Report of the EC Flagg (#76) expedition to Spitsbergen (Svalbard) 2007

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IPY-LASHIPA 4 – Expedition summary

Between the 2nd – 25th of August 2007, an archaeological expedition of the IPY endorsed LASHIPA project (#10) took place on Spitsbergen. This EC Flagg expedition (#76) was organized by the Arctic Centre of the University of Groningen in The Netherlands and financially supported by the Dutch Research Council. The objective of the EC Flagg expedition was to gather archaeological evidence from whaling, hunting and mining sites at Grønfjorden and Adventdalen in the central part of Spitsbergen on 78º North. The scientific aims were closely tied to the overall objectives and research questions of the IPY endorsed LASHIPA project, as well as to the individual sub-projects of the participants (PhD theses, post-doc projects etc). The expedition team was subdivided into three task groups – one mapping remains of coal mining in Adventdalen, one mapping remains of modern whaling and coal mining on the east side of Grønfjorden and one conducting an archaeological excavation of a hunters and whaling station at Kokerineset on the western side of the same fiord.

Expedition Team with the EC Flag. Photo Ben Bekooy.
Field work at the Longyear- and Advent valley

The field work in Longyeardalen and Adventdalen was first and foremost a part of the research of the team members from the Michigan Technological University (MTU) – Cameron Hartnell, who is working on his doctorate degree and Seth Depasquall, who is working on his masters degree. The MTU team focused its efforts on the historical remains of a US firm, the Arctic Coal Company (ACC), who was active on Spitsbergen between 1905 and 1916. August 2007 was the second season MTU has been involved in field documentation of ACC remains. In 2004, a field school (LASHIPA 1), documented much of the remains of old Longyear city and the ACC mine nr. 1. This year survey efforts examined the way the company analyzed the coal landscape (and the company’s second largest activity area at Grønfjorden, see below). Surveys covered large areas around the Longyear- and Advent valley’s, to find remains of test-pits (structures built to take coal samples and map the character of the coal seam). All finds were mapped using a TRIMBLE-gps and some structures were also mapped with a total station.

The field work on the east side of Grønfjorden

The LASHIPA team on the east side of Grønfjorden, consisted of Swedish, Dutch and American historians and archaeologists. The team was stationed at the Research Station Barentsburg (belonging to the Kola Science Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences). The team worked in Barentsburg and its surrounding from the 5th to the 23rd of August and consisted of Dr. Dag Avango (project/team leader), and the PhD students Ulf Gustafsson, Hidde De Haas (all from Arctic Centre, University of Groningen) and Cameron Hartnell and master student Seth DePasquall (MTU). The team had all together five major tasks to accomplish in the field.

One task was to document an early 20th century whaling station at Finneset, as a part of the PhD thesis work of Ulf Gustafsson. The station was built in 1905, in the wake of the 1904 national ban on whaling on mainland Norway and was in operation until 1912. During the course of these eight years, the station at Finneset underwent several technical and constructional changes. A second field work task at Finneset was to document the remains of a radio station, erected in 1911 by the Norwegian government (and part of the post-doc research of Dag Avango). Both the whaling station and the radio station was used by the Norwegian government to strengthen its position in the ongoing negotiations about the legal status of Spitsbergen (then a no mans land). Both stations were mapped by Ulf Gustafsson, Hidde De Haas and Dag Avango. First, the sites was carefully surveyed, structures were identified and functions established with the aid of historical documents and photographs. Secondly, all foundations and structures were measured and sketched. Finally, all remains was mapped with a TRIMBLE gps, as well as with a total station (operated by Erwin Bolhuis). Moreover, the stations were carefully photo documented by Ben Bekooy.

A third task in the Finneset area was to map the remains of coal mining between Barentsburg and Grøndalen, with a special focus on the remains of the Arctic Coal Co’s (ACC) activities there between 1905-1913. Cameron Hartnell and Seth Depasquall from MTU found several mine entrances in the area. Two of them could be identified as remains of ACC mines and at least one as the remains of a mine used by The Green Harbour Coal Co – another mining company competing for the coal in the area in the early 19 hundreds. All mines, as well as remains of adjacent transport systems, coal stockpiles and house foundations were documented with a TRIMBLE gps. In addition, all remains of ACC and Green Harbour Coal Co activities where mapped with a total station.
The team on the east side of Grønfjorden also had several tasks to accomplish in the mining town of Barentsburg. As part of the PhD thesis work of Hidde De Haas, a fourth task was to map buildings, mines and mining technology built and used by the Dutch coal mining company *Nederlandsche Spitsbergen Compagnie* (NESPICO). NESPICO was the company that established Barentsburg and was active there between 1921 and 1932. With the help of historical photographs and maps, Hidde De Haas and Dag Avango carefully surveyed the entire mining town. It is generally believed that the remains of NESPICO’s Barentsburg are, with some notable exceptions, impossible to find because of the massive destruction of the town in 1943. However, the survey yielded impressive and unexpected results. Remains of numerous pre-war structures were found. A careful documentation was made, with GPS technology and digital cameras, as well as measuring tape and sketch blocks. In addition, some of the building remains were documented with Total Station (by Erwin Bolhuis).

A fifth task, as part of the comparative research conducted by Dag Avango, was to document standing buildings, mines and mining technology built and used by the Russian coal mining company *Trust Arktikugol*, from the 2nd world war to the present. The functions of the buildings and technological systems were documented by description and digital photographs.

**The Archaeological research on Kokerineset and the west side of Grønfjorden**

The LASHIPA team on the west side of Grønfjorden included five Dutch archaeologist – Prof. Dr. Louwrens Hacquebord (expedition- & project leader), PhD student Ypie Alders (excavation leader), master student Sara Drescher, technical assistant Erwin Bolhuis and photographer Ben Bekooy. Moreover, the team included five Russian researchers – Prof. Vadim Starkov (Archaeologist, Russian team leader) Vitali Anufriev (Historian), Dr. Victor Derzhavin (Archaeologist), Maxim Derbenev (Technical assistant) and Vladimir Prokurnov (translator, assistant).

The Kokerineset site was discovered during an earlier expedition of LASHIPA (2) in August 2005. Traces of both whaling and hunting activities were revealed and were preliminary interpreted as a whaling station from the 17th century, over layered by a Russian Pomor hunter’s camp from the 18th century. The objective of the excavation in Aug. 2007 was not only to test this hypothesis, but to produce information about the way man exploited natural resources in the High Arctic during the pre-industrial period and thus open the possibility for comparison with exploitation of natural resources in the region during the industrial period. Moreover, the study should give insight in the way people of two totally different cultures (17th and 18th century European whalers and 18th and 19th century Russian hunters) were exploiting natural resources during the pre-industrial exploitation period of Spitsbergen and in the nature of their contact with each other.
The archaeological research conducted at Kokerineset was planned to excavate and document remains of a furnace from the 17th century whaling station, the remains of a probably more recent sod house, the remains of an unknown structure and the remains of the 18th century Pomor hunting station. The excavation and documentation of the Pomor hunting station got priority in the planning. Two trenches of 10 square meters each were set out at the site of this hunting station. During the excavation work the remains of two log houses were uncovered. Both houses form part of a larger complex of structures which were occupied during different periods. The broad contours of these structures can be traced in the landscape.

At least two culture layers could be distinguished while digging. The finds of the lowest and oldest culture layer consisted of (mostly black) pottery sherds, bones and fragmented pieces of bone, stones of prunes and fragments of leather, textile and metal. The find assemblage of this layer indicates Pomor occupation very clearly. The layer consisted further of a very compact layer of bark and many small pieces of wood (wood chips) and was situated under the floor of the log houses so it must be older. The second and younger culture layer contained more pieces of glazed ware which are very likely to be of West-European origin, and might indicate a barter between the European whalers and the Pomor hunters. This layer belongs to the period the two log houses were built, probably the end of the 18th or the beginning of the 19th century.

An interesting aspect was that the houses were built on a terrace and that this terrace was extended by the inhabitants towards the sea in subsequent periods. Because of this it is very plausible that the youngest structures on the terrace are situated closest to the sea and that the oldest structures are to found more inland. To test this theory however more research at the site will be needed. After the Pomor site excavations were executed in the
remains of a probably more recent sod house and a undefinable feature close to the beach. The excavations in the sod house demonstrated that this house was more recently built (20th century) and used as a dwelling by people from the Coal Company Isefjord. Together with other utensils a claim sign with the inscription Kulgrubecompagni Isefjord Eiendom was found in the culture layer of the sod house. The excavation in the undefinable structure produced no new information so that the purpose of this structure remained unclear. An important aspect of the research was the mapping of the topography of the area together with visible archaeological remains and other characteristic features of the landscape by using a Total Station. In this way a very detailed map of the area was created.

The surveys
The LASHIPA 4 team also conducted two surveys. One at Kap Laila at the western entrance to the Coles Bay, with the objective of finding remains of a number of buildings erected there by the NESPICO in the 1920’s. The area around Kap Laila was searched in a pedestrian reconnaissance mode, but no remains were found. The result can partly be explained by severe weather conditions. The other survey was made at Sandefjord point, a cape located on the west side of Grønfjorden, south of Kokerineset. The site was used as fresh water supply by the whaling company active on Finneset, who also had plans to move its whaling station there. The expectation was to find claim boards and/or facilities for fresh water supply.