

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Akandevøj 7  
Lille Vaerløse  
Denmark  
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WGM-1  
Plans and Problems

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York  
USA

Dear Dick,

It was a pleasure to see you yesterday, even for such a short time and even though we didn't manage to get out of Kastrup Airport before your plane to London! Glad to hear that the lost suitcase turned up.

As you know from our talk over lunch yesterday, I have been experiencing the frustrating situation of having to get a letter off to you (and for some time now, indeed!) in the beginning stages of a study of the northern North Atlantic area. I wonder if others in their early months with ICWA have not felt a similar anxiety about writing something meaningful, while at the same time getting their feet on the ground in a new country and building the foundation for future reports and newsletters. I marvel at some of the early newsletters that have been written by others in circumstances much more frustrating than in our wonderful environment of Denmark! I am thinking particularly of Takashi Oka in Saigon, whose own early days in South Viet Nam had added elements of danger.

In this letter I shall say a bit about the settling-in process as it concerns my study and mention the main points which I hope to cover. First, a few things about initial problems, some of which are probably common when studying in areas outside the United States.

A study of Danish became for me a prime project since the first day we arrived. I will be the first to admit that it has taken up an inordinate amount of time which might well have been spent on other things. I was under the erroneous impression that Danish would come rapidly since I was not only partially conversant in it but knew some of the other Scandinavian languages as well. Written Danish is quite similar to Norwegian. Spoken Danish, however, is another matter and I feel that it is, in pronunciation and idiomatic usage, perhaps one of the most difficult languages in my experience.

So Danish language became a 'project' of the first order of importance. Without beginning language-study immediately upon arrival, and without intensive dedication to mastering what can be mastered in the time available, the study I have planned will not yield all the fruit possible. But doesn't everyone in Denmark (and even Scandinavia at large) speak English better than I will ever be able to speak Danish? To this

I would say that a lot of people speak English better than I shall be able to speak their language. I would, however, be quick to point out the obvious advantages of language skills which need no elaboration here.

Most of what is written which is of interest to me is not in English, and many people with whom I have already come in contact in Denmark prefer to speak Danish. Little wonder, when I know how I feel at the end of a day of trying to speak a foreign tongue! The main point, of course, is that I am the visitor here and am eager to become knowledgeable in an area of different language than mine.

There are several ways to go about learning a language. One may find a tutor (I haven't found one yet), or enroll in one or more of the many evening schools or University extension courses available. I have done both of the last two and shall continue to take new and more advanced courses as I progress. One may also (and should) subscribe to local newspapers and other periodicals and journals which has the two-edged advantage of providing language training and information. I have, therefore, subscribed to: Aftenposten, one of the chief Norwegian newspapers; Berlingske Tidende, a Copenhagen daily; Information, another Copenhagen daily; and Grønlands-posten, a bi-weekly newspaper published in Godthaab, Greenland. This last is a paper in both Greenlandic and Danish, the Greenlandic portion of which has been published for over 100 years! So much for language.

Through the Arktisk Institut (Danish Arctic Institute) in the suburb of Charlottenlund I have been able to gain access to sources of Greenlandic information as well as a very welcome place to study and write. The first (and probably most basic) matter to look into in Greenland is population. In this initial study the leader of Arktisk Institut, Col. J.V. Helk, has given me invaluable aid. Col. Helk, who is also chief of the Topographic Division of the government's Geodetic Institute, knows Greenland well and is perhaps the leading authority on the puzzling matter of Greenlandic population and place-names. I have received warm welcome at Arktisk Institut and have become interested in their work and in their unique sources of information - more of this later. (I have been gathering information about the Institut for part of a future newsletter series on organizations and institutions active in northern North Atlantic work.)

This initial period for us has been hectic, busy, and interesting to a point of fascination, but as yet not very productive. The question of population trends and mapping in Greenland has taken up much time, and I am only now able to start plotting a series of maps showing the distribution of population on the west coast from 1900. It is unfortunate that little is known about some of the smaller living places in Greenland which were inhabited at the turn of this century. Even their locations are in doubt, and many will never be able to be placed on a map. The situation is no better today: there is no good place-name and population map of Greenland. It is difficult, therefore, to show trends in population growth and movement without first drafting the necessary series of maps. This work is now virtually complete (or as complete as I will ever be able to make it), and has been the result of a painstaking search through old literature and maps.

These initial studies about Greenland and its population will be augmented by similar ones in other parts of the northern North Atlantic Ocean area. The geographic extent of this area is formidable and other topics of possible interest many, so that it might be important to state now what I consider significant for study.

Consideration of the area as a natural region is a primary basis of my study program. Human geographers are often interested more in natural regions than in artificial international boundaries. Areas of similar natural conditions are taken up for examination to see how they are developing and what effects environment has in man's life in these areas, as well as how man has changed, through occupation, the land on which he lives. It becomes even more interesting when national borders are crossed so that inevitable comparisons may be made in areas of similar environment. All this is not to say that one finds uniform climate, soils, fauna, and other physical characteristics within a natural region. The sum of these features, however, is such that the region as a whole has a quality unto itself which sets it off from neighboring areas. A difficulty in taking the regional approach on a large scale is that statistical data and other information must then be gathered from many more sources once national boundaries are crossed.

Utilization of natural resources and their potential for the future in the area is of great interest. Canada, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway have sovereignty over most of the area as indicated by the sketch map. The boundaries of this area are loose and it is obvious that external influences play a major role in the area's development. Many European countries have sallied into the area for resource exploitation, while USA, UK, and USSR have been interested in resources, plus the region's strategic importance.



Scientific research and its future trends in the area is a subject to be looked into carefully. As with the development and use of natural resources, scientific research problems are similar to those in other parts of the North. Differences of approach in solving these problems might be determined by wealth, tradition, energy, and the degree to which people in power have been convinced of the necessity to spend money. It is also possible that there are differences of approach within the area.

International co-operation in scientific research and resource utilization might well be fostered because of the great extent of the northern North Atlantic area. The extent to which this already exists, as well as future possibilities for international co-operation, will be investigated. Both utilization of natural resources and scientific research in the area are, in my estimation, intimately bound up with the consideration of international co-operation.

In this connection, in the area today we have perhaps one of the few remaining possibilities in the world for establishing protected regions of importance for conservation. It is my hope to be able to delve into the question of conservation areas (and I have in mind huge portions of the total area) in relation to obvious economic and political considerations. Perhaps it is too late to be talking about such matters, but I rather think not. Regardless of heated controversy which always seems to surround the subject, it is one of great importance.

Finally, a consideration will be made of the changing strategic value of this northern North Atlantic Ocean area. Have the potentialities of satellites eclipsed the usual conception of military importance of the North? If so, has this or will this affect other pursuits such as research, transportation, and defense, on which the military groups of many nations have devoted vast resources in the past?

Recent activity of Soviet Russia naturally comes to mind when talking about military strategy, resource utilization, and international co-operation in the area. This activity has been increasing markedly and there is much to be learned about Russian activities in the region.

With a bit of trepidation I have outlined these topics to be studied in the northern North Atlantic Ocean area. Equal weight and time cannot be given them all, and emphasis will probably shift as I take a closer look at some of the problems mentioned above.

Yours sincerely,

*Bill*  
W.G. Mattox

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