

*Peter*. Behring steered a southeasterly course for many days, and at last reached latitude 46 degrees without having encountered land. This is the latitude of the Columbia River, but how near the coast of America he approached at that point is not recorded. The mysteries of longitude seem to have been beyond the penetration of the explorers of those days. Captain Cook, nearly fifty years later, is the first explorer who seems to have understood the necessity of locating an object by its longitude as well as its distance from the equator. Behring then turned his prow to the northeast and continued his voyage until he had ascended to the sixtieth degree, where he discovered land, the first thing to meet his gaze being a giant snow-crowned peak. This he named "Mount St. Elias," in honor of the saint whose name appeared in the Russian calendar as patron of the 18th of July, the date of the discovery. The *St. Peter* sailed into a passage leading between the mainland and a large island, when Behring observed that the water was discolored, as though it had been discharged from a large river, the volume indicating the stream to be the water drain of a land of continental proportions. That this was America no one on board doubted. The subordinate officers desired to explore the coast southward in the direction of the Spanish colonies, but Behring, who was in ill health, refused to do so, and started upon the return voyage. They made but slow progress among the islands lying to the southwest of the peninsula of Alaska, and finally, being driven by a severe storm far to the southward, the vessel wandered aimlessly about for two months, the sport of the winds and ocean currents. Horrible were the sufferings of the crew. Scurvy in its most ghastly form preyed upon them unchecked. Famine and disease went hand in hand. The surgeon's journal says: "The general distress and mortality increased so fast that not only the sick died, but those who pretended to be healthy when relieved from their posts fainted and fell down dead; of which the scantiness of water, the want of biscuits and brandy, cold, wet, nakedness, vermin and terror were not the least causes." At last these horrors came to an end. On the 5th of November they sighted a small island lying between the Aleutian Archipelago and Kamtchatka, and running the vessel close in they all landed with the purpose of spending the winter. The island was a small, rocky speck on the bosom of the sea, consisting of a few barren granite peaks thrust up from the water, whose sides were continually lashed by a heavy surf, and upon which the waves furiously dashed when storms swept across the surface of the ocean. Here they lived upon the flesh of fur-bearing animals which abounded in the water and upon the fish they were able to catch. Their house was constructed of the timbers of their vessel, which was wrecked upon the rocky coast during a gale immediately after they disembarked, and whose broken pieces were washed up by the surf. Their sufferings did not end with their removal to this new abode. Disease had taken too firm a grasp upon that afflicted crew. Behring died on the 8th of December, and before spring thirty of his followers also

found a grave on those water-bound rocks. The skins of slaughtered animals served them for both clothes and bedding. Had this island been located at the same altitude in the Atlantic Ocean not one of these enfeebled men could have survived the rigors of winter. Here the great ocean river known as the Japan current imparts its general warmth to the islands of the Aleutian Archipelago, and fringes the icy peaks and glaciers of Alaska with a coast line of verdure. Owing to this great modifying element, even floating ice from the frozen Arctic is not seen in Behring's Sea, though on the Atlantic side the ocean is rendered unsafe by floes and icebergs at a much lower latitude. Upon the return of spring the survivors constructed a small vessel from the wreck of the *St. Peter*, and when that long task was finished embarked and sailed directly westward, reaching the Bay of Avatscha in August. That bleak island which had been their winter home, and where were the graves of their commander and many of their comrades, they christened "Behring's Isle," and as such it is known to the present day.

Twenty years elapsed before another official exploration was made, and half a century passed ere the full account of this fatal one was published to the world. Accompanying Behring on the *St. Peter* was a German surgeon and scientist named Steller, and his journal, which was not published until 1795, long after the Alaskan coast had been thoroughly explored by Spanish, Russian, English and American navigators, is the only record preserved of the adventures and terrible sufferings endured by the discoverers of Alaska. The general features of the voyage, however, were well known in Europe soon after its termination. The skins which the survivors wore when they returned to Avatscha were found to be exceedingly valuable (probably seal and sea otter), and several private expeditions were fitted out by Russian traders to visit the islands to the eastward in search of furs. In this way the fur trade of the Pacific began, and before the Government was prepared for another expedition this trade had reached considerable proportions. For years the furs were conveyed to Pekin and St. Petersburg overland on sledges, China being then, as today, the greatest fur market in the world. Not until 1771 was a cargo taken directly by sea to Canton, and not until then was it known that the Bay of Avatscha and the Chinese Sea were connected by water. For the first time was realized the immense magnitude of the Pacific—that the same waters which beat upon Behring's Isle washed the shores of the thousand islands of the South Sea, gazed up at the frowning rocks of Cape Horn, and bore the Spanish galleons on their long voyage from Acapulco to the Indies. This innovation was not by any means the result of Russian enterprise. A few of the patriotic defenders of Poland, who had been exiled to Siberia by the Russian czar, made their escape in a small vessel from a port on the southwest coast of Kamtchatka, under the leadership of a Hungarian exile, Count Maurice de Benyowsky. After much aimless wandering among the Aleutian Islands, where they procured from the