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Virginia

In Virginia, the land of Pocahontas, there initially was a good rapport between the English colonists and the local Indians. This is reflected in the early maps of the region drawn by John Smith (1612): apart from two English names all the names are clearly Indian (see map above).

Later on, without any conscious effort to exchange names of Indian derivation for those given by colonists, the namescape of Virginia changed completely (see map below). When we look at a current map introduced by the National Geographic, it is English language names that stand out; the only name category that has preserved its Indian character is that of the river names: e.g. Chesapeake, and Rappahannock. The only native place name still rendered seems to be Tappahannock. So, even if this was not the result of names planning it is a complete change of the namescape.



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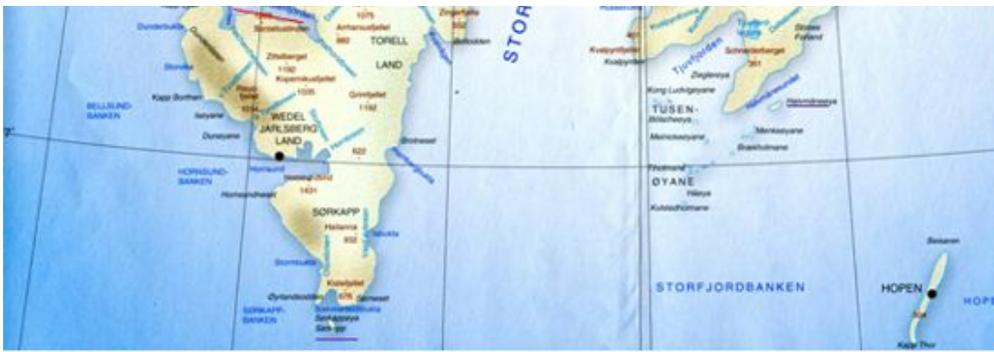


It is usual to name objects discovered after the discoverer or after any other name he or she would have bestowed on the discovered object, such as the name of a patron or other worthy person or institution. Even today this practice continues in some areas. But these original names are not always kept. The name Spitsbergen was bestowed on the present Svalbard archipelago by the Dutch explorer Willem Barentsz in 1596, on his way to Novaya Zemlya, when looking for a northern route towards East Asia. In 1925 when the archipelago had been allocated to Norway, the latter opted for the name Svalbard. In a 12th century Icelandic text, this name (meaning cold rim or cold coast) was mentioned, probably however for a part of Greenland (see Politikens Nudansk Ordbog, 1992, under *Svalbard*).

Most languages follow this Norwegian practice and use Svalbard when naming the archipelago and Spitsbergen when referring to its largest island. In the Dutch, German and Russian languages the original meaning is kept; here 'Spitsbergen' refers both to the archipelago and to its largest island.

Svalbard is an example of a largely uninhabited area where, since it has been allocated to Norway, Norwegian officials have bestowed names of worthy countrymen and -women who in their opinion should be honored by naming a mountain, bay or island after them. An occasional Swede or Dane is also included in this toponymic pantheon. By this naming behavior the original names for objects in the Spitsbergen archipelago, given by the English and Dutch in the 16th and 17th century, have been swamped completely by this new influx of names, and the character of the namescape thus changed.





Svalbard, map by Trond Haugskott in the book Stedsnavn på Svalbard, by Eli Johanne Ellingsve, Trondheim, Tapir Akademisk Forlag 2005. Names underlined in red have a Dutch specific name part; names underlined in purple have been translated from Dutch into Norwegian.

What is wholly reprehensible is the obliteration of existing place names and their replacement by placenames that suit those in charge. It is the toponymical counterpart of ethnic cleansing, and it happened under nationalist ideologies in both Europe and elsewhere. The United Nations have taken a strong stand against this particular aspect of names planning, in resolution **III-16** and **VI-9** (see UNGEGN webpage "[Resolution on the Standardization of Geographical Names](#)", click here for [pdf](#), resp. pp. 32 and 34 and/or see images below).

III/16 National standardization

The Conference.

Recalling that the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names adopted resolution 4, regarding national standardization,

Considering that many countries have their own national geographical names authorities with status, composition, functions and procedures clearly outlined regarding officially standardized geographical names,

Recognizing that those national geographical names authorities have set up rules pertaining to official standardization procedures,

Also recognizing that according to the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (see Vol. II, 1972, p. 52) a standardized name is a name that has the official sanction of a legally constituted entity,

Recommends that to recommendation A of resolution 4 of the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names should be added the following:

"It is recommended that any changes made by other authorities in the names standardized by the competent national geographical names authority should not be recognized by the United Nations".

VI/9 Recognition of national standardization

The Conference.

Recognizing the cultural and historical significance of geographical names,

Aware of the sensitivity to deliberate changing of geographical names, which could lead to the loss of cultural and historical heritage,

1. Discourages the unauthorized changing of geographical names that have already been established by a legally constituted entity and are nationally recognized,
2. Endorses and reaffirms resolution 16 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, in which it was emphasized that geographical names given and/or standardized by a body other than that nationally authorized, should not be recognized by the United Nations.

