

# Chapter 1. Remarks on the opening of the historic place names of Franz Josef Land workshop, Oslo, Norway, 12-13 May 2015<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Remarks at the opening of a workshop, sponsored by the U.S. National Science Foundation, and held in Oslo, Norway, from 12-13 May 2015, to discuss the historic place names of the High Arctic archipelago of Franz Josef Land. The visiting students from Penn State University, none of whom had ever before been to Europe, were anxious to hear how Dr. Barr, a native of the United Kingdom, had come to Norway and made a life for herself in a different country with a different language, as a female in a then-largely male universe of polar research, and, in a nation of hunters, as a vegetarian.

## Keywords

Franz Josef Land, polar exploration, Oslo NSF workshop, women in polar studies

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7557/5.3578>

I want to say welcome to Norway but there's nobody here who's Norwegian, which is quite interesting, except for the two of us who live here. I've lived here for a lot more than half my life. The area where we are now (near the Oslo Opera House and the buildings known collectively as the 'bar code') is the area where Oslo was originally established, and now we've started all this building out here, and in the process uncovered quite a lot of interesting boat wrecks. So the contractors are having to put in a lot of money for the archaeological work here, which is rather nice.

I'd also like to say, this book of Pete's that's coming, on the American story in Franz Josef Land, I think it's just fabulous. It's going to be the Bible for these expeditions in years to come. Absolutely amazing. He brought up the subject, and it hadn't yet existed really. Perhaps because the Americans didn't really get close to the North Pole, even though they were supposed to be there for that purpose, those expeditions to Franz Josef Land have been forgotten.

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<sup>2</sup> About the author: Dr. Susan Barr of the Cultural Ministry in Oslo, Norway, is a preeminent polar historian and ethnologist. As one of the first Westerners to visit many of the historic sites of Franz Josef Land just as the Soviet Union collapsed, she edited the seminal volume *Franz Josef Land* (Oslo: Norsk Polarinstitutt, 1995), among her dozens of article and monograph works in the history and exploration of the Polar Regions.



Fig. 1. Penn State University student Jackie Lanning (right) presenting her polar art print to Dr. Susan Barr, 12 May 2015 (© Dr. C.L. Devlin).

I have worked in polar areas since 1979. But the first time I came to Norway was 1968. And I have lived here permanently since 1973. The first reason to come here had nothing to do with history: it was to go skiing. I wanted good, long winters, and lots of skiing. So I kept coming backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, from Britain. I went to university here for a while, and met the man I married and that was ... when you get stuck.

So now I'm a bit sort of in between. People ask, well are you Norwegian? Well, I'm not. I'm still British. If it's a skiing race between Sweden and Norway, then it's Norway all the time. If it's a football match between Norway and England then it's England all the time. So a bit mixed up.

But I have to say that, by now, I dream more in Norwegian. And it's a bit embarrassing, as I speak pretty good English and then I suddenly say, oh, what's that word in English... Just

silly. Virtually all of my work has been in Norwegian. It took a long time before I understood that I should publish in English because the market increased from 50 people to 100 people. And I've actually brought for you one of the very first books I ever wrote, so it's pretty old by now. But it's quite a good overview of Norway's polar territories. It's mostly still relevant.

But so many things have changed in these areas in the past 30 years. So this early book says that there's no tourism but now there's a lot of tourism, the kind of tourism on land where you go into hotels and shops and all that sort of thing. And one other thing was that the illustrations were meant to be in color. So one of them says, look at the wonderful colors. There aren't any colors! But apart from that, the facts are still quite good.

Norway is the only country in the world that has territories in both the Arctic and the Antarctic. And they also, interestingly enough, have the northernmost island on the mid-Atlantic ridge and the southernmost island. The ridge itself has even been suggested or proposed for world heritage.

So I just got sold on polar areas and it was a coincidence that I got the job. And life is coincidences. I can tell you that from my own experience. I never intended to marry. I never intended to marry a Norwegian. Especially not one with a beard. I was never going to have children. Got two. And when I did my degree, just happened to see an advertisement for the first cultural heritage office of the Norwegian Arctic, in Longyearbyen in Svalbard—which I didn't know where it was or what it was or anything. I just applied and got it. My first step on Svalbard was in March of 1979 and I was just sold. The cold air... There was just no turning back. So that's what I've done ever since.