

79°43.9'N 010°59.7'E

Smeerenburg

Nordvest-Spitsbergen National Park – From smeer (Dutch), meaning speck or blubber, accordingly the name means blubber town.

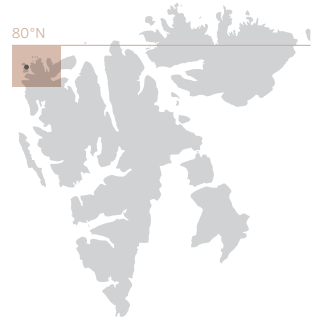


Photo: Christopher Ide

Europe's first oil adventure

"Blubber town" was the main base for Dutch whaling in the first half of the 1600s. The blubber produced oil for lighting, paint, soap and other products in demand, in the increasingly-expanding urban Europe. Contrary to the myth of 20 000 inhabitants and a hectic party-life in Smeerenburg, the reality was 200 hard-working men in a growing oil industry at almost 80° North.

VEGETATION

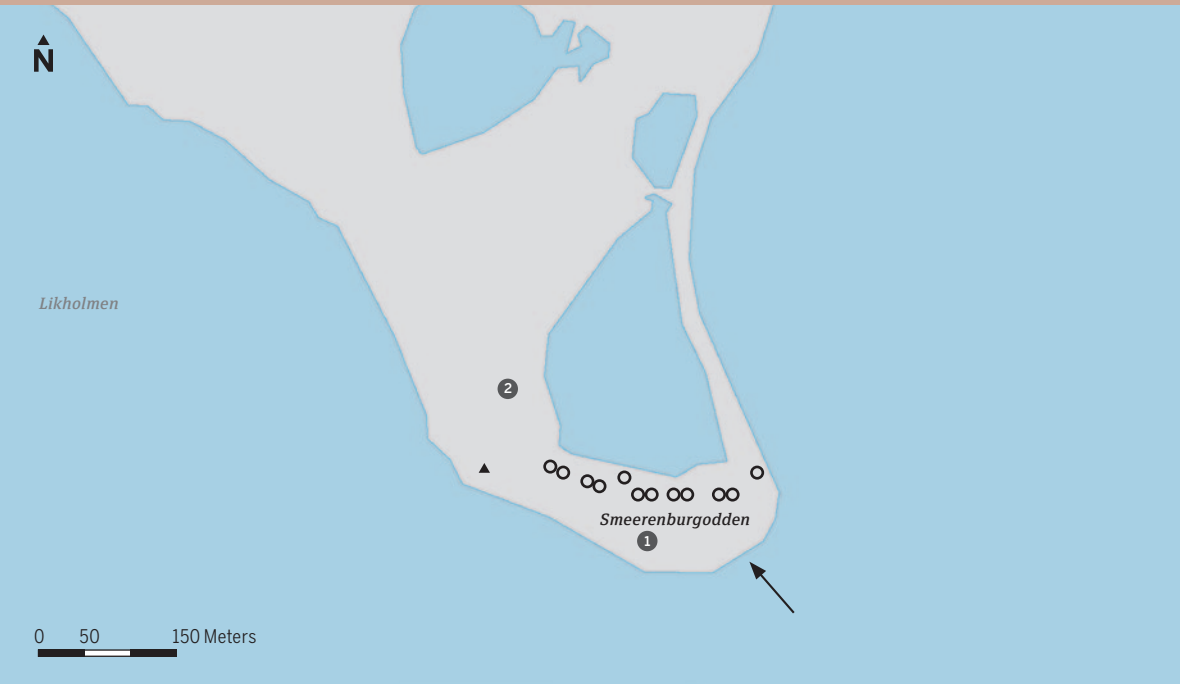
The main part of Smeerenburg was built on fine-grain sand. Most probably there was no vegetation here during the whaling period, but over the years a thin moss cover has developed. Behind the outer plain is a large vegetated area with polygonal ground, perfectly sorted with wet clay in the center, surrounded by larger stones.

FAUNA

Common eider and Arctic tern breed close to the shore. Arctic skua and probably also great skua breed on the flat inland area. This is a feeding and moulting area for barnacle goose. Several species of waders, including ringed plover, ruddy turnstone, purple sandpiper and sanderling inhabit the area. Harbor seals are residents in the area and can often be seen resting on stones near the shore. Walrus, reindeer, polar bear and Arctic fox may frequent the area.

CULTURAL REMAINS

The most visible traces after the whaling station of Smeerenburg is the "concrete" from the 12 remaining blubber ovens. The asphalt-looking mass was formed by the greasy whale oil, which was blended with sand and gravel. Long after Smeerenburg was abandoned, it was still used as a harbor of refuge, equipment storage, a rendezvous for whale boats in the spring and autumn and as a burial ground. 101 graves are found in the area.



MAP SYMBOLS

- ← Landing area
- ① Information board
- ② Graves
- ▲ Cairn
- Blubber oven

Guidelines

- Stay on the beach as long as the area is snow-covered and wet in order to avoid unintentional trampling on the cultural heritage remains and damage to the vegetation.
- Observe the remains of the blubber ovens and the graves from the perimeter.
- The small pieces of blubber concrete are also protected and must not be touched.
- Retreat if terns and skuas attack while watching were you step to avoid trampling on eggs and chicks.
- Especially in late June and in July, approach the area carefully and allow family groups of geese and eiders to make a controlled retreat.
- The polygonal ground behind the plain is muddy, partly very muddy. Walking in the area could cause visible footprints.



Photo: Frigg Jørgensen

Limit walking to the beach area when the ground is still snow-covered or wet.



Photo: Trond Haugskott

Harbor seal, the only seals in Svalbard that rest on stones, especially at low tide.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rappv

An asphalt-looking mass formed by greasy whale oil.

Tip

Smeerenburg is one of the northernmost places where harbor seals are often seen.

79°51.3'N 011°35.9'E

Ytre Norskøya

Nordvest-Spitsbergen National Park
Ytre Norskøya means "Outer Norwegian island".

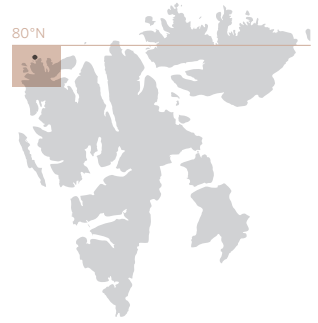


Photo: Jørn Henriksen

Old whalers' paths

For the whalers, catching sight of the whales as early as possible was of utmost importance. The important "spotters" were positioned in lookouts with good views of the ocean. While waiting they enjoyed their clay pipes and wine. When the first whalers arrived in 1611, the waters were "boiling" with whales. About 200 years later the big whales in the north were almost exterminated. Today visitors can walk on the old whalers' paths to enjoy the sight from this last point of land before the North Pole.

VEGETATION

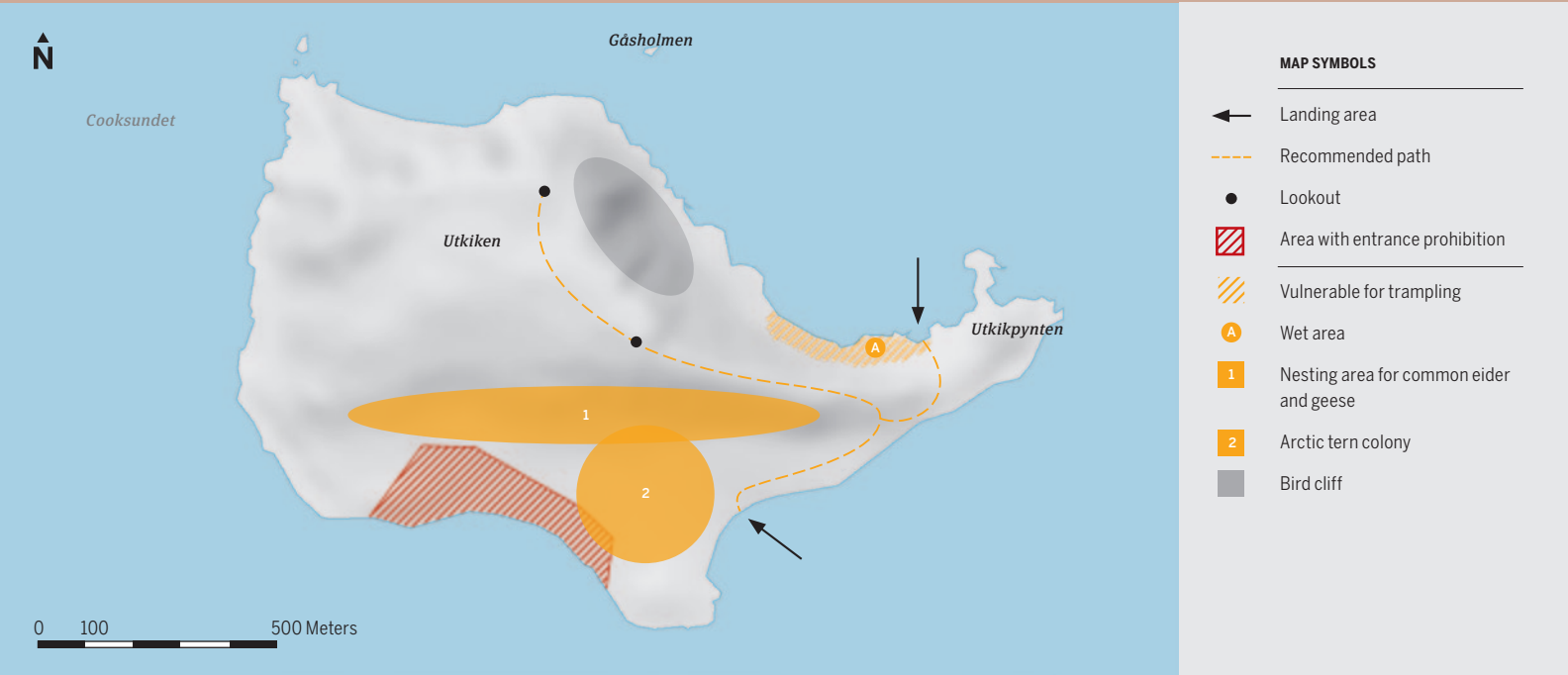
At first sight Ytre Norskøya looks barren and shale-covered. But as you pass the shoreline fantastic carpets of colorful moss cover, called golden moss tundra, appear. Further up in the landscape is solid rock and stone, and the vegetation cover is sparse and dominated by grey moss and lichens. Some flowering plants are present, like wood rushes, Svalbard poppies, and large populations of pygmy buttercups.

FAUNA

The bird cliff on the island is occupied by many thousand seabirds. The little auk is most common, but other breeding birds include Brünnich's guillemot, Atlantic puffin, black guillemot and glaucous gull. Several pairs of Arctic tern, Arctic skua and sometimes great skua breed on the lower part of the island. Other breeding birds here are barnacle goose, common eider and purple sandpiper.

CULTURAL REMAINS

The burial ground at Ytre Norskøya, with 165 graves, is one of the largest in Svalbard. Fifty of the graves were excavated by Dutch archaeologists in 1980. Clothes and textiles from the graves are part of the "Smeerenburg-collection", on exhibit at the Svalbard Museum in Longyearbyen. The whaling station is also one of Svalbard's largest.



Guidelines

- Observe the entrance prohibition at the cultural heritage site. All traffic is forbidden but the remains can be observed from the Utkiken mountain or from the ridge on the western side.
- Especially in late June and in July, approach the island carefully to allow family groups of geese and eiders to make a controlled retreat.
- Retreat if terns and skuas attack while watching where you step to avoid trampling on eggs and chicks.
- Walk around the wettest part of the moss tundra as it has small tolerance for trampling. Pay special attention at the borderline between the shoreline and the moss tundra.



Photo: Linda Drake

The barnacle goose is found in three different populations in the Arctic; Svalbard, northeast Greenland and northwest Russia.

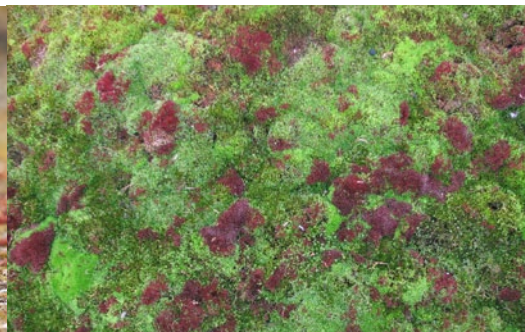


Photo: Dagmar Hagen

The golden moss is like a colorful treasure in the grey landscape at Ytre Norskøya.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

The Svalbard puppy holds its ground.

Tip

The Atlantic puffin, nicknamed the sea parrot, nests in the bird cliff on the northern side of the island. From the top area of the mountain it is possible to get good views of the puffins, as well as guillemots, barnacle geese and glaucous gulls.

It is possible to land in different places around the island and also possible to walk over the mountain along the old whalers' paths.

78°57.8'N 012°2.9'E

London

The Norwegians jokingly called the English camp "London", and this name came into general use.

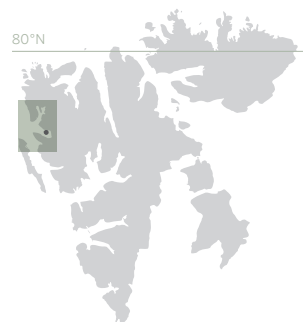


Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

The marble bubble

An enterprising and charming Englishman created a lot of enthusiasm when he claimed to have found an entire island of marble. Money was quickly in place and industrial equipment bought and shipped to Blomstrandhalvøya. The marble was beautiful while left in the ground, but during transportation it crumbled to pieces. The pipe dream was demolished.

VEGETATION

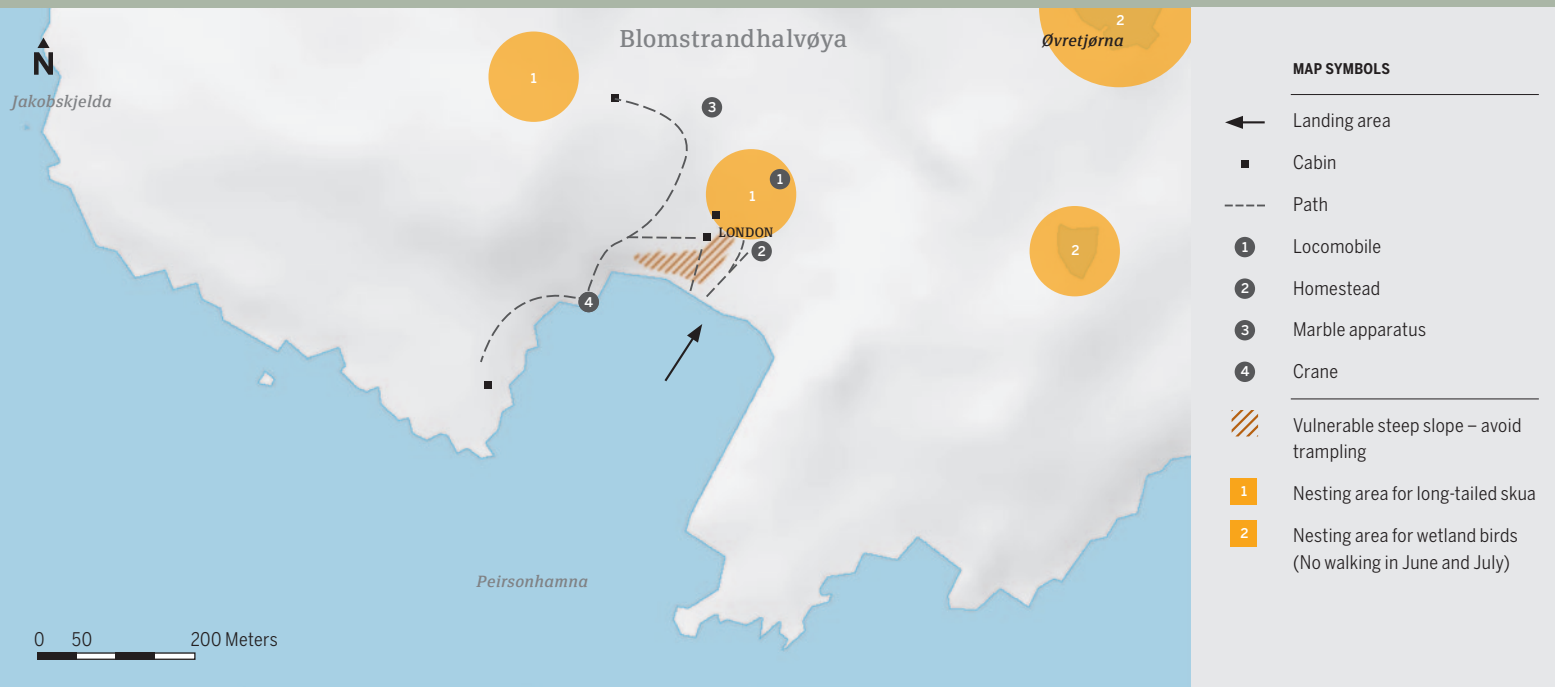
The vegetation at Blomstrandhalvøya and London illustrates how temperature, water and snow conditions create a mosaic of different plant communities. The white Arctic bell heather needs snow cover in the winter, and in Svalbard it is only found in the temperate inner fjord areas, as here at London. Go down on your knees and smell the beautiful scent. The mountain avens and Svalbard poppies use their parabolic flowers to catch sunlight for ripening the seeds.

FAUNA

The long-tailed skua is rare in Svalbard, but a few pairs breed here as well as Arctic skua and Arctic tern. Several pairs of rock ptarmigan can often be found in the surrounding hills. It is easiest to catch sight of the male, which in summer is grey-white. Reindeer and Arctic fox are also common in the area.

CULTURAL REMAINS

London is inextricably attached to Ernest Mansfield and Northern Exploration Company Ltd, NEC. The marble deposits were discovered in 1906 and the adventure started in 1911, but the dream of an easy profit ended quickly, and the industrial town and all of the advanced technical equipment were left behind. Almost all houses were moved from London to Ny-Ålesund in the 1950s. Today London is still the place in Svalbard with the most preserved technical equipment dating from before World War I.



Guidelines

- Please use the existing paths up to the cabins. Do not use the brink as a crosscut. The fine-grained soil is easily eroded and very vulnerable to trampling.
- Use existing tracks whenever possible.
- Please keep distance to the breeding long-tailed skua. It will warn you by flying very close, possibly dive-bombing you and make anxious noises. Return in the direction you came from, until the bird has calmed down.
- Observe the house ruins and construction sites from a perimeter. Avoid trampling as the cultural remains are fragile.
- Small pieces of marble are also protected cultural remains as part of the heritage site. They are not to be removed.
- Please respect privacy if the cabins are occupied.



Photo: Jørn Henriksen

Gently rub the white Arctic bell and smell the beautiful scent.



Photo: Yan-Ali Tabarand

The “locomobile” – one of the advanced technologies used in London.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

The long-tailed skua from Svalbard winter mostly in the ocean around South Africa.

Tip

London is a great location for creative photography. The old buildings and constructions make excellent backdrops.

79°7.3'N 011°50.9'E

Fjortende Julibukta

Nordvest-Spitsbergen National Park
Named after the National Day of France.

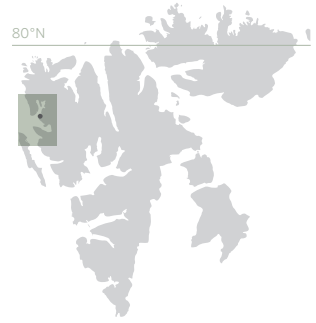


Photo: Yan-Ali Tabarand

The Hanging Gardens of Svalbard

Very few places near 79° North can offer more opulent vegetation than this very special site. Here you can enjoy the rich diversity and colors of Arctic vegetation and nice smells at close range. The bay close to the glacier offers one of the most beautiful beaches in the Arctic. The water temperature may not be impressive but the view is!

VEGETATION

This site offers very contrasting vegetation within a few hundred meters, from the barren gravel near the glacier to the most spectacular flowering meadows below the bird cliff. The high diversity of species and the size of individual plants make the site a vegetation hotspot. Species like the yellow polar dandelion and black erigeron have a restricted distribution at Svalbard, but are seen in large numbers under this bird cliff. These can be observed from below, without walking up the slope.

FAUNA

The bird cliff above the shore holds thousands of seabirds, including Brünnich's guillemot, black-legged kittiwake, northern fulmar, glaucous gull, black guillemot, little auk, Atlantic puffin and a few razorbill. A few pairs of Arctic skua breed close to the shore and barnacle and pink-footed geese breed on the slopes below the cliff. Reindeer also frequent these slopes. Good numbers of common eider and Arctic tern can be seen around the bay.



Guidelines

- Stay along the shore and the lower flat area to avoid disturbance of breeding and foraging geese and trampling on the loose vegetation on the slope.
- Walk around the wetland areas as they have very low-trampling tolerance.
- The breeding areas for Brünnich's guillemot, Atlantic puffin and razorbill can be observed from the small ridge to the east of it. Avoid walking into the breeding area.
- This breeding area can also be observed from the water, but beware of shallow waters.



Photo: Georg Bangjord

The Atlantic puffin is also known as the sea parrot.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

The cliff is like a botanic garden with high diversity of species, also in sizes rarely seen in Svalbard.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Go for a swim from one of Svalbard's finest beaches.

Tip

Stroll along the beach towards the glacier, Fjortende Julibreen. However, do not approach too close and in the event of a calving be aware of the surging wave.

79°16.3'N 011°32.1'E

Signehamna

Nordvest-Spitsbergen National Park – Named after Signe Amalie Isachsen, the wife of the polar and Spitsbergen explorer, Gunnar Isachsen. The bay was mapped and named by the expedition to Spitsbergen which Prince Albert I of Monaco organized and Gunnar Isachsen led in 1906 and 1907.

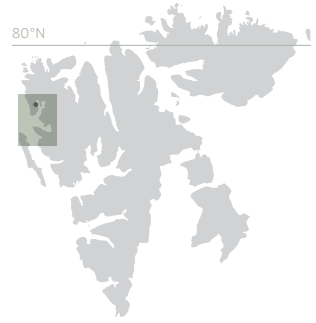


Photo: Jørn Henriksen

The war for weather data in mighty nature

Weather information can make the difference of a battle lost or won. In World War II German generals realized the value of weather data in the North Atlantic and established weather stations in Svalbard from 1941. In the beautiful surroundings of Signehamna, men overwintered and sent daily weather data to the German military. In 1943, Norwegian forces bombed and burnt the Signehamna station.

VEGETATION

The vegetation at Signehamna is quite ordinary, but very characteristic, and envelops the amazing and interesting landscape. The grey moss carpet covers large areas, and the presence of yellow reindeer lichen indicates that the area is not heavily used by reindeer. Polar willow and wood rush are the dominant flowering plants. The walk from landing site up to the cultural remains passes through a perfect polygonal ground, and the shape of the stone ring is enhanced by vegetation in different colours.

FAUNA

The bird cliff, Nilspynten, holds thousands of seabirds, dominated by Brünnich's guillemot and black-legged kittiwake. The lakes and their direct surroundings feature breeding red-throated diver, Arctic tern, Arctic and great skua, barnacle goose and purple sandpiper. Black-legged kittiwakes from Nilspynten use the lakes as a bathing place.

CULTURAL REMAINS

Supporting legs to an antenna and remains of batteries lie on a ridge not visible from the fjord. By Lake Hajeren lie the remains of the manned weather stations, Knospe and Nussbaum. Large amounts of technical equipment, domestic utensils, personal outfits, fuel barrels and bits of tent canvas from the station building is spread around on the ground.



Guidelines

- Do not enter the ruins of Knospe and Nussbaum. Watch from a distance to avoid damaging the fragile remains.
- Please do not pick-up or in any way rearrange any of the small and larger objects at this site.
- If the terns attack, walk away while watching where you step to avoid trampling on eggs and chicks.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

The rusty barrels are protected cultural heritage remains.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Binoculars are almost compulsory when traveling in Svalbard.



Photo: Georg Bangjord

The red-throated diver is the smallest of the divers and has circumpolar distribution.

Tip

An approximately one kilometer hike from Knospe and Nussbaum in a westerly direction will bring you to a hill from where you will have good sight of three freshwater lakes, as well as a view of Signehamna with the Lilliehök glacier as a backdrop.

76°56.6'N 015°50.9'E

Gåshamna

Sør-Spitsbergen National Park – Gåshamna means “goose bay” in Norwegian. “...the bay is called Bowles Bay by the English and Goeshaven by the Dutch...” (Conway).

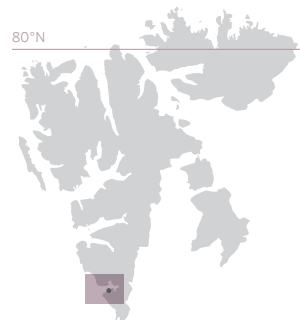


Photo: Christopher Ide

The earth was not circular after all

During the large Russian Arc of Meridian Expedition in 1899-1900, the scientists were making trigonometric measurements in Gåshamna and made what was considered a sensational discovery of the time. The scientists worked over large areas, measuring the distance between latitudes and determined the earth was flattened at the Poles.

VEGETATION

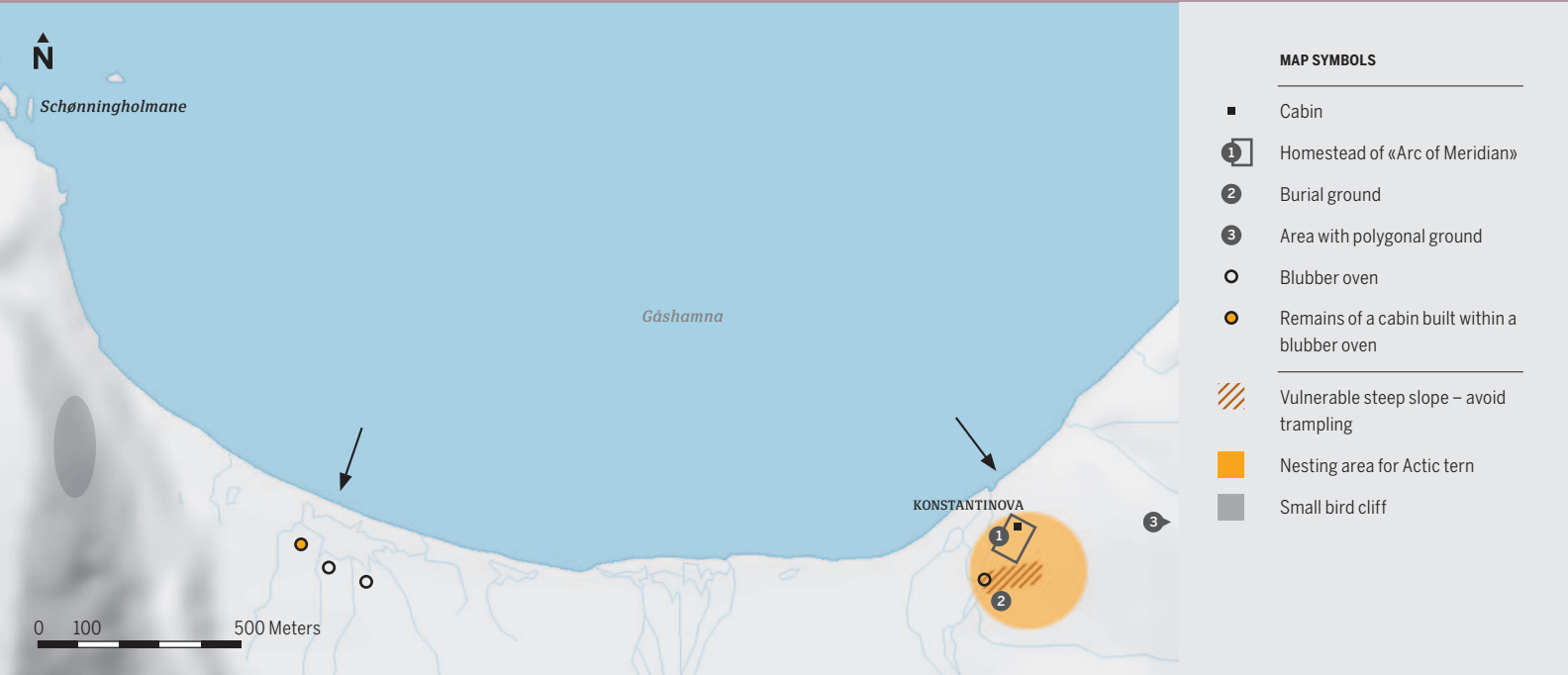
Gåshamna is barren with a few plant species scattered over the gravel and sand. Next to the cultural remains are green spots of vegetation, due to the supply of nutrients from human whaling and hunting activities of the past.

FAUNA

This area holds relatively few species and low numbers of animals and birds. A few pairs of Arctic tern, Arctic skua and common eider breed here.

CULTURAL REMAINS

The ruins of the large Russian research station built for the Arc of Meridian Expedition appear as colorful spots in a grayish landscape. The remains include a residence, laboratory and an observatory. Later, a small cabin for Norwegian overwintering trappers was built within the remains of the station and was named Konstantinovka. Fragments of two large 17th century English whaling stations with their blubber ovens flank the river delta. Most creative is perhaps the Norwegian trapper's cabin built of whale bones and crates within the remains of a blubber oven.



Guidelines

- The moss carpet surrounding the blubber ovens and the whalebones are fragile. Walk carefully and minimise trampling on vegetation by walking on the barren soil.
- When visiting the whaling burial ground, enter from the eastern side to avoid erosion in the steep slope.
- Observe the house ruins and blubber ovens from a perimeter and avoid trampling on them.
- If the terns attack, walk away while watching where you step to avoid trampling on eggs and chicks.



Photo: Jørn Henriksen

It is sometimes difficult to recognize blubber ovens. Green vegetation is typical.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Remains of a large Russian research station.



Photo: Jørn Henriksen

Arctic tern – attacks when you come close to eggs and chicks.

Tip

On the ridge east of the ruins is a large area with polygonal ground.

77°0.9'N 015°52.3'E

Gnålodden

Sør-Spitsbergen National Park – Gnålodden has its name from the incessantly humming mountain Gnålberget, that is inhabited by a large number of shrieking black-legged kittiwakes.

80°N

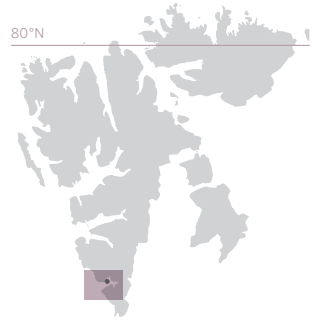


Photo: Jørn Henriksen

Trapper cabin under the sound of birds

The female hunter and trapper Wanny Woldstad was tougher than most males. Below the steep and very noisy bird cliff she stayed in one of her hunting cabins. The cabin stands as a monument over toil and self-denial. Her nearest neighbors were the remains of a Russian trapping station and a grave of a 17th century whaler.

VEGETATION

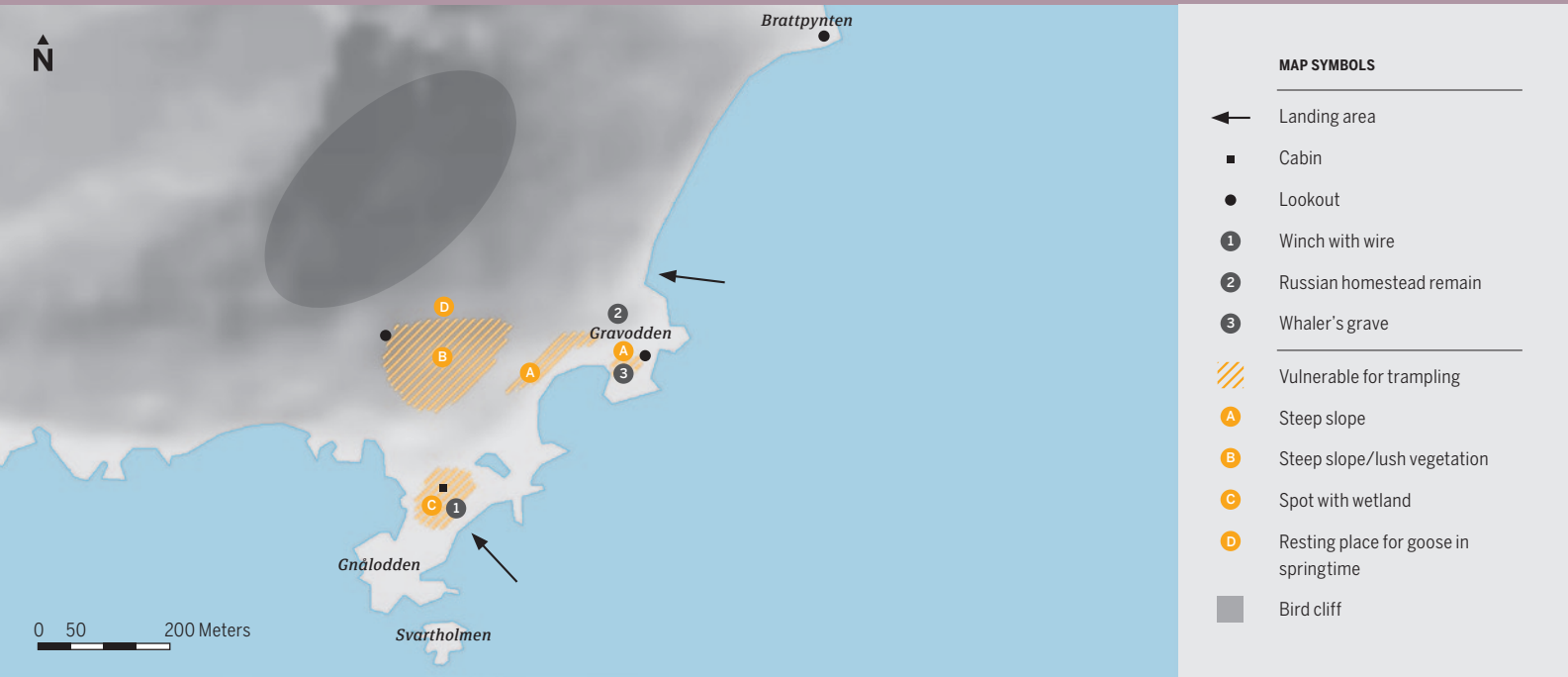
The south facing slope and rich nutrient supply from the large bird colony makes this a particularly productive vegetation site. Just inside the shoreline are continuous carpets of moss. Large diversity of flora can be found further up the cliff, including several species of buttercups, saxifrages, and a large population of the rare alpine rock cress.

FAUNA

The most striking feature of Gnålodden is the bird cliff in the characteristic Gnålberget mountain. This spectacular cliff is occupied by thousands of seabirds, dominated by three species; black-legged kittiwake, Brünnich's guillemot and northern fulmar. The ice in the fjord is also a good area for finding bearded seal and is frequently visited by polar bear.

CULTURAL REMAINS

Below the bird cliff is an old trappers' cabin used by Norwegian overwintering hunting and trapping parties. The cabin is well known because of the legendary female trapper, Wanny Wolstad. She used it as a satellite station when she overwintered in Hyttevika, just north of Hornsund, in the 1930's. Not far from the cabin a small homestead used by Russian overwintering parties during the 18th century and what presumably is a whaler's grave from the 17th century.



Guidelines

- Please walk on the vegetation-free shoreline when walking between the cultural heritage sites.
- The moss carpet surrounding the cabin and the pond is fragile. Walk carefully and minimise trampling on vegetation.
- It is quite easy to reach the lower part of the bird cliff and observe the breeding birds without disturbing them. However, beware of falling/rolling rocks from the cliff as falling rocks can be triggered from people walking.
- You are welcome to visit the cabin unless it is occupied. Remember to close the door behind you when leaving the cabin.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Remember to close the door behind you when leaving the cabin.

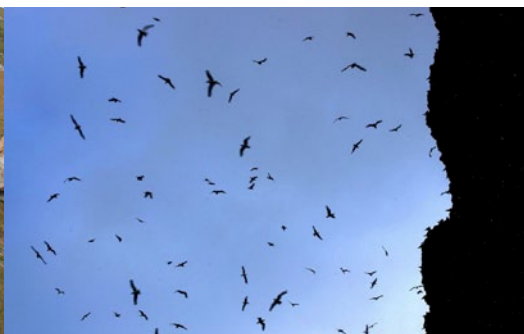


Photo: Jørn Henriksen

Thousands of seabirds occupy the spectacular cliff, Gnålberget.



Photo: Dagmar Hagen

The rare alpine rock cress can be found in Gnålodden.

Tip

A small walking-excursion can bring you to the point east of Gnålodden from where you can view the large glacier fronts in Burgerbukta, the Sofiakammen mountain and potentially seals and bears on the ice.

77°33.1'N 014°58.8'E

Ahlstrandhalvøya

Sør-Spitsbergen National Park – Ahlstrandhalvøya is named after the Swedish librarian, Johan August Ahlstrand (1822-96) who was interested in polar exploration.

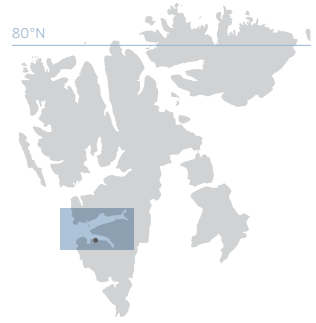


Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

When belugas were big business

Large piles of beluga whale bones adorn the beach, the result of hectic and valuable summer-hunting during the interwar years. The beluga blubber as well as the skin was sought after. The beluga whales swam in large groups into the fjords where trappers were waiting with large seine nets to close the mouth of the fjord, trapping and slaughtering the whales.

This slaughtering place is a unique cultural remain in Svalbard.

VEGETATION — This is one of the most favorable and productive climatic regions for plants at Svalbard. Within the range of a short walk, several of the most typical of Svalbard vegetation types can be observed, including saxifrage heath, wetland, grassland, moss heath, along with exposed ridges of vegetation.

FAUNA — The birdlife on this peninsula is relatively rich and varied and Ahlstrandhalvøya is an important feeding area for family groups of barnacle geese and female common eider. Several species of waders, including ruddy turnstone, purple sandpiper, sanderling and grey phalarope are also present in the area. Reindeer are commonly seen grazing on the rich vegetation.

CULTURAL REMAINS — The cabin, Bamsebu, in Ingebrigtsenbukta, was built as a beluga whaling station and is the only excellent example of a beluga whaling station remaining in Svalbard. Next to the cabin is the small storage place, Kjeftausa, where a turned boat forms the roof. Three of the seine boats lie on the beach in Fleur de Lyshamna. The names of the bays, beaches and headlands of Ahlstrandhalvøya originated from the cultural heritage environment connected with the hunting of beluga.



MAP SYMBOLS

←	Landing area
■	Cabin
①	Slaughtering place for beluga
②	Seine boats
<hr/>	
▨	Vulnerable for trampling
Ⓐ	Wet area
Ⓑ	Scattered vegetation on fine substrate
■	Important nesting area

Guidelines

- The slaughtering place and the remains of the belugas are protected cultural remains. Please do not touch.
- The small patches of wetland next to the cabin Bamsebu have low trampling tolerance, so please walk outside them.
- In late June through July, approach carefully in order to let family groups of geese and eiders make a controlled retreat. This cautionary behavior will help to avoid chicks being separated from the adults, making them easy prey for glaucous gull and Arctic fox.
- From late May through July avoid traffic on and around the islets off Fleur de Lyshamna as birds are breeding there.
- Please respect the private cabin Bamsebu.



Photo: Yan-Ali Tabarnd

The spectacular tilted folded strata are part of the Ullaberget series.



Photo: Trond Haugskott

The charming grey phalarope is relatively common in the area.



Photo: Ole Magnus Rapp

Quite well kept seine boats lie on the beach in Fleur de Lyshamna.

Tip

A four kilometer hike will take you from Ingebrigtsenbukta to Fleur de Lyshamna. If you walk the first part along the beach you will avoid the wet tundra. During the trip you will cross the spectacular tilted folded strata of the Ullaberget series.

77°39.4'N 014°44.4'E

Gåsbergkilen

Gåsbergkilen means the goose rock bay.

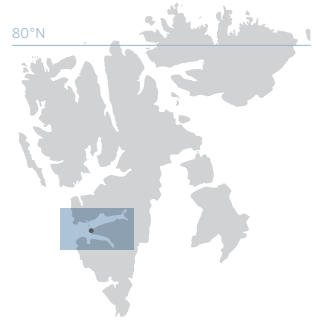


Photo: Yan-Ali Tabarand

Green oasis made by birds

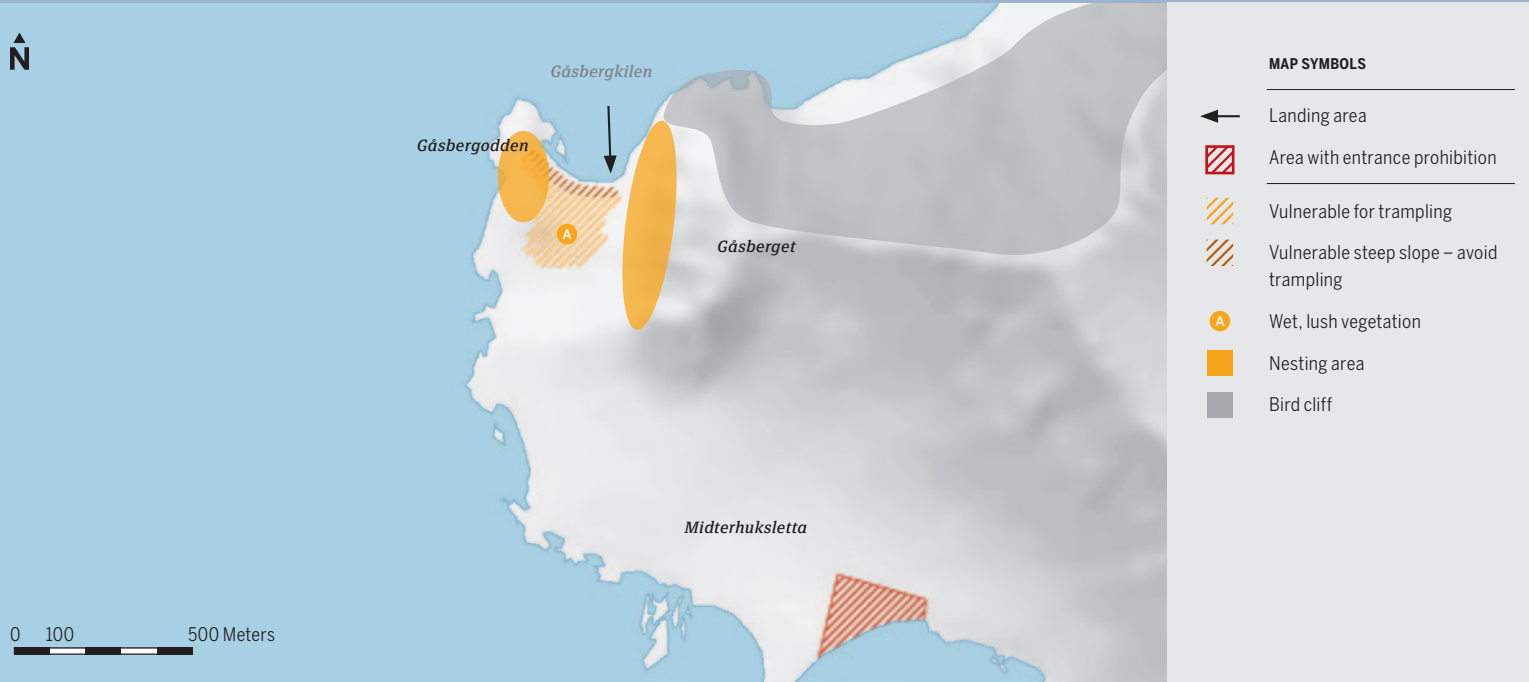
This place is full of life, but it is also quite sensitive so set your foot gently and pay special attention to the guidelines. Through thousands of years of accumulated guano from the bird cliff, this area developed a thick peat, which is now the bed for very lush plant-life. The bird cliff is full of life all through the summer. Over it flies the glaucous gull, searching for food. Arctic fox are often seen under the cliff in search of prey.

VEGETATION

This is one of the very few areas at Svalbard with patches of peat, and the vegetation cover is exceptionally thick and productive. The combination of moist and temperate climate in the fjord and nutrients from the nearby bird cliff have created this biomass hotspot. The turfs of peat moss and flower-size variation of turf saxifrage are well worth observing.

FAUNA

The bird cliff in Midterhuken is one of the largest on the west coast of Spitsbergen and is dominated by Brünnich's guillemot and black-legged kittiwake. This is one of the few places in Svalbard where razorbill and common guillemot are found. It is also an important area for barnacle and pink-footed goose.



Guidelines

- This site requires special attention to the guidelines for any visitors and guides.
- From late May through June activity ashore should be restricted to the beach only, due to the large numbers of breeding geese.
- Especially in late June through July, approach the area cautiously to let family groups of geese retreat calmly.
- The vegetated brink next to the shoreline is very fragile, and each single trampling will cause erosion. If you enter the vegetated area, use the stony slope at the eastern end of the beach.
- You can get great views of the bird cliff from the sea, but drive slowly to avoid bird jumping. Beware of rock fall.



Photo: Georg Bangjord

Accumulated guano from birds has made Gåsbergkilen a green oasis, which also has polygonal ground.



Photo: Georg Bangjord

Pink-footed goose – starts breeding right after arrival in the second half of May.



Photo: Trond Haugskott

Brünnich's guillemot – among these a few common guillemot.

Tip

Beware of the protected cultural heritage site on Midterhuksletta. Landings and visits within the area are prohibited, but you will have a good view of all the remains from the hillside above, which can be reached by walking from Gåsbergkilen.