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# Greenland 2005

The Danish Polar Centre issued 38 permits for sporting, as opposed to scientific expeditions, in 2005. This was about normal but there was a significant drop in the number of expeditions choosing to cross the Inland Ice. Of the 14 having that as their objective, all but two limited themselves to the trade route between Ammassalik and Kangerlussuaq* although a higher percentage than usual opted for the W-E crossing.

**Inland Ice**

Of those from whom reports have been received, the first to leave the east coast were Erik Hanstein Andersen, Håvard Skuland Pedersen and Hans Aleksander Bjerke (Norway). The team flew to East Greenland in the middle of July 2005 and spent time preparing their equipment before being taken by boat to Nagtivit. Their pulks weighed 80kg and they had to work their way through extensive crevassing before reaching soft snow where they found it necessary to rope up. The snow soon became stronger and they could proceed faster, moving at night to take advantage of the lower temperature of between –10°C and –25°C. They travelled about 32km per night walking for about 8-9 hours. They experienced whiteout conditions which they found 'hard, monotonous and boring and even the mp3 player didn't help!' The snow was a lot wetter and it was harder to travel in such conditions. As expected they encountered melt water; on day 16, it was up to their knees and was much worse than expected. It formed large lakes on the snow, connected by large rivers. It proved impossible to go around the melt water system so they travelled on a compass course, sometimes using skis, sometimes crampons. This took them across deep rivers in the snow, some so deep that it was difficult to get down to the water. One of the rivers crossed was about 45 metres wide, and they were up to their hips in the water. They had to site one camp in the water-logged area before, after doubling their rations and travelling another long day, they were able to look back at the water.

The next days were less wet but more crevassed. They had to move their pulks one at a time through this area and after scouting the route ahead were able to set up their last camp, number 21, on dry land at Kangerlussuaq

* The 'new' spelling of Kangerlussuaq reflects the changing face of written Greenlandic, or Inuktittut. It is the form used by most of my contacts, including the Danish Polar Centre. I have retained the 'old' spelling – Kangerdlugssuaq – only when the name is quoted. DF

610km from their starting point, on 3 August. Morten Lund and Rasmus Boeckman (Norway) started their 'Sommerfugler i Vinterland' (Butterflies in Winter land) expedition on 21 July at Nagtivit and reached Kangerlussuaq 25 days later. They encountered little lying snow until 1000m and then experienced seven days of snow and continuous whiteout conditions with very heavy skiing conditions. From the highest point on the route, 2500m, the weather and snow improved and they reached Dye-2, the abandoned early warning station, on day 19. Melt water lakes were encountered 60km after Dye-2 and did not present any problems other than wet feet. The ice road, established in earlier years to serve a vehicle testing station on the Inland Ice, was met but since it had not been maintained it was of little use. The expedition reached Kangerlussuaq on 15 August. Their pulks weighed 75kg each and the lowest temperature encountered was –20°C.

Magnus Lovold and Bjørnar Gjerde (Norway) started their 'Greenland 2005' expedition on 2 August after being delayed by the late arrival of some of their equipment. They shared the boat to the drop-off point on the mainland and the first camp with the Sami expedition described next. The first few days were warm but the second week was overcast with clouds. Whiteout conditions, described as 'like walking in a huge glass of milk', led them on one occasion to ski for 40 minutes in the wrong, easterly, direction until their GPS brought them into line. Once past the highest point, the team reached Dye-2 and found the complex simultaneously frightening and fascinating, describing it as, 'a piece of dust in the eye of Greenland'.

Shortly after leaving Dye-2 the expedition came to a very extensive area of lakes and rivers on the ice and changed to a more northerly route. (The unusually extensive area of melt water on this part of the Inland Ice in 2005 has been attributed to global warming and was the reason for an expedition organised by Hvitserk, a Norwegian expedition group, who were one day behind the Greenland 2005 team, being air-lifted out.) Considerable effort was needed to get through this area but the party were helped by finding the tracks of the 'Sami-express' expedition who were by now ahead of them. Resorting at times to floating the pulks on glacial streams, the expedition finally escaped from the ice after 25 days on route.

Anne Lajla and Arvid Dahl (Norway) were the 'Sami ekspedisuvdna 2005' and shared the first day (2 August) of the traverse with the previously described group. They were both Sami from northern Norway and wanted their expedition to raise the profile of the Sami people, two of whom, Balto and Ravna, gave much valuable help to Nansen when he made the first crossing of the Inland Ice in 1888. As a token of how valuable the Sami's help to Nansen was, Anne and Arvid, the first Sami on the Inland Ice since Nansen's expedition, wore traditional Sami reindeer skin clothing and eschewed modern expedition rations in favour of dried reindeer meat as had been used in 1888.

As one might have expected from such experts, they completed most of

the route quickly and with no problems; hence the nickname given by their fellow Norwegians, 'the Sami-express'. However, as had other expeditions, they found the last 100km extremely difficult due to the melt water problems and reached Kangerlussuaq on 23 August after a journey of 21days.

Danna Corke and Anne-Mette Nørregaard (Denmark) were the 'Ice Queens Expedition', the first Danish women's expedition to cross the Inland Ice from west to east. Both were experienced adventure racers and alpinists. The crossing started from Kangerlussuaq on 30 April and finished at Isortoq on 5 June.They had four days tent bound due to a storm but otherwise no special problems. The weather was very poor with a lot of wind and snowy conditions for the first 12 days but after that there was almost no wind and they enjoyed continuous sunshine.

On day 15 they passed the abandoned radar station Dye-2 and 144km from the east coast Danna's ski boot broke and she had to walk the rest for the way on one ski or no skis! The descent from the ice cap was relatively easy without too much crevassing or melt water. They were picked up by boat at the Isortoq fjord an hour and a half after finishing the expedition. The journey to Tasiilaq took 58 hours instead of the calculated 4 hours but that's a completely different story.

Olivier Pezeron and Arnaud Fauvet (France) left Kangerlussuaq in early June on an expedition to honour the French explorer Paul Emile Victor. They carried a small sculpture made by P E Victor's youngest child and on arrival in Ammassalik/Tasiilaq, where P E Victor had lived in 1934–1936 while carrying out ethnographic research, this was presented to the local 'Mayor'.

They made the 600km crossing with pulks weighing 95kg each in 20 days, experiencing strong head winds for half the journey. They encountered problems with melt water and crevasses at the end of the journey at Isortoq and commented on the fact that their lowest night temperature in June was –20°C in contrast with Nansen's of –45°C in August 118 years ago and that this seemed to support the local Inuit's claim that rising temperatures were responsible for a decrease in their hunting and fishing catches.

Ingvar Sjothun, Olav Tangeland and Thomas Gjesteland (Norway) formed the 'Kangerlussuaq-Isortoq Expedition 2005' which set off from Kangerlussuaq on 2 June in sunny weather and moderate winds hoping that by starting from the west coast they would avoid melt problems. After nine days of skiing, lots of wind and sometimes complete whiteout they reached Dye-2 and had to have a day off due to winds exceeding100km/hr. The weather then improved and they found the best travelling technique was to start skiing at about 0500 and ski for 9-10 hours. High temperatures in the afternoon were a bigger problem than colder nights. The last few days were made difficult by crevasses and icy melt rivers but after 21 days on the ice they reached Isortoq Fjord for a boat pick up.

Paul Landry and three companions (Canada) reached the east coast north of Ammassalik on 14 June having completed a double crossing of the Inland Ice. No further details are available at the time of writing.

Niklas Norman,Trygve Kristiansen and Carl Florence (Norway) left sea level west of Narsaq in South Greenland on the 29 June and, kiting and ski sailing on the western margin of the Inland Ice, reached the head of Bowdoin Fjord, east of Qaanaaq in North Greenland, some 2300km and 21 days later where they were picked up by local hunters by boat.

Their aim had been to rely as much as possible on the wind but initially they had to walk for three days to get through crevasses and gain height. Then they covered a distance equal to five times the standard crossing from Ammassalik to Kangerlussuaq in only 21 days!

The expedition encountered no problems other than poor wind and white-out for most of the first 10 days and two extensive areas of crevassing as they passed the latitude of Kangerlussuaq. These crevasse fields lie full square across the standard trade route across the Inland Ice and are a good example of why the convenient airfield-to-airfield route is really not a very good route to follow across Greenland!

During the nine last days the expedition averaged 210km/day and the longest distance in 24 hours was 442.7km (in 23 hours).The highest speed during normal travelling was 59km/h.

**East Greenland**

The CUMC Centenary Kangerdlugssuaq 2005 Expedition was composed of eight members led by James Sample and they were in the field in June-July. Bad weather delayed the team's arrival in Greenland and prevented their chartered aircraft from landing in the chosen spot. They made the first ascent of the most significant local peak, before skiing to their planned area, where they made first ascents of further peaks (mostly unnamed). They were fortunate in that following an accident to one of the members it was possible to get the plane in and have the injured party in hospital only 37 hours after the accident.

The British Kangerdlugssuaq 2005 Expedition: Peter Whyley, Carole Feldman, Paul Hawksworth and Cath Walton used Tangent Expeditions to access the region to the south of the Hutchinson glacier during July-August. As far as was known, the exact area had never previously been visited. Climbing mainly at night, they were successful in making a number of probable first ascents of local peaks.

Manfred Heini and six others (Switzerland) formed the 'Swiss AACB East Greenland Expedition' to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Akademischer Alpen Club Bern. On 11 July the expedition flew into the Sødalen airstrip, south of the Watkins Mountains, with the object of exploring and making ascents in the mountains between Watkins and Jakobsen fjords. A few ascents were made from the airstrip before moving to an advanced base which gave access to the peaks at the southern end of the Frederiksborg glacier several of which were climbed before the expedition was flown out after spending 23 days in the area.

**South Greenland**

The KMC Tôrnârssuk Expedition comprising Dave Bone, Marylise Dufaux, Dan O'Brien, Carl Pulley and David Whittingham was active on Tôrnârssuk Island in July-August. The island is uninhabited and lies off SW Greenland. The team was subject to much rain and strong wind which limited their activities. A number of new routes of varying grades were made and apart from a team that put up a number of difficult rock routes in 2004, the island appears to have little recent climbing history.

**North Greenland**

Martin Brice, Glenn Morris, David Key and David Johnson (GB) forming the 'Greenland by the Polar Sea' expedition left Siorapaluk, the most northerly settlement in NW Greenland, in April travelling with local Inuit hunters by dog sledge. Their intention was to travel 300km northwards along the coast and then return alone by another route on the Inland Ice, pulling their own pulks.

They could not get as far north as they had hoped owing to new snow slowing down the dogs. They had only gone a third of the distance when, after a week or so of struggling to get north, the hunters left them and headed off to hunt polar bear.

The expedition then decided to retrace their steps over the sea ice. The new snow slowed progress with the pulks and things were not turning out as planned, particularly in a storm when a fly-sheet was blown away and two expedition members spent a grim several hours in a 30mph gale at –20°C wrapped in the inner of a Quasar. Miraculously, they later found the fly-sheet wrapped round a rock a few hundred yards away. But the new snow had also frustrated the hunters who shortly returned down the coast; when they offered the expedition a lift it was gladly accepted. This was not quite the reflection of Knud Rasmussen's expedition of the same name that the members had undoubtedly hoped for, but they felt it had been a tremendous opportunity to spend time with Inuit hunters, who still travel and hunt largely as their forefathers.

Dennis Schmitt (USA) in September of 2005 led an expedition across the North Atlantic from Svalbard to NE Greenland.

An attempt was made to sail through the East Greenland ice pack at 78°N to land at Ile de France, in support of which the granddaughter of the French explorer Charcot was on the expedition's vessel, as well as the reigning Duke of Orleans. The attempt to make Ile de France failed, but an important discovery was made in East Greenland above 71°N on the Liverpool Land peninsula just outside NE Greenland National Park. Kap Gladstone has always been shown on maps as a peninsula linked to the mainland by a glacial isthmus. On 12 September 2005 it was discovered that the isthmus connecting Kap Gladstone to the mainland had disappeared and a new strait formed. The newly constituted island is 7km across and is significant because it appears to be a clear product of climate change.

150. The new strait adjacent to Kap Gladstone on the Liverpool Coast, seen from the north-west. (*Dennis Schmitt*)

The 'Danmarkekspedition', which took place 100 years ago in 1906-1908, aimed to fill in the last blanks on the NE Greenland map. The expedition succeeded, but paid a high price. Three of the participants, including the leader, Ludvig Mylius-Erichsen, died of hunger and the low temperatures.

In March 2006 Peter Wath (Denmark) set out from the weather station Danmarkshavn with an expedition cast in the traditional mould; six Danes and five native Greenlandic hunters from Qaanaaq and Illullissat, and 72 dogs! The Danish Crown Prince Frederik participated in part of the expedition, the purpose of which was to follow in the footsteps of the original and to make a tv-documentary series for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. Peter Wath's expedition was air-lifted out from Station Nord nearly 70 days after leaving Danmarkshavn.

Finn Rasmussen and Erling Gai (Denmark) formed the 'Mylius-Erichsen Memorial Expedition 2006' and also celebrated the 100th anniversary of that famous early expedition. This was the sixth of a series of expeditions which have had a dual purpose. The first is to look for traces of The Independence I and II Inuit cultures and map, draw and photograph them. The second is to look for traces of the Danmarkekspedition of 1906-08, a sledge party from which vanished near 79 Fjord in late November 1907. Mylius-Erichsen, his cartographer and their scientific journals and personal diaries were never found. The current series of expeditions hopes to find these journals and diaries and perhaps solve the mystery of what happened in the cold and dark winter storms of 1907.

The 2005 expedition left Denmark on 27July and was taken out to Hagen

Fjord via Station Nord late in the evening of 28 July. They returned to Station Nord on 13 August and flew home via Kangerlussuaq on 15 August. The expedition travelled by Lindner aluminium canoe and was able to search all the coast lines of Hagen Fjord as well as parts of the southern coast of Independence Fjord. One of the old expedition's camps was found at Cape Peter Henrik, where tent circles were still visible. On the north-east coast of the fjord the expedition were able to revisit the so-called Hagen cairn on Valdemar Glückstadt Land which had been erected by Mylius-Erichsen in 1907.

Expedition members are currently writing a book on the expedition. This book as well as the reports from earlier expeditions can be purchased from: Finn Rasmussen, V. Skibelundvej 1, Askov. 6600 Vejen, Denmark. e-mail: ugbfr@vibamt.dk Tel: 45 7536 1666.

**Nanok.**

This famous reincarnation of the pre-war hunting company, which built hunters' huts along most of the NE Greenland coast, has over many years carried out an annual programme of locating, rebuilding and documenting these huts. The huts, now, as in the pre-war years, have been useful to so many expeditions and in 2005 the Nanok programme during July and August included the areas in which the previous two expeditions were operating.

**Tangent Expeditions and Hvitserk A/S.**

It is known that as usual these two expedition companies were active in Greenland, particularly in organising a number of expeditions across the Inland Ice and in the Watkins Mountains.

One piece of news which will be of particular interest to aficionados of the Watkins Mountains is that on 4 March 2006 Paul Walker, John Starbuck and Barry Roberts made the first winter ascent of Gunnbjørnsfjeld, 3693m, the highest peak in the Arctic. The mountain was ascended by the north ridge on a still – 30°C day. Barry Roberts then flew by paraglider back to base camp some 1700m below where, a day or so later, a polar bear came into the camp while the team were playing Trivial Pursuits! This gave them a good fright and wrecked two tents before precipitating an early flight out.