

Chapter 3. The place names of Franz Josef Land: framing the problem¹³

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Abstract

A brief introduction to the geographic place names of Franz Josef Land. Franz Josef Land is located in the western Arctic though for much of the 20th Century it was closed behind the Iron Curtain. Prior to that, there were a series of Western expeditions between the ‘official’ discovery in 1873 and the departure of the American Fiala group in 1905. From these expeditions, the islands are heavily connected to the history of the search for the North Pole.

Keywords

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Franz Josef Land is located in the western Arctic though for much of the 20th Century it was closed behind the Iron Curtain. Prior to that, there were a series of Western expeditions between the ‘official’ discovery in 1873 and the departure of the American Fiala group in 1905. From these expeditions, the islands are heavily connected to the history of the search for the North Pole. The distance from Cape Fligely, the most northern tip, to the North Pole is 429 nautical miles according to the navigation chart. There was a Norwegian expedition there in 1931, and in World War II a German radio station.

How do you reach Franz Josef Land? Well in the old days, most of the expeditions started at Arkhangelsk, to pick up dogs and horses. These included Jackson, Wellman, Baldwin, and Fiala. Russian vessels sailed to the islands from Murmansk. And now from Norway, Longyearbyen, a few expeditions have started from there.

Many Russians will fly to Franz Josef Land from Arkhangelsk, usually to Novaya Zemlya and from Novaya Zemlya by helicopter up to Alexandra Land. In the old days, when the Soviets had military and scientific installations and runways in Franz Josef Land, it was also very

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¹⁴ About the author: Magnus Forsberg was born in Sweden. Although he was formally educated in mathematics and physics at Goteborg University and Chalmers University of Technology at Goteborg, Magnus soon returned to his first love — nature. He worked as a warden for a nature sanctuary and bird observatory from 1976 to 1994, including, in 1990, heading the second largest wetland restoration in Sweden, the Getteron Wetland Sanctuary. He has been a guide in North Africa, the Middle East, Siberia, Central Asia, and throughout the Polar Regions.

common to fly out from Siberia here up to Novaya Zemlya in long-range helicopters from Novaya Zemlya.

Of course the issue with reaching Franz Josef Land—and the reason it was found at such a late time, in 1873 if you're Austrian, in 1865 if you're Norwegian—is the ice. As you can see here, it is ice, ice, ice. Some 90% of the landmass in Franz Josef Land is covered by glaciers, so that there are very few areas with barren land. The main current of the ice is moving from the northeast to the southwest. That creates a lot of issues for perilous navigating up there.

What makes Franz Josef Land interesting today? Those of us gathered here are polar history freaks. But I would say it's almost impossible to sell a trip focusing on polar history. Very few people will actually go on a trip just focusing on history. The reason why people come to the arctic is of course the polar areas. If you would do a trip up to the ice and not see a polar bear, you would be in deep trouble, I promise you.

But what people are truly fascinated about and it's the reason why I return over and over to the Arctic or Antarctica is not really the polar bears, it is the ice. To spend days in the ice in the Arctic is something you never, ever forget. And in Franz Josef Land, around all these islands, the ice is very hard here. Drifting ice is trapped in the channels here, fast ice stays for a long time, which makes it very very hard to navigate if you don't have access to very good icebreaker. Unfortunately for the tourist industry, icebreakers are very expensive ships to run and there are few of them.

Most of the tourist ships used today in the Arctic, not every one unfortunately, or in the Antarctic, are what you call ice-enforced, or ice-strengthened. We're not going to dig deeper than that but they are not icebreakers. That is important to remember. A lot of people will say 'I have been travelling on an icebreaker' but that's not the case.

Now, for Franz Josef Land's history. It was very probably known, prior to the Austro-Hungarian 'official' discovery in 1873, by Arctic sealers and walrus-hunters from northern Scandinavia. In this it likely mirrors the situation in Antarctica, where sealers from America and England went down there and found a land and kept it a secret. You did not want to reveal about seal and walrus sites because it was walrus that made money for them and of course if you had reached these islands in 1865 and found a goldmine of seals and walrus and polar bears there, completely untouched, you would keep that information to yourself.

At this time, Sweden and Norway were a union, and there was much poverty in Northern Finland and Northern Sweden and Norway, so if you were a sea-hunter out of Hammerfest such a discovery gave you an opportunity to survive. If we pursue this history, then the first place name ever attached to the area was Northeast Spitsbergen. I don't think we'll ever be able to confirm it and of course the Austrians would never agree on this but it's there.

The official finding of Franz Josef Land dates back to the Weyprecht-Payer expedition that was sent out by the Hungarian empire with the aim to be the first through the Northeast Passage and also make a detour to discover the North Pole. They did neither—they got stuck in ice because as I said moves from the east-northeast to the southwest and so they were beset in the ice for more than a year. Finally, in August of 1873, they see land for the first time. They stayed there over winter and into the spring of 1874 when Payer and a few of the crew makes a trip up north. This trip leads to 92 place names and additionally in Carlson's diary—which still survives—there are two more that have never been recognized.

Of the 92 place names, there are today 10 or more which have significant questions remaining from them. This is because we need to take the name and connect it with a person and then ask: why did Payer pick this? At times this is extremely difficult to find his connection because the name derives after people who have nothing to do with anything Arctic. Payer was a cartographer and had been mapping in the Alps, before he came to Franz Josef Land.

But in general Payer names many many places after early Arctic history, for example the *Germania/Hansa* expedition to Greenland under Koldewey in 1869-70. There are American explorers named, like Kane and Hall, and also a lot of very famous German and Austrian scientists, explorers, politicians, bankers, and so on, and of course sponsors. We can see these in the first maps of Franz Josef Land, published in Petermann's *Mitteilungen*, which was the meta center of exploration in the day, and which promoted the idea of an 'open polar sea' to the North Pole.

The next expeditions, in 1878 and 1879, were an English voyage with Albert Markham and the other Dutch. These expeditions approached Franz Josef Land but the ice was an issue and they never landed but they did attach two place names, but only one survived.

Then in 1880, Leigh Smith came to Franz Josef Land and that is one of the few things we could not definitely name when we wrote our article, which is why did he name the ship *Eira*? We have many theories that, but I think we'll have to survive without finding the final answer. The most important of Leigh Smith's voyages was that he sighted a new part of Franz Josef Land, to the west of where Payer had been.

The next expedition was Jackson's British North Pole expedition, and used both the storehouse Leigh Smith left behind, called Eira Lodge, as well as Leigh Smith's overwintering hut at Cape Flora. Jackson continued Leigh Smith's mapping of western Franz Josef Land, and several of the veterans of this expedition later join with Scott on the *Discovery* expedition to Antarctica.

It is during Jackson's time in Franz Josef Land that he meets with Fridtjof Nansen, who has picked up on the idea of drifting across the polar basin. He has an incredible ship builder

here in Norway, Colin Archer, descended from Scottish family. So they built this round ship, which you saw at the Fram Museum. Nansen leaves the ship with Johansen for a dash towards the North Pole, but they realized very rapidly they wouldn't make it and they had to retreat and the only thing he had was Payer's map of Franz Josef Land, which was very poor, and they lost their watch, so they had a hard time to know exactly what longitude they were at.

They reach Franz Josef Land in late summer of 1895, and in 1896 they slowly made it south where they meet up with Jackson. It is a fascinating meeting because Nansen knew about this expedition, knew that Jackson should be somewhere Franz Josef Land, but the possibility that they should actually meet is an amazing polar story. The most interesting for us is that Nansen produced a map and it looks like this. Of course he based much of his map on Jackson's work in mapping the territory. In fact, when Jackson wrote his autobiography in the 1930s, he actually expressed a little bit disappointment that Nansen had more or less stolen his Franz Josef Land map.

Now it was time for the Americans to enter the arena. Walter Wellman had become obsessed with the Arctic, in Chicago at the Columbian Exposition in 1893, and in 1894 he comes up to northern Norway and launches an expedition to Spitsbergen that fails, but he returns safe and sound and the only casualty, besides the expedition ship that sank, was one of the Norwegians who broke a toe.

Wellman then went to Paris to find out if you could build a polar balloon. But without the money to support such an enormous effort, he decides to launch his next expedition from Franz Josef Land. There were four Americans and five Norwegians and strangely enough he didn't have a plan to retreat from Franz Josef Land. That was up to his brother to arrange over the year when they were going to the North Pole.

They settled at Cape Tegetthoff while second-in-command Baldwin is supposed to get as far north as possible to establish an outpost base camp. They ended up at Cape Heller, far short of Wellman's plans, and it was there that the Norwegian Bentsen dies early in 1899. Baldwin was not a good commander, could not figure his latitude or longitude, so these measurements were made by the Norwegians and they were actually mapping the eastern parts and also the last major land area to be found on Franz Josef Land with the island Graham Bell Land as it was called in those days and named after the famous Graham Bell who at the time was the chairman of National Geographic society.

When Wellman went towards the North Pole in the spring of 1899 he mentions in a letter that he has a list of names which should be used on the features he and Baldwin have found and the names had a close association with the financing of the expedition as well as Wellman's position as one of the leading journalists in US at the time.

As Wellman is leaving in 1899 he runs into a ship the expedition of the Duke of the Abruzzi on board the *Polar Star*. Abruzzi is heavily financed and his ship reaches Teplitz Bay on the western side of Rudolf Land, where he establishes his base. He sends out his second-in-command and they are able to best Nansen's farthest north by 20 nautical miles. That is what they come home with, they have beaten Nansen's record, but strangely enough they don't get the energy, the steam, like Nansen got from his return from the Arctic the mapping done on the expedition was not terribly well done.

In 1901, Baldwin was back in Franz Josef Land as the leader of his own expedition, but he never published a book or even a detailed article about the expedition, as did Jackson, whose *One Thousand Days in the Arctic* has a lot of information about the place names. Baldwin had been very successful in his fundraising and nowhere moreso than with William Ziegler, a multi-millionaire. They reached Franz Josef Land on the ship *America*, an old Scottish whaler.

Baldwin states that there are a lot of Norwegians on board, but in fact it was an American expedition with more or less a Swedish crew. The captain was Swedish, all the officers were Swedish, I think there were only three Norwegians on board. There was also a Hungarian as well as six Russians, or Siberians, on the expedition, but it's still called an American expedition.

The expedition is little less than a disaster, but we do have an incredible map, unpublished by Baldwin, of course, and suddenly we can start to find the areas did they find, what places did they name, where did they travel. There are probably still a lot of archaeological sites to be found at Franz Josef Land after this expedition and maybe I made a contribution to this when I stepped on a ski on Champ Island that hints that it comes from either the Baldwin or Fiala expedition.¹⁵

There are roughly 27 place names derived from the Baldwin expedition. There are a few that we have yet to trace the origins of, like Field Island, which is perhaps the Field Museum in Chicago.

The final American attempt, the Ziegler Polar Expedition under the leadership of Anthony Fiala, is again an American mix and match, with crew members from several different countries. The expedition ship, Baldwin's old *America*, reaches all the way to Teplitz Bay, where the expedition disintegrates, with the ship being crushed by the ice and the expedition itself devolving into several small groups attempting to survive throughout the islands.

However, the expedition is favored by the presence of Russell Porter, an excellent cartographer and artist who explores and maps much of the archipelago, correcting earlier maps,

¹⁵ See: P.J. Capelotti. 2007. "Century-old ski found at Mys Triest, Ostrov Champa, Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa, Russia," *Polar Record* 43 (3): 272-275 [doi:10.1017/S0032247407006717](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407006717)

and laying the baseline for all future mapping. Porter's work was published in 1907 along with the entire scientific output of the expedition.

So, by 1905, the outlines of Franz Josef Land were very well known, named and described.

The archipelago was claimed by the Soviet Union in 1926. And that goes back actually to the Canadians and the sector principle. Everyone has seen the map of Antarctica, seen these pie slices into the South Pole. That idea originates from the Canadians, in 1925, in extending their claim from the northern coast of Canada all the way to the North Pole. And then Russia adopted this idea and claimed everything from the western and eastern points of mainland Russia all the way up to the North Pole.

That was when Franz Josef Land became part of the Soviet Union. It was then closed from 1931, I know of only a lone French scientist there, visiting the islands in cooperation with the Russians, until '68. And then in '91 it was opened up again and then it was open, closed a little bit and then in the last say 15 years, it has been approachable by tourists.

Then did anyone actually go to the North Pole from Franz Josef Land? That happened several times with Soviet aeronautical expeditions staged from Franz Josef Land, but to my knowledge still today no one has been able to walk over the ice from Franz Josef Land to the North Pole.

There are only two persons, or two teams, who have walked from the North Pole to Franz Josef Land, have arrived at Franz Josef Land without using a ship or an airplane, and both are Norwegians.

As for the place names themselves, very soon after the 2006 visit to Franz Josef Land, we realized that this is an enormous undertaking. Not until 2013, after Pete had written his book about Leigh Smith, were we at last able to put together the first article, on the *Eira* voyages. Last year, we were able to do the same for Wellman.

Where are we now? With the help of Maria Gavrilov, we have a list of all of the names recently published in Russian (see: Savatyugin and Dorozhkina, 2012). But it is not complete. Some things have been highlighted while others left out entirely. My guess for the reason is that when it gets to the names from the expeditions to 1905, they have taken the names that can be picked up from the books by both Jackson and Payer.

Here is the list of all the names, in English, which are included in the book. But, when we start to drill down into this data, just to connect the names to the right expedition has been a

huge effort. Our goal at the moment is to complete the names of the three American expeditions. We have published Wellman, and now remains Baldwin and Fiala.

After 1905, I have been able to find only three more place names added into Franz Josef Land. One is a hunting expedition with a Norwegian ship arranged by an interesting fellow of Spanish-English ancestry, who arranged a hunting expedition to the Arctic in 1906 and he brings a very prominent figure from a noble family in Spain and they find an island and they name it.

The first Russian to arrive to Franz Josef Land was actually with the Jackson expedition, one of the carpenters was a Russian and as already mentioned Baldwin had six Siberians with him. The first place name indisputably set by Russians, Komsomolets Island, was probably first seen and named by Payer and then it was relocated and the first people to ever step on it were the Norwegians during the Wellman expedition, where they were trying to bring provisions to Cape Heller from Storm Bay and they are forced because of the wind and ice to land on a very flat island. This island should be actually be named Bentsen Island, from this strong Norwegian connection, combined with the fact that there are very few Norwegian names up there.

The last thing I want to mention before I close, is to connect with what Pete said about newspaper sources. I started to search in historical Scandinavian newspapers and when you do that suddenly you are overwhelmed with how much information you come across. Just to give you an idea on Wellman's expedition, I have so far been able to download 57 articles in Norwegian newspapers and that is certainly only a fragment since some of the major newspapers here in Norway have not been digitalized yet, so I'm sure that you can probably double that number.

In Sweden—and Wellman's expedition had really no direct connection with Sweden—we have more than 90 newspaper articles. In Britain I have so far found 50 articles, in a country with had a much stronger connection than Sweden, so there will be many more there. That makes so far already 261 articles from three countries about that one expedition. You should divide that maybe in three to give the real sense of what it is, because there are the three major newspapers in Sweden and many of the articles are syndications of the same article that have been published in all three, but still there was a huge interest and an enormous amount of information.

Then there are the as-yet undiscovered archival sources, letters, diaries, and so forth.

We wouldn't be surprised if there are more of these to be found in Sweden when it comes to the Baldwin expedition. Payers diaries are in Austria at the military museum, and these, if anyone can read old German style, which is very few today unfortunately, can reveal a lot of interesting information.

Then there is the issue of the melting ice. Glaciers are melting and previously hidden land is being uncovered. Melting glacier fronts will retreat to form shorelines, or bays, or fjords. So, as you can see, just as we may solve the historic problems of the Franz Josef Land place names, the changing Arctic will create whole new ones.

Discussion

Barr: I would point out that Jackson made an application to be on Nansen's expedition. It was refused, but afterwards he was the one saving Nansen.

Elzinga: Can you say something about the process of verification of the names and establishing them internationally?

Umbreit: The Russian book do they give the explanations of the names?

Forsberg: They try. But, they have not necessarily hit them correctly. For example, Essen Bay, named by Leigh Smith, is described as being named after the town of Esssen in Germany. It could also be named from a family in Sweden. Yet we know from Leigh Smith's papers that it was actually named after his engineer on *Eira*. By depending solely on a few Russian sources, they have often gone onto the wrong track. For example, a lot of glaciers are not included in the Russian place names book. But most of the glaciers are named after it became Soviet. They are all tied to Soviet names. That makes it hard if you're not Russian speaking and know the Russian academic science because most of them are tied to Russian scientific men and sometimes women, or pilots and captains aboard ships doing expeditions up in the Arctic, and not necessarily Franz Josef Land.

Umbreit: But those Russian names might be more correct in the Russian book?

Forsberg: Almost certainly. I have not really looked much into the Russian names here because our focus has always been on the historic expeditions before 1905.

Barr: I think if we were ever to get to the point where there was a place names of Franz Josef Land, it would have to be cut off at 1905. The modern Russian work on the Russian toponymy should stand as the Russian/Soviet/Russian testament. Then, the historic place names that come from countries other than Russia would form a separate database, otherwise, you could get hopelessly lost.

- Forsberg: If we were to pursue Russian place names we would have to have a Russian colleague or colleagues who understand Arctic history and the Russian archives. Otherwise we are doomed. We can do something pre-Russian or Soviet Union, for instance, place name book.
- Barr: Like historic place names?
- Forsberg: *Historic Place Names* we could call it. Yes. Thank you.
- Capelotti: We've been trying to find that title for four years now. I knew there was a reason we came here.
- Forsberg: Okay. Here starts the list of place names which are not included in the book. Additional place names. You can see it runs and runs and runs.
- Elzinga: How many are they?
- Forsberg: I think about 200. They could be names, like Ben Cable Island, which turned out to be a mirage. So there are many, many place names which are there that have been located, named, and then relocated and renamed, because the expedition's didn't know about each other or what places had been named or the positions were not recorded with enough precision.
- Capelotti: That is an excellent point. Once you extend the historical discussion of the names to variants and mirage islands, that becomes a titanic project unless you can limit it to say 250 historic names. Even that, you're looking at years of work.
- Forsberg: Just an estimate of how many names are not in the Russian work, I would say roughly 140.
- Capelotti: Well, if you follow the system used in the *Place Names of Svalbard* then the approved name would be listed in bold but something like Ben Cable Island would not be because the name doesn't survive or in that case was just a mirage island.
- Forsberg: This is where we are right now. We have two articles out. Nine that could easily be published. It's only a matter of time. We have all the basic facts. I think I have it quite well set.

- Capelotti: What Susan said earlier, especially if it was going to be a web portal like they have now at Norsk Polar, it could be set up as a series of fields and we just start plugging in information. They could then be finalized through a review board there and go online. Then it is a matter of continuing to add to the names until the historic list is complete. We could start with Wellman and Benjamin Leigh Smith, since those have all been published. We could start there and then build out from there. The historic maps would be another issue.
- Forsberg: This is probably the most complete listing of place names where we at least can connect all the place names to certain sources. That is step number one. Then, to identify and confirm and, if possible add more sources. To identify is usually not so hard. But, to make the final confirmation, is. Of course, it's a matter of how much you need. We gave up on Cape Flora when we couldn't get a definite answer.
- Capelotti: We didn't give up on it. We got four different explanations.
- Forsberg: Yes, of course. We couldn't go any farther.
- Elzinga: I mean it's very legitimate to write multiple hypotheses. Could be this, could be that.
- Capelotti: In specific reference to Leigh Smith, he'd left behind very few writings of his own. Much of what we know is from articles that were submitted by Clements Markham of the RGS and the drafts of those articles in the RGS archives. The original manuscripts have penciled in the margins that this was Cape Stephens and that Cape Forbes after Stephens and Forbes Shipyard, and Essen Bay after the chief engineer of Eira, and so forth.
- Umbreit: Where did he get his information from?
- Capelotti: Presumably Clements Markham got it straight from Leigh Smith, since Leigh Smith was a patron of the RGS, and gave them huge sums of money. Markham wrote up his articles from Leigh Smith's notes.
- Umbreit: He had notes?
- Capelotti: He would have had some notes from Leigh Smith, yes, his roughed-in charts, and so forth. Markham, if he did not know the people behind these names personally, would have gone to him when they were doing the cartography for those articles

and said, “Where does this name come from?” Because the source of those names doesn’t appear in the published article. Some of them do, but most of them don’t. W.W. May, for example, May Island, I mean we know that because Markham, that name was probably assigned by Markham, as a tribute to the guy that did the drawings for the article for free or probably near free. That’s how we were able to knock down a couple of those names.

- Umbreit: You must have logged many hours.
- Capelotti: Yes, but lot of that was just an accidental discovery while doing the Leigh Smith biography, finding those original manuscripts.
- Elzinga: You were saying that 250 are historic names if you cut the list at 1905?
- Forsberg: Approximately 250 before 1905 and then roughly 300 to 400 after 1905. For the Russian place names you would have to know the history of Russian academic and science names, and all the Russian explorers.
- Umbreit: You'd need to get a third author?
- Elzinga: Do you have a Russian colleague?
- Capelotti: Not in the Russian geography or toponymy. We would need a Russian trained in historical geography in the Arctic.
- Wråkberg: But you would expect that at the Geographical Society or the Russian Academy of Sciences there must be an official list of names for Franz Josef Land that you would at least expect them to have for themselves. But that is separate from what you are doing here, which is primary historical research.
- Capelotti: Yes. But what we wouldn’t want is to get into current schemes for standardizing international place names. At that point you’re into U.S. Board on Geographic Names or U.N. Board of Experts on Geographic Names territory. That is a whole other level of bureaucracy, one not necessarily focused on historical place names and certainly not on place names of mirage islands or historical problems like Giles Land.
- Wråkberg: That doesn’t say that you wouldn't be able to influence or discuss?

- Capelotti: Well, there are examples where the historical record could suggest different names from the current accepted name. What Magnus says about the quote, unquote, Young Communist Island or the Communist Youth League Island, it really has nothing to do with this and everything to do with the historical associations with the Norwegians who landed there during the Wellman expedition. Payer probably saw it but we know that the Norwegians were there and formed definite associations with it based on their attempts to get from there to Cape Heller.
- Forsberg: They were the first ones to ever sleep on the island for sure.
- Capelotti: The fact that almost all of that expedition was carried out by Norwegians and then one of them died and that there's basically, other than Bentsen Bay, there's nothing to mark the Norwegian presence there.
- Elzinga: Gunnar Horn, he would have had the name of the island also.
- Forsberg: Gunnar Horn didn't produce any map in his work on Franz Josef Land. It gives the history of the island and he lists all of the Norwegian expeditions and also there is a very, very strong list of the science made.
- Larsson: There is a map but it's very small and sketchy.
- Forsberg: You cannot make out anything about the place names. If I recall the map is just a very brief map with the name of islands that we already know. Another source which I'm impressed with, is Vise, obviously he must have been able to speak German and English.
- Umbreit: He was of German descent.
- Forsberg: But he also must have spoken very good English because he has so many names that he must have spent a lot of time looking into, to find and correlate to the right person because he even got Newton Island correct. It has nothing to do with Isaac Newton. It's a completely different Newton who went up to Svalbard in the 1860s and is very famous in ornithology. He got that right. There are other names that are associated with Benjamin Leigh Smith that I'm surprised that he was able to name because they are so inaccessible.
- Wråkberg: It seems likely that he would have access to staff resources, perhaps an assistant.

Forsberg: Probably. They had a very good library in St. Petersburg already in the 20s when
Vise was there.

Elzinga: Perhaps the Russian naval archives.

Forsberg: Yes, but he was in, in those days it was still the Arctic Institute. It was renamed
later. He was there for many years if I remember correct.