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Spitsbergen

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SPITSBERGEN.

By Sir MARTIN CONWAY.

IN the summer of 1906 the Dutch Government sent a cruiser, the *Friesland*, to Spitsbergen. Smeerenburg was visited, and a stay of some duration made there for the purpose of putting in order the graves of the old Dutch whalers, so disrespectfully treated by visitors in recent years. They anchored in Hoeker (Virgo) bay. West of this, on the north-west coast of Danes island, they found two graveyards, whereof the one to the east belonged, according to tradition, to Frieslanders, the other to Danes. The principal Dutch graveyard was on Amsterdam island, on the east end of the north shore, and it was here that the Dutch ship *Willem Barents* set up a monument in 1878. Older than this burying-place was Deadman's island, probably only used in the earliest days of the fishery. There were also graves on the south shore of Amsterdam island, most of which were probably made after the abandonment of Smeerenburg. It was here that the captain of the *Friesland* caused all the remains to be brought together and buried in a single grave, on which a great heap of stones was piled and cemented together. Close to the still visible foundations of the Middelburg tent seven graves were discovered, probably those of the seven winterers of 1634–1635, who all died in that tent. Their skeletons also were removed to the new grave. A yet larger graveyard, containing some four hundred graves, was found on the opposite side of the bay, on the coast of the mainland. These appear to date from the eighteenth century, and to be later than the graves on Amsterdam island. One of these graves bore the date 1717. They were in good condition and unviolated, as tourists do not land there! All the names found there were Dutch.

Baron van Asbeck, who has sent us the account of the above expedition, adds some observations on matters connected with Spitsbergen history in the nature of addenda to my recently published 'No Man's Land.' The first of these is in connection with the Dutch winterings at Spitsbergen and Jan Mayen in 1633–34. It appears that in 1633 the future Admiral de Ruyter went up to Jan Mayen as mate of a whaler. In his journal, under date July 27, 1633, he notes that on this day "there came a jager (*i.e.* a ship to carry blubber, etc., to Holland) from Holland, and brought two men, one to stay on the island (Jan Mayen) with six men of the fleet to be enlisted by him, and the other to proceed to Spitsbergen to enlist there six more men. On July 29 the jager sailed for Spitsbergen with the 'burgher' (*i.e.* citizen) of Spitsbergen to stay there." These two men were evidently the leaders of the two wintering parties.

Baron van Asbeck has also been led to study carefully the recorded accounts of the voyage of discovery of Barents in 1596, when Spitsbergen
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SKETCH-MAP OF SPITSBERGEN, TO ILLUSTRATE BARENTS' TRACK IN 1596.

was first seen. He finds that if the French translation of Barents' log is followed,* instead of the English translation printed in my

* Printed in S. Muller's 'Geschiedeniss der Noorsche compagnie.'

Hakluyt Society volume, 'Early Voyages to Spitsbergen,' the course actually steered by Barents' vessel can be explained. He has made out three sketches, on which he has laid down the courses, (1) according to 'Early Voyages;' (2) according to the French translation, (a) by dead reckoning, and (b) by dead reckoning corrected by the recorded observation for latitude of one point; and lastly, by (3) the track of 2 (b) with the positions of three known points corrected.

"The difference between the true latitudes and the dead reckoning," he explains, "shows us that from June 13 to 15 they experienced a northerly current of about $1\frac{3}{4}$ English miles an hour; from June 15 to 17 a northerly current of about 2 English miles an hour; and from June 17 (in $80^{\circ} 10'$) to June 18 (in 80°), having steered southerly courses for 16 miles and made $10'$ south, a current of about 2 English miles an hour. The track (as drawn on the accompanying sketch) crosses the north-west corner of Spitsbergen.* It seems to me probable, not to say certain, that the current experienced was not a northerly one, but a north-westerly or a north-north-westerly, the trending of the west coast of Spitsbergen. Assuming the current to have been as supposed, with a velocity of nearly 2 English miles an hour, and that the bearing of the west headland on June 20, 1596, south-south-west 5 miles (= 20 English miles), was right, we have to fix the point *c* by computing the bearing and the current somewhere north-north-east of the Norway islands in a latitude of about 80° N."

Baron van Asbeck concludes that all the difficulties of laying down, from the recorded accounts, what was actually the course followed cannot be entirely overcome without a more exact knowledge of the currents in those parts.

ADMIRALTY SURVEYS DURING THE YEAR 1906.

By Rear-Admiral A. MOSTYN FIELD, F.R.S., Hydrographer.

UNDER the orders of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, nine of His Majesty's vessels, with three small hired vessels, manned by 86 officers and 777 men, have been employed on hydrographical surveys both at home and abroad.

The Marine Survey of India, which is now in charge of an officer of the Royal Indian Marine, has been continued as in previous years.

A detailed report of Admiralty Surveys has been drawn up and presented to Parliament. The following is a brief summary:—

During the year 1906 no less than 367 rocks and shoals dangerous to navigation have been discovered, and during the same period 658 miles of coast-line have been charted, and an area of 2950 square miles has been sounded over by H.M. surveying vessels.

On the *East Coast of England*, at various places in the Medway and Thames

* Which, of course, the vessel cannot have done.