

Greenland 1983

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Activity in Greenland over the past few years seems to have centred around the popular SW and E coast areas.

Back in 1979 J. Walch, a frequent French visitor had to abandon an attempt on Ingolfsfjeld, 2232m, due to access problems caused by dense pack-ice and instead made a long and difficult ascent of the 4th Trillingerne tower north of Kungmiut.

In 1980 the Queen's University of Belfast M.C. sent a seven man expedition under Alistair Acheson to the Kap Farvel area where they made a total of 40 ascents, some 20 of which were claimed as 'firsts'. The climbing was described as 'more a matter of endurance than technical difficulty'.

Further north and two years later the British Schools' Exploring Society hit the Angmagssalik area with an expedition of 106 leaders and students. They split into a number of groups and despite some really bad weather managed to complete their projects, one of which was to erect a new metal cross at Tugtilik Fjord, in which Gino Watkins had drowned 50 years earlier, the original wooden cross having been destroyed by bears. The same year the British East Greenland Expedition led by Geoffrey Managhan with the superb objective of Pt. 3060m on the edge of the Inland Ice Cap had trouble getting away from Angmagssalik due to pack ice and eventually, due to running out of time had to settle for making a number of ascents around the Knud Rasmussen's Glacier.

1983 was an active year for the mountaineering scientists with a party led by Robert Burton on Wollaston Forland, and the East Greenland Goose Project of Brathay Hall carrying out studies in Jameson Land. In the Angmagssalik area Imperial College, London, under the leadership of Melanie Hiorns carried out a two-pronged science and sledging expedition. The sledgers ascended onto an arm of the Inland Ice and whetted their appetites for a future visit despite having problems with equipment purchased secondhand from the Transglobe Expedition. Further north an Italian expedition under Gianni Fasciolo made a number of ascents around the head of the Karales Glacier, north of Kungmiut, whilst also carrying out geological research. In the Staunings area, The Nathorst Land Reconnaissance Expedition led by Jonathan Walton carried out geomorphological and hydrological research around the western end of Furesø. Finally in late summer the Danes had to mount a rescue flight to locate two Germans who were six weeks overdue on what turned out to be an overloaded dog-sledge traverse of the Inland Ice.

Future expedition prospects in Greenland.

Expeditions planned to visit Greenland this summer may find they face great difficulty in obtaining permission due to 4 expeditions which got into trouble last year (1983). Of these, 2 caused between them 7 fatalities and, the reason for the Danes' concern, not only much expenditure on search and rescue but also the loss of much flying time in the all too short Arctic summer.

The most serious accident occurred to 5 members of an Italian expedition climbing in the mountains north of Umanaq on the west coast, who all fell to their

deaths for reasons as yet unrevealed. Further south on the west coast 2 Germans, having deliberately evaded the required formality of obtaining permission set off to cross the Inland Ice Cap and were never seen again. The Inland Ice exerted its lure on 2 other expeditions which also met difficulties. One German, travelling with dogs was so delayed that a large rescue operation was mounted before the expedition finally reached Flyver Fjord and had to be helicoptered out. The expedition's insurance had expired and the Danes ensured that the German government would foot the bill before the helicopter lift was initiated. Further south an Italian expedition with permission and insurance completed a crossing but arrived on the coast in very poor shape.

The Inland Ice has been crossed many times now but as Martin Linsay wrote in 1934, 'each journey on it is a venture into the realms of death', and it exacts a high price from those not prepared both mentally and physically for its challenge. Following this disastrous summer the Ministry for Greenland have signified their intention to lay down more stringent conditions, to limit the areas available to expeditions and to insist on regular radio contact being maintained. One can hardly blame the Danes for wishing to impose such conditions but nevertheless it is particularly unfortunate that the shortcomings of a few are visited on the many.

