

GREENLAND 2006

There was an increase in non-scientific expeditions in 2006 and the Danish Polar Centre issued 69 permits for 'sporting' expeditions of which some 36 were for expeditions on or across the Inland Ice. This year was however no different to previous years and the majority of expeditions opted for the standard east-west route from the Ammassalik region to Kangerlussuaq although several attempted longer south-north routes starting from various points and aiming for Thule or Qaanaaq. In addition another double crossing was made so perhaps the stranglehold of the trade route is being slowly broken.

What was very different in 2006 were the largely unpredicted and changing weather patterns which to some extent affected almost all expeditions other than those in the very far north. This had a significant impact on the increased numbers attempting to cross the Inland Ice, where the large number of failures perhaps suggests that the increased numbers completing the route are encouraging a false sense of security. As reported by the Finnish expedition below it is now becoming increasingly common to meet other groups on the ice. There was a time when the prospect of 'meeting' people on the Inland Ice would have been totally unthinkable and would certainly have been regarded as a major detraction from what is still considered a major, remote wilderness undertaking.

The fact that three of the four groups met by the Finns were later evacuated adds weight to the idea that some groups are treating such a wilderness undertaking too lightly and with insufficient preparation.

The early spring weather proved typically unpredictable and one of the first groups to start, **Eero Oura and Vesa Luomala** from Finland, experienced the extremely high katabatic winds, known as the piteraq, which in 1997 killed 2 of their countrymen on the Inland Ice. They completed their crossing from Isortoq to Kangerlussuaq in 34 days having started on 12 April and experienced windy, low pressure weather for almost the whole trip.

The Ammassalik/Tasilaq area of the East Greenland coast is particularly subject to these conditions early in the year and they probably accounted for the fact that 6 people starting from the east coast in early April had to be evacuated by several helicopter missions.

The Finns met a Spanish couple on the west coast who later summoned a rescue by use of a PLB adding to the mounting concern that at least the trade route crossing has become too popular as a result of the number of parties completing it. The concern of undue popularity is supported by the fact that the Finns met two separate expedition groups in the early part of the crossing, both of which were evacuated a short while later. They then met a third Danish group at DYE 2, the abandoned early warning station, on the Inland Ice.

The above comments on popularity of travel on the Inland Ice are additionally borne out by the Kangerlussuaq Tourism Company's brochure advertising motorised travel from Kangerlussuaq over the Inland Ice to have a 'unique experience' staying in DYE 2.

Among others undertaking the east-west route, were the 3 strong **Grønland Transversale 2006** led by Martin Hülle of Germany who started in Tasilaq on 11 May and ended in Illulissat 34 days later on 13 June having used parawings to significantly help their progress.

On 14 May **Ben Saunders** and his team were flown to the head of the Hahn Glacier to test equipment for a future Antarctic expedition. They experienced changeable conditions from baking sunshine and sludgy snow to complete whiteout and high winds

On 19 July **Kai Sundnes** and a colleague, both from the Norwegian Army set off from Tasilaq but due to a gastric ulcer developing after 20 days en route a helicopter had to be summoned once they were off the Inland Ice.

Endre Nakstad and his wife Eva Mari had better conditions when they started later on 4 August from Tasilaq reaching Kangerlussuaq after an uneventful journey on 23 August, choosing to comment on the amount of melt water encountered at altitude and the warm temperatures.

Pascal Hemon and Fabrice Baptiste left Tasilaq on 13 June planning to reach Thule in the north west of Greenland but had to divert their journey of 43 days to Illulissat due to lack of wind and heavy snowfall.

Also with a south-north traverse in mind, but with kite assistance planned, a 4 man French group led **Frédéric Donzé** left Narsarssuaq in the far south of Greenland heading for Qaanaaq on 28 April. By 23 May they had been forced to divert west to Kangerlussuaq due to unfavourable winds.

Even the **Arctic Foxes Greenland Quest** led by Felicity Ashton who planned a kite assisted double crossing of the Inland Ice encountered winds consistently from the wrong direction. They made the first traverse from Kangerlussuaq, which they left on 30 April, to a point just south of the Hahn Glacier in 16 days without using their kites. They then set off on the return on 21 May and reached Kangerlussuaq on 4 June having completed a journey of 1120km. They became the first British women's team to cross the Inland Ice.

The earlier comments on popularity of travel on the Inland Ice are additionally borne out by the Kangerlussuaq Tourism Company's brochure advertising motorised travel from Kangerlussuaq over the Inland Ice to have a 'unique experience' staying in the abandoned DYE2 early warning station.

In the Schweizerland mountains just north of Ammassalik a 4 strong team from **Cambridge University** ferried loads inland to a series of base camps from where they made a number of ascents ranging from F to AD. The peaks ranged from 931m to 1589m and eight of them were first ascents. They experienced poor, wet and rainy weather and also much rubbish left by an earlier French expedition which to their credit they removed.

Further north an eight strong party from the **Brathay Exploration Group** in weather which was unusually warm, producing poor snow conditions, made 5 ascents of F to D in the area inland from Knud Rasmussen's Land, NE of the Watkins Mountains.

The **Royal Navy Greenland Expedition 2006** was in the Watkins Mountains from 6-27 May. As well as climbing the highest peak in the Arctic, Gunnbjornsfjeld, 3693m, they climbed several of the surrounding highest Arctic peaks in the main Watkins group and around the Upper Woolley Glacier. The snow conditions and weather were good for travelling and enabled the party to climb 13 summits, four of them first ascents.

Just north of Scoresbysund a party of three led by **Matt Tinsley** made an interesting journey linking the largely abandoned airfield at Mestersvig to the relatively new airfield at Constable Pynt. The trip of 200km was accomplished in 10 days in mid July, the major problems being the crossing of rivers high with melt water.

Also in the Mestersvig area three generations of the **Laptun family** took part in a tour of the area. Otto Laptun who was first associated with East Greenland as a trapper in the 1930s, his son Hans with his wife and their daughter, explored some of the areas which while unchanged themselves will have seen much change take place since Otto was first there. Inland from the Watkins, in an area unvisited since Martin Lindsay's expedition sledged past to the north west in 1934 the **Oxford University Greenland Expedition** visited the Gronau Nunatak. The 3 man party spent 3-4 weeks in the area during August and climbing on snow and ice made 12 first ascents graded between F and AD. The team's first climb, a prominent snow and ice pyramid they named Mount Currahee, proved to be the most demanding of the expedition involving an almost impassable bergschrund, climbing on steep ice and an unplanned bivouac just below the summit. The team made other ascents in an unexplored group to the west of the Christian IV's Glacier, which they named the Oxford Nunatak. They experienced weather patterns ranging from the high pressure systems normal for the area to clinging fog and rain. Towards the end of their stay winter was making its advances and the temperature dropped to -20°C with strong winds forcing the the group to abandon one route.

Much further north in **Dove Bugt** at about latitude 76°N in late July an enterprising, and presumably wealthy, group from Arcturus Expeditions established themselves by Twin Otter on the south shore of the bay. Prevented by bay ice from using their inflatable boat they explored the coast and inland through Ravnedalen until it was possible to use the boat when they moved camp to Adolf S Jensen Land where they explored the hills and off shore islands. The weather as one would expect this far north was the settled anti-cyclonic pattern to which the rest of Greenland seems to have said farewell in 2006 and also as one would expect in such an unvisited area there was a multitude of wildlife to be observed.

At the same time as the above party were enjoying the good weather on the south of Dove Bugt the **Danish 'Nanok' company** were once again at work seeking out and repairing the old hunting huts on the north shore. They were also frustrated by sea ice but managed to locate some 'new' huts and effect repairs, as did a southern group from the same company who worked on huts further south on Traill and Geographical Society Islands, a little north of Mestersvig.

The icy seas off the NE Greenland coast attracted the usual number of cruise ships but 2006 saw two more interesting ventures. The first was the 3 man **Greenland East Coast Kayak Expedition** led by Martin Rickard who started from Scoresbysund or Ittoqqortoormiit after considerable delays on 21 July in 3 sea kayaks and made the long crossing of Scoresbysund on the first stage of the projected route to Ammassalik. On the journey down the very steep, rocky Bløseville coast with each kayak weighing about 140kg the party had difficulty finding camp sites on the few beaches available. By the time they reached Kap Beaupre ice, driven by wind, was an increasing problem and at Kap Daussy after so many delays and about 280km they were forced to turn back rather than try to press on south and risk a rescue. Also starting from Scoresbysund but heading north was the veteran German Arctic traveller **Arved Fuchs** who set off on 9 August having sailed from Flensburg in the 10 crewed Dagmar Aaen with the intention of sailing as far north as possible in what was essentially an unprotected vessel. Having sailed through the fjords of the 'Arctic Riviera' the Sirius Patrol HQ at Daneborg was reached on the 22 August where further northward progress was frustrated by ice and the boat returned to Scoresbysund on 30 August, and ultimately back to Flensburg.