

Impatient Inuits

You can easily get the idea that everything started in the Nuuk area, as the Danish-Norwegian priest Hans Egede arrived to Greenland in 1721.

This is not true. The Inuit people had settled in the local area around The Godthåbsfiord several centuries before. The Norsemen had also been here for centuries and had even disappeared again when Hans Egede came looking for them.

But also expeditions and whalers from other countries had been visiting the Nuuk area. In the old reports we have information about a British expedition led by John Davis. John Davis had visited The Godthåbsfiord in 1585.

Early in the 1600-century, the English explorer James Hall arrived at the fiord. Actually James Hall gave the fiord a name. Hall called the fiord, which he thought was a great river, the Ball River. The fiord was named after the English merchant Richard Ball, who had financed Hall's expedition.

But Hans Egede, unlike the others, has his statue at the old port of Nuuk, and it's probably justified. There are many stories of the work of Hans Egede in Greenland. Among other things, there is a larger report, which Egede's son, Poul Egede, delivered to the Danish king in 1788.

The son wrote that the father had the challenge as priest to preach in a language (Danish), the Inuit did not understand. It must have been a pain to the Inuits to sit still and listen to long sermons without understanding a word of it all. Therefore, Hans Egede had to find a way to get the impatient Inuits to sit still and listen. Hans Egede brought a method into play: He pointed on his arm with the other hand to indicate how far he had come.

When there was restlessness in the church, he could show that he for example was halfway in his sermon. The Inuit quickly caught the principle, and if Hans Egede paused in his speech stream, they immediately pointed highly on their arm, that he had reached the end. Hans Egede had to give them a new target on his arm, and the Inuits again had to wait for the end of the sermon.



The Hans Egede statue, October 2007