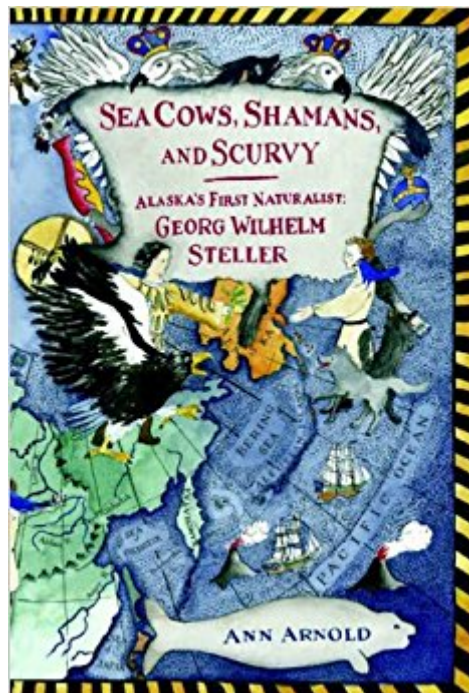




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Sea Cows, Shamans, And Scurvy: Alaska's First Naturalist: Georg Wilhelm Steller



Synopsis

On June 4, 1741, Georg Wilhelm Steller set sail from Avacha Bay in Siberia on the St. Peter, under the command of Vitus Bering. The crew was bound for America on the last leg of an expedition whose mission was to explore, describe, and map Russia's vast lands from the Ural Mountains across Siberia to the Kamchatka Peninsula, and possibly lay claim to the northwest coast of America if they could find it, for no European had ever reached America by this route. Officially, Steller was the ship's mineralogist, but in practice he was its doctor, minister, and naturalist as well. Appointed to the expedition in 1737 by the Academy of Science in St. Petersburg, he was sworn to secrecy concerning any discoveries. Making judicious use of Steller's richly detailed journals and liberal use of illustrations and maps, Ann Arnold allows the reader to join Steller on this fascinating voyage and its final dangerous mission, which left half the crew dead and the rest suffering from scurvy.

Book Information

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Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up • Arnold tells an amazing story of exploration, natural history, and survival.

Steller was a naturalist/doctor who accompanied the explorer Vitus Bering on his voyages from the Kamchatka Peninsula to the Alaska coast at a time when that area was one of the last uncharted spots on the world map. From 1738, when Steller set off overland from Moscow to cross the Ural

Mountains and join Bering's Second Kamchatka Expedition, until he died in 1743, he documented Siberian and Alaska plant and animal life and produced a monumental compendium of natural history and human cultures. A number of species carry his name (Steller's jay, Steller's sea lion, Steller's eider, and others), and his descriptions bear witness to the now-extinct sea cow and spectacled cormorant. The text is profusely illustrated with Arnold's quirky line drawings that recall Steller's era. An unfortunate choice places some of the most interesting narrative and needed background information in 30-odd pages of endnotes. Accomplished readers, who will be the audience for this work, would have followed these in the main text but may miss important details if they skip these substantial notes. For example, Steller's birthplace is given as "the Lutheran city of Windsheim," but the fact that Windsheim is now a German city but at the time was part of the Holy Roman Empire is relegated to notes that only the most intrepid student will find 169 pages later.

—Sue Sherif, Alaska State Library, Anchorage Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Born and educated in Germany, eighteenth-century naturalist Steller traveled to Russia and joined the Second Kamchatka Expedition. Journeying across Siberia, Steller studied wildlife and the ways of native peoples before joining Bering in sailing to North America and landing in Alaska. Through stricken by scurvy and storms, shipwrecked, and nearly starved, Steller and the remaining crew returned to Kamchatka. The lengthy back matter includes an afterword, a concordance of animals and plants, a time line, historical notes, source notes, and an annotated bibliography. The book design is attractive, and small, naive drawings illustrate the text. The chapters concerning the voyage to Alaska are the most exciting and probably the most interesting to a North American audience. Although the book's opening anecdote is odd (Arnold relates without comment that Steller was born "a dead baby" but returned to life after being wrapped in warm blankets), this biography appears to be very extensively researched and overflows with historical details. For larger collections. Grades 7-10. --Carolyn Phelan

Great experience! GREAT BOOK!

This is a very fun and very education book, written for school-aged children, but suitable for all age. Georg Steller was one of the greatest naturalists of all time, and his discoveries were numerous and awe-inspiring. This fascinating tale is one of hardship and adventure also, not just natural science. A easy read and a real page turner. A good way to make learning fun.

send it to my boyfriend , will buy next time . very well. delivery on time receive it next day , For a home product, for the price, this is quite good. I prefer a heavier product altogether, but I was surprised with the quality considering how inexpensive this product is. Coming from a professional background, I'd say this is a great piece to start with.

I found Sea Cows, Shamans, and Scurvy to be an ideal fit for our little homeschool unit study on explorers, navigation and natural history. We needed a change from tales of American and British explorers and hadn't read much about Siberia previously so this fit the bill. I picked this title by chance from our library and was quickly attracted by its highly readable language and quirky pen and ink illustrations. Great as a read aloud too...but if you have highly-sensitive little children, you should be aware that the author mentions disease and death. Readers who enjoyed The Voyage of the Beetle by Anne Weaver may enjoy this book too.

Wonderful concise journey into an amazing man's dedication to his research. He was not just Alaska's first naturalist, but raised the benchmark for all who followed him.

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