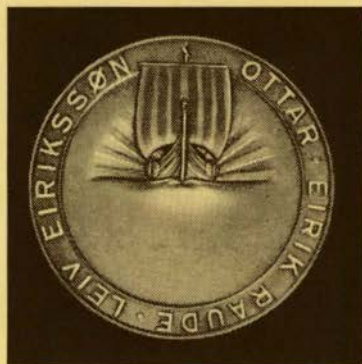
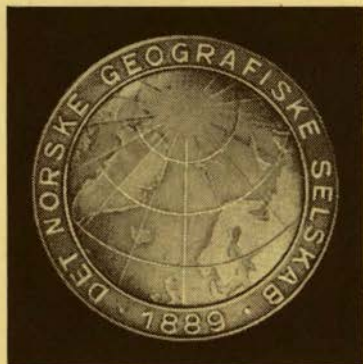


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**ANDERS K. ORVIN**  
**THE SETTLEMENTS AND HUTS**  
**OF SVALBARD**

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## THE SETTLEMENTS AND HUTS OF SVALBARD

BY

ANDERS K. ORVIN

Among the high Arctic countries Svalbard (Spitsbergen and adjacent islands and Bear Island) occupies a singularly favourable position as regards both accessibility and exploitation. The islands have therefore been settled to an extent quite unknown in other countries situated in the same latitude. Settlements are always changing, hence it is difficult to show them correctly on a map. Almost every year new huts are being built, or old ones are removed or being ruined by the action of the weather or by polar-bears. Many of the more isolated huts are visited only at intervals of several years, so that their present state is not always known. The localities of a few huts are not exactly known and they have therefore been omitted from the map. The hut map does not claim to be accurate in every detail, but it is approximately correct. Through a number of years the *Norges Svalbard- og Ishavs-undersøkelser* in Oslo have collected information about the huts through personal visits to the spot, talks with hunters, by consulting books, articles, and hunters' diaries.

Information on the subject of this article is to be found scattered through the literature on Svalbard. Much useful information is to be found in the works of Gunnar Isachsen, Gunnar Holmsen, Hans Reusch, and Adolf Hoel.

For the purpose of the map a hut has been considered fit for use, even if, as is frequently the case, it lacks glass in the windows, usable stoves etc. Only when the huts are in so poor a state that repair seems useless, have they been classed as "badly damaged". In addition to the localities given in the map, there are a number of points which quite recently have had huts, which however have been totally disturbed or removed.

When the accompanying map had been prepared there appeared a settlement map of Svalbard by H. Dege, published in Petermanns *Mitteilungen* 1939, No. 5. This map is, however, incomplete and inaccurate. Dege's map shows only 130 points with huts etc., whereas the actual number is about 210. The situation and character of many of his settlement localities are also misleading. I have for this reason no hesitation in publishing the accompanying map.

In this paper I intend to deal quite briefly with the settlements and huts, in particular with the more important centres. Bear Island has not been included here, as the houses and huts there have been dealt with in detail in *Skrifter om Svalbard og Ishavet*, No. 15.

The old accounts tell us that shortly after the discovery of Spitsbergen in 1596, when whaling began, cookeries and other buildings were established on shore. Occasionally people wintered, but as whaling declined these shore establishments fell into disuse, and not much can have been left of them when Russian hunters commenced to winter about 1715. In the following 100 years the Russians were practically alone on the islands. They carried out hunting in much the same way as the Norwegians do to-day. They lived in head quarters consisting of a couple of huts including a steam bath-room, and during their hunting trips they spent the nights in small secondary stations.

The last of the Russian hunters wintered on the north coast about the year 1850, and even as late as towards the end of the century Russian huts, built of drift-wood, could be found. It is said that one or two drift-wood huts still standing in Wijdefjorden are from the Russian period. Russian house sites are to be found at many points, but usually all that remains are pieces of timber, bricks, birch-bark, various domestic utensils, and occasionally some white bones or skulls can be seen, brought from the old graves by a fox or a polar-bear. The Russian settlement is therefore now past history.

Norwegian hunters did not begin to put up huts until the year 1822, when a hut was built on the north side of Bear Island, and two log cabins in Krossfjorden. In 1825 a small house was erected in Grøn fjorden (Green Harbour). All these buildings have disappeared long ago, and no building activity is reported during the following years.



Fig. 1

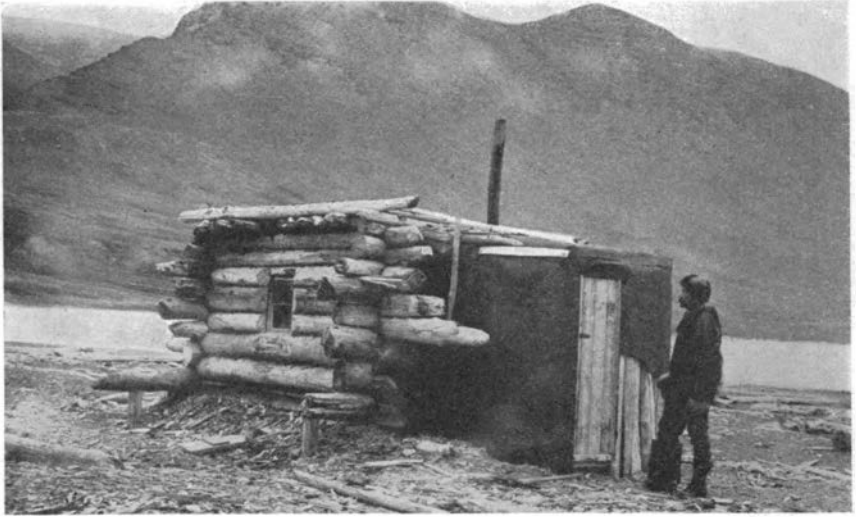


Fig. 2. Hunter's hut built of drift-wood, Kapp Petermann, Wijdefjorden.  
Adolf Hoel phot. 1912.

The oldest Norwegian house in Svalbard now standing is probably the house built on Bear Island by Sivert Tobiesen in 1865. A little later the Hjemgaard hut in Calypsobyen is believed to have been erected by the merchant Hjemgaard of Vardø; and in 1873 the expedition of Ole Barth Tollefsen put up a "gamme" (Lapp hut) in Colesbukta, and used it for smoking meat.

In 1872 two spacious and fine houses were built by Swedish expeditions, viz. *Polhem* at Mosselbukta, built by A. E. Nordenskiöld, and *Svenskehuset* (The Swedish House) on Kapp Thordsen erected by the expedition of P. Öberg on behalf of a Swedish company for the exploitation of the phosphorite deposits here. The following winter the latter house was the scene of a terrible event, for 17 Norwegian hunters whose ships had become beset arrived at the house, but died in the course of the winter from scurvy.

An Englishman, Arnold Pike, had in the year 1888 a substantial house built on the north side of Danskøya where he spent the winter. His house was also used by Andrée, Wellman and others, but was pulled down and sold to the then Dutch mining settlement Barentsburg in 1925; on whose authority it is not known.



Fig. 3. Hunter's headquarter, Kapp Wijk, Nordfjorden.  
Adolf Hoel phot. 1936.

Until the end of the nineties, when the Norwegians started their winterings for the purpose of hunting fur animals, only very few new huts were built. But in 1896 there was brisk activity in Spitsbergen: Andréé was putting up his balloon shed on Danskøya, and M. Thams & Co, Trondheim built an hotel on the point at the entrance to Adventfjorden on behalf of Vesterålske dampskibsselskap which had established a tourist route to Spitsbergen. The point has from that time borne the name "Hotellneset". As late as 1862 a Russian hut could be seen here, and in 1895 Klaus Thue of Tromsø had his hut on the point. Thue has been one of the most constant visitors to Spitsbergen, having spent no less than 45 summers there. After having changed hands once, the hotel was purchased in 1905 by the firm of Ayer and Longyear of Boston, U. S. A., and in 1907 the building was taken to Longyear City (now Longyearbyen) to be used as a store (shop).

The hunting huts built about the turn of the century were usually put up by expeditions sent out by fur firms — many of Tromsø — but later it became the practice for the hunters themselves to fit out the expeditions, build the huts or hire a hut and trap on their



Fig. 4. House built in connection with the capturing of white-fish, Van Keulenfjorden. A. K. Orvin phot. 1936.

own account. It is often difficult to find out *who* has built the oldest huts, because these have been moved, rebuilt or repaired to such a degree that not much may be left of the original house.

Two huts built by Martin Ekroll on Andersonøyane and on Kong Ludvigøyane in 1894 are now totally disturbed. L. Hagerup put up four huts in Bellsund in 1898, but only the hut at Midterhuken is still fit for use. The hut at Kapp Laila in Colesbukta and the one at Alkhornet were both erected by Hans Tuffjord in 1905. Møller's expedition from Hammerfest had a hut on Halvmåneøya in 1897, and in 1901 Hjalmar Jensen's expedition built some huts on Edgeøya and Zieglerøya. Different expeditions continued the hut building in this district in 1904—06. Those now in use, however, are more recent.

The expeditions of Claus Andersen put up huts at Hornsund in 1907, at Kvalvågen in 1909, at Krossfjorden in 1910 and on the west side of Wijdefjorden in 1910 and 1912. The oldest hut in Sassendalen is probably used by L. J. Nisja 1900—01. Daniel Nøis had huts in Tempelfjorden and east of Grønfjorden from 1907, Ole Hokstad erected huts on Flathuken, Biskayerhuken and in Raudfjorden 1907, and at St. Jonsfjorden an expedition from Tromsø put up a hut in the same year.





Fig. 5. The Norwegian mining settlement Hiorthhamn, Adventfjorden.  
A. K. Orvin phot. 1925.

In 1908 huts were built in Nordaustlandet by Grødahl's expedition, Sverdrup Zachariassen and Johan Sivertsen, whose party died of scurvy in Beverleysundet. On the east side of Wijdefjorden Norwegian huts were at first erected by Hans Jensen's expedition in 1921, and in Lomfjorden huts were built in 1923 and 1924.

I. A. Killengreen's expedition erected the oldest huts in Hopen in 1908, but the present huts are of a more recent date. The oldest huts at Sørkapp and Kistefjellet are from about the same year.

The greater part of the hunting huts were built later than 1910, but space does not permit an enumeration of the builders and year of erection. Most of the huts shown as "hunter's station" on the map were built by Norwegians for hunting purposes. Some of them, however, were constructed by others, e. g. Northern Exploration Co., Ltd., but used for hunting purposes; they are therefore classed as such.

As it will appear from the map a number of houses have been built to serve other purposes. The majority of them were built by companies or persons who had claimed land to prospect for coal and minerals, etc., but some were erected for scientific use, or as quarters for persons taking trips overland. Many of these huts are now only in use for hunting, or are vacant and are falling into disrepair.



Fig. 6. Longyearbyen, Adventfjorden. W. Solheim phot. 1936.

With the advent of mining in Svalbard the standard of housing changed completely. Previously the habitations had consisted of very rude hunting huts and a better class of house used by scientific expeditions. There now sprang up mining camps with workmen's barracks, messes, shops, stores, cinema-buildings, schools, and also a church as in Longyearbyen. We shall here deal quite briefly with the establishment and growth of the mining settlements.

In Adventfjorden two companies started work at about the same time. The English company, The Spitsbergen Coal and Trading Co. Ltd., did preliminary work and established their mining camp Advent City from 1902. Mining operations lasted from 1905 to 1908 when the "City" consisted of 13 houses. The property of the company was sold to the Norwegian company A/S De Norske Kulfelter Spitsbergen, and in 1916 all the houses were moved to Hiorthhamn. Mining here lasted until the year 1921. Since then work has been carried out only intermittently. The property is now owned by the Bergen shipowner Jakob Kjøde, and work will possibly be started at an early date.

Longyearbyen (L. City) was founded in 1904 by the American company Arctic Coal Co. which erected the camp and the old quay, and opened Mine No. 1. In 1916 the properties of the Americans were



Fig. 7. The Russian coal mine Barentsburg, Grønfjorden.  
Air-photo by B. Luncke 1938.

purchased by Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani A/S of Oslo. Mining operations were started in Mine No. 2 on the other side of Longyeardalen, and a new modern loading plant was erected on Hotellneset. Longyearbyen has also been enlarged, and a church was built in 1921. The Governor of Svalbard (*Sysselmann*) and the Mining Inspector have their residences here. In 1929 the wireless station of the Norwegian State was transferred to Longyearbyen. In the last few years a new entrance to Mine No. 2 with coal bin and aerial ropeway station has been built some distance farther up the valley, and a new mine has also been opened on the west side of the valley where the new mining community, Sverdrupbyen, is being built.

The Swedish company, Bellsund-Isfjorden, had in 1910 houses put up at Pyramiden and in Ebbadalen in Billefjorden where the coal occurrences were examined. Both houses are still standing, but the Pyramid area has been owned by the Russian State company Arctic Ougol since 1934, and the Ebba Valley area has been acquired by the Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani A/S.

At Sveagruva the first claim hut had been put up in 1911 by the Northern Exploration Co. The mining settlement was built in 1917



Fig. 8. The coal-mining camp Calypsobyen on the southern shore of Bellsund.  
A. K. Orvin phot. 1936.

by the Svenska Stenkolsaktiebolaget Spetsbergen and this company operated the mines until the year 1925. The settlement had its own wireless station. In 1934 the properties of the Swedes were purchased by Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani A/S, who has carried out certain preliminary work, but regular mining operations have not yet started.

In Ny-Alesund only claim huts existed when the Kings Bay Kul Comp. A/S in 1917 commenced mining operations and built the necessary houses. Mining was suspended in 1929. A fishery station was established in 1935 and some of the buildings are now also used as an hotel. A wireless station is in use during the summer season.

At the present Barentsburg a little work was carried out by A/S Kulspids from 1909, and in 1912 the work was continued by a Stavanger syndicate. The building of the mining "town" started in 1919 by the company De Russiske Kulfelter, and the N. V. Nederlandsche Spitsbergen Compagnie carried out an extensive building programme in the years from 1921 to 1926. In the year 1932 the Dutch company sold its property to the Russian State trust Arctic Ougol. The Russians have erected several big buildings, a wireless



Fig. 9. Iron Mountain Camp on the east side of Recherchefjorden.  
A. K. Orvin phot. 1936.

station and increased the coal production considerably. The settlement in Barentsburg is now the largest in Spitsbergen.

We have then the mine at Grumantbyen started in 1919 by Anglo Russian Grumant Co. and operated by this company until 1931 when the property was transferred to the Arctic Ougol. The mine has since been in operation. There is a wireless station.

In Spitsbergen there are, in addition, a number of smaller mining camps with a small number of houses, now either in disuse or partly occupied by trappers. The company who has most largely contributed to this kind of habitation is the Northern Exploration Co. Ltd., London, which commenced activity in 1905. In 1932 all their properties and houses were purchased by the Norwegian State.

London on the Blomstrand peninsula in Kongsfjorden was built in 1912—13. The intention was to exploit the marble deposits here. The houses are still standing. Camp Morton on the north side of Bellsund at Kolfjellet was the base for coal-prospecting work in this region before the War. The first house was put up on behalf of Christian Michelsen, Prime Minister. The houses are now much damaged and some are entirely destroyed. Only a small hut is being kept up as a hunting station.

West of Ingeborgfjellet, on the north side of Bellsund, the N. E. C. put up a house in 1908 called Camp Bell, still in a good condition, and two houses called Camp Millar. The latter are now badly damaged.

On a coal tract on the south side of the mouth of the Bellsund the company had its establishment, Calypso City, with its own wireless station. The houses were built in the years 1918—21 and are still in a fairly good state. A couple are used by hunters.

At Hedgehogfjellet on the west side of Storfjorden the same company had three houses built in 1920. One has disappeared, and the other two, built together, are in a bad state.

About the same time four houses were put up at Iron Mountain Camp on the east side of Recherchefjorden in connection with the iron ore deposits. Three of the houses are still standing and in fairly good shape. Another mining camp somewhat farther to the north has since been completely removed. The company had also a number of huts along the coast from Storfjorden to the north-west corner of Spitsbergen, and most of them are still standing.

Another British company, The Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate, erected Bruce City on the east side of Billefjorden, and also houses in Gipsbukta, Gipsdalen, and on Prins Karls Forland. The company is still in possession of these houses, some of which are, however, in a very bad state.

On Bohemanneset a hut was built by Isefjord Kulkompani in 1900, and later a few houses have been placed here by the Nederlandsche Spitsbergen Compagnie for the purpose of examining the coal occurrence, which now belong to the Arctic Ougol.

Other quite important houses should also be mentioned in an article dealing with settlements in Svalbard.

In 1904 Johannes Giæver of Tromsø had a private "summer house" built on the west side of Recherchefjorden. The house itself is still standing, but the stove etc. has been taken away.

At Ankerhamna in Grønfjorden the whaling company *Spitsbergen* of Tønsberg built their land station in the year 1905. In 1908 the establishment was sold to the whaling company *Nimrod* of Sandefjord, who used it until 1912. The year before, the Norwegian State had erected a big wireless station at the same point. The station was in operation until 1929, when the service was transferred to Longyear-

byen. In 1933 the furniture, etc. was taken away, but the house is well built and the radio masts are standing.

The meteorological service is now carried out by Isfjord Radio at Kapp Linné, this station having been erected in 1933. In the same year a beacon light was erected here as well as at the entrances of Grønfjorden and Adventfjorden.

In 1920 a geophysic station was erected at Kvadehuken on the south side of the mouth of Kongsfjorden. The station was in operation until 1924, and has since been sold and moved to Colesbukta. A German scientific station was erected at Ebeltoftthamna in Krossfjorden in 1912 and is still standing.

The Swedish-Russian Arc-of-Meridian Expedition had two big stations in Spitsbergen: One built by the Swedes at Sorgfjorden in 1899; and one by the Russians in 1900 at Gåshamna on the south side of Hornsund. The main building of the Swedish station is much damaged, but a small house next to it has been repaired. Of the Russian houses there remains the laboratory building, now being used as a hunting station, and the observatory itself now serving as a store-room.

The hut in Spitsbergen situated at the highest altitude was built 1049 m above sea-level on the summit of Nordenskiöldfjellet for a Swedish scientific expedition in 1932.

In the summer of 1936 the Norwegian Government had huts built on Barentsøya, Svenskøya, and Kongsøya to the east of Spitsbergen, and on Sjuøyane in the north for the benefit of expeditions in distress. For the same purpose the Government acquired the house built in 1935 by the British Glen expedition on the north side of Brennevinsfjorden.

In the last few years the coal company "Store Norske" as well as private persons have put up huts in the Adventfjord area. These huts are being used for weekend trips and as night quarters for those travelling in the interior. The erection of further huts in the inland between Isfjorden and Bellsund has been planned.

As will appear from the above the number of dwelling houses and huts in Svalbard is quite a considerable one, and settlement has never been so extensive as it is to-day. The country will probably not be able to support more hunters than it does now, but it is likely that the mining industry will continue to grow and with it the building activity in the mining districts.

The population of Svalbård during the last two winters was:

	1937—38	1938—39
Longyearbyen and Sverdrupbyen	622	676
Sveagruva .....	0	3
Barentsburg .....	1610	900
Grumantbyen .....	377	600
Hiorthhamn (Moskushamn) .....	2	2
Kapp Linné .....	3	2
Bjørnøya .....	3	3
Hunters .....	36	24
	Total	2210
	2653	



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Observatoriegaten 1, Oslo

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