



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

*Ann Arnold*

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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.

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