

Norway wants explorer ship back 80 years after sinking

August 22 2011, by Michel Viatteau and Michel Comte

Eighty years after it sank in the Canadian Arctic, explorer Roald Amundsen's three-mast ship Maud may once again sail across the Atlantic to become the centerpiece of a new museum in Norway.

Canada, however, must still agree to the repatriation plan hatched by Norwegian investors, amid strong opposition from locals in the Canadian territory of Nunavut who want the ship to stay for tourists to admire from shore.

The wreck now sits at the bottom of Cambridge Bay in Nunavut, but its hulk is partly visible above the frigid waters that preserved it for decades.

"The incredibly strong-built oak ship has been helped by the Arctic cold and clean water to be kept in a reasonably good shape," said Jan Wanggaard, a Norwegian who recently visited the wreck to sort out technical problems with raising the ship as well as to survey the views from locals and officials.

Financed by developer Espen Tandberg and his brothers, the operation to raise the hulk could start in a year. The wreck would be raised with balloons, placed on a barge and floated 7,000 kilometers (4,350 miles) to Asker, where it was launched in 1917, and displayed in a museum to be built by the Tandbergs.

However, many residents of Cambridge Bay oppose losing a treasured

part of their history that has also become a tourist attraction in Canada's far north.

They are backed by the Paris-based International Council on Monuments and Sites, which wants the site preserved in its current state at the eastern end of the famed Northwest Passage.

"[Cultural heritage](#) sites should be left intact as far as possible rather than moving large objects to museums far from their settings," said ICOMOS International Polar Heritage Committee president Susan Barr.

"So I would not like to see the wreck removed."

She also noted that the Maud expedition was not among Amundsen's most glorious and that two vessels from his more prestigious voyages -- the Gjoa and Fram --- are preserved at a museum in Oslo.

Amundsen was the first European explorer to sail through the [Northwest Passage](#) in search of a new shorter shipping route from Europe to Asia in 1906, and to the South Pole in 1911.

-- Bring Maud home --

He again sailed through the Northeast Passage with the Maud in 1918-20 without getting far enough north to start the drift from east to west and maybe over the North Pole.

After one more failed try from the Bering Strait in 1920-21, he finally gave up.

The expedition continued without Amundsen from 1922-25 and "produced excellent scientific results," said Barr, but still could not get into the east-west current up in the ice.

The Maud was sold to Hudson's Bay Company in 1925 and was rechristened Baymaud. It ended its days as a floating warehouse and the region's first radio station, before sinking at its moorings in 1930.

Asker Council, the local district where Maud was built at Vollen, bought the wreck for just \$1 in 1990 and obtained an export permit from Canada, but it has expired.

Nunavut did not exist then, but since it was created in 1999 after splitting from the Northwest Territories, "strong feelings for developing the history and heritage in the area" have emerged, Barr said.

She said the Maud was "historically connected to Canada's north" and could some day become part of a UN World Heritage site organized around the voyages of early European explorers in the Arctic.

Cambridge Bay will also be the site of a new High Arctic Research Station due to open in 2017.

Other Arctic stops visited by a growing number of cruise [ships](#) in the area could include Captain Robert McClure's recently found Investigator, and Gjoa Haven, where Amundsen wintered.

But Wanggaard said "everyone who wishes Maud to be saved for the future should be realistic and happy that anyone will actually put money into saving this ship that has been left for so long."

"This old ship is strongly linked to Norway through the achievement and position that Amundsen have among the Norwegian people," he added, vowing to apply for a new Canadian export permit to bring Maud home.

(c) 2011 AFP

Citation: Norway wants explorer ship back 80 years after sinking (2011, August 22) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-norway-explorer-ship-years.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.