

Briton claims new Svalbard island

10 May 2006

A British artist believes he has found a new island in the arctic Svalbard archipelago and has claimed sovereignty to create his own mini-state.

Alex Hartley of London named the new islet "Nymark" -- new ground or uncharted territory -- and has applied to the Norwegian Polar Institute, asking his name for the small island be officially recognized, Aftenposten reported Wednesday.

Hartley told NRK, Norwegian Broadcasting, the islet is the size of a soccer field, and was uncovered when a glacier on the east coast of Svalbard retreated.

"On September 20, 2004, at 10 past 6 in the evening, I discovered the new holm (small island)," he told NRK. "Here I will found my own Lilliputian state, a republic."

Yngve Melvaer, head of maps at the Norwegian Polar Institute, told Aftenposten there are several hundred, perhaps thousands, of such small islands that emerge or disappear when the ice retreats or advances.

"Svalbard is Norwegian, also the parts under the ice," said Melvaer. "Alex Hartley has no obvious case for his claim to ownership."

Svalbard is located about 500 miles north of the Norwegian mainland.

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