

**Written exam SH-201 The History of Svalbard**  
**The University Centre in Svalbard, Monday 21 February 2011**  
**Solution example**

*The exam is a 3 hour written test. It consists of two parts: Part I is a multiple choice test of factual knowledge. **Note: This sheet with answers to part I shall be handed in.** Part II (see below) is an essay part where you write extensively about one of two alternative subjects. No aids except dictionary are permitted. You may answer in English, Norwegian, Swedish or Danish.*

*Part I counts approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  and part II counts  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the grade at the evaluation, but adjustment may take place. Both parts must be passed in order to pass the whole exam.*

**Part I: Multiple choice test. Make only one cross for each question.**

1.	When did the first map appear that shows Spitsbergen with certainty?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1569	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1598	<input type="checkbox"/> 1613
2.	When did land based whaling start?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ca. 1610	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1640	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1720
3.	Who were the first to engage in winter hunting and trapping?	<input type="checkbox"/> Basques	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Russians	<input type="checkbox"/> Norwegians
4.	When did the Russian Pomor hunting and trapping on Svalbard end?	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1800	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ca. 1850	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1900
5.	Who of these lead the first scientific expedition to Svalbard?	<input type="checkbox"/> Torell	<input type="checkbox"/> Sabine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chichagov
6.	When was the first International Polar Year?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1882-83	<input type="checkbox"/> 1957-58	<input type="checkbox"/> 2007-08
7.	When did year-round coal mining start?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1905	<input type="checkbox"/> 1907
8.	When did the Soviet Trust Arktikugol start coal mining in Barentsburg?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1916	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1932	<input type="checkbox"/> 1946
9.	Which of these polar explorers did <i>not</i> reach the North Pole on their expeditions?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Andrée	<input type="checkbox"/> Amundsen	<input type="checkbox"/> Nobile
10.	When was Svalbard evacuated during World War II?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1940	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1941	<input type="checkbox"/> 1943
11.	When was local democracy (Lokalstyret) introduced in Longyearbyen?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1976	<input type="checkbox"/> 1989	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2002
12.	When was the Svalbard Environment Law put into force?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1973	<input type="checkbox"/> 1992	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2002

**Part II: Choose and answer one of the following questions:**

**A. Wintering hunters and trappers Svalbard**

Describe the development of winter hunting and trapping on Svalbard with regard to who took part, the extent of the activity and how it was organized. What economic and ecological significance has this hunting and trapping had in the various historical periods?

*eller:*

**B. Svalbard in international politics**

Give an overview of Svalbard's political and legal status through the times. Describe turning points in history and important actors. What strategic importance has Svalbard had during the various phases?

### **A. Wintering hunters and trappers Svalbard**

To answer this question adequately you must describe the development of both the Russian wintering activity and that of the other hunters and trappers who wintered on Svalbard, first and foremost the Norwegian. Although the question of when the Pomors first arrived may be discussed, it is fully adequate to concentrate on the period after ca. 1700. With regard to Norwegians and other nationalities it will suffice to describe the development since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The economic significance of winter hunting and trapping was small on a national scale, but probably larger on a local and even regional scale in the White Sea area and Northern Norway, at least in periods. Compared to the fisheries in the Barents Sea and sealing in the East and West Ice, as well as to summer catching, winter hunting and trapping comprised far fewer people and yielded less revenue. This difference should be pointed out. Also, the differences and similarities in organization over time must be discussed.

The first arrival of Russian hunters, the *Pomors*, on Svalbard is a disputed question. Russian archaeologists and historians maintain that they came before Barentsz' discovery in 1596, possibly in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. Western scientists generally agree that they arrived at a later stage, after the whaling period. Certainly, the Pomors were hunting and trapping from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century on.

There were both summer and winter expeditions fitted out by local merchants, townships and some times also monasteries. Chartered companies were involved in periods. The winterings probably numbered fewer men, but the activity was extensive. Remains of Pomor trapping stations are found all over Svalbard, but not all were in use simultaneously. While the summer expeditions primarily hunted sea mammals, the winterers could also hunt or trap fur animals and collect eider-down and eggs. Although a few trappers stayed voluntarily or by mishap for more years, the regular pattern was seasonal. The winterers were collected by the summer expedition the following year. The size of the parties varied, and they were normally led by a captain – a *kormschik*. Normally, a main station would be used throughout the season, whereas smaller by-stations could be in use for periods of time by two or three members of the party. The wintering Pomors exploited all available resources – fish, birds and mammals. They also engaged in handicrafts during the polar night.

It seems Pomor hunting peaked before 1800, and the last expedition returned in 1852. There are numerous possible explanations as to why the activity stopped, but probably structural changes in the Pomor economy are important. Fishing and trade received more attention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, there were a number of ill-fated expeditions that gave the activity a bad reputation.

Norway was slow in taking part in hunting and trapping. After a few unsuccessful attempts in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, activity picked up from the 1820s. Hammerfest was the first town to engage; later (around 1850) Tromsø became the leading Arctic port. There were many accidents during the first winterings, and eventually summer expeditions became the favoured form. A more important activity, however, was sealing in the West Ice and East Ice – compared to these hunting grounds, Svalbard played a modest role.

From the 1890s winter trapping picked up again, but this time usually by smaller parties of 2–4 people. Svalbard was in practice divided into different hunting fields to reduce competition. Some of the trappers were fitted out by merchants who in return secured a part of the catch. Others were individual entrepreneurs who from time to time had to take other jobs to be able to afford a hunting expedition. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Svalbard was in practice divided into trapping areas, some 40 in all, that were occupied by a party of winterers. Only a handful were professional trappers in the sense that they had this activity as their main career. More than half of the trappers spent only 1–2 seasons on Svalbard. After World War II only a handful of trappers continued the activity, mostly polar bear hunting until the ban in 1973.

The ecological consequences of winter hunting and trapping are hard to assess as we lack good statistics. Walrus were caught by the whalers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later by the Russians on summer and winter expeditions. The population came under severe pressure in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Norwegian winterers caught relatively few. In 1952 the species was totally protected, at a point when it was close to becoming extinct. Reindeer were protected in 1925, but was hardly threatened by the wintering hunters and trappers throughout the period. With regard to polar bears it seems that primarily Norwegian hunters and sealers as well as international tourists took the greatest toll in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The winterers took some 25 % of the bears. Polar foxes, though, were harvested by the winterers alone. The fox population varies notoriously from one year to another and it is not likely that the trappers threatened it in the long run. Neither could the relatively few winterers alone have overtaxed seabirds or geese, but some species came under threat as a result of extensive hunting and egg collection by summer expeditions.

### **B. Svalbard in international politics**

To answer this question adequately you must outline the political history from the discovery in 1596 until today and describe the development of Svalbard from *terra nullius* to a part of Norway. Important turning points would be the initiative by Sweden in 1871–72 to bring Svalbard under Norwegian sovereignty, the Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920 and the Norwegian take-over in 1925. World War II and the so-called Svalbard crisis of 1944 are decisive events in recent years. With regard to Svalbard's strategic importance it can be argued that the islands had little significance until World War II. During the war Svalbard was important in the fight for control over the Northern Atlantic and the supply lines between the western allies and the Soviet Union. In the beginning of the Cold War the islands and the waters around had a military strategic potential that was never really realized. This potential was reduced as a result of technological development towards strategic submarines in the Arctic Ocean and intercontinental ballistic missiles, which rendered bases on Svalbard unnecessary. In the post Cold War period after the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 Svalbard's greatest strategic significance lies in the management of marine resources, petroleum and increasing maritime transport.

Although Spitsbergen was discovered in 1596 by the Dutch expedition of Willem Barentsz, the archipelago did not become a legal and political issue until whaling started in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The British whalers claimed the islands to be a possession of King James I in 1613, but the Dutch protested fiercely and argued that the area was part of the *mare liberum*, the open seas, that could not be claimed by any nation. The Danish-Norwegian king Christian IV also claimed sovereignty based on the belief that this was a part of Greenland, which had been a part of the Norwegian realm in the Middle Ages. This diplomatic tug-of-war went on for a couple of years, but from 1618 the Dutch and British agreed to put the question to a rest and divide the hunting areas between them. In practice the archipelago became recognized as a *terra nullius*, a no man's land, by the 1630s.

From 1814 to 1905 Norway and Sweden were unified under the Swedish king. Based on the initiative of A.E. Nordenskiöld, who sought the protection of the king for his planned colony at Kapp Thordsen, the Swedish government in 1871 inquired European states whether they would object to an annexation of Spitsbergen to Norway. Russia protested, and the initiative was abandoned. During the 1890s public opinion in Norway leaned more towards an annexation, probably inspired by the polar expeditions of Nansen. When the union with Sweden was dissolved in 1905, this became a part of the foreign policy program of the young, independent Norwegian government. Locally, there were an increasing number of problems connected to labour conflicts in mining settlement, disputes over land claims and even

excessive hunting and trapping. Norway took an initiative in 1908 to solve the administration question. Conferences were called in Kristiania (Oslo) in 1910, 1912 and 1914 to discuss the “Spitsbergen issue”, but no agreement was reached.

During World War I the islands played no strategic role and were outside the theatre of war. At the same time Norwegian economic interests on Svalbard grew, and the question of sovereignty was raised at the peace conference in Paris in 1919. On 9 February 1920 the Spitsbergen Treaty was signed, giving Norway “full and absolute sovereignty” over the archipelago, but granting excessive rights to citizens of the signatory states. Norway formally assumed sovereignty on 14 August 1925.

The economic crisis in the 1920s resulted in a contraction of coal mining, and from the 1930s only Soviet and Norwegian mines were in production. In this period Svalbard had virtually no strategic importance and very little economic significance. The settlements were evacuated in August-September 1941, and during World War II there were only a handful of German weather stations on Svalbard, and also a small Norwegian garrison. In September 1943 German warships attacked the main settlements and destroyed them. Svalbard was important in the “weather war”; meteorological data were vital for both sides’ war operations in the Northern Atlantic and the Barents Sea.

In November 1944 the Soviet foreign minister Molotov demanded an annulment of the Svalbard Treaty and expressed that the responsibility for the archipelago should be shared between Norway and the Soviet Union. The Norwegian government started a process to prepare a renegotiation of the treaty, but this was called off by the Storting (parliament) in 1947. In 1949 Norway joined NATO, and Svalbard was included in the NATO defence area in 1951.

Svalbard was in the periphery of the Cold War. The Arctic in general was strategically very important, particularly as an operation area for nuclear submarines of the Soviet North Fleet and for military intelligence. Svalbard, however, was largely spared by military activity. This was in the interest of both Norway/NATO and the Soviet Union. Norway kept a low profile – the so called “low tension policy” was intended not to provoke negative reactions from the Soviets and was quite successful. There were only a handful of issues that represented a real strain on the relations: e.g. the airport matter (1960s), the petroleum exploration (1960s), the ESRO radars (1967–74) and the Hopen airplane accident (1978).

It could be argued that Svalbard’s greatest significance for Norway since the 1970s is connected to the sovereignty over and management of natural resources in the sea. Due to developments in the Law of the Sea Norway has been able to expand its sea territory greatly, and in 1977 also declared a 200 NM fishery protection zone around Svalbard. Norway claims full sovereignty over sea and continental shelf in this area, but this is disputed by other states. Considering also the potential petroleum development and increased shipping in Arctic areas in view of climate changes, this explains why the High North has become top priority of Norwegian policy.