

Jan Mayen

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A SMALL ISLAND IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN may set the record for being identified by more names than any other island, and despite this, still retaining the name of its discoverer over three hundred years ago.

The island Jan Mayen is situated in the Greenland Sea about 250 miles off Liverpool Land on the east coast of Greenland and 300 miles north of Iceland. Although small in size compared with other Arctic islands Jan Mayen has an extinct volcano, Beerenberg, on it which except for certain nunataks in Greenland is the highest mountain within the Arctic Circle. This volcanic mountain makes a striking landmark and is visible from more than 100 miles away.

The earliest reference to the island occurs in the Icelandic Landnámabók where it is referred to as Svalbard. There it is written that "from Langanes on the north side of Iceland it is a four doegr's sea voyage to Svalbard (i.e. the cold coast) on the north in Hafsbóttn." The early Scandinavians meant the end of the sea to the north of Norway and northeast of Greenland when they used the term "Hafsbóttn," in the same manner in which they today refer to "Ishavet." A doegr was a 12 hour sail so by this it can be seen that they referred to Svalbard as being a 48 hour sailing distance from the northern portion of Iceland. Jan Mayen is 300 miles distant from there, whereas the present day Svalbard (sometimes erroneously referred to as Spitsbergen) is some 900 miles distant. It would appear from this that the reference was to Jan Mayen as Svalbard rather than to the more distant island group. As the Norsemen's seafaring activities declined during the 14th and 15th centuries the existence of Svalbard or Jan Mayen was forgotten and it was not until the seventeenth century during the time that the English and Dutch were rivals in whaling in the Arctic that

the island was rediscovered. In England Hudson has generally been credited with the discovery, whereas in Holland Jan Jacobsz May has always been given the credit.

In England Thomas Edge in his "Briefe Discoverie of the Northern Discoveries of Seas, Coasts and Countries, etc.," printed in "Purcheas His Pilgrimes," says:

In the yeere 1608 the said fellowship set fourth a Ship called the Hope-well, whereof William Hudson was Master, to discover to the Pole, where it appeareth by his Journall, that he came to the height of 81. degrees, where he gave Names to Certayne places, upon the Continent of Greenland formerly discovered, which continue to this day, namely, Whale Bay, and Hackluit Headland, and being hindred with Ice, returned home without further use of the Countrey, and in ranging homewards hee discovered an Iland lying in 71. degrees which hee named Hudsons Tutches.

Obviously the above relation by Edge is incorrect as Hudson himself has given an account of the voyage and makes absolutely no mention of Hudson's Tutches.¹ There is therefore no justification for accepting Edge's narrative as it has never been substantiated. It is very possible that rumor among the Hull seafarers who might have been there, accounted for this garbled version having been written by Edge.

The account of the Dutch discovery of the island is much more reliable as mention of the discovery is found in a document dated 29 August 1615 in the Dutch Archives at the Hague. This account is a request to the States General by the Noordsche Compagnie to have the discovery accepted as made in July 1614 by their two ships "De goude Cath" and "Den Orangienboom." Jan Jacobsz May was the captain of one of these ships with Joris Carolus as mate. The company had been forced to put forward this claim as a ship from a rival company captained by Jan Jansz Kerekhoff had also visited the island the same summer.

May's discovery is confirmed by recent findings in the Depot des Cartes de la Marine in Paris of the original map drawn in the year 1614 by Joris Carolus on which he calls the island after him-

¹ J. M. Wordie, *Geographical Journal*, Vol. LIX, 1922, p. 182.

self, "Mr. Joris Eylandt."² It is interesting to note that the name given to the island by the mate disappeared quickly and was replaced by the more appropriate captain's name (Blaeu 1623-Zee Atlas), and even Joris Carolus on his map drawn in 1634 names it as "Mr. Joris al Jan Mayen Eylandt."³

Jan Jansz Kerckhoff named the island Mauritius or St. Maurice¹ in honor of Prince Maurice of Nassau, and it was known as this by the Dutch during the peak years of Arctic whaling which finally faded out in 1642.

The first authenticated visit of an Englishman to the island was made by Robert Fotherby who was there in 1615. It was he who gave such an accurate description of the island in Purchas and he who named it Sir Thomas Smith's Island.⁵ Later in Purchas, before 1625 he refers to the island as Tutches. At the time of writing this it appears that he must have known the whole history of the island and it is important that he chose the name Tutches from among many others, even excluding the name which he himself had given it.

Hull whalers, possibly Thomas Marmaduke, are said to have discovered it in 1611 or 1612 and to have called it Trinity Island.⁶ King James I granted a monopoly to a Hull Company in 1618 to whale at what was known in England as Trinity Island.

Jean Vrolicq, the Biscayan, said he visited the island in 1612 and named it Isle de Richelieu.⁷ As a matter of fact Richelieu in 1630 in the name of the King of France gave a license to a French company to whale off the Isle de Richelieu.

Other old names were Young's Foreland⁸ and Pico.⁹

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² F. C. Wieder, *The Dutch Discovery and Mapping of Spitsbergen 1596-1829*. The Hague 1919, plate 5-6 shows a copy of this map.

³ Original map in the collection of Royal Library, Copenhagen.

⁴ A. King, *Geographical Journal*, Vol. XCIV, 1939, p. 116.

⁵ Wordie, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁶ *Arctic Pilot*, Volume 2, British Admiralty Hydrographic Dept., 1949, p. 6.

⁷ A. King, *Geographical Journal*, Vol. XCIV, 1939, p. 116.

⁸ Wordie, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

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