

sid 20-23 ur:
Duyker, Edward:

Nature's
Argonaut The
Minegunyah
Press 1998

that Herr Linnaeus has counted you as his best swain in the subject'. Löffling had obviously considered Solander a sincere friend from his student days in Uppsala, but the apparent seriousness of his professional botanical endeavours now came as a surprise—almost as if he had considered Solander a mere dilettante in the past. Thus he wrote, 'Concerning information on plants to you, you may be assured that from now on I will never fail to communicate to you everything I may achieve. I had never before known that you were a botanist'. Löffling added,

When I hear that you have become such a devoted Botanicus I give myself [a guilty?] conscience not having sent to you, particularly since my pleasure is to do some good with the collection . . . in times past we have been good comrades although in a different field, you know well in which.²²

Was Löffling alluding to less serious extracurricular activities, such as student carousing?

In 1753, the year Linnaeus published the first volume of his *Species Plantarum*—internationally recognized as the beginning of modern plant taxonomy—Solander took his first steps as a botanical field researcher and explorer. Even in far-off Spain, Löffling had become aware, through Linnaeus, that Solander planned to 'go up to Piteå Lappmark'. Details of Solander's route are very sketchy and further confused by Johann Reinhold Forster's ill-founded assertion that after his studies in Uppsala 'he went to Archangel via Lapland and from there to St Petersburg'.²³ In the introduction to the 10th edition of the *Systema Naturae*, Linnaeus makes mention of him as one of his contributors having travelled 'in Lapponiam, Pitsem, and Tornensen 1753'. In the State Natural History Museum in Stockholm are several other clues to Solander's route. Aside from a specimen of *Juncus trifidus* with the annotation 'alp. Pit.' there is a *Gentiana aurea*, inscribed on the back in Solander's hand 'collected near Rörstad's parsonage in Norway; on a dry pasture' and a specimen of *Phleum alpinum* marked 'Tornoa super'. These three specimens indicate that from Piteå Solander reached Rörstad on the Atlantic, returning or proceeding via Övertorneå on the Finnish border, presumably having followed the Torne valley. The other vital clue to Solander's route comes from

mortality and disease statistics he provided his close friend Peter Jonas Bergius for his work *Försök til de uti Sverige Gångbara Sjukdomars Utrönande, för år 1754* [An Attempt at Ascertaining the diseases current in Sweden in the year 1754]. Bergius' book, published in Stockholm in 1755, contains figures for 1754 from the parishes of Arjeplog and Arvidsjaur located on Lake Hornavan, the deepest lake in Sweden. The reader is told by Bergius: 'This information I have got from Med. Stud. Dan. Solander who has recently with praiseworthy diligence at his own expense journeyed across these and other nomadic Laplander territories'.²⁴ At some stage on this route from, or to, the hamlet of Arjeplog, Solander probably also passed through the Junkerdal—the rugged pass which gives access to the Norwegian coast. There was much to interest him there, for the Junkerdal is a unique preserve of both Arctic and temperate plant genera such as *Mezereon* and even *Cyclamen* found nowhere else at such latitudes and altitudes. In the Saltfjell mountains he would have encountered reindeer, lynx, marten, otter, fox, beaver and majestic birds such as the sea eagle and the golden eagle. Rørstad does not appear to have been a chance destination. Two decades earlier, Linnaeus had also visited Rørstad during his Lapland journey. The pastor then was Johan Rasch, a native of the Danish island of Lolland who had come to Rørstad in 1715, after serving as a missionary in Ghana and the West Indies, and who 'never expected to see an honest Swede'. Linnaeus was very impressed that Rasch had published an account of his travels with interesting descriptions of fishes and plants; he was also very attracted to Rasch's 'uncommonly beautiful' eighteen-year old daughter, Sarah!²⁵ At the time of Solander's visit, the pastor was Rasch's son, Johan Georg Rasch (c. 1715–57)—a stern man known as 'Herr Jan' to his parishioners, who is remembered for the heavy financial demands he made and for his tendency to 'hit and strike when he was in the mood'.²⁶ It seems likely Linnaeus gave Solander either specific instructions to visit Rørstad or, at the very least, a letter of introduction to the Rasch family. Solander must also have visited his own family during the summer of 1753. Piteå was certainly a convenient base for his journey.

He made a number of other visits to his home town during his studies. We know this because he also provided Peter Bergius with statistics for Piteå and because his name appears as a witness to

several baptisms recorded in the local parish register. These were on three occasions between mid-March and early April 1754 and on another occasion in January 1756. Each time he was described in Latin as a student and often more specifically as a student of medicine and botany.

We know Solander undertook another botanical expedition to Lapland in the summer of 1755 because yet another of his specimens, a *Vaccinium*, has been preserved in Stockholm. It bears the inscription '*Abesku litus ad lacus Tornense in Paroecia Juckasjärvi Laponiae Tornensis, D. C. Solander, 1755*', from which we can safely assume he reached Abisko on the shores of Lake Torneträsk and passed through the parish of Jukkasjärvi. The charming wooden church of Jukkasjärvi still contains relics of several earlier expeditions to Lapland. It is hard to imagine that Solander did not read and reflect on the wooden plaque (probably the stern of a Lapp sledge) inscribed in Latin in August 1681 by the French explorer Jean-François Regnard (1655–1709)²⁷ and his two companions. Seventy-five years before Solander, they had reached the eastern tip of Torneträsk and thought it was the Arctic Ocean:

*Raised in Gaul, we have seen Africa,
Tasted of the holy waters of the Ganges
And travelled our own Europe;
So driven by fate and travelling by land and sea
We finally stood here at the pole where the world ends.*

In 1718 another Frenchman, Aubry de la Motraye, brazed a Latin verse into half a barrel lid during his visit:

*The North Pole I have finally observed.
Lapland has shown me the never setting sun.
Food and drink from the meat and milk of reindeer
I have been offered
As in the past the Tartars gave me the milk of mares to drink*

If Solander felt inclined to leave a similar memorial of his visit, it has not been preserved. He published no account of his travels in Lapland other than references to cases of skin disease caused by

parasitical insect infestations in Piteå, Jukkasjärvi and on the Torneå River in his paper '*Furia infernalis*' more than twenty years later. His route was clearly dictated by the physical and cultural dictates of the landscape. Ancient Lapp reindeer herding trails wove their way through the folded sedimentary mountains and skirted rivers which are either dammed by glacial morains to form long finger lakes or flow freely to gouge deep valleys. Solander followed these rivers and, it would seem, sought out isolated vicarages to introduce himself as Piteå's minister's son and trust in the hospitality of his Lutheran brethren. In this he was like any other European seeking out his compatriots in far flung colonial outposts. The Lapps had at times suffered excesses as brutal as those experienced by the Andean Indians at the hands of the Spanish. Forcibly converted to Christianity, their shamans were sometimes burnt at the stake and their labour was ruthlessly exploited to transport iron ore by reindeer to coastal blast furnaces. Solander travelled through their nomadic territory at a time of cultural dislocation and the breakdown of their traditional barter economy. Yet like Aubry de la Motraye, he must have lived off 'the meat and milk of reindeer' and adopted other traditional Lapp ways simply to survive. Although he probably travelled in summer, he nevertheless had to brave the seasonal swarms of mosquitoes, gnats and gadflies (which have to be seen to be believed!); the wild cataracts and tortuous knee-deep quagmires fed by vast snow-melts; and the upland storms which, even in the warmest months in Lapland, can leave a traveller battered and bewildered in search of the few existing pathways. Did he fill his boots with fine sedge picked as some Lapps still do to keep their feet warm and dry in the wettest conditions? Such journeys in the deep silence of the north, broken only by the sound of the wind and Lapp encampments, were not for the faint-hearted, but they ushered Solander into a romantic tradition of Lapland travel and scholarship which had begun in the sixteenth century with Olaus Magnus, and had been taken up again in the seventeenth century by the Alsatian Johannes Scheffer and in the eighteenth century by his own teacher.

Unlike Linnaeus, who left a rich journal of his Lapland wanderings—including many drawings of plants, animals and people—Solander's silence is as deep as the silence of Lapland. Ironically, instead of sharing the experience of his northern wanderings through