Archaeologists connected with Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum journeyed into the Russian Arctic to rediscover the graves, ship, and wintering cabin of Willem Barents’ expedition, lost 400 years ago on the shores of a remote Arctic island while charting a passage to Asia.

“Into the Ice Sea” is the account of several expeditions during the 1990s and their historical parallels of four centuries. This is a book about Reformation and exploratory Romanticism, Arctic discovery and the Ancients, and the fortunes of a Russian admiral, chasing the demon of his own creation across the floes of the Kara Sea, the former Ice Sea.

With the original journal from Barents’ ship in hand, the authors present a view of the Arctic through the eyes of a sixteenth-century explorer, and in the geometry of Barents’ ship and cabin discover the key to a Renaissance past.

This book will make you happier and wiser.

Into the Ice Sea

Barents’ wintering on Novaya Zemlya – A Renaissance voyage of discovery
Into the Ice Sea
JAAPJAN ZEEBERG

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With contributions by Pieter Floore
This publication was made possible by the financial support of
Het Nationaal Comité Willem Barentsz (Amsterdam) and
J.E. Jurriaanse Stichting (Rotterdam)

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With contributions by Pieter Floore
Copy editing by Luisa Alexander Izzo (Calgary, Canada)
Design: Puntspatie [bno], Amsterdam

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Rozenberg Publishers, Bloemgracht 82hs,
1015 TM Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Tel.: +31 20 625 54 29, Fax: +31 20 620 33 95
info@rozenbergps.com

isbn 90 5170 787 8 (Hardbound) | isbn 90 5170 926 9 (Paperback)
Contents

Introduction 7
Into the Ice Sea 13
Nova Zembla: Tale and Discovery of the Saved House 35
Dutch Expansion in the Sixteenth Century 51
To Japan: Liefde through the Strait of Magellan 67
Aftermath: Henry Hudson and the Fourth Dutch Expedition 77
Touchdown on Novaya Zemlya – We Uncover the Saved House 87
Digging into the Sixteenth Century 103
Two Years Later 117
Into the Kara Sea aboard R/V Ivan Kiriev 135
Repulsed by the Storm 153
In Search of Willem Barents 165
Waiting to Be Rescued 185
Terra Firma: Ashore in the Bay of Strangers 199
The House on Shore 211
We Find Parts of the Ship 231
In the Yugor Strait 249
What Mean These stones? 263
Acknowledgments 273
Appendices 277
References 301
Index 309
When your children shall ask, ‘What mean these stones?’ (Joshua 4:21), let your children know – this is a memorial to the way God was with us and protected us, in the desert trials of life and in the icy waters of death.

(Chester A. Dollar, The Worship Channel, 27 August 2000)
Introduction

A voyage into the Arctic is a voyage into the history of exploration, the traces of which still scar many a polar coast. Between the wastes and building ruins of the past century, huts, markers, campsites, and graves recall the struggle for each mile, while the names of capes, mountains, and rivers bear witness to the step-wise geographical progress that was diligently laid down in charts of the newly won territory. One of these steps, from 1596, is documented by a work entitled The True and perfect Description of three Voyages, so strange and wonderful, that the like has never been heard of before.[1] This Renaissance adventure, chronicled by

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[1] In Dutch: Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz 1598, 1599, 1605; Meyn 1617; Colijn 1619; Hartgers 1646, 1648. In Latin: Cornelis Claesz 1598. In French: Cornelis Claesz 1598, 1600, 1609; Paris: G. Chaudière 1599 (no plates). In Italian: Venice: Ciotti & Porro 1599 (based on the German edition). In English: London: Pauier 1609; London: Hakluyt Society 1853, 1876. In German: Nuremberg: Levinus Hulsius 1598, 1602, 1612, 1660 (strongly edited; second, third and fourth editions are abridgements of the first edition); Frankfurt: De Bry 1599, 1628, 1629; Hamburg: Capel 1675, 1678 (abstract by Saeghman). The Dutch edition has five maps and 27 plates by engraver brothers Johannes and Baptista van Doetecum. These were copied and adapted for the German edition and as a result the prints appear in mirror image. De Veer seems to have been involved in the production of the German edition, because it has omissions and contains passages and illustrations that do not occur in the original, but are verifiable.
shipmate Gerrit de Veer during Willem Barents’ search for the Northeast Passage between 1594 and 1597, includes the first expedition to investigate the great unknown region surrounding the North Pole. The upbeat, optimistic tone of De Veer’s account reflects the confidence these Dutch mariners derived from the science and technology that supported their expeditions. They were armed with experimental navigational instruments and the cosmographic theory of that age. The wintering of the shipwrecked crew in het Behouden Huys (the Saved House), on north Novaya Zemlya, was the first successful wintering of Europeans in the High Arctic. Archaeologists connected with the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, keeper of objects recovered from the cabin since 1872, searched Novaya Zemlya’s near-inaccessible northeastern coast for traces of the wintering, including Barents’ shipwreck and grave. Expeditions in 1993 and 1995 were designed to gain further insight into the motives, strategies, and tools of these sixteenth-century explorers. By retracing the original voyage with De Veer’s journal in hand, we present a view of the Arctic through the eyes of a sixteenth-century explorer.

For a brief period at the end of the sixteenth century, the Dutch were intensely engaged in the exploration of the northeastern seaway. The contacts between Dutch explorers and Russians led to a stable and profitable trade and maritime bonds between the two nations that endure today. The wintering on Novaya Zemlya remained a mere historical footnote to burgeoning Arctic development by the Russians, who brought in icebreakers, use of aircraft to aid research and shipping, and drifting ice stations in the first decades of the twentieth century alone [Barr 1985, 1991]. The revolution of 1991, however, effectively put an end to the open-to-all research cruises and paid-for helicopter visits to remote polar stations and field camps, which ran annually under the flag of the Soviet...
Academy of Sciences. With Arctic towns and settlements spinning into isolation, dented helicopters grounded for lack of spare parts, and weather stations that once accommodated vessel navigation obsolete and abandoned, it was the historical footnote that gave something to hold on to during the early 1990s: a point of reference in the maelstrom of a reforming economy. The present is the key to the past is the key to the future, as the uniformitarians say. During the 1990s, Russian Arctic research continued through international partnerships that provided Western scientists opportunity to rediscover the Eurasian North. Today, many of the historical issues are resurfacing. In a warming environment, the Northern Sea Route, a shipping lane between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, is predicted to become accessible for non-strengthened vessels within years, and the Arctic nations are prepared to battle over the right to use it [US ONR 2001; Kerr 2002]. Traffic through these once-remote districts will be increasing, and demand for their vast mineral resources and timber is growing every day. Four centuries ago, there was already a trade route to the Ob River and the depot of Mangazeya, from which pelts, ivory from mammoth and walrus, and “mountain crystals” (pyrites and other sparkly minerals that resembled gold or silver) found their way across Europe.[2]

The Netherlanders explored the Arctic frontier for three consecutive years (1594, 1595, and 1596) with fleets consisting of freighters and warships and carrying merchants, cartographers, geographers, translators, and soldiers. They searched for a seaway across the North Pole that would yield access to the markets of Asia while avoiding Spanish or Portuguese harbors and patrols. The third expedition, under the leadership of Willem Barents, was stranded on Novaya Zemlya’s Cape Spory Navolok in August 1596. On an escarpment of the windswept Arctic desert, overlooking the frozen sea, the castaways constructed a cabin from wreckage. They wintered there, and in the following spring they took to sea in the two open boats from their vessel, escaping the Arctic in eighty days. Their cabin, partly destroyed to make the boats seaworthy, was covered by snow three or four months later. In the cold of the Little Ice Age, a climate episode that lasted until ca. 1860 [Note #3 in Chapter 15], this snow hardened to ice. Ice encapsulated the cabin’s interior until the arrival of the next visitor, Norwegian walrus hunter Elling Carlsen, in the summer of 1871. The recovery

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2. By the year 2080, the navigation season for the Northern Sea Route will have increased from 20–30 days per year to 90–100 days, and even more for ice-strengthened vessels [ACIA 2005]. Projecting current rates of change, mean annual air temperatures in the High Arctic are predicted to rise by as much as 6°C (present Cape Zhelaniya averages are 2°C for the summer months and –20°C for the winter months [Zeeberg 2001]).
of the wintering camp by Carlsen, in conjunction with De Veer’s account of daily life in those very quarters, has given archaeologists an unparalleled, multidimensional view of this site.

The Saved House held a commercial sample of the booming European cultures. It was an extraordinary winter camp, with linens, pewter tableware, a variety of Renaissance prints by Hendrick Goltzius and Jacob de Gheyn, an eighty-year-old Gothic clock, wax candles, leather-bound books, and ornately decorated Venetian chalices. On Novaya Zemlya the explorers left carpenter tools, household goods, clothing, instruments, prints, merchandise, and armament they wouldn’t need in the boats. Nineteenth-century visitors to the Saved House came as treasure hunters and failed to record even the most basic observations, such as the dimensions and layout of the cabin. Russian surveys during the Cold War, notably by Dmitri Kravchenko in 1979, found the wintering site still littered with debris. Many traces of the original encampment remained preserved under the layer of soil and mosses – twenty to thirty centimeters thick – that covered the site. Comparison of the 1979 finds with those from 1871 demonstrates that corrosion rates and decay accelerated in the last century, in part because of post-Little Ice Age climate warming. The recovery project gained further urgency after 1992, when international tour operators began to exploit the mystery of the formerly inaccessible Russian Arctic. Annual visits to Novaya Zemlya with chartered icebreakers and helicopters continue, the Saved House being a main point of interest.

This book synthesizes the fruits of five summer field seasons in the Novaya Zemlya archipelago between 1991 and 2000. Our expeditions were designed to provide an observational and analytical basis to the historical record by (1) mapping activity areas in and around the remnant building structure during an
Introduction

archaeological survey, (2) locating and recovering remains of the vessel on the beach and offshore, and (3) recovering the bodies of Willem Barents and Claes Andriesz Goutijck. De Veer in his account of the voyage implies that they were buried on the coast of north Novaya Zemlya, and by survey on foot we inspected ca. 180 km of Novaya Zemlya’s northern coast in 1995 and 1998. Ship and camp remains and the objects recovered from the Saved House provide the material link between the diary and its historical context. “The hands of our seamen touched those objects,” wrote maritime historian Jarig Mollema in 1947 after viewing an exhibit of the finds, “and one leaves feeling as though their hands have grabbed ours.”
THE
True and perfect De-
scription of three Voy-
eges, so strange and woonerdful,
that the like hath never been
heard of before:
Done and performed three yeares, one after the other, by the Ships of
Holland and Zeland, on the North Sides of Norway, Muscovy and
Tartaria, towards the Kingdomes of Cathay & & China (shewing
the discouerie of the Straights of Weigates, Nova Zembla,
and the Countrie lying vnder 80. degrees, which is
thought to be Greenland: where never any man had
bin before: with the cruel Beares, and other
Monsters of the Sea, and the vnufp-
portable and extreme cold
that is found to be in
those places.
And how that in the last Voyage the Shippe was so inclosed by the
Ice, that it was left there, whereby the men were forced to build a
house in the cold and desart Countrie of Nova Zembla, where
they continued 10. months together, and neither saw nor
heard of any man, in most great cold and extreme
easie; and how after that, to save their lives, they
were constrained to sake above 350. Dutch-
miles, which is about 1000. miles English,
in little open Boates, along and over the
maine Seas, in most great daunger,
and with extreme labour, vn-
speakable troubles, and
great hunger.

Imprinted at London for T. Pasier
1609.

FIGURE 1
Title page of the 1609 English edition of De Veer’s work.
Winter was sweeping its last wet strokes across the saturated Dutch land when Dmitri Kravchenko arrived in Amsterdam on the morning of 3 March 1991. He was a man with a mission and a scientist with an obsession. The slim, 52-year-old archaeologist with pallid beard and sunken face called himself captain, admiral, and historian. For more than a decade, Kravchenko had been obsessed by the glimpse into the past allowed him on a remote, snow-dusted Arctic island. Now his goal was the Rijksmuseum in the center of town. In a small suitcase he carried plans to complete Willem Barents’ voyage around the Eurasian continent. Kravchenko expected that in the Netherlands his reputation as investigator of Barents’ wintering would open wide many doors, through which money would flow prodigiously. In full regalia, an old-fashioned Russian Navy uniform replete with gold braids, he presented himself at the main entrance of the museum, queuing with tourists before the box office and nervously searching for words.

“I must see Barents expert, Dr. Braat,” Kravchenko began, striding up the steps to the counter.

“Sir, this is the entrance to the museum,” replied the woman behind the thick glass window. “Would you like to buy a ticket?”

“I have twenty years’ experience in the Arctic territory,” Kravchenko continued, unfazed. “At the site of the Saved House, we erected a cross six meters tall and a cairn in honor of Barents and his men. That monument is also intended as a warning: This is a historic spot, which must be preserved!”

Chapter One

Into the Ice Sea
12 June 1597: “Plate of how we with great effort leveled a way across the ice.” Although the plates by De Bry in the German (Hulsius) edition are less artistic than the Doetecum plates, they are more informative. Plate #27, shown here, includes the Saved House as it was left behind: partly torn down.
The clerk in the box office nodded politely (people were more patient then than they are today) and then waved for Security.

Kravchenko asked for an interview with Joost Braat, curator and archivist in the Rijksmuseum’s Dutch history section. During the past twelve years, they had met occasionally in Moscow, and now Kravchenko was back – with a new plan.[1] It soon transpired that he was not at the right address after all: the offices and archives were in another building, across the street from the museum. “You’re holding up the line,” the security guard told him. “Please step back.” Kravchenko hesitated and then, uttering Russian phrases, made his way outside through the revolving doors.

“Problem – but small problem,” he muttered, backing away from the imposing nineteenth-century building to try and spot another entry. When he realized that the officer was keeping an eye on him, he decided to look for the institute’s offices. Crossing the street, he searched the name plates and stepped up to one labeled “Rijksmuseum”. The door buzzed open. He stepped inside and received further scrutiny. But a few minutes later – at last – a familiar face! Much to Kravchenko’s relief, he had found Joost Braat.

In 1974, Joost Braat had initiated a cautious diplomatic approach to Soviet authorities about finalizing the salvage of Willem Barents’ Saved House. In the Cold War years, such efforts required good contacts. Braat, then a Communist by conviction, had met with M.I. Belov, director of St. Petersburg’s Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (AARI), and inquired how much really was preserved of the Saved House. “Nothing... There is nothing left,” was the reply, but in 1977, Belov arranged for Dmitri Kravchenko to visit northern Novaya

1. Kravchenko participated in a search of the coasts of the Kara Sea – promoted by Komsomol’skaya Pravda and led by D.M. Shparo in 1973, 1974, and 1975 – for traces of the expedition of Vladimir Rusanov with Gerkules, which disappeared after rounding north Novaya Zemlya in 1912. In 1934, a cairn and a wooden pole with the carving “Gerkules 1913” were discovered on a small island at the mainland coast (Gerkules Island, 75°47’N, 88°18’E). The 1934 expedition found belongings of Rusanov and Gerkules in among the driftwood on a small island in the archipelago of Shkery Minina (74°54’N, 86°35’E) [Barr 1984]. Shparo’s survey produced a fireplace on Mikhailov Island, with objects similar to those found in 1934. Otto Sverdrup, searching for the party according to instructions left by Rusanov at West Matochkin Shar, spent the winter of 1914–1915 at Cape Vylda, close to Gerkules Island [Barr 1974a, b; 1984]. Ice conditions in the eastern Kara Sea were severe in 1912 and 1913, even for the icebreaker Vaygach, which was headed for discovery of Severnaya Zemlya [Barr 1991]. The Rusanov party, therefore, may have wintered on northeast Novaya Zemlya or Gerkules Island and subsequently moved west along the coast of Taymyr, probably toward Dikson.
Willem Barents' book of charts (Caertboeck) for the Mediterranean Sea, published by Cornelisz Claesz in 1595.
Chapter Three

Dutch Expansion in the Sixteenth Century

Demise of an Empire and Birth of a Republic

Nine printed books and a manuscript were retrieved after 1871 from the ice that filled the ruins of the Saved House. These were practical works: navigational handbooks, a Dutch translation of Mendoza’s History of China, religious books and a Dutch-French dictionary, and also a historical reference of the Netherlands, which signifies that the Dutch in their winter quarters were keenly aware of their moment in history. The chronicles of Holland, Zeeland, and Friesland until the year 1517 (Delft, 1585) is a leather-bound history book with fancy copper locks, written in part by Ellert de Veer (1540–1598), Gerrit’s father. With the title extension, “and what has happened since the reign of Charles of Burgundy, Fifth Roman Emperor” (Charles V, 1500–1558), the authors provided a link to their own time. This line is followed by Gerrit de Veer, who dedicated his exploration account to the States General and to Maurits, Prince of Orange by birth, “Stadholder and Commander of Gelderland, Holland, Zeeland, West-Friesland, Utrecht, and Overijssel, etc., and Admiral at sea.”

And Jan Huyghen van Linschoten [1601], who also dedicated his account of the Arctic region to the Prince, further explains in his introduction:

Because the undertaking was Your own work and occurred in Your name and under Your policies...[The exploration of the World] had been on our minds for years and...
has now materialized through the insights of our national government and our nation’s Stadholder, Our beloved Protector, His Serene Highness, the late Prince [William I] of Orange, who took particular pleasure [in new discoveries]. For a long time, many difficulties arising from disturbances and war prevented us from ultimately turning our words into actions, but in our hearts, the drive continued to spark and was never extinguished. When the Almighty finally lifted our burdens through the military leadership of our intrepid hero, Prince Maurits, who succeeded his father, and through the wisdom of the States General, the fires were rekindled. [L’Honoré-Naber 1917, p. 26]

Willem Barents and the Novaya Zemlya wintering are associated with the blossoming of Dutch commerce and culture and the dawning of the Golden Age. Dutch expansion and voyages of discovery at the close of the sixteenth century were direct consequences of years of revolution and war. Following the division of the Habsburg Empire in 1559, Spain’s northern territories had been entrusted to the leadership of Willem of Orange (1533–1584), a wealthy nobleman appointed by Philip II stadholder of the provinces of Zeeland, Holland, and Utrecht. Protests against the close-knit political and church systems propagated by Calvin (1509–1564) in France and Luther (1483–1546) in Germany were stimulated by tax increases imposed on the financially flourishing Netherlands. When military forces arrived in 1567 to oppress the rebellion, the Netherlanders under the leadership of Orange rose up against Madrid, starting a war that was to last eighty years. Outlawed by Philip, Willem of Orange was shot dead by a French assassin in June 1584. A year later, the Spanish regained control of Antwerp, the Netherlands’ booming metropolis and economic center that inspired Bruegel’s “Tower of Babel” (1563). This city was a major staple market for commodities from the Mediterranean and Baltic seas and goods from the Americas imported by the Spanish. Over the next decade, half the population of all major cities in the southern Netherlands moved to the north – 38,000 from Antwerp alone. The cities of Holland during the 1580s received the flow of refugees with relative ease, and the immigrants from the south brought advanced skills to an assemblage of seamen, shipyard workers, peat-diggers, and peasants [Wilson 1976; Israel 1995]. International trade rapidly broadened the view of the surrounding world, and the merchant fleet, especially, provided the eyes and ears of the Reformation.

Spanish influences were omnipresent in Holland during the 1580s and 1590s, as a result of the two countries’ common history. Despite the war, the Netherlanders were considered Spanish citizens and could pursue careers in service to the Empire. On the third voyage to the Arctic, the explorers carried Spanish currency (reals), ate mazamorra (porridge), and named several landforms in Spanish. Jan
Huyghen van Linschoten (1563–1611) moved to Sevilla at age sixteen “to see and travel into strange countries, thereby to seek some adventure” [Appendix 1]. In the streets of Sevilla strolled people from every corner of the vast colonial realm, even some “Indians” from Patagonia, “of large build with coarse arms and legs, in the growth of facial hair and color not unlike the Samoyeds of Novaya Zemlya and Vaygach or the Straits of Nassau” [Van Linschoten 1596, Itinerario, Part 3, Chapter 13]. When Spain annexed Portugal and its colonies in 1580, Spanish authorities replaced the Portuguese, and Van Linschoten, appointed assistant to the new Archbishop of Goa, traveled in 1583 to this colonial city on India’s west coast. While the young clerk took care of the bishopric palace, diligently copying everything that passed by his eyes, Dirck Gerritsz Pomp, who, like Jan Huyghen, hailed from the town of Enkhuizen, left Goa aboard the Portuguese vessel Santa Cruz, with destination Japan. His report of the eight-month stay in Japan was brief, but significant:

On the island of Japan lives a good-natured people, but they worship the same idols as those in China. They also have statues in their churches. In the city of Nagasaki, and others under the influence of the Portuguese king, are the Jesuits, which over some years have been driven away, because they all wanted to be merchants. This island is as big as England. [Waghenaer 1592, in Wieder 1923, Part I, p. 54]

Meanwhile, Van Linschoten found that the captain of the ship that sailed annually from Macao to Nagasaki had on occasion earned as much as 200,000 ducats [Appendix 2]. The Portuguese vessel brought silk and returned with silver. It was a cold country, according to Van Linschoten, so woolens would find great demand. This was significant because the region around Antwerp was the center of Europe’s linen and wool manufacturing. Silver mines, inhabitants dressed in silk, and ceramics worth up to fourteen thousand ducats: Japan was sufficiently
attractive to establish trading contacts, indeed! Pomp and Van Linschoten together set sail for their patria in 1589.\[1\]

Van Linschoten returned to the Netherlands on 3 September 1592. Three years later, he published his vast collection of records and notations. The Voyage or navigation of Jan Huyghen van Linschoten to East- or Portuguese India – the Itinerario, as it is commonly called – described the maritime routes to the Indies, physical facts of the eastern sea-lanes and the shores of America and Africa, consular reports, and economic and political treatises of Spain and Portugal. Van Linschoten presented an accurate layout of the “East Indian” riches and the measures taken by the Iberians to shield them from others, recommending Java as a secure target. He was unable, however, to accompany brothers Cornelis and Frederik de Houtman on the first Dutch intercontinental voyage (April 1595 to August 1597). Just as that journey was being prepared, he accepted an invitation to join the first polar expedition in 1594, “although I had only recently returned from the East Indian Countries, had barely completed the description of that country, and had only briefly enjoyed my country and the company of my few remaining friends” [Round by the North (1601), in L’Honoré-Naber 1914, p. 27].

The consolidation of the Dutch state that enabled the intercontinental voyages began in 1588, when Spain diverted its attention to England. The need for an ally at sea had persuaded Elizabeth to withdraw English support for the Dutch opposition, which, by sustaining the unrest in the Netherlands, had incapacitated the young republic. The English had regarded the populist rebellion against Spain with mixed feelings; support to Orange had been half-hearted, although Walsingham and other advisors recommended otherwise. Only after Antwerp fell in 1585 did Queen Elizabeth abandon her neutrality toward Philip, and English troops were hailed in as liberators in Holland and Zeeland. (Gardiner in 1876 found a portrait of Elizabeth, ornamental to a map of England and Wales by Hondius [1590], in the Saved House.) Further consolidation took place when Spain in 1590 declared war on France, relieving the north of the pressure of the Spanish Army. The Netherlands’ military leaders quickly took advantage of these sudden shifts in the international power field, recapturing many towns and fortifications along the eastern and southern fronts between 1590 and 1592. Prince Maurits had reorganized the Dutch forces along the lines of the Roman armies: infantrymen armed with pikes and muskets were trained for swift, disciplined moves across rivers and through marshlands.

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1. Pomp would attempt to return to Japan with Mahu and De Cordes in 1598, but in 1599, the Spanish captured him, along with his vessel Blijde Boodschap (‘Good Tidings’), on the west coast of South America (Chapter 4).
The military successes secured the basis for sustained economic and political growth, including expansion of international trade. The States General ordered its Arctic explorers to show friendly intentions wherever they called, and to make it clear that the Netherlands maintained contact with nations and regions over the entire world (Letters of Instruction 16 May 1594 and 16 June 1595). The explorers were also to explain what advantages these contacts entailed and, whenever interest was noted, to offer to send a more appropriate delegation at the first opportunity [Van Linschoten 1601; Mollema 1947, p. 179]. The explorers, in turn, honored their leaders and entrepreneurs in the toponymy of the New World. At opposite ends of the globe appeared names like Staten Island, New Zealand, Nassau Straits, the Islands of Orange, and Mauritius.

**Cartography of the Arctic Coasts**

Dutch exploration of the European Arctic was economically motivated, but it also served to satisfy a scientific curiosity. The campaign against the Spanish in 1585 cost 3.2 million guilders, and expenses quadrupled in the following thirty years, causing desperate financial need in a population of a little more than one million [Schama 1987]. The country’s leaders eagerly searched for sources of income to help the new nation recover from the crippling damages of war, privateering by Dunkirk pirates, and sabotage. However, the “expansion” was primarily an expression of self-confidence and drive after the paralyzing 1580s, and not one
of need, as contended by contemporary historians such as Emmanuel van Meteren. The grain trade with Italy, generally tolerated by Spain to relieve grain shortages, had grown to involve 400 ships a year. Dutch expansionism was a commercial enterprise, “...on the one hand to prevent our competitors from gaining an advantage over us, and on the other hand out of an insatiable lust for profits” [van Linschoten 1601, in L’Honoré-Naber 1914, p. 28]. The steady flow of geographical data generated by the merchants and their scouts invited frequent updates of sea-route descriptions and navigational handbooks, further stimulating international trade. Products and art that the Mediterranean trade brought in from Italy heralded the northern European Renaissance. With Goltzius, who studied Roman antiquity during a stay in Italy in 1591, Haarlem became one of Europe’s most influential art centers. The artwork recovered from the Saved House includes allegories, a series of Roman heroes, and many prints of Biblical scenes, because Holland’s clergymen and scholars were still quarreling about what the snake might have hissed in Paradise.

Amsterdam became the center of book printing and cartography. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, rapid developments in shipbuilding and navigation enabled mariners to leave the coasts and explore the open ocean. Willem Barents was a cartographer, and his involvement with the merchant-explorers can be traced to the production of an atlas of the Mediterranean Sea.[2] Barents’ Caertboeck van de Middellandse Zee [Chartbook of the Mediterranean Sea], a collection of charts and solar declination tables, appeared in 1595. His “Chart of the Mediterranean Sea,” a copper engraving (418 × 855 mm), is an almost unaltered copy of a coasting pilot or “portolano” for the Mediterranean from the 14th century [Nordenskiöld 1889]. The book’s title page includes the following anonymous praise:

They who long sailed the blue-painted field in fear and delusion to the land of Italy [...] Come and buy this book, see what has been written here [...] Pay honor by heart and mouth, to him who brought this to light, without scorn and with great force,

2. Willem Barents’ portrait was discovered in the Royal Library of Brussels [by S.D. de Vries, Mollema 1947] on an allegorical etching of the Amsterdam harbor, by Abraham Coninck (1613 or 1615). Barents and Gerrit de Veer also appear to have been depicted on Aert Pietersz’ 1599 portrait of a civic guard. This painting, housed in Amsterdam’s Historical Museum, shows two men pointing at the map of Novaya Zemlya, the senior man holding navigator’s dividers. Barents’ widow asked the city to pay compensation to her and her children, but this request was denied in a resolution of the States General on 17 March 1598. Being the father of five children, Barents was probably in his forties in 1596 [L’Honoré Naber 1917].
Dutch Expansion in the Sixteenth Century

praise him day, month and year [...] Praise Willem Barentszoon, who acts not without God (Rust baart Lust).

The Northeast Passage had been partially mapped in the sixteenth century through a compilation of observations, word-of-mouth knowledge, and knowledge ascribed to the Ancients, notably the Roman geographer Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79) and Ptolemy (A.D. 87–150) [cf. Wallis 1984; Okhuizen 1996]. The critical point in the seaway was Cape Tabin (the present Cape Chelyuskin), the northernmost cape in Asia. Tabin promontorium Plinio (Cape Tabin according to Pliny) was first shown on Gerard Mercator’s chart of the Arctic (1569, revised by his son in 1595 and 1601), which appears to include Vilkitsky Strait between the mainland and the mythical Arctic Continent. Cape Tabin was also displayed on Ortelius’ Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (1570), as well as on maps by Lucas Jansz Waghenaer (1589, 1592), Plancius (1594), and Hondius (1595). Later additions accurately indicate continuing geographic discoveries, e.g. “the New Land that Olivier Brunel has found, situated under the Northern Pole, named Nova Zembla” on Waghenaer’s map of 1592 [Schöler 1984]. The Yugor Strait, 2–10 km wide, was believed to yield exclusive entrance to the Northeast Passage. The strait now known as the Kara Gates, to the north of Vaygach Island, had not been explored, and it does not appear on the maps of Barents and De Veer. On Isaac Massa’s map (1602), it is marked: “Here one may cross at high tide – otherwise it is dry.”

The investors in the first two expeditions tried to secure exclusive rights to the northern sea route. On 26 August 1594, aboard Zwane, one of the Zeeland vessels of the Dutch fleet exploring the Russian north, Van Linschoten wrote: “One should of course build a stronghold on Idols Point [Cape] near the entrance of the [Yugor] Strait. Then no force in the world could harm us there. With some constructions behind this point, a harbor can be created where ships can be sheltered and supplied” [Van Linschoten 1601, in L’Honoré-Naber 1914, p. 30]. The successful Zeeland merchant Balthasar de Moucheron, an acquaintance of Mercator and driving force behind the Dutch Arctic explorations, wrote to the States of Holland and Zeeland (6 April 1595):

If one succeeds in sailing to Cape Tabin and sending back a message [about having reached this Cape], it is of the uttermost importance that you [the States] have assured

3. Olivier Brunel (1545?–1605?) worked throughout Russia during the 1560s as merchant for the Stroganovs [Koolmans-Beijnen 1876]. Brunel’s exploration of northern Russia and Novaya Zemlya during the 1580s is evident from De Veer’s reference (8 August 1594) to “the place where Olivier Brunel had been before, called Costinsarch” (see also Chapter 5).
Friday, 27 August 1993 — A cold day! No wind, but very damp, with thick fog. I have no idea what is going on, but every morning I wake as if from a coma. It takes a good half hour for me to regain my senses and get dressed. Until today, I held on to the illusion that we would be able to complete our tasks at the Saved House, but excavation is terribly labor-intensive, which makes for slow progress. Keeping up with the administration of finds took me almost the entire day. Hans stays all alone in his small tent, surrounded by a good number of bags, and he diligently tries to keep up with the avalanche of new discoveries. Henk van Veen, who is sharing that tent with Hans, is sent off after breakfast, and all day his cot is used as a sorting station. On our chart of the excavation, slowly but surely, the organization of the Saved House is taking shape.

The hearth, in the centre of the House, has now been completely unearthed. Few objects are found in the hearth itself, but small items in its immediate surroundings betray its intensive use. We have found the small bones of Arctic foxes, a welcome supplement to the winterers’ menu. The small skulls were cracked so they could consume everything, even the brains. It has been suggested that this helped to stem the outbreak of scurvy, the much-feared disease that results from Vitamin C deficiency. The human body cannot make Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) by itself: we derive it primarily from fresh fruit and...
FIGURE 1
The interior of the Saved House, as depicted in the German edition of the “True and Perfect Description” (Hulsius 1598). This plate accurately depicts the lamp that burned day and night (27 October 1596; 12–13 February 1597), the wine barrel turned into a steam bath (4 November 1596), the bunks, kettle (Fig. 7.8), and clock (Fig. 7.9). When the clock froze, the passing of time was recorded with an hourglass.

FIGURE 2
Copper kettle with iron hinge, 37 cm in diameter, 26 cm tall. This was regular kitchenware in the Netherlands.
vegetables. But Arctic foxes can produce ascorbic acid from glucose, so their meat contains a certain level of Vitamin C [Note #2 in Chapter 8]. The winterers were able to snare almost 30 foxes. Victor Dershawin excavated the lower part of a fox’s paw, its knuckles still all in place. Perhaps it was tossed into the fire during a meal and remained there.

We have also found bones of larger animals, which turned out, after cleaning, to be cow and pig ribs hacked into pieces. There was salted meat on board, and De Veer described how the winterers pulled a barrel of meat from the ship to refill it with fresh water. During this operation, a couple of passing polar bears peeked around the corner. One of them paid dearly for that: he immediately received a bullet and dropped dead on the spot. This bear was stood up until it froze and probably remained in front of the Saved House all winter long. Possibly the pile of polar-bear bones seen by Kravchenko in 1979 and by Frans Heeres in 1991, near the spot where the cross now stands, was the remains of that unfortunate animal.

All victuals aboard were dragged into the House, which was soon filled with barrels, crates, and bags containing not only provisions, but also merchandise. The winterers lived off these provisions during their entire stay. They were not too concerned about their supplies’ spoiling. After all, they were living inside a natural freezer. Although we have found a great deal of trash on the floor, it’s likely that the House was reasonably well kept during the wintering. Skipper Jacob van Heemskerck would have maintained the rigid cleaning routines followed aboard ship even during the cold and dark months inside the House. The huge piles of trash on either side of the House are simple proof of that. Besides, flammable refuse would certainly have disappeared into the fire.

Most of our finds are concentrated on the northeast side of the hearth. Here, we discovered a space of three to four square meters full of leather cuttings, lead bullets, pottery, buttons, and smaller bits of fabric: a few hundred objects in total. This is in stark contrast with the near lack of data in a two-meter-wide strip on the eastern side of the interior, suggesting that the cots were alongside this wall. A seaman’s locker, harboring expensive and personal items, stood in front of each cot. This locker was also used to step up into the cots. Crates and barrels would probably have been stacked up against the north and west walls. A door in the south wall opened onto a porch. There probably was also a cot in the southeastern corner of the House, right next to the door. The etching of the interior of the Saved House in the German edition of De Veer’s account [Hulsius edition, 1598] would then represent a north-south bisection. Although the House’s dimensions in that picture are too generous, individual details correspond quite well with the archaeological data. Thus, the cots are indeed in the correct place,
but they are represented on too small a scale. If there were six cots, then each cot was meant for three men. Aboard ship it was also customary for several men to share one cot. In the Saved House, that would have allowed them to profit from each other’s body warmth. A cot measured approximately 1.5 to 1.7 meters long. Even though the mariners were not very tall – Van Heemskerck’s body armor in the Rijksmuseum is small – they would probably have slept in a half-sitting position, as people were wont to do in those days.

Svetlana has been a complete no-show at the digs. Together with Yuri, she keeps busy in the kitchen. The culinary level of the field kitchen has been considerably raised by her arrival. Today, we’ll be getting Uga, a delicious soup with fish from the Yenisey River. This afternoon, the weather also took a turn for the better. The fog lifted and the sun broke through the clouds. Henk, Dirk, and I took a walk towards the ruins of the wooden lighthouse on the cape to gather firewood for our camp. After keeping a fire going for almost ten days, we have to walk farther and farther to gather firewood. Driftwood on the beach in front of the Saved House was already in very short supply, but now it has been depleted. Sometime during the 1950s a wooden lighthouse a good 15 meters tall was constructed on the southern tip of the promontory. There is a small shelter next to it. The glass prism of the lighthouse’s lamp lies spread about the remains like a sort of eternal ice. From what’s left of the wooden tower, one gets a grand view of the entire cape until far past Ice Harbor. It is so clear that objects on the horizon don’t grow blurry, but rather become too small for the eye to see. Everything is flat, the sea as well as the land. In the nineteenth century, Charles Francis Hall of the United States spent two years with the Eskimos in Northern Canada. One day, Hall was with an Eskimo hunter and viewed his surroundings with a telescope. Although the hunter boasted sharp eyesight, with the telescope he could bring closer those things that were barely visible even for him. He told Hall that the telescope provided a view into tomorrow. Hall wondered at the remark, and when I read it I did not understand it either, but now it suddenly makes sense. Here, you can easily see 30 km, and if you are at a higher elevation, even farther. However far you can see, you will see as far across the landscape as you can cover by foot in a day. You will always be looking at today.

Upon returning, I asked René Gerritsen if he could cover the excavation with his flying camera today. The kite took off with the camera tilting from underneath it at a 45° angle to obtain oblique images. The kite-flying session ran its course beautifully, and this will result in splendid photographs. Today it is exactly 397 years ago that the Dutch vessel got stuck in the ice and the decision was made to sit out the winter on Novaya Zemlya. Henk read from the diary and brought the festivities to a close with a speech, in which he simultaneously commemorated
the dead of the sojourn. Devoutly we doffed our caps. As usual, Henri was putting it all on film, and as usual, it would all have to be repeated. Then Taco hurried to include the event in his reporting and transmit it all with the satellite phone. René again managed to send seven digital photos to the *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*. They, in turn, announced that they will have a full-page spread on the expedition.

Svetlana will pull double guard duty tonight, so I will hit the sack early. She thought we had been working hard. The temperature started dropping this evening and is expected to go below freezing. Dirk and I have been lying in our tent, still chatting, for quite a while.

*Saturday, 28 August 1993* – The wind gauge indicates a Force 8 wind. Large waves are crashing in a haze of ocean spray along the coast, and foam is gusting up almost to our camp. The coast had been almost free of ice for the last few days, but now many ice floes come floating by out of the north. Reluctantly, we started our work near the Saved House. It was so frigid that I could hardly look into the wind. A few minutes later, a polar bear alert sounded. Two young bears had headed out to sea not too far from camp, only to come plodding along the beach towards the lighthouse. We had barely started again when Vadim showed us something unbelievable. Yesterday he astonished everyone with a leaden compass-case casually left behind near the hearth, in the center of the Saved House. This could be the compass De Veer wrote about on 29 January 1597. In the square that he has just started to dig, Vadim is working around the end of a glass drinking horn preserved in the soil. The object is made out of crystal-clear glass, decorated with gilded paint. Two of these extremely rare horns are kept in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum. In the sixteenth century, it was nearly impossible for most glassblowers to produce such colorless glass. Only the masterful Venetian glassblowers proved capable of this tour-de-force. This is not to say, yet, that this horn originated in Italy. Attracted by financially strong buyers, Italians had long been working in countries bordering the North Sea. These types of objects, however, are unusual on a ship, and I believe this horn is part of the precious cargo taken aboard in Amsterdam.

Van Heemskerck and Barents carried a highly diverse sample of arts and crafts available in the Dutch Republic. Their cargo was not a specific trade cargo, because they were not yet sure what might interest the peoples of Cathay and Japan. Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, during his stay in Goa, learned from missionaries that the Chinese Emperor was particularly enamored of clocks. The clock that Carlsen discovered in 1871, also depicted on Hulsius’ print of the Saved House’s interior, certainly was not a ship’s clock. This timepiece with weights was totally unsuited for shipboard use and was likely selected as a gift for the
Weight-driven clock used until 3 December 1596, when it froze. This is a unique specimen of a north European house clock, with characteristics of fifteenth-century Gothic clocks. In the Saved House, it was probably an “antique” almost a hundred years old [Grimbergen & Wijnberg, in: Braat et al 1998, p. 182]. The main wheel has a one-hour time cycle. The bronze bell does not fit the clock and shows no hammer traces (150 per day). It may not have been part of the original construction.
Emperor. The two very large maps of the United Netherlands recovered from the remains of the Saved House were also intended to impress the mightiest of Asian Rulers. Commercially and politically, the voyage of Barents and Van Heemskerck was very much experimental.

Today, work progressed slowly because everybody soon became cold and tired in the icy wind. It remained to be seen if we could finish our research, for toward the end of the afternoon it started snowing. Powdery snow has continued to fall all during the evening. I transferred the data from Kravchenko’s field sketches to our charts to compare the results of the two investigations. This afternoon, Hans researched the spot outside the northeast corner, where Kravchenko had marked his largest concentration of discoveries. As expected, it delivered scant results: a few small shards and nails remained, but nothing else. This was probably a spot where debris and scrap had been deposited during the disassembly of the House by Carlsen and Gardiner in the 1870s. The refuse heap on the southwest side that we dug into this week is totally overgrown with a thick layer of moss and small plants, as can be expected after 400 years.

A big ivory gull (*Pagophila eburnea* – somewhat rare in these parts) was soaring about our camp all day long. Yuri tossed some food remnants at it. The bird is very tame and flies away only when you come close, so just about everybody has already taken its picture. Another rare bird was a dead Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*), which Dirk stumbled on near Kravchenko’s camp [Re birds on Novaya Zemlya: cf. Zeeberg 2001, p. 146–147]. Oh yes, the new satellite phone went dead tonight. Will Jos Goos send us a new one again?

**Sunday, 29 August 1993** – I unzipped my tent to a white Novaya Zemlya. It snowed all night, and the accumulation is 30 cm for sure. This year may see an early winter. Thus, the investigations have come to an end for Vadim. He is of the opinion that all work has to come to a stop, because we cannot possibly work like this. Two days ago, he suddenly announced that he has to go to Spitsbergen on 30 August, and could we just call for the helicopter? Everyone was surprised, and Henk van Veen was clearly dumbfounded. “Couldn’t this man have announced his itinerary before our trip?” said the expression on his face. “We sat around the table for days, and besides, the schedule and all agreements were already documented months ago.” Vadim probably already sensed that repeating his urgent request would arouse resistance from his Dutch colleagues, so he brought Svetlana along to buttress his arguments. She also wants to go home because her mother is ill. It seemed best to everyone to just continue working and avoid further discussions. After a few hours in his tent, Vadim rejoined the excavations, continuing his tasks as though nothing had happened.
7 September 1995 – “Barents and his crew were gentlemen,” Jerzy told the crowd gathered in the mess. “Take, for instance, this exquisitely shaped copper button. It shows that they were not a bunch of vagrants but rather gentlemen. They traveled in style. After discovering the Northeast Passage, Barents was to immediately establish trade contacts and therefore had bolts of fabric, among other things, on board. We have now found the leaden seals from this cloth near the Saved House.” R/V Ivan Kiriev has embarked on its voyage home, and Jerzy presented the results of nine days of hard labor to the ship’s crew. A selection of objects has been exhibited on the mess room tables. The expeditions of 1993 and 1995 together produced 1370 itemized artifacts. More than a hundred soil samples were collected for analysis of plant seeds, pollen, and human parasites (fleas and lice). The survey has revealed the cabin’s floor plan and given us a view of its interior and its building structure. The objects that we recovered bear witness as to how the men gathered around the fire and mended their clothing, shoes, and instruments. We’ve completed the Rijksmuseum’s Nova Zembla collection with the smallest objects, including several decorative items that were probably part of the trade cargo. The prime example of these is the series of nine mythological figurines, 3 to 4 cm tall, which demonstrate the influence of the Renaissance in northern Europe towards the end of the sixteenth century. The commercial load represented a sample of the booming European cultures and the Golden Section layout of the cabin fits well in this picture.
The expedition’s finds are being processed at two tables in a laboratory room on the top deck of the ship, behind the bridge. Some sample bags simply contain an amorphous mass of soil, held together by moss, which is gradually extracted to reveal diverse kinds of potsherds, nails, textiles, and bones. All the shards are then relabeled and sorted by color: orange-glazed shards are collected in bags with other orange-glazed shards, green shards with green shards, white with white, etc. etc. Objects are individually inspected, soil fragments are brushed off, and then the objects are repackaged. The iron nails are wrapped in wet toilet paper, then in aluminum foil, to delay corrosion. The pewter figurines, of which ten were found altogether, are being dried by immersion in alcohol. The mystery of the lead plaque showing Barents’ signature has been resolved. The inscription is not a signature, but indicates a “3 ons” weight measure. After the exhibition for Kiriev’s crew, these fragile finds are repackaged, to be opened, we hope, only at the Rijksmuseum’s preservation studio in one of the turrets of the majestic building in Amsterdam. Conservator Ab Hoving described the major “historical sensation” he got from a small glass plate that he just couldn’t rub clean. “In the same collection of artifacts, I found three out of four parts of the frame that had held the glass, and suddenly I realized this had been a mirror. The corroded glass that I had been ignorantly studying a moment earlier once reflected the
winterers’ faces, and for a brief moment I felt their presence. It was as if they were looking over my shoulder in the remaining layer of mercury."

The successful completion of the research activities is exuberantly celebrated, and tall tales abound. Our comrades from Ivanov Bay, by their own accounts, were put through quite an ordeal, and had almost been abandoned in that abominable Arctic land. They were indestructible, however, and we call them Ivanovatarakan: the Ivanov Cockroaches. Pieter and George told how Russians who were rain-soaked or had fallen overboard would stand over fire “until they were steaming and their pants caught fire.” Later that night, through the drubbing and howling of another storm, feeble songs could be heard throughout the ship as Starkov, drunk but indefatigable, tried to remember some German opera. When he’s on, the singing is splendid: Starkov’s tenor with Dima’s basso. With the beer gone, an alcoholic meltdown followed with the last vodka. The chef was on the kitchen floor, dead-drunk. Sailors grinned as they stepped over him; they were working and wouldn’t touch a drop.

Shortly after midnight, when the ritual drinking orgy had ended, Jerzy pushed me on ahead of him, behind Vitali and Dima: “Hurry, hurry!” Dima has a brother, Daniel, and another brother who lives in St. Louis, Missouri, who resembles Jerzy like two drops of vodka. Tonight, all three of us are brothers, because we’ve stayed on the longest. You too, Vitali – you are our brother, too. Embracing, we stumbled into Vitali’s cabin. Vitali was wearing his speznats shirt – the blue-and-white stripes of the Russian Navy. He nodded amiably and stirred his heating coil in a glass of water that, indeed, started bubbling in no time. He had a plastic bag full of cookies and also offered us condensed milk with our tea. Then the door opened, first just a wee bit, and Anton entered.

“There you are!” he said. He was listening at each door until he found us, I thought; he returned to the mess room and found everybody gone. Anton sat down on the bunk, dangling his legs over the edge. Since he was unable to lean now, he sat down bent slightly forward; it looked like he was broken. Vitali finished his hospitable household chores and proceeded to show us a picture of his small daughter, a cheerful girl of five. I glanced once again towards Vitali, the charmer, and I could see little direct resemblance, but really, she is a beautiful child. The picture also affected Anton, who had been drinking and was a bit more emotional than usual. While Dima softly hummed a melancholy song with Jerzy plucking at his beard, Anton wrestled a photograph of his loved ones from his wallet. He peered at it and then, without taking his eyes off the photo, passed it on to me with a smile. I grasped the black-and-white print: a Dutch woman and a Dutch girl, smiling at the photographer. “They’re coming to pick me up,” he said, “they’re coming to pick me up at the airport. Maybe you’ve seen them because they also saw me off.” I handed the photo back to him.
“The Elements”, seven series of four by Jacob de Gheyn; and Roman
heroes; series of ten prints, 25 × 16 cm, by Hendrick Goltzius (1586).

Six of ten pewter figurines recovered in 1995, including a Scythian
rider and the Biblical symbols Faith, Hope, and Love.
(b) Some have flat backsides with wood imprints, suggesting they
were ornamental to a larger piece.
“Hey!” said Dima seriously: “Why we have no drink?” He got up and with Vitali distributed the glasses and the vodka – still more vodka.

“Just a tad, OK?” said Anton, laughing and holding out his glass. “Yeah. Thank you very much.”

“How’s your movie?” Jerzy roared at him. Anton raised his glass:

“Good. Very good!”

“Anton,” I said, “Did I ever thank you for your help when my theodolite didn’t work? Did I ever thank you for that?”

“Don’t mention it,” Anton nodded, smiling.

“I really appreciated it,” I said.

“It was entirely my pleasure.”

8 September 1995 – We are belayed off the Russian mainland coast, near Amdlerma. Kiriev quietly rides the swells in the pale sunlight. Through my binoculars, I followed the descent of an Antonov 26 transport plane towards Amdlerma’s landing strip on a sandy beach berm. The town rises on a slope about 15 m above the sea, and its seaside is one uninterrupted landfill of rusted junk and oil barrels. A small pilot launch was heading for Kiriev across the choppy waters. This small vessel was a steel container with car tires along its black sides and a wooden cubicle just large enough for two or three men on top. Once it had come alongside, Starkov lowered himself via the rope ladder and was caught by one of the two men aboard. At 9:00 a.m., Starkov waved goodbye, standing legs apart on the galloping vessel, which lent a dramatic air to it all. Then they headed for the coast, where Starkov will board the Antonov-26 to Vorkuta and from there continue via Moscow to Longyearbyen. We will sail the 1300 km from Amdlerma back to Archangelsk.

This afternoon (12:30 to 7:00 p.m.) we made a reconnaissance of Staten Island (Ostrov Mestny, 4.5 km long) just outside the Yugor Strait, where the Dutch fleet lay at anchor in September 1595 with seven ships and about 180 men. Two men were killed by a polar bear on 6 September and buried on Staten Island. Van Linschoten [1601] had marked the burial site on a map, and on a photocopy of this map, George pointed out the location of our landing. He proposed a bay-to-bay search. Finding the burial site would also shed light on a mystery created by a passage in the German edition of De Veer’s manuscript [HULSIUS 1598], which claimed that five mutineers had been hanged and buried on Staten Island at the same location as the bear victims. Van Linschoten’s map shows the most obvious features of the island as they would appear to a vessel approaching its shores. The various shallow, rocky inlets are easily recognizable and so are the remarkable bands of peat, which seem to descend like glaciers from the center of the
Yugor Strait (here marked Waygats or Nassau Strait) in the Hulsius edition, with the fleet’s anchoring places until 11 September 1595 and depiction of the events described by De Veer or Van Linschoten. Marked from Train Bay going east are the Idols Cape (Abgötter Eck), Cross Cape (Creutz Eck), and Cape Quarrel (Zwist Eck). Jan Huyghen’s lookout at Thon Eck (Cape Barrel) inspired a Dutch children’s song: “...And the barrel came apart”. Depicted on Staten Island (Stenden Insel) are the gallows for five mutineers (omitted by De Veer).
island to the sea. On the highest, central part of the island is a wooden tower with a light on top. This lighthouse is powered by a thermonuclear battery of the kind that is used on interplanetary spacecraft, with cooling fins on the sides. Electricity is generated by a strontium radioisotope, so we were advised to maintain a minimum distance of 50 m. Our search of the burial site yielded modern nails and a German cartridge from World War II. “Peat lies meters deep along the shore,” George said, disappointed. “What all may have covered up those 400-year-old graves? They can’t be found.”

9 September 1995 – The sky was overcast: through a few threadbare holes in the cloud cover, golden rays spray across a dark world. Kiriev was sailing a straight line through Yugor Strait, a channel 5 km wide between Vaygach Island and the Russian mainland. Balthasar de Moucheron had wanted to erect his fort where the strait narrows to about 3 km, to close this entry to the Northeast Passage to competing vessels (Chapter 3). From the aft-deck, I observed the angular bend in the ship’s wake from a sudden change of course. Ahead in the distance, I suddenly noticed a lonely settlement atop a plateau on the southern coast. The ship was closing in on it fast, and I recognized wooden buildings on the beach, towers on the plateau, and then, through my binoculars, barbed wire – walls of barbed wire. I hurried forward along the gangway, where a few Russians stared silently ahead.

“Chabarova,” one said grimly: “Gulag.”

Across the water from the prison camp, Kiriev dropped anchor in Vaygach’s Train Bay at 5:00 p.m. The landscape appeared liquid under hundreds of moving reindeer. The second Dutch expedition also anchored in Train Bay, “sheltered from all winds and a good anchoring ground,” when it encountered sea ice in Yugor Strait in August 1595. The explorers named the bay after the train oil that Samoyed whale hunters were producing on shore [Appendix 8]. This was a potential staging area for the exploration of Asia and a party went ashore to establish contacts with the locals. On the beach the Dutch found five whales, but the Samoyeds[1] had fled when they saw the fleet entering the bay, leaving their loaded sledges behind. The theft of some hides from those sledges was severely punished. According to the statutes that had been read to each seaman as he mustered, Admiral Nay ordered that the responsible sailor would be left behind

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1 The indigenous people were called Samoyeds, a combination of saam-yedno, meaning ‘land of the bog people,’ the Saami. The Samoyeds, with other Ugrian [in Russian, Yugorski] tribes, came over the Ural Mountains from Siberia. In their own language, they call themselves Nenets [Nentsi], meaning ‘people’.
FIGURE 5
Map of Staten Island in Van Linschoten (1601), showing the burial site of two men killed by a bear.

FIGURE 6
6 September 1595: “Plate of a terrible murder, by a cruel, fearsome, devouring bear.” The victim was collecting “mountain crystal”.

[256]
on Vaygach Island. He had another man keelhauled, accidentally tearing his body into two pieces, as graphically depicted by an etching in the German edition of De Veer’s log [Holstus 1598]. While the ship lay at anchor, other men died as a thick fog enveloped the bay. The dead were buried on land, but to the horror of the seamen, polar bears emerging from the fog exhumed and consumed the bodies. The Admiral then dispatched 54 armed men on the southern coast of Yugor Strait to find other inhabitants of the region and collect information on water depths and the ice season. “We found them one mile inland [German mile = 6.3 km: Verhoeff 1983], where we did not expect to find people at all”, wrote De Veer [31 August 1595].

“They were standing in two groups, five and five, and we were hard by them before we knew it. Then our interpreter went alone towards them to speak with them. They perceived this and sent a man towards us. When that man came close to our interpreter, he drew an arrow from its quiver and threatened to shoot. Our man feared for his life, because he was unarmed, and shouted in Russian: “Do not shoot, we are friends.” When the other heard this, he cast down his bow and arrow. Our translator called again: “We are friends,” to which the other answered, “Then you are welcome,” and they saluted each other by bending their heads down to the ground”

We didn’t have to wait long for contact with the “Samoyeds”. As soon as Kiriev had dropped anchor, small outboards came racing past. The men in these boats waved frantically, made a rapid turn around the vessel to come alongside, and quickly climbed aboard. They were of small stature with brown, weathered oriental faces: Nenets, as they should be called today. We kept our distance while the crew, tactfully but forcefully, confined them to the aft deck. They were after alcohol but received our (virtually untouched) stock of chocolate bars and some other delicacies instead. Invited to come ashore, we prepared the landing craft. As we approached a pier, only children and a few elders were waiting. The kids didn’t smile; they just stared. Just like many other Arctic settlements, Varnek is a mess of broken glass and oil barrels. On a peninsula in the bay, the Communists exploited lead and copper mines. The miners lived in Varnek in wooden barracks, which still make up the majority of its dwellings. The young adults that we encountered were hammered. It is terribly desolate, even now in summer, the most exuberant of seasons.

Considering all they have been put through, it is a miracle that anything is even left of the original Nenets culture. Alcohol has disrupted their societies. Children start drinking around the age of ten. George explained that the Nenets lack the enzyme required to break down alcohol: thus, they remain drunk for
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