

SH-201 THE HISTORY OF SVALBARD

6

The great (and not so great) polar expeditions from Svalbard

Thor Bjørn Arlov, NTNU & UNIS

UNIS NTNU

1

Content of today's lecture

1st half: • Background and early attempts

- Farthest North: motives and methods
- Competing approaches to polar exploration
- Timeline: North Pole attempts from Svalbard

2nd half: • The advent of modern technology

- Balloons or airship? Andrée and Wellman
- A race towards the Pole: The 1920s
- The North Pole attained – so what?

Problem: • Results and effects of polar expeditions?

- How important was Svalbard in the North Pole race – and *vice versa*?

2

Today's Cultural Heritage Quiz

What is this?

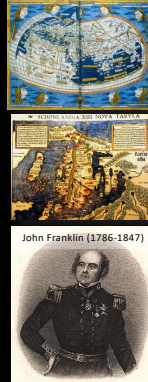
© Svalbard Museum



3

A North Pole primer

- The mystery of the North Pole region
- Revival of interest in the 19th century: global exploration
- The search for the Franklin expedition (1845-47)
 - Scientific and technological advances
 - Imperialism and national prestige
 - Making heroes: the rôle of mass media



4

Theory of the Open Polar Sea

- Kane's exploration 1853–54 of Smith's Sound
- A glimpse of an open Polar Sea? Hayes' expedition to Ellesmere 1860–61
- (Pseudo-) scientific explanations: August Peterman and Silas Bent (1870s)
- Weyprecht at Franz Josef Land 1872–74



5

Competing approaches

- Sailing: busting the theory of an open Polar Sea
 - Nordenskiöld's "Vega" expedition 1878-79 through the Northern Sea route
 - De Long's "Jeanette" expedition 1879-1881
- Let nature do the job: drifting with the ice
 - "Fram" across the Polar Sea 1893-96
- Learning from the locals: skis, dogs and sledges
- New technology: Fly me to the Pole



6

1750 1800 1850 1900 1950


A dozen polar expeditions

- 1764–66: Chichagov
- 1773: Phipps
- 1818: Buchan & Franklin
- 1827: Parry
- 1861: Torell (trial)
- 1868: Nordenskiöld
- 1872–73: Nordenskiöld
- 1894: Wellman
- 1896–97: Andrée
- 1907, 1909: Wellman
- 1925: Amundsen & Ellsworth
- 1926: Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile; Byrd & Bennet
- 1928: Nobile



7

15 minutes break



8

Andrée's first attempt 1896

- Salomon August Andrée and his plan
- A technological approach to polar exploration
- Supporters and sponsors: a matter of national pride and honour
- The aeronautical base at Virgohamna
- A visit of "Fram" and the end of an expedition
- Winner meets loser: Nansen's appraisal of Andrée
- Planning for a second attempt



9

Fate of the 1897 expedition

- "Cut everywhere!" Departure on 11 July
- "All well" – the flight towards the pole
- Final crash on 14 July, at 82°56' N, 29°52'E
- The march southwards: Franz Josef land or Spitsbergen?
- Final stop: Kvitøya in October
- Resolving the mystery: the "Bratvaag" expedition 1930
- Consequences for Swedish polar research

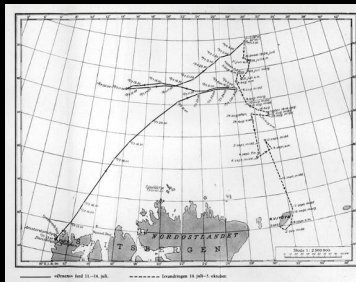


10

Doomed to despair?



David Hempleman-Adams flew from Svalbard to the Pole and back in 2000



11

Wellman – pioneer or failure?

- Walter Wellman (1858–1934): journalist turned explorer
- With "Ragnvald Jarl" towards the pole, 1894
- Sledging from Franz Josef land, 1898–1899
- Airship "America" at Svalbard, 1907
- Second attempt with "America" 1909
- Pioneer or failure? Wellman judged by his contemporaries
- Game over: Peary and Cook 1909



12

Amundsen airborne

- Amundsen: ageing hero, new technology
- A helping hand: Lincoln Ellsworth
- Ny-Ålesund as an Arctic airbase
- The flight to (nearly) 88° north – and back



13

The Pole attained – twice?

- Back on Svalbard 1926: Amundsen, Ellsworth – and Nobile
- Second generation of airships
- Byrd and Bennet snatch the prize – or do they?
- The flight of "Norge"
- The Amundsen-Nobile controversy: pride and prejudice
- The return of Nobile, 1928
- The "Italia" tragedy
- End of an era



14

Farthest north – so what?

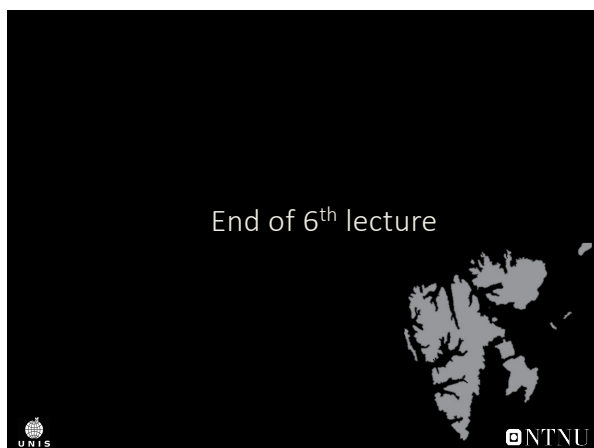
- Epilogue: Kuznetsov 1948 and Herbert 1969
- The North Pole – vastly overrated?
 - The scientific challenges and results
 - Economic and strategic interests – was it worth the trouble?
 - "I must have fame" – heroism as driving force
 - The rôle of mass media and the public: polar exploration by proxy
- Polar expeditions in the history of Svalbard – are they important?



15



17



18
