

Canada lays claim to Santa and the North Pole

Canada has submitted an application to the UN claiming territorial rights over more than a million square kilometres of the Arctic – including the North Pole. Who really owns the ice caps?



CITIZENSHIP
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The Arctic: a vast expanse of freezing sea dotted with barren islands of ice. So inhospitable is the Earth's northernmost region that no human had set eyes on it until 1926. To grow or build anything there is out of the question.

Yet now this whitewashed wasteland is at the centre of a mounting international dispute: Canada has submitted an application to the UN claiming territorial rights over 1.2 million square kilometres of the Arctic. And included in this icy expanse is the North Pole itself.

Canada will not get its mittens on the North Pole without a fight. Denmark is also preparing a claim over the Arctic, while Russia argues that its sovereignty over the region is its historical right. Russian president Vladimir Putin has even gone so far as to deploy troops in the Arctic and place an underwater flag at the North Pole.

'We know that the Liberals do not think that the North Pole or Santa Claus are in Canada,' said a member of the Canadian government. 'We do. We are going to make sure that we protect them as best we can.' The Liberal leader rushed in to assure voters that he was not abandoning Father Christmas: 'Everybody knows that Santa is a Canadian. His postcode is HoH oHo.' Alaskans weighed in to claim Santa for the US, and soon Norway and Finland were making their cases too.

Suddenly Santa is at the centre of a mounting international dispute. But the real debate, of course, is about something a little more serious. In spite of its emptiness, the Arctic harbours an enormous wealth of valuable resources. Around 30% of the world's undiscovered gas and 15% of its oil are thought to lie beneath the icy ocean. As fossil fuel reserves dwindle the Arctic's value will grow.

At the moment, the UN recognises no single country's sovereignty over the North Pole: the area is jointly administered by an Arctic Council of nine northern nations. But the UN does recognise a country's rights over sea beds connected to their landmass – and Canadian cartographers claim that this grants them territorial rights over much of the Arctic.

ICE WIDE OPEN

Internationalists are appalled by this territorial dispute. No single country should own a majestic wilderness like the Arctic, they say. Instead of squabbling over who gets to plunder it, we should come together and agree to preserve it from humanity's destructive grasp.

What sentimental nonsense, reply less idealistic types. If the Arctic is worth exploiting then countries like Canada should do their worst. The world needs oil and gas infinitely more than ice islands and polar bears.



Q & A

Q Is it possible to visit the North Pole?

A It's not easy. For a start, the exact point of the Earth's magnetic north is constantly shifting, so it's difficult to say for certain whether you are there. And travelling in these northern wastes is fraught with hazard and discomfort. But there is

also another problem: it's no longer permanently covered in ice.

Q What? So Santa lives underwater?

A So it would seem. There is of course no solid ground in the Arctic (unlike the Antarctic), and scientists believe that the ice at the North Pole has occasionally melted. Some believe that climate change could mean that the entire Arctic could soon be ice-free in the summer. So if we

want any hope of visiting the polar region ever, we need to get serious about fighting global warming.



SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'The real Santa Claus is at the mall.'

Lemony Snicket

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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WORD WATCH

1926 – The title of the first person to reach the North Pole is usually given to Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, whose expedition triumphed in 1926. Others (such as the Americans Frederick Cook and Robert Peary) argued that they got there before him, but now there are doubts over all of these claims. The first unquestionably proven journey to the North Pole was conducted by Soviet scientists in 1937.

Alaskans – There is a town in Alaska called North Pole, which contains a road called St Nicholas Drive. Santa Claus supposedly lives at number 101.

Finland – The Finns have possibly the strongest basis for claiming Santa as a citizen, since their country is home to Lapland. Indeed, this fact accounts for a substantial proportion of Finland's tourism industry. You can even visit Santa in the summer.

Arctic Council – The members are: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.

Cartographers – People who study or produce maps. Canadian cartographers have spent years mapping the supposed reach of their country's seabed, but many foreign observers are dubious about their claims.



YOU DECIDE

1. Should anybody own the Arctic?
2. 'An untouched wilderness is more valuable than gas or oil.' Do you agree?



ACTIVITIES

1. Where do you think Santa comes from? Pick a country and make the best case you can for Santa being one of its citizens!
2. Write a paragraph explaining why the Earth's poles are so cold.



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