



# SCOTTISH ARCTIC CLUB

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



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### **Forthcoming events, details inside**

#### **ANNUAL GATHERING & SUPPER**

7 November 2026

Nethybridge Hotel

#### **SUMMER SOLSTICE BBQ**

20-21 June

Farletter, Kincaig

#### **NEXT NEWSLETTER**

Articles sought:

**Members' expedition reports old & new  
Items of Arctic interest, etc.**

**Deadline 30 April 2026**

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President: Anthony Walker Vice President: vacant  
Secretary: Jinty Smart Treasurer: Mandy Peden  
Membership Secretary: Jane Craxton Gathering Secretary: Bethany Carol  
Other Committee Members: Mike Bauermeister, Hannah Mortlock,  
Henry Lodge, Anne Bartle, Tuppence Mellish (co-opted)

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.

[www.arcticclub.scot](http://www.arcticclub.scot)

#### **Contacts:**

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

Newsletter editor: James Fenton

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

## ANNUAL GATHERING & SUPPER

1-2 November 2025

Ben Nevis Hotel, Fort William

### THE GATHERING

Susie Ranford

An advance party of SAC members arrived at the Ben Nevis Hotel in Fort William on Halloween to enjoy a sociable dinner and drinks.

#### Expedition presentations

With the rain pouring down outside, SAC members were happy to be indoors imagining sunnier, colder climes!

By 2pm on Saturday 1st November, all members had gathered for an entertaining and informative programme of talks. First up were our Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund award winners, ably kicked off by Clare Ballantyne describing her snowshoe trek with friends in Arctic Sweden.

Daniel King kept us in Scandinavia, speaking thoughtfully about his experiences meeting and travelling with young people from all over the polar north as part of the Arctic Council's Arctic Youth Expedition.

Stirling University climbers Dylan Coker, Megan Cumming, Benjamin Toole and Rosie Aldridge spoke about their climbing trip to East Greenland. They found difficult travelling ground and a mix of sound and frost shattered rock which had many audience members empathising hard and reliving their own trips to the same part of Greenland. Despite the challenges, the team put up lots of new routes and collected samples for a nanoplastics study.



St Andrews geologist Andrew Edginton shared his experiences mapping igneous rocks in South Greenland, where retreating glaciers are exposing new rock and creating opportunities for exploration geologists.

The grant awardees talks were complemented by member Bryan Alexander's photographic comparison of life in Ittoqqortoormiit (formerly Scoresbysund) in East Greenland in 1974 and his return visit in 2024. Although the main landmarks of the town, such as the church, remain, ubiquitous sled dogs have been largely replaced by snow scooters. Hunting practices have changed too, with Bryan's photo-journalism in 1974 contributing to the banning of indiscriminate snare gun traps. Outgoing President Noel Williams introduced us to Henry Chichester Hart, a botanist and member of the British

Arctic Expedition of 1875–1876 to the West coast of Greenland. The team successfully set a new furthest north record, albeit still far from the pole that they had aspired to reach. Hart also climbed on Skye, where he identified the only native British population of Alpine Rock-cress *Arabis alpina* high in the Cuillin, a plant which he had seen on his Arctic travels.

Invited speaker Martin Rickard recalled a kayak journey along East Greenland's infamous Blossville Coast. He set off with two friends from Ittoqqortoormiit with 65 days food intending to kayak 800 miles south to Tasiilaq. Martin's huge experience of kayaking on Greenland's East coast shone through and teaser anecdotes of his 'obsession' with Gino Watkins means pressure will be applied for him to return to tell more stories soon!

Former SAEF award winner Mark Agnew sent a video, which unfortunately was not shown due to technical difficulties.

#### Dinner

The AGM was after the presentations followed by the dinner in the evening.

Past President Stella conducted our usual SAEF fund-raising raffle, with numerous prizes ranging from whisky to a grooming kit and as usual, a fascinating selection of books.

A leisurely and chatty Sunday breakfast culminated in spreading out photos of the club's Greenland map, sadly misplaced after a previous Gathering. Luckily, former Secretary Iain had the foresight to take photos of all the signatures and dates documenting members' trips and Supper attendance before the map was lost.

Commitment has been made to recreate the map and reinstate the tradition of spreading the map out on the floor at the Gathering. It was always a focal point and sparked off many reminiscences as well as future expedition plans!



#### AGM MINUTES (Extracts)

The full minutes and reports are on the SAC website

#### President's Annual Report

The President gave an overview of the club activities over the last year starting with the excellent presentations from both the 2024 SAEF recipients, as well as other club members at last year's Gathering. The guest speaker was club member, Master Maiwenn Beadle, who gave an entertaining account of her highs and lows as a superyacht skipper navigating through the sea ice of the North West Passage.

This year saw excellent weather for the Attadale Meet and eleven members enjoyed local walks with visits to the Gardens and sorties to Applecross and Torridon. Regrettably Kathleen Cartwright has decided that this is the last such meet she will organise. We offer Kathleen a

huge thanks for organising this very successful meet for fifteen years.

Unfortunately the Summer Solstice Meet had to be cancelled in June because Myrtle Simpson was 'a bit under the weather'.

The Committee are looking into ensuring that these two meets continue in some way, shape or form next year.

He also noted with sadness the deaths of seven long standing club members, John Hay, Sheila McCulloch, Robin Lloyd-Jones, Pat Sellar, Douglas Peacock, Stephen Thomas and Colin Whimster.

He mentioned the donation of 14 beautifully annotated photo albums donated to the SAC by long time member Ray Woolmore, which record his journeys to the Arctic between 1991 and 2008. Thanks to Jane Craxton and Tuppence Mellish for organising the pickup and delivery of them.

He finished by thanking all the office bearers of the club his thanks for their help and support during his time as President and welcomed Anthony Walker as the incoming President. He noted the position of vice president was still vacant and nominations would be welcome.

### Membership Report

Membership stands at 160 but is slowly declining. This year we have lost some of our oldest and most distinguished members. New members come mostly through word of mouth, therefore anything anyone can do to attract new ones, especially younger people, is useful.

Ray Woolmore's photos (14 albums) are on view. Ray hopes they will inspire and inform SAC members. Thanks to Tuppence Mellish for bringing them from Cheltenham to me in Edinburgh. Jinty and I will make contact with the University of Dundee to arrange their deposit in the Society's archives. Ray has kept his final album which he wishes to be passed to SAC after his death. Many thanks to Ray for his generosity.

### Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported that the club finances were healthy, raising membership fees had paid off. The total income for the year was £5,826 with total expenditure £4,730.18. The bank balance now sits at £4,991.87. This is split between two accounts, a current and a savings account.

### Election of new Committee members

Noel Williams has completed his term as President, with Anthony Walker taking over.

Mike Bauermeister's term as a committee member has come to an end but he has agreed to stay on for a further three years.

As yet there is no Vice President, nominations welcome!

### Spring Meet

The 15<sup>th</sup> Spring Meet at Attadale took place in late April with 15 members present. Activities included garden visits and walks to Applecross and Torridon. It was a great success, especially as the weather was superb.

Kathleen let us know that she is now stepping down from organising the Spring Meet and would welcome anyone who would like to take it on.

Noel gave a great vote of thanks to Kathleen for all her hard work.

### Summer Solstice Meet

The Summer Solstice Meet did not take place this year as Myrtle was "under the weather" in June and an alternative weekend this summer was not found. Stella Spratley and Susie Ranford have stepped forward to ensure this annual event will carry on.



### Annual Gathering and Supper 2026

The Gathering will be on Saturday 7th November at the Nethybridge Hotel (details below).

A suggestion was made that it might be an idea to look for a hotel closer to the central belt for 2027 as it might be easier to attract younger members if it wasn't too far for them to travel. This will be investigated, any suggestions for location welcome.

### Ray Woolmore's Photographic Collection

Long time member, Ray Woolmore who participated in many expeditions to the High Arctic, particularly North-East Greenland, between 1991 and 2008 has donated 14 of his photograph albums to the club. No longer in the best of health, Ray hopes that they will benefit and inspire future expeditions. There is one more album to come to the club, after he has died. The albums will be on show at the Gathering.

Both Jane Craxton and Tuppence Mellish were thanked for organising the collection and hand over. The membership secretary will get in touch with the Archives at Dundee University to organise storage there [see below].

### Siggi's Cards

Siggi has donated cards to be sold at the Supper in aid of the expedition fund.

Siggi is a very good painter of watercolours and has done some lovely ones of places in northeast Greenland. Years ago he had three of his paintings printed and made into cards with envelopes, etc. He has packaged them in packs of 5 of the same subject. There are 182 packs. They are for sale at £4 a pack, or three packs for £10. All proceeds to go to the SAEF.

Meeting finished at around 6 pm with a vote of thanks to Noel Williams for all his hard work as Club President over the last three years.

*Jinty Smart (Secretary), 6th November 2025*

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## SUMMER SOLSTICE MEET 2026

This year's meet will take place 20/21 June at Farletter, Kincaig, hosted by Myrtle Simpson and her son Robin. There will be the usual BBQ and fire on the Saturday evening.

There is space available for camping and campervans. Other activities will be confirmed nearer the time, with suggestions and musical instruments welcome.

Please contact Stella if you'd like to join us:  
[spratley42@hotmail.com](mailto:spratley42@hotmail.com)



## 2026 GATHERING AND SUPPER 7 November

The Nethybridge Hotel has been booked for 2026. The Gathering will be on Saturday 7th November. Costs are £60pp for D,B&B for twin/double and £80 D.B&B for single. The meal cost for non residents is £32.25

Contact details:

Nethybridge Hotel, Main St, Nethy Bridge PH25 3DP

Phone 01479 821203

Email [salesnethybridge@strathmorehotels.com](mailto:salesnethybridge@strathmorehotels.com)



## LOUISE HOLLINRAKE

*Jinty Smart*

It is with sadness I am getting in touch to let you know that long time club member Louise Hollinrake died on January 8th 2026. Her funeral was held among friends in Shapinsay, Orkney, where she lived, on January 30th.

Louise was a strong supporter of the club, she had just finished her term as a Committee member and currently was on the SAEF committee where she was greatly missed at our recent meeting. Those of you who have the Scottish Arctic Club 50th Anniversary Journal can re-read her fascinating account of her winter spent north of Dawson City in 1980 where she assisted Rick Atkinson take care of, and run, two teams of huskies, keeping them in prime condition for entry in the Iditarod. The experience fired her love of the Arctic.



## FUTURE SPRING MEETS?

*Jinty Smart*

There is no Spring Meet this year but its future was discussed at a recent Zoom committee meeting.

Kathleen Cartwright who has organised the popular Attadale event for the last 15 years has retired from the role and invitations for someone else to take it on have proved fruitless. So it was decided that this might be an opportunity to start afresh and try a different approach. We are always keen to encourage the younger members of the club to become more involved and we thought perhaps we could use the Spring meet to do this. Maybe change it to just a weekend, camping, bunkhouses or bothies with outdoor activities involved. It would give the younger members a chance to get to know each other and perhaps plan future Arctic adventures together!

Henry Lodge, one of the younger committee members was volunteered into canvassing the opinions of whether this might be viable. He is going to do this using the SAEF WhatsApp group that has been set up for previous participants. We thought young might be defined as anyone 35 or younger but not cast in stone! So if you fit this category and are not part of the WhatsApp group please do get in touch [scottisharcticclub@gmail.com](mailto:scottisharcticclub@gmail.com) and we can include you in the group. You don't have to be a SAEF recipient, just young!



## SAC LIBRARY at the Royal Scottish Geographical Society

*Jane Craxton*

Jinty and I visited the Royal Scottish Geographical Society at John Murray House in Perth on 27 January. We wanted to find out more about the library of polar books deposited there by early members of the Scottish Arctic Club. We were warmly welcomed by Chief



Executive, Mike Robinson and the Collections Committee Chair, Margaret Wilkes. With 2,500 members, plus a network of international links and supporters, the main focus of the RSGS is on its programme of activities in education and its potential to influence policy development at national level.

It has a fairly large collection of books and artefacts at John Murray House, and the Polar material is housed in the Shackleton Room. The main components of the Polar material are the libraries of George and Irene Waterston and Angus Erskine. Access is by appointment and open to members of the Scottish Arctic Club.

However, now so much is available online, there are relatively few visits in person. John Murrery House is well worth a visit in its own right with many historical artefacts, maps and pictures.

There is a Memorandum of Understanding which was drawn up between the RSGS and SAC in March 2009. It was signed by Kathleen Cartwright and Peter Mackay for SAC and J M Wilkes and one other (illegible) for RSGS. The catalogue of the collection on the Library section of the SAC web site covers the bulk of the collection but is not up to date. Any further queries should be directed to the RSGS.



## RAY WOOLMORE'S PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS

*Jane Craxton*



At the Gathering in Fort William, members had the chance to see the fourteen photograph albums donated by Ray Woolmore. Chronicling his journeys to North-East Greenland from 1991 to 2008, they were much enjoyed and appreciated, especially by those, who like Kathleen and Neville Cartwright, had participated in the same expeditions. Jinty Smart and I subsequently contacted Caroline Brown, the University Archivist of Dundee University, to arrange their permanent home. Dundee already has a strong collection of Arctic material which includes Scottish Arctic Club papers.



On 14 January, with a sigh of relief that the bad weather had relented, I loaded the albums into my car and set off from Edinburgh for Dundee. Jinty and I were warmly welcomed to the Archives by Caroline Brown and her colleague, Sharon Kelly. Both were enthusiastic about Ray's collection and convinced it would provide inspiration and information to their students

and visitors, just as Ray wished. Informed of this outcome, Ray was delighted.

Jinty and I also spent some time skimming through the earlier material on the Scottish Arctic Club which included a fascinating (if somewhat scruffy!) scrapbook

compiled by one of SAC's founders, George Waterston. Jinty's father, Iain Smart, another founder member, also featured strongly. The University Archives are open to all. More information is available on the University website, <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/archives>



## ARCTIC PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

*Bryan Alexander*

There have been several times since the Gathering last November when I have wanted to be back in the Arctic! We had the director and curator of the Arctic museum in Maine with us for almost a week as they went through and packed our photos, diaries, carvings & artifacts. By the end they had packed some 800 kg which are now in Glasgow waiting to be flown to Boston. I have experienced a sense of loss, but on the plus side it's good to know it will be all be looked after & preserved.

I have written this summary for a photo library trade magazine:

'Arcticphoto', Bryan & Cherry Alexander's photo archive which specialises in the indigenous peoples of the Arctic is leaving the Scottish Highlands for a new home at the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum & Center for Arctic Studies at Bowdoin College in Maine (USA). This unique collection of over 15,000 photographs is the result of the 76 trips that Bryan has made to the Arctic during the past 54 years. It focusses on traditional life in indigenous communities right around the circumpolar polar north during a period of great change. Its move to Maine ensures that this remarkable collection of photographs will be preserved for future generations.



## POLAR MEDAL AWARD FOR CRAIG MATHIESON

*Jane Craxton*

Craig Mathieson is one of Scotland's most distinguished Arctic Explorers and, as the founder of the Polar Academy, has done extraordinary work in encouraging potential in disadvantaged young people through experience in the Arctic.

It is splendid to see his work and achievements recognised with the award of the prestigious Polar Medal this January. His quoted response to the award was absolutely in character:

"This is truly a huge honour and one I've dreamt about since a small boy. However, my thoughts this morning are with the young people of The Polar Academy. It is their courage, their resilience, and their determination that inspire me every day. The journeys we undertake together across ice, through hardship, and ultimately toward self-belief are what give my work purpose. This

medal may bear my name, but its spirit belongs to every young person who has found their voice in the Arctic and brought that strength home to Scotland”.



The SAC is proud to have once again five recipients of the Polar Medal as members after the death of Duggie Peacock (awarded 1954) last year. The others are:

Stephen Andrews	2024
Dougal Goodman	1997
Phil Gribbon	2014
Myrtle Simpson	2017



### SHEILA McCULLOCH CENTENARY

Jane Craxton found the following article in *Edinburgh Live* about SAC member Sheila McCulloch who died in August 2025, and who donated the carved Inuit figures for auction at the 2024 dinner.

"An Edinburgh woman has marked her centenary as she celebrates a life filled with adventure. Former nurse, Sheila McCulloch, turned 100 on Friday June 27 as she was surrounded by friends and family. Born in Ayrshire in 1925, Sheila worked in both Perth and Edinburgh as well as having a stint in the Arctic.

She described forming lifelong friendships and memories with indigenous communities in the Arctic Circle. Sheila described growing up alongside her sister Helen, with those close to her describing her as a 'resilient spirit.' Her professional path also led her to Queen Margaret College, where she forged lifelong friendships with colleagues Ann and David, whom she said she still holds dear.

The 100-year-old is still an active member of the Church or Scotland and she kept active throughout her life by thwacking at Ravelston Golf Club. Her love for learning and nature is said to shine through in her enthusiasm for



David Attenborough’s wildlife programmes, which she still enjoys watching.

Sheila’s close relationships with her cousins’ children – Gordon, Susan, and Elspeth – remain a cornerstone of her life, as well as fond memories of lunches with her nursing friend Elaine at Lauriston Farm. When asked what her secret to a long life, Sheila McCulloch stated: "Well I don’t know but I feel like a hundred now!"

Fiona Truesdale, HC-One Scotland’s Murrayfield House Care Home Manager, said: “Sheila’s radiant spirit and incredible stories inspire us all. Her 100th birthday is a momentous occasion at HC-One Scotland’s Murrayfield House, and we’re thrilled to celebrate her extraordinary life with her friends, family, and our community.”

## SCOTTISH ARCTIC EXPEDITION FUND UPDATE

### Report for 2025

The AGM of the Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund (SAEF) took place before The Gathering at Fort William on 2 November.

Five ‘expeditions’ were funded this year; three trips in winter and two in summer. Three were able to give presentations at the Gathering in person, and one sent a YouTube link as he could not be present – a new baby arrived on the very day of the Gathering! Congratulations to the Agnew family.

Stella Spratley, an ex-officio trustee, stood down at the end of her tenure, and Noel Williams joined the board as an ex-officio trustee (past president). A big thank you to Stella for all her years on both the SAC and SAEF committees!

Trustee Dougal Ranford has volunteered to take over as treasurer from Sue Fenton at the end of her two consecutive terms of five years in November 2026. Susie Ranford will then join the board and take over Sue’s role of secretary, including posting on social media.

John Peden will (re)join the board at the 2026 AGM.

Many thanks to all the members of the SAC for all their fundraising and donations which enable this sponsorship to be possible each year. Donations are welcomed at any time of the year!

### Money raised

The following was raised for the SAEF at the 2025 Gathering:

- Raffle: £242
- Guess the Whisky: £108
- Sale of Bryan’s cards: £80
- Sale of Siggie’s cards: £225
- Total: £655**

## Grants 2026

The 2026 round of funding attracted a bumper crop of 12 applications. The Committee met on 5 February and, after much deliberation, the trustees agreed to award grants to the following expeditions:

<b>Emma Cameron</b>	Science Leader, Polar Academy expedition to Greenland
<b>Fraser Melville</b>	Winter skills course, Norway
<b>Kyle Ramstedt-Sinclair</b>	Architecture adaptations in Longyearbyen, Svalbard
<b>Katherine Low</b>	Filming in Siberia: Indigenous Sakha communities
<b>Joe Jennings</b>	Geological mapping in SW Greenland
<b>Megan Loftus*</b>	Sailing to S Greenland then climbing

\* Megan has been awarded the Myrtle & Hugh Simpson award for adventurous, self-led expeditions.

Congratulations to all recipients, and we look forward to hearing about your ventures north at the Gathering in November!

### Trustee news

John Peden will (re-) join the board at the AGM. He was instrumental in setting up the SAEF as a charity with Iain Allison in 2016, and drafting the Constitution.

We were very sad to learn of the death of Louise Hollinrake, a trustee of the SAEF for several years.

*Sue Fenton, Secretary/Treasurer | Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund | Scottish Charity SC046857*

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## AN EXPEDITION TO NORTH WEST GREENLAND IN 1983

*Kate Lea*

*Since Greenland is so much in the news I thought a trip in 1983 via what was Thule air base might be timely. Some of the photos not too good as they were photos of photos!*

Mike and I went to Qaanaaq in North West Greenland for the first time in July 1983 because the previous year we had noticed that there was actually an SAS flight to Thule listed on the departures board at Copenhagen airport. Since North West Greenland was then almost totally off the 'tourist' map and it involved going through the American military base at Thule, we checked with both the American and Danish Embassy's to see if there were any restrictions, and then set off arming ourselves with official permissions!



Thule Air Base

However, when we arrived at Thule Air base (now called Pituffik Space Base), an officious Danish administrator told us Qaanaaq was totally out of bounds, the Inuit there were starving, and he attempted to put us on the plane back to Copenhagen! Of course he failed, but

covered himself by asking Kaj Soby, a Danish schoolteacher in Qaanaaq to keep an eye on us!

Before we got the helicopter flight to the settlement 60 miles away at Qaanaaq we were allowed to have a meal at the American base canteen – steaks and strawberries were evidently flown in almost daily from New York so no signs of starvation here. Apparently too, very few Americans had ever visited the settlement, even those who had been many years in Greenland, A few Greenlanders did work at the base and some years later we met and then stayed with Sisu, alias Robert Peary II, who had worked there.

The Americans obviously had a very different experience of Greenland – playing golf on Dundas mountain, phoning for a 'taxi' to get between buildings on the base, and booking a table for a gourmet meal at the 'top of the world club'. We were able to experience this in 1989 when we got stuck at the base due to bad weather. In contrast, Qaanaaq and the other smaller settlements in the region still relied to some extent on traditional skills - hunting and trapping for food, skins and fur, and carving bone and ivory in the winter months.

### Qaanaaq

When we arrived at the settlement the pack ice had only just begun to break up and the annual supply ship was not expected until the end of July/beginning of August so the small supermarket was low on foodstuffs – plenty of tins but no fresh food and the small stock of frozen food had rather old sell by dates. When the supply ship eventually arrived almost the first consignment ferried ashore was Carlsberg! However, the local inuit council had fairly strict alcohol laws so there was far less drunkenness and broken glass here than in many of the settlements along the west coast.



Kaj and his Inuit wife Arnaq were very welcoming and became good friends over the years. They helped us to find a suitable place to camp, advised us on any do's and don'ts and helped us negotiate with Greenlanders to take and drop us at various points so we could walk and make sound recordings of birds. They also let us have the occasional shower after weeks away from the settlement!

While in Qaanaaq we were able to attend a wedding and confirmation, and a birthday party where we sampled kiviaq (fermented little auks) but most of our time we backpacked round the area watching and recording birds and wildlife.



Unloading the local supply ship

### Siorapaluk

One day we hitched a lift with some Danish surveyors to go to Siorapaluk to see the vast little auk colonies. They were recording and numbering every house and hut in the settlements, This turned out to become one of our most memorable experiences as we were welcomed and invited into their homes by two of the old hunters – Sakeunnguaq who was a great friend of Jean Malaurie, and Inuterrssuaq the best hunter in the settlement and northern deputy of the Thule District Council of Hunters, who had worked for



A wedding

a time with Peter Freuchen at Knud Rasmussens store at North Star Bay. Both hunters are often mentioned in 'The Last Kings of Thule'.



Sakeunnguaq gave me this polar bear head necklace and then he and his family took us a short distance from the settlement to show us how they used nets to catch the little auks.

We then went to Inuterrssuaqs house and had a long 'chat' backed up by diagrams he scribbled in our notebook about the expeditions that had taken place in the past from Siorapaluk.

Communication was obviously a little difficult as we had no Greenlandic and minimal Danish and French and he had no English but we managed to get some of the gist! His wife then prepared a meal for us of little auks.



Catching little auks

### Qeqertat

A few days later we had a short visit to Qeqertat, a small settlement of 11 houses. Perched on the rocks were several Greenlanders with binoculars watching for their first sight of narwhal as the local community here relied heavily on hunting for narwhal, seals, and walrus. We were invited into one of their houses for tea and learned that the settlement had to rely on streams for their water supply.

Eventually we had to return to the UK but we took with us lasting memories of the wealth of hospitality and experiences we had gained with the Greenlanders.

We went again to the North West in 1985 and 1989 but that's another story!



Inuterrssuaq and his wife



## JOHN HAY: AN APPRECIATION OF HIS LIFE

Born: 25/02/1938

Died: 18/08/2025

*Kathleen Cartwright and Bill McKerrow*

John was born and brought up in Aberdeen, studied Law at the University and subsequently practised as a lawyer in Aberdeen. He had a good and full life with many interests mostly connected with the outdoors.

In his early days he acquired near legendary status as a climber, mainly in the Cairngorms, which he had frequented, often on his own, since the age of around twelve years. His contemporaries, all considerably older than him, included the already celebrated Tom Patey and Bill Brooker among other Aberdeen climbers. In their company John pioneered many hard rock climbs, some achieved climbing solo. Probably John's most celebrated climbing route was the very severe Djibangi in Coire Etchachan in 1956. This enigmatically named route is still highly regarded as a Cairngorm classic.

He became the youngest person to become a member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club at the age of

eighteen, something quite unheard of in the days when the club was a bastion of tradition with a membership largely comprising the great and the good of Scottish climbing. A look at his application form confirms that his successful application was anything but a "shoe in" on the back of his father's membership. His proposer was Tom Patey and seconders were celebrated names in Scottish Mountaineering – Len Lovat, Tom Weir, WH Murray, Archie McAlpine and Bill MacKenzie. John's application form to join the Club lists over 20 new routes pioneered by him as well as many other days in the mountains. Although his passion for the hills lasted his whole lifetime, his rock climbing career gradually came to an end after his marriage to Elizabeth in 1964 and the arrival of his family.

He also owned an estate on the southside of Loch Mullardoch where, with enormous physical effort, he constructed alone, no fewer than four bothies, moving all the materials and furnishings on his back from the trackless lochside. The highest was located at a height of over 2,000 feet. It was perhaps good training for dragging stags off the hill since he did not use any mechanisation on the ground. Over the years he acquired properties in various locations around the country including Braemar, Aberdeenshire, Speyside, Gairloch and Torridon and in later life developed a great affinity with Caithness. He welcomed many friends and acquaintances to his properties where they enjoyed his legendary hospitality. He had an intimate knowledge of most of the north, northeast and northwest of Scotland which he read about exhaustively and explored in detail.

Although John's mobility and physical strength inevitably declined as he got older he never tired of spending time in wild country, latterly, aided by the use of sticks acquired from the orthopaedic department after his hip surgery. These were not just for moral support but





encounter with a Polar Bear that leisurely walked round our camp one breakfast time!

However over the years John's main companion in Greenland was his great friend Iain Smart, father of Jinty. They had many adventures, covered huge distances on foot and ski and were indefatigable. It was also Iain who encouraged John to draw and paint. A skill and pastime which helped him very much in later in life when he suffered greatly from backpain and could not cover the distances he had previously achieved. When he rested he would sit on a rock and sketch and paint the scenery around him.

enabled him to continue his adventures in rough country including deer stalking. From a distance John would blend into the hillside perfectly where the combination of his old jumpers (a legacy from the days when folk went to the hills in their oldest clothes) and his four legged stance increased the impression of a man at one with his surroundings.

John became more and more fascinated by the High Arctic and loved travelling there whether by ski, small boat or on foot. Over a period of 15 to 20 years he made many expeditions to Northeast Greenland and several to Svalbard.

He travelled initially with Tim Pettifer and friends such as Ian Smart, Malcolm Slessor and Jane King. Amongst the things that John loved about his exploration of the high arctic was the remoteness, the freedom, the magnificent scenery, mountains and atmosphere, the challenges and the fact that in remote areas one was expected to handle problems oneself! This was something at which John excelled.

Several of his skiing expeditions in early spring, apart from some with his son Kenneth, were with a small group of friends to East Greenland, but John being John, invariably peeled off from the group after a couple of days to do his own thing. He could be completely self sufficient and happy in his own company.

In 2000, to celebrate the Millenium and see parts of remote northwest and north Greenland, he took part in a Circumnavigation of Greenland in a Twin Otter, flown by a good friend, Sigurdur Adalsteinson, who along with his wife Helena are members of our Club.

Apart from two expeditions with Bill McKerrow, one of which was to try to retrace an earlier expedition to Milne Land, two with Elizabeth, myself (Kathleen) and a small group to explore the inner reaches of Scoresby Sund and another to Dove Bugt at approximately 76 degrees north, his last expedition to Northeast Greenland was with Neville, myself and four Scottish Arctic Club friends to Vega Sund where we had a close

Iain wrote about one memorable two-man boat journey into the inner recesses of Scoresby Sund around Milne Land that they made in late summer 1997. It had been a bad summer in east Greenland and much of the fjord ice had not melted making boating very difficult, and although John was a very skilled boatman, they did not manage to reach their objective "the Dark Isle" and were nearly stuck in the pack ice in the main part of the fjord. Iain had been in the area about 20 years previously and during their expedition remembered and walked straight to a food dump that had been left on one of the Bear Islands. Luckily it was intact, which was just as well since as Iain wrote "John had done an impeccable job in organising the expedition, except for the food.

Out in the field John does not eat very much unless he can shoot it. This time he had forgotten to multiply the slender basic rations by two so the vintage bully beef, sardines, biscuits and chocolate from the cache saved us from hardship. There was of course plenty of whisky: in this department John was more than competent! I was reminded of that when stopping at the Hamna Hut near Mestersvig on our way back from Antarctic Havn in 2008 we came across an entry in the hut book written by John and Iain in 1998 which ended with the statement "We drank Highland Park and Aberlour single malts!"

With his very extensive travel in the Arctic he deservedly became President of the Scottish Arctic Club and was an enthusiastic and loyal member of the Club for many



years and a regular with Elizabeth at both the annual Suppers and the Club's Spring Meets at Attadale where he invariably donated and cooked a wonderful meal of venison. He even managed a week at Attadale last April just a few months before he died.

John was a very strong yet gentle person, physically and mentally very tough. Always kind, knowledgeable, interested and interesting, considerate and caring for his friends and very loyal to his family. He will be sorely missed.

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## STIRLING UNIVERSITY EASTERN GREENLAND MOUNTAINEERING EXPEDITION



### SERMILIGAAQ FJORD, KUUMIT, 2025

*Benjamin Toole, Megan Cumming, Dylan Coker, Rosie Aldridge*

[Recipients of an SAEF grant. This is the summary of the full report.]

#### 1. Expedition Summary and Achievements

The 2025 expedition to the Sermiligaaq fjord area was carried out by a four-person team composed of Dylan Coker, Benjamin Toole, Rosie Aldridge, and Megan Cumming. We departed Glasgow on the 27th of July 2025, flying via Keflavik, Iceland, and arriving in Kulusuk, on the east coast of Greenland.

Base camp was established at Rodin Bay on 31st July, marking the beginning of a 23-day field period. During this time, as a team we put up various climbing first ascents in the area and undertook sampling for the global atmospheric plastic survey on areas of the surrounding glaciers, operating entirely self-sufficiently. Our original objectives situated further up the Kaarali glacier to the North west, proved to be largely inaccessible due to large distances of impassable or dangerous marine terminating glaciers, the time of year increasing the risk of very open crevasses. Similarly this objective would require many days of stable weather - which didn't come - due to the long approach and length of the route. Instead we focused on areas of rock to the immediate North of our basecamp at 66.084906, -36.600279 which proved to be extremely fruitful, and didn't require us to bivi with some unstable weather forecasts.

#### 1.1 Climbing overview

We spent a number of days scouting the area and getting a feel of the terrain, rock quality and possible

descent routes before climbing first on the western face of peak 1300 tucked away above a small cirque glacier to the back of a large, river dominated valley behind our basecamp (66°08'26"N 36°33'08"W). We nicknamed the face "the mini Mojito" largely because of its large and rising shape in between two the higher summits. Dylan and Rosie climbed "Under an Arctic sky", a 7 pitch route moving through a variety of slabs and chimneys on the right hand middle of the face, leading up to a notch and summit ridge, which was given a grade of HVS 5a.

Ben and Megan climbed "The golden snack snatcher" on the far left hand side of the mini mojito face, a 5 pitch route to the right of a deep cut chimney, leading through a variety of cracks, roofs, slabs and crossing rightwards over sections of gully to an abseil point, which was given a grade of HVS 5b. Dylan and Rosie abseiled down from the summit to meet Ben and Megan further below in the gully separating the "Mojito" and "mini "Mojito" where 6 abseils led out and rightwards to the bergschrund at the base of the rock (8th Aug).

On the next good weather day we headed up the Glacier to the west to scout the back of the massif, with all four of us eventually climbing on the slabs on the East Spur of the summit behind our camp (66°06'48"N 36°32'36"W). Megan and Dylan climbed "Pink Panther" together linking up cracks and up the main face, moving over a variety of ribs and broken slabs leading to a ridge crest. This was given a grade of AD 5a and linked at the top to where Ben and Rosie were climbing a few hundred metres to their right, tracing a line more direct up the spur. They followed a line of moderate scrambling on the bottom half, linking to immaculate higher slabs on the right of a long gully line, named "Captain Chapati" and given AD- 4. The rock was an



excellent compact and enjoyable granite, with the angle too slack to provide any particularly difficult climbing.

The descent was all possible on foot and without the need for ropes, heading from the summit north to a loose col, and from there traversing into the corrie on a small cirque glacier, following this down onto the moraine and into basecamp (8th Aug).

Later on in the expedition (18th Aug), Ben and Megan climbed another new line on the slabs “Pete from the peak’s variation” which followed a similar line to that of Pink panther, starting just to the left, and finishing on the summit ridge at a grade of VS 4c. Dylan and Rosie ventured further up the valley containing the “Mojito” to a higher col to search for good rock, to which disappointingly they failed to find, however were able to complete a 23km loop of the main rock massif at a grade of F, and undertook nanoplastic sampling on sections of glacier.

On the final day of the trip (Aug 20), Megan and Dylan headed up early to climb the excellent ‘Deep Fried Pancake Sunday’. The glacial approach was slippier than anticipated after starting earlier than usual, but fortunately passable. The route was climbed quickly and they were down at camp by 1700. Rosie and Ben headed up into the glacier to the west of camp and had an enjoyable time ice climbing in the crevasses. The following day we packed down our camp, were picked



up by boat and taken back to Kulusuk on the 21st of August.

### 1.2 Our main objectives

Our original objectives ended up being rather ambitious and potentially achievable. We had been looking to climb one of the ‘Triplets’ which are usually accessed from the Fox’s Jaw. Ignorantly, we dismissed the 18km glacial approach, although we quickly realised that this length of journey across such crevassed terrain would take days. Our other main objective was Rytterknaegten, which unfortunately we never ended up seeing. The routes we climbed were connected to it, but the rock proved so chossy that we never ventured up to what we had originally planned.

The main takeaways from this were our lack of experience translating google earth imagery into the actual world, especially in such a new environment. Everything was much further than we had anticipated, we moved much slower than we had thought and it was all a lot steeper than we had hoped. This, in combination, with the largely poor rock meant that we never really attempted any of our objectives. Despite this, the routes we did manage to climb were of high quality and gave us an incredible taste of Mountaineering within this region of East Greenland.



**GREENLAND SETTLEMENTS** James Fenton

Because Greenland has been in the news recently owing to Donald Trump's wish to annex it, below are some modern-day pictures of settlements.



Nuuk  
The runway of the new international airport is visible at the top (now open)



Nuuk



Nuuk



Sisimiut stern trawler



Sisimiut: prawns & whitefish for export



Sisimiut



Sisimiut



Sheep farm with big bag silage at Brattahlid



Sisimiut (new Cultural Centre)



Sisimiut



Ilulissat



Icefjord Centre at Ilulissat



Hotel at Qaqortoq



Umannaq

## BOOK REVIEW

### THERE WILL BE HEADWINDS – KAYAKING THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

Mark Agnew

*A review by Anthony Walker*

A few years ago at The Gathering a number of us enjoying a drink in the bar were approached by Mark asking our thoughts about a self propelled trip through the Northwest passage, in particular whether we thought kayaking or rowing would be the best option. We were unanimously in favour of kayaking because it's possible to drag your kayak out of the water and over the ice to avoid being trapped.

I was therefore delighted when Father Christmas managed to squeeze Mark's book into my stocking so I could catch up with the full story.

Mark had quite a traumatic journey getting to the start line; he describes a number of failures in his life's adventure plans and the resulting mental effects. Finally in 2023 he joins an American team, appropriately named 'The Arctic Cowboys', in two double kayaks. This is all pretty bold as Mark has very limited kayaking experience, while the leaders are very powerful paddlers from Texas but with apparently no Arctic experience.

While Mark teams up really well with his paddling partner, his relationship with the leaders is a love/hate one, a recurring theme throughout the journey. Like this reader, Mark is clearly surprised by the leaders' ignorance of navigation and tidal planning, but he carefully handles their learning curve as they come to

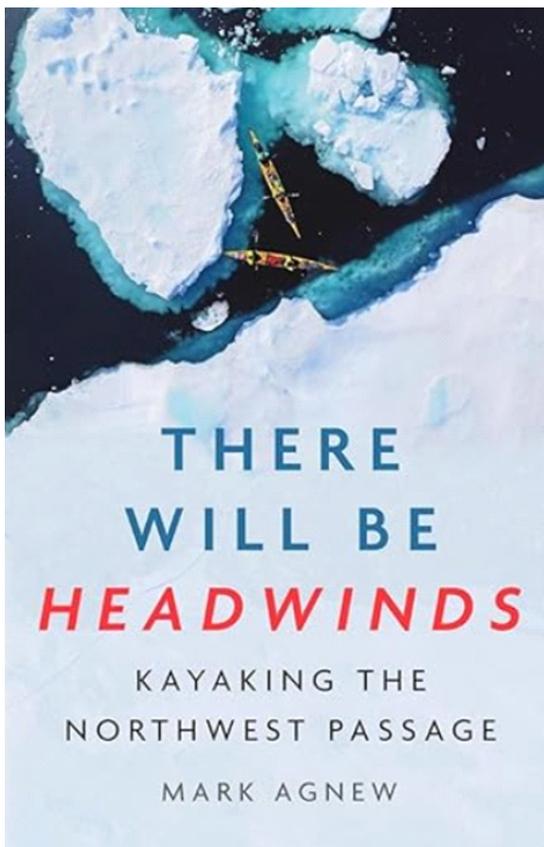
rely on him – and eventually admit that the expedition would not have succeeded without him.

The ups and downs of expedition life and the sometimes annoying decisions of his companions are well described. One can identify with Mark's frustration at the unnecessary tarrying, while pushing on is regarded as being gung-ho.

Mark describes vividly the numerous alarming encounters with polar bears, the brilliant salute by a pod of narwhal, the near fatal falls through the ice, terrifying sea conditions and being bowled along in a maelstrom of ice. He is reduced to a gibbering wreck at the halfway point by the team's sudden and brutal arrest and confiscation of vital equipment by Canadian parc authorities. Despite the advance of autumn, being permanently wet cold and hungry, they battle on through some of the worst sea conditions to the finish line. They have finally become the team united in camaraderie after which Mark so hankers. This is a great adventure story and we are proud to have Mark as member of the SAC.

My only serious criticism of the book is that the only map shows little more than the start and finish points, and being a bit of a map freak, I found myself constantly referring to a large scale map of the area – but this in no way this detracts from a great read.

*Note: Mark received an SAEF grant, originally to join a rowing expedition through the NorthWest Passage (which Tuppence joined, also with an SAEF award), but then swapped to kayaking.*



**Deadline for next newsletter**

**30 APRIL**

**CONTRIBUTIONS ALWAYS WELCOME**

**Anything of Arctic interest:**

**Expedition reports (old and new)**

**Reminiscences**

**Paintings, drawings, photos**

**Arctic news & reports**

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