

Tore Gjelsvik, former director of the Norwegian Polar Institute, died at the beginning of this year. He is fondly remembered by a great many people. In this piece, Olav Orheim recalls the man and his key role in Norwegian polar activities. Orheim was head of Antarctic Research at the Norwegian Polar Institute in 1972–1993 and was the institute’s director from 1993 to 2005.



Remembering Tore Gjelsvik (1916–2006)

Olav Orheim

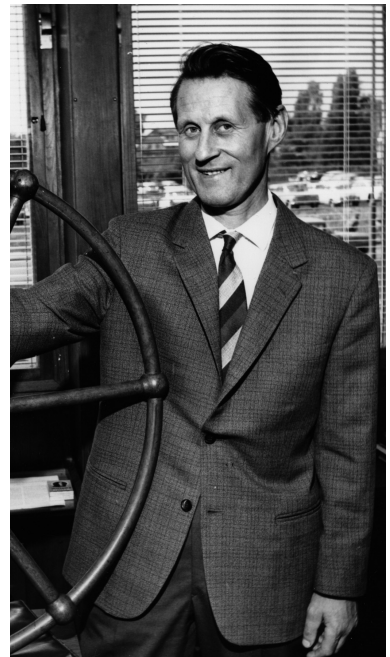
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Tore Gjelsvik, who was director of the Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI) from 1960 to 1983, died on 23 January 2006 at the age of 89.

Tore Gjelsvik had a high intellectual and working capacity, and a burning engagement for polar issues. He was result-oriented, and unpretentious on his own behalf. Combined with an extensive national and international network, this gave him much influence. There is no doubt that Norwegian polar activities today owe much to the foundations he built. He worked incessantly for the institute, and is remembered as an informal, approachable leader with high integrity and loyalty.

The following notes are some of my personal recollections of Tore, with all the potential errors and bias such recollections may have. I hope they complement the many factual articles that have been written about him.

The director’s position at NPI became vacant in 1959 when Anders Orvin, the director at that time, reached the retirement age of 70. Tore was one of several applicants for the position. He was then a geologist at the Geological Survey of Norway



Gjelsvik holding the wheel of the submarine *Nautilus*, during his tenure as the NPI’s director. (Photographs courtesy of the Norwegian Polar Institute Picture Library except where stated otherwise.)

(NGU), which was slated to move from Oslo to Trondheim. Tore and his wife Anne Marie lived in the suburbs of Oslo with their four children, and no doubt the decision to relocate the NGU was one reason why Tore applied. But he no doubt also had ambitions for a higher position than that he had held at the NGU.

There were several applicants for the position, including the NPI's Deputy Director Captain Kaare Lundquist, and Professor Kåre Rodahl, who had done much research in the field of Arctic medicine. Tore told me that the Minister for Industry, who was then in charge of the NPI, could not find agreement within the cabinet regarding whom to select. Some ministers would not have Rodahl, apparently because of opinions about his personality, whereas others rejected Lundquist because he lacked a science degree, and perhaps because he was seen to represent "business as usual." Neither group was willing to give in. Tore grew impatient with the slow process and withdrew his candidature. This apparently triggered a decision and Tore was appointed, to everybody's eventual satisfaction, I am sure.

This illustrates one of Tore's important character traits: he wanted action. It also illustrates that, following his impressive track record with the Resistance movement during World War II, Tore was held in high regard by many influential persons.

When Tore started as the NPI's director, Norway Station, at the coast of Dronning Maud Land, had been closed down after three overwintering seasons. Tore was told to concentrate on the Arctic. He went to Antarctica in December 1961 together with Gordon de Q. Robin, who was then the director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, in Cambridge. They flew by US invitation to the Amundsen–Scott South Pole Station, where they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the attainment of the pole. Tore had excellent contacts in the US from having studied at Harvard and through knowing the leadership of the United States Antarctic Research Program. I believe that the combination of these contacts and this trip with Gordon, who was by many considered the leading Antarctic scientist, gave Tore an everlasting interest in Antarctica and a belief that it was wrong to confine the NPI's activities to the north.

However, at the start of his directorship there were other pressing issues. The Kings Bay coal mine accident in Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, in 1962, which led to the government's downfall in 1963, had a major national impact, but there were also other Svalbard issues that received considerable political and media attention. These included the increasing Soviet presence and the question of oil exploration. Tore had very clear ideas about what was in the nation's best interests and pressed to strengthen Norway's presence in the archipelago.

With his background as a geologist, he doubted whether oil and gas would be found in Svalbard. At the same time he recognized that the Mining Code for Svalbard was not a good instrument for regulating such exploration. In general, there was little petroleum industry competence in Norway in those years prior to the

North Sea discoveries. He told me that Norway was in many ways lucky that oil was not found in Svalbard because we were not prepared to handle such a development. He was also skeptical of the many wild claims made by oil speculators in the archipelago and of the various individuals who promoted themselves as Arctic experts without the necessary qualifications.

These were the years when the central administration had little expertise related to the archipelago, which was formally ruled by the Governor of Svalbard (Sysselmannen), under the Ministry of Justice, but—in all practical terms—by the Store Norske Spitsbergen Coal Company. Store Norske was mostly state-owned and was under the Ministry of Industry, like the NPI. In those years geology and topographic and hydrographic mapping were the most well-staffed sections of the institute. These disciplines were clearly related to what was then perceived as the most important national needs, but the NPI also employed scientists in other fields. Tore and the NPI—in many ways they became synonymous—represented most of the broad competence, and continuity of knowledge, in Svalbard that could be found in Oslo. The situation of these early years, I believe, made Tore feel increasingly responsible for taking a broad national position on Svalbard issues. Many years



The commemoration in 1961 of the 50th anniversary of the attainment of the South Pole culminated by the flagpole at the Amundsen–Scott South Pole Station. Tore Gjelsvik, his face framed in a fur-rimmed hood, represented Norway and is holding up one end of the plaque in this photograph. The other end is supported by Gordon de Q. Robin, representing the UK.



Gjelsvik at work in his office at the NPI.

later this kind of stance led to conflicts with the Ministry of the Environment, which I describe below, but it is my impression that such conflicts were few in this period, when the Ministry of Industry administered Svalbard under a principle of “benign neglect.”

I first met Tore in 1965, when he interviewed me as a potential Norwegian participant on a US-organized traverse across the central Antarctic Plateau in Dronning Maud Land. I believe I was the second choice for this position: Tore wanted a back-up in case the favoured candidate, who was much senior to me in glaciology studies, should not want to take part. The interview was very short, but Tore was apparently satisfied. I was hired, and participated in other NPI projects during the next three years while completing my studies. I looked in awe at Tore and was never close to him in this period, but he and Anne Marie came to my wedding in Fjærland in 1968. Perhaps one reason for this was that he knew my father. Many years later, when he wrote his first book on the Norwegian Resistance, he gave me a copy, together with notes from his archive on my father’s role in Resistance activities in Bergen.

I went to the US to continue Antarctic research, and I was in Antarctica when I received a telegram from Tore informing me that he had succeeded in getting funds for a new type of position, a person who would concentrate on Antarctic research. He asked me to apply, which I did. I started in 1972, with a fast-growing set of responsibilities.

This illustrates another of Tore’s qualities: he was always on the look-out for new people, and he was very willing to delegate functions and responsibility. Those

he trusted he trusted strongly!

By 1972 Tore had reasons to believe he could get Norway back into Antarctic research but it would be another couple of years before he broke the political and financial ice. He many times proudly recollected how, when the time finally came, he had only a minute to plead his case for resuming Antarctic activities in his presentation to the Minister of Finance—he got the message across. In 1976 the NPI sent its first expedition to Antarctica since 1960.

Tore was elected president of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) in 1974, at the SCAR XIII meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This was my first SCAR meeting, while he was a veteran in this group, which still was dominated by the old boys' club, with many participants from the late 1950s era of the International Geophysical Year. No doubt it was his status as a polar leader, and his personal engagement with Antarctic affairs, rather than Norway's own efforts, that led to his election.

Anne Marie usually came along to the SCAR meetings, so over the next four years I got to know both much better as Tore's presidential duties also meant supporting tasks for me. In 1976 we spent some glorious days in Mendoza, the wine capital of Argentina. Here was also a college of education for the holiday industry. Each of the delegates was assigned a young lady who was training to be tourist guide (or similar) as a personal helper. Perhaps this inspired Tore to speak at the meeting about bringing more female scientists to Antarctica!

In 1978 we were in Chamonix, enjoying spectacular scenery and more grand hospitality. That was Tore's last meeting as president, and also his last at SCAR, as he appointed me as Norwegian delegate in 1980.

It was very educational for a relative youngster like myself to be Tore's right-hand man during those four years. Tore discussed issues with me and I learned much about international relations, not least getting people to agree in situations where consensus is the only way forward. This illustrates another of Tore's characteristics: his willingness to talk and teach. I believe there were many of us youngsters at the NPI who benefited from this.

Tore was also active in the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings, and was a central person when Norway arranged ATCM VIII in Oslo in 1975. I replaced him at these meetings from 1979, when the issue of mineral resources in Antarctica was just emerging. With his geological perspective, he was always very clear that the idea of commercial mineral activities in this area was not realistic in the foreseeable future.

As the institute grew in the 1970s, Tore wanted to get the staff better involved in the decision-making process. He established Fagkollegiet, which was an internal board of group leaders who were to advise the director on such questions as priority for logistics support and fieldwork, new appointments and any other issue that Tore felt he wanted views on. The NPI did not then (or now) have a board, so this

was a way of fostering collective thinking on selected issues. Tore did not normally participate in these meetings.

I was chair of Fagkollegiet when Tore and I had our only serious disagreement. He presented an issue on which he wanted us to agree with him and then stayed on to take part in the discussions, which he tried to dominate. I asked him to leave for the reason that he would not get independent advice if he continued to voice his opinions at the meeting. He became very angry with me, but left, and we thereafter had a heated exchange of notes on the role of Fagkollegiet. Retrospectively, I can see that we were both right—I, as a matter of principle, but he probably had good reasons why the results should be as he wanted, and perhaps he did not want to have a situation where Fagkollegiet came up with advice that he would have to overrule.

Despite this disagreement he saw to it that I became a member of the Fram Committee (Framkomiteen), where he was chair from 1985. While he was chair he had me elected to the Executive Committee (Arbeidsutvalget) and then to deputy chair and finally in 1996 to follow him as the chair. The committee was a prestigious group of up to 12 people and was the board of the Fram Museum, which was dedicated to the history of Norwegian polar exploration. Within this group, the Executive Committee comprised the inner five who in reality carried out the board functions. Tore had been a member of the Fram Committee from the start of his directorship, and he put a great deal of energy into the museum, not least after his retirement as director. From the late 1980s he was responsible for modernizing the exhibits, something that certainly contributed to an increase in visitors. Tore already had some experience with making exhibitions as he had led this work when Norway's Resistance Museum (Heimefrontmuseet) was established many years earlier. He was very proud of the financial independence of the Fram Museum, which supports itself entirely from the 200 000 visitors it receives annually. These were principles that we followed when we built the Norwegian Glacier Museum (Norsk Bremuseum) in 1991 in Fjærland.

Tore was proper when he needed to be, but in general he was a very informal person. I remember the astonishment of a newly hired secretary when Tore was visited one summer by a nicely suited ambassador. Tore received him in shorts, which was his usual working attire when it was hot. No doubt the astonishment was compounded by me: when I was called in to the meeting I not only wore shorts but also probably very inelegant footwear!

In 1979 the institute was moved from the Ministry of Industry to the Ministry of the Environment. I suspect Tore came to the view that this was a department with more ambition than wisdom when it came to polar affairs. His guiding principle had, I believe, always been to present what he thought was best from a *national* standpoint rather than in terms of a single ministry. It is easy to understand this attitude not only because of his wartime background, but also because the Arctic

was a central arena in global security policy throughout the Cold War. There were many issues on which he gave advice that can be found in the institute's confidential files. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had (and still has) particularly close ties to the NPI. This, I believe, was not to the liking of the "young" Ministry of the Environment. There may be other reasons, but there certainly were serious conflicts between Tore and Director General Erik Lykke. I was present at one meeting during which if one of these two men disagreed with something the other had said on an issue he would not say anything—so in reality there was no dialogue, and seemingly little attempt to understand the other point of view. Tore was stubborn when he felt he was right, and I suspect that he was mostly right on the issues of substance. But much of the power resided with the director general, especially in the internal budget decisions within the ministry. I suspect that some willingness to accommodate on Tore's part would have given better results in the long run and would perhaps also have helped to educate the ministry! As it was, the NPI did not get a proportionate share of the increases in the ministry's budget in the 1980s.

Tore liked to see young people coming into polar science and was initially supportive of one young lady who made a large media impact in the 1980s. But he lost faith in her for various reasons, including, I believe, a failure to return some items borrowed from the Fram Museum.

Tore was by training a field geologist and he had spent many field seasons in Svalbard, the last when he was in his 79th year. But other duties limited his field activities so he was perhaps not such a field person as he considered himself to be. He would make decisions, as usual, but they were not always the most practical solutions. This is, perhaps, a common problem for institute directors who end up having to spend most of their time behind a desk and in meetings.

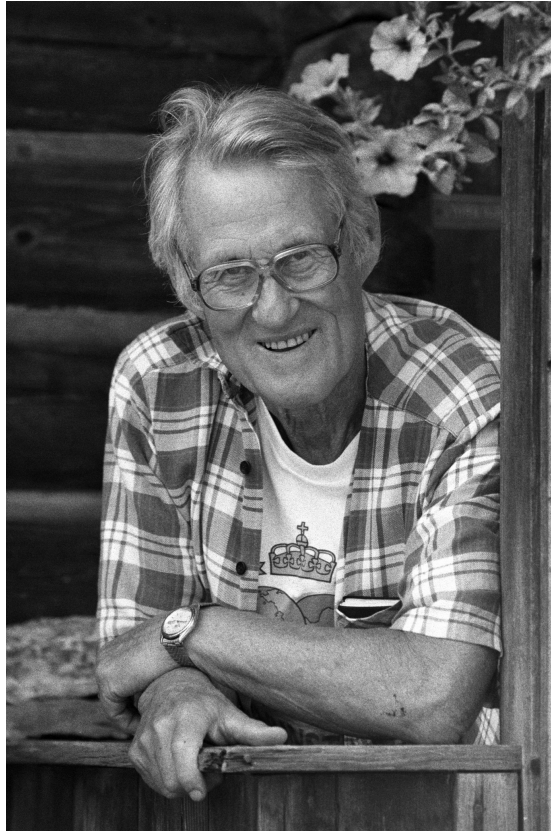
Tore was strongly supported by Anne Marie. They would invite new employ-

Three geologists enjoy a break in Liefdefjorden, Svalbard, 1995. From left: Yoshihide Ohta, Aleksandr A. Krasilsjtsjikov and Tore Gjelsvik.



ees to their home—where we were seated with name-cards slotted in rocks from his extensive travels. For institute parties Anne Marie would come with freshly baked cakes. Their warm hospitality was one reason for their very wide international contacts and their very many friends. In my period as director I frequently met people who would ask how they were doing.

The last time I was in their house was on Tore's 75th birthday, where the many guests included Gunnar Sønsteby, the famous war hero. Tore and Anne Marie later moved from this house, where they had lived for many decades, to a large flat in central Sandvika, a suburb of Oslo. The move took place about a half year after their youngest son was killed in a freak car accident. This affected Tore strongly, and he never regained his vitality.



Gjelsvik at 80. (Photo: Tom A. Kolstad, *Aftenposten*/SCANPIX.)

Tore Gjelsvik (1916–2006): some facts

Tore Gjelsvik was born in Bodø, north of the Arctic Circle in northern Norway, on 7 September 1916. He completed his Cand. Real. degree in geology at the University of Oslo in 1942. At the same time, Tore was playing an increasingly important role in the Resistance movement. In 1943 he became a member of the Coordinating Committee and eventually led its secretariat. In January 1945, he narrowly eluded capture by the SS. With a gunshot wound in his shoulder, he managed to escape across the Swedish border. He was soon back in Norway, where he helped lead the Resistance. Tore later played an important role in the establishment of Norway's Resistance Museum, in Akershus Castle, Oslo. Tore wrote two books about his wartime experiences, one of which was translated into English: *Norwegian Resistance, 1940–1945* (1979).

Tore married Anne-Marie Skaven soon after the war and they had four children. He was research fellow at Harvard University in 1946–47, completing his PhD in

Norway in 1953. He worked for the next seven years with the Geological Survey of Norway and undertook assignments as a geology adviser and consultant for the United Nations in Turkey (1955–56) and Burma (1958–59). In 1960 he was appointed director of the NPI, a position he held until retirement in 1983.

Tore was chairman or member of many national and international committees and societies. In 1975 he was made Knight First Class of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav; in 1984 he was made Commander of the Order. He was honoured with the Swedish Order of the Northern Star in 1982 and the Polish Copernicus Medal in 1983. Germany bestowed him with the Georg von Neumayer Service Medal in 1988 for his contribution to the development of German polar research.

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