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978-1-108-04825-5 - The Great Frozen Land: (Bolshaia Zemelskija Tundra): Narrative of a Winter Journey Across the Tundras and a Sojourn Among the Samoyeds

Edited by Frederick George Jackson and Arthur Montefiore

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The Great Frozen Land (Bolshaia Zemelskija Tundra)

Frederick George Jackson (1860–1938) set out on his expedition from Vaygach Island with two objectives: to test his equipment for a future voyage much further north, and to study the Samoyeds. Although his goals seemed straightforward, they proved more difficult than expected to achieve. After being left on the island ahead of schedule without most of his food supplies, and with no interpreter, he found that his principal bargaining tool was tea, and that many of the areas he had hoped to explore were too dangerous. This account of his experiences, first published in 1895, provides a glimpse into the seemingly insuperable difficulties of a nineteenth-century Arctic expedition, and the unflappable way in which Jackson dealt with them. Including notes on distraught lemmings, Samoyed customs, and the linguistic annotations of the editor, Arthur Montefiore, this entertaining book will interest historians and curious modern-day travellers alike.

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*Narrative of a Winter Journey
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Sojourn Among the Samoyads*

FREDERICK GEORGE JACKSON
EDITED BY ARTHUR MONTEFIORE



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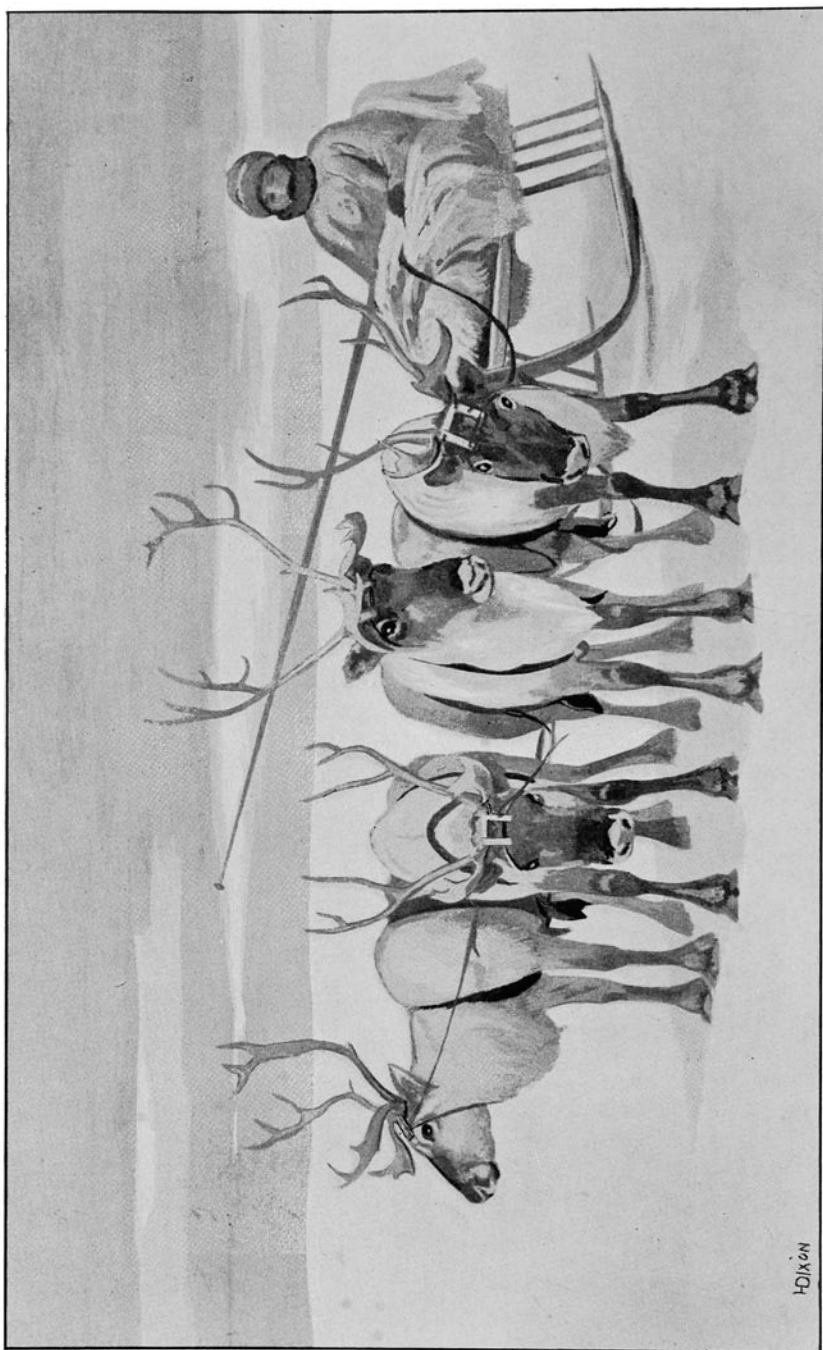
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THE AUTHOR IN A SAMOYAD SLEDGE.

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THE
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(BOLSHAIA ZEMELSKIJA TUNDRA)

NARRATIVE OF A WINTER JOURNEY ACROSS
THE TUNDRAS AND A SOJOURN
AMONG THE SAMOYADS

BY

FREDERICK GEORGE JACKSON

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
LEADER OF THE JACKSON-HARMSWORTH POLAR EXPEDITION

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

EDITED FROM HIS JOURNALS BY

ARTHUR MONTEFIORE

FELLOW OF THE GEOLOGICAL AND ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETIES
AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

London

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P R E F A C E

OF the two objects which were in view when this journey was undertaken, the first and more important was to experiment with and test a selected variety of equipment, clothing, and food under the conditions of an Arctic winter, in order that the results of this experience might be utilised in the more prolonged and far more difficult journey contemplated to the unknown Arctic area north of Franz Josef Land. As most people are aware, the low Tundras of Arctic Russia and Siberia, although readily accessible and stretching on the east, west, and south to the confines of civilisation, possess a winter climate of a severity so great that it does not merely exceed the rigour of many regions lying farther north, and in the strict embrace of Oceanic ice, but actually reveals the lowest temperature yet recorded in the whole of the Arctic basin. For it is on the frozen Tundras of Siberia that we find what has been called "The Pole of Extreme Cold."

A sledge-journey, then, across the Tundras lying between the Kara and the White Seas—undertaken,

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too, in the winter season—might well be expected to provide an adequate test of the suitability of the clothing, camp-kit, means of locomotion, and food intended to be taken on an Arctic Expedition. Such very practical and important questions as those involved in clothing for the feet, cooking-stoves for use on the march, the lowest limit of the weight of the sledge compatible with strength, the action of breech-loading and self-ejecting rifles, the most convenient and effectual form of shelter from the snow-gales of the Polar regions—these are but a few of the many problems to be faced, considered, and decided by any one who contemplates an exploration of the unknown areas around the North Pole. Not merely would the Tundras, stiff and stark and lifeless in the deadly grip of winter, provide opportunities of raising and settling these questions, but they would also enable the traveller to reckon on his return to civilisation in the early spring, in time to prepare and complete the equipment which should be the outcome of his experience on those inhospitable wastes.

It is true that the winter visitor would fail to find at his feet the bright if short-lived flowers of the Arctic summer; true that the fortune would not be his to mark the simple nest and priceless eggs of those birds whose breeding-places have never yet been seen by naturalist, but are probably to be discovered on the Tundras; true, too, that the evidences of the geological past and the open book of the geographical present would be largely hidden by the unbroken surface of ice and snow which he would traverse and survey.

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But just as the golden harvest of the morrow can alone be reaped through the toil of to-day, so he who would enjoy the delight of Arctic discovery and the glow of a successful wrestle with Nature in her most formidable mood must be content to forego the interest and ease of a summer wandering which fails to stretch the cords of the muscles to a high point of tension or strain the capacity of physical endurance.

Yet here, again, the selection of the Tundras would permit some slight modification; and this book will show that arrival on the scene in the late summer, and a sojourn during the short autumn, enables the traveller to view those solitudes when flushed by the lingering sun, tinged with the hues of vegetation, and broken by the sounds of animated nature.

And this brings me to the second object of the journey, which was to visit and, for some months, to live with that primitive group of the human family, the Samoyads of the Great Frozen Tundra of Arctic Russia; to dwell in their tents, to eat of their food, to go and come with them in their daily life, to share their labour and their rest; to mark their ways and seek their motives, to note their relations to one another, and to learn, if possible, something of their sense of a higher influence. And there was more, too, than the curiosity of a member of a civilised nation in a primitive folk; for—still bearing in mind the coming voyage to lands and seas yet to be surveyed—there were the lessons which a people could teach who simply existed in this rigid wilderness because they

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had learnt to adapt themselves and all their modes of life to that environment. It is a wise saying and a true which tells us to live, wherever we travel, as the natives of each country can show us how; more especially concerning clothing, food, the ordinary shifts and expedients of the daily round, and regard for times and seasons. And the narrative which this book contains will tell wherein even the rude Samoyad can give knowledge to an Englishman who had already travelled far and well.

Finally, and included in this second object, was the journeying over that Great Tundra, between the Kara Sea and the Pechora River—a solitude through which no Englishman had ever passed; of which no sufficient map existed; whose tale of river-labyrinths, ancient beaches, and lost bays had never been told; of whose winter climate no account was to be discovered in the English tongue.

These, then, were the objects, and these the means which Mr. Frederick George Jackson set before him and achieved in his journey of 1893-94. He went out towards the end of the summer; devoted the autumn to the survey of Waigatz Island, which links Novaia Zemlia to the Ural chain, and opens the gate into the Kara Sea; and the winter to his sledge-journey of near two thousand five hundred miles from the frontier of Siberia across the Great Tundra, the Pechora Valley, the Little Tundra; and then, if haply he might learn of the Lapp what he had not been taught by the Samoyad, through Russian Lapland to the Murmansk Coast. He pulled his own sledge and he

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drove it behind reindeer and the wiry ponies of Northern Russia; he lived much as the natives lived, and ate with them of their coarse but vitalising food; he stayed in their foul and almost suffocating chooms, and he lay down to sleep, as they slept, on the open snow. And he returned to England with his physical powers and all his great courage and enthusiasm at their highest, and a new store of experience for his very material assistance.

Then the strenuous work of preparing for the great expedition to Franz Josef Land and the unknown area lying north of it, which private patriotism and munificence had rendered possible on a scale we had not looked for, came upon him; and although we had many a talk together on this winter journey and his life among the Samoyads, and together went through his journals, it was not until the fever of preparation was over, and we were steaming up the Norwegian fiords and round the North Cape for the White Sea and Arkhangel, that Mr. Jackson was able to arrange and connect his notes for publication; and, even then, it was found impossible to decide this point and that point, to give final shape to one sentence and another. And so it was left to me to see the work through the press, and make those necessary changes and additions which come within editorial discretion.

If, then, there are errors of opinion, too great insistence on trifles, or scant recognition of that which is important, I trust that they may be set down to my own shortcomings and not charged to my absent friend, for whom I hope and of whom I expect a

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glorious record of English pluck and Arctic Discovery; and that his readers will remember that for this, his first essay in the literature of travel, I have done what the exceptional circumstances and my own capacity have permitted.

ARTHUR MONTEFIORE.

CHRISTMAS 1894.

[In the following pages I must accept responsibility for the notes, unless otherwise stated, and for the chapters on the Speech and Folk-lore of the Samoyads. And I should acknowledge here the kindness of Mr. Herbert Ward, F.R.G.S., in supplying me with some interesting sketches, and of Mr. J. Russell Jeaffreson, F.R.G.S., in examining and reporting on the birds observed and collected by Mr. Jackson.]

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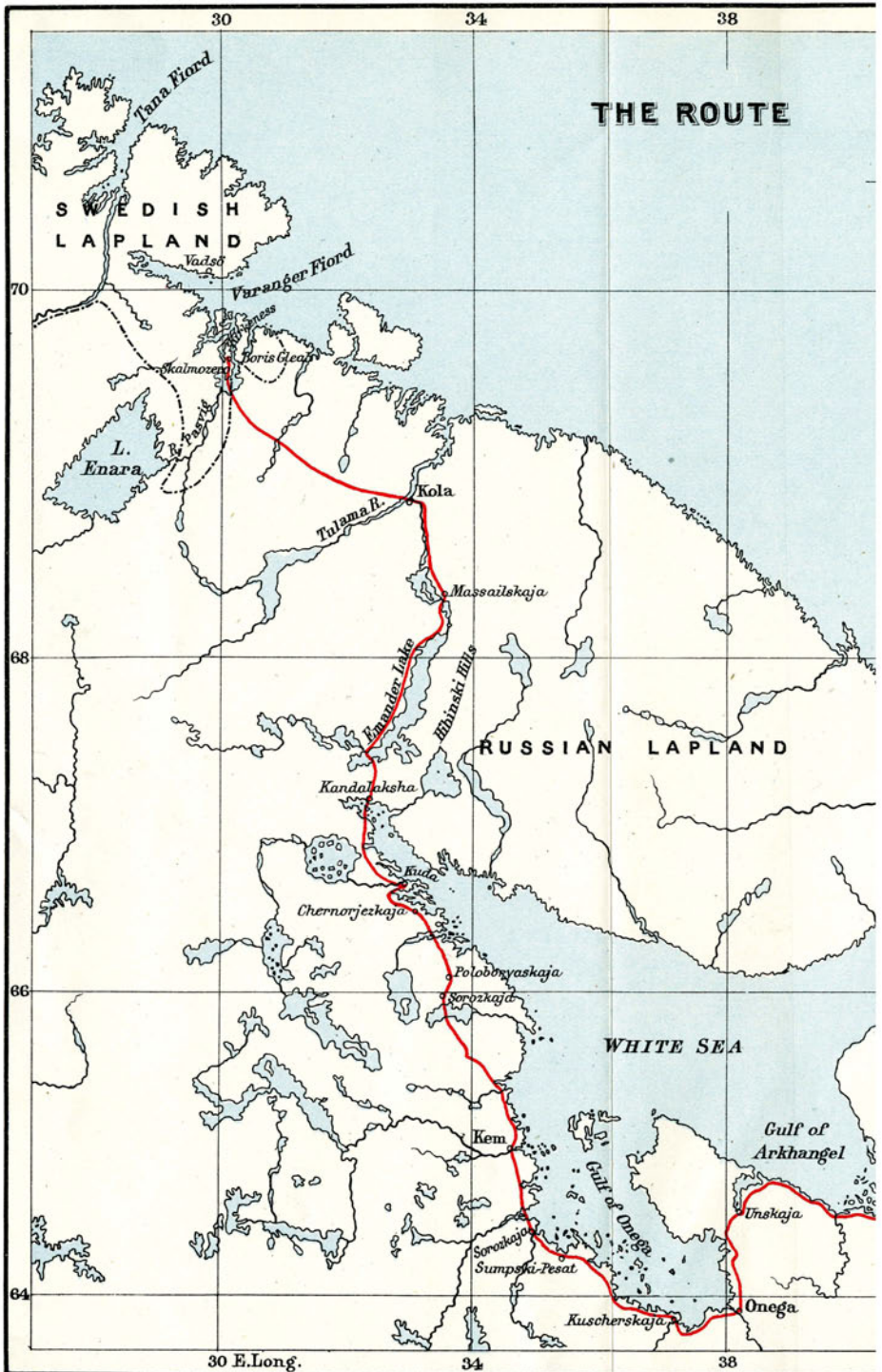
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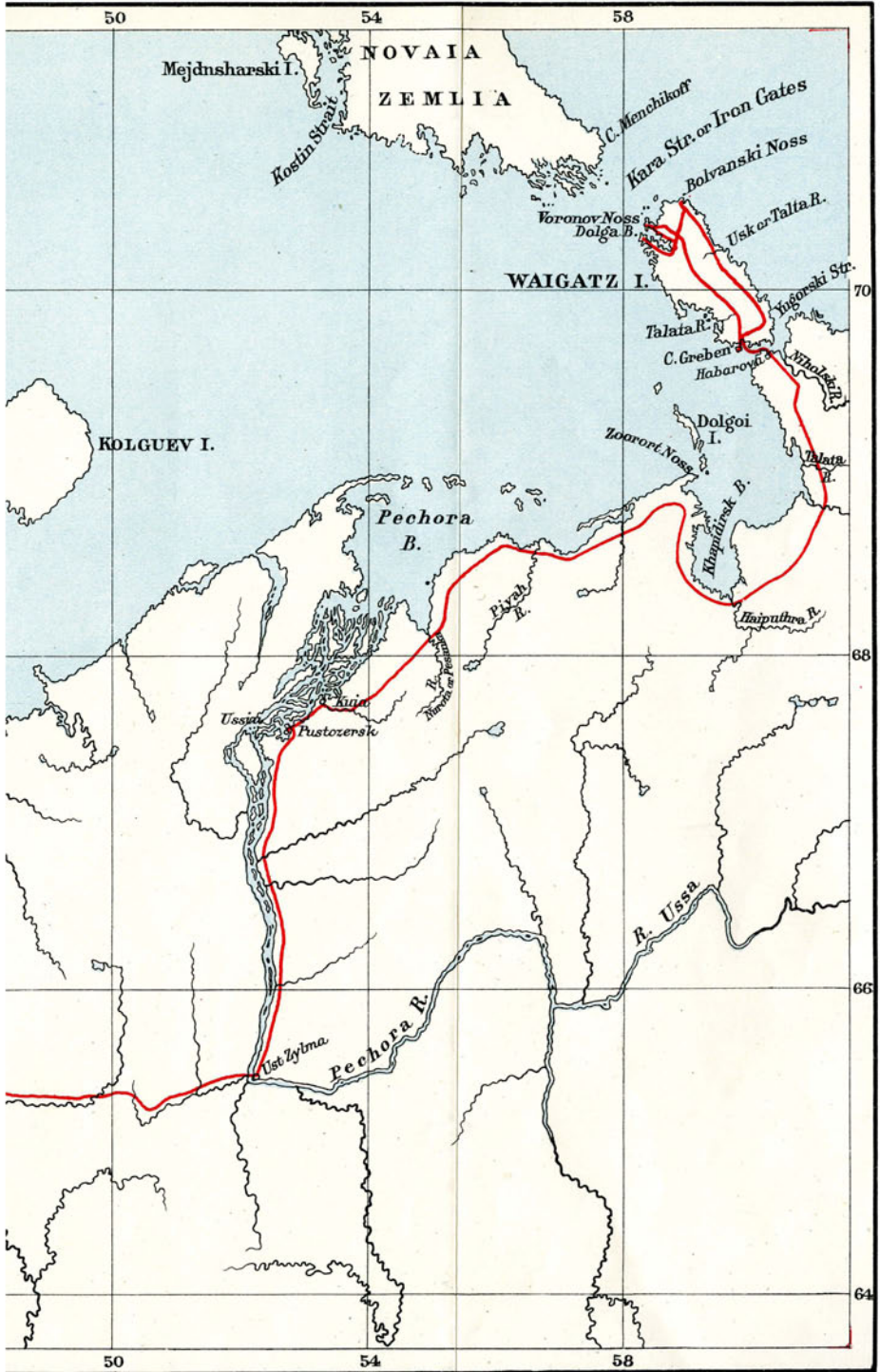
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