peterhead. Encountering several more whalers in the days ahead, Parry received the

discomfiting news that each one considered the ice they had seen so far that season “to offer more obstacles to the attainment of [the North Pole] than it had done for many years past.”¹⁹

On the 14th, the expedition was off Hakluyt’s Headland (Hakluythovden), a thousand-foot high mountain that forms the northern point of Amsterdamøya and which for centuries had marked the turning point for all ships seeking to round the northwest corner of the Svalbard archipelago. Here Parry encountered his first real problems, finding, like Phipps and Buchan and Franklin before him, nothing but unbroken ice. Moreover, a strong southerly wind was coursing out of Smeerenburgfjorden, where he had hoped to anchor and land a planned relief cache of supplies at Hakluythovden. Despite every exertion by the crew, *Hecla* was blown north toward Fuglesangen almost on her beam ends. Seventy years later, in 1897 and almost to the day, a similar southerly wind would push Salomon Andrée over Fuglesangen in his balloon *Örnen* (*Eagle*), where a young crew member named Nils Strindberg would throw a letter to his fiancé onto the island.

Parry maneuvered the ship deep into the pack ice to get it away from the breaking seas and within a day the wind had died down and *Hecla* was carried past Fuglesangen and Klovningen and along the heavily-indented northern coast of Svalbard. Soon they had crossed the 80th parallel, hard on the keels of Phipps’s farthest north. Parry couldn’t resist reminding his readers that his ship had escaped the serious damage that David Buchan’s *Dorothea* had suffered in exactly the same spot during his 1818 polar expedition.

Having reached the latitude where he planned to secure the ship and take to the boats, Parry instead set out to squeeze *Hecla* between the polar ice pack and the Svalbard shore in search of a suitable anchorage. In a region where every day lost was a major blow to his plans, this survey alone cost Parry a month, during much of which time *Hecla* was beset in the ice. Parry’s impatience led him at last to launch the small boats into the pack, where he soon had to retrieve them or watch as jagged ice floes tore them apart. Search as he might, there was no smooth road. The ice edge was miles wide and up to twelve feet thick. Wrote Parry: “The nature of the ice was, beyond all comparison, the most unfavorable for our purpose that I ever remember to have seen.”²⁰

But Parry still held to the belief that, just beyond those jagged edges, his small boats would find ice floes and fields more suited to his purpose. Yet a second experiment in dragging one of the boats across the pack went so badly that Parry considered dropping one of the boats from the polar dash but keeping the same number of men to haul a single boat.

On the 13th of June, they got into enough clear water north of Low Island (Lågøya) to reach Waldenøya, where Parry eventually landed and sought to cache enough supplies to create a relief station. From Waldenøya, Parry could spy, ten nautical miles off, Little Table Island (Vesle Tavleøya), at that moment the northernmost known land on the planet. On the 14th, *Hecla* bested Phipps's farthest north and a few hours later drew above the 81st parallel. Here Parry was within a few nautical miles of Scoresby's record. Yet all he could see ahead of him were broken fields of ice extending in every direction, not the 'flat and unbroken' road Phipps had written of from near the same spot.

Ascending Waldenøya's heights on June 16th, Parry saw nothing but discouragement all around him and gave up searching for a safe anchorage among the Sjuøyane. He made one more attempt, sending Lieutenant James Clark Ross ashore at a small island north of Vesle Tavleøya. Ross landed some supplies but found no suitable holding ground for the ship. Besides standing on a new northernmost point of land in the world, Ross would later have the islet named for him by his commander. Today its accepted name is Rossøya.

Retreating southwards below the 80th parallel, Parry on the 18th finally found what he was looking for, an area within Sorgfjorden where the ship could be anchored and the small boats deployed without instantly encountering crushing ice floes. Parry writes:

On the following morning I proceeded to examine the place, accompanied by Lieutenant Ross in a second boat, and, to our great joy, found it a considerable bay, with one affording excellent land-locked anchorage, and, what was equally fortunate, sufficiently clear of ice to allow the ship to enter. Having sounded the entrance, and determined on the anchorage, we returned to the ship to bring her in; and I cannot describe the satisfaction

which the information of our success communicated to every individual on board. The main object of our enterprise now appeared within our grasp, and every body seemed anxious to make up, by renewed exertions, for the time we had unavoidably lost. The ship was towed and warped in with the greatest alacrity, and at 1.40, A.M., on the 20th, we dropped anchor in Hecla Cove [Heclahamna], in thirteen fathoms, on a bottom of very tenacious blue clay, and made some hawsers fast to the land-ice which still filled all the upper part of the bay.²¹

Sorgfjorden is often cut off by ice drifting across its mouth from nearby Hinlopen Strait (Hinlopenstretet). Any ship caught in this trap would remain there all winter. Parry, however, was lucky. The drift ice in the summer of 1827 did not close off his choice of a harbor. Wasting no time, Parry devolved command of *Hecla* to Lieutenant Henry Foster and left the ship at five p.m. on the 21st. Depositing some more relief supply caches, first at Lågøya and then at Waldenøya (where he found his original cache already picked over by polar bears), the North Pole expedition proper began.

As it was still necessary not to delay our return beyond the end of August, the time originally intended, I took with me only seventy-one days' provisions; which, including the boats and every other article, made up a weight of 260 lbs. per man; and as it appeared highly improbable, from what we had seen of the very rugged nature of the ice we should first have to encounter, that either the rein-deer, the snow-shoes [sledges], or the wheels would prove of any service for some time to come, I gave up the idea of taking them.²²

It took Parry only two days to lay in his caches and return to the edge of the world at Rossøya. There he and his men began to haul the boats northwards. They traveled at 'night,' a relatively meaningless term where the daylight lasts twenty-four hours, but at least the wind was not as strong during nighttime hours and the slightly diminished light it allowed them some relief from snow-blindness. They began the evening with prayers,

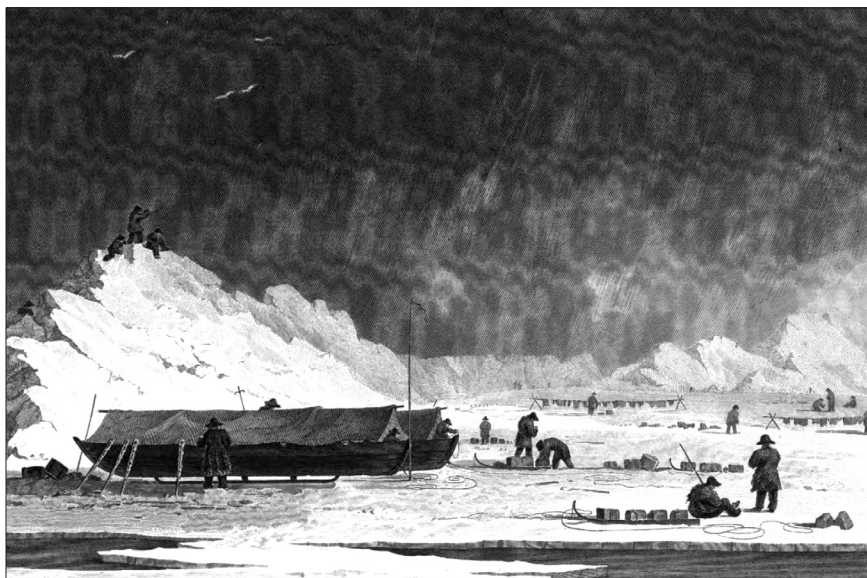


Fig. 4. Parry's boats stopped for the night, somewhere north of Svalbard, 1827 (from Parry 1828).

removed their sleeping furs and put on lighter traveling furs, and had some biscuits and cocoa. They set out in wet boots, traveling about ten hours at a stretch with an hour in the middle for rest. The boats would then be hauled onto the biggest pan of ice they could find, the sails thrown over them to form a canvas awning, and the men settled. Pipe smoke drifted up into the canvas, drying it somewhat. With a watch set against the appearance of polar bears or a break-up of the ice and a recitation of 'evening' prayers, they slept.

The going was "slow and laborious,"²³ and at some stretches it was taking them four hours just to advance half a mile. Even as they made a bit of progress to the north, oceans currents and winds would shift the ice further south, rendering their immense physical efforts all for naught. On one day, certain they had traveled over twelve nautical miles over the ice, their noon observation found that they had gone only five actual miles across the Earth. Recognizing a morale-killer when he saw it, Parry sensibly hid

this data from the men. They, however, were not stupid, and often made bitter jokes about how long it was taking to get to the 83rd parallel.

By early July, the men's eyes were failing in the constant light. When it rained, the snow turned to slush and the men were forced to crawl on all fours in order to make any progress at all. Four days hard march after taking a sight that had placed them at lat. 82°40'23" N, Parry found to his horror that they were three nautical miles *south* of that position. This was enough futility for even the most determined officer. The agony had lasted for thirty-five days, and on July 26th Parry called a halt to this "useless fatigue to the officers and men."²⁴ They had reached their furthest north of lat. 82°45' N on July 23rd, some 172 nautical miles north of where their ship was anchored in Hecla Cove. To achieve these 172 nautical miles, Parry reckoned that they had actually hauled the boats over nearly 300 nautical miles of ice. If in fact there had been a smooth road north of Svalbard, their exertions would have put them at lat. 85° N – and only 300 nautical miles from the North Pole.

They regained Rossøya two weeks later, where they found that in their absence bears had eaten all of the one hundred pounds of bread they had laid in before departing northwards. Unable to land and haul the boats anywhere on Vesle Tavleøya, Parry headed for the cache on Waldenøya. Hauling the boats onto the lee of Waldenøya, Parry noted that his men were so tired that they still obeyed his orders but did not seem to understand them. He sent Ross around to the northeast corner of the island in search of the boat and supplies Foster had been instructed to place there. Then they sat down and waited for better weather.

Parry's brief penetration onto the polar pack ice north of the Sjuøyane would remain the sum total of the world's knowledge of the entire polar basin for much of the next half century. His book about the adventure along the north coast of Svalbard was published in the same year, 1828 – and almost to the same day – as the birth of Benjamin Leigh Smith, who would become the next Englishman to see in the geography of northern Svalbard and the Sjuøyane as the best route to the North Pole.

It was Leigh Smith's father, Benjamin Smith, who would style his grandmother's maiden name "Leigh" to the otherwise pedestrian "Smith" of William Smith in order to create a new and distinct family name well suited to a pre-Victorian upper class pretension. Benjamin Smith the elder

became known as ‘the Pater’ and he was every bit of that. A raffish and Radical Member of Parliament whom *The Times* described as “a sufficiently flippant personage,”²⁵ the Pater, despite a prodigious reproductive life, never married. He was as radical in his personal life as he was in his public life and his politics. He fathered at least eight children out of wedlock with two and possibly three different women, including five with Leigh Smith’s mother, commoner Anne Longden, and three with another woman named Jane Buss.²⁶

He met Anne Longden, a twenty-five-year-old milliner from the East Midlands, in 1826. When she became pregnant, the Pater sequestered her in the remote East Sussex village of Whatlington, a tiny collection of structures that is now little more than a blink of the eye on the A21 from London to Hastings. There she was fashioned as ‘Mrs. Leigh,’ and it was there that she gave birth to the estimable, formidable Barbara on April 8, 1827. As Barbara Bodichon, the Pater’s first child would through the force of her personality go on to become an artist and one of the great social reformers and feminists of the nineteenth century. Before she turned forty, she would do as much as anyone to extend university education to women, co-founding Girton College at Cambridge.

Benjamin Leigh Smith, the future explorer, followed very quickly on, in 1828. As the Pater’s eldest son, Leigh Smith would have been the most heavily burdened with the highest expectations, a weary load he eventually tried to carry to the North Pole.

Besides Barbara and Benjamin, other children included the mercurial Isabella, ‘Bella,’ who would struggle throughout her life with an ultimately incapacitating mental illness; Anne, or ‘Nannie,’ who would live as openly homosexual as one could in nineteenth century England; and William, or ‘Willy,’ who to all appearances was as straight down the line as his siblings were radically flamboyant, and who was apparently content to remain throughout much of his life a simple gentleman-farmer on his inherited lands just outside of the town of Battle.

After Willy’s birth, Anne Longden suffered a steady decline in her health. She died, still a young woman, in 1834, having never married the man she bore five children to. After her death, the children were looked after by aunts. Their firmly upper-class status was reinforced by Latin tutors and riding instructors and by such trappings as an eight-seat coach

the Pater spent a fortune on in 1842. There is little reason to believe that he was particularly troubled by the millstones he had placed on each of his children by either their illegitimacy or the social isolation of his anti-establishment politics. In fact it is more than likely that he considered the two inextricably linked.

With men serving overseas in the military or emigrating in higher numbers than women and with consequently more women than men in England, meaning fewer potential partners, there existed an appalling bias against women in nineteenth-century English law that all but forced on women a kind of legalized prostitution. Men could divorce women accused of adultery, but not the reverse. Women could be cast out of a marriage and forbidden from seeing their own children. Everything a woman owned or earned became, upon marriage, her husband's. Leigh Smith's descendent, the novelist Charlotte Moore, believes that the Pater's approach was much more than an upper-class gentleman refusing to legitimize a union with a member of the working class. He simply refused to force a woman to, in effect, become his personal property. "Ben chose to make a stand against the conventions of marriage; he disapproved of the fact that, once married, a woman forfeited any right to property of her own and became little more than one of her husband's chattels."²⁷

In the end, the Pater would do much more than that: he took his father William's political progressivism and, joining it to his own beliefs and proclivities, fashioned a kind of socio-sexual life experiment. He raised his first family – the one that included the brilliant Barbara and the restless Benjamin – as prosperous landed gentry. And then he extended his *Pater familias* to at least one if not two additional illegitimate families. With little regard for prevailing conjugal property law or public opinion, and in control of lots of inherited money and numerous mini-estates scattered across the green pasturelands of Sussex, Leigh Smith would have had numerous opportunities to both attract and impregnate local poor and working-class women who either could not or would not reject the advances of a prosperous middle-aged member of the gentry. That he took advantage of a ripe situation is not at issue, as there is little reason to doubt that men of similar means behaved in similar ways. That he sought such a life in order to make manifest his political beliefs regarding women and property is the more interesting story.

And this is where the Pater's tale becomes a bit murky. For if his family with Anne Longden was raised to be his 'first' or upper-class family, there is a suggestion that the second family, which he contrived as the "Bentley Smiths," and possibly even a third family, were conceived and organized on radically different economic lines: the second as deliberately middle class and the third as distinctly working class.²⁸ As a highly personal socio-economic experiment, the Pater could monitor the lives and careers of his variety of offspring – with each family unit cast in uniquely different economic strata – and gauge thereby the relative effects of inherited wealth to abject poverty in the development of the human being. If true – and given the prevailing laws and mores it is entirely possible that he arranged his life in this way not entirely or even mainly as a social experiment but rather because he was wealthy and could afford to do as he liked – it suggests a remarkably clinical compartmentalization of one's social, emotional, sexual, and economic lives.

Several of daughter Barbara's pencil sketches survive from this period and three of them in particular are stark depictions of lives lived by the poor and the gentry. In their Dickensian opposition they can perhaps be seen as glimpses into the social thinking of the Pater. The first sketch, from about 1840, presents the Pater as a well-dressed, balding man sitting in a finely-appointed drawing room complete with a marble bust of a female in the background. He is playing a game of chess with a young Willy Leigh Smith, who is standing and appears ready to make a move as his father contemplates the board. The Pater's face is soft, and reflects a seemingly pleased, indulgent father. It is an impression of an unhurried man leading an unhurried life.

The second sketch is likewise another depiction of upper-class wealth, education, and privilege. It shows Benjamin Leigh Smith, the future explorer, elaborately dressed in the cross-gartered stockings of Shakespeare's Malvolio from *Twelfth Night*, courting a scowling Olivia, played by his sister Bella, as an amused Maria played by Barbara kneels at Bella's feet.

The third sketch, made in 1847, when Barbara was twenty, could not be more severely different from the first two. It shows four children, all dressed in patches and rags, begging on the streets of Hastings. One boy holds a hoop to run with, while another child carries a burden packed into a flat box atop his head. A small girl is forlornly watching another boy

as he begs for change from passersby by banging a tambourine to keep time for the puppets he is making dance via a string tied to his leg. It is a complete representation of small children trapped in hopeless poverty and facing the front of a lifetime of labor. And the scene takes place just a few miles from where Willy is playing chess with the well-fed Pater and where the future polar explorer is donning colorful costumes for his family's amateur theatricals. More to the point, given the Pater's unconventional sexuality, which Barbara learned of after his death when she learned of the existence of the Bentley Smiths, Barbara may have unknowingly sketched – not some tragically anonymous street urchins – but her own blood relations, deliberately placed in their stations by a father conducting a social experiment.

The third sketch also offers some insight into Barbara, the future social activist and now a justly and much-chronicled and celebrated historical figure. Throughout her life she sought constant improvement in the living and working conditions of women. Perhaps her first tangible attempt was made in November of 1854, when she founded a progressive educational institution, the School for Girls and Boys at Portman Hall. It promised “to bring a thoroughly good Education within reach of the working and middle classes.”²⁹ It was intended that the teachers at Portman Hall would see to the “whole nature of their pupils, not omitting to give special instruction suited to fit them for the practical duties of life.”³⁰

Whether her brother, the future explorer Benjamin Leigh Smith, was as fundamentally disturbed as Barbara by the plight of the British working class is an open question. Few indications survive from his early life or his years at Jesus College at Cambridge to offer clues one way or the other. Leigh Smith entered Cambridge at twenty, in 1848, where he was reputed a good shot and yachtsman, qualifications that evidently placed one in good stead in the Fen country. He was one of less than three dozen undergraduates, at a time when Dissenters were still forbidden from taking their degrees and decades before Jesus College became a center for the education of hundreds of middle-class Englishmen each year.

When Leigh Smith reached twenty-one years of age the following year, the Pater bestowed on him investment income of £300 per year. Compared to the prevailing salary of a Royal Navy Marine of about £12 a year, Leigh Smith now possessed more than enough to relieve any



Figs. 5–6. Two sketches by Barbara (Leigh Smith) Bodichon. The first shows the Pater playing chess with Willie, ca. 1840; the second shows street urchins in Hastings, ca. 1850 (courtesy Hancox Archive).

financial worries about having to work for the rest of his life. Each of the Pater's daughters also received the same amount when they came of age, and Charlotte Moore writes that this was much more than a gift. It was to guarantee that these women would not be placed in the same situation as virtually every other woman of their age: that of being not only dependent on men and marriage, but in fact becoming the property of any man they might marry.

The beneficence to his children also shows that, whatever his political, social, and sexual proclivities, the Pater had managed his financial affairs well. Yet a letter from Barbara in December of 1852, when she was twenty-five and Leigh Smith twenty-four, hints at a blazing row between Leigh Smith and the Pater. The basis of the argument is unknown, but it was one that smoldered in Leigh Smith for some time. "I believe," Barbara writes, "that Papa will be astonished that you have taken his passionate words so seriously. His words never mean as much to him as you take them for."³¹

But clearly they did. What Leigh Smith interpreted as an explosion the Pater could have seen as a routine fatherly criticism of BLS's choice of career, of course. It is entirely possible that the father was irritated at the leisurely pace of his son's studies, even though the Pater could have considered himself as responsible for this tardiness as anyone, having fixed a fortune on the young man at the age of twenty-one.

In her letter, when Barbara reminds her brother that he has responsibilities to others besides his father, she reveals that Leigh Smith has moved away from home. Such a drastic family cleavage suggests the possibility of a more serious confrontation between father and son. If the argument was not a fight over money, then perhaps Leigh Smith had learned with the shocked horror of a young naïf of the Pater's other families? Worse, that he himself was part of a grand socio-sexual experiment. Perhaps there was a final reckoning over his illegitimacy and that of all his siblings – with half-siblings into the bargain? If in fact he found himself in loathing of the Pater's apparent womanizing and tight family control, it is possible if not probable that such feelings mutated to self-loathing when the same patterns emerged in Leigh Smith's own adult life, when he invested inordinate amounts of time coveting and controlling much younger women.

Whatever the reasons for the schism with his father, as the eldest son of a family of illegitimate dissenters Leigh Smith had been placed in an almost impossible position in Victorian society. He would come to have all the property anyone could hope for – which to the landed gentry meant rental income for life and an existence of extreme comfort and leisure. But as a dissenter from the Church of England he was nearly thirty before he could take his degree at Cambridge and this, combined with his illegitimacy, has to be considered when searching for an explanation as to why this otherwise dominant personality would later shy away from public acclaim for his polar accomplishments.

Dissenters were finally allowed to take their degrees from Jesus College in 1856, making Leigh Smith one of if not the first such student to receive his diploma. Even then, with his admittance to the Bar, he did not practice. It seems clear enough that he had his mind's eye on different frontiers, and he had more than enough money to afford to take his time exploring them. It is not difficult to see where he wanted to go. Instead of the law, the young man earned a master's certificate to demonstrate the competence to sail his own ships.³²

One writer suggests that, in the 1850s, the unconventional children were further snubbed by their famous cousins the Nightingales.³³ Whatever the reason for this slight – the children's illegitimacy, Barbara's politics, or the fact that the Pater was originally urged to marry into the Nightingale family and had refused – it was all apparently forgotten or forgiven thirty years later when Leigh Smith named a prominent waterway in Franz Josef Land 'Nightingale Sound.'

When it came to the row with his father, Barbara – as revolutionary a personality as any in Victorian England – urged her brother to stand his ground, and her Churchillian exhortation borders on an abuse charge against the Pater. "Every one must bear & fight in the place he is put & every resistance makes one stronger & more able to resist."³⁴ Unfortunately, if Leigh Smith replied to Barbara this letter does not survive to give us more insight into her nebulous comment that she does "not quite understand your letter & therefore cannot say exactly what I think."³⁵ Yet the remark suggests a deep bond between the siblings and a sister's natural protectiveness of a younger brother.

Another possibility that cannot be discounted is that Leigh Smith had declared his intention to make a career in exploration and had been rebuffed by his father. £300 was a princely inheritance, but to build an Arctic research vessel one required a king's ransom of £10,000 or more. Such a rebuke would surely have stung, but given the timing it was certainly understandable. The Pater would not be inclined to buy a ship for his son while the Franklin disaster was at that moment in full carnage. The same year that Leigh Smith entered Cambridge, the Admiralty dispatched three separate expeditions to locate their lost ships. They then offered a massive reward of £20,000 for anyone who could find the lost crews and get them out of the Arctic. Had Leigh Smith, a young man keen on sailing and exploration, seen in the Franklin epic not a disaster but rather a heaven-sent chance to put both his money and his skill to work on a project that would make him famous as well?

The notion is not so far-fetched. Twenty years after the rift with his father, Leigh Smith would do something very similar, coming to the aid of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld's expedition stranded at Mussel Bay (Mos-selbukta) on the north coast of Svalbard and in the process winning for himself the Royal Order of the Polar Star from the King of Sweden.³⁶

But the 1850s saw Leigh Smith not in the Arctic but tied to his studies at Cambridge. He was resigned to watching (and collecting notes on) the increasingly spectacular developments around him, each of which likely only intensified his impatience with the pace of his own life. Besides the encompassing saga of the search for Franklin, the technological transformations alone were accelerating at a bewildering rate as communications, sanitation, and transportation networks were systematically overhauled. The overwhelming stench of the wide Thames led to its banking with London's first modern sewer system in the 1850s. As railroads replaced canals as the major mode of heavy transportation, a new railway line from London to Hastings in 1851 cut the journey to the family properties in East Sussex from eight hours to a little over two. Leigh Smith could lunch at Jesus College and be on the family properties in East Sussex in time for dinner.

But more than this, the intellectual underpinnings of societies, economies, even the nature of humanity itself, all were revolutionized in the 1850s. Karl Marx published the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* just as

Leigh Smith entered Cambridge. The discovery of a human ancestor in Germany's Neander Valley in 1857, the year Leigh Smith finally took his degree at Jesus, combined with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* two years later, with their Genesis-smashing implications that humans were descended from a common ancestor of non-human primates, were perhaps the culminating hammer blows to the moral foundations of Victorian society.

By 1854, Leigh Smith's sister Barbara was publishing her first major tract on the rights of women, even as the Crimean War led to the international fame of Florence Nightingale and other pioneers of modern nursing. Barbara's marriage to Eugene Bodichon, a French doctor living in Algeria, was as unconventional as her father's social and sexual arrangements had been. She lived half the year with Bodichon in Algeria and the other half without him in England, agitating for the rights of women. With no rights to property or access to decent jobs, Barbara saw the prevailing status of British women as one of prostitution in everything but name.

Against this tumultuous backdrop, Leigh Smith's formative decade witnessed the return of no less than fourteen different expeditions sent in an increasingly desperate search of any survivors of the Franklin expedition. Two of these, the first and second Grinnell expeditions, were financed by a wealthy American, Henry Grinnell, recently retired, flush with cash, and fascinated by Franklin's fate. Grinnell loaned two ships to the U.S. Navy and, manned with volunteers, they set out from New York harbor in late May, 1850. It was this first Grinnell expedition that later that summer located Franklin's winter quarters at the site of the graves of three of Franklin's sailors on Beechey Island. Further searches proved unsuccessful and, while attempting to return home, both vessels were caught in the ice and forced to overwinter. The ships eventually escaped, drifting back into the Davis Strait in the spring of 1851 where they broke free of the ice and returned to New York. The discoveries at Beechey were a sensation, but the expedition is best recalled as the first Arctic experience of its peripatetic medical officer, the wondrous Elisha Kent Kane of Philadelphia.

Kane was thirty when he first witnessed the Arctic. By the time he died less than seven years later, he was an international polar hero,

freighted with honors for his work in the north. Slender on geographic discovery, Kane's work nevertheless created a new Arctic literature and left behind a deadly and confounding notion of an open polar sea. He became the subject of one of America's first celebrity biographies, written by his spiritualist-lover, and was buried in the kind of hillside bunker usually reserved for a pharaoh.³⁷ He would eventually have a crater named for him on the Moon.

Kane returned to his home in Philadelphia just long enough to drop off an eight-foot-long narwhal tusk for his hometown's Academy of Natural Sciences, and then just as quickly went north again. This time Kane placed himself in command and armed the expedition with both a new program to search for Franklin and a notion to make the first serious American attempt on the North Pole. Kane and his men charted the areas of Smith Sound, Kane Basin, and Kennedy Channel, pioneering what would later become Robert Peary's 'American route' to the North Pole. Even more than this, Kane's published accounts of the two Grinnell expeditions crackled with drama and suspense. This was something new in polar exploration – the Arctic as a kind of *Götterdämmerung* – and it set the model for nearly all future polar exploration literature. In between the cold and suffering, the Arctic offered an almost spiritual connection with the universe:

On our road we were favored with a gorgeous spectacle, which hardly any excitement of peril could have made us overlook. The midnight sun came out over the northern crest of the great berg, our late "fast friend," kindling variously-colored fires on every part of its surface, and making the ice around us one great resplendency of gemwork, blazing carbuncles, and rubies and molten gold.³⁸

Such writing was entirely absent in the expedition accounts of men like Phipps and Parry, and it was all but calculated to course hot blood through the veins of young would-be explorers like Benjamin Leigh Smith. No wonder he was fighting with his father. One imagines Leigh Smith sitting with a copy of Kane's mystical *Arctic Explorations*, peeking through it even as he was trying to plow through British case law in the spring of 1857.

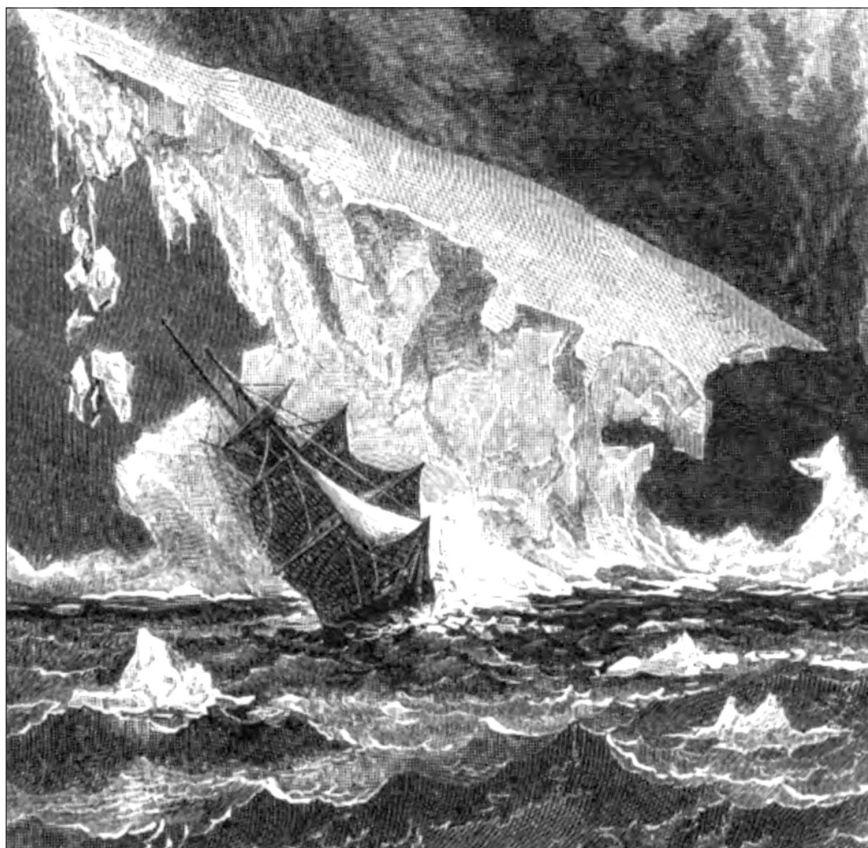


Fig. 7. The Arctic of Elisha Kent Kane, full of drama, danger and heroism (from Kane 1856).

Another Arctic book appeared in 1857, as insouciant in its descriptions of high latitude sailing as Kane's tomes were dramatically desperate. This was *Letters from High Latitudes*, a breezy lark written by a carefree popinjay by the name of Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava or, a bit more simply, Lord Dufferin. In a smart little yacht named *Foam*, Dufferin planned a summer excursion to Iceland, Jan Mayen, and Svalbard. His combination of erudite silliness, playful flirtations with the locals, multi-lingual history lessons, and a genuine high

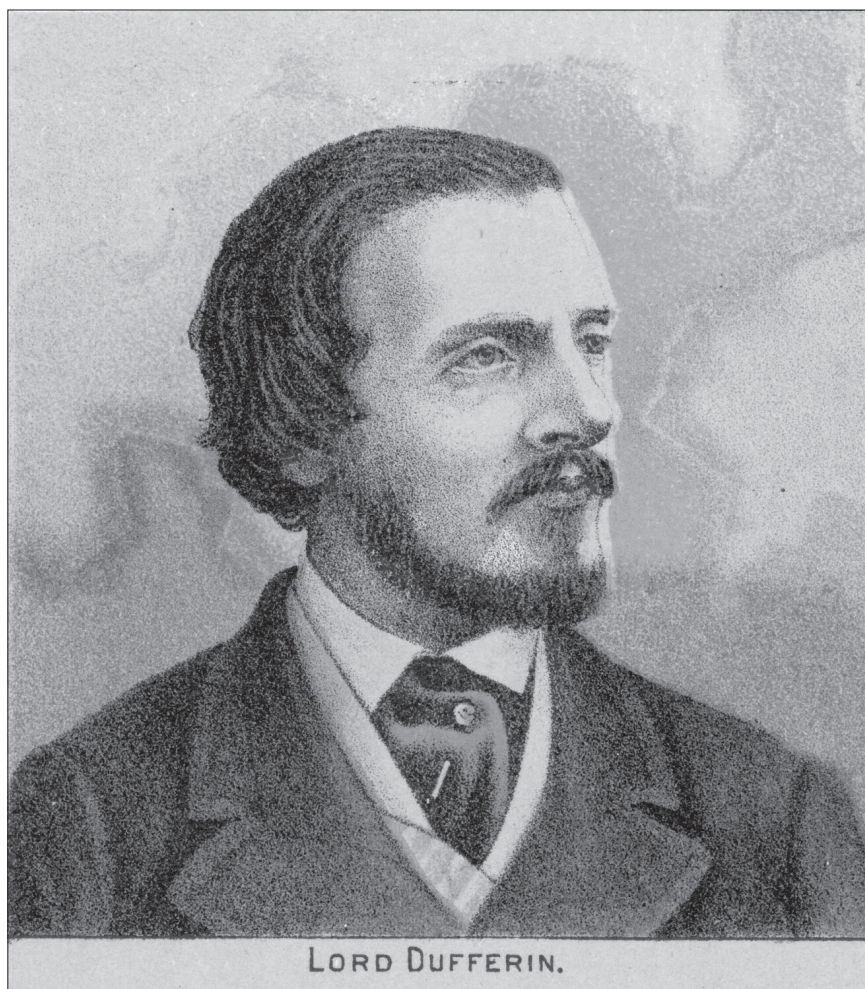


Fig. 8. Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, ca. 1869 (courtesy Toronto Public Library).

Arctic sailing adventure, made the book a hit. He offered, for example, an insight into nineteenth-century remedies for seasickness, administered consecutively until one managed to lay down and stay down: “Brandy, prussic-acid, opium, champagne, ginger, mutton-chops, and tumblers of salt water....”³⁹

He sailed first from Scotland to Iceland, giving most Britons their first glimpse of Reykjavík (“a collection of wooden sheds [surrounded by] a desolate plain of lava”); Icelandic language (“a singularly sweet caressing language”⁴⁰); saga literature (“so much art and cleverness as almost to combine the dramatic power of Macaulay with Clarendon’s delicate delineation of character, and the charming loquacity of Mr. Pepys”⁴¹); and even wandering into expansive topics such as the demise of the Norse colony in Greenland (“like the fabric of a dream”⁴²); and the probable location of Vinland (“[not] farther [south] than Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, or, at most, the coast of Massachusetts”⁴³). Toasted at a party in both Icelandic and Latin, Dufferin responds with his own remarks in Latin, deigning in his published account to “subjoin a translation of them for the benefit of the unlearned.”⁴⁴ Other letters are left entirely in their original French.

Dufferin can be said to have invented the modern tourist weekend in Iceland: a rapid pony trip to the ancient legislative meeting spot of Þingvellir enjoyed with a coffee brewed from Geysir water, before a quick return to Reykjavík with an obligatory discussion of how the volcanoes of Iceland periodically contaminate “even the pure skies of England and Holland.”⁴⁵ At a time when Leigh Smith was managing to get by on his £300 per annum inheritance, Dufferin records that the average stipend for an Icelandic clergyman was about £6 per year.

Back in Reykjavík, he renewed acquaintances with the Emperor of France, first as a guest of honor on board the emperor’s yacht *Reine Hortense* and, later, at a ball where the local women were asked to come and show off their “ivory shoulders.”⁴⁶ Dufferin was particularly interested in disproving a previous account of travels in Iceland that noted that Icelandic females were accustomed to flattening down their breasts. He engaged in this intensive anthropological field research by means of an evening of dancing with women in low-cut dresses. He thus satisfied himself that Icelandic women were every bit “as buxom in form as any rosy English girl I have ever seen.”⁴⁷

The French emperor offered to tow the *Foam* northwards and help Dufferin to make up for time lost by his studies of the women of Reykjavík, for his main object was an attempt to see Jan Mayen Land and especially the towering landmark of Mount Beerenberg. The tow lasted until *Foam* was less than 130 nautical miles from Jan Mayen, at which point the Frenchman decided that the island could not be located for the fog, and the vessels parted. Dufferin carried on under sail, but thick fog and pack ice prevented anything more than a long view of Beerenberg from about eight nautical miles off. Quite intrepidly he maneuvered his ship through broken ice around the island until he was close enough to the northern shore to launch a small boat and gain solid ground. He and his men then disembarked and dragged an old figurehead ashore and on up to a rock outcropping. There they ceremoniously mounted it alongside the white ensign of St. George and a tin biscuit-box holding a paper with the ship's name and the names of the men of the crew and the date of their landing.⁴⁸

The harsh ice conditions meant that they had to depart immediately. Disappointed at not being able to spend more time exploring the primary objective of his summer cruise, Dufferin turned northeast towards Hammerfest in northern Norway, a run of 800 nautical miles that *Foam* covered in eight days.

Dufferin then made north for Svalbard, where *Foam* reached her greatest glories, closing on Amsterdamøya and dropping anchor in English Bay (Engelsbukta) on August 6th, 1856. For Dufferin, Svalbard, when he finally witnessed it, held none of the charms of Iceland. All he saw was a “numbness and dumbness [that] seemed to pervade the solitude. I suppose in scarcely any other part of the world is this appearance of deadness so strikingly exhibited”⁴⁹ It was probably too much to ask the magnificent geological stratigraphy of Svalbard to compete with the deep female cleavage of Iceland. Decidedly unimpressed, Dufferin only stayed about a week.

With his sprightly published account, pretentious but unstuffy, Dufferin achieved a minor celebrity, which later he parlayed into a series of increasingly responsible diplomatic postings. Almost certainly Leigh Smith would have read Dufferin's *Letters*. It was popular just at the time he was having doubts about a vocation in the law. Such a career would



Fig. 9. Lord Dufferin's Foam gets her first look at Jan Mayen, 1856 (from Dufferin 1857).

end before it even began, when his father's death left him in a position to contemplate the Arctic without the restraints of the formidable Pater looking over his shoulder.

The Pater died in 1860. He left his eldest son enough money and property in East Sussex and London so that, should he so choose, Leigh Smith could live the rest of his life in the comfortable management of his investments and the collection of rents from his tenant farmers. The land holdings alone were impressive and included a series of estates in the rolling green pasture lands of the English Weald. Amid deep copses and creekside stands of trees, Leigh Smith would have woken to the alternating honking of geese, quacking of ducks, and the subdued songs of the doves.

It was a formidable inheritance and there is no evidence that Leigh Smith ever despised either the land or the money, now seeing through its fourth generation since being assembled by his great-grandfather Samuel Smith out of tea and sugar imports a century earlier. But what he wanted

now, as he entered his middle years, was to indulge his desire to see the Arctic. A whole genre of Arctic travel literature was under construction and all of it beckoned him north. Besides Dufferin's book, there is no doubt Leigh Smith would have read the other major popular account of an upper-class foray into the Arctic, when in 1861 James Lamont published his *Seasons with the Sea-horses: Sporting Adventures in the Northern Seas*. Where Lord Dufferin wrote of his brief contacts with Arctic shores with the foppishness one might expect of an English Lord off on a summer lark, James Lamont, F.G.S., took a much more serious, crabbed approach. That is clear enough in the dedication of his book, which is given over to the very model of the dour Scotsman, the geologist Charles Lyell. Lamont flatters his fellow countryman Lyell with the insight that his "delightful *Principles of Geology* has been my unvarying and instructive companion during ten years of adventurous wanderings, during which everything I have seen seems to me confirmatory of your Geological views."⁵⁰ Fulsome, certainly, but hardly misplaced. Lamont joined a long list of explorers, beginning with Darwin during the *Beagle* expedition in the 1830s, for whom *Principles of Geology* had informed everything they observed in the natural world.

Aside from his general interest in northern adventure, there are very definite reasons why Leigh Smith would keep a close eye on the Arctic travels of James Lamont. Unlike Dufferin, who was from a long-established upper-class family, Lamont and Leigh Smith were virtual carbon copies of children of successful nineteenth-century British middle-class entrepreneurs. They were also exact contemporaries, with Lamont born just six weeks after Leigh Smith in 1828 and departed this life six months after Leigh Smith in 1913.⁵¹ And, just like Leigh Smith, at the age of twenty-one Lamont had inherited a fortune. The monies enabled Lamont to end a young career in the army, move to London, manage estates in Scotland and the West Indies, and, probably his most desired result, take his master's certificate and sail his own vessel in the Arctic.

Seasons with the Sea-horses is, first and foremost, the travelogue of a snob with upper-class pretensions, off on a boutique hunting experience in Svalbard. If one can read a man from his writings, you'd ship out any day of the week with Lord Dufferin, enjoying the wine and the women and

tolerating his endless toasts in Latin and French. But in his foolish charm, Dufferin had completely missed the spirit of the times. It was Lamont, the serious student of Arctic history, geography, and biology with a grating nouveau-riche condescension and relentless focus on observing nature with his own eyes, who perfectly reflected the advancing materialism and fascination with science that was shaking the world of the 1850s to its stuffy, religious core.

To understand just how seriously Lamont took himself, he often quoted from Darwin's just-published *On the Origin of Species* and he sent a copy of *Seasons with the Sea-horses* to Darwin as soon as it appeared in print. Darwin in turn responded approvingly of Lamont's hypothesis for the evolution of the polar bear. Lamont speculated – correctly as it turns out – that polar bears had developed from northern brown bears, “who, finding their means of subsistence running short, and pressed by hunger, ventured on the ice and caught some seals ... so there is no impossibility in supposing that the brown bears, who by my theory were the progenitors of the present white bears, were accidentally driven over to Greenland and Spitzbergen by storms or currents.”⁵² More astounding, Lamont thought this process through while sailing in Svalbard and *before* the 1859 publication of *Origin of Species*. In a measure of generosity that echoes the interplay between Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, Darwin even credits Lamont with arriving independently at the theory of natural selection.⁵³

In August of 1858, Lamont sailed in his 142-ton yacht *Ginevra* to Norway. There, induced by tales of favorable and exotic hunting in the Arctic, he shaped a course for Svalbard. Given the lateness of the summer, *Ginevra* could only remain in the archipelago for a short time. But, cruising in the southern reaches of Svalbard in the area of the Thousand Islands (Tusenøyane), Lamont saw enough unusual wildlife and stunning geology to realize that he had to return.

That return came the following year, when Lamont began sailing toward Norway in early June of 1859. Putting into Lerwick on the 11th in the face of heavy seas and strong headwinds, the wealthy Lamont quickly noted the crushing starvation of the Shetlanders, but did not allow it to delay his departure for the north. He reached Hammerfest on the 23rd where he had a summer support charter waiting for him. This was the *Anna*

Louisa, “an extremely ugly, clumsy little tub of a sloop, of about 30 tons ... [that] looked as if the intention of her builder had been that she should make as much leeway as possible, and upset at the first opportunity.”⁵⁴

Just as with Leigh Smith a decade later, Lamont found himself a strange man in command of a strange fleet. His Norwegian charter was a traditional one-masted cargo vessel called a *jagt* or *jakt*, in this case a walrus-hunter with an all-Norwegian crew made up of a skipper, two walrus harpooners, a cook, and eight other seamen. And like the Norwegian crew on board Leigh Smith’s *Sampson* in 1871, the men of the *Anna Louisa* did not impress Lamont. It took some time to round them all up and dry them all out, but the *jakt* finally left port with a full complement on June 26th. The plan was for the support vessel to sail for southeastern Svalbard and rendezvous there with Lamont on board *Ginevra*.

Lamont sighted Sørkapp on July 2nd, and after sailing about in Storfjorden, made his rendezvous with the *Anna Louisa* on the 5th. On the 6th, unwilling to subject his pristine *Ginevra* to the carnage and smell of a summer of walrus hunting in the ice, Lamont, along with his guests, a Lord David Kennedy and his manservant, transferred to the “narrow and odoriferous bunks”⁵⁵ on board the *Anna Louisa*. Lamont gave the master of *Ginevra* instructions to meet up again in a month, and in the interim to collect as many fossils and hunt as many reindeer as he could, since the reindeer hides and meat would not bring the kind of overwhelming stench to *Ginevra* as would the blubber of the marine mammals Lamont wanted to shoot.

Once on board the *Anna Louisa*, Lamont proceeded to relentlessly kill seal, walrus, and polar bear wherever they could be found, along the way making a few geographic observations and curtly dismissing a plea for help from a badly frostbitten sailor of a shipwrecked *jakt*. Lamont slowed his expedition long enough to toss a few bottles of rum the sailor’s way before continuing on with his hunting. He criticized Dufferin for believing that the Gulf Stream could bring pine to Svalbard, hypothesizing instead that it floats in from the rivers of Siberia. He also took to task those Arctic explorers who believed that the phenomenon of ‘red snow’ was a natural discoloration caused by a form of algae.

Lamont was correct about the pine, mistaken about the algae. He was also correct in his observation that the landmass of Svalbard was rising



Fig. 10. James Lamont, ca. 1860s (courtesy of the Royal Geographic Society (RGS-IBG)).

and in fact had been for some time. Whale bones and driftwood found up to two hundred feet above the level of the sea demonstrated that no storm could have thrown it there. Lamont put the rate of elevation at about thirteen feet per century, not far from modern geological estimates for various sectors of Svalbard of more than ten feet per century following the last Ice Age.

Right or wrong, Lamont was anything but shy in his opinions. He also seemed to take a grotesque thrill in the amount of carnage he and Lord Kennedy and his paid harpooners wrought on the wild animals of Storfjorden: "Lord David fired and struck the old bear on the back, completely paralysing her; we then scrambled through the icy mud up to where she lay, and despatched her. The cubs, quite black with mud, and shivering with cold, lay upon the body of their mother growling viciously..."⁵⁶

Anna Louisa rendezvoused with *Ginevra* on the 4th, and to Lamont's fury his crew on board *Ginevra* had only managed to kill eight reindeer while cruising around the area of Bellsund. Worse, they had had the temerity to have "carefully eaten all the hind-quarters of the deer themselves, and had left nothing but ten lean fore-quarters for us!"⁵⁷ Fortunately, the sailing master had made a large collection of fossils and other geological specimens, which somewhat mollified Lamont's anger at not receiving the choice cuts of meat he felt were equal to his status. He ordered *Ginevra* northwards into Storfjorden after more reindeer, while *Anna Louisa* returned to the walrus hunt. One of the Norwegian sea-hunters related to him the tale of an incredible slaughter of over nine hundred walrus on one island alone in the summer of 1852. Lamont calculated that by the time of his voyage a thousand or more of the giant sea mammals were being killed in Svalbard each summer. He believed that the animals were attempting to retreat further and further north and away from their pursuers, taking refuge of sorts in the inaccessible islands along the more remote northern coast of Svalbard. Lamont freely admitted that the walrus were vastly overhunted, and thought they would be extinct within twenty to thirty years. But he did not let his feelings slow his trigger finger.

Lamont was curious to sail further north and east, toward the chimerical "Commander Gillies' Land, which lies sixty or seventy miles to the north-east of Spitzbergen,"⁵⁸ and thought there might be other lands in that direction, lands where walrus and polar bear existed in even greater

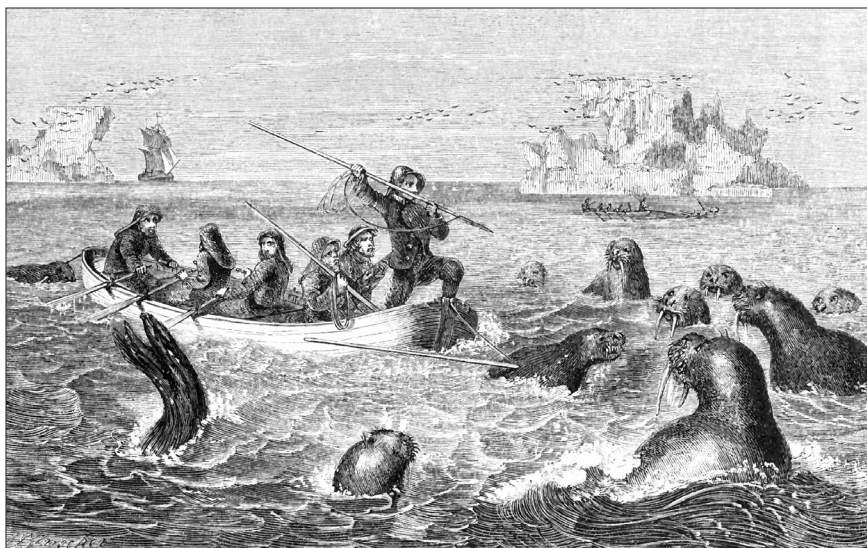


Fig. 11. James Lamont's men engaged in one of his favorite activities: killing Arctic marine animals (from Lamont 1861).

numbers. But no sailing vessels had ever been able to reach the northeast corner of Svalbard in order to test this proposition. Nor was Lamont any fan of the idea that there was an easy route to the north, otherwise known as the “open polar sea theory.” “I am aware that the distinguished Dr. Kane held very strongly an opposite opinion; but the arguments in his book do not seem to me to be the slightest avail against the overwhelming amount of evidence in a contrary direction.”⁵⁹ Lamont believed, along with Scoresby, that the highest latitude that a sailing vessel was likely to ever see was about lat. 81°30' N.

As in so much else, Lamont was correct in this, as well as in his belief that the only way the pole could be reached was over the ice. If a ship could overwinter somewhere in along the northern coast of Svalbard, hunters could spend their time provisioning the expedition from the wildlife in the area, and then in the spring trained teams of dogs could possibly make the six-hundred-mile dash over the ice.⁶⁰ Parry had failed precisely for these reasons: he had failed to overwinter, had started his trek many

months too late, had hauled his sledges and boats with men rather than dogs, and then adverse ocean currents had pushed the ice southwards faster than Parry's men could drag their heavily-burdened boats northwards.

Meeting up again with *Ginevra* on the 24th of August, Lamont left *Anna Louisa* behind in a small harbor while he sailed on his own yacht deeper into Storfjorden. Taking to the *Ginevra*'s small boats on the 26th, Lamont and a few of his crew sailed and then rowed to the head of Storfjorden. There, a fjord existed that some had long thought might actually be a strait that connected Storfjorden to the wide confluence of the three straits to the east known as the Southern Gateway (Sørporten) of Svalbard. The strait does in fact exist and is called Heleysundet. It separates mainland Spitsbergen from the island of Barentsøya. An adverse current stopped the small flying expedition, but Lamont's effort is now commemorated in Ginevrabotnen (Ginevra Bay), the body of water at the head of Storfjorden and just to the west of the sought-after strait.

By the end of August, Lamont had sent the *Anna Louisa* back to Hammerfest to cash in on his summer's hunting profits, which he would use to defray the costs of his northern explorations and hunting adventures, while he continued in *Ginevra* to round Sørkapp and make a late-season foray into Isfjorden on the west coast of Svalbard. It was during this interlude that Lamont had time to reflect on the nature of the seal and walrus and the polar bear he had spent much of the summer killing and how they illuminated the question of special creation versus natural selection. Writing as one would expect during perilous times for anyone contradicting the literal truth of Genesis, Lamont does not jump entirely off Darwin's cliff. But it is clear that he believes in a Darwinian universe, even as his writing settles for a form of theistic evolution:

I acknowledge with humility my presumption in entering upon so profound a question in Natural History; but although I make no pretensions to the character of a scientific naturalist, still I have opportunities such as few have enjoyed, of observing and studying the habits and mode of life of strange animals in many strange countries; and the more I observe nature, and ponder on the subject, the more do I become convinced that Almighty

God always carries out his intentions with regard to the animal creation, *not* by “direct interpositions” of His will, nor by “special fiats of creation,” but by the slow and gradual agency of natural causes.⁶¹

Ginevra anchored in a sheltered bay inside Isfjorden on September 2nd. There the crew replenished the water and firewood necessary for the return to the Hammerfest. More than three tons of meat was stowed on deck. They had killed just about everything there was to kill, with the exception of a narwhal and an Arctic fox, which Lamont very much regretted. Leaving Isfjorden on the 5th, *Ginevra* anchored in Hammerfest on the 11th. Lamont sold off everything he could sell and took home to Scotland two live polar bear cubs, six adult polar bear skins, and all the ivory his men had extracted from all of the walrus they had slaughtered. They were back in Leith Roads in early October. The final death toll: 46 walruses (plus 20 more killed but lost at sea); 88 seals (plus 40 more killed and lost); 8 polar bears; 61 reindeer; and one white or beluga whale. The rock and fossil specimens were all boxed and carted off to the Geological Society.

These first two sailing cruises to Svalbard had left Lamont fascinated but unsatisfied. The hunting had challenged him, as had the landscape and the ice, but he wanted to go further. Back at home, he entertained the fantasy that if he just possessed a ship with auxiliary steam power, he could make an attempt on the North Pole itself. In this, despite the truth he observed with his own eyes, he was enticed – by accounts of Norwegian walrus hunters and the speculations of open polar sea enthusiasts like August Petermann – with the thought that somewhere north and east of Svalbard there could after all be an ice-free channel that led to the pole. The fact that Britain had left the field of polar exploration after 1859 also pricked his sense of national pride. “So completely did these ideas gain possession of me that at the general election of 1868 I abandoned a seat in Parliament ... and set to work to build a vessel which should embody all Arctic requirements in a moderate compass.”⁶²

The result was the *Diana*, a three-masted schooner with thirty-horsepower compound steam engines. Her range of 10,000 nautical miles under

steam power and ability to survive an Arctic winter was made possible by the tiny berthing and messing accommodations that made room for more coal and for the supplies that would be required if the ship were ever frozen in for a winter. In such an event, a 'man of leisure and means' would possess all the food and warmth necessary to survive an overwintering with a touch of class.

Launched into the Clyde in March of 1869 with seventeen iron holding tanks for the blubber he hoped to harvest, Lamont called her "a cross between a yacht and a modern Scotch whaler."⁶³ As with his voyages on board *Ginevra* and *Anna Louisa*, Lamont intended to shoot his way across the Arctic, and if possible engage in some whaling ("destroying these monsters of the deep"⁶⁴), in an attempt to recoup at least some of the cost of the vessel and the expeditions he had in store for her. In *Diana*, he felt, he had built the best private vessel for Arctic exploration and pure Arctic conditions in all of maritime history.

In April of 1869, *Diana* steamed through the Caledonian Canal with a crew of fifteen, including an artist, William Livesay. At Tromsø on May 6th, six Norwegians skilled in hunting walrus and seal were taken on board. By the end of the cruise, Lamont would write that he had never shipped with "six lazier, dirtier, sulkier, more mutinous and cowardly rascals...."⁶⁵ Calling at Hammerfest, the execrable Lamont demanded that the local agent produce a small boat and some walrus gear Lamont had left with him over a decade earlier. One hopes that the agent produced his own bill of charges for ten years' worth of storage.

From Hammerfest, Lamont chose to sail eastwards to Novaya Zemlya, then northwards along that coast until stopped by ice, then work his way back westwards towards Svalbard while searching out any opportunity to get north through the pack. Lamont also wanted to try out a new method of killing walrus, by firing a large shell at them in order to make it easier to harpoon them while they were attempting to escape his guns. In the end, the shells blew up such large parts of the walrus that the carcass sank and could not be recovered. When he did manage to kill a walrus cow, he took the calf on board in an attempt to bring it back to England and sell it to a zoological park.

Diana sighted Novaya Zemlya on June 2nd, and there the crew commenced killing walrus in earnest, slaughters that Lamont employed

with almost pornographic glee to describe the correct types of shells for penetrating thick walrus skulls at various angles. Lamont even saw an advantage for polar exploration in the gradual extermination of walrus populations. As long as the hunt continued, the walrus would be forced to retreat further and further north. Hunters would follow them north and in the process find a split in the ice somewhere between Novaya Zemlya and Svalbard that, in a season of open ice, would lead to the pole. Lamont understood, as much if not more than his contemporaries, the unlikelihood of such a pathway presenting itself. But, like his contemporaries, he could not resist being seduced by the possibility.

On June 19th, *Diana* was at 75°21' N, 44°08' E, and following a chart drawn up by Petermann two years earlier. If the chart was accurate, then an observer in *Diana*'s crow's nest, some seventy feet above the surface of the sea, should be able to see the peaks of Gillis Land, the southern extremity of which Petermann had placed at lat. 77°30' N. Lamont could see nothing, and thought that the land might lie even farther north. Irritated, Lamont made a note to track down Petermann after the voyage and inquire by what authority he placed Gillis Land so far south.

The expedition reached Svalbard at the end of June, only to find Storfjorden and in fact the entire western coast of the archipelago blocked by a band of ice. Lamont directed his crew to sail for the northwest coast of Svalbard, where he hoped to round Hakluythovden and test how far *Diana* might be able to get north from that point.

Dropping anchor at Coal Haven (Kolhamna), near the present-day airstrip at Ny-Ålesund, with the snow-wrapped Tre Kroner mountains in the distance, Lamont enjoyed what he described as a 'typical' night in a bay in Svalbard. Everything was quiet beyond the rustle of activity on the decks of *Diana*. "Absolute stillness everywhere, save occasionally when the voice of a wild bird miles away over the glassy sea was borne to the ear, or the noisy falling of the edge of a glacier, like the sound of artillery discharges, was echoed from hill to hill. A clear, unclouded sky permitted the rays of the evening sun to crimson the snowy peaks, and to throw vast shadows across the glaciers."⁶⁶ He rowed around as much of Krossfjorden and Kongsfjorden as the ice would allow, shooting at birds and seals and taking notes and picking up the odd artifact – like a broken oar from a vessel called *Vigilant* – as he went.

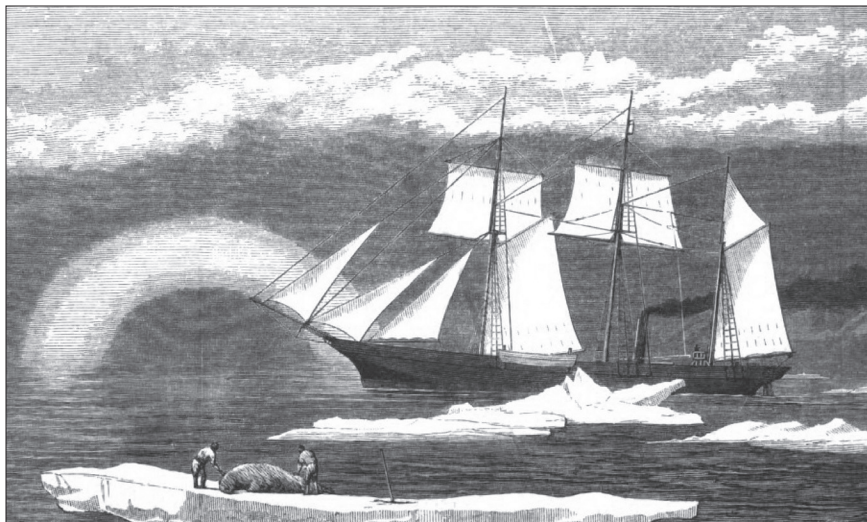


Fig. 12. *The Diana* at lat. 80° N (from Lamont 1876).

Leaving the bay, they moved off northwards, rounding Hakluythovden and making for Moffen Island, where Lamont hoped to find more walrus. Meeting up with a walrus hunter nearly beset at Moffen, *Diana* towed the sloop to an anchorage in Fair Haven. There Lamont sent a crewman twice each day to climb the heights of Utkiken (141 m/462' high), a spot on Outer Norway Island (Ytre Norskøya) used 250 years earlier by the Dutch as a lookout point.⁶⁷ There they could scan for a favorable way ahead.

Ice now lay in a sheet from Fair Haven to Moffen, so Lamont took to a small boat to explore along the northern coast of Svalbard. After rowing and hauling the boat through and over the ice for more than seventy nautical miles, Lamont and his companions returned exhausted and discouraged at the impenetrability of the pack ice. In the meantime, some of his crew on board *Diana* had gone ashore to a graveyard of Dutch whalers and returned with a collection of skulls of the Dutchmen themselves. After more than a week of enforced idleness, during which Lamont concluded that no ship would soon reach the North Pole, he retreated south to

Isfjorden where, fortified with coffee, biscuits and brandy, he geologized, hunted reindeer, and mined ten tons of coal from a seam he named The *Diana* Coal Mine.

After ten days of larking about Isfjorden, Lamont made one more attempt to round Hakluythovden but again found the sea clogged by pack ice. Hiking to a promontory near Welcome Point (Velkomstpynten), Lamont could see that the object of his voyage, Hinlopenstretet, was also jammed with ice. A few more days spent lolling in Magdalenefjorden, rummaging for coal on shore and arguing over rum rations with the Norwegians, Lamont gave up on Gillis Land, Nordaustlandet, and the North Pole. "Never, I am convinced," he writes, "will a ship sail from Spitzbergen to the Pole."⁶⁸

Rounding Sørkapp, *Diana* reached Edge Island (Edgeøya) and a bay on the southeast coast later named for the vessel. Soon after, Lamont gave up and returned to Tromsø, where he "discharged the sinful Norwegians,"⁶⁹ and then sailed for home, arriving at Dundee on October 6th. He would return to Novaya Zemlya the next summer, followed by a brief return to the northwest corner of Svalbard in 1871. But these voyages merely served to confirm him in his belief that even his steam-assisted *Diana* would never be able to visit the hidden northeastern coast of Svalbard, or find the mythical Gillis Land, or come anywhere near to the North Pole.

Reading the accounts of Lamont would have done nothing to dampen the desire for Arctic exploration of Benjamin Leigh Smith. If James Lamont could make such journeys with little more than a scientific bent, a master's license, the desire to hunt and an awful lot of money, well, Leigh Smith had all those qualifications, too. And for Leigh Smith there was now even more reason to try. While Lamont was making his first voyages to the waters around Svalbard, Leigh Smith had in the interim come into even more money, inheritance from a vague figure in family history referred to as 'Uncle Joe' Gratton.⁷⁰ Whatever influence Gratton exerted on Leigh Smith's development, it must have been profound to one extreme or the other, since he would later name a glacier in Franz Josef Land after him. Other relatives – direct or not – would also find their names placed upon one remote fastness or other in the new lands in the Arctic that would be soon be discovered by Leigh Smith, but Gratton Glacier strikes one as either grandly honorific or coldly ironic.

With the death of his father, as Benjamin Leigh Smith became the new *Pater familias* at the age of thirty-two, he was now the dominant figure in a family that included the estimable Barbara, the insane Bella, the gay Nannie, and the gentleman-farmer Willy. Nannie saw her brother as someone who had a kind of “personal *influence* that subtle thing that makes a person a power without even uttering a word.”⁷¹ Over the decade that followed the assumption of his new responsibilities, it would be Leigh Smith’s younger brother Willy’s daughter Amy, alone among the other nieces and nephews, who would become the prime object of Leigh Smith’s affections, a situation that, given his new primacy in the family, was accepted as the norm. When she wounded him by accepting the engagement with Norman Moore, Leigh Smith turned his attentions to Mabel, the daughter of Bella and her retired and much-older husband, General John Ludlow.

Bella married the General in 1859 when she was twenty-nine and Ludlow was fifty-eight. John Ludlow had fought with distinction in the 1820s during the First Anglo-Burmese War, and then went on to join the Indian Police Force and help end the horrific practises of the killing of Indian girls by families who could not afford to marry them off and the immolation of a wife along with her husband’s corpse.⁷² It is to the deeply faithful and minutely detailed surviving diary of Ludlow that we owe most of the intimate glimpses into Leigh Smith’s life between 1863 and Ludlow’s death in 1882. These occasional commentaries are very likely the only such views we will ever have of the years when Leigh Smith grew from ambitious young man to internationally-recognized polar explorer. Most of these insights are in the form of family notes or gossip about the staff, as in the first entry that specifically mentions Leigh Smith. On April 12, 1863, the General writes that “Ben communicated a piece of intelligence connected with our coachman and former parlour maid which surprised me.”⁷³ An entry from 1865 notes the death of Uncle Joe Gratton as well as his will that leaves everything to Leigh Smith’s aunt, who promptly devolved it all to Leigh Smith, who was asked to manage it while paying her £1,000 a year. When Edmund, the three-year-old son of the General and Bella, sickened and eventually died in the winter of 1866–67, Ludlow’s diary mentions that Leigh Smith was always around to help.

A year later, the General noted that Leigh Smith planned to stand for Parliament as member from the parliamentary constituency of Rye, but nothing came of his candidacy. Mostly, between 1863 and 1870, Leigh Smith shows up as something of an itinerant manager of funds and family. He escorted young relatives, like the nineteen-year-old Iona Bonham-Carter, to their first public balls. He played the occasional game of chess and otherwise helped intensively with an increasingly deranged Bella. He made plans to visit Egypt but does not seem to have made the journey. He gave one of his nieces a pony. He gossiped about how much money other, even more fabulously wealthy relations had settled on their offspring. He did visit Rome. Ten years after leaving Cambridge, and as he faced mid-life, Leigh Smith was clearly still casting about for a profession. The General, whose life possessed a not unpleasantly rigid routine, took note. "Ben talks of going abroad," Ludlow writes in his diary in mid-summer, 1869. "When will he settle down & have done with 'knocking about' which he so much delights in?"⁷⁴

What the General did not know, but what he and the entire family would soon discover, was that Leigh Smith's days of "knocking about" had not even begun. In the summer of 1870, the General learned that Leigh Smith had hired *Gleam*, the 125-ton yacht of Sir David Baird, for a three months' charter at a staggering £500 per month. With it he hatched a plan to sail to Jersey, then Hastings, and then Scotland. To the family, such a charter must have been seen as a massive indulgence. For Leigh Smith, however, it was very much more. It is not known if he sailed as far north as Peterhead, the remote whaling port on the northeastern coast of Scotland, but, if so, and if he spoke with the whaling captains there, it was very likely this voyage that convinced him that he had the stuff of a great Arctic voyage in him.

Over the winter of 1870–71, this feeling must have only intensified. With the exceptions of the private voyages of Dufferin and Lamont, the British had all but given up on the north. Since the resolution of the major elements of the Franklin saga more than a decade earlier, the Royal Navy had sworn off the Arctic. It was not merely the Franklin disaster. War in the Crimea, the long transition from sail to steam, the laying of transatlantic and transpacific telegraph cables, each and all of these drew

British naval attention away from Arctic exploration. Dufferin and Lamont had opened a door to the private exploration of the Arctic to any Englishman with a will and a wallet, and with the extra monies from Uncle Joe Gratton, Leigh Smith now had more than enough money to match his polar ambitions.

Even so, it was a far cry to believe that a wealthy neophyte just finished with a summer holiday sailing charter might be the one to step in where the entire Royal Navy now feared to go. Leigh Smith in the spring of 1871 was not yet the scientific explorer of the Arctic that he would become. His conception of Arctic sailing at this stage was virtually identical as his contemporaries Dufferin and Lamont: the Arctic was where one could engage large amounts of money in hunting exotic species and navigating in high latitudes. The hunt furthermore held the promise of defraying the enormous costs of such a voyage.

Still, the seeds of a much greater ambition were clearly there and, in late April, 1871, the General writes as much, albeit with unselfconscious humor: "Ben has bought a big & stout yacht without having seen her. She has been cased in the North Sea & was built for going among the ice. Ben says he is 'going to the North Pole' – but it seems that he cannot get anyone to accompany him.... His object is sport & he has been to Blissets in Holborn to buy rifles...."⁷⁵

This yacht was the *Sampson*, an 85-ton topsail schooner purchased from a John Pallisser of Comragh, Ireland. Built by Messrs. John White of Cowes, Isle of Wight, in 1852, *Sampson* had already made two Arctic voyages while owned by Pallisser. That was apparently enough of a recommendation for Leigh Smith to decide that this was the vessel he could use to sail far beyond the usual courses he encountered as a member of the New Thames Yacht Club. With no countrymen brave enough or foolhardy enough to go with him, Leigh Smith turned his gaze to Norway, the gateway to the North. His plan was to take *Sampson* into the same waters explored before him by Phipps, Nelson, and Parry and, if possible, go even farther than these titanic names in the history of British polar exploration.

At the age of forty-three, Leigh Smith believed he could finally realize his calling. Within six months – with his first experience in the Arctic a ringing success – Leigh Smith would become preoccupied with the scientific exploration of the north. Between 1871 and 1882, his five expeditions

into the Arctic would discover dozens of new islands, engage in the survey of uncharted coastlines, pioneer deepwater oceanographic research, carry live polar bears to the zoos of London, collect fossils and other geological specimens on remote shores and dredge marine invertebrates from the ocean floor to add to the burgeoning natural history collections in Britain. These increasingly daring expeditions would climax in a spectacular story of shipwreck and survival at a place no one even knew existed in 1871. And his fame would largely eclipse the twin curses of his youth in the eyes of polite Victorian society: his family's dissent and his own illegitimacy.