

# AN OXFORD SPITSBERGEN EXPEDITION

FROM THE TIMES DECEMBER 16, 1920

An expedition to Spitsbergen is being arranged by Oxford University men, with the sanction of the University and material assistance from University funds. In these days of grandiose ideas, the scheme has the singular merit of being modest and practical. It is proposed that two parties should go out on sealing-sloops, the first early in June 1921, the second a few weeks later, when there is a better probability of finding the north coast free from ice. Two or three zoologists are to study the abundant bird life of the islands, which will be in the full activity of

the breeding season. They hope, in particular, to make observations on the habits of the phalaropes and the purple sandpiper, wading birds in which the appearance and functions of the sexes are curiously reversed, the males being dull in colour and performing the duties of incubation, the hens gaily plumaged and negligent of domestic cares. The expedition may bring back an admonition to the new girl undergraduates of Oxford; doubtless Cambridge, which has not yet taken the plunge, will eagerly await a warning from the birds. Botanists are to study the plants, few in species but abundant in number, paying special attention to modes of fertilization evoked in adaptation to Arctic conditions. There are known to be fossil-bearing rocks of many geological ages, supplying evidence of repeated changes of climate. Paleontologists intend to make large collections. Four Alpine climbers are

to attempt the difficult traverse of the high peaks and glaciers of New Friesland or West Spitsbergen.

The total cost of the expedition is estimated at £3,000, which it is hoped to raise privately and by donations from scientific societies. Sir Martin Conway, reporting on his 1896 visit to Spitsbergen, suggested that the islands might become a resort of the summer tourist. We think he was sanguine, for rain and mist seem to be the chief features of the Spitsbergen summer. But there is a fortunate absence of microbes, and Sir Martin and his companions found that they could live and sleep in damp clothes with no risk to health and little to comfort. We trust that the Oxford Expedition will quickly find the money it requires, and do not doubt that good scientific results will be obtained.

.....  
[THETIMES.CO.UK/ARCHIVE](http://THETIMES.CO.UK/ARCHIVE)