



# SCOTTISH ARCTIC CLUB

*"To Encourage Adventurous Endeavour and Interest in  
the Science, Culture and Protection of the Arctic"*



## NEWSLETTER May 2023

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*The next newsletter is due out in October. All material gratefully received by the editor:*

*Expedition plans, expedition reports (current or historic), Arctic-related news, topics or anecdotes, photographs, paintings, drawings.*

*Deadline for copy: 30 September*

#### **SUMMER SOLSTICE MEET**

**Kincraig 24-25 June 2023**

#### **ANNUAL GATHERING & DINNER**

**Saturday 18 November 2023**

**Ben Nevis Hotel, Fort William**

President: Noel Williams Vice President: Anthony Walker

Secretary: Jinty Smart Treasurer: Mandy Peden

Membership Secretary: Jane Craxton Gathering Secretary: Bethany Carol

Other Committee Members: Mike Bauermeister, Louise Hollinrake, Fraser Melville, Jennifer Newall

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 website for an application form.

#### **Contacts:**

Club Secretary: [jintysmart@btopenworld.com](mailto:jintysmart@btopenworld.com)

[www.scottisharcticclub.org.uk](http://www.scottisharcticclub.org.uk)

Newsletter editor: We are always on the lookout for articles: please send them to [james@fenton.scot](mailto:james@fenton.scot)



## THE 2023 SUMMER SOLSTICE WALK

24-5 June

Myrtle Simpson would like to invite members to our annual Summer Solstice gathering 24-25 June at Farletter, Kincaig. We will have our usual BBQ starting at about 4pm on Saturday 24th. Some meat will be supplied, but bring your own salads, puddings, drinks. Camping is available.



There will be opportunities to walk, run, climb, swim or canoe on both Saturday and Sunday. Over the years we have done many things on the Sunday, but canoes/kayaks on Loch Insh are often involved, as is swimming. Mountains are also available. All suggestions welcome!

*If you are planning on attending please let*

*Stella Sprately know:*

[spratley42@hotmail.com](mailto:spratley42@hotmail.com)

*Additionally, if you are keen to join in outdoor activities let Susie Allison know so that she and*

*Dougal can coordinate activities and gear:*

[susie.allison@gmail.com](mailto:susie.allison@gmail.com)

07780 602139



## THE 2023 ANNUAL GATHERING AND DINNER

18 November

The Club has booked accommodation for this year's Gathering & Supper. It will be held at the Ben Nevis Hotel on Saturday 18th November 2023. For your accommodation bookings, please contact the hotel directly:

### **Ben Nevis Hotel & Leisure Club**

North Road, Fort William PH33 6TG

**Tel:** 01397 702 331

### **Enquiries and Reservations:**

[salesbennevis@strathmorehotels.com](mailto:salesbennevis@strathmorehotels.com)

A booking form and programme will be sent out in the October newsletter.



## JEAN BALFOUR: AN APPRECIATION

**Dr Jean Balfour CBE, FRSE, FRSA**

**4 November 1927 – 27 February 2023**

**President, Scottish Arctic Club 1998 – 2001**



A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Jean Balfour was held in St Drostan's Church, Markinch on 11 April. It was a memorable occasion attended by many of her extensive family, former colleagues and friends and commemorated her extraordinary range of public service and her vigorous and, at times, formidable personality. The order of service included a reproduction of one of the many landscape watercolours she painted under her maiden name, Jean Drew.

Her eldest son, Robert, summarised her public and private life. She was fortunate that when she married John Balfour of Balbirnie in 1950, he was more than happy to see her develop her public life, delegate house-keeping and share a secretary with her. She entered public life as an independent councillor for Fife. With typical energy, she had visited every house in the ward to sway voters from their traditional Labour allegiance.

Small in stature, but a diminutive dynamo, Jean forged into hitherto male-dominated areas in conservation and forestry, starting with improvements to Balbirnie Home Farms. Later, as the first female President of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society, she made such an impact that she was known as 'Queen Tree!' It was after her Chairmanship of the Countryside Commission for Scotland from 1972 to 1982 that she was awarded the CBE.

She remained active well into her eighties, keeping up her interest in botany and enjoying her many journeys to the Arctic. She was pleased to see her three sons succeed in areas close to her heart, Robert in land management, David in forestry and Alan in trout farming.

After the service, guests were invited to the family's former home, Balbirnie House, which is now a 30-bedroom country house hotel. Balfours had lived there since 1642 but quit in the early 1970s when it was acquired by Glenrothes Development Corporation. Jean and John, who died in 2009, lived out their lives at their new and rather more manageable home, Kirkforthar. On 11 April, the guests remembered Jean as she would have wished, with recognition, respect and affection and much lively conversation.

*Jane Craxton*

## SCOTTISH ARCTIC EXPEDITION FUND

### Update

#### 2023 grants

This year, the Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund (SAEF) has helped to support three trips north by young Scots. They are:

**Louise Mercer** for PhD research on water contamination in the North West Territories, Arctic Canada, which includes collaboration with the local community.

The **East Greenland 2023** expedition, comprising **Harry Newmark, Eve MacCallum and Oliver Smaje**, is the first winner of the **Myrtle & Hugh Simpson Award** for small, independently organised and self-supporting adventurous expeditions. A donation to the SAEF was made in Hugh's memory by his family, friends and colleagues after his death in 2019.

**Claire Mellish** for the **North West Passage Row**, east to west – 'The Last Great First.' (See page 3)

*Stop Press:* **Mark Agnew**, who was awarded an SAEF grant pre-pandemic for rowing this same North West Passage expedition, has 'jumped ship.' He has decided to switch from rowing to kayaking and is now in a new team of four, in two tandem kayaks. They are planning to start on July 1, depending on the ice break up. Will it be a race between the ocean rowing boat and the kayaks?!

Mountain Equipment has, once again, given the grant recipients a generous discount on expedition gear this year.

Congratulations to them all, safe travels, and we look forward to hearing all about their adventures at the Gathering in November.

#### Change of plan

Kristofer Law was awarded an SAEF grant in 2022 to take part in 'The Last World First' to be claimed, an expedition to The Northern Pole of Inaccessibility. He used the grant money to take part in training in Svalbard, and gave a video presentation remotely at the Carrbridge Gathering in 2022.

However, he has pulled out of the main expedition after it was announced, in December, that it would again be cancelled. He said:

"This has been the fourth time it has been cancelled while I have been involved in it and I think at least the eighth time overall. I was starting to feel that the likelihood of it happening was starting to dwindle – and to be honest, I had lost interest in it. Of course, if it ends up happening, I will be a bit gutted not to have joined –

but this feels like the right decision for me. What I'm more interested in now is a solo expedition, or as a small, close-knit team. I've got some ideas for the future and with some trusted people who are in the same position as me.

"I've just returned to Scotland after three months in Northern Sweden volunteering with sled dogs – which was amazing. I'm heading to Canada and up to the Yukon to do the same. Taking some time to travel and see what life has in store for me there. Before I left one of the kennels, my hosts gave me a gift of an old Swedish army anorak. Among several modifications, I've put the SAC logo on the arm and put some tartan fleece in the hood and pockets – I think it looks great - a testament to the way explorers used to look!"



#### Donating to the SAEF fund

Donations to the expedition fund are welcome all year round. Please send cheques payable to:

Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund  
*and send to*  
Sue Fenton, Treasurer  
Polldoran, Clachan Seil, Oban, Argyll PA34 4TJ  
*or BACS to:*  
sort code 82-67-04; account 20109358

Please ask for a Gift Aid form if you have not already completed one.

If you would like an SAC embroidered patch, please send your mailing address and a suggested donation of £5, to the above address. An SAE would be appreciated! A reminder that Amazon (Smile) is no longer supporting charities, including our fund, through online purchases.

## New SAEF trustees needed

The trustees of the Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund are Kathleen Cartwright (Convenor), Bryan Alexander, Andrea Anderson, Pat Duchart, Louise Hollinrake, Luke Robertson and Mairi Webster. Sue Fenton is the secretary/ treasurer.

The board of trustees is now augmented, *ex-officio*, by the immediate past president and secretary of the Scottish Arctic Club committee. Kathleen will be retiring as Convenor at this year's AGM, with Bryan taking over.

### Three additional trustees are sought for 2024

Trustees review and rank grant applications, which have an application deadline of 31 January each year; and thereafter discuss them by email and Zoom in mid-February. The SAEF AGM is dovetailed with the SAC committee meeting at the November Gathering.

**Please contact Sue if you are interested, or want to discuss it further:**

[scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com](mailto:scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com)

*Sue Fenton, Secretary/Treasurer SAEF*

## WRITING COMPETITION

Don't forget the writing competition on the subject of the Arctic and Me! An original piece of prose or poetry, (with illustrations if desired) and not exceeding 3,000 words, is to be submitted to the SAEF secretary by 30 September:

[scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com](mailto:scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com)

The winner will be announced at the 2023 Gathering



## THE NORTH WEST PASSAGE ROWING EXPEDITION Update from Tuppence Mellish



Preparations are ramping up now, with only a few weeks until the delivery of the boat to Canada begins. I am going to be a part of this expedition, which will see us using an electric outboard motor, rowing and possibly a small sail

to manoeuvre our boat from Eyemouth to Orkney, then Faroe, then Iceland, then round the coast of Greenland, and eventually across the Davies Strait to Baffin Island. Myself and Leven Brown will be committed to the entirety of the delivery expedition, with other crew mates joining us for individual legs of it.

Our plan is to set off around the 15th May, although this may vary based on weather conditions (and currently I think it looks like we will leave a few days later). I hope that at each of our stops I will be able to provide some photographs and updates. We will be all based up in Pond Inlet, Baffin Island from late June/ early July and are expecting to leave around mid-late July (again weather is a major factor here). Fundraising has been going well and we are hoping to have a few more sponsors on board soon.

Our first sea trials this week involved getting our boat (*Hermione*) into the water and then we wanted to test out our outboard for the delivery expedition, and it was great to see how well it did. We also got rowing practice in, and found that we rowed very well together, despite massive size differences (myself being the smallest at 5ft 4.5 and the tallest being about 6ft 4), meaning our stroke lengths aren't always easy to match but we were able to find a stroke that suited everyone. I will admit to feeling pretty sea sick on the voyage (as did most of the crew), as the boat is long and narrow and has a very particular way of moving in the water that takes a while to get used to. However, I will be taking medication in advance next time, and am convinced it is more of a mental battle whilst my body adapts to its new environment.

Below are pictures of *Hermione's* launch, helped by the extremely wonderful team at Eyemouth Marine.

*Claire (Tuppence) Mellish*

[tuppencemellish@aol.com](mailto:tuppencemellish@aol.com)

Expedition website: [www.nwpxpedition.com](http://www.nwpxpedition.com)



## SVALBARD SMALL WORKS COLLECTION

by Ellis O'Connor

In the February newsletter, Ellis O'Connor, a recipient of a SAEF grant, described her expedition to Svalbard last year. She has now uploaded to her website some of the artworks she created during this trip. She says:

“These are all works created in Svalbard while I was there back in October/November on the Arctic Circle Residency. We sailed around the archipelago and got to land in many incredible places that completely overwhelmed and stunned me into silence.

“It was here on these landings in amongst the ice and rock where I spent time when I could painting and responding to the environment around me. Minus temperatures, frozen paint, water that kept turning into slush in my jar, all challenging conditions but deeply grateful to be able to sit and work in these spots.

“I built up a quite a few small works on board here and wasn't sure what I intended to do with them. I thought it would be good to be able to share them as originals that you can purchase. From the land of ice to you.”

*Her artworks can be viewed on her website:*

[www.ellisoconnor.com](http://www.ellisoconnor.com)

*And her photographs taken on the expedition can be viewed here:*

<https://www.ellisoconnor.com/#/high-arctic-expedition/>



## CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS Collated by Susie Ranford

Susie says:

“A couple of years ago the club discussed climate change and agreed that one thing we could do was to include relevant news/notes in the newsletter. I took an action to look for them & you've probably seen some of the results in the earlier newsletters. I've always found it a bit tricky as I don't want to be all doom and gloom! Anyway, here are this spring's offerings – if you have suggestions of how we can make this more engaging/appropriate, please let me know! “

### Ice sheet melting

The seven worst years for polar ice sheets melting and losing ice have occurred during the past decade, according to recently published research. Satellite surveys have found that the polar ice sheets lost 7,560 billion tonnes of ice between 1992 and 2020. This has

caused a 21mm rise in global sea level, almost two thirds of which has originated from Greenland.

If the ice sheets continue to lose mass at this pace, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that they will contribute between 148 and 272 mm to global mean-sea level by the end of the century.

The UK's Centre for Polar Observation and Monitoring ([CPOM](http://cpom.org.uk)) led the international collaboration, funded by ESA and NASA.

<https://cpom.org.uk/polar-ice-sheet-melting-records-have-toppled-during-the-past-decade/>

### Carbon literacy training

Protect Our Winters UK ([POW UK](http://pow.uk)) is an outdoors climate action charity who help passionate outdoor people protect the people and places we love from climate change – for everyone.

POW UK offer Carbon Literacy Training tailored to outdoors enthusiasts with upcoming dates in May and June. This one-day course teaches the science behind climate change, giving an awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities alongside the ability and motivation to reduce emissions.

Tailored for passionate outdoor people and designed to the Carbon Literacy Standard, developed by the UN-recognised Carbon Literacy Project, you'll be learning the most up-to-date science and be able to tackle those difficult conversations head-on.

<https://www.tickettailor.com/events/protectourwintersuk>

### Influential scientists

Environmental journalist Irene Quaille notes in her latest [ice blog](#) that TIME magazine has included two polar scientists, Britney Schmidt (Cornell University) and Peter Davis (British Antarctic Survey), in its 2023 annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world.

Additionally, fellow journalist David Shukman, who led the BBC's coverage of climate change and other environmental issues for twenty years talks about his career and focus on climate action on [The Adventure Podcast](#).



Melting permafrost, Herschel Island, Canada  
Photo James Fenton, 2022



## THE ARCTIC PLASTIC PROJECT by Dave King

*Editor's note: The following is a long read from Dave, but well worth it. Dave has a real emotional attachment to the Arctic.*



### A changing Arctic

I have been fortunate to spend a lifetime exploring, travelling and living in the Arctic. The Arctic region is my home and central to my spirit. The Arctic is also home to some four million people. These people are spread across continents and countries and are diluted into 14.5 million square km of tundra, ice, forests mountain and ocean environments, they have travelled and lived here for over 20,000 years, living sustainably and in balance with this daunting land and oceanscape, along with all the other diverse species that also call the Arctic their home.

Over several decades of travelling the remoter parts of the Arctic, mostly by dog team, I have had the joy to live with many people indigenous to the Arctic. I have learned from the best dog drivers, kayaked with the best kayak hunters and been taught how to survive unimaginably cold temperatures. I've hunted Caribou on the high Arctic plains in Alaska with Inuit elders who shed tears of thanks when they shoot an animal, and travelled with other elders in tall boreal forests in search of game, places they recall as children being barren tundra before the rising temperatures and rising global temperatures brought the treeline so far North.

Living in the Arctic is many things to many people. To many in the world, this is a barren and hostile place of cold and danger. To others, it's seen as a place of abundant natural resources, empty and there for the taking, regardless of environmental and social cost, all to supply an ever-growing global market for profit, simple as that. But, to those four+ million of us who live here, this is our home, a place that sustains our life, it's a place of winds that travel over icecaps, where, in places, the sun never sets for half a year; when it does, it's dark for the other half, a place of melting heat in summers and 60–70–80 below zero temperatures in winter; a place where Aurora Borealis rages overhead,

the colder air giving a clarity in the night sky that makes you feel you can reach right out into the stars and touch them. There are high mountains here, vast flat plains of tundra, endless forests, glaciers and thousands and thousands of kilometres of the wildest coastlines on the planet. In all this, there are bears, wolves, musk ox, caribou, seals, whales and huge fish stocks in the rivers and oceans, birds by the billion...and even more mosquitoes! These and hundreds of other living species, all sharing this home, all essential to one another for survival, be it the human, the bear or the mosquito. For 20,000 years, this human relationship has existed in harmony in the Arctic, and for millennia before us, the other species have lived in the same slowly evolving balance. Living here is an opportunity to truly feel part of that spectrum of life and its evolution.

So that's all the good stuff. Sadly, the bad news is the Arctic is dying. Sound dramatic? It is. In recent decades, human activity has contributed such negative influence on the Arctic that it is literally melting, faster and faster each year. Discussions I have with Inuit mushers in any part of the Arctic who 20 years ago regularly travelled for months on fjords and sea ice routes used for generations, tell me most of those routes are now only possible by boat. Images I have taken 25 years ago of High North mountain glaciers bear no resemblance to images taken today, in some places, those glaciers no longer even exist. We hear about all this stuff in the media, compelling enough, but to see it first hand, to be witness over a life span of the magnitude of change, is utterly alarming.

Regional indigenous people I meet, tell me of rapidly declining fresh and saltwater fish stocks, and radical changes in migration habits of birds and terrestrial animals, some migrations that no longer even take place. I've seen first hand, polar bear/ grizzly bear hybrids destroying caribou, the DNA mix of those two species creating a frightening hybrid that threatens a



whole ecosystem. We watched these shore-bound polar bears 25 years ago, land-trapped by melting ice, and expressed concern on how this could affect caribou, yet government biologists resisted any suggestion that polar bear/grizzly bear DNA could mix. No problem – despite us seeing this was clearly happening out on the tundra. Eventually a bear climbed into an oil pump

station in NW Alaska and attacked a worker. When it was shot, it had an even mix of polar/grizzly bear DNA. Scientists finally accepted that, 20+ years after regional locals and first hand observation reached the same conclusions.

### Polar garbage

The changes in the climate and the rapidity of how that is changing the Arctic is distressing enough, but the next and even more compelling situation that is devastating Arctic regions is garbage. I grew up in an era where we would at times go “beach combing”, a somewhat benign activity with the attraction of possibly finding something interesting washed up on the shores, perhaps even a bottle with a message in it...a glass one. Then sometime in-between, the tides changed from bringing the odd net, rope, bottle ashore with it, to instead bringing vast amounts of plain waste with it...you name it, if it floated or partly floated, it came ashore on beaches around the globe and beaches in the Arctic with impunity. No longer just a small selection of items, but now tons and tons of every imaginable kind of garbage, in it, wrapped in tons of old fishing gear, whales, birds, fish and up north even bear carcasses, all dead with bellies full of the same garbage. Today, I can fly along endless Arctic beaches that I recall as one time pristine, now thick with this mix of garbage and death and inland, endless kilometres of tundra, riddled with the chewed-up tracks of oil and gas exploration survey vehicles and all the millions of discarded fuel drums needed to sustain it all.



Get closer to the established “research” sites, oil wells, mines that now infect the remote Arctic like a virus, and you can also see the chemicals and pollutants flowing into the oceans and rivers with little restraint, despite all the environmental statements made by regional governments and corporate spin managers.

Today, an increasing amount of ships ply Arctic waters, again, all at cost to Arctic ecology and society. Industry sees global warming and a melting Arctic as an opportunity, not an environmental disaster. Huge container ships now travel in greater numbers in the Arctic, discarding oil and waste as they go and transporting vast volumes of goods, much of which will

find its way back into the Arctic, post-use, as waste. Massive tourist ships now dominate the skylines of tiny communities even at very high latitudes bringing little of value to those places they visit, rather damaging and at high risk to both people and the environment. Military and geopolitical issues become more inflamed as various nations vie for influence and opportunity to exploit.

It's not only on the surface that this environmental destruction is rampant. Drop a hydrophone into almost any Arctic Ocean waters and the resultant audio is not one of expected whale song or the clicks and squeaks of narwhal, orca, echo-locating each other or navigation between breeding regions or in search of fish; no, what you hear is the constant cacophony of ship noise, military explosions and worst of all, an almost constant bombardment of seismic surveys seeking new oil, gas and mineral deposits for future exploitation.

To me, today, to travel in the Arctic feels like being witness to a murder, murder of life itself. It is no longer rare to hear any Inuit, or resident of the high Arctic say “we are being killed by the rest of the world”.

Yes, it's rather “doom and gloom” and a long read, but bear with me please. In the last few years, I've watched with interest, several large-scale scientific expeditions to the Arctic. One in particular dubbed “the largest scientific expedition to the Arctic – ever” according to its own website. A huge, multimillion dollar ship, loaded with a scientific alumni from just about every topic you care to mention, from multiple nations. This ship spent months in the Arctic, at times locked in ice and undertaking a multitude of research. Yet so far as I can find, all it returned with was yet more data simply sustaining what we already knew long ago, or, as several Inuit friends of mine seldom tire to remind me, what they knew what was going on 20 years ago and would happily have told the scientists, had they every thought to ask.

### Local wisdom

The Inuit knew the climate was changing, the ice was melting, the fish and animal stocks declining and that the Ocean was rapidly filling with plastics...the fish had bellyfuls of it and a whole litany of other environmental changes were manifesting in high latitudes. It seems science forgets the people that live in the places they wish to study. This most recent mega scientific expedition, never even stopped in an Inuit harbour, thought to talk to local hunters, local fishermen, to people who live and breathe and rely upon the natural environment, nor does science seem to want to include them into research or attempts to find solutions. Our modern science simply expends more and more

resource validating what we already know and what many have known for a long time.

So, where does this lead, what do I have to do with this, what can Arctic Plastic Project contribute to this mess? At times, the sheer scale of the problems developing in the Arctic are overwhelming. Climate change and global warming are facts and abundant environmental travesties manifest daily and all around the world, the issues come at us in an accelerated volume and pace, from all directions. The media is full of doom and gloom – just as I present here – or misplaced optimism that there are solutions just around the corner – we just need to be patient whilst science discovers those solutions. This optimism is dangerous. It allows many to simply feel that a remote awareness is enough to counter the serious position our planet is in. As long as we re-cycle our garbage, use a little less of this or that, it will all be OK. Yet few, it seems to me, are really – I mean REALLY – aware of the magnitude of the problems we face. Why would they, they do not see it first hand, feel it, breathe it and live or die by it. It's all abstract, someplace else, in a faraway desolate waste land of our planet. Nor are many aware of the rapidity of these changes and the dramatic effects it is having on communities all over the Arctic on a daily basis.

Humanity is experiencing a global disconnect with our natural world. We have moved into an era of technology without precedent. Our foods come from global sources but for the vast majority of people living in the “developed” World, they have no clue how that is produced and at what cost to the overall environment. We now live in an era where people willingly buy a banana, wrapped in plastic. Think about that!

It is my observation that to really, truly understand the seriousness of how fragile and at risk our natural environment has become, it is critical we humans find increased ways to re connect with our natural surroundings, to re-understand and learn what it is to be an organic creature as part of an organic planet, to re-learn how to live with nature, to live with animals and how to live a balanced and sustainable lifestyle. Daily, we are killing the abilities of those who still can kill to sustain, and killing our opportunities to learn from those peoples. We have lost so much already, our hope lies with the small pockets of people who still exist as they did for generations. They, too, are under existential threat but still do have connectivity to the land, the sea, that we have largely lost.

In my Arctic life and home, no ice core sample or scientific study will ever replace the intuitive wisdom of people who lives and breathes this environment. We need to develop a more balanced and healthy understanding from indigenous Arctic residents if we are to develop sustainable solutions. There is a sense of urgency to developing this understanding of wisdom,

applying that and sharing it with a wider audience, particularly the younger and next generations that will inherit this colossal mess.

### Arctic plastic

So to plastics in the Arctic. Plastics here seem to have become the metaphor – a sadly prominent and visible metaphor – for all that is bad in the world and how it has infected the Arctic. Little is more compelling than a dead sea mammal on a shore full of and wrapped in a variety of plastic garbage. In the past this was a rare sight, now it is a regular one.

The volumes of plastic waste daily flowing into the Arctic Ocean are staggering and growing at an equally staggering rate. In 2017, Arctic Plastic Project removed 5 tons of waste from one single Arctic Circle beach. A survey of that same location 2 weeks ago suggested there is now upwards of 3x that volume there now. I could write as many words as I have above about plastic garbage volumes and what it's doing to the Arctic and not even come close to explaining the severity of the issue here now. Just Google “plastic in the Arctic” and that will lead you on an extended odyssey of reports, articles and papers on the plastic invasion of the Arctic, how it's in the fish the birds, the glaciers, the deep sediments, in the invertebrates – in the whole food chain and in us. Read all this and it is understandable how the whole situation is so damn overwhelming that no amount of remedial action will redress the balance in favour of the environment. I sense this in more and more people today, a feeling of helplessness in the face of overwhelming odds with little tangible solution.

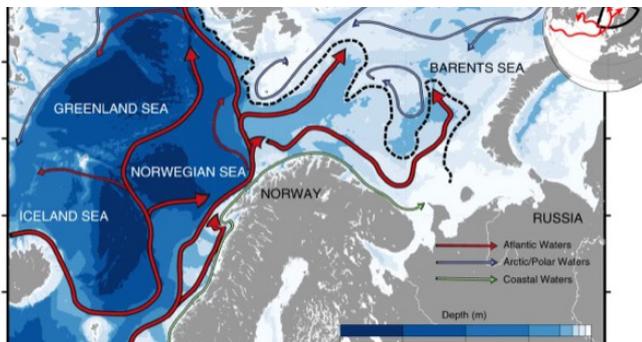
I felt this back in 2016-17 when guiding kayaking trips in Alaska and Norway: here we would be in these awesome places, some of the most dramatic scenery on Earth, yet we would land on beaches festooned with garbage. It was striking how people can block out the existence of that garbage, focus on the scenery, focus on the high mountain glaciers or the distant bear digging for clams, but ignore the ketchup bottles, nets, ropes and bags littering our landing spots. When I implemented a policy that we would all stuff at least one hatch with garbage at each stop, people looked at me as if I was nuts. What possible difference could taking a few dozen plastic bottles off a beach that had thousands littering it? My sentiment that it's at least “a few dozen less than when we arrived” seemed to fall on deaf ears, that is, until they did arrive back in camp with garbage, became part of how to further responsibly dispose of what they had collected, and when the evening round the campfire discussion became increasingly about the garbage surrounding us in such awesome places. How did it get here, why, where from, what does it do here, how do we stop it, clean it – the

whole conversation. In following days once this switch is thrown, paddlers would almost make garbage collection the reason for the day's paddle, all the rest, the whales, the scenery – all of it – just became “cherry on top”. Most compelling to me in being witness to this metamorphosis was the deep effect it had on people where the simple act of gathering some garbage somehow re-connected them with the natural environment they now are caring for, seeking to make better. So simple, so small, yet seemingly with immeasurable potential.

## The Arctic Plastic Project

This realisation really was the spark to find ways to expand this opportunity for people as much as actually contributing in a positive way to a cleaner Arctic, a cleaner home for all of us here. We cannot think about the volume, to dwell on that is to risk complete impotency, but rather to think on a small, almost individual basis and what the positive action of removing volumes of waste in individual amounts has on that individual and how that can spread in a positive manner, way beyond the beaches we clean.

With this in mind, the Arctic Plastic Project was formed in my mind, formed in the collection of kayaks, a couple of sailboats and skiff and whoever would sign up for a camping trip, some sailing, paddling and a load of



damn hard and dirty work on our targeted clean up areas. As much human therapy as clean-ups.

We gained great traction with this initiative, right up to the arrival of Covid 19 and the catastrophic chaos that caused to so many. The one thing that did not change however, was the steady flow of garbage into the Arctic, now with added items such as surgical masks by the million floating up on beaches here.

For me, the Covid hiatus was a time for reflection. We were fortunate living in our Northern bubble, with minimal disruption, no lock downs. We could still paddle from our doorstep and run our dog teams once winter arrived. Access to the sea was shut through a complete closure of Norway where our boats lay. The garbage continued, we remained landlocked. The Arctic Plastic Project lost all gained traction, incurred debt on marine fees for vessel we could not use. What a mess! But,

then as so often, positive can rise from negative. Time to re-evaluate, to think about priorities and goals. So now as we head into 2023, those priorities and goals are clear. For me the priority is to get the Arctic Plastic Project back on track, active once more and will become the number one objective in how I apply my non-winter season time and efforts.

The goals are to develop Arctic Plastic Project into an Arctic-wide initiative that can connect regional peoples with others in a positive and educational way, ways we can combine cultures and interests in actual physical projects that contribute to a cleaner Arctic environment. Yes, it's still about cleaning beaches and fjords where we can and need to, but we also want to build greater value into those efforts also, be that political, social, educational or simply as stated above, therapeutic for everyone involved. The Arctic is bigger than all of us in so many ways, we should not fight it, resist it, damage it – we should be part of it. I really hope that the Arctic Plastic Project (APP) can be a component in encouraging that union.

Right now our APP projects are somewhat straightforward for 2023. This is a season of rebuilding, re-visiting our past projects, assessing how much has changed since we first started and how to grow into the future, developing a new team, new volunteers and re-establishing connections with scientific bodies we love to fence with!

Arctic Plastic Project 2023 is targeting a somewhat local problem, but a huge one at that, in an area spanning the Arctic Circle, one we know well and have operated in in that past. With a strong and close inshore gulf stream, together with Westerly airflows, this specific region receives absolutely staggering volumes of garbage on a constant marine conveyor belt, much of it washing into fjords, beaches and onto islands in deep concentrations. These island chains are also critical habitat for many, many species of aquatic and terrestrial animals, many rare. A problem that become increasingly concerning is a rapidly rising toxicity of fresh water sources that these species rely upon. This toxicity caused by steady build-up of plastic waste, some decades old and leaching multiple polymers and chemicals into the water and sub-surface sediments. There are literally hundreds of islands in each of these Arctic Circle archipelagos, each supporting a diverse



community of creatures, all who rely upon clean, fresh water.

The ponds that are polluted must number in the thousands, some small, some like small lakes. The islands are low and rugged, most of the waste in the island ponds are dumped there either by extreme high tides or most usually by the extreme winter storm winds that ravage these exposed areas. There is everything from bottles, bags, lawn chairs, ropes, nets pontoons and even in a lot of them, containers that can contain everything from sea water to oil to whatever – we never know. What we do know is it's all toxic. In most places the plastic waste is everything to decades old to recent, we also know there is tons and tons of it, all decomposing. In some smaller ponds we have surveyed, the surface is a toxic soup of semi-decayed microplastics and chemicals. The toxicity levels, variations, degrees of toxic waste in sediments, effects on aquatic plants in these ponds is largely unknown, hardly any study has been done on this; but that said, how much do we need to know? We do know they are rapidly filling with more and more garbage.

The Arctic Plastic project feels this is an urgent project and one we can contribute to with our current limited resources and volunteer base. There are currently dozens of good initiatives operating in the same regions gathering shore-bound garbage, but it's still not enough and few are willing to tackle the pond pollution on the islands. With understandable reason, the islands are rugged and the physical challenges of getting waste from the ponds, once one has removed it to the shorelines for collection, can be monumentally challenging. It's also a particularly filthy challenge and who would not want to be waist deep in chemical sludge dragging random waste from the water? We also have to assess how much damage we can inflict in such operations. These are sensitive nesting areas and questions abound such as can we risk creating toxic concentrations by stirring up decades-long sedimentary accumulations by trying to remove subsurface items as well as surface garbage?



## Plans for 2023

Right now, the operational plan is to make initial surveys of areas considered most in need of attention and clean-up ops in July, followed by actual clean-up operations post-breeding seasons in August, September and as long into October as weather and resources hold.

The clean-ups will be regionally based on land, base camps set up in some truly wonderful locations and we will transport daily to individual clean-up targets by RIB or by optional kayak. We are looking for volunteers who can join for the entire project period or for 10-day blocks or more within it. We hope to have a full time co-ordination team in place by early June, a slightly larger full time team in the field by end July and be receptive to more volunteers from then onwards. We set up the base camps, are responsible for all transportation from pick up points to operational areas, transport and safety gear whilst part of the project. The projects are demanding, both physically and mentally so we try to balance this with plenty of opportunity to enjoy the wonderful place we are in, to kayak, hike, climb, swim or simply absorb the place, the birds and all the other creatures here.

Each day's project block will attempt to tackle an area of pre surveyed islands, cleaning and collecting what we can in as many fresh water sources as possible. Bagging that waste, hauling it to central shore collection points. At the end of each project block, we arrange collection of these hauls, either with our own vessel or various regional commercial vessels we contract to collect and transport to mainland collection points for further disposal. It's a labour-intensive process but one we feel can make an enormously positive impact on critical habitats.

Ideally we would also like to document efforts for educational purposes, undertake water and sediment samplings as we go and seek volunteers who can assist with that also.

Finally, as with all these things, funding is what makes or breaks what any organisation can do. The Arctic Plastic project is in a process to create a non-profit organisation, complicated when it's a Brit running it, living in Sweden, running ops in various other nations! However we feel this is essential to secure future funding and this is a priority.

Currently, we have just launched a fund raiser to support 2023 and the final payment on a large ex-Swedish Coastguard RIB that will be the central support and safety vessel for this year's projects. Particularly in the area we will operate this year, sailboats are not an option due to the large area the islands cover and shallow waters between them. We may use one of the sail boats we have access to for support or accommodation in some areas, but the RIB, a smaller

outboard vessel and our kayak fleet will be the primary means of access and operation for 2023. We currently need to raise just under 30k Euro to pay for the RIB, buy fuel and other resources for this season's projects. Please visit the fundraiser, please share it, anything! Every little bit helps and above all please, if you can, consider joining the Arctic Plastic Project in our efforts!

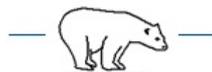
You can visit the new website for info, visit us on social media on Instagram or Facebook and hopefully shortly sign up for a regular news letter about our efforts and all things Arctic "Ultimate Polar" (also on FaceBook).

Thanks for reading and sending greetings to all SAC members and families from a still very white and wintery Lapland!

Dave King  
Arctic Plastic Project

[www.arcticplasticproject.org](http://www.arcticplasticproject.org)

Fundraising:  
<https://gofund.me/eb200499>



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