

УДК 910.4(985)

**AMONG RUSSIA, THE USA, CANADA AND GREAT BRITAIN.**

**THE HISTORY OF WRANGEL ISLAND IN THE  
19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES**

**Christensen C.S.**

A more improbable object of imperial rivalry than Wrangel Island could scarcely be found in the world. For decades in the 1800s and the early 1900s Wrangel Island became the subject of controversy among Russia, USA, Canada and Great Britain. Having about 140 km long from East to West and 90 km wide from North to South this cold, barren and inhospitable island lies in Arctic Ocean A shifting expanse of ice surrounds the island and isolates it from the Russian mainland around 200 km away from the Siberian Northeast coast. Even though arctic storms batter its shores and chill wind sweep off the ice, stirring the defence fog that constantly blankets the bleak landscapes Wrangel Island has its own dramatic and interesting history. This article analyses and explains how Western world viewed life in the Polar Regions in the 1800s and 1900s.

**Keywords:** Wrangel Island, woolly mammoths, Canada, USA, Great Britain, Ferdinand von Wrangel, Herald Island, World Natural Heritage Site, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Chukchi people.

**МЕЖДУ РОССИЕЙ, США, КАНАДОЙ И ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИЕЙ.**

**ИСТОРИЯ ОСТРОВА ВРАНГЕЛЯ В XIX – XX ВВ.**

**Христенсен К.С.**

В мире едва ли можно найти более удивительный объект имперского соперничества, чем остров Врангеля. На протяжении десятилетий в 1800-х и начале 1900-х гг. остров Врангеля становился предметом споров между Россией, США, Канадой и Великобританией. Имеющий около 140 км в длину с востока на запад и 80 км в ширину с севера на юг, этот холодный, бесплодный и негостеприимный остров лежит в Северном Ледовитом океане. Подвижное ледяное пространство окружает остров и изолирует его от материковой части

России на расстоянии примерно в 200 км от северо-восточного побережья Сибири. Несмотря на то, что арктические штормы обрушаются на его берега, а холодный ветер сметает лед, поднимая защитный туман, который постоянно окутывает унылые пейзажи, остров Врангеля имеет свою драматическую и интересную историю. В этой статье анализируется и объясняется, как именно западный мир рассматривал жизнь в полярных регионах в 1800-х и 1900-х гг.

**Ключевые слова:** остров Врангеля, шерстистые мамонты, Канада, США, Великобритания, Фердинанд фон Врангель, остров Геральд, объект всемирного природного наследия, Вильхьялмур Стефанссон, чукотский народ.

### **The Chukchi, sustainability and Wrangel Island before the 1800s**

Wrangel Island is a small Russian island ( $7,608 \text{ km}^2$ ) in the Arctic Ocean. Situated between the Chukchi Sea and the East Siberian Sea, Wrangel lies astride the 180-grade meridian. The International Date Line is displaced eastwards at this latitude to avoid the island as well as the Chukchi Peninsula on mainland Russia. The tiny rocky Herald Island located 60 kilometres to the East is the closest land to Wrangel Island. Most of Wrangel Island and Herald Island is a federally protected nature sanctuary administrated by Russia's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The islands and their surrounding waters were classified as a strict nature reserve ("zapovednik") in 1976 and as such receive a high level of protection and exclude practically all human activity other than for scientific purposes.

As well in the antiquity as in contemporary history, the Wrangel Island has stood out from its surroundings. The island is believed to have been the final place on Earth to support the last original species of the big dinosaurs, the woolly mammoth. Around 3,700 years ago, the breed simply extinct. More than 5,000 years after the last woolly mammoths extinct on the Russian Mainland. The presence of humans using advanced hunting and survival skills probably hastened their demise. However, diseases and inbreeding are considered the real cause of death of the unique species. The lack of contact and mixing with other individuals was fateful. This "Jurassic Park" was a kind of a time warp in the Arctic Ocean.

Wrangel Island has a severe polar climate. The daily mean temperature in winter is 22 degrees below zero and in summer around 2 degrees above zero. The region is blanketed by dry and cold Arctic air masses for most of the year. Warmer and more humid air can reach the island from the Southeast during summer. Dry and heated air from Siberia comes to the island periodically. In other words, habitation on the island is only for Inuit people and other peoples accustomed to living in Polar Regions. For people from Europe and America this ice desert is almost uninhabitable.

The tribe of the first inhabitants on the island is unknown. However, it is well-known that the Chukchi people inhabited the island many hundred or even thousand years ago. The Chukchi (15,000 people) are an indigenous Inuit people, that in 2021 first and foremost live on the Chukchi Peninsula and until recently also on the Wrangel Island. A legend among the Chukchi tells of a chief Krachai, who with his tribe fled across ice to settle in northern land. Though it is a myth, the existence of an island or continent to the north was lent credence by the annual migration of reindeer across the ice, as well as the appearance of slate spear points washed up on the Arctic shores, even though some of them were made in a fashion unknown to the Chukchi people. Theories (archaeological, historical, and linguistic evidence) about a trade route in late prehistoric and early historic times, linking the present Inuit settlements near Point Hope in Alaska to the Siberian North coast, have been presented by researchers [7, p. 177-179].

The Chukchi people, like other Inuit, have always lived in harmony with nature. Their traditional way of life is adapted to the harsh nature and the animals' life rhythms. The Chukchi were engaged in nomadic hunter gatherer modes of existence, including that of polar bears, whales, walruses and reindeers. If they destroyed the life cycle of the region, for instance by overfishing, they destroyed their own possibilities of existence. Furthermore, adaptation to their surroundings was of highest importance. Therefore, their traditional lifestyle was adapted to the region, in which they lived. Lifestyles of coastal and inland Chukchi differ. Coastal Chukchi were largely settled fishers, whereas inland Chukchi were mostly reindeer herders [14, s. 130-131].

In Chukchi author Yuri Rytkeu's (1930-2008) historical novel "*A Dream in Polar Fog*", set in the early 20th century, the Chukchi knew of Wrangel Island and referred to it as the "Invisible Land" or "Invisible Island". For hundreds of years the Chukchi were living in harmony with nature. The ecological system worked optimally and the endemic animal and flower species were not exterminated. Even the amount of Chukchi people was increasing during the centuries. Also, the Inuit traditional homes, the Yaranga tents (a special kind of yurt) were designed according to the climate, seasons and daily work the extreme cold considered [8, s. 46-47].

The Yaranga's framework was made of posts. So-called Tarpaulins were used for covering the framework. The tent was surrounded by sod or planking around the base. There was a smaller cabin within the Yaranga, at the rear, used for sleeping and living. This part was warm and cozy. It was separated from the outer, cooler parts of the Yaranga with haired reindeer skins and grass, supported by a cage-like framework. Household duties were done in the larger outer room of the tent in front of its inner building. In winter storms and at night, the dogs were there [12, s. 29].

The secret behind the Chukchi people's great adaptability in the Arctic regions is sustainability. Chukchi is part of the ecological system. There will always be enough food, just as the amount of waste will be reduced and never pose a threat to the tribe. Furthermore, the Inuit people are mobile and their boats, houses and their livestock will always be part of these ecological cycles. This pattern is also seen in the other Arctic regions, Greenland, Canada and Alaska. But elsewhere on the planet such as people living in the desert, jungle, harsh moor landscape or other extreme places, this pattern is recurring [8, s. 72-73].

Another notable relationship with Inuit people is their mobility with subsequent passivity towards actual property rights. In the Arctic regions you will not find as in other regions on the globe, castles and fortresses. Major wars are not common in the region either. The Chukchi people must follow the movements of the animals and therefore an actual property relationship would not matter, as for large parts of the year, there is not enough food on their plots of land [8, s. 34-35].

## **The Wrangel Island and the 1800s**

It was different with other peoples, for example the Europeans. From 1600 and 1700, seafarers and explorers from all over the European continent, supported by their respective governments, began to explore the American continents and the land areas hidden in the Arctic Ocean and the Polar Regions in general. A few centuries before, exploration of the coasts of Asia and Africa had begun. In an astonishingly short time, a concentrated effort was made by the European states to dominate most of the land of the earth of those two continents. Here the main features of European colonization were determined. In both Asia and Africa, Europeans encountered a well-established high culture and at times cultures far more developed than the European one, which they recognized as their equals. After all, trade was also the primary reason for the violent expansion [5, s. 20-21].

Only in two crucial respects were the Europeans superior to the other cultures: shipbuilding and navigation, as well as the ability of their firearms. For instance, their adaptability to harsh areas did not exist. The Europeans were in Asia and Africa to procure goods and other goods that could be sold in Europe at a profit and as long as the local business community could supply these goods in sufficient quantities and quality, the Europeans just settled on leased land in suitable places along coasts and riverbanks. In Africa, Europeans quickly found that the amount of goods and goods did not matter much. Therefore, Africa's contribution to the European colonial world became the slaves.

However, the recognition of the equality of in the American content and the Arctic zone quickly ceased. The Native American and Arctic cultures were perceived as underdeveloped, inferior and weak, and when they simultaneously proved vulnerable, they broke down remarkably quickly. The Europeans brought both smallpox and measles to the areas and the resistance of the natives proved to be very weak. At the same time, the amount of goods and other goods, especially in the Arctic regions, was small, especially due to the harsh natural conditions. Therefore, the Arctic became home to another part of the European colonial world, namely to

strategic bases in conquering and supremacy over other territories [2, p. 2-3; 5, s. 18-19].

In 1764 the Cossack Sergeant Stepan Andreev claimed to have sighted the small island. Calling it Tikegen Land, he found evidence of its habitants, named after the abovementioned mythological Chukchi chief, Krachai. The Wrangel Island is named after the Admiral and Baron Ferdinand von Wrangel (1797-1870), who after reading Andreev's report and hearing Chukchi stories of land at the island's coordinates, set off on an expedition (1820-1824) to discover the island, with no success. In other words, the Russian Empire demanded supremacy over the island, even though no white man has ever set foot on it completely in line with the other European colonial powers, at that time. However, no one took notice or addressed the local peoples of the Arctic regions. The Europeans took it for granted that they could just occupy and assert their rights in these areas. After all, it was just an uncivilized culture that had to be civilized with the higher European culture. Legally, it was otherwise the Inuit who were entitled to ownership of the area since they were there first [13, p. 333-335].

It took a while up in the 19th century before the expeditions in the Arctic Ocean began to yield real results. One of the reasons was that the ships of the time were not built for the conditions in the Arctic regions. The wooden hulls of the ships were quickly crushed in screw ice and against floating icebergs. Likewise, it was difficult for the sailors to act normally in the icy climate. Diseases and especially gangrene were fatal to the crews of the ships. Winters with longer stays in camps in the area were also equal to certain death. They had no Yaranga tents. The logistics around the food provisions were also a problem for the Europeans. They had not the same knowledge of the very fickle polar climate as the Chukchi people had. Discovery and conquest of the area was therefore virtually ruled out in the beginning of the 1800s.

In 1849 the British naval officer and explorer Henry Kellett (1806-1875), captain of H.M.S *Herald*, landed on and named Herald Island and thought he saw another island to the west, which he called Plover Island, thereafter indicated on

British Admiralty charts as Kellett Land. A German whaler, Eduard Dallmann (1830-1896), reported in 1881 that he landed in 1866. However, there was no evidence that his assertion was true [15, p. 18-19].

In August 1867 Thomas W. Long, an American whaling captain, “approached it as near as fifteen miles. I have named this northern land Wrangell [sic] Land … as an appropriate tribute to the memory of a man who spent three consecutive years north of latitude 68°, and demonstrated the problem of this open polar sea forty-five years ago, although others of much later date have endeavoured to claim the merit of this discovery” [10, p. XV-XVI].

Besides having named the Wrangel Island after Ferdinand von Wrangel, Thomas W. Long also named Cape Hawaii and Cape Thomas on the island. An account appeared in the “*Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science*” (1868, 17th Meeting at Chicago), published in 1869, under the title “The New Arctic Continent, or Wrangell’s Land, discovered 14 August 1867, by Captain Long, of the American Ship Nile, and seen by Captains Raynor, Bliven and others, with a brief Notice of Baron Wrangell’s Exploration in 1823” [19, p. 1-4].

In 1879 an expedition led by the American Captain George W. DeLong (1844-1881), commanding the USS *Jeanette*, attempting to reach the North Pole, described the eastside of the Wrangell. After this USS *Jeanette* became locked in the polar ice pack and drifted eastward within sight of Wrangel before being crushed and sunk nearby. The search for the USS *Jeanette* was the reason the island was found. The first known landing of a European or American on Wrangel Island took place on August 12, 1881 – 130 years ago. A party from the USRC *Corwin* landed on Wrangel Island on 12 August 1881, claimed the island for the United States and named it “New Columbia”. The expedition, under the command of Calvin L. Hooper, was seeking the USS *Jeanette* and two missing whalers in addition to conducting general exploration. It included naturalist John Muir, who published the first description of Wrangel Island. In the same year on 23 August, a ship, commanded by Lieutenant and explorer Robert M. Berry (1846-1929) during the second search for the USS

*Jeannette*, landed a party on Wrangel Island that stayed about two weeks and conducted an extensive survey of the southern coast [15, p. 21].

### **The Wrangel Island and the 1900s**

The first time the public became aware of the small windswept and ice-covered island was around 1890. In the French author Jules Verne's (1828-1905) novel "César Cascabel" the protagonists float past Wrangel Island on an iceberg. In Jules Verne's description, although he has visited the island himself, a live volcano is located on the island. Between Cape Haven and Cape Thomas on Wrangel's southern coast, you could see the crater, the Frenchman wrote. And it was perfectly legitimate to fantasize about the northernmost areas. Often it was the imagination descriptions that were the dominant ones in the perception of the Arctic zone and the Inuit peoples.

After the discovery of the island's real existence, however, it would be a few more decades before the island really entered the political game of the modern world. It must be added, though, that the Inuit people still lived in their own rhythm of life and that no great power had yet taken an interest in them. But that had to be changed quickly. In 1911 the Russian Arctic Ocean Hydrographical Expedition on the icebreakers Taymyr and Vaygach under command of the Russian hydrograph and surveyor Boris Vilkitsky (1885-1961) landed on the island and in 1916, the tsarist government declared Wrangel Island to the Russian Empire. The purpose of the abovementioned Russian Arctic Ocean Hydrographical Expedition was to further explore the Northern Sea Routes and to find new land areas. Especially, after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, where Russia lost territories to Japan.

After the land claims of Great Britain, USA and Russia of the tiny island, Canada joined the fight. In 1914, members of an ill-equipped Canadian Arctic Expedition, organized by an Icelandic American Arctic explorer and ethnologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962), were marooned on Wrangel Island for nine months after their ship *Karluk* was crushed in the ice pack. Their purpose was to explore the regions west of Parry Archipelago for the Canadian government. The ship with Captain Robert Bartlett (1875-1946) of Newfoundland and 24 other expedition

members aboard drifted westward. The ship sank on January 11, 1914. Four of the survivors made their way to Herald Island but died there, before they could be rescued. Four other members of the crew tried reaching the coast of Wrangel Island on their own but perished in Arctic ice. Among these four perished the Scottish biologist and polar explorer Alistair Mackay (1878-1914) was represented. He has been part of the British Ernest Shackleton's (1874-1922) polar expeditions in the beginning of 1900s. The remaining members of the expedition, under command of Captain Robert Bartlett, made their way to Wrangel Island where three of them died. Robert Bartlett and his Inuk hunter Kataktovik made their way across sea ice across the Chukchi Sea to Siberia to get help. An American motorized fishing schooner rescued the marooned [15, p. 27-29].

Vilhjalmur Stefansson's interest for Wrangel Island was awakened. The polar explorer represented the researchers and explorers who agitated for a western colonization of as well the Arctic zone as of the Inuit people. Although he got help from his Inuit hunter Kataktovik, he regarded the Inuit people as uncivilized and a weak civilization that had to be modernized. In the beginning of the 1900s, it was very common that Inuit people were relocated to either Canada or Europe or to places where you could study their behaviour. Vilhjalmur Stefansson regarded these relocations as pure disasters. The Inuit were compared to the Indians and Afro-Americans in North America [16, p. 236-238].

There were several reasons for that in the opinion of Vilhjalmur Stefansson. 1) In the Arctic area Inuit people live their lives of good exuberant health in a comparatively germfree atmosphere. They are not frequently attacked by germs and so neither they nor their ancestry have developed immunity against them. Therefore, when they are relocated, the Inuit people are attacked by hosts of strange germs and their sturdy good health either crumbles before their first charge or succumbs to their persistent siege. 2) The Inuit people could not adapt to the European civilization. They had difficulty integrating into the differences of the modern world. Trade the European way, the Inuit people could not understand. Counting and the value of money neither. 3) The Inuit people would not adapt to European rites and faith. The

Inuit and their special way of understanding the world did not fit into the European way of thinking. 4) Their way of life what depends for instance household was conducive to scurvy and other deficiency diseases. By integrating them in modern society they could therefore improve their health situation [17, p. 100-101].

Another of the problems, Vilhjalmur Stefansson worked with, was the so-called surplus population (so many Inuit hat they could not get food enough). Theoretically, there were four ways in which Canada could treat the surplus population in their Arctic territories: 1) they could allow the population to increase unhindered, provided on behalf of the other Canadian taxpayers; 2) they could let the population increase unhindered and employ the Inuit in the companies that would come, based on the motto higher incomes regulate the number of children; 3) encourage family planning and 4) relocate all Inuit who had no work or income to southern Canada [3, s. 261].

According to Vilhjalmur Stefansson, passivity in the face of the population problem in the North would be a total lack of sense of responsibility, which would be a blow to the innermost realities of any European civilization that has survived the last many centuries.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson's conclusion was, therefore, that the Inuit civilization was weak and, in a way, uncivilized. In several books he argued that the best for the Inuit people to be colonized and to be fully integrated in the European world. The Inuit could not cope with the transition from their culture in the Polar Regions to Stefansson's so-called modern society. After all, this was the main proof the Inuit were uncivilized and would become extinct if they did not get help to become integrated into the European type of society. Ergo, something had to be done to help this underdeveloped culture into the 20th century [18, p. 219].

In modern time you could compare this to the relationship of Chinese to Tibetans. The Chinese have colonized Tibet, primarily because they would help the Tibetans into the modern world. Otherwise the Tibetans would as well disappear as a tribe very quickly as be a burden for modern China.

Like the Chinese Vilhjalmur Stefansson not only wanted to colonize Wrangel Island, but also to safe the Inuit people by integrating them into modern society. In 1921 he, therefore, encouraged and planned an expedition for four young men to colonize Wrangel Island, where the eleven survivors of the 22 men on the ship *Karluk* had lived from March to September 1914. Stefansson had, furthermore, designs for forming an exploration company that would be geared towards individuals interested in touring the Arctic island [4, s. 72-73].

Stefansson originally wanted to claim Wrangel Island for the Canadian government. However, due to the dangerous outcome of his initial trip to the island, the government refused to assist with the expedition. He then wanted to claim the land for Britain, but the British government rejected the claim when it was made by the young men of the expedition. The raising of the British flag on Wrangel Island, an acknowledged Russian territory, caused an international incident.

In 1921 Stefansson sent five settlers (the Canadian Allan R. Crawford, three Americans: Frederick W. Maurer, Lorne Knight and Milton Gall, and Inuit seamstress and cook Ada Blackjack 1898-1983) to the island in a speculative attempt to claim it for Canada. Thereby in 1921 Wrangel Island became the stage for one of history's tragedies. The explorers were handpicked by Stefansson based upon their previous experience and academic credentials. Stefansson considered those with advanced knowledge in the fields of geography and science for this expedition. At the time, Stefansson claimed that his purpose was to head off a possible Japanese claim. An attempt to relieve this group in 1922 failed when the schooner *Teddy Bear* under Captain Joe Bernard (1878-1972) became stuck in the ice. In 1923 the sole survivor of the Wrangel Island expedition, Ada Blackjack, was rescued by a ship that left another party of 13 (American Charles Wells and 12 Inuit) [15, p. 100-103].

By 1922 the Russian government had survived revolution, civil war, allied invasion, economic bankruptcy and political terror. Still smarting from the Allies' intervention during their civil war, Soviet officials affirmed that any nation intruding into their territory would be repulsed. Thus, notes poured into Great Britain, Canada, and the United States protesting Stefansson's colony on Wrangel Island. They

declared the island Soviet domain and warned that all furs and commercial property of trespassing colonists would be confiscated.

Newspapers sensationalized the tragedy. Headlines revealed that Crawford's parents blamed Stefansson for the four deaths. Misleading, distorted and even fabricated stories damaged Stefansson's theory of the Friendly Arctic. In defence of his reputation and those of his colonists, he wrote a 420-page book entitled "*The Adventure of Wrangel Island*". The parents of Lorne Knight defended the explorer-adventurer and allowed free use of their son/s diary. Nonetheless, four more deaths, added to the eleven of the *Karluk*, became associated with Stefansson and Wrangel Island [15, p. 1-3].

Stefansson found no sympathetic ear in Canada, Great Britain or the United States. Canada had already washed its hands of him and his schemes. Great Britain confronted economic and political instability following World War I and wanted no additional troubles from Stefansson and Wrangel Island. The United States, the reigning world power, sought isolation, disarmament and disentanglement from world politics. The unofficial US policy reflected these sentiments. To maintain the balance of power, American officials covertly supported Soviet claims and actively discouraged British and Japanese intervention. Thus, the international climate was not receptive to Stefansson's colonization of Wrangel Island [9, p. 245-247].

On August 20, 1924, the Wrangel colonists watched the ship force its way through the ice. They thought that it was Stefansson's supply ship, which was daily expected. Eagerly the five men of the colony launched a skin boat and rowed out to meet the vessel. As they approached, Wells recognized the Soviet flag and started to turn back. The Eskimos, however, feared the cannon and maneuvered the boat alongside the ship as ordered. Politely, the officers assured them that they would be returned unharmed to Alaska. The Russians, however, did confiscate the furs (around 150 foxes and 40 polar bear skins) and ivory (four full gunny sacks). One month later, after scientists had conducted investigations ashore, the Soviet vessel *Krasny Oktyabr* left Wrangel Island with the Americans under arrest [6, p. 156-157].

After stopping at various Siberian ports, the ship reached Vladivostok in the middle of November. The Eskimos moved to the naval barracks and Wells to a hotel. The Eskimo men set to work fishing, their wives to sewing, and their children to exploring the largest city they had seen. Nine-year-old Billy Konanoruk who had been sickly most of his life, fell desperately ill. Although hospitalized and treated, he died within a few days. Diplomatic entanglements prevented the prisoners from returning home.

First, since the United States did not recognize the Soviet Union, no American diplomats were closer than Harbin, China. Second, the State Department believed that Carl J. Lomen (1880-1965) should provide funds for the relief and transportation of his employees. Third, Charles Wells caught pneumonia and could not travel. Fourth, when the Eskimos reached the Chinese border, the US consul told the Chinese officials that only Wells was American, but not the Eskimos. Fifth, the Soviets would not allow Wells to leave unless an apology was forthcoming from the United States.

Ironically, Stefansson's colony was a tragedy, because the colonists, including him, did not have enough experience to live and reside in such extreme areas. The civilization he wanted to introduce was not capable of solving the problems that arose along the way. Here we have a superb demonstration of this original, independent mind. He never fell for the folklore of science. Nor, having mastered the hunting and other techniques of the Eskimos as no outsider ever had before, did he succumb to a mystical or sentimental evaluation of "primitive wisdom". His question-asking, answer-doubting intelligence was in fact unique in the first half of the 20th century. He mastered the skills of stone-age Eskimos and consorted with the best minds of New York, London, Europe without ever surrendering his right to challenge confrontations of belief and knowledge. Many of his findings were so convincing that decades will pass before they are fully understood and accepted.

However, Stefansson's contributions to science flowed from his common sense, which was devastatingly simple and dazzlingly uncommon, and which he applied with equal-handed candour to what primitive men think they know and what

sophisticated, civilized men think they know. The notes of curiosity and candour were struck early in his life: offered a year of study at the Divinity School at Harvard he accepted with the stipulation, that it be clearly understood by his Unitarian sponsors that he was interested in religion only as folklore. Vilhjalmur Stefansson became a symbol of Europeans' failed policies towards the polar regions and their perception of their own cultural superiority towards the Inuit culture and lifestyle. Furthermore, he was some decades too late with his conquering of Wrangel Island. In 1924 the conquest phases of the colonial era were disappearing, at least in terms of conquests of land in areas where there was no prospect of increased profits from the conquest [15, p. 160-161].

### **The Wrangel Island in the Soviet Union and Russia (1911-2021)**

Beginning in the 1920s, the Soviets organized the economic activities of both coastal and inland Chukchi and eventually established 28 collectively run, state-owned enterprises in Chukotka. All of these were based on reindeer herding, with the addition of sea mammal hunting and walrus ivory carving in the coastal areas. Chukchi were educated in Soviet schools and today are almost 100% literate and fluent in the Russian language. Only a portion of them today work directly in reindeer herding or sea mammals hunting and continue to live a nomadic lifestyle in Yaranga tents [16, p. 670-673].

In 1924 the Soviet Union removed the American and 13 Inuit (one was born on the island) of this settlement aboard the vessel *Krasny Oktyabr*. Wells subsequently died of pneumonia in Vladivostok during a diplomatic American-Soviet row about an American boundary marker on the Siberian coast and so did an Inuit child. The others were deported from Vladivostok to the Chinese border post Suifenhe, but the Chinese government did not want to accept them as the American consul in Harbin told them the Inuit were not American citizens. Later, the American government came up with a statement that the Inuit were 'wards' of the United States, but that there were no funds for returning them. Eventually, the American Red Cross came up with \$1600 for their return. They subsequently moved through Dalian, Kobe and Seattle (where

another Inuit child drowned during the wait for the return trip to Alaska) back to Nome.

During the Soviet trip the American reindeer owner Carl J. Lomen from Nome had taken over the possessions of Stefansson and had acquired explicit support (“go and hold it”) from US Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to claim the island for the United States, a goal about which the Russian expedition got to hear during their trip. Lomen dispatched the MS *Herman*, commanded by Captain Louis L. Lane. Due to unfavourable ice conditions, the *Herman* could not get any further than Herald Island, where the American flag was raised [15, p. 298-299].

In 1926 the government of the Soviet Union reaffirmed the Tsarist claim to sovereignty over Wrangel Island. Also in 1926 a team of Soviet explorers, equipped with three years of supplies, landed on Wrangel Island. Clear waters that facilitated the 1926 landing were followed by years of continuous heavy ice surrounding the island. Attempts to reach the island by sea failed and it was feared that the team would not survive their fourth winter [6, p. 158].

In 1929 the icebreaker Fyodor Litke was chosen for a rescue operation. It sailed from Sevastopol, commanded by Captain Konstantin Dublitsky. On 4 July it reached Vladivostok, where all Black Sea sailors were replaced by local crew members. Ten days later Fyodor Litke sailed North, passed the Bering Strait and tried to pass Long Strait and approach the island from south. On 8 August a scout plane reported impassable ice in the strait and Fyodor Litke turned North, heading to Herald Island. He failed to escape mounting ice. On August 12 the Captain shut down the engines to save coal and had to wait two weeks until the ice pressure eased. Making a few hundred meters a day, Fyodor Litke reached the settlement on August 28. On September 5, Litke turned back, taking all the ‘islanders’ to safety. This operation earned Litke the order of the Red Banner of Labour (January 20, 1930), as well as commemorative badges for the crew.

According to a 1936 article in *Time* magazine, Wrangel Island became the scene of a bizarre criminal story in the 1930s, when it fell under the increasingly arbitrary rule of its appointed governor Konstantin Semenchuk, who controlled the

local populace and his own staff through open extortion and murder. He forbade the local Yupik Inuit people (recruited from Providence Bay in 1926) to hunt walrus, which put them in danger of starvation, while collecting food for himself. He was then implicated in the mysterious deaths of some of his opponents, including the local doctor. Allegedly, he ordered his subordinate, the sledge driver Stepan Startsev, to murder Dr. Nikolai Vulfson, who had attempted to stand up to Semenchuk on 27 December, 1934 (though there were also rumours that Startsev had fallen in love with Vulfson's wife, Dr. Gita Feldman, and killed him out of jealousy). The subsequent trial in May-June 1936, at the Supreme Court of the RSFSR, sentenced Semenchuk and Startsev to death for "banditry" and violation of Soviet law, and "the most publicised result of the trial was the joy of the liberated Eskimos". This trial had the result of launching the career of the prosecutor, Andrey Vyshinsky, who called the two defendants "human waste" and who would soon achieve great notoriety in the Moscow Trials.

During and after World War II many German Schutzstaffel (SS) prisoners of war and the remnants of Andrey Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army were imprisoned and died on Wrangel Island. A prisoner Efim Moshinsky, who later immigrated to Israel, claims to have seen Raoul Wallenberg there in 1962.

In 1948 a small herd of domestic reindeer was introduced with the intention of establishing commercial herding to generate income for island residents. Aside from the main settlement of Ushakovskoye near Rogers Bay, on the south-central coast, in the 1960s a new settlement named Zvyozdny was established some 38 km (24 mi) to the West in the Somnitelnaya Bay area, where ground runways reserved for military aviation were constructed (these were abandoned in the 1970s). Moreover, a military radar installation was built on the southeast coast at Cape Hawaii. Rock crystal mining had been carried out for several years in the centre of the island near Khrustalnyi Creek. At the time, a small settlement Perkatkun had been established nearby to house the miners, but later it was destroyed.

On 1 June, 1990 US Secretary of State James Baker signed an executive agreement with Eduard Shevardnadze, the USSR foreign minister. It specified that

even though the treaty had not been ratified, the U. and the USSR agreed to abide by the terms of the treaty beginning 15 June, 1990. The Senate ratified the USSR-USA Maritime Boundary Agreement in 1991, which was then signed by President George Bush. Today, in 2021, Wrangel Island is uninhabited – only weather stations and other scientific personnel is on the island [1].

The natural system of Wrangel Island and surroundings are unique in the World, and in 2004 Wrangel Island became a World Heritage Site (UNESCO). The Wrangel Island Reserve is a self-contained island ecosystem and there is ample evidence that it has undergone a long evolutionary process uninterrupted by the glaciation that swept most other parts of the Arctic during the Quaternary period. The number and type of endemic plant species, the diversity within plant communities, the rapid succession and mosaic of tundra types, the presence of relatively recent mammoth tusks and skulls, the range of terrain types and geological formations in the small geographic space are all visible evidence of Wrangel's rich natural history and its unique evolutionary status within the Arctic [11].

## **Conclusion**

When a person develops in a culture this person learns to express his thoughts, opinions and feelings within the same framework, where the things in life will be connected for the person. We can talk about the person in that way becoming a whole person within the very culture he grew up in, and that in contrast to people, who grow up in several different cultures. He gets some experience in one culture and other experiences in other cultures and in other languages. When these cultures are too different from each other, man becomes, so to speak, ‘handicapped’. In such a way that the person cannot formulate themselves well enough in any of the cultures to which the person belongs. It becomes enclosed and isolates itself. This isolation occurs in both cultures, of which the person is only half a part. It therefore requires a very great personal and mental effort to be able to break free from this division and become a so-called ‘whole’ human being. For it to succeed, it requires that man has the capacity to live with being different. This is true in both cultures.

This description fits very well with what happened to the Inuit who were either involuntarily relocated or simply forcibly removed from Wrangel Island. However, this is not how the scientists and political establishment of the time viewed the situation in the early 1900s. There existed the superior European and the inferior Native American and Inuit cultures, which were considered uncivilized and backward.

Wrangel Island is a good example of how the Western world viewed life in the Polar Regions in the 1800s and 1900s. The small windswept island and its original inhabitants have been dragged into the development of history faster and in a more brutal way than one could have imagined. This outskirt of the world first became an effort in the 18th century Europeans' discovery zeal for new markets for their domestic products also suffered for the strategic importance of the area on the planet, next, to a protruding bridgehead for a strategic war arena for Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and Canada. To eventually end up as a kind of Gulag for the old Soviet prisoners of war and dissidents, until nowadays in the 2020s, where the area soon will be military integrated in the future strategic defence in an Arctic zone that changes very quickly, and few decades will be of very important importance for the future world, thanks to the climate changes.

The last thing missing to complete the island's journey through the European conception of diverse cultures in the 1900s is forced Russification and the annihilation of their language and culture. There were tendencies for this in Greenland, where the Greenlanders were forcibly identified as Danes. The reason why this did not take place must probably be found in the previous existence of a Jurassic Park. Wrangel Island was so far out in the wilderness that the central team was not interested in this icy island. However, all Inuit people had to learn the Russian language and had to integrate in society of the Soviet Union. Today, in 2021, the island also has only geographical and meteorological significance for Russia and for the surrounding neighbours. Ironically, the island was declared a UNESCO site for the island to regain its sustainability, it had in more 5,000 years.

Due to the very extensive climate change the Earth is in, man-made or not, the people of the earth will soon have to return to the sustainability that the Inuit lived for many millennia. Therefore, the old saying fits here that history repeats itself, just as Europeans must recognize that Inuit culture was not underdeveloped rather the opposite.

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#### **Data about the author:**

Christensen Carsten Sander – Doctor of History (PhD), curator of Billund Museum (Billund, Denmark).

#### **Сведения об авторе:**

Христенсен Карстен Сандер – доктор истории (PhD), куратор Музея Биллунда (Биллунд, Дания).

**E-mail:** csc@billund.dk.