



# 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**

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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)

## SUMMER SOLSTICE MEET 2026

20-21 June

From Stella Spratley

This year's meet will take place at Farletter, Kinraig, PH21 1NU, hosted by Myrtle Simpson and her son Robin.

BBQ and bonfire Saturday evening, from 4pm. Burgers and sausages will be supplied. Please bring a contribution. Salads, nibbles, puddings, cake. Please bring your own drinks.

There is space available for camping and vans.

I'll be bringing my guitar and whistle, so all instruments welcome.

Those of us still there on Sunday often go for a paddle on Loch Insh. Myrtle has two canoes that can be borrowed and the water is accessible from Farletter. Any other suggestions for activities very welcome.

Please let me know if you plan on coming so that we can cater accordingly.

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

See you next month. Fingers crossed for sunshine.



## 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)

*Programme to follow in next newsletter*



'Reflections'. by John Hutchinson

It is from a photo I took of Doug Anderson and his boat near Tasillaq a few years ago. I like the combination of the symmetry of the sharp lines with the softer reflections.

## SCOTTISH ARCTIC EXPEDITION FUND (SAEF) UPDATE

Fraser Melville successfully undertook winter skills training on the Hardangavidda in March, and is now in the process of moving to Canada.

Joe Jennings, from St Andrews University, has returned his funding for geological mapping fieldwork in South West Greenland, because of perceived polar bear issues. He hopes to reapply in 2027.

We wish the remainder of the SAEF awardees safe travels to the north this summer. They are:

- Katherine Low (filming in Siberia)
- Megan Loftus (sailing/climbing in East Greenland)
- Emma Cameron (Polar Academy science leader, East Greenland)
- Kyle Ramstedt-Sinclair (architecture in Svalbard)

Donations to the Scottish Arctic Expedition Fund are always welcome:

Account: 20011919  
Sort Code: 82-67-04

Previous Gift Aid forms will be still current, unless your circumstances have changed. Ask Sue at [scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com](mailto:scottisharcticexpeditionfund@gmail.com) if you require a form.

### Maps available

I still have individual maps of Greenland, one of the Rockies National Park and several of Arctic Norway. All are available for a wee donation to the SAEF and can be posted.

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



### Hardangervidda Crossing — March 2026

*Fraser Melville* [SAEF-supported]

The Hardangervidda crossing took place between 7th and 16th March 2026, organised and guided by Ousland Explorers as part of their Norway training programme for aspiring polar expeditioners. The objective was to cross the Hardangervidda mountain plateau using ski-pulk travel in just under eight days. The area is renowned for its vast natural beauty and often temperamental weather systems that offer serious challenges to those who seek to cross it.

The expedition drew an interesting roster, with individuals from international backgrounds and a broad spectrum of experiences. The team consisted of our guide Anders Gulbrandsen (Norway), Dr Douglas Bell (USA), Mike Porter (England), Jason Heath (USA), Tom Schechten (Germany) and Fraser Melville (Scotland). Before setting off, the team gathered in Oslo for a thorough kit check, with guide Anders taking a

characteristically pragmatic approach and stripping equipment back to the bare essentials.



The expedition started at Finse, a place of genuine significance in polar history – Amundsen, Shackleton and Scott all used the surrounding terrain to prepare for their Antarctic expeditions. On arrival, the team bunked down at Børge Ousland personal cabin and were met by none other than the man himself. Børge made an effort getting to know the team and shared stories of his own expeditions before heading back to Oslo – a memorable and inspiring start to the trip.

The first two days offered warm, sunny conditions and spectacular scenery, though the plateau's hilly, undulating terrain quickly proved a challenge, particularly for those new to skiing with a pulk (like myself). Day 3 brought snow, wind and significant climbing before conditions eased and the team descended down to flatter terrain on their way to Kjeldebu. Up until now the crossing had been relatively easy, terrain and weather conditions had been manageable and had allowed for straight-forward pitching and breaking of camp. However, the vidda had different plans for us in the days to come.



Day 4 saw a marked deterioration as headwinds, snowdrift and partial whiteout made for gruelling progress. Blisters began to emerge and feet required taping at camp, while the team were forced to adapt their technique to manage pulks in sustained wind – a skill that can only truly be learned in the field.

Conditions on Day 5 were, if anything, worse. A major storm that had been battering the Norwegian west coast swept across the vidda in full force, driving fierce winds, heavy snow and whiteout conditions directly into the faces of the skiers. These conditions had also forced us to adapt how we pitched camp. All team members were needed to pitch one tent at a time. The effort was tiresome after a day's skiing, but the team work cohesively and effectively to get the job done. It turns



out pitching tents in 70 mile an hour winds on top a mountain plateau in Norway serves as a rather entertaining story for friends and family!

Day 6 brought no meaningful reprieve: the wind intensified further and the freshly fallen snow drifted constantly around the team as they moved. Recognising the toll the storm had taken, the decision was made to camp a little earlier than usual, banking rest ahead of the final push. It proved the right call. Day 7 brought a modest improvement as the weather cleared slightly, and the team managed a solid day of skiing to around 10km short of Haukeliseter, the final destination. The team's morale had been tested heavily in the preceding days, but spirits were high as the finish came within reach.



On the final morning the team were on skis by 06:30, but the weather was not yet finished with us. Strong southerly gusts and fresh snowfall accompanied us through the last stretch, and the steep final descent to Haukeliseter demanded care and composure after eight days on the plateau. We navigated it successfully and arrived with a full hour to spare, catching the express bus back to Oslo. The storm that dominated the middle and latter stages of the crossing was a formidable test of endurance, judgement and mental strength. Combined with the early days of spectacular scenery and fair conditions, it made for an experience that encompassed the full range of what Hardangervidda has to offer – it was certainly a memorable experience and has advanced my expedition and polar fieldcraft skills immensely.



### What the Ice Gave Me: Thirty Years On *Sue Stockdale*

Thirty years ago, I stood at the Magnetic North Pole after a gruelling expedition across the Arctic environment from Resolute. At the time, it felt like the culmination of a dream. Today, I understand that reaching the Pole was not the most important part of the experience. What mattered far more was what the ice revealed to me, lessons about leadership, perspective, and human connection that have shaped the way I have lived and worked ever since.

As a child growing up in Scotland, I loved stories of exploration. I devoured tales of ordinary people achieving extraordinary things. Some were fictional adventures like Enid Blyton's Famous Five, while others were real explorers such as mountaineers and sailors.

Yet despite being inspired by these stories, I quietly absorbed limiting assumptions about who got to live adventurous lives. Explorers were usually men, military figures, or wealthy individuals with opportunities far beyond my own world. Adventure felt inspiring – but distant.

My early career followed a more conventional route. At sixteen, I began work in an energy company and progressed steadily through the organisation, eventually becoming one of its



At the Magnetic North Pole, 1996



Skiing to the Magnetic North Pole, 1996

youngest senior managers. From the outside, it looked like success: security, progression, predictability. But curiosity kept pulling at me.

Eventually I left that comfortable corporate life behind to work with the United Nations in the former Yugoslavia during the aftermath of war. It felt risky, uncertain, and far outside my comfort zone. Yet it taught me something important: growth rarely arrives wrapped in certainty. More often, it arrives disguised as disruption. That lesson prepared me for what came next.

In 1996, I spotted a newspaper advertisement seeking novice explorers for an expedition to the magnetic North Pole, led by David Hempleman-Adams. More than 500 people applied. I had no polar experience, no elite sporting background, and no certainty I could succeed. But something inside me recognised the opportunity immediately so I took it.

The Arctic strips life back to fundamentals. There is nowhere to hide from discomfort, fear, or self-doubt. On day 17 of our trek, my heels were blistered like the size of 50p coins. Every step felt like walking on broken glass. The horizon looked identical day after day, endless white, relentless cold, complete exposure. And somewhere in that exhaustion, I remember thinking: why am I doing this?



Our large team, led by David Hempleman Adams

It is a dangerous question in extreme environments because if you cannot answer it, everything can unravel very quickly. What surprised me was that the answer had little to do with toughness or determination.

Instead, it depended entirely on where I placed my attention.

I stopped focusing on my own discomfort and started paying attention to the people around me. Was someone struggling more than they admitted? Had a teammate eaten enough? Did morale need lifting before we made camp? In focusing outward, something shifted. Helping others did not simply distract me from the pain — it carried me through it. That lesson has stayed with me for thirty years.

Leadership, I discovered, is rarely about being the strongest person in the room. More often, it is about creating conditions where other people can keep going too. In difficult environments, whether on Arctic ice or inside organisations navigating uncertainty, collective resilience matters far more than individual heroics.

The other gift the Arctic gave me was harder to articulate, and perhaps even more important. Standing at the Magnetic North Pole, surrounded by vast ancient ice stretching far beyond the horizon, I felt profoundly small. Not insignificant in a negative sense, small in a liberating one. The kind of perspective that arrives when you encounter something so much larger and older than yourself that your own anxieties momentarily dissolve. It was humbling in the truest sense of the word.

Today we often speak about the polar regions through the language of crisis and loss, and those concerns are real. But what moved me most deeply in the Arctic was not fear. It was wonder. A recognition that this extraordinary environment deserved respect simply because it exists. That sense of awe has shaped much of my work since.

Following the expedition, I went on to Antarctica, Greenland, the Geographic North Pole, and many other remote regions. Over the years, I have translated lessons from extreme environments into practical insights for leaders, teams, and organisations facing uncertainty and change. Because the truth is that most people will never cross Arctic Sea ice, but everyone experiences moments where the route ahead feels unclear.

The landscapes may differ, but the emotional terrain is remarkably similar. The Arctic taught me that resilience comes not from controlling uncertainty, but from learning how to move through it. It taught me that turning outward when things are hardest often strengthens us more than retreating inward. And perhaps most importantly, it taught me the value of remaining small enough to stay in wonder.

Thirty years is a long time to carry lessons from a few weeks on the ice. Yet remarkably little about those lessons has changed. Step into the unknown. Turn outward when things are hard. Stay curious enough to be changed by what you encounter. The North Pole is still there. And so, I believe, is everything it still has to teach us.

## Longyearbyen in the past

James Fenton

I first visited Longyearbyen in Svalbard in 1978 when working as a marine assistant on a German fisheries research boat: my role was to measure the length of the fish caught (mainly cod, blue whiting and red perch).

At that time, the coalmines were still working and tourism was discouraged: it was too much hassle dealing with tourism in a mining community. Now, of course, it is the opposite and tourism has increased out of all proportion, and the mines in Longyearbyen have closed.

The overhead wires carrying coal trucks from the mine to the harbour were still present. When they stopped working, to be replaced by lorries, I remember the museum curator telling me she missed the clatter of the trucks (like the sound of a chairlift going over the wheels of a supporting tower).

In fact, in my childhood, I still remember seeing the overhead trucks in West Lothian, carrying coal (or was it shale?) parallel to the A904 near The Binns.



### Cairngorms self-catering accommodation:

Juniper Bank – self catering two bedroom cottage in Insh, between Kingussie and Glen Feshie near the Cairngorms. Sleeps 8. Please mention SAC when enquiring about availability and rates.

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



**Deadline for next newsletter**

**15 September**

**CONTRIBUTIONS ALWAYS WELCOME**

**Anything of Arctic interest:**

**Expedition reports (old and new)**

**Reminiscences**

**Paintings, drawings, photos**

**Arctic news & reports**

Send to [james@fenton.scot](mailto:james@fenton.scot)

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