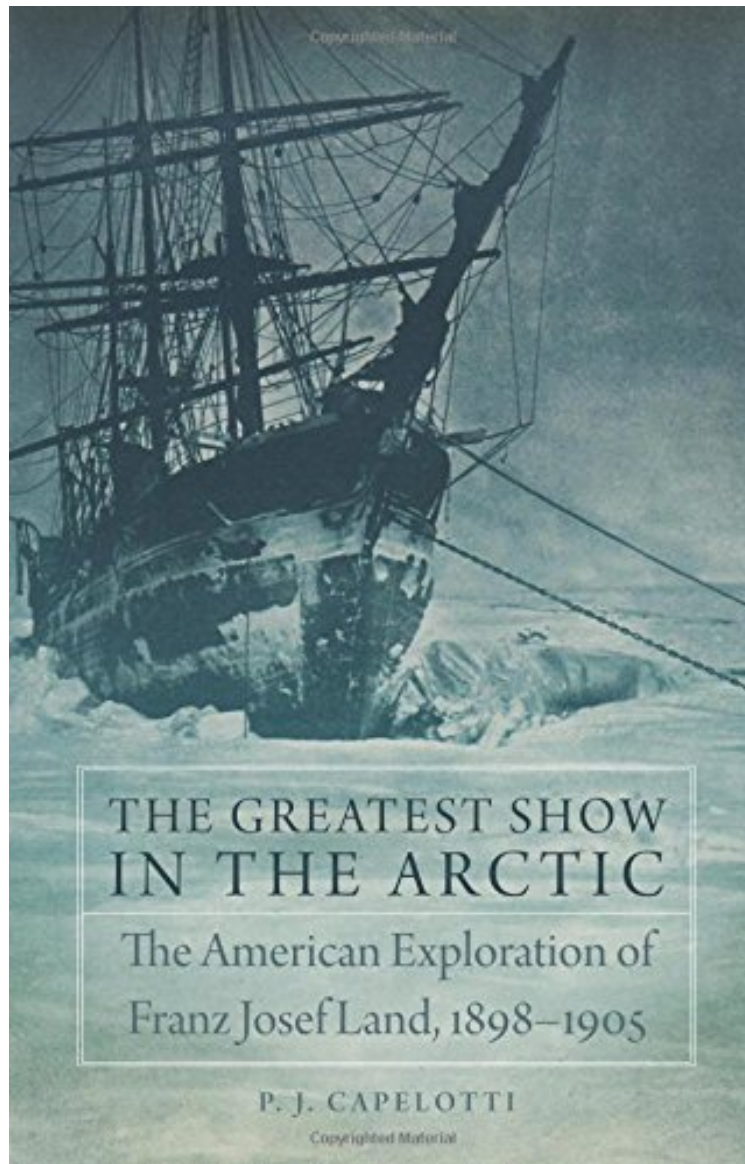


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The Greatest Show in the Arctic: The American Exploration of Franz Josef Land, 1898-1905 (American Exploration and Travel Series)

P. J. Capelotti

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P. J. Capelotti : The Greatest Show in the Arctic: The American Exploration of Franz Josef Land, 1898-1905 (American Exploration and Travel Series) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth

my time, and all praised *The Greatest Show in the Arctic: The American Exploration of Franz Josef Land, 1898-1905* (American Exploration and Travel Series):

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Ah But for A Strong Leader
By Susan Duxbury-Amz
The book *The Greatest Show in the Arctic* by Peter J. Capelotti covers three American expeditions with the stated goal of reaching the North Pole. These expeditions covered the period from 1898 to 1905 and were staged from the Franz Joseph archipelago off the northern coast of Russia. The first of these expeditions was led by Walter Wellman, a Chicago journalist. He was joined on this expedition by Evelyn Briggs Baldwin to whom he gave a great amount of authority for which he was sorely disappointed. The second expedition was led by Evelyn Briggs Baldwin with unlimited financial support from William Ziegler, a New York City millionaire. And the final expedition was led by a profoundly spiritual Anthony Fiala. None of these expeditions reached the stated goal of making it to the North Pole. Walter Wallman's attempt was hampered by his personal foils between him and his wife over the presence of a mistress with an illegitimate daughter. Further he turned over much of the progress of the expedition to Baldwin who had an absolute talent for getting on the bad side of the working party, to the point of hate. Baldwin's expedition, with all that money could purchase, again failed to provide leadership and esprit de corps among the team. Rather than seeking the stated goal he contented himself with exploring the Franz Joseph Islands, naming bays and inlets after industrialists and patrons. While all the while the other members of the expedition made futile trips over the ice to stash away supplies. The final attempt by Anthony Fiala was doomed by poor choices of fellow explorers. Capelotti has researched these expeditions thoroughly and written well of the vastness of the Franz Joseph Lands and its hazards. One is left with knowing that good intentions and lots of money are not what make a success of ventures such as these. Leadership was the missing element in each of these adventures, particularly those in which Baldwin had a major role. He was indeed a madman and I praise Capelotti for spending years with this man through his journals and those of his fellow explorers. I longed for the brilliant leadership of someone like Shackleton who could get this circus on track. I enjoy reading about Arctic exploration and *The Greatest Show* adds to this genre, although I think it could have benefitted by some extra editing.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A great read
By James Cecorn
Each adventure includes the back story leading up to the expedition; the authors in-depth research is thorough and detailed. The personality of each player is covered, the hurdles they faced are described in detail, and finally their ultimate failures unfold as each story is told. The book offers a rich coverage of the politics and technology of the time allowing each story take us back to the turn of century. Even though the book is a detailed step back in time, it emphasizes to us that success or failure ultimately depends on compatible personalities with the leadership skills to bring people together for success. The approach taken by the author is a reminder that all failures have similar roots and these failures are fertile ground for thought. This is a well written book that I thoroughly enjoyed.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A raw and unvarnished look at early Arctic exploration
By Customer
A fascinating read of a little-known corner of Arctic exploration at a time when the lure of being "first to the pole" led to more tragedy than triumph, Capelotti's work puts you on the ice and in the hearts and minds of men who saw the extremely isolated Franz Josef archipelago as a springboard to the North Pole - a vision that mostly led to hardship, greed, mutiny, madness, and utter failure. If it is true that we learn as much from our mistakes as from our successes, especially when it comes to leadership, than this book deserves to be studied as much as any work on Shackleton. The succession of failures of leadership brought to life in "*Greatest Show in the Arctic*" is astonishing. The author's research is impeccable. I often found myself vicariously feeling cold and exhausted. Of the numerous arctic exploration books that I have read, this one feels to me to be probably the most realistic and truthful.

In Gilded Age America, Arctic explorers were fabulous celebrities assured of riches and near-immortality so long as they reached the North Pole first. Of the many attempts to meet that goal, three American expeditions, launched from the Russian archipelago of Franz Josef Land, ended in abject failure, their exploits consigned to near-oblivion. Even so, these ventures—the Wellman expedition (1898-99), the Baldwin-Ziegler (1901-2), and the Fiala-Ziegler (1903-5)—have much to tell us about the personalities, politics, and economics of exploration in their day. In *The Greatest Show in the Arctic*, the first book to chronicle all three expeditions, P. J. Capelotti explores what went right and what, in the end, went tragically wrong. The cast of colorful characters from the Franz Josef Land forays included Walter Wellman, a Chicago journalist and bon vivant running from debts, his mistress, and an illegitimate daughter; Evelyn Briggs Baldwin, a deranged meteorologist with a fetish for balloons and a passion for Swedish preserves; and Anthony Fiala, a pious photographer in search of God in the Arctic. Featuring an international cast of supporting characters worthy of a three-ring circus, *The Greatest Show in the Arctic* follows each of the three expeditions in turn, from spectacular feats of financing to their bitter ends. Along the way, the explorers accumulated considerable geographic knowledge and left a legacy of place-names. Through close study of the expeditions' journals, Capelotti reveals that the Franz Josef Land endeavors foundered chiefly because of poor leadership and internal friction, not for lack of funding, as historians have previously suspected. Presenting tales of noble intentions, novel inventions, and epic miscalculations, *The Greatest Show in the Arctic* brings fresh life to a unique and underappreciated story of American exploration.

"[Capelotti's] book is an excellent read that has the makings of a script for a dramatic film. For the discerning scholar, it is an essential work for further research on an increasingly important region in the High Arctic all too frequently passed over or simplified in mainstream historiography of polar geography and exploration."-Aant Elzinga, Polar Research

Capelotti's purpose is to describe what happened and analyze why the expeditions failed so abysmally. Thanks to access to new source material and close reading of the correspondence, the author acts like a detective on the trail of the various expeditions, from the political background to the treacherous ice to the incompetent leadership. This is no hero story, but more often it has the aspect of a doomed plot. With the key at times the logistical details - the number of polar bears shot, killed and slaughtered sled dogs and ponies all presented with chilling objectivity - Capelotti evokes a picture of both astonishing dedication and icy futility."-Torgny Nordin, Svenska Dagbladet

A succession of engagingly written and sometimes brilliantly researched volumes has produced new and detailed accounts of one expedition after another, enriching the official published and archival resources with newsprint, memorabilia and the letters and diaries of participants preserved by their descendants. Peter Capelotti is one such exploration historian, who in 2013 published *Shipwreck at Cape Flora*, a fine account of the five voyages of the British amateur yachtsman Benjamin Leigh Smith to Svalbard and Franz Josef Land in the 1870s and 80s. Now he has written an even more impressive portrayal of three more expeditions to [Franz Josef Land]... And P. J. Capelotti is surely right in attributing the disabling paralysis of indecision that overcame all three leaders to their growing realization of the appalling gap between the breezy promises they had made in New York and the physical and mental reality of a long-distance dogsled journey over sea ice. It was a gap that none of them ever came close to bridging." -Jonathan Dore, Times Literary Supplement

painstaking research ... that has uncovered the remarkable intricacies of the American exploration of Franz Josef Land"-William Barr, Arctic Book

"P.J. Capelotti's latest book seems a natural outgrowth and culmination of interests that have occupied him for a number of years... Therefore, Capelotti (Professor of Anthropology at Pennsylvania State University, Abington campus) is eminently qualified to write this thorough study of the three American expeditions that attempted to reach the North Pole from the remote islands above Arctic Russia. He does not disappoint."-Robert M. Bryce, Polar Record

About the Author P. J. Capelotti, Professor of Anthropology at Pennsylvania State University, is author or editor of numerous books on history and archaeology, including *Shipwreck at Cape Flora: The Expeditions of Benjamin Leigh Smith*, *England's Forgotten Arctic Explorer* and *Life and Death on the Greenland Patrol, 1942*.