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Greenland 2007

There were 61 expeditions in the field in Greenland in 2007 and of those 32 were planning to make a traverse of the Inland Ice, either transverse or longitudinal. However, as in previous years, enthusiasm for Greenland has not been matched by the expeditions' willingness to let the *AJ* know about their activities and this regional notes editor's enquiries met with only a 20% response rate, somewhat reducing the effectiveness of his material!

Refreshingly, in addition to the usual interest in the trade route across the Inland Ice, there were more groups than in previous years breaking away from the straightforward east-west or west-east route, including two south-north proposals and one north-south. This widening of horizons was also apparent in the expeditions to relatively new areas. Ejnar Mikkelsens Fjeld and the adjacent Sortebrae area in the Watkins Mountains have now started to rival Gunnbjörnsfjeld as popular destinations, although EMF's significantly greater difficulty than GBF, and it not being the Arctic's highest, will probably always leave it a close second to GBF. Elsewhere innovative groups visited Dronning Louise Land in north-east Greenland, Milneland in inner Scoresbysund and the far northern coast of Greenland.

Possible harbingers of climate change were responsible for significant problems with weather and snow during 2007. A number of expeditions expecting to fly in to their objectives could not be put down where they wished or, in some cases, where others had landed in previous years. The Sortebrae expedition (see below) was delayed by weather in Iceland and then spent a significant amount of their time in the field, and an extraordinary amount of effort, digging out their aircraft several times. At the time of writing, the outcome of this problem, manifested in the field by statements from the pilots that they would not in future fly into the mountains, remains unresolved.

For those parties setting off on the Inland Ice the weather was not significantly different or better than last year and most parties who did not want high winds experienced them, some to extremes. A three-member team of Linda Beilharz, Bob Rigato and Roger Chao (Australia) calling themselves the **Bendigo Bank Greenland Expedition** used a helicopter to reach Nagtivit on the east coast on 17 May and were immediately hit by a *piteraq*, the sudden katabatic wind for which this area of the coast is notorious and which has in the past proved fatal to more than one expedition. They suffered five tent-bound days and some equipment damage before getting

away. The weather improved and temperatures dropped as they climbed away from the coast, first through 10 days of whiteout conditions and then into brilliant clear weather as they reached the high point of the ice. Skiing conditions were good and due to the relatively early start the party did not have big melt-water problems and reached Kangerlussuak after a rather long five weeks on the Inland Ice.

On 17 April Jan Fokke Oosterhof and Paul Kamphuis (Netherlands) commenced the second stage of their **Frozen Dreams Project**, the first stage having been the ascent of Mont Blanc in 2006. The third stage is planned to be a ski expedition to the South Pole. Intending to follow Nansen's route of the first crossing of Greenland, they were landed on the edge of the Inland Ice by helicopter and were also struck by a *piteraqa* and confined to their tent for four days while having to dig the tent out every few hours. The period of whiteout which followed the storm delayed the group's progress sufficiently for them to decide to return to their starting point, which they reached safely on 11 May after covering some 340km.

Of the 10 expeditions which received permission to attempt the west-east route, only that of Frenchmen Olivier Le Piouff and Guillaume Hintzy provided details of their journey from **Ilulissat to Isortok**. Starting on 3 April in very cold winter conditions, they took 37 days to ski the 700km from Eqip Sermia on the west coast to a point on the Inland ice some few kilometres from the east coast where they were met by a helicopter. Their only problems while completing this fine trip were encountering head winds for a great part of the journey and suffering minor frostbite, probably almost inevitable at that time of year.

Of those tackling the much longer south-north longitudinal traverse, Fleming Lund and his companion Sverri formed the **Arctic Kite Tour** and left Narsaq, near to the southern tip of Greenland, on 19 April aiming for Qaanaaq. They were slowed during the first two weeks by a lack of wind for part of the day. At night on the Inland Ice in April it is too cold and dark to ski and so by 12 May, in difficult conditions, they were only just east of Pt 660, the traditional exit point for parties crossing from the east coast to Kangerlussuak, and decided to divert directly to Kangerlussuak. They plan to return to complete the job in 2009 but their experience suggests a slightly later start would be better.

This is perhaps borne out by the experience of **The Pittarakk Expedition** composed of Canadians Eric and Sarah McNair Landry and Curtis Jones who set out from Narsaq on 26 May, reaching Qaanaaq, some 2300km away, on 10 July. They had some difficulties getting all their gear to and through the marginal zone of the Inland Ice, but once through were able to use their kites and head north. In the south they encountered some head winds and wet storms but once across the Arctic Circle the winds became more constant and helpful and on 30 June, when well north and before reaching Qaanaaq, the team decided to see how far they could travel in one day and achieved 412km!



171. SMC East Greenland Expedition: view of the still unclimbed north face of Bersaerkertinde. (*Mark Litterick*)

On the east coast, a **Spanish Army Mountain Group** expedition aiming to climb Gunnbjörnsfjeld in the Watkins Mountains, sailed from Isafjordur in Iceland reaching Mikis Fjord, SSE of their objective, on 2 August. This was too late as the very extensive network of surface drainage for which the enormous Christian IV glacier is notorious, had fully developed; the expedition was unable to cross to the mountains and returned to Mikis Fjord.

Further north, the **East Greenland Sortebrae** expedition led by David Jakulis, after delays in Iceland, were finally flown into their area, north and east of Ejnar Mikkelsens Fjeld. On landing the first half of the eight-strong group, the Twin Otter aircraft sank into the snow and required two days of digging to get it back on to the surface again. This meant that the pilot, when he returned with the second group, would only land at a higher level some 30km from the first group, thus creating the need for a reunion before the expedition could get to grips with the area. They split into two groups and, generally avoiding the rock, made some rewarding ascents of snow ridges and faces assessed as being of about PD standard.

With their time already limited by earlier delays, the expedition felt they should spend time making a heavily laden move to a higher level where the Twin Otter could land safely. This was not high enough and when the plane returned to take surplus gear it again buried itself, but not so deep, and this time it was on its way in a few hours, leaving the group to reach a high point on Borgetinde and make another first ascent from the Borgetinde plateau. The expedition ended with a further 30km change of position to reach a point where the pilot decreed he could safely land and take off with no chance of further burials.

Further north, on Ren Land in the inner reaches of Scoresbysund, Dick Griffiths led a 50-strong **UK Scout expedition** which efficiently carried out a comprehensive programme of climbing and exploration of this relatively little known area and an extensive science project. They also conducted a long canoe journey along the length of Scoresbysund. Many people, including the Danish Polar Centre, usually raise their eyebrows at expeditions of this size. Whatever one's view, this project was carried out in accordance with all written and unwritten rules governing expedition activities in a pristine wilderness area and seems to have been a great success.

In the Staunings Alps the **SMC East Greenland Expedition**, led by Colwyn Jones, left the UK on 29 April and then flew on to a base camp site on the Lang glacier on 30 April; the next day they made their first ascent. The expedition subsequently achieved a total of 16 first ascents before making a ski journey to the airstrip at Mestersvig from where they were flown back to Iceland. For most of the time in the field they enjoyed excellent weather, so clear and cold that it resulted in three cases of superficial frostbite. One interesting item of concern is that the expedition experienced problems with some early model MSR XGK II stoves not working with Jet A1 fuel. Other parties planning to use this type of fuel in the Arctic, where Jet A1 is often a very available and convenient fuel, might be well advised to test the compatibility of stoves and fuel before departure.

Further north in Andrees Land, **Operation Boreal Zenith** was an eight-person Army Mountaineering Association expedition led by Sam Marshall. They established a base camp by air in Grejsdalen from where the expedition made 34 ascents of which 29 were first ascents. Peaks in the area range up to 2300m and mainly rise above snow plateaux at about 1800m leaving ascents of about 500m. Mostly the peaks are of shattered sedimentary rocks but there are a number of areas of more solid rock; among these are some large granite slabs which remain unclimbed and form a complex face on the peak named by the expedition Lizard Peak (1404m). It was noted from the aircraft that there are many interesting peaks in the surrounding unvisited areas. The expedition had generally good weather and was in the field from 3 July to 3 August.

Dronning Louise Land 2007 planned to visit the southern area of DLL which had not been visited by the two previous expeditions to the range. On 13 May, owing to perceived difficulties of landing at the chosen landing

site, the three-man expedition was eventually landed some 50km north. This was closer to the planned pick-up point than intended and it was decided not to go 'back' to the initially chosen drop-off point. This entailed a revision of the plans and the expedition moved 80km northwards towards the pick-up point, climbing 19 peaks on the way, 15 of which were first ascents, before being picked up on 8 June. A small programme of geological collecting was carried out, but the meteorites the expedition had hoped to find remained as elusive as ever on the fringes of the mountains the expedition had hoped to reach, known on the maps as *Fairytale Mountains*.

Both west and east coasts were the settings for enterprising kayak journeys. On the west coast the **Paddle to the Peaks** expedition comprising Althea Rogers, Kelly Ryan and Bradford Cabot of the USA spent 65 days in the field and on the fjords, exploring the region between Manitsoq and Kangamiut. They left Manitsoq on 21 June and paddled through the coastal network of fjords, generally sleeping during the middle of the day and using the twilight hours of the midnight sun to explore the glaciers, snow fields and ridges and mountains which flanked their route. They climbed some 11 summits up to 1775m and placed great emphasis on following a 'leave no trace' ethic.

On the east coast Bill David and Beth Anne, the **East Greenland Kayak Expedition**, set out from Daneborg on 17 July, just after the fjord ice had broken up, and kayaked some 500km south to Mestersvig which they reached 28 days later using a very narrow window of ice conditions. This was emphasised when, on arrival at Mestersvig, they learnt that vessels were already having trouble with ice back at their starting point, Daneborg. During their journey through the wonderful fjord region of the 'Arctic Riviera' they made excursions inland up many of the fine valleys for which this region is noted, and experienced the prolific wildlife and wonderful weather for which the area is also famous.

In past years these Greenland notes have ended with the exploits of the ubiquitous American, **Dennis Schmitt**, and this year is no exception as he and his party discovered yet another new island. The island lies in the Bliss Bugt area of the north coast, about 60km east of Kap Morris Jessup, where Schmitt's teams have previously discovered new 'most northerly' islands, and was named 'Stray Dog Island' in American and 'Kitaa Qeqertoq' in Greenlandic. It is a small moraine-like mass rising only a little above the surrounding pack ice but it does show that new 'land' is still there to be discovered!