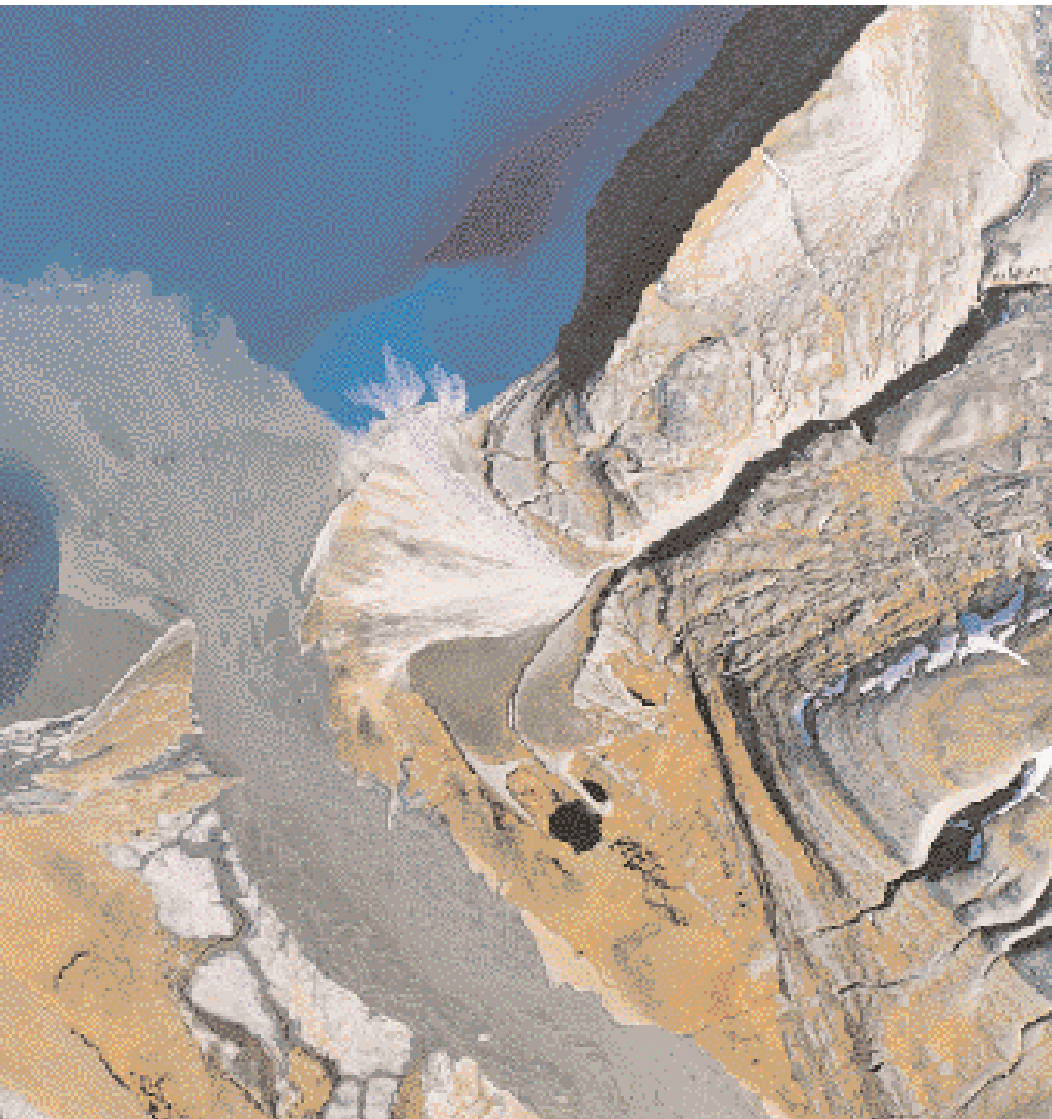




VILLA FREDHEIM

By Leif Johnny Johannessen



Hilmar Nøis` hunting station and home



The Governor of Svalbard is the Norwegian government's supreme representative in Svalbard. One of the Governor's most important tasks is the management of Svalbard's natural and cultural environment.

The Cultural Heritage in Svalbard

Svalbard possesses a special attraction. We would like as many people as possible - both today and in future - to experience the almost undisturbed natural and cultural environment of Svalbard. Even the oldest remnants lie exposed on the fragile soil; buildings, facilities and equipment are well preserved. Cultural monuments are therefore rich encounters with the past. But the limits of what the undisturbed can tolerate are easily surpassed by visitors.

Special adjustments made for visitors can distort the pristine picture most have come to experience. We would therefore like to leave both the environment and the cultural monuments as they are - with no pontoon bridges, no picnic tables or outdoor grills; with a few signs and guide posts as possible. This places great demands on visitors, but it probably gives most of them greater satisfaction and a more profound experience.

Traffic generally entails wear and tear and deterioration of landscape and cultural monuments. If you turn a single stone, it will stand out as a bright stranger among its grey relatives for decades. The piece of bone you took with you from the slaughter ground may be fun to show off, but it will nevertheless remain a stain in your souvenir collection. Rumaging through and picking up moveable objects is an insult to the past and a theft from the future which destroys primary sources and the experience of fragile cultural environments. Rules and regulations are therefore necessary - as much for visitors as for the environment.

The Regulations Concerning Cultural Heritage in Svalbard establish that all traces of human activity predating 1946 are protected cultural monuments. This applies to all types of buildings or remnants from houses, work and hunting/trapping facilities, bone remnants at slaughter grounds, graves, crosses, inscriptions, not to mention the large number of moveable objects: remnants from traps, bones, tools, ammunition and cartridges, pieces of ceramic and glass, broken handles, pieces of chain and cable, heaps of iron filings, shoe soles, tent pegs, barrel hoops, oven rings - all this and all you may come across along the coast of Svalbard. Loose cultural monuments may be waste, but they are not worthless. They can tell us more about people's every day lives, activities and habits and about where they were from and what they were like than the remnants of buildings.

Destruction, removal or defacing of fixed or moveable cultural monuments is forbidden. The regulations provide for a 100 metre protection zone. Within this zone it is forbidden to camp, build a fire or in any other way leave traces of one's visit. Violation of these regulations is punishable by fines or imprisonment up to one year.

Villa Fredheim -Hilmar Nøis' hunting station and home



Fredheim with 80 white fox hides.

Photo: P. Adams

At Sassenfjorden there is an unusual hunting station. The builder himself called the lodge *Villa Fredheim*. With Tempelet and the Von Post glacier in the immediate vicinity, the hunting station stands as a monument to Hilmar Nøis and his two wives, first Ellen Dorthe Johansen Nøis, and then Helfrid Nøis.

Fredheim has functioned as the main depot for Nøis and other hunters who wintered there since the mid 1920s, but also as a home where children were born and grew up.

In this leaflet we look at the history of Villa Fredheim, glance at Hilmar Nøis, and at the life of hunters.

VILLA FREDHEIM

Let us first look more closely at the area of Sassendalen where Fredheim is situated.



Hilmar's first wife, Ellen Dorthe, gave birth to a son in Gammelhytta at Fredheim in 1922. Johannes Kaps spent several winters in Svalbard together with his father.

Sassendalen is one of the best hunting areas for reindeer and fox in Svalbard. We are certain that the area had been used by Russian hunters from the beginning of the 19th century. Later it was used by Norwegian hunters.

The name Sassen comes from the Dutch "sas" meaning the inlet of a harbour or something similar. Thus it is likely that Dutch whalers made use of the area too.

The main building

The main building (A) was set up in 1924. The frame of the building was raised by Hilmar and a carpenter from the mining facility at Hiorthhamn. Since then the

lodge has been rebuilt and expanded several times.

Fredheim is one of the largest hunting stations in Svalbard. The lodge is separated into several

rooms and has two floors. It is important to emphasize that Fredheim is not representative for hunters' huts in Svalbard. Normally functionality was more important than aesthetics.

Today's living room with bunk beds was earlier two rooms. There was a veranda towards the sea. The attic contained storage space for supplies and other equipment.

The fact that the lodge appears the way it does can probably be ascribed to the women who spent the winter with Hilmar. Both his wives took part in making Fredheim a home. Nøis himself took pride in making



Photo: Unknoun

Carefree summers at Fredheim with the company of a book.

Fredheim something more than merely a typical hunting cabin.

A journalist from a magazine visiting Helfrid was struck by the order and cleanliness which characterized Fredheim:



Photo: O. Berset

"If only I could take all of our magazine's readers with me to Mrs. Nøis' storage room! Then we would all learn a lesson about order and planning!"

Helfrid put her feminine touch on the lodge. Next to the ammunition there was a jar of Elisabeth Arden cream, and next to the windbreaker hung a nightgown.

Coming to Fredheim must have been an experience. In the middle of the wilderness there was a well kept little house with a flagpole, potted plants, curtains and table cloths. Outside there was more colour than what was

normal. Helfrid is said to have had a flower bed around the house created by soil from nesting cliffs and household waste. Ashes and soot which were sprinkled on top added nourishment and contributed to an early thaw.

When guests arrived, the house had only its best to offer. Freshly baked cakes were served as well as steaming hot coffee.

Imagine the work that went into this little piece of Norway in that huge, icy desert.

Nødhytta and Gammelhytta

Next to the main building is a shed (B), also known as Nødhytta (Emergency Hut). This served as a storage room for tools and equipment.

To the east of the main building is Gammelhytta (Old Hut) (C). This was built by Hilmar's uncle, Daniel Nøis, during the winter of 1911/12. Gammelhytta has a number of characteristic details which reflect building practices from the pioneer age of Norwegian winter hunting prior to the First World War. This particularly applies to wall coverings and insulation – moss was used for filling the walls, birch bark covered both the walls and roof, and turf was put up along the walls and on the roof.

To the west of the main building out on the bluff by the beach is an outhouse (D). Due to strong beach erosion – on average 25 centimetres per year – both this building and Gammelhytta are in danger of sliding off.

Remnants of other hunting stations

Fifty metres west of the main building are remnants of the foundation of a burnt-out building. We know neither the age nor the constructor of this building. Perhaps it's from the winter of 1900/01 which Peder Nilsen Furfjord spent at Sassen?

The site of an earlier Russian hunting station was approximately 140 metres west of the main building. This has now slid into

the sea. Thereby yet another cultural monument in Svalbard has been lost.

Other sites in Sassendalen contain remains of Russian buildings, bearing witness to the rich hunting tradition in the area.



Drawing: K. Fossmo

Karl Fossmo spent the winter of 1920/21 at Sassen. Here we view one of his drawings from the lonely days there.

Hilmar Nøis and Fredheim have also inspired fiction writers. In the 1937 book *"I polarnattens favn"* (*"In the Embrace of the Polar Night"*) by Øvre Richter Frich, the main character comes to a hunting station in Sassen:

"The typical picture of a hunter's hut met the two long distance travellers. The disorder and uncleanness had virtually besieged the little building. The surroundings reminded one of a cholera-cemetery where there had been no time to bury the dead. All sorts of animals lay spread around - foxes, polar bears and reindeer. They had had their fur removed and looked utterly miserable in their pink hidelessness. And amidst these corpses were all kinds of vile waste. Everything had been thrown around: tins, potsherds, food waste, potato peels, fur and other waste."

Even though this portrayal is clearly marked by the novel genre and by the writer's as well as contemporary society's view of hunters and hunting, nevertheless this description provides details which help us to understand what a hunting station could be like. Fredheim was not just an idyllic home with clean table cloths and potted plants; it was also a place of work.

Hilmar Nøis – The King of Sassen

Hilmar Nøis is often referred to as the King of Sassen. It was here that he maintained his main depot, Fredheim, as well as secondary depots, cocked guns for polar bears and a number of fox traps. Who was this man? Let us try to go beyond the legend of the hunter.



Huntsman Hilmar Nøis

Huntsman

Hilmar Andreas Nilsen Nøis was born at Risøyhamn on the island of Andøya on March 8, 1891. He died in 1975. He spent 38 winters in Svalbard

- more than most other hunters.

Nøis came from a family with long fishing and polar hunting experience. As an eleven-year-old he learnt how to shoot ptarmigan; a year later he joined



Photo: A. Braathen

A hunter's lodge needed to be functional, but not necessarily comfortable or aesthetic. Here at De Geerdalen we see an upsidedown boat resting on scaffolding made of driftwood, surrounded by an earthen embankment. The hut contained provisions and was used on long treks. Hilmar and Helfrid were forced to overnight here once when they were taken by surprise by bad weather en route to Longyearbyen.

18. He and his uncle Daniel Nøis spent the winter of 1909/10 at Grøn fjorden. His last winter in Svalbard was spent in Sassen with his wife Helfrid. That was in 1963 and by then he was 72 years old.

Nøis never bagged the “prize game” that allowed him to become rich from hunting. But he managed to catch enough to supply a new expedition, allowing him to try his luck once again.

Eventually it was not the search for fortune which drove him; hunting had become his way of life. Nøis himself explains his motivation by saying:

“I shall always remember the freedom of the great open country”.

Nøis was enthralled by Svalbard's freedom, landscape, plants and animals. From an early date, he was conscious of the fragility of nature and worked for protective measures. At Fredheim he

established his own little private nature reserve where animals and plants were left undisturbed. However, we must remember that hunting was his livelihood.

His chosen way of life was more than a profession. In Svalbard he was sole ruler over himself and nature. There was no need to punch the clock, and there were no supervisors. He was his own master.

Life as a hunter gave Nøis a status he could not have dreamt of on the mainland. His work made him unique and famous. Another hunter, Arthur Oxaas, expressed it thus:

“Life as a hunter was our goal. If we could only get to the polar seas or to Svalbard, we would be like kings when we returned. Then we would be seen as real hunters.”

Even though hunters were few in number and hunting had little significance for the national economy, interest for the activity

his father at sea as a cook. As a sixteen-year-old he took part in the traditional spring cod fishing in Finnmark.

Hilmar Nøis spent his first winter in Svalbard when he was

Photo: N. M. Lidgard



was substantial. When the book *Hilmar Nøis: Storviltjegeren fra Svalbard (Big Game Hunter of Svalbard)* was published in 1953, it sold 5,000 copies the first year. This was one of many books which became a best seller. Reports from Svalbard provided good material for newspapers and magazines. Hilmar Nøis became a legend in his own life time.

Hut builder

Sassendalen was Nøis' primary area, although he hunted throughout large parts of Spitsbergen.

A number of huts functioned as secondary depots and were used during his travels. Some he built himself; others he took over from mining companies or from fellow hunters. Hilmar also rented them out to other hunters. Today the state owns these huts.

Family man

Hilmar Nøis was a man who ruled over nature in Svalbard. In minus



Hilmar in front of the hunting station at Reinsdyrflya.

forty degrees he would travel around Svalbard to check his traps and visit fellow hunters. However, his choice of profession was difficult to combine with a regular family life.

In 1913, Nøis married Ellen Dorthe Johansen. She gave birth to their first child, a daughter, Embjørg, early the next autumn. Shortly before the birth, Nøis went to Svalbard to spend the winter. Ellen Dorthe was left behind in Tromsø with no means of supporting a daughter who was raised by her maternal grandparents.

In the years that followed, the husband and father was often away hunting. Ellen Dorthe felt neglected. In 1921, when Hilmar announced that he was heading off for another winter, she had had enough and went along. She spent her time mainly at Gammelhytta whilst he inspected the traps. Ellen Dorthe became pregnant again, but as the time of the birth drew close, Nøis took off. He set off for help, but when he came back the birth was over.

Their son, Johannes Normann Kaps Nøis was born in Gammelhytta on June 11, 1922. Ellen

Dorthe fell ill after having given birth all alone and spent some time in hospital. Two years later she and her son were back in Svalbard. However, the solitary life in Sassen was too burdensome and she suffered a



Photo: N. M. Udegard

of the hunter and make his story more realistic.

It must be mentioned that Nøis was grateful for the efforts his wives made. In one of his many diaries and memoirs he writes about Helfrid:

"Remember all dat she done to create a home. She hadda take any job she could."

What remains undisputed is that Hilmar Nøis left his mark on Svalbard. It is almost impossible not to be impressed by the will power and effort which characterised his life. Fredheim is one of many examples.

Charmer

In the summer of 1936 Hilmar met Helfrid on a coastal steamer on his way north from Svolvær. Helfrid was living in Oslo and was on holiday. Hilmar was off for another winter. Within a few hours Hilmar asked:

"Do you wanna come with me to Svalbard and see how I live, perhaps look after me house on Sassen Bay dis winter?"

Helfrid returned to Oslo, but after several letters she decided to go to Svalbard after all.

The next summer involved great changes at Fredheim. A new stove, new curtains and new carpets. Helfrid even decid-

ed to spend the winter in Svalbard.

By the autumn Hilmar had worked up enough courage. He bought rings and informed the governor. Helfrid knew nothing about the plans until Hilmar one day announced that the governor would be coming the next morning to wed them. They were



Photo: R. Gardi

Hilmar Nøis outside the cabin at Bjonahamna. On the wall hangs dried seal meat. Hilmar is holding a bear skull. Hilmar acquired the cabin from a Swedish company which had attempted to extract gypsum around Tempelet prior to World War One.

married in the living room at Fredheim on August 22, 1937.

Helfrid and Hilmar adopted a daughter whilst in Scotland during the Second World War. Else-Marie was at Fredheim several times.

Helfrid lived in Bodø for several years until she died aged 96, in April 1996.

mental breakdown. Mother and son returned to Tromsø on one of the first boats alone.

Ellen Dorthe never fully recovered from the trauma which resulted from her experience in Svalbard, and she never went back. A few years later the marriage was over. Their son went with Hilmar several winters. He also worked in the mining industry in Svalbard.

Not even the King of Sassen was master of everything. By mentioning some of his less complimentary traits, we wish to provide a more nuanced picture



Photo: Unknown

Helfrid and Hilmar dressed for their wedding at Sassen. Few couples have enjoyed such impressive surroundings as Tempelet at their wedding.

Winter hunting

Hunters have incredible encounters with nature and enjoy a sense of freedom, but there's also monotonous labour from early til late, often in extreme cold and bad weather. How was life as a hunter? Who became a hunter?



Helfrid often went along to inspect the traps.



Norwegian winter hunting increased in magnitude from the 1890s onward. In the beginning merchants from Tromsø would supply larger expeditions. Hunting demanded both resources and experience. Eventually the merchants received competition from the mining companies and from small groups of experienced hunters who outfitted themselves.

Up until the First World War the number of people spending the winter in Svalbard increased. Du-

ring the war numbers declined, but in the 1920s they rose again. In the inter-war period there were between 20 and 40 hunters wintering in Svalbard annually.

During this period there was another change in hunting patterns. The number of hunters wintering together as a team dropped from 3-4 men down to 2; a few were entirely on their own.

Most hunters spent only a few seasons in Svalbard. The legends - Hilmar Nøis, Henry Rudi, Georg

Bjørnnes and Arther Oxaas - who spent dozens of winters there were the exceptions.

The hunt

Hides, furs and blubber were the most important sources of income for the hunters. Blue foxes,

polar foxes, polar bears and bearded seals were the core of the hunt's value. Svalbard reindeer came under protection as early as 1925 and thereby lost commercial interest. In addition, birds were hunted, eggs and down collected.

most hunters, the aim was to earn enough to be able to stay for another winter season.

Ready for the winter?

Hunters would travel to Svalbard in late summer or early autumn to get ready for the winter. In those



Photo: Unknown



Photo: Unknown

Svalbard reindeer was protected in 1925 at a time when it was nearly extinct. Prior to being protected, reindeer had been an important part of the hunters' diet. In addition, the hides contributed to larger incomes.

Prices on the catch would vary from year to year. The blue fox fetched the best prices. At one stage the price of a single hide reached NOK 800-NOK 1,000 but prices varied a lot and dropped in the inter-war period. Polar bear hides were sought after and had a stable, high price generally between NOK 200 and NOK 300.

A miner made between NOK 10 and NOK 15 per day in this period. In other words a successful hunt could provide substantial income.

The hunt varied from one area to the other. There were also year-to-year differences within one area. Income from hunting was highly unpredictable, and it is difficult to say how much could be earned in one season. For

days they had to bring supplies for two seasons. This had been decided upon by the authorities in 1915 after winters with tragic endings. Planning was often the difference between a successful winter and a catastrophe.

In addition to weapons, ammunition, tools and other equipment, food formed a large part of the stock of supplies. Hilmar Nøis compiled a list of what a hunter needed to live off of through an entire year (see below). In addition, there was all that the land itself could offer in terms of meat from bearded seal, reindeer, ptarmigan, greylag, eider duck and sea gulls.

One year's provisions

- 200 kilos of flour
- 18 kilos of margarine
- 5 kilos of rice
- 15 kilos of oats
- 5 kilos of grits
- 12 kilos of coffee
- ½ kilo of tea
- 5 bottles of fruit juice
- 3 kilos of prunes
- 3 kilos of raisins
- 50 kilos of potatoes
- 5 kilos of dried potatoes
- assorted spices
- 12 boxes of condensed milk
- 1 kilo of powdered milk
- 15 kilos of syrup
- 1 barrel of sour milk (to prevent scurvy)

Photo: K. Fjærtøft



Helfrid outside Fredheim during the celebration of her silver wedding anniversary, 1962.



reindeer came under protection. The hunters also made traps and collected drift wood. A lot of work needed to be done before ice settled on the fjord.

After this, hunting went in cycles throughout the year. Daniel Nøis set up an annual cycle for Svalbard

longing for something new and better. Life as a Svalbard hunter meant living in two incompatible worlds: the more predictable and in some ways more comfortable life on the mainland vs. the freedom, the adventure, the hunt and the status of spending a



Helfrid had a particular talent for "sniffing out" polar bears. This bear was shot by Hilmar near Storffjorden, but it had been located by Helfrid.

The everyday life of a hunter

The initial period was spent setting up primary and secondary depots and building food stocks

for the winter. This became more difficult once the



hunters (see diagram). Daily work consisted in maintaining traps and cocked guns and, when sunlight returned, hunting seals and polar bears. Work repeated itself day by day regardless of weather. The traps needed to be checked, otherwise the catch could be destroyed by foxes or birds.

Toil and monotony nourished the dream of something else, the

season in Svalbard. Restlessness and dreams were always there. Henry Rudi insisted that he could breathe with both lungs at the hunting station and that wintering in Svalbard was no harder than winters on the mainland.

Who became a hunter?

Winter hunting was a livelihood, a way to survive. Some were able to

cope with this profession and with Svalbard's nature, others were not. Many were enthralled by the scenery, the freedom, perhaps even the adventure and the status which went with the work, but all in all it meant choosing a profession. Recruiting often happened



Photo: Unknown

important to the history of this trade. This particularly applies to Fredheim where Ellen Dorthe and Helfrid both spent periods on their own.

Women most often assumed the role of housewife, but several also took part in preparing the huts, inspecting traps, collecting wood and hunting. Helfrid went along on inspection tours to northern Spitsbergen, too. Women's efforts often contributed to a more successful hunt because several people could share tasks and duties.

Examples of women hunters exist, but they represent the exceptions.

Significance of the mining industry

A close connection existed between winter hunting and the mining industry. Many hunters worked as watchmen at the mining facilities thereby securing housing for their main depots and often a regular monthly salary as well. For hunters this often meant the difference between surplus and bankruptcy.

The mining industry led to increased traffic between the

mainland and Svalbard, which simplified transportation. Hunters could sell parts of their catch in the company towns, too.

Most importantly the mining industry provided a chance for work if the hunt should fail, something which occurred often. Even Hilmar Nøis spent one season working the mines in Svalbard.

Today's hunters

Even though winter hunting has died out as a livelihood in practical terms, a few hunters remain in Svalbard today. In recent years there have been stations at Austfjordneset, Kapp Wijk, Mushamna, Farmhamna and Akseløya. Not all of them have been in use each year.

Today's hunters have been criticized for being too modern. However, we must remember that modern culture is constantly changing. Use of snowmobiles, radios, telephones and telefax is as natural today as skis, dogsleds, messages in tin cans and telegrams were 70 years ago.

Today's hunters are part of preserving an important portion of Svalbard's history - the hunting culture. A living culture means not just preserving traditions, but also developing them further.



Photo: Unknown

Provisions outside of Gammelhytta.

through family and friends who had experience from hunting. Some families and villages are repeatedly represented in registers of hunters. This particularly applies to the Nøis family of Andøya.

The role of women

Women are often neglected when talking about winter hunting. However, several women have participated in and are

Diagram of the annual cycle for polar hunting

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Fox												
Polar Bear												
Preparation of hide												
Seal												
Eggs and down												
Goose												
Building and rep. of huts												
Collection of driftwood												
Preparing traps												
Reindeer												
Ptarmigan												

Fig.: After Rossvies 1993

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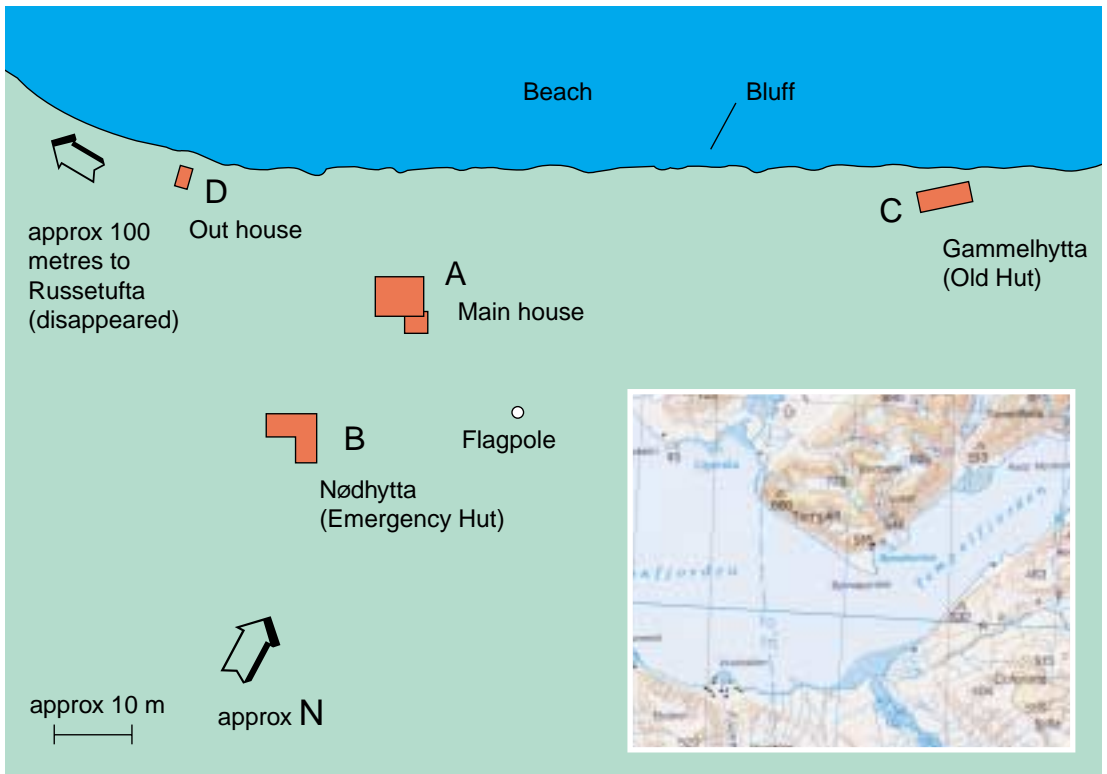


Photo: A. Kjørshelm

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Map of buildings at Fredheim drawn by H. B. Bjerck, 1996



Photo: H. B. Bjerck



GOVERNOR OF SVALBARD

ENVIRONMENTAL SECTION

9170 LONGYEARBYEN
NORWAY

Villa Fredheim at Sassenfjorden is an unusual hunting station. Not only is the main building large and well equipped, Fredheim was also a home where children were born and raised. In this leaflet we take a closer look at the history of this cultural monument in Sassen, at huntsman Hilmar Nøis, and at winter hunting in Svalbard.

