

EXPLORATION HISTORY AND PLACE NAMES OF NORTHERN EAST GREENLAND. Anthony K. Higgins. 2010. Copenhagen: Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland (Bulletin 21). 368 p. illustrated, hard cover. ISSN 1604-8156; ISBN 978-87-7871-292-9. DKK 200.

Expeditions have always regarded it as their prerogative to bestow names on geographical features which they encounter. Perhaps this is reasonable, but it does lead to a profusion of bizarre or inappropriate names, not to mention the multiple naming of individual features, often by groups unaware of existing names. Perhaps this is true of Arctic exploration in particular, where indigenous names are unknown to the explorers and the names of earlier explorers go unheeded.

Examples of such names in East Greenland include cumbersome names such as Geographical Society Ø and Hold with Hope (a venerable name going back to Henry Hudson's voyage in 1607) and multiple names. In West Greenland an example of this is Frobisher's Cape Desolation, the indigenous name of which, Nunarsuit, was certainly unknown to him. Of course, the most common dual names are Danish and Greenlandic as in the case of the numerous Redekammen [comb]/Kidlavat found throughout Greenland. These were earlier regarded as equivalent, but with the institution of home rule in 1979 and later, in 2009, self-government, there has been an increasing tendency to prioritise Greenlandic names. This is especially true of towns, where the Danish name has gradually been dropped from official signs, tourist literature, web-sites and the like.

A very special problem in Greenland comes with the indigenous language. Traditionally, place names used the old orthography, which among other features has diacritical marks to aid pronunciation. However, there was a spelling reform in 1973, in which these marks were abolished and long vowels came to be shown with a doubled letter, as for example in Nuuk, the capital, which was earlier Nûk. This is not the end of the matter however. The official language is that of West Greenland, whereas East Greenland has its own dialect such that the two are effectively mutually unintelligible. The upshot of this is that the settlement of Scoresbysund has two new style Greenlandic versions: Illoqqortoormiut and Ittoqqortoormiit (which translate as 'the people of the big houses'). It also had two old style Greenlandic versions, but was then generally known as Scoresbysund on maps and official literature.

Another cultural factor which applies in northeastern Greenland is that much of the area was claimed by Norway at one time and Norwegian names were bestowed on most features. Many of these Norwegian names (but not all) have not been authenticated.

The purpose of place names is, of course, to allow places to be unambiguously referred to in conversation, official documents, technical reports, etc. In contrast to expedition personnel, who saw topographic features as an opportunity to bestow immortality either on each other, their girlfriends or their sponsors, the Inuit had a purely utilitarian use for names and as such, generally the name became that of the feature's main character. Thus, the same name comes up time and time again as well as in various versions such as: 'the big fjord', 'the little fjord' 'the not-so-big fjord', etc. Not surprisingly in the high Arctic the sun played a big role and place names including

'saaqqaq' meaning 'the sunny side' and 'alangorsuaq' or 'the shady side' are abundant. Interestingly, William Scoresby tells us that he gave the name of his father to the magnificent body of water, said to be the world's longest fjord, since known as Scoresby Sund or simply Kangerlussuaq or 'Big Fjord' to the Greenlanders (or in the old orthography Kangerdlugsuaq). This must be Greenland's commonest place name).

Perhaps this introduction gives some idea of the confusion of place names, which has grown up in northeastern Greenland over the years. Clearly, there needs to be some kind of standard list to which one can refer and the present volume provides just that. Such a work has been missed for long by scientists working in the area, especially since Svalbard (an area with many similarities, but no indigenous population) has been covered since 2003 by Orheim and others (2003). The rather complex history of the committee on place names, now Nunat Aqqinik Aalajangiisartut, means that it has not always been easy to find out what the correct name and its spelling is. The present volume solves this problem for the approximately one third of the island of Greenland.

The *Exploration history and place names of northern East Greenland* is a very considerable work of scholarship, which represents many years of work by the author. It covers the area from 69°N to 81°21N, which is rather more than the area of the national park, but about half the extent of the administrative area known as East Greenland (Tunu). Over 3000 officially approved names occur in the area but there are probably around as many again unapproved names, many of which are also to be found in this volume, clearly marked as such. There is a discussion of the precise meaning of 'approved/nonapproved' at the outset, as well as a deeper-going examination of the problems, and others, set out above, and this makes very interesting reading. This is succeeded by a very detailed exploration history of northeastern Greenland, starting with the first people, the Palaeoeskimos, as long ago as 2500 BC, continuing via Norse voyaging in the period 1000–1250 AD, Henry Hudson (1607) and continuing up to 2008 with detailed descriptions of about 450 expeditions. These expeditions range from major enterprises over several years, using aircraft and ships, to university expeditions and one- or two-man enterprises. An example of the first type is the four-summer 'Treårsekspedition to Christian X's Land' [The Three-year Expedition to East Greenland] led by Lauge Koch and numbering as many as 109 personnel in 1933, the penultimate summer. An extreme example of the latter is the single-handed voyage and overwintering at Sydkap in Scoresby Sund in 1959–1960 by Tristan Jones in a converted wooden lifeboat. This is the most complete expedition list ever made and has been culled from a variety of sources, including numerous reports to the Danish Polar Centre (now defunct). A report to this body was one of the conditions for expeditions to be given permission by the Danish authorities. This entire section is filled with interest, not only for people who are familiar with the area, but for those with a genuine interest in polar travel.

The actual list of names takes up most of the book (pages 117–349). It begins with explanations: the meaning of normal type and bold type, italics and capitals and the position in the alphabet of the Danish letters Æ, Ø and Å (also Aa and not to be confused with the Greenlandic Aa, which comes at the beginning of the alphabet). Each name is identified with a Place Names Committee reference number and latitude and longitude in degrees, minutes and tenths of a minute. The

exclusion of prospectors place names used only in confidential company reports and many mountaineers' names (with the exception of the Stauning Alps, which is given in Map 5) is explained.

Naturally, such a list of names is a reference work, not designed to be read from beginning to end. However, it must on no account be thought of as dull reading. The origin of most place names is given in detail, often with further information, sometimes amounting to a short story, making serendipitous reading a delight.

After the place names, there is a glossary giving the meaning of Danish official names, acronyms and abbreviations. There is also a translation of Danish geographical terms. The book finishes with a reference list and Maps 1 to 3, which show sub-areas. Map 4, showing the whole of the area covered, and Map 5, the Stauning Alps, are in front and back pockets).

This is a magnificent book, which should be a must for all polar libraries and will be enthusiastically read by all polar-interested types. This reviewer has thoroughly enjoyed dipping in to it, even though it does not cover his own primary area of interest. How can such a work be a page-turner? I found it difficult to put down. I was not able to find more than a very few errors, all of small importance (for example on page 78 the yacht's name was *Rundø* not *Rondø* and on pages 17, 102, 104, the name of the travel company in Scoresbysund is Nanu Travel Aps, not Nuna Travel Aps). I have also been

informed that the photograph on p. 57 (Fig. 20) does not show geologist John Haller, but photographer (and author of the book *Arctic Riviera*) Ernst Hofer, a no doubt easy-to-make mistake. A small *errata* slip has recently been circulated correcting, among other matters, the name of the Editor of this journal who acted as reviewer for the book. Interest is greatly increased by many tastefully chosen illustrations, in both monochrome and colour: maps (for example on p. 24: part of Carl Ryder's map of inner Scoresby Sund from 1891–1892), expedition ships (for example on p. 69: *Magga Dan* used as a floating base during mapping of Scoresby Sund), topographical features (for example on p. 184: the amazing spire known as Grundtvigskirken in Renland) and historic photos (for example on p. 55: Lauge Koch's Norseman aircraft from the 1950s). Higgins has done a wonderful job in cutting through a mass of confusion and producing a handsome volume, which certainly answers the question of researchers as to what is the correct name to use in their publications. In conclusion, this exhaustive work cannot be too highly recommended. (Kent Brooks, Museum of Natural History, University of Copenhagen, Øster Voldgade 5-7, 1350 Copenhagen K, Denmark.)

Reference

Orheim, O., A. Urset, and G.S. Jaklin. 2003. *The place names of Svalbard*. Oslo:Norsk Polarinstitutt (Rapportserie 122).