

POLARMUSEET



GUIDE

<http://uit.no/polarmuseet>



History

The Polar Museum was officially opened in Tromsø on 18 June 1978, the 50th anniversary of Roald Amundsen's fateful flight aboard the "Latham". The building dates back to 1830, and was used as a bonded warehouse by the customs authorities until the 1970's. The museum also owns the neighbouring building which was built in 1840. It was also used as a customhouse but now houses the museum's administration. Both buildings are protected by preservation orders.

The Polar Museum's meeting room

The meeting room is on the first floor, and is in regular use. It is also often rented out to organisations with a polar background. Conderence reception and other social arrangements are often held here – with the museum's exhibitions as an extra setting. Weddings have even been held in the meeting room. The Arctic Club and Tromsø hold all its public meetings here – with formal and informal lectures. With its special polar atmosphere, this meeting room is one of the best arenas for the presentation and Tromsø's proud traditions of the Arctic and Antarctic.

The Polar Museum's temporary exhibitions

Apart from its permanent exhibitions, the Polar Museum also presents temporary exhibitions at regular intervals. The exhibit hall is in the building called Sjøhuset (The Sea Warehouse). This is the oldest house of the building complex, build around 1800. The building was restored in 1994 – and is now used to present the museum's own temporary exhibitions as well as exhibitions brought in from elsewhere. The entrance to this hall is to the right of the ticket counter.

Exhibition

Ground floor:

- Room 1 Trapping in the Arctic.
- Room 2 Svalbard in the 1600's and 1700's.
- Room 3 Hunting situation.
- Room 4 Seal hunting – zoological exhibition.
- Room 5 Seal hunting.

1.floor

- Room 6 Roald Amundsen
- Room 7 Henry Rudi and Wanny Woldstad
- Room 8 Walrus hunting and Polar bear hunting.

Meeting room (Møtesal): Fridtjof Nansen

The Sea warehouse (Sjøhuset): temporary exhibition (ground floor)

Rom 1. Trapping in the Arctic

The pioneers

Reindeer on Svalbard

The reindeer living on Svalbard are considered as a "dwarf" race of reindeer. Special characteristics of the race include the facts that they live in small flocks and do not move very much. Reasons for this are that they have no natural predators on Svalbard, and that food is readily available. Svalbard reindeer also live longer than other races - up to 17 years has been documented. Other characteristics of the race are that they build up a thick layer of fat in summer which acts as a nutrient reserve over the long winter. This layer of fat can be over 10 cm thick, and a reindeer can lose over half its weight during the winter. Their coat is the densest of all races of reindeer, and they can survive temperatures down to -40°C. Their legs, neck and ears are shorter than those of other reindeer. This helps conserve warmth. They spend 95% of the day grazing and chewing the cud - much more than other reindeer.

Numbers

The hunting of reindeer on Svalbard was so intense towards the end of the 1800s and start of the 1900s that the population approached extinction. When Norway gained sovereignty of the islands in 1925, only ca. 1000 reindeer remained, and hunting was forbidden. Today the population on Svalbard is estimated to be ca. 10 000 animals.

Hunting

The reindeer on Svalbard were almost certainly hunted as long ago as the 1600s, by Dutch and English whalers. Their meat was probably a welcome supplement to the otherwise monotonous ships' fare. Russian polar bear and arctic fox trappers and hunters wintering on Svalbard in the 1700s also hunted reindeer. The Norwegians started winter trapping and hunting in the 1800s, and again reindeer meat was a welcome supplement. Meat, hides and tallow were also taken down to the mainland for sale there. During a single winter, a couple of hunters could easily shoot more than 100 reindeer. This hunting continued until the reindeer were protected in 1925. When the coal industry started early in the 1900s, the miners also ate a lot of reindeer meat. Reindeer hunters were even hired by the coal company. This led to the near extermination of the flocks around the mining towns.

Reindeer hunting by tourists

During the second half of the 19th century, reindeer hunting was very popular among the tourists brought to Svalbard in steamboats, sealers, yachts, etc. Quite often the animals were simply shot, and their whole carcasses left to rot.

Protection in 1925

Although forbidden by law, many reindeer were hunted by miners, whalers and tourists also after 1925. But as time drew on, the District Governor of Svalbard began to gain better control. Since 1983, the residents and some scientists have been allowed to shoot a strict quota each year.

Arctic fox trapping

Arctic foxes (*Alopex lagopus*) live on all the islands in the Arctic, and on the tundra of North America and Eurasia. There are two colour varieties: the “white” fox and the “blue” fox.

In winter they roam along the coast and on the ice flows. In summer they often seek out the seabird cliffs. The Norwegians started trapping arctic foxes were the surest source of income. The season lasted from the middle of October to the middle of April. You can see the various types of gintrap used. Their use was banned in 1978, when trapping foxes alive was also banned, The use of poison was forbidden in 1927. Today, only the use of “shutter” traps and rifles is permitted on Svalbard and Jan Mayen. The shutter trap set-up is shown in the exhibition this was the most common method used to trap foxes. When the trappers’ returned to the mainland, the pelts were sold, tanned and used to make a variety of products.

Trapper’s hut

This hut was built in 1910 as the main station for five trappers at Krosspynten in Wijdefjord on Svalbard. It was built of Siberian drift wood. Moss was used to keep out the draught.

During the second winter of its use, one of the trappers died of scurvy. The hut was used regularly until 1936 when it was transported to Oslo. There it was exhibited at the Maritime Museum until 1974. It was then moved to Tromsø in 1984. Here we have tried to recreate, as authentically as possible, a trapper’s situation, both inside and outside the hut.

Room 2 Svalbard in the 1600 and 1700’s

The name Svalbard comes from middle-age Nordic; sval means cold, bard means coast, the land with the cold coast. It appears for the first time in Icelandic writings dating back to 1194.

The first true documentation of knowledge of Svalbard dates to 1596 when the Dutchman Willem Barents led an expedition in search of the Northeast Passage. Since then, most of Svalbard’s history is known. Barents’ crew called the island they saw “Spitsbergen”

Englishmen and Dutchmen started an intense hunt of walruses and right whales early in the 1600's. Large land-based stations were built where the whale blubber was boiled and barrelled. This hunt lasted about 50 years, a hunt in which, as far as we know, the Russians did not take part.

They did, however, start fur trapping in the early 1700's. The expeditions were financed by the large, north Russian trading stations.

Exhibits 3 and 4

Finds from Willem Barent's camp on Novaya Zemlya. An emergency camp was established in 1596 during the expedition to find the Northeast Passage to China. Barents died while wintering on Novaya Zemlya. The rest of this expedition reached safety during the summer of 1597. The remains of the camp were found by a Norwegian, Elling Carlsen in 1871. Exhibited are lead seals from rolls of cloth which were to be traded when they reached China. Also two knives, an iron buckle, part of a hammer, a sledge hammer head, an angle iron from a wooden chest, gunpowder measures, various locks, remains of a balance and an oil lamp.

Whaling in the 1600's

Large numbers of whales and walruses were seen during Barents' expedition in the waters around Svalbard. An intensive hunt started in 1610. Ships from the Netherlands, England and Denmark/Norway took part in this hunt every year for 40-50 years. It ceased in the early 1700's due to an overexploitation of the whales and a change in climate. Remains of this first industrial period on Svalbard can still be found. The whaling employed large numbers of people every year.

Exhibit 5

Finds from the Cutch whaling station in Bellsund, mud bricks, clay pipes, pottery, nails, iron key, and spur. The woollen hat was found in a whaler's grave in Ny-Ålesund.

Exhibit 6

Finds from Bellsund where England had two whaling stations (Robertelv and Calypso) in 1610-1650, incl. pottery remains, clay pipes, nails, and a clump of sand soaked in whale oil. The cannonball and remains of a canon indicate a military presence. Disagreements concerning rights to the best whaling grounds made it necessary to bring in naval forces to defend each country's economic interests.

Board 7

A photograph of Cornelius do Man's oil painting of the activity at a whaling station in

1639.

Reproduction of an engraving illustrating the various processes involved in the refinement of whale blubber. Hunting gear. Archaeological studies on Svalbard.

Exhibit 8

Remains of clothes found in a whaler's graver.

Exhibit 9

This is one of 225 graves examined by archaeologists. It is difficult to put an exact date on it, but it is probably from the last half of the 1600's. Due to the arctic climate, the contents are remarkably well preserved. This enables us to describe the clothing, the whalers' health, and their social and economic wellbeing in some detail. The grave contains a young man, aged 20-25 years. His wrists and backbone show signs of wear and a life of hard physical labour. We don't know why he died, but many whalers died of scurvy in the 1600's. He may have come from Holland or northern Germany, or even Denmark/Norway.

Fur trapping in the 1700's

There is an ongoing discussion among researchers about the possibility of there having been Russian wintering expeditions to Svalbard already from the 1500's, where fur animals were hunted.

What is known for sure is the Russians were winter hunting on Svalbard in the early 1700's. Apart from polar bear and fox pelts, they also took walrus teeth and blubber and eider down.

Archaeologists examined an 18th century Russian trapping station in 1955- the station was in Russekeila (Russian Inlet) on the west coast of Svalbard. Finds are exhibited in cases 10-15.

The station was owned by the Solovjet monastery, which is on the coast of the coast of the White Sea. It was established in 1720, and was in use as a main base between 1750 and 1790.

Case 10.

Gear used for trapping, fishing and handicrafts.

Case 11

The trigger mechanism of a fox trap, battens on which pelts were dried, a ski tip, and parts of a sledge.

Case 12

Various tools and kitchen equipment.

Case 13

Tools used to build boats and make barrels. Frame for mending nets, frame for drying socks, pottery.

Case 14

Combs for hair and beard, leather boot, birch bark slipper, knife sheath, knife handle.

Case 15

Leatherworker's tools Chess and other games. Clay pipe – the only one found. Religion prohibited the Russian trappers to smoke and drink.

Room 3. Sealing

Exhibits 16 and 17

This exhibition shows how sealing was carried out in the Arctic in the early days. Each sealing vessel carried several such working boats. They were used when the seals were spread widely on the pack ice. After the Second World War, they often had inboard engines. Each boat had a crew of three or more, each of whom had his own duty. The rifleman sat in the bow. The rower sat aft. He had the most difficult job, making sure that the boat moved silently forward towards the seals. In the middle sat/stood the man who pushed aside the ice when the going became difficult. He also jumped onto the ice to kill the baby seals using the "hakupik" (sealing pick). Together, they rowed the boat, and when several seals were killed, skinned them. These boats are still used today under certain ice conditions, although the harvesting of baby seals is not allowed any more.

Room 4. Seals and sealing

There are 32 species of seal. Seven occur in Norwegian waters. They are: the walrus, and the grey, harbour, harp, hooded, bearded and ringed seals. Skins and/or stuffed animals of all seven species are shown in this room. Apart from the walrus, they are all true seals and have the same ancestry as the otter.

Seals are mammals and suckle their young. Seals often hunt their food at great depths. Some species can dive to 200 m, and remain submerged for 20-30 minutes. To manage this, they store large amounts of oxygen before they dive. When they dive, they empty their lungs of air and their heartbeat drops. Their streamlined body is an

adaption to life in the sea. They propel themselves using their hind limbs. They steer using their forelimbs/flippers. One can age a seal by counting annual rings in a cross-section of a tooth. Seals have been hunted along the Norwegian coast since the stone-age, ca.1000-1500 years BC. A lot more recently, coastal seals were caught using a long line carrying many tow-armed iron hooks. The line was stretched out, a shot was fired and the seals were frightened out to sea. Those that got caught by the hooks were shot.

When sealers hunted alone, they used a rifle and a “hakupik” After being killed, the seals were bled and skinned. Sealing from ships started in the 1700’s but the Norwegians didn’t play any central role until a hundred years later. The first Norwegian to start hunting in the Greenland Sea was Sven Foyn in 1846. Most of the Norwegian sealers of the 20th century came from North Norway and Møre, which is in western Norway. In the early days, sealskin were used to make rope, to cover wooden chests and to make shoes. The blubber was refined to make lamp oil. Today, clothes are made of sealskins and industrial oil of the blubber. Exhibited here are models of Norwegian sealers from 1890 to 1930.

Room 5. Norwegian sealing in recent times

Norwegians have hunted seals for centuries and seals have been an important resource since the stone-age. Seals were hunted along the whole Norwegian coast. The developments of larger boats allowed the hunt to spread to more arctic regions. Seal hunting became a primary source of income with a specialization of boats and crew. In North Norway, Hammerfest and Tromsø became important centres. The first true summer expedition to the Arctic left Hammerfest in 1819. More and more boats participated as time passed to hunt walrus and reindeer and to collect eiderdown and feathers. Tromsø boats became active in the 1860’s and seals became the main commodity.

Sealing grounds in the 1800’s

During the second half of the 19th century, North Norwegian sealing was concentrated in the following areas:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| April-June: | White Sea (harp seals) |
| May-September: | Novaya Zemlya (bearded and harp seals, walrus). |
| Autumn: | Spitsbergen and Bear Island (seals and beluga, plus fishing for Greenland shark and cod. Reindeer were hunted on land, and down and feathers were collected.) |

The main markets for these products were Germany, England and Russia. Ports of export were Bergen, Trondheim, Tromsø, Hammerfest and Vadsø.

Sealing vessels and seal hunters

In the 1850's, many foreign vessels were equipped with steam engines. Sven Foyn was the first Norwegian to put engines in his vessels. There was some reluctance amongst other Norwegian ship owners to do the same, but they followed suit after a while. Some of the sealing boats were imported, but the best and strongest were built in Norway. At the turn of the century, engines replaced sails in the smaller boats. It was not unusual for some of the larger vessels from southern Norway to have had a crew of up to 60 men, of which 9-10 were riflemen. To start with they used old military muzzleloaders, but these were later replaced by Remington and Krag-Jørgensen rifles.

A sealer's life

A hunting trip normally lasted from April to September. Clothing consisted of woollen underwear and trousers, thick woollen pullovers, long leather boots, a canvas jacket and a set of oilskins. Food was nourishing and tasty and consisted of salted meat, potatoes, bread, dried peas, oatmeal, salted and dried fish, bacon, coffee and sugar. They also ate fresh meat of seal, reindeer and seabirds.

Artic sealing in the 1900`s

During the First World War the market for seal products was good. Prices were high and a record number of boats took part in 1918. The market dropped after the war and the economic crisis of the 1920`s also affected the seal trade. The prices of skins collapsed, and it was difficult to find crews for the boats. Restrictions were also put on the sealing grounds due to political problems.

Loss of ships

Sealing in the Artic was not without incident. The loss of ships and life was common. Many vessels were lost during the First World War. Some were sunk, others were lost on passage or while in the ice. 1917, 1928, 1939 and 1952 were all bad years during which a total of 46 sealing vessels were lost in the ice.

Sealing between the Wars

Between 1918 and 1940, Norwegians hunted seals in the following grounds: "East ice" around and in the White Sea (newly opened grounds), "North ice" around Svalbard, "West ice" around Jan Mayen, Straits of Denmark – between Greenland and Iceland and Newforundland.

The sealers could make up three trips a year. After the First World War, technical

innovations such as echosounders and radio-telephony were introduced.

Sealing after 1945

Sealing stopped during the Second World War, resulting in an increase in seal populations. Profits thereby increased when it resumed, larger vessels were used and more technical equipment was installed. This resulted in the need for more capital to maintain the industry. From the middle of the 1950`s the number of seals harvested dropped and fewer and fewer vessels participated.

After 1970

Conditions changed drastically in the 1970`s when severe restrictions were imposed by the Norwegian state through the need for hunting licenses and international agreements. Strong conservation lobbies turned the public opinion against sealing in the 1970`s and the EEC prohibited the import of sealskins in 1973. Important markets collapsed, as did the prices of seal products. The number of active sealing vessels dropped from 34 in 1971 to 4-5 today. Seal skins are now kept in store in the hope of a better market in the future.

Room 6. Early aviation in the arctic

The exhibition presents models of famous airships from polar aviation history during the period from 1897 to 1928.

Model of the hot air balloon “Ørnen” (The Eagle), that the Swedish engineer, Salomon August Andree, attempted to reach the North Pole with in 1897. The expedition failed. Thirty-three years later the three participants were found dead on Kvitøya, located to the north of Spitsbergen.

Model of the aircraft Dornier Wal N-24, that Roald Amundsen attempted to reach the North Pole with in 1925. another aircraft of the same type, N-25, was also used during the same attempt. Both of the aircraft had to make emergency landings without having reached the goal. Everyone returned uninjured in one of the airplanes, N-25. It was not possible to get N-24 airborne again and the plane had to be abandoned in the frozen wasteland.

Model of the aircraft “Josephine Ford” that American Richard Byrd claimed he had reached the North Pole with on May 9, 1926. He began in Ny-Ålesund on Svalbard. Later it was established that he could not possibly have been so far north and the claim by Byrd was therefore rejected.

Model of the airship “Norge”

On May 12, Roald Amundsen, the Italian Umberto Nobile and American Lincoln Ellsworth succeeded, together with their crew, in flying over the North Pole with the airship “Norge”, as the first in the world. The airship’s last stage went from Ny-Ålesund on Svalbard via the North Pole to Teller in Alaska, where the airship was immediately dismantled.

Model of the French flying boat “Latham47” that was under the command of Roald Amundsen departed Tromsø in the summer of 1928 on a search expedition after the missing airship “Italia”. The airplane crashed someplace between Tromsø and Svalbard. Only the petrol tank and a wing float were later found drifting in the ocean. The entire crew of six persons; four Frenchmen and the two Norwegians, Roald Amundsen and Dietrichson, died.

Room 7. Henry Rudi – “King of the Polar bear”

1889-1970

Henry Rudi was from Tromsø and one of our most well known trappers, both nationally and internationally. Boyhood dreams became a reality when he spent his first winter on Svalbard in 1908-09. Ninety polar bears gave him a taste for more! In the following years, Henry Rudi spent winter after winter, 27 in all, on Svalbard, Greenland and Jan Mayen. He also accompanied sealers on 30 trips into the ice. Between 1908-1948, Henry Rudi shot and trapped 713 polar bears – far more than anyone else has managed and earned the name “Isbjørnkongen” (King of the polar bears).

Life as a trapper in the Arctic was hard in both body and soul. When bad weather forced the trapper to remain indoors for days on end, it was difficult for him to keep up his spirits. Time was spent in the little cabin doing household chores, repairing traps and dog harnesses, writing the log and reading. Henry Rudi had a wide selection of tools with him and even made his own dog harnesses. Well maintained skiing equipment and proper clothes were essential. Winter trapping was a matter of luck. One never knew what the result would be. Henry Rudi’s last expedition to Greenland was in 1939. He did not return until 1945. His last winter spent as trapper was in 1947-48, but he did spend the two following winters as cook at the Isjford radio station on Spitsbergen.

As a pensioner in Tromsø, Henry Rudi was a living legend. He was a symbol of the hardened trapper, and his endless stories entertained many a Norwegian. Rudi had many friends, at home and abroad, he was awarded the king’s medal of honour for his

work in the Arctic. Henry Rudi died in 1970.

Musk Ox

A musk ox (*Ovibus moschatus*) is more closely related to sheep and goats than to cattle. Bulls can be up to 450 kg, cows are smaller. They have a thick, soft wool which is shed in spring and they can tolerate temperatures down to -70°C. They are fearless animals and often form flocks. 17 musk ox were introduced in Svalbard from Greenland in 1929, but the experiment failed and all died. Norwegians hunted musk ox on Greenland. The meat was nutritious and tasty and fed both the hunters and their dogs. Sausages were even made of musk ox meat.

Wanny Woldstad 1893-1959

Winter trapping had long traditions as an activity for men. The few women that did participate did so more as housekeepers for their husbands than as actual trappers. Wanny Woldstad from Tromsø was however an exception. She spent several winters in Svalbard with her hunting partner Anders Sæterdal. Sæterdal was an experienced hunter and trapper, and taught her all the skills needed for her to become a partner on equal terms. By the time Wanny first met Sæterdal, she had been widowed twice and had two teenage sons. Wanny was an exceptional woman. She took part in shooting competitions, and was Tromsø's first taxi driver - in the 1920s with her own car. Her first season in Svalbard was in 1932/33, with Sæterdal. They hunted seals, geese and ptarmigan in the autumn, and polar bears and arctic foxes in the winter. She shot her first polar bear just before Christmas. As Sæterdal's partner, Wanny was perfect. The winter passed without problem - and Wanny kept a diary describing everything that happened. Late in the following summer, they were picked up by a sealer - and Wanny was joyfully reunited with her two sons in Tromsø.

Within a few days, Wanny and Sæterdal had started outfitting the next expedition - this time with Wanny's two sons. They used the same hut and hunting terrain - around Hornsund. That spring they shot two belugas - thus increasing their profits. Wanny Woldstad spent several winters on Svalbard. Her two sons, Bjørvik and Alf, accompanied also them in 1934/35, whereas Sæterdal and Wanny were alone in 1935/36. Sæterdal's two children, Emilie and Fredrik - also teenagers - joined them in 1936/37, a season which was to be Wanny's last on Svalbard. After her unusual career as a trapper and hunter, Wanny became famous in the "arctic circles" of Tromsø. Based on her diaries, she wrote a book "The first woman trapper on Svalbard". She was also a popular lecturer.

Epilogue

With her five seasons on Svalbard, Wanny Woldstad proved that it was perfectly possible for a woman to enter what was traditionally a man's "world" of trapping and hunting. She proved that a person's capabilities played a much bigger role than gender when faced by the hardships of the Svalbard winter. Women's entry into the trappers' lives brought with it several changes for the better in the daily running of the stations - curtains, mats, plants and tablecloths became common. And their culinary skills also contributed to a more varied diet. Arthur Oxaas, a well-known hunter of his time, declared of his wife, "She transformed the primitive hut to a comfortable home". Women proved to be perfectly capable hunters, but at the same time gave their husbands the feeling of living a more normal and harmonious life during the long winters in the ice.

Room 8. Walrus hunting

The walrus is the largest of the arctic seals. It can weigh over 2000 kilos and reach 4 m. in length. The Atlantic walrus lives along the coasts of Canada and Greenland and in the Barents Sea.

The characteristic teeth can be up to 1 m. long, and are thought to be used when searching for food on the sea bed. Walruses eat mainly molluscs, but also fish and even seals. They can hear and smell well, but have poor eyesight. They are very sociable animals, often forming large flocks. Pregnancy lasts a year, and a female bears a single pup once every three years. Walruses have been hunted for centuries. Prior to the 17th century, Russians and Finns were the primary actors and during the Middle Ages, walrus teeth were a very valuable trade commodity. Walrus hide was used to make rope and drive belts.

In the early 1600's Englishmen and Dutchmen started hunting walruses on Svalbard. In the 1700's and 1800's Norwegians and Russians overtook, but because of heavy exploitation the stocks were severely reduced and the remaining animals retreated further north and east. In the 1900's, firearms were introduced. around 1930, the Russians denied the Norwegian boats access to the grounds around Franz Josef Land and Victoria Island and the hunt soon drew to a close. All hunting was forbidden in 1952, and the stocks have slowly started to increase. Only natives of the Canadian, Alaskan, Siberian and Greenland Arctic are now allowed to hunt a certain number of walrus.

Polar bear hunting

The polar bear spends most of its life on the pack ice. Only when about to cub does it seek land. Males can be 3m long and weigh over 600 kg. Females are much smaller. They eat mainly ringed seals. The first recorded killing of a polar bear dates back to

Willem Barents' expedition in 1596. Members of the expedition fought with the bear for over two hours in the sea off Bear Island. This event gave the island its name. The whalers of the 1600's certainly killed the odd bear, but an organized hunt did not start until the Russians manned expeditions to Svalbard in the early 1700's. However, the first winter trapping did not start until around 1890 when polar bears were an important supplement to fox trapping.

During the 20th century, the number of polar bear trappers varied according to employment levels on the mainland and the price of a polar bear skin. After 1970, licenses to shoot polar bears were the order of the day. After Norway gained full sovereignty of Svalbard in the 1920's, a series of restrictions was imposed on the polar bear hunt in an attempt to protect the species against overexploitation. Several methods have been used to hunt and trap the polar bear. Between 1900 and 1970 a "self shooting" trap was the most common. A modern version of this trap is exhibited. It was banned in 1970. It was often mounted on a snowless ridge, and was baited using seal blubber.

Between the bait and trigger was a tight string. When the bear pulled at the bait, the rifle was fired and the bear shot itself in the head. Some hunters also kept living polar bear cubs after shooting their mothers. They were sold to zoos all over the world, and fetched a good price. This was forbidden in 1957. Gin traps were sometimes used to catch living bears, but this was banned in 1928. The use of poisoned bait was banned in 1927. In addition to trapping, polar bears were also hunted using rifles. Due to an increase in restrictions, it soon became difficult to make a living by hunting and trapping polar bears, and the last season was in 1972-73. The current international moratorium on the hunting of polar bears started in 1976.

Room 9. Roald Amundsen

16 july 1872-1928

Life and expeditions

Roald Amundsen was born on the property "Tomta" near Sarpsborg on 16 July 1872. The following year, the family moved to Kristiania (Oslo). Amundsen graduated from school there in 1890 and, at the wish of his mother, started to study medicine. He dropped out in 1893 and joined a sealing trip in the Arctic. From then on he did everything he could to improve his qualifications as a polar explorer. He gained his mate's certificate in 1895.

The "Belgica" expedition.

Amundsen was hired as a mate on the “Belgica” expedition of 1897-99. The aim of the expedition was to map the magnetic South Pole. On this trip, Amundsen dreamt of leading an expedition to the North Pole and through the Northwest Passage. On his return home, he studied in Norway and Germany to become a specialist in the earth’s magnetism.

“Gjøa” and the Northwest Passage

Amundsen bought the sealing vessel “Gjøa” in Tromsø in 1901. He sailed from Kristiania on 17 June 1903 and entered Gjøahavn, near the magnetic North Pole, on 12 November. During the next two years, the expedition collected a mass of magnetic observations and scientifically important geographical and ethnic material. When “Gjøa” anchored off Nome in Alaska on 31 August 1906, she was the first vessel ever to have sailed through the Northwest Passage. The “Gjøa” was exhibited in the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco between 1906 and 1972 when it was returned to Norway. She is now at the National Maritime Museum, Oslo.

“Fram” and the South Pole 1910-12

On 7 June 1910, Amundsen set out on a new expedition on board “Fram”. His plan to explore the North Pole was soon abandoned and, instead, he aimed for the South Pole. Robert Scott of Britain was also on his way south and the race began. The base camp, “Framheim” (Fram home), was established on the Ross Barrier and after four months of systematic and detailed planning, Amundsen and four of his men reached the South Pole on 14 December 1911. While Amundsen was on the ice cap, “Fram” carried out a detailed oceanographic study of the South Atlantic. Scott’s expedition reached the South Pole on 18 January 1912. He and his companions died on their way back to base camp.

“Maud” and the Northeast Passage 1918-1923

Roald Amundsen always set new goals and, in 1918, he took the newly built “Maud” on what was then the biggest and best-equipped geophysical polar expedition ever. The idea was to drift with the ice over the North Pole. However, poor ice conditions resulted in delays lasting several winters and the plan to enter the polar ice was given up. Instead, they sailed through the Northeast Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific along the Asian coast. Amundsen left “Maud” on 25 July 1920 and reached Nome, Alaska two days later. Using “Maud” as a base, an attempt was made to fly to the North Pole in May 1923. This failed, and “Maud” was sold to the Hudson Bay Company. She was later wrecked on the coast of Canada.

By air to the North Pole 1925-26 “N-24” and “N-25”

Although the attempt to fly to the North Pole failed in 1923, Amundsen did not give up the idea. Contact with the American millionaire, Lincoln Ellsworth resulted in enough capital for a second attempt. The two of them led an expedition with the German-built flying boats “N-24” and “N-25”, and flew from Ny-Ålesund on Svalbard on 21 May 1925. The following day, “N-24” developed engine trouble and both planes landed at 88°N. Having failed to reach the Pole, the six participants returned to Svalbard on 15 June on board “N-25”.

Airship “Norge”

With economic support from Ellsworth, Amundsen bought the airship “N-1” from the Italian state. It was refurbished during the 1926 winter and was renamed “Norge”. It was then flown from Rome to Ny-Ålesund where the last preparations were made. “Norge” started its flight over the Polar Sea from Europe to Alaska on 11 May 1926. Amundsen and Ellsworth led the expedition and Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen was second-in-command. The Italian airship constructor Umberto Nobile was hired as pilot. There were 16 members of the crew. The Norwegian, American and Italian flags were dropped over the North Pole, and “Norge” landed in Teller, Alaska on 14 May. Roald Amundsen had now planted the Norwegian flag on both Pole and had sailed the Northwest and Northeast Passages. He had become one of the greatest explorers ever.

Epilogue

Roald Amundsen was always at hand when help was needed. In 1928, Umberto Nobile led the Italian North Pole expedition with the airship “Italia”. The airship crashed on its return from the Pole and a rescue mission was started. On 18 June 1928, the flying boat “Latham” left Tromsø with Amundsen on board to search for Nobile. Radio contact was soon lost and Amundsen and his crew were never seen again. Nobile and eight of his men were rescued. Amundsen’s memory was honoured the world over.

Room 10. Fridtjof Nansen and the first Fram expedition, 1893-1896

Fridtjof Nansen 1861-1930

Fridtjof Nansen is recognized as one of Norway’s most famous countrymen of all time. He made a mark for himself in a wide variety of different pursuits. First and foremost, he is known as the polar explorer, zoologist, oceanographer, diplomat and humanist Nansen. He was also an author and artist of importance. In addition, he made a significant contribution as a refugee-assistance organizer and received the Nobel peace prize in 1922. The Polar Museum’s focus on Nansen is due to his feats as

an explorer and polar researcher. In 1888 he led an expedition that crossed the inland ice on Greenland, for the first time in history. During the period from 1893-1896 he attempted to conquer the North Pole itself with the polar vessel “Fram”

Here we present an exhibition on Nansen’s North Pole expedition, entitled **The first Fram expedition, 1893-1896**

Nansen’s theory

In 1890 Nansen put forward his idea on how the North Pole could be conquered; to let an icebound ship drift with the current and ice from east to west, across the North Pole. The theory originated from the documentation of drift wood on the east coast of Greenland that had originated from Siberia in Russia. The theory was supported by the discovery of wreckage from the polar vessel “Jeanette” on the coast of Greenland in 1884, three years after the vessel had been wrecked off the New Siberian Islands. Nansen built the vessel “Fram” and let it become icebound beyond the New Siberian Islands – and as far north as possible. From this point the drift ice, according to Nansen’s plan, would bring the vessel over the pole area in the course of 2-3 years.

Preparations

Nansen chose a crew of 12 persons – with Otto Sverdrup as the captain. A great deal of effort was invested in finding the proper provisions, in order to avoid sickness, such as the much feared scurvy. The leading experts were engaged in the scientific preparations within physics, hydrography, geomagnetism and astronomy. Fifty-nine sled dogs were ordered from Siberia. Three depots were also placed on the New Siberian Islands, in case of shipwreck. The supplies were sufficient for an expedition lasting up to five years. There had never been a polar expedition as well prepared!

Departure

“Fram” departed Kristiania (Oslo) on June 25, 1893. The vessel sailed northward along the Norwegian coast and arrived in Tromsø on July 12, where it took on board a variety of provisions, including dried reindeer meat. Sami leather clothing, footwear of reindeer skin with blister sedge to be used as footwear insulation were also purchased. Crew member Bernt Bentsen came aboard in Tromsø. After two days, Fram continued northward. On July 21, the vessel departed Vardø, the final destination before the true journey began.

Drifting over the Arctic Ocean

On July 25 the vessel passed Novaja Semlja. Shortly thereafter they encountered serious ice problems, but the vessel passed this test admirably and reached Kaborova

on the Jugor Strait on July 29. From here they mailed the final letters to be sent home. The sled dogs were also taken on board here and minor repairs made to the steam engine. The journey further along the Siberian coast went well for the most part. Finally “Fram” met the ice edge. On September 22 the vessel was anchored to a large ice floe. The position was 78° N latitude and 133° E longitude. The long ice drift had finally begun and Nansen’s theory could be tested!

Lif on board

Everyone was now anxious about how things would turn out. The steam engine was disassembled and prepared for winter. The rudder and propeller were raised to avoid damage. Different workshops were established on board, such as a carpentry shop, machine shop, tin shop as well as a shoemaker and sailmaker. A windmill was mounted on deck that drove a dynamo to produce electricity for lighting. There was a great deal of activity among the entire crew, which was important to keep them in physical and mental health. Scientific investigations were also undertaken the entire time. But the actual ice drift towards the North Pole went very slowly. In September 1884 it became clear that “Fram” would not come further than 85° N. Nansen began to think seriously about the plan to reach the North Pole with by ski and sled. In January 1885 “Fram” was exposed to enormous ice pressure and risked being pushed under. Still the vessel’s sturdy construction managed to withstand the force of the ice.

Skiiing towards the North Pole

As the expedition’s commander, Nansen carefully considered the consequences of leaving the vessel. He quickly assessed that the second-in-command, Otto Sverdrup, had the best qualifications to take over as leader on board and that the most important scientific observations would be continued according to all of the established guidelines. In November 1894, Hjalmar Johansen was asked if he would accompany Nansen on skis towards the North Pole. Johansen said yes without hesitation. They started preparations for a long and exhausting journey.

In February 1895, Nansen decided that they should use dogs and sleds to reach the Pole. Accidents with the sleds led to two failed starts. They finally got under way in the middle of March. Nansen’s plan was to travel northward up to 50 days. At this point they would have to turn back, whether or not they had reached the North Pole, due to limited supplies. They used three sleds. On one sled lay the kayaks that they would use on the return trip, when the ice had begun to melt. The journey went on and the dogs lost their strength, the weakest were slaughtered and the meat used to feed the others. Their speed was still insufficient to reach the North Pole in time. When the daily progress was reduced to 2-3 kilometers, Nansen decided to turn back. On April 8

1895, with a temperature of minus 36°C, they held a “banquet” at their northernmost tent site, 86° 14' N latitude. They were several hundred kilometres further north than any other persons had been up to that point. The location was decorated with two flags and the return journey began.

The homeward journey

The course was set in the direction of Franz Josef Land. As the crew flies, this was a distance of 670 kilometers, but ocean currents and ice leads made the actual distance much greater. The journey was an awful ordeal. Endless ice ridges, fog and violent snowstorms with temperatures below minus 40°C. Early in May the ice opened more and after a time they abandoned the sleds. They had 12 dogs left. The remainder had been slaughtered. The last part of the remainder had been slaughtered. The last part of the trip before they reached land was the worst with strong currents and partially dispersed drift ice. On August 7 the last two dogs were killed. Nansen shot Johansen's dog and vice versa. They reached the coast of Franz Josef Land on August 15, 1895 some distance from Cape Fligely. The trip continued along land in the direction of Svalbard, but it was soon impassible for the frail kayaks. A new overwintering was unavoidable.

Winter camp at Franz Josef Land, 1895-1896

If they were to manage to survive, they had to quickly prepare for a second overwintering. On an island they built a stone hut with a driftwood log and the hide of a walrus as a roof. They shot polar bears and walrus nearby, which they lived on through nine long months of winter. In many ways, it was a wonder that they were able to survive – and with their wits in behold! They later recounted having dreamed about clean, warm clothes, about books and everything else from the civilized world. Now and then they took short walks in the vicinity, when the weather permitted. At the same time, they managed to maintain their friendship.

Spring break-up 1896 and the journey southward

In the spring of 1896 they began to prepare for the journey southward. They had to make new trousers and jackets, which they sewed out of wool blankets from the sleeping bags. They made wind-proof clothing out of sailcloth. A light and warm sleeping bag was sewn out of polar bear skin. Nansen wrote a travel account of their journey up to that point, placed it in a metal cylinder and hung it up on the ridge.