

## Julius von Payer (1842-1915)

Julius von Payer was born near Teplitz in Bohemia. On completing his education, he chose a military career and distinguished himself at the Battle of Custozza during the Austro-Italian war of 1866. Later, while on leave from the army, he made the first ascents and conducted surveys of several alpine peaks, supported in his later surveys by a few troopers from alpine army units. For a time he served as instructor in cartography at the Austro-Hungarian Military College in Vienna. Due to his expertise on alpine glaciers, he was invited to join the German Polar Expedition of 1869-70, which worked in "new" areas in northeast Greenland. There, because of Payer, some topographical features still have Austrian place names.

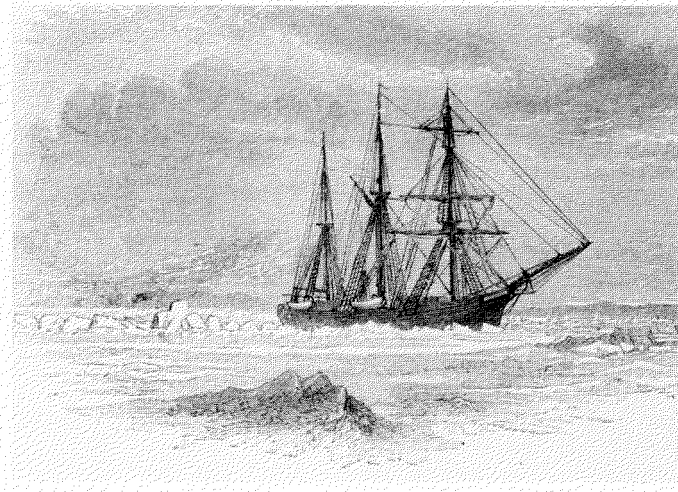
Payer and his friend naval Lieutenant Weyprecht thought that the area between Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlya might offer a relatively ice-free zone to the north. Financed by Count Wylzeck, they chartered a small sailing vessel and during a favourable period in 1871 made a preliminary expedition in the area, reaching a maximal northern latitude of 78.5°.

Their next and last polar expedition, 1872-74, led to what might be called the "accidental" discovery of an archipelago of islands that they named Franz Josef Land, after their emperor. This expedition was supported by the Austro-Hungarian government, which also supplied sailors to form the crew. Their motorized sailing ship, the *Tegetthoff*, was named after the Austrian admiral who had distinguished himself against the Italian warships in the Austro-Prussian and Italian war of 1866.

In September 1872 the *Tegetthoff* became ice bound and drifted northward over an irregular course. In August 1873 the southernmost island of Franz Josef Land was seen but could not be reached until October of the same year. Lieutenant Weyprecht commanded the ship and Payer led the sled expeditions that in early 1874 discovered the central portion of the island archipelago. During the drift of the *Tegetthoff*, on many occasions the ship's timbers groaned loudly as if it were about to be crushed by the ice. Each time the crew was prepared to lower their small boats and sleds onto the ice, each man having an emergency kit and rations ready.



Payer, as depicted by a contemporary.



The "Tegetthoff" finally beset. Drawing by Payer.

Payer's sledge parties covered about 800 km, the northernmost point being 81°51'N. He believed he could see more land to the northeast and northwest, but later expeditions showed that the whole of Franz Josef Land was much smaller than Payer thought.

Their ship was still ice bound when the sledge parties returned. Some members of the expedition had died, including an old Norwegian whaling captain. In May, an expedition with sleds and three 60-m boats struck out for the depot left in 1871 on the island of Novaya Zemlya. Progress over the snow-covered ice was so slow that after eight days the leaders decided to await the breakup of the ice. It was mid-August before they were able to row and sail southward, covering the 300 km to Novaya Zemlya. Because of the land ice on the west coast of the island, they were unable



The first abandonment of the "Tegetthoff." Drawing by Payer.

to get to their depot and had to sail and row almost to its southern extremity before they were picked up by a Russian fishing vessel on 24 August 1874. The captain of this ship was paid to cut short his fishing and take them to the Norwegian arctic port of Vard. Payer later wrote a two-volume account of the expedition.

It should be pointed out that the Austro-Hungarian government, which only controlled a short coastline on the eastern Adriatic, laid no claim to the lands discovered by the Austrian expedition, and Franz Josef Land became a Russian possession. A recent Russian ornithological survey of the island archipelago showed it to be the world's greatest breeding place of the ivory gull.

Payer was not only an alpinist and explorer but also an artist. His book is illustrated with many drawings, two of which are reproduced here. Payer also made water-colour sketches in the Arctic. One of these, showing a sledge party against a bi-coloured sky at noon in February, forms the frontispiece of his two-volume work.

On his return from the North, Payer lived as a civilian in Paris until 1890, where he studied art. He then returned to Vienna and opened his own school of painting. He painted arctic landscapes based on sketches he had made during his

expeditions. These were well received at several important exhibitions and he was, in fact, the first artist to depict the Arctic in colour. He died in Vienna in 1915.

#### ANNOTATED FURTHER READINGS

- BAMBERGER, R., and MAIER-BRUCK, F. 1966. *Ostereich Lexikon*. Vienna and Munich: Ostereichischer Bundesverlag. Vol. 2. 180 p.
- MIRSKY, I. 1948. *To the Arctic*. New York: Alfred Knopf. pp. 174-181, with a useful map of the drift of the *Tegetthoff* and the return journey in small boats. (The map in Payer's book is very difficult to read, as it includes the routes of the preliminary boat journey of 1871 as well as that of the journey of discovery. Mirsky also gives details of Payer's sledge parties.)
- PAYER, J. von. 1876. *New Lands within the Arctic Circle. Narration of the discoveries of the Austrian ship "Tegetthoff" in the years 1872-1874*. London: Macmillan and Co. Authorized English translation in 2 vols., 335 p. and 303 p., with map and many illustrations.

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