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Summary Article: **Greenland**

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Green. *Kalaallit Nunaat*, Dan. *Grønland*, the largest island in the world (2015 est. pop. 56,000), 836,109 sq mi (2,166,086 sq km), self-governing overseas administrative division of Denmark, lying largely within the Arctic Circle. It is surrounded by the Arctic Ocean in the north; the Greenland Sea in the east; the Denmark Strait in the southeast, which separates it from Iceland; the Atlantic Ocean in the south; and Davis Strait and Baffin Bay in the west, which separate it from Baffin Island, Canada. The capital is Nuuk (formerly Godthåb).

Land and People

Greenland is 1,659 mi (2,670 km) long from Cape Farewell (lat. 59°46′N) to Cape Morris Jesup (lat. 82°39′N) and has a maximum width of about 800 mi (1,290 km). Geologically, the island is part of the Canadian Shield and, therefore, of North America; more than 50% of its ice-free area consists of rocks of the Precambrian, mostly granites and gneisses. Mountain chains parallel Greenland's east and west coasts; Mt. Gunnbjørn (12,139 ft/3,700 m) and Mt. Forel (11,024 ft/3,360 m), both in SE Greenland, are the highest peaks. The entire coastline of Greenland is deeply indented by fjords. There are many offshore islands, of which Disko, in W Greenland, is the largest.

Except for about 158,430 sq mi (410,450 sq km) of coastland and coastal islands, an ice sheet and numerous minor ice caps and glaciers cover the island. The extreme northern peninsula (Peary Land) has no ice sheet but does have local ice caps. The thickness of the ice sheet reaches c.14,000 ft (4,300 m) in some places. Two drilling operations on the highest part of the ice sheet ("Summit" in N Greenland) in 1992 and 1993 both reached bottom, with the deepest core measuring 10,016 ft (3,053 m) from surface to bottom. Studies of the composition of the ice cores have permitted new insights into the climatic history of the last 200,000–300,000 years. The ice moves outward from the center, entering the sea in walls or debouching in glaciers, of which Humboldt Glacier is the largest and Jakobshavn Glacier the most calf-ice productive. These rapidly moving glaciers calve tremendous icebergs, notably into the Davis Strait, through which they frequently reach Atlantic shipping lanes. Surveys conducted from 1993 to 1998 showed the ice sheet in southern Greenland to be shrinking by about 2 cu mi (8 cu km) each year, but ice cores collected in the area suggested that such changes may be similar to those that occurred in the past. From 1996 to 2004, however, the amount of ice melting each year in Greenland increased by 2 1/2 times, and melting and iceberg calving reduced Greenland's ice by increasing annual amounts in subsequent years, leading to concerns that the sea level could rise significantly during the 21st century. The loss of ice has led also to a corresponding increase in elevation in Greenland's coastal areas since the mid-1990s. Studies of satellite radar images of the ice sheet have also revealed (2013) hidden beneath it an enormous canyon, some 500 mi (800 km) long and up to .5 mi (800 m) deep, that stretches from central Greenland to its northern coast; the canyon was carved by a river more than 4 million years ago.

Cold winds rush out from Greenland's interior, making the weather uncertain and foggy. A polar ocean current flows south along the entire east coast and around Cape Farewell, carrying immense ice floes that make the sea approach to E Greenland hazardous. The North Atlantic Drift gives the southwest coast of Greenland a warmer climate and heavy rainfall.

There are no forests in Greenland; dwarf trees are found in the southern coastal areas. Natural vegetation also includes mosses, lichens, grasses, and sedges. The polar bear, musk ox, polar wolf, lemming, Arctic hare, and reindeer are the chief land animals.

In addition to the capital, other important settlements are Sisimiut (Holsteinsborg), Aasiaat (Egedesminde), Qaqortoq (JulianehÅb), Maniitsoq (Sukkertoppen), and Ilulissat (Jakobshavn). More than 90% of the island's population live along the west coast. About 88% of the people are Inuits or Greenland-born Caucasians; the balance are mainly Danish. The major religion is Evangelical Lutheran. Inuit dialects (Greenlandic), Danish, and English are spoken; Greenlandic and Danish are the official languages.

Economy

Fishing (shrimp, halibut, salmon, and cod) is the main industry, and dozens of processing plants have been constructed in the south and southwest. Some of the world's largest shrimp beds are in Disko Bay. In the north and east seals, foxes, and polar bears are hunted. Seabirds are hunted for their flesh, eggs, and down. Reindeer are herded and there is extensive sheep breeding in the southern area.

Gold, niobium, tantalite, uranium, iron, and diamonds are mined. Deposits of cryolite, zinc, and lead, which were important to Greenland's mining industry, have been largely worked out. Copper, coal, oil, and molybdenum deposits also exist but are difficult to extract. The country is gradually shifting its electricity production from fossil fuel to hydropower.

Greenland has gradually modernized its economy but still depends heavily on its fishing industry, and fish products are its largest export. The country must import most machinery and transportation equipment, manufactured goods, food, and petroleum products. Tourism is being developed. Significant financial support from Denmark, however, remains essential. Greenland has benefited from greatly improved air transportation and telecommunications in recent years.

Government

A Danish colony until 1953, Greenland then became a county; it attained home rule in 1979 and began full self-government in 1981. Greenland has a 31-member unicameral parliament (Landsting) and a premier and sends two representatives to the Danish Folketing. It is divided into 18 municipalities. The nominal head of state is the Danish monarch, represented by a high commissioner.

History

The earliest Palaeo-Eskimo cultures had already arrived in Greenland from Canada by c.2,500 B.C. The Thule Eskimo culture first arrived in N Greenland c.A.D. 900 and in the following 1,000 years spread to both W and E Greenland. From Iceland, Greenland was discovered and colonized by Norsemen (980s), led according to the sagas by Eric the Red, who named it Greenland in order to make it seem attractive to potential settlers. Local walrus tusks, valuable as ivory, were an important source of trade goods for the Norse. Two areas of settlement, in the south and southwest, were established; archaeologists now believe that the Norse population never numbered more than 2,500. It was in sailing to Greenland (c.1000) that Leif Ericsson, the son of Eric the Red, probably reached North America. Greenland became a bishopric c.1110, and ruins of churches of that period remain.

Greenland became self-governing, with its own Althing, but failed to achieve political stability. In 1261 the colony came under Norwegian rule, but in the 14th and 15th cent. it suffered from the cooling of the climate and the collapse of the ivory trade, and was neglected; the colonists either died out, gradually

returned to Iceland, or assimilated with the Eskimos. The British explorers Martin Frobisher and John Davis rediscovered Greenland in the 16th cent. but found no trace of Norsemen. Other explorers looking for the Northwest Passage subsequently charted much of the coast.

Modern colonization was begun (1721) by the Norwegian missionary Hans Egede. Danish trading posts were established shortly afterward, and colonization was furthered by deporting undesirable subjects to Greenland. Soon, the native Greenlanders began to suffer from European diseases; tuberculosis remained a problem into the 1960s. In 1814, with the Treaty of Kiel, Denmark retained Greenland and other Atlantic possessions when Norway was ceded to Sweden, which, for strategic reasons, was interested in control of the Scandinavian peninsula but not in overseas commitments of the outlying Norwegian possessions.

In the 19th and 20th cent., Greenland was explored and mapped by numerous arctic explorers. In World War II, after the German occupation (1940) of Denmark, the United States invoked the Monroe Doctrine for Greenland and reached an agreement (1941) with the Danish minister at Washington that permitted the establishment of U.S. military bases and meteorological stations. A Danish-American agreement for the common defense of Greenland was signed in 1951, and U.S. bases were retained, notably at Thule. Thule is now the sole remaining U.S. military base in Greenland.

Greenland joined the European Community (now the European Union [EU]) with Denmark in 1972 but withdrew in 1985 after a controversy over stringent fishing quotas. Since then, relations with the EU have been based on special agreements. Jonathan Motzfeldt, of Forward (Siumut) became premier of Greenland when home rule was established in 1979. In 1991, Lars-Emil Johansen, also of Forward, succeeded him; in 1995 he remained in power as head of a coalition that favored increased autonomy from Denmark and greater internal economic development.

Johansen retired in 1997 and was replaced by Motzfeldt, who retained office after the 1999 elections. Following elections in 2002, Motzfeldt was replaced as premier by fellow party member Hans Enoksen. A political scandal involving misuse of funds forced an election in Nov., 2005; Enoksen remained prime minister of an expanded coalition. In 2008, Greenlanders approved a plan for increased autonomy, including increased control over natural resources; the changes, which were also supported by the Danish government, took effect in June, 2009. Elections that month resulted in a victory for the left-wing Community of the People party (Inuit Ataqatigiit; IA); party leader Kuupik Kleist became prime minister of a coalition government. The 2013 elections resulted in a plurality for Forward, which formed a coalition with two smaller parties; Aleqa Hammond became Greenland's first woman premier. In Oct., 2014, a new scandal over the misuse of government funds led to early elections; Hammond resigned as Forward's leader. Forward won a narrow plurality and formed a coalition government, with Kim Kielsen as premier.

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