

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SCOTTISH ARCTIC CLUB</b> <i>To Encourage Adventurous Endeavour and Interest in the Science, Culture and Protection of the Arctic</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Newsletter - Autumn 2020</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>President: Stella Spratley</i> <i>Vice Presidents: Susie Ranford, Noel Williams</i> <i>Secretary: Iain Allison, Treasurer: Chris Calver,</i> <i>Committee members: David Broadhead, Chris Gilmore, Hans-Peter Grossmann, Elspeth Hamilton, David Stone, Aythya Young</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="http://www.scottisharcticclub.org.uk">www.scottisharcticclub.org.uk</a></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>New members are welcome: the Club is for people of all ages and nationalities who have an interest in the Arctic, particularly if they have already been, or are planning to travel there. See the web site for an application form.</i></p>
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## Subscriptions

The annual subscription of the Club became due on 1<sup>st</sup> September and remains at £5. As this year's Gathering and Supper has been cancelled, there is no opportunity to collect the subscription in person. The Club's preferred method of payment is by Standing Order. If you have not already done so, please consider setting one up.

The Club's bank account details are:

**Bank of Scotland**, sort code: **80-06-18** account number **00835858**

BIC: BOFSGB21364 IBAN: GB58 BOFS 8006 1800 8358 58

Alternatively, you may pay by:

1. Internet bank transfer (BACS) to the above account with the subscription just for this year
2. By cheque to the secretary
3. By cash – a £5 note in an envelope to the secretary

If you do not have a sterling bank account, your membership will continue in the hope that at some point you will be able to pay your subscriptions in arrears.

The secretary's address is: Iain Allison, 1/2 13 Crosbie Street, Glasgow G20 0BQ

If you wish to add a donation to the **Expedition Fund** please transfer the amount by internet banking to the **Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund**:

**Clydesdale Bank**, sort code: **82-67-04** account number **20109358**

again using your initial and surname as reference. If you wish to pay by cheque, payable to Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund, please send it to the SAEF Secretary (address below). Donations made in this way are eligible for Gift Aid, donations made through the Club's account are not.

The SAEF secretary's address is: Sue Fenton, Polldoran, Clachan Seil, Oban PA34 4TJ

## **Anniversary Expedition to Ammassalik Island, East Greenland**

A number of members have withdrawn from the expedition for 2021 and we now have 2 spare places booked on the return flight from Reykjavik to Kulusuk. If you wish to join us next year please contact the secretary as soon as possible. The dates are: Saturday 24th July to Saturday 7th August 2021

## **Annual Gathering & Supper 2021**

The Ben Nevis Hotel had already been booked for November 2021 prior to the cancellation of this year's event. At a virtual committee meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August, we decided to keep that booking rather than cancel and hold the Gathering in Dundee as planned for this year.

Details are: Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021, Ben Nevis Hotel and Leisure Club, North Road, Fort William, telephone 01397 702331, email salesbennevis@strathmorehotels.com.

In keeping with previous years, many members will book for Friday 19<sup>th</sup> and have dinner together. A walk will be organised for the Sunday morning.

## **Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund**

Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund applications, for 2021 Arctic journeys, are welcomed, by 31 January. See the SAC website for details and an application form.

“Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund grants were awarded to ten groups or individuals for 2020. As a result of the pandemic, one expedition was cancelled completely, and the grant returned. Five recipients managed to travel to the Arctic; four already being in situ in March; Ashton McDonald, Tormod Doherty (at UNIS in Longyearbyen) Emily Purvis (Tromso) and Huw Oliver (fatbiking in West Greenland and managed to get the last flight out!). Lia Lechler was able to travel to Svalbard in the summer for permafrost fieldwork. The remaining four have postponed their travels until 2021, including a Glasgow University bird fieldwork trip to Iceland, Ellis O’Connor’s appointment as artist-in-residence at Upernavik in Greenland, Zeki Basan’s adventure at Isortoq reindeer station in southern Greenland, and Susie Ranford’s family participation in the SAC’s own East Greenland adventure.”

The folk who managed to get away have been invited to contact you about writing for the newsletter, as they won’t be able to fulfil their contracted ten-minute talk at the Gathering this year. Obviously, fundraising for SAEF will be more difficult for 2021, although we do have some reserves

### **SAEF grant recipient 2020, Huw Oliver**



This is Huw Oliver's photo of his fatbike expedition, with Annie Lloyd-Evans, in Greenland this past spring. The trip was supported by The Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund. They cycled 100 miles from Kangerlussuaq on traditional sledging routes, over tundra and sea ice. In Sisimuit, they had a fast turn round in order to catch the last flight out of Greenland before lockdown! An account of the expedition will be in the autumn SAC newsletter, in lieu of a presentation at the Gathering, cancelled this year because of covid.

The Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund is seeking nominations for two trustees, to replace two who are retiring. They must be members of the Scottish Arctic Club.

Please write to the secretary, Sue, at [scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com](mailto:scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com), for information about the responsibilities of the role, if you are interested.

### **Other News items**

Polar Academy is back on BBC Scotland on Thursday evenings at 7.30

A film entitled "Mischief in Greenland" is the story of H.W. Tilman's 1964 expedition to East Greenland and is available on the BFI Player for free. It is 39 minutes long and is silent. See

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-mischief-in-greenland-online>

### **Expeditions**

Dave King writes:

After the disappointment of being unable to make Greenland this year, let's all hope the current situation has levelled out sufficiently to allow us to meet in 2021! My plans remain the same, to sail from Norway in early May to either Lochinver or Ullapool, meet crew & provision there and depart from Iceland in Early June and crossing to East Greenland as soon as ice conditions hopefully allow us. The expedition is with my friend Lonnie Dupre, well known for his solo Winter climbs in Alaska, for mushing a dog team the entire length of the NW Passage, two successful North Pole expeditions and to date the only person to have circumnavigated all of Greenland by kayak & dog team. Our expedition is at this link [www.lonniedupre.com/greenland2020](http://www.lonniedupre.com/greenland2020). You can also find a link to our Winter expedition in NW Greenland on the same site. It is possible that we will be two 40ft boats sailing to Greenland so we would have a few additional crew berths for either some of the legs or the entire voyage for anyone who would like to get to Greenland the hard way. Email me at [polarquest300@outlook.com](mailto:polarquest300@outlook.com) Following our Kangerlussuaq Fjord expedition, we will sail South to Tasilaq and plan to spend the duration of the SAC expedition in that area, exploring with the boats, kayaking and climbing. We are happy to support the SAC trip in any way we can. I have some exciting plans beyond 2021-22 that involve mushing a dog team from North Greenland, through the middle of Ellesmere Island and on to Alaska. An expedition mostly to highlight the rapid disappearance of the sled dog in Inuit culture and, well, seems like a great way to visit friends along the way and make some new ones! Watch this spot as well as some co-operative scientific projects and educational projects as part of [www.polarquest.org](http://www.polarquest.org) and eventually details on my site at [www.polarquestexpeditions.com](http://www.polarquestexpeditions.com) Our Arctic Plastic Projects are still alive...just... and will be part of the above project. Sadly, this year our APP boats remained dormant, gathering weed not plastic due to Norwegian covid related border closures. We hope our Norwegian crew can pick up, literally, again next season! Happy Winter all and look forward to expeditioning with you next year!

## Arctic Culture and Climate

British Museum Exhibition, 22 October 2020 – 21 February 2021, tickets £18 advance booking required.

Home to rich cultures for nearly 30,000 years, the Arctic is far from the inhospitable hinterland it's often imagined to be. From ancient mammoth ivory sculpture to modern refitted snow mobiles, the objects in this immersive exhibition reveal the creativity and resourcefulness of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic. Developed in collaboration with Arctic communities, the exhibition celebrates the ingenuity and resilience of Arctic Peoples throughout history. It tells the powerful story of respectful relationships with icy worlds and how Arctic Peoples have harnessed the weather and climate to thrive.

The dramatic loss of ice and erratic weather caused by climate change are putting unprecedented pressure on Arctic peoples, testing their adaptive capacities and threatening their way of life.

What happens in the Arctic will affect us all and this exhibition is a timely reminder of what the world can learn from its people.

*Long ago people knew something was going to happen to this earth. How they knew it, I don't know. An Elder mentioned in the 1940s that this climate is going to change. They meant climate change.*

– Martha Snowshoe, Teetl'it Gwich'in

# Beechey Island

Louise Hollinrake

## Introduction

In 1846 Sir John Franklin's Expedition to seek the Northwest Passage through Arctic Canada sailed out of their last British port of call, Stromness in Orkney. The two ships were H.M.S. Erebus and H.M.S. Terror. One of the Able Seamen in the Erebus was Thomas Work from Laird in Shapinsay, Orkney. After the loss of the expedition all crew members were awarded the Arctic Medal. Thomas Work's Medal was not claimed until 1998 when his great-nephew James Twatt of Kirkwall accepted it on behalf of Thomas's great-great granddaughter, Cynthia Muir Scott of New South Wales, Australia. She gifted the Medal to Stromness Museum where it is on display.

The story below was inspired by a visit to Beechey Island in September 2008 by me, Louise Hollinrake of Shapinsay. On a wild and wintry day I stood by the three graves of the Franklin Expedition, and saw 'Franklin's Cairn' on the island's summit above impressive cliffs. Knowing that Thomas Work had walked this beach while the crews overwintered here in 1845/46 I started musing about what his life would have been like then, and the story emerged.

## Beechey Island

Thomas Work shielded his eyes against the brightness of the sun on the snow, and scanned the expanse of Lancaster Sound.

"No change," he remarked to his shipmate, George Thompson. It was still choked with sea ice.

"Aye," answered George. "What can you expect this early in the season? It's only April. They reckon we'll be lucky to get free by July."

It was true. They had heard that in an exceptionally good year it might be June, but equally it could be August before the thaw came.

Thomas looked down into the bay below, where the two ships, the Erebus and the Terror, were held in the ice. Smoke issued from the funnels of both ships, and he looked forward to the warmth and food when his watch was over.

To keep warm he returned to his task.

Captain Fitzjames of the Erebus, his ship, had ordered the building of a cairn on the summit of this island, to show anyone in the vicinity that the Expedition was here, and Thomas enjoyed the job. It reminded him of his home in Orkney where he had built and repaired the stone walls around his family's croft.

"Dry stane dyking," he thought to himself. He pictured his brothers choosing from a pile of good sandstone squares that needed little dressing.

It was a bit different here. He had to use a pick to loosen the stones from the hard-packed snow before he could carry them to the cairn, so it was slow and laborious but the cairn was growing. When he finished the cairn he planned to build a low stone wall, to give the watch some shelter from the wind. Orkney was a windy place too, and it made a huge difference if you had a bit of a wind break.

Because of the cold each pair of men did only one hour on the summit before being relieved by the next pair. Peering down at the ships he saw the next watch setting off. It would take them near on half an hour to get up here.

They had been doing this daily watch on ice conditions in Lancaster Sound since the daylight returned, a couple of months now.

A well-worn track snaked up the hill.

Which was a good thing in bad visibility.

Fog and snow storms could sweep in quickly, and there were high sheer cliffs on three sides of the island. You wouldn't want to go the wrong way off the top!





*Beechey Island, Lancaster Sound.*

The food on the ship was generally good, with more to eat than Thomas could expect at home in the winter. Because he didn't feel the cold he had been part of hunting expeditions last autumn and again this spring. They went after musk ox, and usually got one. There was a lot of meat on those animals, welcomed by the men though the officers seemed to prefer the canned beef.

All in all, Thomas found the life quite satisfactory. The expedition was well-equipped, thanks to being commanded by Sir John Franklin, an experienced polar explorer, who was onboard the *Erebus* with Fitzjames as Captain. All the crew respected both officers. Thomas had heard that the *Terror* was not such a happy company, with some discontent among the officers which spread to the men. Things would likely improve when they got out of the ice in the summer and could settle down to sailing the ships, exploring new lands. That was exciting, and good money at the end of it too.

After eating their fill Thomas and George found their hammocks and settled down for the night.

Next morning the Ship's Company was called on deck. Sir John quite often addressed the crew, or had a prayer reading. Today the atmosphere was sombre, and Thomas saw the reason why. One of the carpenter's coffins stood on the deck.

The chill deepened as the Captain informed them of the death of William Braine, Royal Marine, from causes unknown.

The crew had heard that it was a wasting illness, but different from the dreaded scurvy. It was worrying not to know the cause. This was the second death in the *Erebus* since she became beset. Able Seaman John Hartnell had died on January 4<sup>th</sup>, four days after John Torrington, Petty Officer from the *Terror*. You just had to hope the next one wasn't you.

Captain Fitzjames continued to speak.

"Sir John will conduct the funeral service at mid-day tomorrow, all hands present, followed by burial on Beechey Island."

Thomas was not surprised to find that he and Thompson were among the four appointed grave diggers. As the



sailors dispersed they took up their picks and spades, and crossed the ice to the stony beach. The wind honed the beach bare, lifting dry snow and dumping it in drifts. They made their way to the lonely headstones at the east end of the beach. They knew this would be a long and tough job -- they had dug John Hartnell's grave in January, working in the dark back then. His name was carved in the wooden headstone. Thomas was glad young Tommy Hartnell wasn't with the four of them. In January he had given his best shirt for his older brother John to be buried in. He said he hoped his mother would get some comfort from that when he broke the news to her back in London at the end of this voyage.

Thomas knew Billy Braine. In almost a year living on the ship you got to know everyone. Billy had been a particularly close shipmate. And you didn't expect a Marine, six foot tall and only 34, to waste away and die.

With heavy hearts the four men attacked the frozen ground.

Thomas used a pick to loosen the shingle so that George could shovel it out. They knew they had to manage more than a shallow grave: the fierce white bears would dig the coffin out if you didn't do a good job. But it was hard because below the gravel you were into frozen soil that was more solid ice than earth.

They laboured most of the day with their shipmates Abraham Seeley and Henry Lloyd.

"Will that do?" asked Thomas, eventually. They all stood back and surveyed their work. They had gone down a good way, but nearer three feet, not the usual six.

"Aye, I reckon," answered George. "We can cover him with this loose stuff. Poor fellow. We'll do our best for him."

"I'm going to stay here a few minutes, George. To say a few prayers for Billy. You three go ahead."

With a nod George picked up the spade and slung it over his shoulder. He and the other two strode away down the frozen shore back towards the Erebus.

Thomas looked at the panorama.

"It's a wild and lonely place to end your days, Billy old chum."

Beechey's sheer cliffs to his right were backed by the uneven chaos of Lancaster Sound's sea ice, then the icy sweep of the bay enclosed the two trapped ships, and the long spit reached away to his right towards Devon Island and more cliffs. The spit was covered with stranded icebergs of different shapes and sizes. It protected the bay from them, and therefore the ships. The cove was a safe haven for the winter, but a desolate place to leave a comrade.

With a sigh he turned down the slope and followed his companions back to H.M.S. Erebus.

The new grave lay open behind him, cold and silent, awaiting its occupant.



*The Franklin Expedition graves on Beechey Island.*



# Cold

Dave King

For my inaugural SAC newsletter screed, I thought I'd write about Cold Cold by the Numbers

As we all here have an interest in the Arctic, I hope I'm right in assuming we all have some affinity with the cold.

Me, I love it, the colder the better. To a degree.

I've loved the cold and snow as long as I can recall. As a young kid I was parked for a time in a school run by Nuns in a former British Army hill station in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. The Nuns got used to me sliding out of their control each and every time it snowed, and it snowed a lot there. They would hunt me down, following my tracks, usually to a point where I could gaze out at the high peaks in the distance, admonishing me with tales of young boys being easy prey for hungry Snow Leopards. The very thought made the winter landscape even more alluring !

Later, living back in the depths of Wales where my parents bought an old farm, I perfected the techniques required to hitch a single German Shepherd to a toboggan and even a decent frost was good enough to cajole it to haul me around, pretty much any place it wanted to go.

Having grown up around mountaineers, I was already in awe of the names of the day, be they climbers scaling the Welsh rocks or pioneering huge ascents in the distant ranges. By age 9, I could already trace a pitch by pitch route up the North Face of the Eiger and knew by heart every name of every climber who had climbed it or died on that awe inspiring alpine face. At night, especially when the weather was at its worst, I'd manage a series of bold moves out of my bedroom window, traversing across to and onto the broad ledge that surrounded one of our chimneys. I'd see how long I could endure the wind, the rain & sleet, sitting on the ledge imagining it to be "Death Bivouac" on the Eiger, until my fraught Mother realised what the dog was barking at and ladders and trouble soon followed, along with nailing shut of my window. Soon after I also discovered tools.

So later in life, inevitably pursuing a career as a mountaineering guide, I had my fix of cold, first in the Alps, then back to the Himalayas. My thoughts also began to wander Southwards. As well as sponging up the literary offerings of mountaineers past & present, I'd also started reading with awe, the exploits of those brave souls pioneering the high latitudes The exploits of Nansen, Amundsen, Svedrup, Freuchen, Rasmussen, Shackleton, Cook and a host of others filled my head as did the one common thread that most employed in their explorations, dogs. One explorer in particular, caught my attention, Wally Herbert. A picture of this eminent explorer having just completed a traverse of the Arctic Ocean, by dog team, became indelibly etched in my imagination.

At that time, BAS (British Antarctic Survey) often posted job ads for climbers to act as support for scientists in Antarctica, often using dog teams as the primary transport mode. Seemed the perfect fit for me and I duly applied for such a position. The deflating response came sometime later, that dog teams were soon to be made redundant and replaced with motorized transport. A move that to this day I heartily believe was a mistake, but that's another story.

For me, it became "no dogs, no Antarctica" and I moved on. Ultimately, a climbing job on Mt McKinley (Denali) took me to Alaska. Here, the cold was on a whole new level to anything I'd experienced before. Here I learned how tent poles blow apart in -40C winds, and how much of my Himalayan kit really was useless in the high altitudes of Alaska. And this was all Summer.

But I was in Alaska, a place when I exclaimed at -40 on the mountain, those that lived there year-round, laughed. "Come back in the Winter" they said. So I did. First a Winter in central Alaska working in a kennel with 70 dogs. Training each day, running on the frozen rivers and lakes, I was in heaven. First -20 then -30 became normal. Friends back home would be in awe when I told them of these temperatures that we

played in each day. Then late Winter came, with the -40's and when it dropped to -50 one week, I was almost afraid to venture out. The days when it rose back to the -30's, felt balmy. But I loved it all.

Over the next couple of Winters, my love of dog mushing grew and my confidence in cold grew along with it. However, the dangers of cold periodically gave graphic reminders of how deadly it could be. A soldier on guard duty at a military camp in central Alaska: one critical, a quick nip from a flask of spirits that had been inside a bag, outdoors at -50c, one slug, instant death.

I also learned of water & cold and of a dreaded phenomenon called "overflow" when water seeps up from a river or lake into and saturating the covering of snow. Run into overflow with a dog team or snowmobile and it's like running into quick setting cement. Overflow can be 3 or 4 feet deep and you are in it before you know it. It gets worse, the colder it gets. As the ice contracts in the cold, cracks occur allowing the water beneath to escape the sinking weight of the ice. It can be treacherous. Sometimes you see it as a greenish tinge, other times and at night you can see telltale clouds of steam where there is overflow. After years of Winter travel in places like Alaska, one learns where to expect it, when to expect it...but not always and at some point any regular dog driver will wrestle with overflow. The problems with overflow are not so much being in it, after all the water is warmer than the air, the problems start when you finally break free of it and everything that is soaked, turns to steel. Boots, pants, mittens, dog harnesses, lines, snaps, all become one and solid. Drive in it with a snowmobile, all that slush instantly becomes a track wrecking solid mass. Overflow usually does not kill you, but plenty of toes and fingers have been lost to escaping it.

Open water on rivers or lakes is another hazard. Even in the coldest winters, most rivers have large open water areas and lakes that are mostly frozen can have wind scoured areas of thin ice. I've travelled down most of the Yukon River over many Winters on trails running beside open, black water, steaming in the cold and in places disappearing in a fast running current under the ice.

One day, returning to the kennel after a terrifying run across a lake that groaned and stretched under our weight, thankfully the thin ice holding, I was reminded that even after months of -40 cold, not all ice forms the same. Turning on the news that very same night, a Yukon Quest musher, Bruce Johnson, died, with all his dogs whilst on a training run on the river.

But for all its bad, cold brings a vibrant to life for me. I love the clarity in the air on the super cold days, the way the light becomes a vivid pink and purple. One can tell the temperature by the colours and by the sound of the cold. My parka feels different at -30, then different again at -50 as does just about everything else I use. The cooker I use to melt dog food is tough to light at -50 despite using methanol and various other fuels, my plastic runners get less slippery the colder it gets and when my eyes are freezing together when I blink, I know just how cold it is. Batteries last a fraction of the normal time, a big deal when we mushers do much of our training in the long dark nights. It's tough to stay hydrated as even the best flasks freeze after very short periods inside a sled. Basically, if it's not beside your body, stuff freezes and quickly. For me, living with the cold is like living with another dimension that is a constant partner in all I do in Winter. Fight it and you loose, embrace, understand it, work with it, and it mostly lets you pass .

But the -40s, 50s are only partly cold. I'd spent something like 20 Winters learning sled dogs, learning the cold and learning about bush life in Alaska, a couple of these Winters living in a tent alongside 12 dogs, deep in the wilds of central Alaska. I knew how to survive, moreover, how to be comfortable in the cold. However, I'd heard of places far colder, far wilder and I wanted a part of that. I packed my dogs and all our stuff and moved even further North.

I bought a small parcel of land on a remote lake in the Gates of the Arctic, a region of few people and of huge remote valleys stretching down to the Arctic Ocean. It's a place where Wolves walk up to you to check you out, really. One Summer, a friend and I flew in to my little plot in the middle of nowhere, landing on a gravel bar, unloading a small canoe, two months of supplies, fuel, a couple of chainsaws and after watching the bush plane leave, set to work on building a tiny cabin I'd use over the coming Winters. We felled trees, peeled them and gradually built a small haven from expected Winter cold I could only imagine. Little did I know just how cold this place could be in Winter. At night we'd feast on huge Arctic Char from the lake, had peaceful visits from Black bears and one a day a curious Grizzly bear watched us hammering. The wolves watch from

the bluffs above - wolves I'd later listen to in the Winters nights at this place. As Summer came to an end, our food and fuel long gone, we floated down river, living off wild potato, abundant Grayling and even a fat porcupine we roasted beside the river that eventually led to the village that would become my home.

I moved house on a late November day, after a message from a trapper friend up North who informed me the ice was crossable on two rivers I'd have to cross to get to the village. At the village, I also had a cabin, a wood stove and little else. Everything I'd need would have to go in overland by trail, 80 miles, by either dog team or snowmobile. Everything for me was 30 dogs, several sleds, several tons of dog food and my personal belongings.

We set off North, loaded in my 1980's Ford dog truck. A placid -30c when we left Fairbanks, but steadily it got colder as we headed North and after several summits crossed on the infamous "haul road" - the Ice Road Truckers road of fame that leads to the Arctic oil fields, we started to drop down to the Yukon River, with the decent went the temperature, -40, -50 and the truck started to splutter as we crossed the Yukon River bridge, the thermometer sitting square on -60F. The fuel froze. I parked up, tried to start a small generator I had. Frozen. Every second the engine was stopped, the chances of getting it going again diminished. I still had another 100 miles to go, then another 80 across the tundra. Thankfully, another musher buddy had agreed to help move me and the dogs and who was following behind in a vehicle a little less vintage than mine, hauling 2 tons of dog food and a snowmobile on a trailer. Together we tried in vain to start the Ford, eventually giving in to nature, feeding the dogs and settling into a small tent for the night, hoping for a warmer morning. We got our lovely morning, clear, sunny, bluebird day. --65...and still falling. The Toyota started after lighting my dog cooker under it. The Ford remained frozen in that spot until May.

Several more nights camping and shuttling followed, over the trail, dogs first then multiple back and forth by snowmobile hauling the food and the rest of the stuff to my new home. The -60 clear weather prevailed all through those first weeks, my cabin stove ran flat out 24/7, a white straight line of smoke rising into the frigid air. At times the stove would glow red hot, but step four feet away and the cold started to bite, this, in a cabin built of 4ft thick logs! I had a diesel stove also but had to pour boiling water frequently on the inlet pipe to thaw the fuel. The dogs simply curled up, buried in straw and slept except for mealtimes, meals consisting of colossal amount of calories. Starting the snowmobile to go haul more freight from the road, was an hour long and careful project each morning and once started, was not turned off until the end of the day. I made trip after trip with laden freight sleds, much of it at temps below -65 but at night with air so clear it felt I could reach out and touch the Milky Way. And the Aurora, Aurora more alive and vibrant than I'd ever seen before, raging across the sky, horizon to horizon and so bright it cast racing shadows across the snow. I'd heard Natives talk of how one could hear the lights. These nights, they felt and moved so powerfully it was like another dimensional sound existed, as if those lights danced and sang with the cold.

But cold was yet to come. Once settled, I began the process to pack some trail way up to the tiny cabin up North, built the previous Summer. By now I picked the "warm" days to either snowmobile freight up there or run the dogs there, the days when the thermometer rose to a balmy -50 and some days a luxuriant -40. Crazy. I stockpiled straw and food for the dogs at the lake cabin, a stash of human food and fuel and began running my trail back and forth in preparation for Spring races I'd planned to compete in. Most days it was seldom above -40 but this one becomes used to as do the dogs. After time, travelling in such temperatures becomes second nature, one simply adapts as the number falls or rises. In many ways, warmer temps can become as hard to deal with as the cold. My runs to the cabin usually took three legs, we'd run for some hours then stop for two then run again, day or night. Because fuel was 3 X the price out in the bush than in town, I relied on quick camp-fires to melt enough snow on these short rest stops, a few litres for me and about 20 litres each time for the team. The best moments are always in the deep cold, in the dead of night, the nearest other humans hundreds of miles away and a deep sleeping dog team curled up in the snow after a meal.

Tucked in a warm sleeping bag, out in the open and only the stars and aurora for a cover. It is bliss, never gets old whatever the temperature.

Then one morning at the tiny cabin I woke to a day like no other I'd ever experienced. The night had been silent but for the two Wolf packs howling at occasional intervals, sometimes getting a response from my dogs. I'd had a great run up the valleys the day before, dogs were good, ate well and slept well after our

runs. During the night I could sense the temperature was falling beyond the -45 it had been when I arrived, the logs began to pop, at times loud enough to wake me like a gunshot and I could feel the cold seeping in through the door, despite it being insulated and almost a foot thick. The wood stove ran about two hours per fill but even flat out and glowing red, it struggled to keep the cold at bay, cold I could almost see invading the tiny building hour by hour. I slept fitfully, waking every hour or so to stuff more wood in the fire, eventually realizing I was getting cold in my -50c rated sleeping bag! I donned a light down parka that had a Wolf ruff, wore that in my bag and the ruff covering my face. I could see the frost building on the fur as my breath froze, and this from the light creeping out from the gaps in the wood stove. Finally, the daylight came, I stoked the stove, put on some coffee and gradually emerged from my bag. The small internal thermometer read -30c yet as I cracked open the door to peer outside, the cold rushed in like a wave. The sky, a clear clear blue with the sun shining bright, it was an awesome day, but clearly the day was different. Nailed to a tree was a large round outdoor thermometer, the red arrow clearly bottomed out way below the final -65c graduation. My guess was at least -70! I retreated back to the "warmth" and contemplated -70, a new number for me. The worst though was I had to travel back to the village, I had not enough supplies for an extended stay and I had another team waiting to be trained. Could I even run at -70 for that distance? I guess I'd need to find out! Everything, literally everything takes longer and longer the colder it gets. Everything is stiff, fragile, metal snaps like candy and even breathing needs to be done slowly and carefully. It took me about three hours to pack the sled, cook and feed the dogs. An almost boiling mix of meat, fat and kibble was almost frozen before it hit the ground. I feed straight to the snow, most dogs will not eat from a pan in the cold, learning quickly the unpleasantness of freezing tongues to the metal, plus, what liquid in the food not immediately eaten, soaks into the snow that they then eat, adding even more fluid to mix. The colder it gets, the harder it gets to keep them hydrated, yet the more critical proper hydration becomes, its a vicious circle that a musher has to stay on top of to keep a team in good shape.

Finally we pulled out of camp, the dogs wearing thick jackets made from the same material as my own parka and each dog wearing protective booties. The booties can be a mushers nightmare. Each dog, four feet, 16 dogs, 64 booties, every run. Putting on 64 booties, bare fingered at -70, well perhaps you can imagine, it takes time, a lot of rapid warm up stops and all the time the dogs getting more agitated to run. The results are frost nip at best, cracked skin and painful tiny lesions that over time can make your hands almost unusable. But a dog team is only as good as its feet, and its essential. We moved down the trail slowly, partly due to my weight on the brake but also the runner plastics hardly glide at all at such temperatures. Its essential not to overexert the dogs and to keep the respiration as mellow as possible. Leaving camp felt like leaving the space station. My vision is a tiny gap between in my fur ruff, I have everything on I own, a one-piece suit, a huge heavy fur rimmed parka. On my hands I haveliner gloves, ski gloves then a huge pair of sheepskin lined bear/beaver mittens. Feet in white ex-military "bunny boots". I am barely warm. I can easily feel my body making heat from what I'd eaten and could sense that heat/energy gradually flowing out into the cold. I'd trot periodically beside the sled, mostly to keep warm, but each time I did, the dogs would pick up pace and I had to ride the runners again. I'd guess we moved along at about 7 mph in this cold, faster was just not possible, or smart. After about four hours, we stopped in some trees, built a fire and rested an hour or so, before moving again. At times as we climbed some low passes, I felt the temperature slightly rising but as we descended back to the river valley, again the cold deepened and I could sense it becoming even colder as we approached the Koyukuk River. It took about 12 hours to cover a distance normally we'd run in 6 and I'm not sure how much longer we could have run safely that day so it was a welcome sight to see the distant village lights come into view with its prospect of warmth. We crossed the silent frozen river and slowly trotted onto the empty village main street and headed for home. My headlamp alerted my friend working in the weather station and as I passed, he cracked the window and yelled "dude, what are you doing out running dogs, its 80 below zero !!!) I gave a nonchalant fur thumbs up and trotted past and into my yard. Thankfully at that place I have a "dog barn" a large barn with straw filled boxes inside and a huge wood fired barrel stove. The dogs needed no encouragement to file inside and curl up in the straw and soon I had the stove roaring, sending showers of sparks out the chimney into the night sky. We managed about -30c inside, wonderful, warm and cozy and all ate dinner together. Eventually I retired to my cabin, managed about -20 in there so felt in the lap of luxury and slept in comfort!

Next day, it dropped another 7 degrees from the -80. I managed some outside chores at -87c, just so I could say I did. The dogs happy in their barn simply sleep. I spent the day draping spare sleeping bags over

the windows of my cabin and heating or rather, thawing fuel oil over the wood stove, shocked at how a super thick log building, Arctic insulated could just hemorrhage heat as it did. The stove roared like a furnace, glowed red, yet lost the battle to cast heat more than a few feet away.

A week later, the warm weather returned, we picked up life as normal, the birds emerged, the Wolves wandered about again and we all enjoyed -50c once again.

Until the wind kicked up, but the wind, is another story!



The Pink of Cold



Camping on the trail





Across the tundra



Departing our Brooks Range cabin. This day was -65





A -40c evening



The price to pay for booties!



Dead of night





Husky bliss !

## Kangerlussuaq to Sisimiut

Huw Oliver

“You’re probably heading to the best place on earth right now! Greenland? No better place to get away from all this nonsense”

More than one person said words to that effect as we made preparations to leave the dripping, grey monotony of late winter in Scotland for the clearer, colder white of western Greenland at the beginning of March. As it does for almost everyone, back then seems like a lifetime ago; it’s easy to look back with all the benefits of hindsight and wonder why we casually brushed it off as yet another story in a busy world, one that would happen somewhere else, to someone else. The virus and its effects were all just beginning to be felt at home, and the 24 hours that we spent camped out in Copenhagen airport weren’t especially unusual. That said, there is an irony in getting to the world’s largest island: our reasons for going were rooted in space, solitude and the landscape itself. Like most other tourists, we were drawn by the chance to experience raw places, in contrast to our over-exploited and densely crowded homes, but to arrive there we use air travel that relies on products of the exploitation that we were trying to escape...

The first sight of the island from the air is breath-taking. The sea surface below is peppered by ‘bergy bits’ and larger icebergs for some time before Greenland itself arrives suddenly. Glacial streams, punctured by *nunataqs*, cascade and crumble eastward from the ice’s summit into the Greenland Sea. Seen from 10,000 metres up, it’s geography on a monumental scale. The only other sight I can compare it to is flying over the Grand Canyon, but while that is a truly vast feature, this is an entire continent rising out of the sea. The blank expanse of the ice sheet eventually gives way to a band of moraine lakes and scrubby tundra, then to fjords and, finally, the snowy but ice-free coast of the Davis Strait, where the US-built runway stands out like the ‘X’ on a map.

On landing, we learned that those current events were going to be sticking a little too close for comfort. The plane taxied inexplicably away from the small but familiar terminal building, heading instead towards the emergency services depot on the far side of the tarmac. Blue lights flashed through the windows, and inside the plane heads began swivelling, while brows furrowed in question. We felt a slight but unmistakable ripple of panic course through the seated passengers. When officials in haz-mat suits climbed into the aircraft and escorted a couple of teenagers out and into a waiting ambulance, the penny dropped. The Haz-mat suits were replaced by the police, who seemed to be trying to come up with a plan for a situation that they neither expected nor wanted. Thankfully, the all-clear came the next day, and after the brief panic of a potential lockdown we could continue packing.

Greenland has a strong tradition of human and animal-powered travel across the frozen landscapes of the far north. Greenlanders might have chosen to build their settlements on the milder coastline, away from the inland ice, but some of the best caribou and muskox hunting can be found well inland. Despite what ill-prepared westerners might expect, overland travel is considered to be much easier during the winter months, when lakes, fjords and swamps are frozen solid, and the extra human endurance of sled dogs can be harnessed to pull loads along winter trails.

One such trail runs between Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut on the coast, 180km away. When we left town under the bright sun of a March morning it was sitting around minus 15 degrees in the sun, but a couple of weeks earlier the temps had been hovering closer to minus 50 at night. The upside of the cold is that the fjord itself freezes to over a metre in thickness, so after crossing frozen swamp toward the ice we were treated to the bizarre sensation of retracing our own steps — or paddle strokes — of 18 months earlier, when we had set off from the same point in pack rafts, entering into a 16-day boat and bike journey that first firmly cemented the Greenlandic landscape in our hearts.

After following the fjord for a while, our path this time branched north and then west. There is always a feeling of shedding worries, responsibilities and distractions that comes with setting off on a journey. Greenlandic settlements make such a light mark on the world that the process of ‘getting away’ is a quick one, and in this

case it really did feel as though there was something to be getting away from. A couple of months later, we're perhaps quicker to recognise when the ever-refreshing news cycle and worries over the future are building up to a point when we need to set them aside and practise some mindfulness. I didn't recognise it then, but the act of turning pedals, and setting thoughts to more immediate things like warmth, food and camp chores felt like a welcome unwinding of a band inside me that I hadn't realised was all twisted up.

The tundra is almost devoid of life during the winter. Birds and insects; caribou and muskoxen; arctic hares and the underfoot carpet of innumerable tiny flowers make the arctic in summer austere but vigorously alive. What's left is the land, and during the winter it's the star of the show: different places have different scales, and in the arctic it's vast. Stern features and imposing distances don't so much invite appreciation as remain impassive to it. We felt incorporated into the place more than we felt welcomed by it.

The trail follows several chains of lakes along most of its length, where the flat surface gives good travel and mostly simple navigation. Being so flat and featureless, it's easy to misjudge distances on them, and several times I set an arbitrary marker to aim for, where we could stop and have a snack and some tea, only to realise that 'one' kilometre was actually ten. The little frozen mars bars in our lunch rations were to be savoured for just the right moment, as every day would inevitably have a low point in it somewhere, when a treat could keep the mind focused on positive things. Or better than a mars bar, we might find the Scottish delicacy that is a Tunnock's caramel wafer lurking among the peanuts and oatcakes.

Winter travel is hard, but only because it is unfamiliar. The trail we rode exists because it has always offered the path of least resistance for Greenlanders. It was a challenge for us, but making the trip is no big deal for someone that lives here, who knows the land and the myriad little pieces of knowledge and wisdom that can make the arctic more hospitable. We would see a couple of snowmobiles or dog teams most days, all making faster progress than our bikes, but it was notable that no-one ever bothered to question what we were doing, or why. I think it's sometimes assumed that the motivations behind riding in remote places centre around macho desires to claim a first or to prove personal worth through masochism, and it can be difficult to persuade people that I wouldn't be there if it wasn't enjoyable, especially where winter riding is concerned. There is inimitable joy in riding a bike over the clean, white surface of a winter trail, knowing that it is the only slender thread of rideable terrain linking you to your far-off destination, but the brief contact we did have with other people on the trail suggested that that aspect, at least, didn't need explaining.

Staying comfortable while moving on the trail is relatively easy — provided that your layering is good and your boots are dry. Things are trickier in camp when there is still a long night ahead, the sun is setting and it's taking the temperature south of minus 25. The arctic sun lingers gently on the horizon, long enough to make anyone want to stay out and watch, but when it did finally slip over the edge we would scuttle quickly into our sleeping bags, adjusting the many layers of warmth in a complicated operation that never got any slicker with time, and wait for the whole setup to get warm. The exception was, and will always be, when the aurora made an appearance. As long as I live, I will never get bored of watching the veils of light make the sky their dancefloor. Some Greenlandic beliefs say that I'm wrong, and it's actually a football pitch, where spirits kick walrus skulls across the sky...

Successfully sleeping through the coldest hours before dawn counts as a great success, but the trickiest part of the day is manoeuvring from sleep to trail-ready, via the painful shuffle of dressing, and alternating whose turn it was to get the stove primed and a breakfast of tea and porridge ready. The trail moves west, through more mountainous terrain and the narrow Nerumaq valley with its frequent areas of overflow, then back toward the coast before a final climb over the hills to descend to Sisimiut. The wind is funnelled through those mountain valleys, giving a quick reminder of the importance of covering every little bit of facial skin when it blows against you.

When we came within a day's ride or a morning's sled trip from the town itself, we began to see more tracks from day tripping locals. While most of the trail surface is dominated by snowmobile tracks, which are loose, broken and generally so-so as a riding surface, for the final approach into town we picked up a well-used dog trail, with its firm, fast surface slick from paws and runners — just one reason to mourn the decline of dog use in favour of snowmobiles.

Arrival in Sisimiut from the east involves passing through 'dog town': a sprawling area of kennels and sheds set away from the rest of town, where mushers keep their teams. We heard it from miles away. After the solitude and quiet of the trail, it was like being absorbed into a crowded stadium, full of noise, bickering, energy and life. A good metaphor, then, for what came next.

We should have got the clues from the almost deserted hotel straight away, and when we asked the staff what was up they confirmed that worries over Coronavirus were keeping people away. Someone had tested positive down in Nuuk. Our plan had been to rest up for a day or two and then repack and head out to explore some other potential hunter's trails. It was only when we got chatting to a friendly guy in the supermarket that we learned the Greenlandic authorities had decided to cease all flights in and out of the country, effective from two days' time. Cue a few hours spent with elevated heart rate, fatalistically considering the pros and cons of actually being stuck in Sisimiut for the foreseeable future, and then eventually securing the last two seats on the last flight back to Copenhagen. Suddenly, all this inter-connectivity had its advantages. The plan, however, revolved around being able to take an internal flight back east on the one day that high winds were being forecast for the area...

In the end, it took several delayed take-offs and the 'big plane' waiting on the tarmac at Kangerlussuaq for us before we did eventually make the trip home. We sat moping over our lost adventure, while people all over the world were losing freedom and jobs. Life right now is dominated by uncertainty, worry and speculation, but one thing that's for certain is that the bikes we ride will keep on meaning much more to us than the sum of their parts, to keep bodies and minds healthy. It seems likely that a lot will change as we come out the other side of these events, and this trip highlighted the inherent fragility of a world where people, planes and diseases can travel so far, so fast. Despite the turbulence of the times, back at home I see huge numbers of people making human-powered journeys, eager to get outside and take that daily hour of exercise. Cargo bike deliveries are booming in cities; it's fast becoming more normal to see people taking a bike to make their food shop; the ability to go and explore your neighbourhood on your bike has become a precious route to freedom. What I hope is that while we live through these changes in the future, humanity as a whole will hang on to the need for those slow, precious journeys, whether they're on foot, by bike or at the back of a sled.



## Kayak Gone Wrong 2010

Sigmund Av Teigum

### Note From Doug Anderson:

Sigmund the author is an electrician/fisherman friend of mine who lives near me in Greenland. He is from the Faroe Islands. One night he told me this story. He's a great storyteller and his account of his first trip ever in a kayak and the near disaster and the emotional impact it had on him was very moving. I badgered him for about 3yrs to write it down and finally he did.

There are lots of English mistakes but it reads clearly and if you want to use it I think it should be printed "as is".

So here it is:

February 26th 2010, it was definitely clear that if I should travel from Tasiilaq to Nuuk, I had to find an alternative route from Tasiilaq to Kulusuk other than by helicopter, to get to the plane from Kulusuk to Nuuk. Air Greenland had full booked all helicopter departures to Kulusuk that day.

I wanted to participate in a L-AUS course in Nuuk the following week for electricians. As an added bonus, the Faroese association in Nuuk had annual party this Friday February 27th, where the menu was grind whale meat from the Faroe Islands. I was also invited.

I had only been in Greenland for about 2½ months, so I might have been a little naive about how to travel in arctic conditions.

As the whole fjord in Tasiilaq was covered with ice, as well as large parts of the area between Tasiilaq and Kulusuk, it was impossible to sail with boat between the villages. I asked several of my work colleagues at Tunumi Entreprise whether it was possible to go kayak to Kulusuk and I was referred to Morten Steen, who was a building engineer at the municipality. He was also chairman of the kayak association in Tasiilaq. Morten Steen has made many trips with tourists in East Greenland. He was 62-year old in great shape.

I had some electrical questions to clarify with Morten Steen about ongoing buildings for the municipality, I went optimistic to the municipality and talked to Morten Steen. This was around midday February 26th. 2010.

Morten Steen asked about my experience with kayaking, I told him that I had once been to a water polo at the Sluseholmen in Copenhagen with the electrician class in 2001, but otherwise no experience with kayaking. However, I said that I would very much like to take this trip to Kulusuk, if he thought it was safe. Morten Steen said that he had all the necessary equipment and was otherwise prepared for all the challenges that we possibly could be exposed to in a kayak in East Greenland. He talked about a previous long trip of more than a week where they faced extreme weather challenges, but it was no problem at all back then.

Morten Steen meant that if only me and him were going, it was not a problem with my little experience of kayaking as he could instruct me along the way. He said that he had all the necessary equipment, such as GPS phone, satellite phone, mattress pads, sleeping bags, tents and primus, so if we should be prevented, we just tap an ice flake and get warm and relax.

I asked about which challenges or obstacles we could be exposed to, he said that he had never ever been stuck in the ice and never will be.

I asked how he was dealing with a potential encounter with a polar bear along the way. He said it has never been a problem and that the polar bears were not really interested in humans. Should a polar bear come

close, you could try to pull the zipper on the jacket upside down to create a different sound than the polar bears are used to.

I told him that there were seen 5 polar bears earlier this week between Tasiilaq and Kulusuk, a mother with two cubs and two adult polar bears. Morten Steen said very calmly and confidently that polar bears will not be a problem at all.

Morten Steen said that the condition for lending a kayak was that you had to be a member of the kayak club and then you could borrow them as often as you want for free. The membership fee cost 200Dkk a year. I accepted without hesitation, only wanted to do this after the trip, because we had not much time right now.

I asked how long the trip was going to take, he said approximate 2 hours. We agreed to meet at his house at 15 o'clock to choose the right suit that he had at his home.

I took from the commune with a good feeling that this would be a good and exciting trip.

I consulted with my apprentice Gerth Mikaelson and decided to go down to the shop and buy a rifle for safety reasons in case of a polar bear encounter. I bought a 22/250 that would be sufficient to kill a polar bear.

I went home and prepared for departure. I called my mother in the Faroe Islands and told her that I was about to maybe do the dumbest thing of my life, but I was about to go a kayak trip from Tasiilaq to Kulusuk. She was clearly worried and asked when I expected to be in Kulusuk. I said at about 18 o'clock. She asked me to call her when I came to Kulusuk, which I said yes to.

We met later at Morten Steen home, where I got dressed in a wet suit and put my own clothes in a waterproof bag. I also got a mattress and a sleeping bag that I should have in the room in front of the kayak. I also got a liter of water in a used juice dunk bought in the store. I bought 2 pieces of Ritter Sport chocolate to bring with me.

I was also given a Icelandic mittens from Morten Steen that he thought would suited well for the trip.

At 15.30 o'clock we were finally ready to leave from the Kayak Club at the port of Tasiilaq. Gerth Mikaelson said goodbye to us before we departure. We dragged the kayak's after us as we walked on the ice. We talked together on the way out of the fjord how well it felt to be invincible, as long we just had the right gear. The weather was very good. Morten Steen had a camcorder with him and filmed a bit as we left Tasiilaq fjord. I asked again what if a polar bear came towards us. Morten Steen said in case of a polar bear attack, you should acting death because it most likely was not interested in humans. I was not convinced, but it didn't matter, I had my new rifle anyway – if I could find out to use it.

When we approached the lighthouse, the ice was slightly thinner. We walked next to each other with approximate 6-8 meter between us. Suddenly Morten Steen fell down through the ice. I immediately stepped over my kayak and walked towards him with the kayak between my legs. He wanted to place the kayak's close together so he easier could lift him self up again. I was surprised how long time it took him to come out of the water. He got up on the ice again after more than 1 minute in the water. But after a little break Morten Steen was ready to continue and said the water was no problem as we wearing wet suit. We approached the cliff to get into the open water between the solid ice and the land. We fought our way along the land until we had to cross over the ice to keep heading for Kulusuk. We sat in the kayak all the time, we used the axes to pull us over the ice areas for different water openings. It was a great feeling and the weather was nice to traveling along the magnificent nature with plenty of ice where two men still felt good and invincible.

Morten Steen was surprised how big the ice belt was and how difficult it was to pass through before we came to the open water between Tasiilaq and Kulusuk. I never looked at the clock, but it was still daylight. Now we were moving faster and in the twilight we could see the lights in Kulusuk.

Unfortunate we got increasingly headwind and the current in the sea increasingly became stronger and the waves bigger. The evening coldness also sat in, although it was no problem to keep warm as we struggled to keep moving forward. I was usually ahead and said at one point, "it might be a good idea to call for a boat from Kulusuk to come and pick us up" Morten Steen said surprisingly, "It will damage my future reputation as a tourist guide if I ask for help" I was getting slightly more worried about our ongoing trip, but we had to give it a more time before we decided anything. Morten Steen said that we had to tie a rope between us in the big waves. We then made the kayaks together and fastened a 10 meter long rope between our kayaks. I had shown that I had more energy than Morten Steen, maybe that's why he tied the rope behind my kayak and in front of his kayak. We then turned the kayaks across the waves and continued heading towards Kulusuk. Still it was not quite dark. It was a bright full moon throughout all the evening and the night too. The waves became still a bigger challenge and the wind to. We did not talk much, but just tried to fight us through this fearsome start of a nightmare. I once again said that we really should ask for a boat from Kulusuk to pick us up, Morten Steen did not answer on that issue.

Morten Steen suddenly said, "Do you also feel like we are not going forward but just standing in the same place?" I said "yes", we took the kayaks side by side again and had to decide whether we should continue or turn around. I said we had to call for help, but Morten Steen did not answer.

Then I asked for the phone so I could call for help. He then picked up the orange phone from his pocket and said there was no signal. I then took my own phone off my pocket, but no signal. I knew nothing about satellite phones and had never seen one before, so I asked if there shouldn't be a signal, Morten Steen said we had to get closer to land to get phone signal. We agreed that it was best to return to the ice where we came from and then set up tent and wait to early morning or until the weather had improved. I asked about there was a phone signal closer to Tasiilaq at the ice where we came from, Morten Steen answered yes. By this time, I was already doubting the capabilities of Morten Steen as a tour guide as he refused to call for help and now had no functionally phone for emergency call, which he ensured was okay before the trip.

We were about midway in the open water and turned ours kayaks around. I asked Morten Steen which area we should head towards. He said the shortest way was actually in a straight line across the waves. I then said we have to head up against the waves and then get the current in the tail down again, Morten Steen said "no, we go straight". That was the turning point in my head, then I took control of the situation and said decidedly "yes we do!" and then I took some strong paddle strokes against the waves and dragged Morten Steen with me. I knew from rowing with Faroese boats from my younger years when we sailed between the islands in strong current, we never sailed straight across the waves, but always up against and then turning.

I became aware that the situation now was extremely dangerous. We fought through the waves that now constantly broke over. About 7-8 times I was on the edge to tip over with my kayak as the waves broke and pushed both the paddle and kayak. But with powerful maneuver I managed every time to take the paddle out of the sea and bend both my self and the paddle forward so the wave lost it's grip.

If there is a god – he must have been with us that day.

Fighting for my life, I kept struggling without hesitation. We finally approached the other side again without any of us been in the water. Morten Steen as the experienced kayaker and me as the younger stronger man, finally came out of the big waves, and approached the ice on the other side. Exhausted and thirsty I was looking forward to get water and then getting the tent up and have a much needed rest. I was wet all over of sweat. I then took my water dunk out of the room in front of the kayak, but unfortunate the whole dunk was frozen. I put my tongue on it to get a few drops, but the effort wasn't giving me much. I slowly got more cold, as we weren't so active any more.

The night temperature sat in (below -15 degrees Celsius). I tried to break a piece of my Ritter Sport chocolate but it was too frozen, I tried to keep it in my mouth to melt a bit of it, but at the same time it was a fight to keeping the body temperature, so I gave up on the chocolate.

We took it more easy now in the calm water. There were some ice flakes close by, so we decided for the one

with a plane surface that was about 30 meter from us. While we took it easy, the water suddenly became to ice. It was really an amazing and surprising ice formation. Our kayaks were not in line with the ice flakes so we had to turn the kayaks. We were suddenly in compact ice and struggled to turn our kayaks. We rowed a little further in the straight line but had to turn about 90 degrees to get over to the ice flake. I managed to turn my kayak with great difficulty. We now had to use our axes. I had come close to the ice flake as the line between us tightened. I waited and looked at Morten Steen as he struggled to turn his kayak, but he clearly had less energy now. His kayak laid firmly in the sea ice. I tried to pull the line as Morten Steen tried to pull the kayak out of the ice.

After a couple of minutes of struggling, Morten Steen suddenly said, "I can't turn the kayak, I am stocked in the ice" and then he just sat staring straight forward. After he had sat there for about one minute, I had to go back towards him and try to help him, but we could not turn his kayak. I then said to him, I will try to turn my kayak and then we can go for the other ice flake a bit further ahead which was in a straight line. Morten Steen did not say anything at all, as I just started fighting to turn my kayak back again. After a few minutes of struggle we were heading in the direction towards the other ice flake 20 meter away, as Morten Steen followed in my path.

We finally came to the ice flake, and still Morten Steen was silence and grumpy. Maybe it was too hard for him to handle that he actually was not in charge of this trip anymore, and that his own strength had let him down as he got stuck in the ice. Nevertheless, I wanted badly to make an emergency call, and my own phone now was water damaged with a broken display, the phone was useless.

I asked Morten Steen for the cell phone. Now he gave me a big black cell phone, it was the satellite cell phone. I first tried to call 112 and then 00299 112, but the cell phone turned off all the time. I tried to heat the battery, but had to open my waterproof suit to put it at my body. It was extremely cold, but I realized that this was a vital to make the emergency call. I tried 3 times to warm the battery, but it did not lasted very long before it turned off again. I tried one last time, and this time called my mother in the Faroe Islands. If she got a mysterious call in the middle of the night, she could possible see a connection to the missing call from her son and make alarm. I gave up and instead prepared my self to take a rest. I took my mattress out of the box in front of the kayak, and laid it on the ice, as I also wanted some more of my close to lay around my neck. Then Morten Steen took my mattress as he passed by without saying anything. I realized that I was in an emergency situation with the worst thinkable person, a grumpy selfish old man.

He laid himself on the ice and had raised a thin coat over himself, which however went from the feet and above the head. I was very surprised, because I expected a tent or at least better circumstances than this. But I now had to find a way to how I self could get some rest. I gave him the cell phone under the cover and said, warm the battery while I'm making my ready to come and lay beside you. I then took my two bags and the waterproof bag and laid them on the ground as a mattress right next to Morten Steen. I put myself under the cover with my back against Morten Steen to keep warm. It had become very cold and I did not dare to pie for not giving valuable heat away from my body, as I once saw in Television program about extreme cold circumstances.

When I came under the cover, the satellite phone was lying on the ice next to Morten Steen. Then I really realized that I had an enemy with me in this life threatening situation in the middle of the wilderness. I tried to heat the battery again, but now I did not dare to put the phone on my already cold body. Now the temperature was biting cold and the phone did not start again.

With my back laying against his back, now my hunger and rest was replaced with a staggering fight to keep warm. I might have slept for about 15 minutes but I still got colder. I told Morten Steen that I still got colder, so I suggested that we packed our equipment and kept going so we could work ourselves warm again. Morten Steen said, "I'm sleeping until the early morning - I need some rest".

After a few minutes considerations I could not stand the coldness, so I told him that I felt I only had some few hours left in me and wanted to use them now trying to come home. Morten Steen answered "It will be without me".

After a couple of minutes silence, I took a big, but necessary decision. I told Morten Steen, "I feel that I only have few hours left in me and I have 3 children to fight for, so I will try to go home to Tasiilaq now". He

answered in a rejected tone "Then you must pull me - because I have no energy left in me". But I had made up my mind so there was no way back now. I sat up and began to prepare myself when I said to him "you decide by your self whether you're coming with me or not!" MortenSteen realized he couldn't change anything and answered "Of course I'm coming with you". On my way out of the cover, I tried to encourage him and cheering him up, I said: "Come on, it will be okay!" It was for tactical reasons in an attempt to get him going again.

I took my stuff and packed up again, but I couldn't find one of my mittens, but one of Morten Steen's mittens were lying next to my kayak, he probably lost it when he took the mattress from me. I had a Olympus camera with me. I thought it would certainly not function in the coldness, but it did, so I took 6-7 pictures with blitz against Kulusuk, in a tiny hope that somebody saw it in Kulusuk or if anyone was trying to search for us.

After about 15 minutes, I was ready to go, and told Morten Steen, that still was lying under the cover, that I was leaving now. Then he finally started moving.

I stood there cold and waited while he made himself ready. He said, "Where is my other mitten?". First I did not say anything while I was considering weather if I could do this with only one mitten on my hand. My conscience, however was too much for me, I could simply not do this against anyone in need, even though I was fully aware that this idiot of a man, would not do the same to me what's so ever. I gave him his mitten back and started looking through my things again. My other mitten was lying in the kayak next to the rifle.

We finally took the kayaks towards the edge of this bumping ice flake. I took my frozen water cap out of the kayak and said "We cannot use it for anything now so I leave this extra kilogram here". Then Morten Steen raised his voice a bit and said: "No, we're taking it back home!" Then I threw the dunk hard next to where Morten Steen stood and shouted, "Take it by yourself!".

Surprisingly he did. (a normal 1L juice dunk that was bought in the store)  
We came on the thin ice that was too thin to walk on and too hard to put the paddles in.

It was depressing to look at how far away the land was. I was in front again and Morten Steen surprisingly let me drag him without helping. I was literally pulling both me and him for at least 1 hour where I just sat in his kayak and did absolutely nothing but relaxing. In the start I accepted it for a short while. I had to work to get warm again and I knew he was exhausted.

### **Thicker ice**

I slammed the ax in the ice and dragged us about one meter each time. However, I was so dehydrated and thirsty, so I could not keep the pace for very long. We came to thicker ice, so I had to use more power to chop in the ice to get the ax to grab. This took a lot of energy out of me, so I said to Morten Steen: "can't you see it's harder now to chop it in the ice", he said: "I can see that". I looked regularly behind me to see if Morten Steen was starting to help, but he did not. I became even more exhausted and could only pull 5 strokes with the ax at a time, before I had to take a break for 5-10 seconds.

### **Threatening dark cloud**

It was still dark and a big dark cloud was close to pulling over the shining full moon. It was a bit worrying if we lost the moonlight, because then we probably would not see any polar bear before it was too late.

### **Nearly giving up**

As we made very small progress, I still became even more tired. In one of the breaks I just wanted to sleep while I was sitting in the kayak. Thought it would be okay if I never wake up again, because I had reached my very limit and knew I could collapse at any time. I even thought if a Polar Bear should suddenly appeared, then this journey just would end even faster.

### **Turning point – too much to live for**

But on the very edge mentally and physically, where I almost gave up – I suddenly got a thundering lightening in my mind – realizing that my children would lose their father and never get a good advice in need –NOOOO!!!..... It was a turning point. I just had to make it back home for the cause

of my children. I also realized that no one would help me in this one, and if I should make it back home, I had to do it all by myself.

I got angry – realizing that the stupid grumpy old man took advantage of me and actually had played hazard with my life ever since we came in trouble water.

But I really needed to get angry if I should have any chance to make it back home – but a collapse could strike at any time. The normal limit was exceeded by far, and now it was a desperate struggling for survival.

I was more determined than previous to succeed. I took those 5 strokes with the axes, and a break for 5-10 seconds and so on. At one point I just felt a sleep for at split second, and wake up again with big eyes and realizing that it was a very close call. I just had to stay awake if I should have any chance to make back home.

I never got extra energy, but I just kept fighting. ....almost like in Forrest Gump “run Forrest run”

I still got more mad on Morten Steen, for not helping. I shouted to Morten Steen, “Now you're helping me – you dame Dane!” ..... but he did not help.

I started a shitstorm against him, I really needed that too, my adrenalin almost boiled over. Once when I quickly turned around to see if he was helping, he sat with his paddle and acting like he was rowing, but it was on hard ice, where we only could use our axes. I kept jelling at him saying "it's people like you who make Greenlandic people hate Danes and I understand them very well!" It kept me driving while I was not sleepy anymore.

#### **Muscle contraction**

Suddenly I got contracton in my abdominal muscles, so I hurried to stretch backwards. I managed to saved it and stretch it out again, so it did not become a problem. Now it had become brighter and still the mountains seemed to be unbearable far away. I thought several times that we never gonna make it. I remembered that my cousin Jens Martin Knudsen once said in the radio how their coach back in 1992 told the Faroese players to split the match up in many matches of 5 minutes, for every 5 minutes they don't score, it's a victory. Faroe Island won 1-0 against Austria in their first international appearance. I also broke my struggling for life down to 5 minutes interval, it helped a lot!

Suddenly I got a cramp in the right thigh muscle. Sitting in the kayak, I could not stretch it, so I pulled my muscles hard and stretched them out with my hands, it was the toughest massage I ever had, but I managed to wipe off and had to learn to relax now in both legs, arms and stomachs and make it easy and quiet.

#### **Morten provocation**

I continued to jelling at Morten, who had started to respond provocatively back, alternately replying, "what do you say!" ..... and "I do not hear what you saying!", he was probably tired of the man that had taken over the command, and now constantly was jelling at him.

#### **Considering threatening with riffle**

At one point I thought about threatening him with the riffle to force him to take my orders. I also considered - what if he not took my orders anyway, would I then shoot him in pure anger? ..... but I really didn't know which way the village was and could not afford to make any mistake that made the trip longer. So I actually needed him in a way. Thankfully I quickly dumped the idea again.

I still draged both of us, and then had to do something to get him going. Then I stopped and was looking forward and said “If you do not helping now, I cut the line over” - then he said, "what! - do you cut the linen over!" I turned quickly around and shouted at him "so you can hear what I'm saying! "Then he helped for the rest of the trip.

#### **Approaching thicker ice**

We came to open water and were now able to row long distances towards the land, so now there was



greater optimism for both of us. We finally came to the lighthouse where the ice was thicker. We had small stops, Morten Steen had a small bag of some dried fruits of some kind. He asked if I wanted some in the start of the trip, but I said no thanks, but just before we approached thicker ice, I asked for some and he gave me a couple. It helped against the worst hunger.

We finally approached near the lighthouse, and the ice was clearly thicker. I asked Morten Steen, with an exhausted voice, if he could test if we could walk on the ice by now, I had pulled us for so long and had no more energy left. Morten Steen said nothing and sat just staring with a blank look. I said quietly to him, "Not even that can you help with!".

A simple thing like coming out of the kayak was hard, I had no energy left in me. Anyway, I got up from the kayak and stood now with the kayak between my legs. I then took a step forward and suddenly fell through the ice, and was now sitting on my kayak with my legs in the water. I had to get back into the kayak and use the axes to pull myself a little bit longer. 10 m further, I tried again, because the ice was so hard to hammer the axes in, so maybe it was worth another try. The effort paid out this time. I could finally walk on the ice and Morten Steen followed. The first 50 meters or so, we walked with the kayaks between the legs for safety reasons.

### **Walking towards Tasiilaq**

We could now drag the kayaks after us holding the robes over our shoulders. To my big surprise, Morten Steen now seemed to have more energy left in him, I think he tried to walk away from me heading towards Tasiilaq. I was really angry with his excess of energy, where I had spent all my energy and all the reserves. Seemed to be a little payback time for him. He did not need me anymore, and was overruled several times, since I stopped believing in him out in the waves, and even had jelled all sort of personal anger against some Danish people.

I got so angry inside about his runaway, that I was determined to punch another human for the first time in my life – and give him my hardest punch when I came to Tasiilaq. The bastard had played hazard with my life and taken advantage of my struggling for life where I could collapse at any time.

On our way through the fjord, Morten Steen fell 5 times and I fell 2 times. However, I think that if Morten Steen had not tried to walk away from me, neither him nor I had fallen. Incredible that it became a small race in the end under these circumstances. Halfway through the fjord, the thought struck me that if I hit him, I would give him the obvious reason why the trip had gone so badly wrong – he could claim that the tourist did not take orders and even was violence and difficult to handle so I dropped the idea of give him a punch.

I manage to follow him, though I was a little bit behind. When we got to the kayak club, I laid my kayak in the shed. I was About to leave home, when Morten Steen asked for the rescue vest, so he got it. I then told him that the wet suits and bags would he got tomorrow. He raised his voice and said "No, you're coming home to me with it now!" I got very upset and went quickly towards him and stood right in front of him with a threatening attitude and said, "I've saved your life and you know it very well - the least you could do is say thank you!" Morten Steen remained silence ..... I waited for an answer staring in his eyes and then said "You cannot even say thank you!" And then I went home.

It was just before 7:00 o'clock when I saw a taxi driving down the hill, I waved at him, but he drove up to Narpaaumu with a customer. I continued and when I just got past TelePost, the taxi came back. It was Salo driving. I said to myself that I would pay him a big amount of money if he just could drive me home. I gave signs to stop, but Salo did not stop, he probably had another customers to pick up. I promised to myself that I would never take that taxi again!!! A promise that of course was broken. Salo is a nice guy that I always talks to when I see him.

Somehow I came all the way up the hill with all my stof, and my rifle hanging on my bag. Standing on my doorstep, I faced another problem. The key to my house was in the pocket pocket that was in the bag. I struggled to open the zipper in the bag, but I had no power left in me. Fortunately, my apprentice, who lived right next to my house, came out on his patio to smoke before he went to work. He saw me, I could

not shout, but waved with my arm to come over. He came right away and saw my bad shape. He immediately asked what have happened. I asked him to take the key out of the bag.

When we came inside I explained to him what happened. When I came to the point where I was about to give up, when I realized that my children would lose their father, I could not hold my tears back. I said with a crying voice, you can see how important it was for me. Gerth then called Jacob Abelsen, Director of Tunumi Entreprise where we were employed. Jacob Abelsen quickly came up to my place and he got the same explanation and again I cried when I was going to explain about the children. Gerth Mikaelson and Jacob Abelsen left my house a bit over. 9 o'clock. I called to Faroe Islands to talk to my son. I got him in the pipe and told him that dad had been on a kayak trip which should have taken 2 hours, but took almost 16 hours and it was a hard battle of surviving, and what kept me fighting was that I had my children to fight for and that probably saved my life today - thanks for having you! He did not know what to say, but what should a 8-year-old boy say?

I should have waited to call, but I was so emotional and choked and really needed to tell him in that presses moment.

I drank a lot of water and ate my Ritter-sport chocolate that was not frozen anymore. I went to bed to get some sleep. 11. I woke up and called to Airgreenland, now there was a free space with the helicopter to Kulusuk. I packed and quickly took to the heliport. At 12am I sat in the helicopter heading for Kulusuk. When we flew over the area where we had slept on the ice flake the night before, I saw that all the ice was driven far out south, I could recognize one particular special iceberg that was right next to the one we sleep on. It was a scary experience and I became even more aware about how lucky we were after all to still be alive.

I came to Nuuk later that day and stayed at Hotel Hans Egede. I just wanted to sleep out until I woke up again. I had frostbite on my chins and was too tired physically and mentally to go to the Faroese party that was held in Nuuk. After a week in Nuuk I returned to Tasiilaq. I still had the bag and knitwear from Morten Steen. Then after a week, Morten Steen called the electrical department to talk to me. We talked for the first time about the trip. I asked him why he did not take it seriously about the satellite phone to ask for help. He would not say much more than he could find when he came home that the battery was less half full so that was probably the reason for it did not work. I said that we were in danger several times and it was a true miracle that I did not feel kayak in the big and breaking waves. He said, no, he would have just helped me out so we were never in danger. I also asked why he should be so obsessed and exploited by just slipping for more than an hour when I got cramps in my abdominal muscles and thighs, but he simply replied that he had plenty of energy to pull both of us home if I were to collapse, but it would just have been at a lower pace than mine. I also mentioned that it counted and the warmth we could expect as he mentioned before leaving never became a thing. He did not answer anything about that subject. All I came with did he reject, so I finally told you what Morten, I was in need of life several times and when I was flying with the helicopter at. 12 days after, I could see that all the ice that was where we slept was driven far out to open sea and we could hardly get back home from there, so Morten Steen said, yes, that could be something. I could not talk to this stupid man anymore and said I got past things. I drove home to Morten Steen with things. Knocked on the door and gave him a suit and bag, so he said and I should also have 200kr, so I asked for what? - for membership of the kayak club, I laughed aloud and said I do not have to join your kayak club, you can have a good life! Then I went. So, one would think that the last sentence was put in that case, but no ! Jacob Abelsen came to the office at the electrical department the following day to talk to me. He understood that I would not pay, but that for the company's best was a good idea if I paid when the company needed to have a good dialog with MortenSteen, who was the municipality's supervisor in the buildings that the company had for the municipality. I so emphatically told Jacob Abelsen that a man who has worst played hazard with my life under these extreme conditions should not have the pleasure of telling the world that it may not have been so bad since the man subsequently signed up for the kayak club . Jacob Abelsen recently tried to say that Tunumi Entreprise A/S could refund me the 200kr if I just paid them, I definitely said, Jacob, take care of what you require from me - this was a very serious situation and I have to take care of my work professionally. Morten Steen, but a member of the kayak club, I will not be as long as Morten Steen is president. Jacob Abelsen understood it well and went so. Sometimes I met MortenSteen at the Convenience store, reminding me that there was a general meeting for the Kayak Club and all the members should meet up. Jacob Abelsen had without telling me about it, paid my membership

fee for me to the kayak club . It was the first time I realized what person Jacob Abelsen really was. Summer 2010 I was working on a mountain top near Kuummiut (Pingelfjeld), I got Jonathan Boassen to pick me up by boat to get to Tasiillaq for the weekend. We came to the same place where we had fought in the ice ½ year earlier and with approximate. same lake conditions where there were similar currents and currents. It ran cold down my back - I got goose skin all over my body. There I understood what post traumatic experiences were for something. My mother had otherwise asked me to go to a psychologist just after the incident on the ice, but I told her that, I have always been so open about my stuff so I speak out and through it. However, I have now had the clear experience and opinion that people who are not as strong and open as me should always go through a course of treatment by traumatic experiences of all kinds. Not how many lives I have but some of My life was used this fate in East Greenland on 26 Feb

## A Most Treasured Moment

Donald Balfour

We will all have a most treasured moment within our Arctic experiences. For me this occurred in the summer of 1968 when I was a member of the twelve person Aberdeen University Expedition to West Greenland. Our base at Kugssuaq was about halfway along Sondre Stromfjord on the Arctic Circle. From this base we used our inflatable boats and hiking to conduct a geomorphological survey of the glacial features of the area. Additional studies were made of a large landslip in Sarfartoq valley, a botanical inventory, and for our final week a settlement survey of Umanaq and its surrounding communities.

For one week a team of four of us crossed the Sukkertoppen Ice Cap reaching Evighed's Fjord. On the return journey we experienced a most amazing sight. The green flash. A moment of emerald green light flashed across the ice followed by a striking red sky as the sun arose above the horizon. To see the green flash was truly wonderful, a treasured moment in an awe-inspiring environment. Has anyone had a similar sighting?

