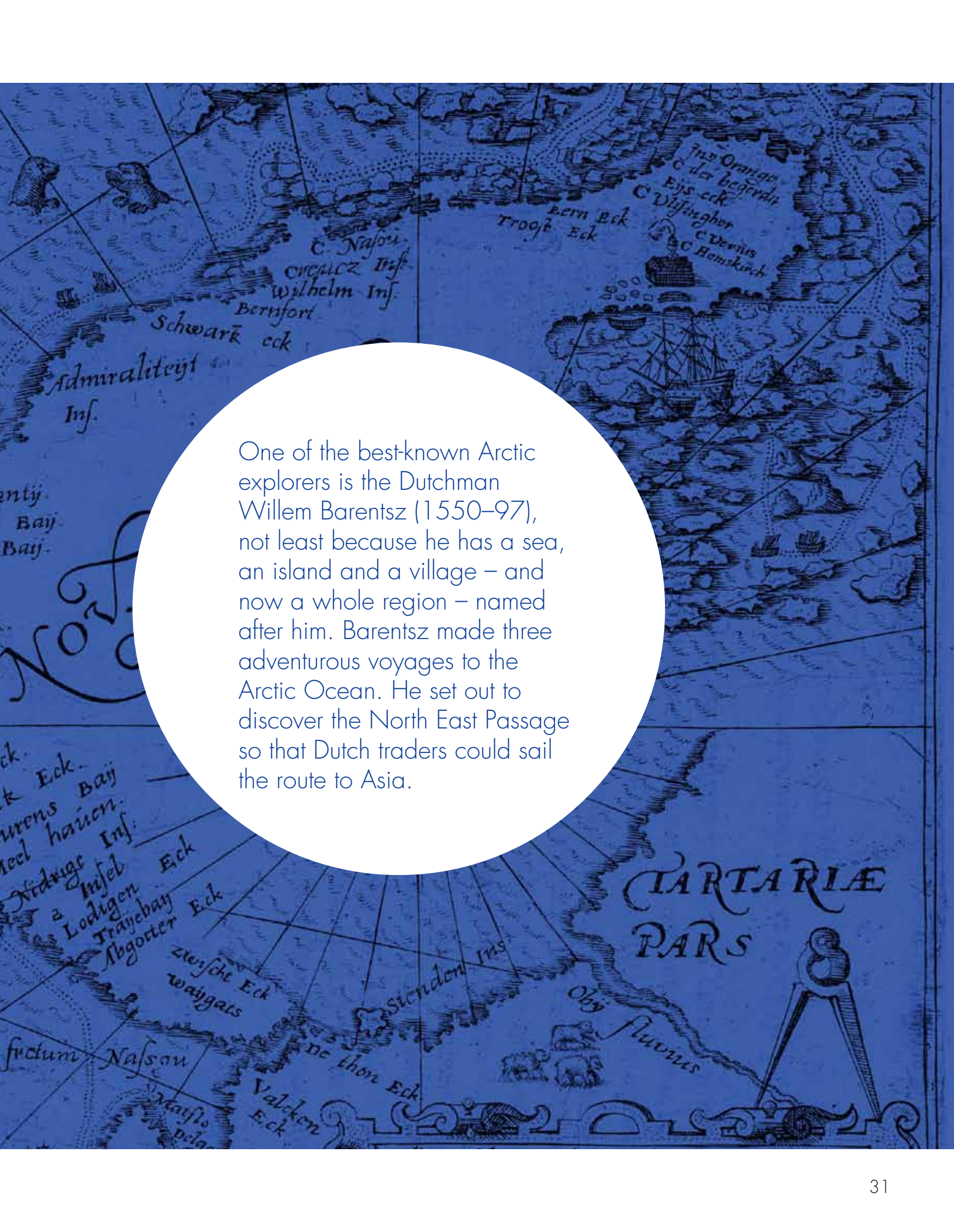


Tabula terra Noue Zembla,
in qua fretum sinusq; WAIGATS,
item ora litoralis TARTARIAE atq;
RUSSIAE, ad urbem usq; KILDEINAM,
praescribitur adhuc CURSUS quem inde
naues in reditu tenent secus septentrionale
littus et TRAIECTUS
prope fretum WAIGATS ad usque
eram et ad promontorium DANIELIUS,
atq; fauces usq; MARIS ALBI.
AUTHORE GERHARDO DE VEER.

The story behind a famous name



Text: Marjo Laukkanen
Drawings: Arctic Centre Collection at
the University of Lapland



One of the best-known Arctic explorers is the Dutchman Willem Barentsz (1550–97), not least because he has a sea, an island and a village – and now a whole region – named after him. Barentsz made three adventurous voyages to the Arctic Ocean. He set out to discover the North East Passage so that Dutch traders could sail the route to Asia.



May 1596

Two ships return to the Arctic Ocean in an expedition that is about to become very famous and pictured repeatedly in many books and maps in forthcoming centuries.



1594

Dutch traders organise an expedition to find the North East Passage. Four ships are led by an experienced navigator, Willem Barentsz. His ship reaches the northern tip of Novaya Zemlya but can't go forward because of ice. One of the ships manages to reach the Kara Sea through the southern strait.

June 1596

The ships continue to sail north. The men see land, again. This time they name it Spitsbergen, because it consists 'only of mountains and pointed hills', as Barentsz himself described it. Nowadays this is the name of the main island, and the group of islands is known as Svalbard, a name that was given to it by the Vikings, who visited the land before the Dutch.

c. 1550

Willem Barentsz is born in Habsburg, the Netherlands.

1595

Seven ships sail to the Arctic Ocean. This time Barentsz tries to sail through Yugorskiy Shar, the southernmost strait through Novaya Zemlya. The attempt to reach the Kara Sea has failed again, and the reason is the same: Arctic sea ice blocks the way.



July 1596

Two expeditions decide to sail different routes. Barentsz heads to Novaya Zemlya. When he reaches the island, he sails towards its northern tip and finally manages to reach the Kara Sea.

June 1596

The ships reach land. Explorers name the island Bear Island when they meet a huge polar bear swimming on their way to the shore. They kill the bear but it manages to put up a tough fight.



June 1597

The ship is still ice-bound. The crew take two small boats and start the return trip. When Barentsz leaves the lodge for the last time, he writes a letter and hangs it in front of the fireplace. Twelve of the seventeen crew members make it back home. Barentsz himself dies on the return trip, probably of scurvy. The maps and the drawings are later published by Gerrit de Veer, one of the survivors.



1871

Barentsz' winter lodge is found by Norwegian seal hunter Elling Carlsen. He finds numerous untouched objects in the lodge, including drawings.

August 1596

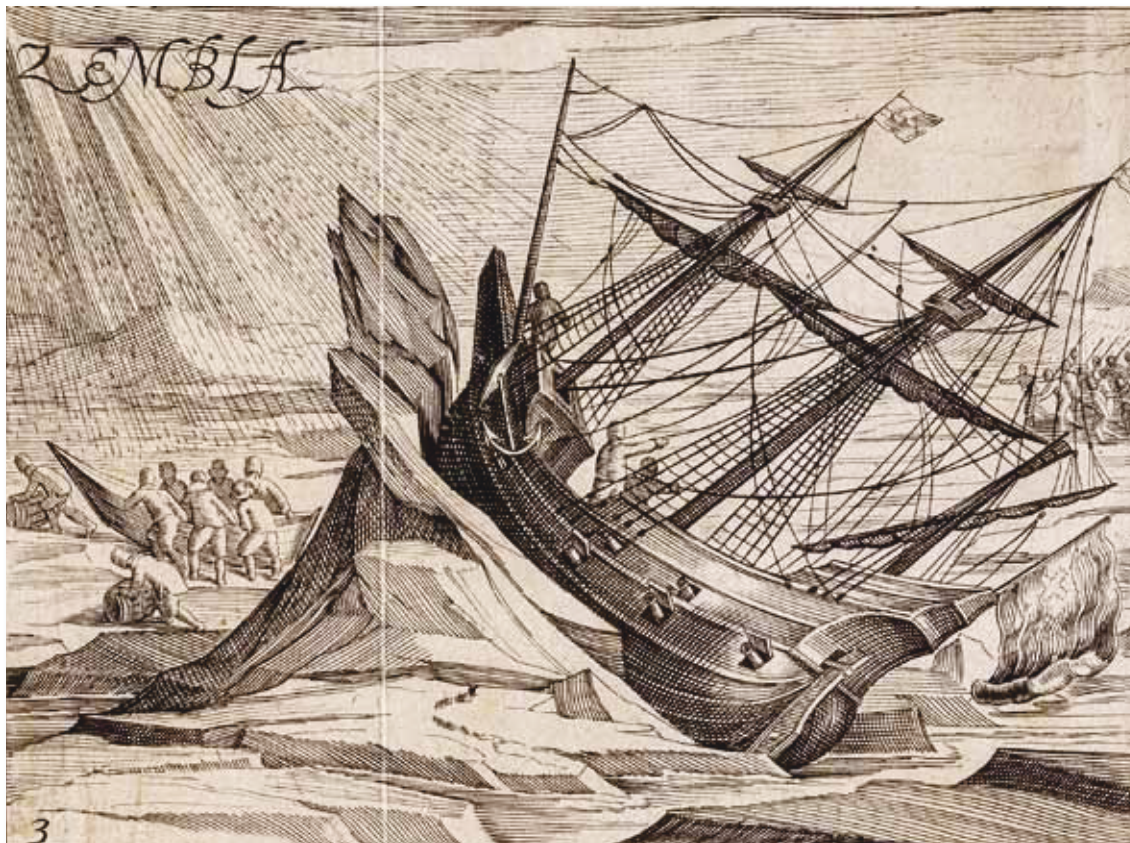
Barentsz's ship is trapped in the ice. The crew has no other choice but to spend the winter on the island. They build a wooden lodge and kill polar bears for food. Bear blubber is also used in lamps as a fuel.

1853

The Barents Sea appears under its modern name for the first time on a sea chart. The sea used to be known to the Vikings and medieval Russians as the Murmean Sea.

1879

Finnish Swede Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld is the first to navigate the North East Passage all the way to the Pacific Ocean.



1993

Cooperation in the Barents Region is officially launched in Kirkenes, Norway, at a meeting establishing the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Barents Regional Council.

Mapped Beauty
exhibition
6.6.2014–12.4.2015

Arktikum
Science Centre,
Rovaniemi, Finland