



TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT
CHEMNITZ

Christiane Ritter's Svalbard Experience
Martin Siefkes, Technische Universität Chemnitz
Darkness conference, 14. – 17.01.2019

Museum representations of Christiane Ritter's Svalbard experience

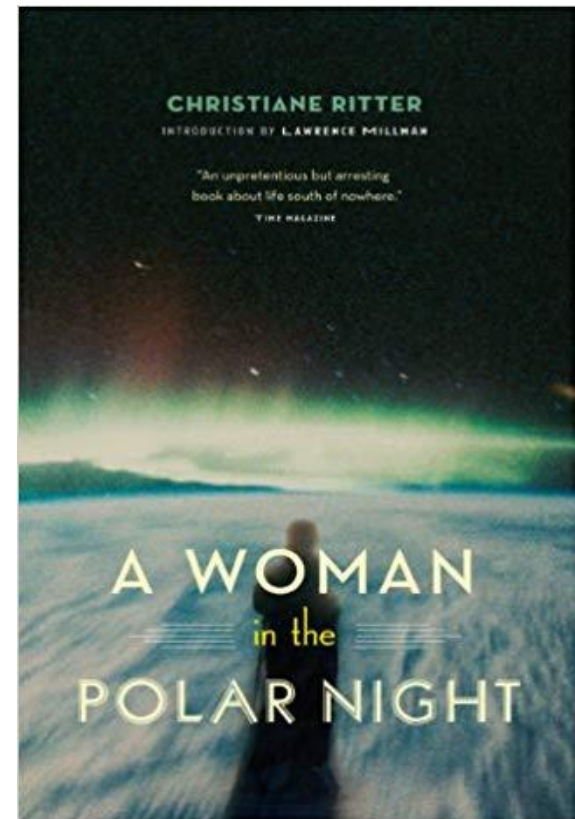


Overview

1. Christiane Ritter on Svalbard
2. Ritter's pictures in Svalbard Museum
3. A Virtual Tour of the Ritter hut
4. The Wanny Woldstad exhibit in the Polar Museum Tromsø

Christiane Ritter's "A Woman in the Polar Night"

- Christiane Ritter (born Christiane Knoll 13. July 1897 in Karlsbad; died 29. Dec. 2000 in Vienna) was an Austrian painter and writer
- She studied painting and illustration in the Vienna region. At the age of 20, she married the naval officer Hermann Ritter
- From 1934 to 1935, she spent one year in Gråhuken, at the Northern end of Andrée Land, between Wijdefjorden and Woodfjorden
- Together with her husband Hermann Ritter and the Norwegian hunter Karl Nicolaisen, she spent one year on Svalbard.
- While Hermann and Karl went on hunting trips that sometimes took up to two weeks, Christiane stayed alone in the hut that today carries her name



Christiane Ritter's "A Woman in the Polar Night"



- She wrote a book about the experience, *Eine Frau erlebt die Polarnacht*. It first appeared in 1938 in Berlin and was a lasting success. The German edition has never been out of print. Different editions include different numbers of illustrations.
- The English edition *A Woman in the Polar Night* was published in New York in 1954; the book was also translated in other languages. It was her only book and the Norwegian edition didn't come out until 2002. There was a new French edition in 2018.
- Ritter wasn't the first woman who spent a winter on Svalbard; for example, Wanny Woldstad from Tromsø did the same some years before Ritter.
- While Ritter wasn't an accomplished hunter like Woldstad, her book introduced a new perspective that made it a classic of travel literature that is still read today.

Ritter's psychological perspective on the High North



- Ritter's book presents a perspective that is different from previous accounts
- These accounts, written by explorers and hunters, focused on a "man vs. nature" framing of the Polar region
- Arguably, Ritter was the first to present a different perspective that focuses on the mental experience and the psychological gains of austerity
- Ritter doesn't romanticize the dangers. Rather, she reflects on the changes she observes in herself and her two companions



Fuglesongen

Velkomstpynten

Bangenhuk

Sorgfjorden
Heclahuken

Biscayarhuken

Breibogen

Reinsdyrflya

Gråhuken

Balberget

Femmiljøen

Lakssjøen

Valhallfonna

Amsterdamøya

Raudfjorden

Woodfjorden

Vasahalvøya

Danskøya

Smeerenburgfjorden

Ben Nevis

Reuschhalvøya

Liefdefjorden

Wijdefjorden

Agdalenefjorden

Albert I Land

Roosfjella

Hoelhalvøya

Bockfjorden

Svartstupa

Åsgardfonna

Monacobreen

Kapp Kjeldsen

Seidfjellet

anken

Fred Olsenfjellet

Risefjella

Okstindane

Andree Land

Ny-Fri

Liljehöökreen

Haakon VII Land

Ringhornet

Möllerfjorden

Mitrahallvøya

Isachsenfonna

Nivlheim

Veteranen

Kapp Mitra

Krossfjorden

H.U. Sverdrupfjella

Dovre fjell

Svartpiggen

Kapp Petermann

Perriertoppen

Atomfjella

Kapp Suissez

Vonbreen

Ruggen

Chydeniu

Kvadehuken

Kongsfjorden

Ny-Ålesund

Holtedahlfonna

Gråkammen

Austfjorden

Newto

Kvi



Nordaustlandet

Kong Karls Land

Ny-Ålesund

Prins Karls Forland

Pyramiden

Barentsoya

Longyearbyen

Spitsbergen

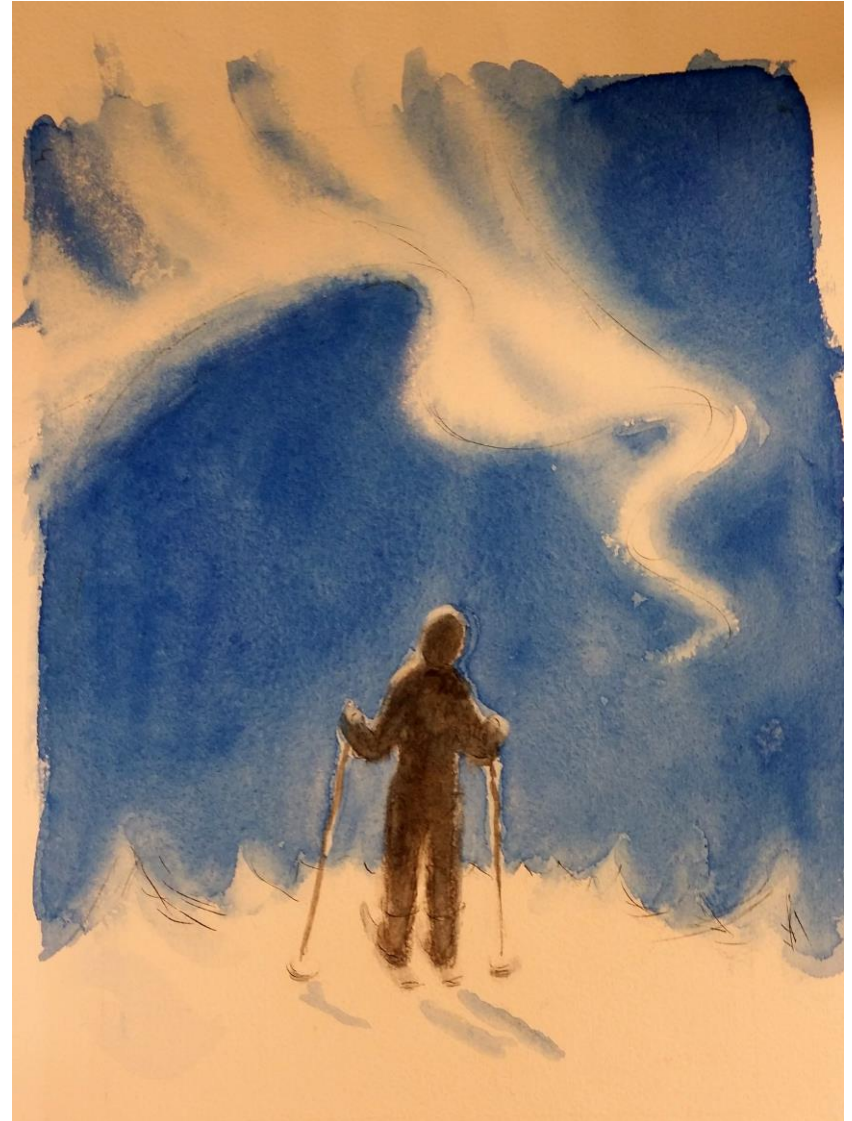
Barentsburg

Sveagruva

Edgeøya

The missing pictures – Svalbard museum

- In late 2018, the Svalbard museum received a gift of more than 30 watercolour paintings by Christiane Ritter. They were given to them, via intermediaries, by Karin Ritter, Christiane Ritter's daughter (b. 1927)
- The museum is currently in the process of cataloguing and digitizing them. Some of them are very fragile and it is unclear how these can be displayed
- In the process, they separate the passepartouts from the image (in order to avoid acid damage to the surface of the images), transcribe writing (where possible, it is sometimes illegible), and photograph front and back.
- 21 of them have already been digitized and available on digitaltmuseum.no, the Norwegian part of the digital museum for Scandinavia

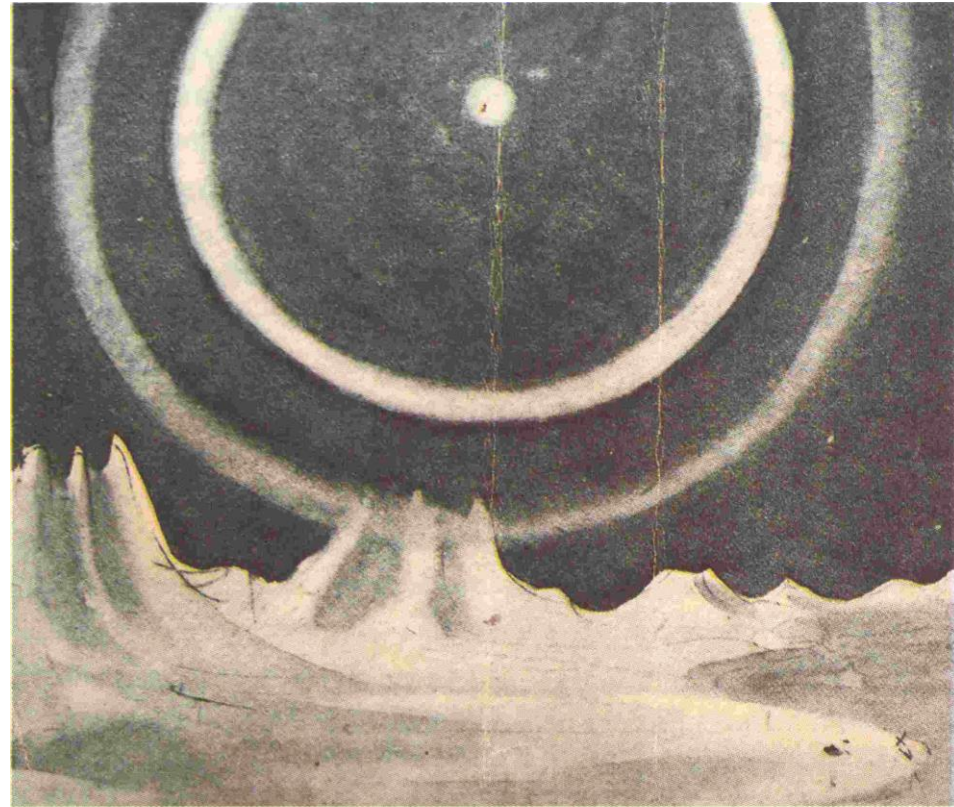


Ritter's paintings in Svalbard Museum



- However, some of the pictures that are in the Ullstein edition of the book (the edition that has the most pictures) are not among those given to the museum
- It is known that a few years after her return to Austria a fire destroyed Ritter's house and many of her possessions
- Some of the watercolours show similar motifs to those in the book (e.g. the pictures of skinned Arctic foxes)
- Some images that were reproduced in the book in fact have a much wider format, or look different in terms of their colours
- When Svalbard Museum received the watercolours, they found that some have text on the back, which seem to be notes for the book

Ritter's paintings in Svalbard Museum



Hinter den Grohuker Bergen stiegen zwei riesige leuchtende Bogen empor. Wie weiße Feuer standen sie im dunklen Nachthimmel (S. 108).

Ritter's paintings in Svalbard Museum



Ritter's paintings in Svalbard Museum

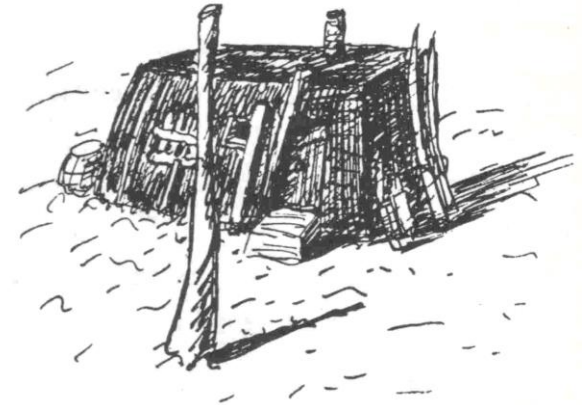


Ritter's paintings in Svalbard Museum



Virtual Tour of the Ritter hut

- A virtual tour that presents the Ritter Hut, and the landscape of Gråhuken around it
- Consists of four panoramic pictures, two of the outside and two of the inside of the hut
- The Virtual Tour is presented on www.spitsbergen-svalbard.com
- Both the texts and the pictures focus on living conditions and technical questions (such as water supply); they do not aim to recreate Ritter's experience
- <https://www.spitsbergen-svalbard.com/photos-panoramas-videos-and-webcams/spitsbergen-panoramas/ritter-hut.html>
- <https://toposvalbard.npolar.no/?lang=en&lang=en>



Virtual Tour: Starting point



Ritter hut: outside 1

The name Gråhuken is storytelling: a grey flatland, stony and barren, sticking out into the Arctic Ocean between Woodfjord and Wijdefjord on the north coast of Spitsbergen. There does not seem to be much alive there, but nevertheless the famous Norwegian trapper Hilmar Nøis built a hut here in



music: © dreamweaver.at

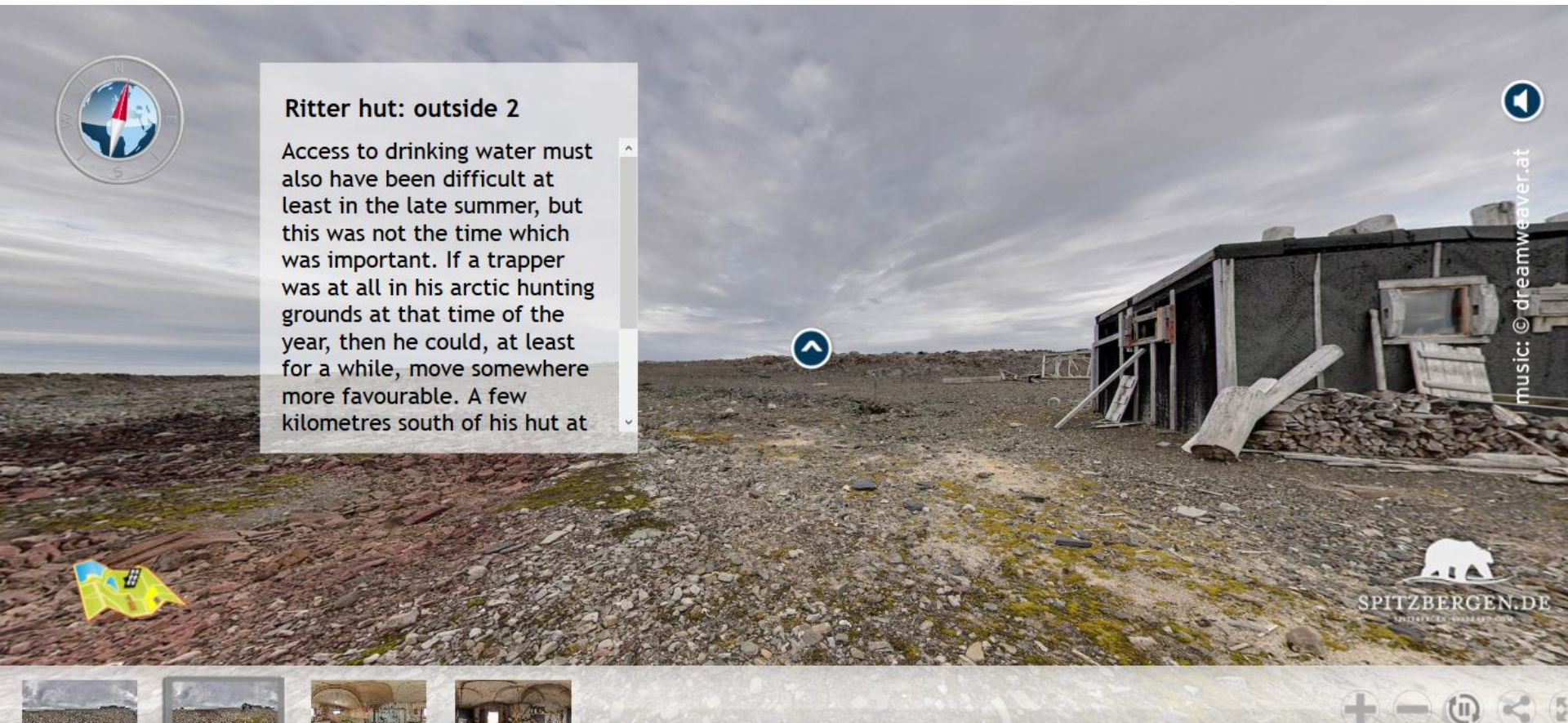


“ Ritter hut: outside 1

The name Gråhuken is storytelling [sic]: a grey flatland, stony and barren, sticking out into the Arctic Ocean Woodfjord and Wijdefjord on the north coast of Spitzbergen. There does not seem to be much alive there, but nevertheless **the famous Norwegian trapper Hilmar Nøis built a hut here in 1928**, which he called Kapp Hvile (Point of rest or silence). A nice name, but it is only a silent place in good weather. **It seems strange to build a hut at such a barren coast, which is only accessible in good weather and sea conditions. The reason was most likely that Hilmar expected good hunting conditions for polar bears here**, on the north coast, close the drift ice in spring. ”

Ritter hut. – Virtual Tour. <https://www.spitsbergen-svalbard.com/photos-panoramas-videos-and-webcams/spitsbergen-panoramas/ritter-hut.html>

Virtual Tour: Surroundings of the Hut



Ritter hut: outside 2

Access to drinking water must also have been difficult at least in the late summer, but this was not the time which was important. If a trapper was at all in his arctic hunting grounds at that time of the year, then he could, at least for a while, move somewhere more favourable. A few kilometres south of his hut at

“ Ritter hut: outside 2

Access to drinking water must also have been difficult at least in the late summer, but this was not the time which was important. If a trapper was at all in his arctic hunting grounds at that time of the year, then he could, at least for a while, move somewhere more favourable. A few kilometres south of his hut at Gråhuken, Hilmar Nøis had another one at Vårfluesjøen, with direct access to a river and a big lake. ”

The main room



Ritter hut: main room

The hut's claim for fame was a wintering in 1934-35, when Christiane Ritter from Austria spent a winter there together with her husband Hermann Ritter and the Norwegian hunter Karl Nikolaisen. Hermann had already a reputation as an experienced arctic hunter, but it was the first (and last) wintering for



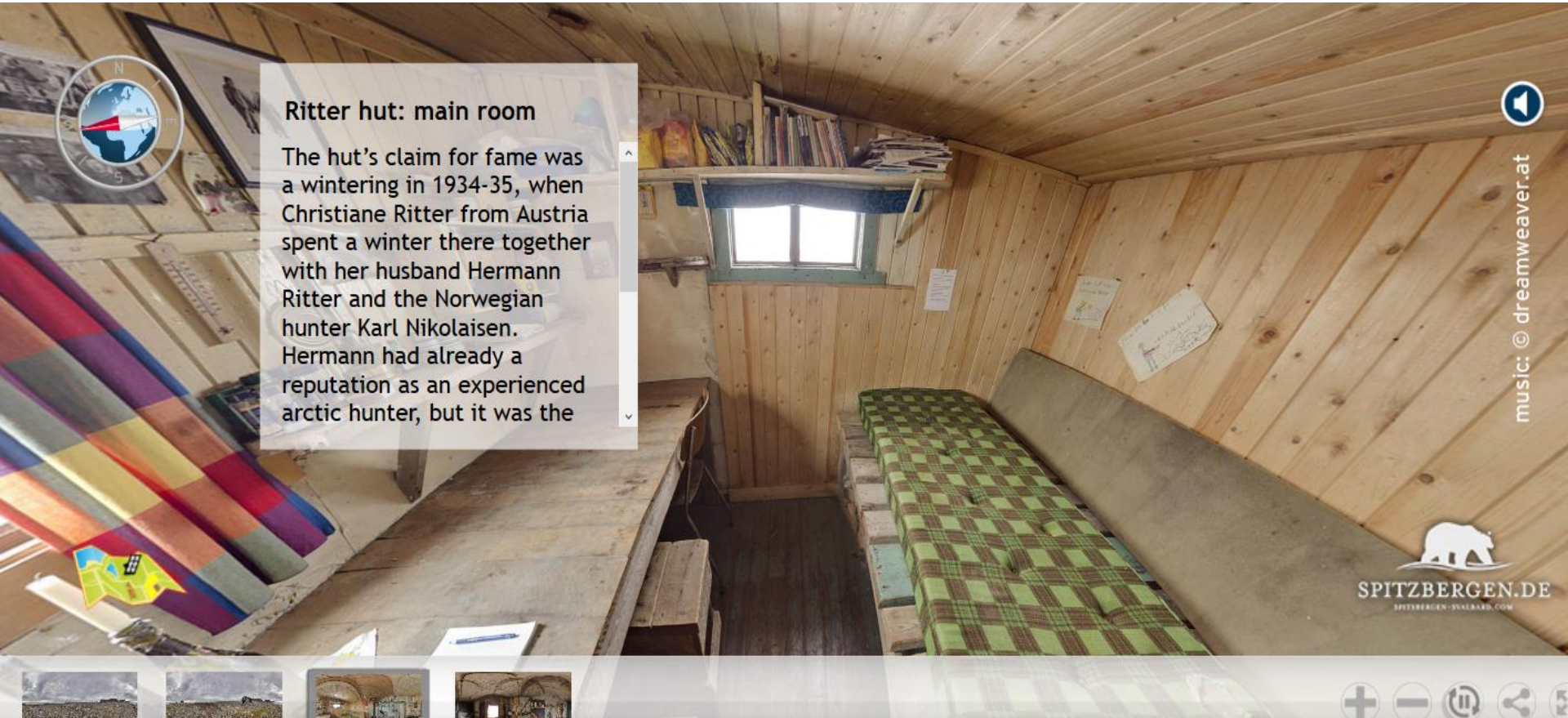
music: © dreamweaver.at



“ Ritter hut: main room

The hut's claim for (sic.) fame was a wintering in 1934–35, when Christiane Ritter from Austria spent a winter there together with her husband Hermann Ritter and the Norwegian hunter Karl Nikolaisen. Hermann had already a reputation as an experienced arctic hunter, **but it was the first (and last) wintering for Christiane**, who later published her memories in a book that became a classic, titled “A woman in the polar night in English, and “Kvinne I polarnatten“ in Norwegian. ”

The main room



Ritter hut: main room

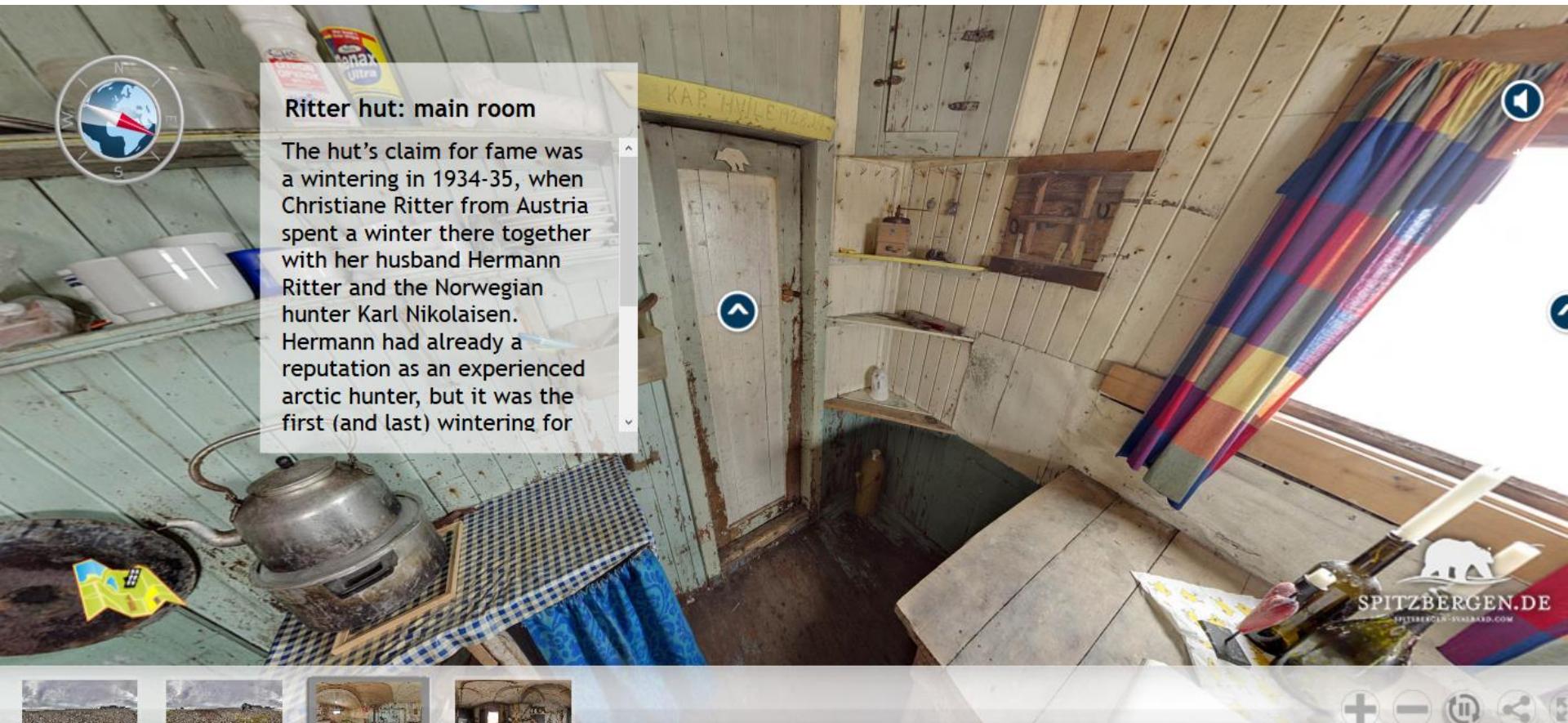
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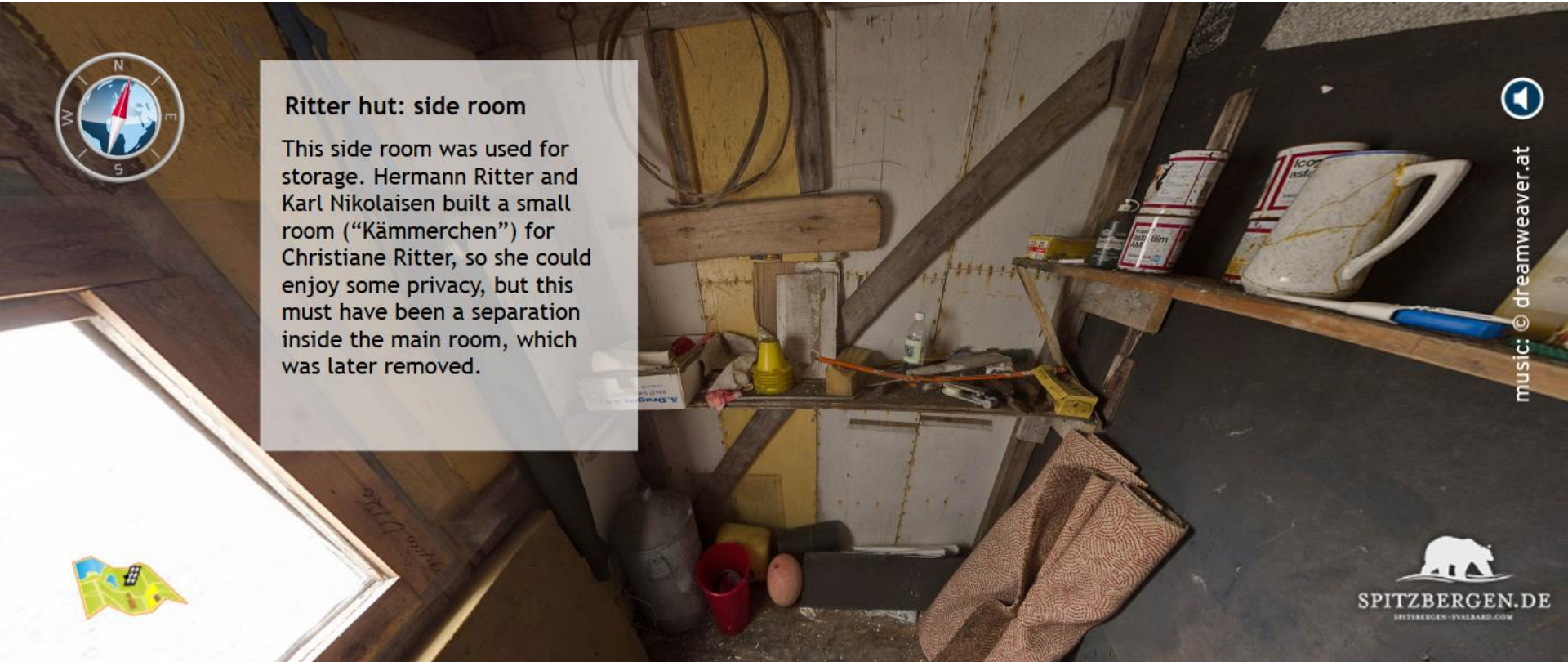
music: © dreamweaver.at



The main room



The side room

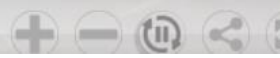


Ritter hut: side room

This side room was used for storage. Hermann Ritter and Karl Nikolaisen built a small room ("Kämmerchen") for Christiane Ritter, so she could enjoy some privacy, but this must have been a separation inside the main room, which was later removed.



music: © dreamweaver.at



Virtual Tour “Ritter hut” on www.spitsbergen-svalbard.com

- The Virtual Tour obviously praises a tourism attraction – you can find images on the web of Ritter fans with the hut
- It manages to convey the **uniformity and desolation** of the landscape, the contrast with the tiny hut, and its **cramped but functional** interior
- The sky is cloudy and grey in the pictures, underscoring the desolation
- It uses music to convey **atmosphere** – but is it really fitting?
- The music seems to mimic the wide landscape with a **soundscape**, and hints at sounds of breaking waves and screeching birds

Literature on Ritter

- Literature on Ritter's book is scarce. One of very few articles, by the blogger Henner Reitmeier, appeared in 2014
- Points out that the book conveys valuable historic information, for example how the hunters used to heat their huts: primarily with drift wood, and occasionally with coal, according to Ritter
- While the wood, often whole tree trunks, comes from Siberia or other faraway places, the coal, even at Ritter's time, was mined on the main island near Longyearbyen
- Ritter reflects on the effects of solitude and the harsh landscape on the human psyche, and on questions of independence from civilisation. However, she **avoids political commentary**, and only hints at the danger of war in Europe. It seems possible she wrote more in the diary she writes that she kept, but edited these parts for publication in Nazi Germany in 1938.

Ritter's influence

- The book is recommended on many websites on **Svalbard** and the Arctic in general.
- Ritter's account focuses on aesthetics, **the 'otherness' of the Arctic life** and landscape for European travelers, and the mentality changes she observes in herself.
- When Ritter writes that future generations might go to the North to seek out truth and radical experiences, in the same way they used to go into the desert, she comes close to predicting **popular culture's current fascination with the High North**. Ritter hints at a spiritual dimension of the Northern experience.

Comparison with the Wanny Woldstad exhibit in the Polar Museum Tromsø

- **Wanny Woldstad** (1893 – 1959) was the first female Svalbard hunter
- The permanent exhibition of the Polar Museum (**Polarmuseet**), which has been closed for some months now, had an exhibit on Woldstad
- The text of this exhibit focused on Woldstad's travels and her personality, mentioning her exceptional role as a **woman on Svalbard** at the time
- In comparison, the text of the Virtual Tour of the Ritter hut talks more about the geography and practical questions, such as where the hunters build their huts, and how they **earned their livelihood**
- A new Woldstad exhibition is scheduled to open in May

“ Wanny Woldstad 1893-1959

Winter trapping in the Arctic had long traditions as an activity for men. The few women who did participate did so more as housekeepers for their husbands than as actual trappers. Wanny Woldstad from Tromsø was however **an exception**. She spent **several winters in Svalbard** with her hunting partner Anders Sæterdal. Sæterdal was an experienced hunter and trapper, and taught her all the skills needed for her to become a partner on equal terms. When Wanny first met Sæterdal she had been widowed twice and had two teenage sons.

Wanny was **an exceptional woman**. She took part in shooting competitions, and was Tromsø's **first taxi driver from the mid 1920s with her own car**. Her first winter in Svalbard was in 1932/33, with Sæterdal. She put her practical skills to good use in many fields, not least her accurate shooting skills. They hunted seals, geese and ptarmigan in the autumn, and polar bears and Arctic foxes in the winter. **She shot her first polar bear just before Christmas**. As Sæterdal's partner, Wanny was perfect. The winter passed without problem - and Wanny **kept a diary** describing everything that happened. Late in the following summer, they were picked up by a sealing vessel – and Wanny was **joyfully reunited with her two sons** in Tromsø. ”

“ Within a few days, Wanny and Sæterdal had started outfitting the next expedition – this time with Wanny’s two sons. They used the same hut and hunting terrain – around Hornsund. That spring they shot two belugas – thus increasing their profits. Wanny Woldstad spent several winters on Svalbard. Her two sons, Bjørvik and Alf, also accompanied them in 1934/35, whereas Sæterdal and Wanny were alone in 1935/36. Sæterdal’s two children, Emilie and Fredrik - also teenagers – joined them in 1936/37, a season which was to be Wanny’s last on Svalbard.

After her **unusual career** as a trapper and hunter, Wanny became famous in the “Arctic circles” of Tromsø. Based on her diaries, she wrote a book “The first woman trapper on Svalbard”. She was also a popular lecturer. ”

Pictures and text: © Polar Museum Tromsø; Ann Eileen Lennert

Wanny og Sæterdal var de første som brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine.



Wanny ser til ei av fellene, ei vanehalsvaks. Et vordfullt blårevskin kan senere omsettes.

Familien i Hittveika
Wanny og Sæterdal var de første som brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine.



På tur mellom de to bistasjonene: Fuglefeil og Isbjørnhamna.

Hjemreisen
Den siste overvintringen var vellykket og snart til ryggen skilte Sæterdal den tilbake til Fomne. De gikk tilbake til Hittveika for Wanny og Sæterdal og Alf og Wanny.



To kvikvål som de klare å lagre vintre 1914



Guttene kommer fra rypejakt!



Her forlater isbasskuta "Thor" Hittveika, etter å ha satt på land Wanny og Sæterdal sin langstokpedisjon.



På tur mot bistasjonen Isbjørnhamna



Wanny med en av de mange isbjørnene hun skjøt

Wanny og Sæterdal var de første som brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine. De brukte isbjørne til å bygge opp husene sine.



Her har Bjørvik og Alf trukket en isbjørn fra et selvkudd frem til hytta



Wanny og synspetuguten, Alf - klare til gåsejakt.



Bjørvik og Sæterdal på storkobbejakt



En vellykket storkobbejakt!



Her er Sæterdal og Wanny



Alf måtte tidlig lære seg å få isbjørn



Fra Fuglefeil bistasjon. Legg merke til beplantningen ved døra - et typisk kvinnelig trekk i langstokket!



Trakkhønder ble benyttet på alle fem overvintringene. Her trekkes en isbjørn fram til langstokhytta.



Tre isbjørner som ble skutt fra hytta



Wanny og Sæterdal



Wanny og Sæterdal

Kombi
1937 m.
Eidvolden

Wanny ble født i Tromsø i 1907. Hun var den yngste av fem søsken. Hun vokste opp i et hjem med mange barn. Hun var en god venninne og en god medarbeider. Hun var en viktig del av livet i Tromsø. Hun var en viktig del av livet i Tromsø.



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KVINNEN SOM "FANGSTMANN" - ET PORTRETT AV WANNY WOLDSTAD

WANNY WOLDSTAD (1907-1985) var en av de første kvinnene som arbeidet som fangstmann i Norge. Hun var en viktig del av livet i Tromsø. Hun var en viktig del av livet i Tromsø.



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Slik måtte håten sikres mot vinterstormene



Huset der Wanny vokste opp på Sletnesveien



Wanny som dreiesjåfør i Tromsø



Hovvedstasjonen i Hyttelva



Wanny, Sæterdal og svensken Quarnström på kai i Sveagruven, i fred med å gå ombord i ishavsduta "Thor".



Isbjørnhamna bistasjon

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Kopi av regnskapsbok fra Andersens Sæterdalssamfunning i Tromsø, som viser Wanny og Sæterdals handlinger til oversamtningene i 1932 og 1933.



Wanny og Sæterdal inne i Fangsthytta



Wanny prøver sammen med ishavsskipper Eirik Jøf Svendsen og hans mannskap på ishavsduta Akula



Karferast under ghejakt inn søren



Polarhund



Svalbardtype



Polarfugl

Blå
1937 m.
Eidvolden