

The Iceberg — Resurfaced?

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Icebergs photographed after the sinking bear the hallmarks of a collision.

Nearly nine decades after the Titanic went down in the Atlantic, probably the first authentic photograph of the iceberg has come to light. It lay unpublished in private ownership until it was rediscovered in April 2000. The photograph shows scars of damage to the iceberg. Combining all indications as described in this report it can be claimed that this new iceberg photograph indeed shows the "real" iceberg. The original print now is kept in a bank safe in Munich.



1. The Rehorek Iceberg

A Bohemian named Stephan Rehorek was on board the German steamer *Bremen* [1](#). This ship sailed past the scene of the accident on its way from Bremerhaven to New York. This event is described in detail in Logan Marshall's book: [2](#) on 20th April the *Bremen* sailed into the area of the disaster, the people on board could see wreckage and the bodies of more than a hundred victims floating on the water. What is more, according to Marshall, an iceberg was sighted "in the vicinity" which fitted precisely the description of the *Titanic* iceberg [3](#). A plan by the *Bremen* to pick up the dead bodies was finally not implemented when it was heard that the *Mackay-Bennett*, chartered for that purpose, was only two hours away.



Stephan Rehorek, too, was witness to the horrifying consequences of the tragedy and he took a photograph of the iceberg. After his arrival in New York he sent a first postcard home, postmarked 25th April. On the front of this card was a picture of the *Titanic*:

"Dear Mother and Father, Best wishes from New York. I am sending you a picture of a dutch [4](#) fast ocean liner which sank on its maiden voyage. It was the biggest in the world. Two days away from New York it collided with an iceberg and the ship was severely damaged on one side. Almost 1,600 people drowned and about 670 were rescued. I have a photograph of the iceberg and will send it to you (...) I also saw the bodies of the drowned and the wreckage from the ship. It was a dreadful sight."



Some weeks later [5](#) he had the photographs of the icebergs printed onto postcards and from Cherbourg sent one of it to his parents, and wrote:

"Dear Mother and Father, (...) This card is a view of the iceberg that collided with and sank the Titanic liner. I will send a card to Josef, too."



The postcard sent to his brother Josef has also survived, but it shows a souvenir picture of the "Titanic". From the message on the card it seems that Stephan Rehorek only had one single print made of the iceberg photograph, because he tells his brother:

"Dear Josef, I am sending you, too, a postcard of the ship that sank (...) We were following about a thousand miles behind it.(...) Next time you come home our brother will show you pictures of the icebergs which were photographed from our ship."

Stephan Rehorek kept two other existing photographs, which show another iceberg. One of the pictures shows part of the steamer from which Rehorek took the photographs. Obviously Rehorek did not sent the pictures with that iceberg floating in the background, nor the photograph showing the iceberg at closer quarters, as postcards because he did not think the iceberg depicted was the famous one that sank the *Titanic*.



These postcards have until now been in private ownership, the photographs have never been published [6](#). The iceberg card shows the place where the ice was chipped away: on the photograph a severed edge is discernible exactly on the side scraped along by the *Titanic*. It is clear that the damage to the iceberg was greatest below the water line but this is not visible on Rehorek's photograph. Although we now have the shape of the fateful iceberg depicted in a photograph, we still cannot deduce with any certainty how large it was. We do not have any recognizable reference objects.

2. Eye-witness reports

A few days after the tragedy the Senate Investigation Committee convened in New York to discover the details of exactly what happened. One after another, witnesses were asked to describe what happened during the collision. Most of them had been asleep at the time and only very few had actually seen the iceberg. The fateful collision itself lasted only a few seconds and, what is more, it was a black, moonless night. So the descriptions of the iceberg were all very different from each other. It was Frederick Fleet, the lookout positioned in the crow's nest at the foremast who caught sight of the iceberg first and, therefore, had the best view of it, but he failed miserably when he was asked to describe it to the investigation committee. He was unable to provide satisfactory answers to the majority of Senator Smith's questions: [7](#)

Smith: "How long before the collision or accident did you report 'Ice ahead'?"

Fleet: "I have no idea."

Smith: "About how long?"

Fleet: "I could not say at the rate she was going."

Smith: "How fast was she going?"

Fleet: "I have no idea."

(...)

Smith: "How large an object was this when you first saw it?"

Fleet: "It was not very large when I first saw it."

Smith: "How large was it?"

Fleet: "I have no idea of distances or spaces."

Smith: "Was it the size of an ordinary house? Was it as large as this room appears to be?"

Fleet: "No, no. It did not appear very large at all."

Smith: "Was it as large as the table at which I am sitting?"

Fleet: "It would be as large as those two tables put together when I saw it at first." [8](#)

This last answer partly is still being misinterpreted today. First of all, what Fleet says is usually held to be his own description but, in fact, the idea of comparing it with the size of a table was suggested to him by Senator Smith; the words were more or less put into his mouth. And the second misinterpretation which persists is that the quotation has always been understood as if Fleet, when he spoke of "two tables put together", was describing the shape of the iceberg. In fact, the sailor was referring to the apparent size of the iceberg. Fleet said absolutely nothing about its shape.

Senator Smith wanted to know the exact size of the iceberg and persevered:

Smith: "How large did it get to be, finally when it struck the ship?"

Fleet: "When we were alongside, it was a little bit higher than the forecastle head."

Smith: "The forecastle head is how high above the water line?"

Fleet: "50 feet I should say."

Smith: "So that black mass, when it finally struck the ship, turned out to be about 50 feet above the water?"

Fleet: "About 50 or 60."

Some others also saw the iceberg go by and described their impressions to the investigation committee. Joseph G. Boxhall, the Fourth Officer on the *Titanic* was questioned by Senator Smith:

Smith: "Did you see it? (i.e.: the iceberg)"

Boxhall: "I was not very sure of seeing it. It seemed to me to be just a small black mass rising not very high out of the water, just a little at the starboard quarter."

Smith: "How far do you think, should you judge? (...) Did it extend up to B deck?"

Boxhall: "Oh no; the ship was past it then. It looked to me to be very, very low in the water."

Smith: "How far do you think it was above the water?(...) Above the ship's rail?"

Boxhall: "No."

Smith: "And how far was this rail above the water's edge?"

Boxhall: "Probably about 30 feet."

One remarkable account was given to the British Commission. *Titanic* seaman Joseph Scarrott had seen the iceberg in that fateful night:

Mr. Butler Aspinall: "What was the shape of this iceberg?"

Scarrott: "Well, it struck me at the time that it resembled the Rock of Gibraltar looking at it from Europa Point. It looked very much the same shape as that, only much smaller."

The Commissioner: "Like a lion couchant?"

Scarrott: "As you approach Gibraltar - it seemed that shape. The highest point would be on my right, as it appeared to me."

Scarrott first described the view as from the "Europa Point". But the commissioner asked for another point of view - the "lion couchant". The widely known shape of the Rock of Gibraltar (with the highest point on the left side) usually was compared with a "lion couchant". It is the view that ships get right after they have entered the Bay of Gibraltar heading for the harbour. It is remarkable that Scarrott resembled the Rock with the highest point on the right side. That means: Scarrott saw an iceberg that looked like the Rock but inverted. Fortunately the steamer *Bremen* had the same position to the iceberg as the *Titanic* has had some days before: so Rehorek took his iceberg picture from the same point of view as the eye-witness Scarrott has had on board the *Titanic* a few seconds after the collision. For this reason we can create a direct comparison between both views: the shape of the Rock (as to be seen as a "lion couchant" from the Bay) and the shape of the iceberg. Indeed the Rehorek iceberg matches the Rock - with the highest point on the right side, as Scarrott has said.



3. Icebergs in the area

Not far from the scene of the tragedy, on April 15th the German steamship *Prinz Adalbert* passed by an iceberg with signs of red paint on it. A photograph was taken of it merely out of curiosity at the unusual red paint marks. As it is told, it was only later that the crew learned that the *Titanic*, whose keel had been painted red, had collided with an iceberg. This meant that this iceberg must have been one of the "chief suspects". Even though the puzzle of the red paint cannot be solved, this can hardly have been the iceberg which the *Titanic* collided with: it is known that the *Titanic* ripped great chunks out of the iceberg and did not simply leave a few scars of red paint. We cannot say anything of the real origin of the red color. Maybe it was from a ship, maybe it was a colored layer. Icebergs with layers in different colors (mostly brownish) are not scarce. But there is nothing in the *Prinz Adalbert* iceberg photograph which suggests the impact of violent forces. Another question is not answered yet: How is it possible, that from this wireless equipped steamer (with a range of 250 nautical miles) a daylight picture of the "suspicious" iceberg has been taken the day after the disaster without any knowledge of the catastrophe? Unfortunately the picture is black and white and further studies about this color are not possible. Of course a dark layer crossing the berg is clearly to be seen.

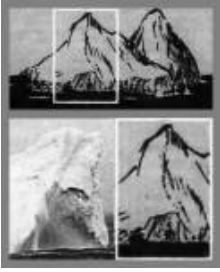
The cable ship *Mackay-Bennett* was chartered to pick up the bodies of the dead. Another iceberg was photographed from this ship but here again there is no recognisable scraping damage nor is there any resemblance with the witness' drawings or Scarrotts account. The same is true of all the previously known photographs of icebergs taken in the vicinity of the scene of the tragedy.

How many icebergs were there in the area? It is well known that the *Titanic* sank near a large field of icebergs. Arthur Rostron, Captain of the rescue ship *Carpathia*, reported to the US investigation committee:

"By the time we had the first boat's people it was breaking day, and then I could see the remaining boats all around within an area of about 4 miles. I also saw icebergs all around me. There were about 20 icebergs that would be anywhere from about 150 to 200 feet high and numerous smaller bergs."

This statement only appears to be in contradiction to the pictures we have of the rescue operation: on some pictures showing life-boats and survivors shortly before their rescue by the *Carpathia* there are no signs of any icebergs or even crawlers at all. It must simply have been that the photographer had his back to the field of icebergs which means they must have been on the other side of the *Carpathia*. In this context it is worth mentioning an observation made by the German steamship *Rhein*: the ship crossed the area a few days after the catastrophe and reported not only of bodies and wreckage drifting in the water but also of only three larger icebergs in the immediate vicinity of the disaster [9](#)

4. Drawings



Two drawings show the basic shape of the iceberg that was rammed as it was seen by eye-witnesses. One of them is a quick sketch from memory by Joseph Scarrott. What is characteristic of the iceberg are the two clear peaks as well as a slight rise in the middle. At either end the iceberg falls steeply into the water. It is not really possible to identify any further details from the drawing but the basic shape depicted in this drawing closely matches that in one of the others: [10](#) on the morning after the tragedy Colin Campbell Cooper, a passenger on the rescue ship *Carpathia*, made a drawing of the iceberg with its two peaks (see inset picture). The rise in the middle, recorded by Scarrott, can be identified in Cooper's drawing to the right of the foremost peak. As Cooper was one of America's most well known painters and, apart from having a well-trained eye, he also had a talent for form and structure, his picture can be taken to be an accurate depiction of the shape of the iceberg. Not only are the two peaks clearly recognisable in his drawing – as in Scarrott's drawing, too – but also a further, as yet, little noticed detail: at the lower edge Cooper sketches an area where part of the iceberg has been chipped away. One can imagine, once the surviving eye-witnesses of the *Titanic* disaster were safely on board the *Carpathia*, that news of a close-hand re-encounter with the fatal iceberg, identified by some of the surviving eye-witnesses, would have spread around the ship like wildfire. Cooper would have grabbed his drawing materials and captured this moment in his drawing. Consequently, a photograph resembling Cooper's drawing of the iceberg must be a picture of the iceberg that rammed the *Titanic*. And this is precisely the case with the photograph taken by Stephan Rehorek.

5. Summary

So, does this mean with absolute certainty that we are looking at the most famous iceberg in the history of Christian seafaring, or is there still cause for doubt? Each clue taken on its own would not be sufficient evidence, but the sum of all the clues does point very strongly to the conclusion that the Rehorek photograph really shows the fateful iceberg:

1. The photograph was taken shortly after the tragedy in a certain vicinity to the place where the dead bodies and the wreckage of the ship were drifting in the water. This is also true for the other, well known, photographs claiming to show the fateful iceberg, but this is the only link they can claim except the red color of the *Prinz-Adalbert* iceberg .
2. The shape and details of the Rehorek iceberg match the drawings made by eye-witnesses. And the shape perfectly match the Rock of Gibraltar that had been compared with the iceberg by the eye-witness Joseph Scarrott.
3. The otherwise undamaged iceberg displays only one place where ice has been chipped off.
4. The damage to the Rehorek iceberg is at exactly the spot at which the *Titanic* would have hit it [11](#).

It can therefore be claimed that this recently recovered photograph which has been taken in April 1912 from the Bohemian Stephan Rehorek probably shows the iceberg that was rammed by the *Titanic*.

Notes

1. Rehorek does not, in fact, say that he was on board the steamer "*Bremen*" owned by the "Norddeutscher Lloyd" shipping company. There are, however, a lot of indications that this was so: 1. What he writes about the situation in the text on the postcard corresponds exactly to Logan Marshall's description of the trip made by the *Bremen*. 2. One of Rehorek's postcards carries a "Bremerhaven" postmark, which is where the "Norddeutscher Lloyd" company was based, 3. An earlier card sent by Rehorek shows a picture of the *Bremen*. 4. Rehorek says himself that he was travelling "1000 miles" behind the *Titanic*, and so he must have passed by the scene of the tragedy around 20th April. According to Logan Marshall this is the date on which the *Bremen* reached the area.

2. Logan Marshall: *The Sinking of the Titanic and Great Sea Disasters* (1912), Chap. XXI

3. Marshall quotes a *Bremen* passenger: "The officers told us that was probably the berg hit by the *Titanic*..."

4. We will never know why Rehorek wrote of a "dutch" liner. According to all informations about Rehorek that are available yet he could have been a seaman. But if he was, he probably should know that the *Titanic*

was not dutch. Reading several other postcards he sent home he seems to have travelled many times over the Atlantic. In another card he wrote that he is "looking forward to join a royal maneuver" of the german fleet. Was he a seaman or not? We cannot say yet for sure.

5. Postmark from 10.6.1912

6. As a collector of *Titanic* documents, I use the Internet a great deal. This is how a Czech collector of postcards obtained my e-mail address and offered me a total of seven of Stephan Rehorek's postcards, among them the pictures of the icebergs. It transpired only later that one of them probably was the very first photograph of the iceberg showing the place where it had been rammed by the *Titanic*.

7. All accounts are taken from "The inquiry Project".

8. Fleet obviously meant the Senator's table and another one next to it.

9. Logan Marshall: *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1912), Chap. XXI.

10. Both drawings printed in: Eaton/Haas: *Titanic, Triumph und Tragödie*, Munich 1997, Pg. 141.

11. I asked a glaciologist from a renowned research institute to provide an expert report on the point of impact on the ice. However, quite understandably, on the basis of only one photograph he was not able to draw any definitive conclusions. The damage to the iceberg could be an indication of natural decomposition – but it could equally be the result of external impact. Consequently the damage to the iceberg should not be seen as evidence, but rather as a clue.

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