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Adam KRAWCZYK

Institute of Geography  
 Jagiellonian University  
 Laboratory for Polar Research  
 Grodzka 64  
 31-044 Kraków, POLAND

## Data for the history of the Dunöyane, Spitsbergen

**ABSTRACT:** Topography and toponymics of Dunöyane were discussed in brief. The location of Lamma Islands was considered. The author recognized it as a trace of discovery of Dunöyane by Hudson in 1607. Historical data on human activity in this region was presented with a closer look at the murder of 10 Russians in 1819 and at Norwegian economic exploitation in the 19th and 20th centuries.

**Key words:** Arctic, Spitsbergen, history, toponymy.

The Dunöyane Islands ("Down Islands") are three small islands and several islets surrounding by rocks and skerries. They are situated to the NW of the mouth of Hornsund, near the western coast of Wedel Jarsberg Land (77°03'N–14°18'E). The Dunöyane Islands consist of Nordre Dunöya — the Northern Down Island (ca. 0.35 km<sup>2</sup>), Store Dunöya — the Great Down Island (about 0.5 km<sup>2</sup>), Fjörholmen — the Feather Islet (ca. 0.2 km<sup>2</sup>) and several islets not larger than 0.02 km<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). To the east the Dunöyane are separated from the coast of Wedel Jarsberg Land by Dunöysundet 3–4 km wide. To the SE of Store Dunöya stretches Dunöskjera. The islands are surrounded by wide shallows. Only from the NW between Nordre Dunöya and Fjörholmen comes the narrow Dunöyhamna, which makes the navigation of small ships and anchorage possible. The islands are flat, slightly undulating with little lakes; the maximum height is not more than 10 m above sea level. Apart from occasional small cliffs, most of the coastline has the form of beaches gradually sloping into the sea.

The name of the islands comes from the down of birds, particularly that of eider duck (*Somateria mollissima*), which was gathered there together with eggs already in the first half of the 19th century (Rossnes 1991). However, the name derived from birds' down appeared for the first time on the map in Dunner and

Nordenskiöld (1965) as *Dunöarne*, which means that it comes from the Swedish expeditions of 1861 and 1864. Since then it has been used in different language forms: *I. Dunen* (Malte Brun 1866), *Dun Inseln* (Höffer 1874), *Down Is.* (Nordenskiöld 1879), *Dunöarna* (Carlheim-Gyllenskiöld 1900), *Dunn-Island* (Orleans 1907), *Daunen Inseln* (Spitsbergen-Handbuch 1916), *Iles du Duvet* (Hoel 1918), *Untuva daaret* (Saraste 1923), *Dunöyan* (Lynge 1924), *Dünen I.* (map — *Nördliches Eismeer...*), *Is. Dunes* (map — *Ocean glacial arctique...*), *Dunöyane* (Nordishavet..., 1933).

Before the name derived from bird down was introduced, the *Dunöyane* had been called the *Hornsund Islands*: *Horensundsörne* (Anon. 1839), *Hornsundörne* (Christie 1851), *Horn Sound Island* (Newton 1865). The name used earlier must have been a descriptive phrase: the islands outside the fjord (Keilhau 1831).

Particular islands were given separate names at different times. *Nordre Dunöya* in 1865: *Norra Dunön*. *Store Dunöya* in 1901: *Stora Dunön*. In 1927 Qvigstad called the present *Nordre Dunöya*: *Storöya* and the present *Store Dunöya*: *Söröya*, but this division has not been accepted (The Place-Names of Svalbard 1942, Orvin 1958). *Fjörnholmen* has got its name in 1953 (Orvin 1958).

The *Dunöyane* were probably discovered in 1607 during Hudson's expedition. According to Hudson's report of 30 July 1607: "In the evening, we saw an island bearing off us north west [? N.E]<sup>1</sup> from us 5 leagues, and we saw land bearing off from us 7 leagues. We had land likewise bearing off us from east-south-east to south-east and by east we judged 10 leagues". (Conway 1906). From the report it follows that Hudson's ship was in front of *Hornsund*, opposite *Hornsundneset*. The island that was 5 leagues away would be the *Dunöyane*, the land that was 7 leagues away would be the northern limit of the mouth of *Hornsund* (*Skjerstranda*, *Ralstranda*), whereas the land that was 10 leagues long would be the western coast of *Sörkapp Land*. Although nobody questions the fact that Hudson was in the vicinity of *Hornsund*, still the possibility of seeing the islands as low as the *Dunöyane* from the distance of approximately 27 km has been undermined. Conway (1906) claims that it was impossible and the supposed island was really the *Rotjesfjellet* Mountain. The authors of *The Place Names of Svalbard* (1942) agree with him suggesting that *Hohenlohefjellet* could have been the supposed island. We are sure, however, that we should trust the contemporary sailors in the first place. If they distinguished the island and the land further away, which is confirmed by the reality we know, they were more likely to overestimate the distance than to take a mountain on land for an island. The reliability of Hudson's report is

<sup>1</sup> Conway justly makes a note of an obvious literal mistake: there is no place in the southern Spitsbergen with possibility to see at the same time one land to NW and another land, with extension 10 leagues, to E-ESE-SE.



Målstokk 1:100 000

1 cm på kartet = 1 km i marka



Fig. 1. Dunøyane on „Topografisk kart over Svalbard, Blad B12, Torellbreen” from 1953.

confirmed by the fact that the Dunöyane could be seen even from the distance of 5 leagues if looked at from the foretop. That is confirmed by counting a visual range under a depression of the horizon according to the formula:  $a = 3.9(\sqrt{h_1} + \sqrt{h_2})$  (Mietelski 1979). If we assume that the mean altitude of the islands ( $h_1$ ) is 6 m and of a foretop ( $h_2$ ) — 19 m a.s.l., the visual range [a] will be 26.52 km, i.e. similar 5 leagues (27.5 km) mentioned by Hudson.

The discovered island was called the Lammas Island, from the Lammas tide (1 August), which was connected with the data of seeing the island (30 July). This name was introduced by Jodocus Hondius on his map from 1611 based on Hudson's direct report (Wieder 1919, Schilder 1988). Hondius placed the Lammas Island in the southern part of the western coast of "Nieu land" on 77°N which is almost exactly the latitude of the Dunöyane (Fig. 2). For the second and last time the name appears on Plancius' globe from 1612 (Wieder 1919). In our opinion the credit for the discovery of the Dunöyane as the Lammas Island should be given to Hudson's expedition in 1607.

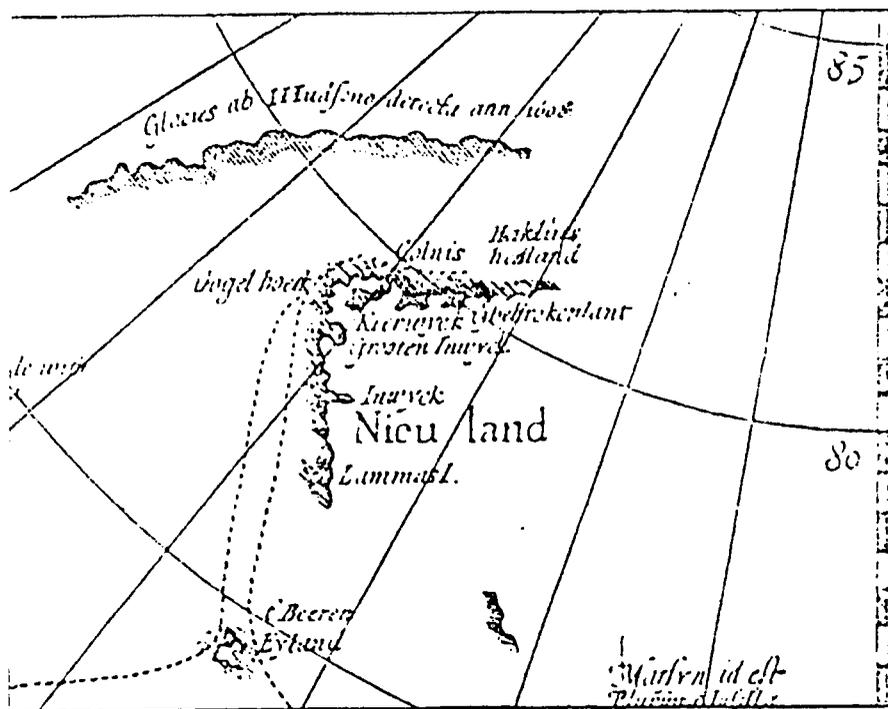


Fig. 2. Lammas Island on "Tabula Nautica" of Jodocus Hondius from 1611, after Conway (1906)

On later maps there are only rough markings of islets or rocks along the western coast of Sörkapp Land and Wedel Jarlsberg Land. Such representation can be seen for example on the maps of John Daniel in 1612, Thomas Edge in

1625, Vralicq in 1634, Pieter Goos in 1660, Hendrich Doncker in 1663, Gerard von Keulen in 1707–1717 and 1724–1725 (Conway 1906, Schilder 1988).

However, on the map of Joris Carolus from 1614 and 1634 there is a group of islets at the northern side of the mouth of Hornsund. On the map of Middelhoven from 1634 (Pl. 1) there are two islets at the north-western limit of Hornsund, which can be regarded as the marking of the Dunöyane (Schilder 1988).

It may be claimed that small islets surrounded by skerries were not attractive for whalers. If they were more or less precisely marked on maps, it was only to steer clear of them. In the area of the Dunöyane no traces of whaling have been found. The closest remains of whaling are approximately 20 km east of Ariebukta and on Wilczekodden (Krawczyk 1989, Chochorowski and Jasiński 1990).

The land and sea character of the area of the Dunöyane abundant in beaches, shallows, rock refuges and skerries with a rich sea bottom fauna made that region a walrus habitat (Krawczyk and Węślawski 1987). The nearby area of Kvartsittsletta, Skjerstranda, Ralstranda is a polar bear trail (Iversen 1939). The above mentioned animals as well as seals in the sea and foxes on land made the area of the Dunöyane attractive for hunters, whereas the possibility of sailing into Dunöyhamna and anchoring or stranding there for a winter period predisposed the Dunöyane to be a place for a base settlement, a winter station. The Dunöyane became such a place for Russian hunters from the area of the White Sea (Pomors). The remains of Russian hunting stations and their activity can be found on three islands. They have been described in detail by Chochorowski and Jasiński (1995). These data point at intensive activity of Pomor hunters in this region, probably at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries.

While the period when Russian stations were functioning on the Dunöyane can be defined only by analogy, the circumstances that ended the activity of Pomors in that region can be quite well described. The last group of Pomors spent a winter on Store Dunöya in 1818–1819. The station was situated on the southern headland of the island and consisted of two huts (Chochorowski and Jasiński 1995). The group of hunters at the end of the winter consisted of 13 people, at least one woman among them.

They had a ship that had been stranded for the winter. It is possible that the group was more numerous when they arrived but some people could have died during the winter and they could have been buried outside the station. Probably their wintering was very successful and the hunters had gathered large amounts of skins and fat which became the cause of their misfortune. Unfortunately we owe this relatively precise information to the tragedy that took place there in 1819.

The event started a legend that was told many times and thus acquired a number of details, frequently quite contradictory. Three accounts are known

but they were published only tens of years after events. The first account is that of an ice-master from Hammerfest, which was written down in 1896 by Conway (1906). The second account is a story of an old fisherman written down in 1898 by Carlheim-Gyllenskiöld (1900). The third one was published in *Aftenposten* (Anon. 1908). Without the contradictions in the three accounts and without secondary plots, this seems to be course of events. The hero is skipper Andersen, a Dane permanently living in Hammerfest. In spring of 1819 he sailed to Spitsbergen and in June he arrived on the Dunöyane where he found the Russians, who had large amounts of skins and fat after winter. Andersen killed the Russians, who were weak after wintering, with a harpoon that was marked with his name. He took the loot but forgot the harpoon. Not much later skipper Stuer from Tromsø arrived there and found the bodies of the murdered Russians with Andersen's harpoon stuck into one of them. After his return to Tromsø Stuer notified people to the crime. In the meantime, sailing among icebergs, Andersen got stuck and in order to find a passage he climbed the iceberg. The iceberg overturned, Andersen died and "went to hell".

The account that is the closest to the events is that of Keilhau from 1827. It says that in 1820 a contemporary base was found. Near a hut there was a ship stranded on the shore (*lodja*). In a buried large chest 10 bodies were discovered; they were partly dismembered by bears. Two other bodies, or rather their remains were wrapped up in a mat (*doormat*). The third body was lying in the hut, partly devoured by foxes. Keilhau (1831) supposes that the expedition was ready to go back when they were attacked by pirates. The expedition of 1820 which found the ship, the hut and the bodies must have been that of Fallengrün from Hammerfest. In 1861 the members of a Swedish expedition saw a well preserved hut, and in 1864 they found 9 skulls lying nearby. It is interesting that neither Keilhau 8 years after the events nor the Swedes 34 years later heard of Andersen, Stuer, or the harpoon and the tragedy was rather connected with English pirates (Conway 1906). As was established in 1984 (Krawczyk 1989), on the southern headland of Store Dunöya, approximately 5 m east of the remains of the hut there was a grave in the form of a shallow depression with the remains of a timber lining provisionally covered with boards (Pl. 2). The grave contained 8 skulls and mixed bones. Anthropological examination on the spot showed that they were bones of 10 individuals; the sex and age of some of the skulls were established (Krawczyk 1989, Głęb and Haduch, *in press*). The grave was repeatedly violated by animals and humans; we also know that in 1960 one of the skulls was taken "as a souvenir" (*pers. commun.*).

It is absolutely certain than that the grave is the buried chest with the bodies of 10 Russians described by Keilhau and the same place at which in 1864 the Swedes saw 9 skulls. Approximately 10 m west of the remains of the hut on the edge of the cliff we found another grave. It was not opened and only the bones that were sticking out of the frozen ground allowed us to estimate that it contained human remains of at least 2 individuals (Krawczyk 1989). The cliff is

being destroyed by abrasive processes, which is also destroying the grave. It was confirmed by the inspection in 1989 when uncovered human bones were also already visible (Chochorowski and Jasiński 1995).

Connecting the data given by Keilhau with the legend and the remains still to be found in the area suggest the following version of the events. The murderer or murderers killed and robbed 10 Russians, one woman among them. Three Russians escaped or, what is more probable, they were not in the base at the time. When they came back, they buried the bodies east of the hut in the shallow grave with timber lining. Since the three of them could not launch the ship, they stayed there. Two of them died later and their bodies were wrapped up in a mat and laid near the hut. For some reason they were not buried. The third one died last in the hut. The expedition of Fallengrün buried them 10 m west of the hut. This would explain why in 1820 two different burials were found 10 people in the grave, 2 people in the mat and one body, not buried in the hut.

No matter how much truth there is in the legend of murderer Andersen, it is a fact that in 1819 the Russian presence on the Dunöyane had a tragic end.

From 1820 almost every year there were summer expeditions from Hammerfest and Tromsø hunting walrus, seals, polar bears, reindeer and foxes, and gathering eider down. For example, from 1824 to 1834 5 to 14 ships set out. Some of them must have visited the Dunöyane, which, together with Isöyane, Forlandsöyane and Tusenöyane, were known as the places abundant in eider down. It is known that in 1839 Jonas Witbro and Olaus Vejen from Tromsø brought about 450 kg of uncleaned down. Gathering down and eggs was the main form of exploiting the Dunöyane in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th c., and it was limited to summer seasons (Rossnes 1991). As has been mentioned, in 1861 and 1864 the Dunöyane were visited by members of Swedish expeditions (Conway 1906). In 1907 the hunting expedition financed by Claus Andersen from Tromsø and led by Samson Fylkenes built a hut in Hyttevika, opposite the Dunöyane and three people stayed there for the winter of 1907/1908. They gathered about 450 kg of down on the Dunöyane. In 1908/1909 four people commissioned by Claus Hagerup from Tromsø spent the winter there. They might have built "Dunöyhytta" on Fjörholmen. In 1914 on the southern headland Artur Oxaas saw a hut which he described as a summer dwelling for people gathering down. Anders Kville Andersen and Ture Lifbom spent the winter of 1919/1920 on the Dunöyane. This was one of three groups of a 9-person expedition financed by Johan Hagerup. The "Jan Mayen" cutter which brought the whole expedition was stranded and remained on the Dunöyane. They also built a new subsidiary station on Wilczekodden, which has remained there till now. The last known wintering on the Dunöyane took place in 1923 – 1924; there were four people, Ole Mortensen and Anton Einarsen among them (Rossnes 1993).

Later one people wintered only in Hyttevika. In the spring, however, trappers set out for the islands to gather down and eggs. The advantages of the Dunöyane for this purpose were emphasised by Henri Rudi, who, wintering in

Hyttevika in 1925–1926, gathered about 600 kg of down (Sörensen 1969). Björvik Jacobson, who, wintering in Hyttevika twice in the 1930s, gathered from 450 to 600 kg of down of the Dunöyane and Isöyane (Rossnes 1991).

By the royal decree of 1 June and 11 October 1973 the Dunöyane were incorporated into the South Spitsbergen National Park and at the same time recognized as a bird sanctuary. Since then they have been protected against any technical interference or human activity and in the period from 15 May to 15 August no visitors are allowed in order to protect hatching (Environmental Regulations for Svalbard...).

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## Streszczenie

Dunøyane (Wyspy Puchowe) to grupa wysp położonych na płn.-wsch. od wylotu Hornsundu (Rys. 1). Nazwa wysp, wywiedziona od zbieranego tu ptasiego puchu, pochodzi od wypraw szwedzkich w 1861 i 1864 r. Wprowadzona na mapę Dunnera i Nordenskiölda w 1865 r. przyjęła się w powszechnym, a potem i oficjalnym użyciu. Wcześniej używano nazwy Wyspy Hornsundu. Odkryte najprawdopodobniej w 1607 roku przez wyprawę Hudsona, nazwane zostały Lammas I. (Rys. 2), ale nazwa ta została zapomniana. Dunøyane nie były terenem działalności wielorybników zachodnioeuropejskich w XVII w., a na ówczesnych mapach zaznaczano je schematycznie (Pl. 1). Położenie i warunki naturalne predystynowały wyspy jako teren działalności myśliwskiej. Pozostałości rosyjskich (pomorskich) stacji łowieckich świadczą o intensywnej działalności Pomorców na tym obszarze, prawdopodobnie pod koniec XVIII i na początku XIX wieku. Ostatnie ich zimowanie miało miejsce na Store Dunøya w 1818–1819 r. Według legendy, w czerwcu 1819 r. dziesięciu Rosjan zostało tu zamordowanych przez szypra Andersena z Hammerfestu, w celach rabunkowych. Faktem jest, że w 1820 r. znaleziono tutaj trzynaście zwłok. Resztki chaty i pochówków zachowały się do dzisiaj (Pl. 2). Od lat dwudziestych XX w. Dunøyane odwiedzane były często w lecie przez norweskich zbieraczy ptasiego puchu i jaj. Ta forma eksploatacji przetrwała do lat trzydziestych XX w. Od wybudowania chaty w Hyttevika w 1907 r. Dunøyane znalazły się w obszarze działalności norweskich traperów. Na samych Dunøyane zimowano w sezonach 1908/1909, 1919/1920 i 1923/1924, prawdopodobnie na Fjörholmen. Od 1973 roku Dunøyane wchodzą do Parku Narodowego Południowego Spitsbergenu oraz są ścisłym rezerwatem ptaków.





Fig. 2. State of the common grave on Store Dunøya in 1984. Photo by A. Krawczyk.