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Greenland 2008

Greenland was as popular as ever in 2008 and 69 land based 'sporting' expeditions, as the Danes like to refer to them, applied for permission to be in the National Park or on the Inland Ice. As usual the majority of these, 51, were to cross the Inland Ice following, with a few notable exceptions, the trade route between the Ammassalik area on the east coast and Kangerlussuaq on the west. Of these 69 expeditions, 14 responded to your correspondent's request for information.

Weather in 2008 seemed to be rather better than the previous year when a number of Inland Ice expeditions were thwarted by poor conditions of weather and ice, although with the low percentage response to information requests it is difficult to draw overall conclusions. Last year's expansion of objectives to embrace more of the lesser-known mountain groups did not seem to continue. Perhaps this was due to the problems experienced last year of aircraft sinking into soft snow and eliciting threats from pilots and air charter companies that they would be limiting activity to such areas in future, but no hard evidence of this limitation has yet been reported.

One of the most interesting expeditions across the Inland Ice was that undertaken by Björn Leander and Andreas Classe (Sweden) who skied from **Qaanaaq** to **Kap Morris Jessup**, the most northerly point of mainland Greenland. They started with pulks weighing 150kg on 20 May after a 16-day delay due to bad weather, and encountered much soft snow followed by surface water on the ice necessitating a southerly detour, which also helped them gain height and cold snow. 500km into the journey, they encountered bear tracks close to their tent and 400km from the nearest coast. After 1200km and 50 days, they sighted Peary Land and much appreciated the relative warmth of entering a huge dry land. A large lake that they had intended to cross on the ice had also enjoyed the warmth and the lake ice was totally melted. Having in earlier lives had contacts with the military, they were able with a satellite telephone to summon a helicopter, which arrived after seven days' wait. A few minutes in the air and they were a lot lighter in wallets and only 350km from their destination in an area never visited before. The terrain was mainly dry valleys with glaciers and plenty of wildlife. Near the coast a lot of river wading was necessary resulting in wet equipment, but after 74 days, running out of food and 15kg each lighter they reached the small hut at Kap Morris Jessup to be picked up by helicopter. In their words, 'we had reached the objective but also emptiness was it not more'.

Much further south **Christian Eide (Norway)** made his sixth crossing of the Inland Ice leading a group of eight from Umivik, south of Ammassalik,



188. The Tasermiut valley with the Hermelnbjerg on the left and the Tininnertup group on the right, British Tasermiut Fjord Expedition. (*Ruben Gutzat*)

to Austmannadalen following the line of Nansen's first crossing in 1888. They started on 20 August and experienced generally good weather with just two days lost to the *piteraq*, the coastal katabatic wind common in this area. The surface of the ice lake at the head of Austmannadalen, which they reached on 13 September, was found to have dropped by about 80m and the lake split into three, probably due to glacial retreat allowing much water to drain away.

Following the trade route, **Harald Fuchs** and **Andre Felbrich (Germany)** left Isortoq, after being delayed a few days by problems with the helicopter that took them to the edge of the Inland Ice, on 21 April. They experienced a couple of days delay due to the *piteraq* after which they were able to make use of their kites to aid progress. Perhaps it was the stress of kite skiing that caused a broken ski in early May but repairs were effected and the pair reached Kangerlussuak on 22 May having remained in touch by satellite telephone with a contact in Germany who maintained an up to date website for the expedition throughout the traverse. On virtually the same route, Grzegorz and Szymon Gontarz, and Piotr Zasko of **Wazari Team Poland** set off from sea level at Nagtivit on 9 August and reached Point 660m at Kangerlussuak on 12 September. Out of their total traverse distance of 665km, they used kites for 80km although high winds up to 150km/hour gave problems as well as assistance. A storm towards the end of the journey caused concern when heavy snow reduced their progress to 10km/day and the party, already on rather slender rations, thought they would run out of food. Also on the same route, but leaving Nagtivit four days behind, were **Camilla Ianke** and **Bjørge Selvåg (Norway)** who reached Point 660m via

Camp Raven, as the old early warning station DYE 2, which all parties following the standard route pass, is now known, on the 4 September and thus without mentioning it must have passed Wazari Team Poland en route! They had no serious problems other than 1.5 days tent-bound and some extensive melt water on the west coast.

Starting earlier in the year on 9 May, **Timo Palo (Estonia)** and **Audun Tholfsen (Norway)** who might have expected reasonably settled weather encountered storms, wet snow, overcast, and rain! However, moving at 'night' after reaching 1700m altitude the skiing conditions improved and just after passing the highest point the temperature dropped to -30°C. Problems were encountered with the breakage of the metal bar which locates the toe of a nordic ski boot (in this case Alfa Skarvet GTX SNS) in the binding. They were able to repair it at Camp Raven and from there carry forward a few spare bits which were all needed. After Camp Raven, in one 17-hour day they managed 59km. Leaving the Russell glacier area of the Inland Ice and gaining Point 660m proved difficult with many crevasses and much melt water on the ice cap and a 36-hour day was necessary to break free after 26 days en route.

The **Polar Explorers Greenland Crossing** was a west-east dog sledge supported ski traverse led by two guides Annie Aggens and Keith Heger who started from Kangerlussuak with an international team of six and met up with their dogs, sledges and East Greenland drivers at a camp on the Inland Ice 72km from Kangerlussuak. (Dogs from East Greenland are not allowed to be taken into West Greenland.) They left Dog Camp on 17 May and reached the east coast near Isortoq on 6 June. They experienced changeable weather with more low-pressure windy days than good ones and they found not much difference between night and day travelling conditions and had one big storm with high winds gusting to 120km/hour.

The **Great British/Tiso Trans Greenland Expedition (Scotland)** consisting of Alex Hibbert and George Bullard covered 2300km between 25 March and mid July, taking 113 days fully unsupported. The route was from near Ammassalik on the east coast to near latitude 74°N on the West Coast and then back again. They laid depots at intervals on the outward leg. They experienced heavy sastrugi for the first 250 km and heavy crevasseing on both coasts. On the return journey, the last two depots had been destroyed and so the final 10 days were completed on dangerously low rations. This expedition is now claimed to be the longest ever unsupported polar journey although it would not appear to match the unsupported 2771km south to north traverse of the Inland Ice made by Rune Gjeldnes and Torry Larsen from the Kap Farvel area to Kap Morris Jessup in 1996.

The **Wings over Greenland Expedition (France)** consisting of Thierry Puyfoulhoux, Cornelius Strohm and Michael Charavin left Qaleragdilit Fjord near Narsaq in the far south of Greenland on 1 May and reached Qaanaaq in the far north after a journey of 2215km on 31 May. The team all made extensive use of various types of kites and averaged 76.4 km/day. They started with 375kg of equipment and during the journey lost



189. Tony Stone high on the 1971 route on the Hermelnbjerg. Summits of the Tininnertuup group behind. (*Ruben Gutzat*)

three days waiting for wind and carrying out repairs. They reached speeds of 55km/hour in good conditions although they encountered 800km of sastrugi! Later in the year on 19 June the **‘Girls in a Gale’ Expedition (Norway)** formed of Ingrid Langdal, Saskia Boldingh and Silje Haaland-set also set off from Narsaq using kites and after a journey of 2300km on 22 July reached MacCormick Fjord in the far north, where they claim to have had a celebratory swim. Their best day’s travel was an amazing 312km helped by their later start, which meant that much of the sastrugi had reduced by melting. The trio are claiming a world record as the first girl expedition to cross Greenland south to north.

High standard big wall climbing was the objective of the **British Taser-miut Fjord Expedition (UK)** consisting of Ged Desforges, Dan McManus, Tom Spreyer, Tony Stone, Es Tresidder, James Vybiral and Ruben Gutzat. They found their chosen objectives, the Minster and Cathedral groups, inland from Kap Farvel to be too broken and moved to the Tasermiut (Ketilsfjord) area where they employed a lightweight approach to tackling the big and hard walls they encountered. The first, Tininnertuup II, 1725m, proved that the combination of climbers and this approach technique could give good results, and high standard routes on that group were followed by ascents on the towering wall of Hermelnbjerg, 1912m, which overlooked their base camp and provided hard climbing and a difficult unseen escape abseil.

Further north and centred on the Watkins Mountains, **The Arctic Summits Expedition (Germany)**, formed of George Csak and Dominik Rind, having flown on to the ice cap east of the Knud Rasmussens Bjerg by helicopter, became the first Germans to ascend the four highest peaks

in the Arctic (the highest being Gunnbjornsfjeld at 3699.96m) and also descend them on ski. A further six ascents were made in the Gronau Nun-attaker and Knud Rasmussens Bjerg groups. Ascents, and ski descents, in the Watkins group were notable for unusually extensive areas of hard blue ice, perhaps resulting from the warm summer of the previous year. During the descent of the peak known as Paul Emile Victor in the Watkins Mountains the weather deteriorated very rapidly and the pair were left in total white-out conditions. They had not left marker wands on their ascent route or recorded any GPS waypoints, other than that of their tent, which they were very lucky to find after a 28-hour day. After further travels the pair were picked up by Twin Otter from Paul Stern Land after a week's delay due to bad weather.

In the interior of Scoresbysund, **The Greenland Renland Expedition (UK)** Nat Spring, Crispin Chatterton and Rob Grant was flown into its base camp in central Renland by a helicopter, which then took out an expedition from **Queen's University Belfast MC (UK)** that had been following up explorations made the previous year by the West Lancashire Scouts Expedition. The Renland expedition's stated objective was to climb unclimbed peaks in a remote area by routes of PD/V Diff standard although the actual standard of some routes completed was rather higher. They climbed four new peaks, all just under 2000m, as well as making the second ascent of Bodger, a peak first climbed by the West Lancashire Scouts in 2007. They travelled the full length of the Edward Bailey glacier and carried out a survey of plant life in the area.

The 'Arctic Riviera' section of the north-east coast seemed to attract a different type of group this year, perhaps more in tune with the legacy of the old trappers who used to live and travel in the area.

At Mestersvig Hans Laptun and his **Nor-Fra 2008 (Norway)** group spent two months ski touring and travelling in the area. Jørn Breinholt and Inge Mortensen with their **Sommerferie 2008 (Denmark)** expedition undertook an interesting kayak trip in the fjord region of the north-east coast. Starting on 19 July and using folding kayaks they travelled from Daneborg through Young Sund past Zackenberg to Moskusheimen. Then down Loch Fyne and overland to Moskusoksfjord and on to Strindberg Land, down Kejser Frants Josef Fjord, passing Teufelsloss, to Blomsterbugten, on to Polarheimen and through Antarctic Sund ending the trip at Ella Ø on 19 August. They saw many musk ox and met polar bears on three separate occasions. The **Wappen von Bremen (Germany)** expedition set out by sailing boat from Reykjavik on 18 July intending to enter Scoresbysund. At that time of year the pack ice off the entrance to Scoresbysund had not loosened and since they were unable to pass into the fjord they sailed south to Nansen Fjord before sailing on down the east coast to Isortoq before heading back to Iceland, reached on 10 August.

Recent editions of these Greenland notes have all finished with the ongoing story of Dennis Schmidt's quest for the most northerly land on earth which must lie somewhere off Kap Morris Jessup (referred to also



190. Midnight sun behind the silhouette of Gunnbjornsfjeld, observed from the top of Paul Emile Victor peak, 3609m, The Arctic Summits Expedition. (*George Csak*)

in the first expedition mentioned in these notes). In 2008, a helicopter was used in an attempt to rationalise a lot of recent claims and eliminate those that refer to patches of ice-borne moraine or other non-island phenomena. It seems that many of the 'islands' reported as seen and then not seen fall into the non-permanent glacial deposits group. The most long-lived at 84 deg. 42min. is now called Eclipse Ø but Dennis's view is that these most northerly 'islands' are lacking in substance and deserve his earlier name of *kimmiapahluit* or 'stray dogs'. He suggests they are more important as an idea than as a physical reality.

Correction

In the item about the **SMC East Greenland** expedition in the Greenland Notes, *AJ* 2008, p291, the reference to problems with some types of MSR stoves and Jet A1 fuel should be substituted with the following: The old MSR XGK II stoves worked well with Jet A1. It was the newer Dragonfly and 2 MSR Whisperlite stoves (600 and Internationale) that did not work with Jet A1 fuel.