



## **GREENLAND - MAY 2015**

Following in the family paw-prints

**COAST-TO-COAST**  
The old way, with skis and dogs

Chris Solheim-Allen

## Greenland Crossing 2015 - A Walk on the Wild Side

Inspired by my father, Keith Allen, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1932 – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2004 and my mentor over many years, Cdr RAS Adams RN, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1952 – 16<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

### Introduction

Before I embarked on this trip I could have found many reasons to not walk over Greenland: time, expense, separation from family, extreme weather, uncertainty over my experience and fitness for the conditions that might be experienced, possibly selfishness and ultimately at a time of cheap air travel to anywhere in the world, the pointlessness of walking to a place where people have been travelling since Dr Nansen walked across in 1888.

I've long enjoyed travelling on snow and ice. Since 1989 I've worked at learning to ski, and have, as Yngvil might say, transformed into a "skogstroll" (Norwegian for forest or outdoor troll), one who is comfortable in the Norwegian winter mountains, able to move at will on skis, through forest, over mountains and across bleak plateaus. Navigation and conditions are more challenging in winter than the summer, but one can move faster, and the options for overnight rests range from the comfortable Norwegian hut system to snow holes and tents.

I've learned over many years, and since 2005 have been a winter guide for the Norwegian mountaineering association. Keith Allen spent 2 years continuously on the Antarctic Peninsula from 1958 to 1960. Based at the northern-most tip of the continent at Hope Bay, he spent most of his time in the field, driving dog teams, and surveying much of Grahamland and nearby islands. As a child I'd always liked listening to his stories and seeing his slideshows. Mountaineering almost every weekend with my parents in the English Lake District was a given. Learning to ski in my mid-20s was a natural progression, but how does one truly understand the experience? It is no longer possible to drive dogs in Antarctica, but Greenland presents a similar environment, and has much history of classic polar travel. Although I've thought about this for many years, the planning and logistics were beyond my resources. A chance meeting with Børge Ousland illustrated the possibility of joining one of the trips run by his organization. Hence at last I could fulfil an ancient ambition and understand the classic means of polar travel.

### Operation Tabarin and FIDS

*The Falklands Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS) was my father's employer from 1958 to 1961. It was originally a wartime Royal Navy expedition (Operation Tabarin) to maintain observation over the Antarctic Peninsula and islands. This subsequently became a civil surveying and scientific organization, though its main purpose was to maintain a political presence. FIDS subsequently became the British Antarctic Survey. A generation after Scott, the Royal Navy had through necessity, again become quietly competent at polar travel.*



*Greenland Ice-Cap, Midnight 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015*

### Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2015

Yngvil, Håvard & Ingeborg drove me to Skøyen station at about 17:00. I'd decided in November 2014 to go on the trip and had spent the time since preparing: Skiing in Nordmarka, Bergsjøen, deputy guide for Turistforeningen's dog sledge trip on Hardangervidda, and telemark in the Tirol. I'd attended a weekend of information and training with Bengt Rotmo at Levanger. In all I'd probably covered about 400km on skis, some of it whilst trying equipment I would use in Greenland. However, the crossing contemplated was beyond my previous experience, and family, particularly Ingeborg were doubtful about how this might turn out. I'd spent much of the 2 weeks before departure waking up at 4am and going out early into the local forest, jogging with 2 tyres pulled along behind me. I'd packed, re-packed, bought equipment and packed again. Some items were considered many times before being either discarded or included. Weight was a constant factor, both for the flights and for the journey itself.



We had a sunny weekend together in Oslo, walking on both days to Skjennungstua in melting snow and ice. After an early dinner I decided it was time to go. For Ingeborg it was emotional when she realised I was on my way and wouldn't return for a month; the longest I'd been away from home. At Skøyen station she was in better humour and ran with Håvard along the platform behind my train, until they vanished from view, and I was on my own with a rucksack, a pair of skis and a huge black travelling bag. It felt like a lonely start to a great adventure. I took a late flight to Copenhagen and on a damp night booked into an airport hotel.

### Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015

After a sleepless night I was up at 05:00 for an early breakfast and then the train back to the airport. I checked on to the Greenland Air flight to Kangerlussuaq with thoughts of "what have I committed myself to now?" The flight left on time at 09:00, and landed 4½ hours later at 09:30 local time. The coast had been crossed at 08:20, with magnificent views of the East Greenland Mountains. But every 3 minutes flying west across the featureless plateau would take a day to walk eastwards again. At Kangerlussuaq I walked into a chaotic arrivals hall, found my bags and ran into Antoine, the other

participant in the February training weekend in Levanger. We were driven a couple of kilometres down the road to an old military barracks, now a hostel called “Old Camp”. The first person I met was a towering Irishman, who introduced himself as Mike and offered a cup of tea: A good start. The next 2 days would be here, organising, modifying, cooking, & packing. Bengt checked and advised, but he was busy with the logistics of the trip and couldn’t spend much time on briefing.



East Greenland coast, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015

#### Kaqaerlussuaq

*This township only exists because the United States military built a long runway here in 1941, on a wartime aircraft ferry route from Newfoundland, over Greenland and Iceland to Scotland.*

*Every day, Greenlandair flies its solitary large Airbus here from Copenhagen. All the other airports in Greenland send in daily connecting flights to meet it. There is a supermarket, a post office, a couple of clothing and gift shops, and a small amount of urban sprawl to support airport workers.*



#### Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015

There was food and gear everywhere in my room as I re-organised to pack into the pulk. The aim was a logical series of bags for ease of access to gear and food when camping on the Greenland plateau. There not being enough freeze dried food for the crossing, we worked late and early to cook about 40 chile-con-bolognese dinners.



Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015

### The Team

*At Kangerlussuaq we were two teams that would be together for the first week. A group of 6 younger people would pull pulks for 4 weeks across the ice. I was part of an older group who would pull pulks for a week until we met our dogs. Both groups had the same guide for the first week: Bengt Rotmo. The "dog" team was:*

<i>Tom Dougherty</i>	<i>American</i>
<i>Ian Clarke</i>	<i>British</i>
<i>Mike O'Shea</i>	<i>Irish</i>
<i>Clare O'Leary</i>	<i>Irish</i>
<i>Ania Schikarski</i>	<i>German</i>
<i>Chris Solheim-Allen</i>	<i>British</i>

Bengt, our guide for phase 1, had a lot to do; delivering dog food, rations and equipment to the airport for a S61 helicopter lift up to Dog Camp. We worked on the tents. They had double poles for strength in storms, which needed to be shortened so that they would be easier to fit in cold conditions. This was a delicate job with a hacksaw and file. Pulks were packed and loaded into a big trailer, and then we took the taxi into the airport for lunch. Bengt arrived with the truck and trailer, and so we set off around the town, and then for an hour or so up the 25km gravel road to the drop off at "660". It was nice weather, sunny and calm. The truck departed, and life didn't feel too lonely. It was a relief to eventually start the adventure.



At about 16:00 Bengt lead us off towards the East. This part of the Russell Glacier is mild, with no crevasses or big inclines. Recent consolidated snowfalls had made the going quite easy for skiers and pulks. The route was restricted though by many ice formations, so there was quite a lot of turns. Although we advanced by 3km in 2 hours, we probably covered 5 to 6km as we constantly back-tracked across the terrain.

Ian Clarke

*Being a former Royal Engineers Officer, Ian was naturally sceptical about anyone from the Royal Navy. He's ascended the 7 summits and taken last degree expeditions to both Poles. He can "black cat" almost any story I have. His experience and foresight solved a number of problems. He's been successful in the telecommunications industry and works on turning around problem companies. Never short of a cheering anecdote, he has a talent for making people feel good about themselves.*



My tent companion was Ian Clarke. He wasn't used to the petrol stoves we'd be using, so the first time he fired it up he took the precaution of doing it outside the tent. This foresight, no doubt the consequence of long experience, was fortunate. The base plate promptly caught fire and there was a risk of it damaging other equipment. We threw snow over it and a beating with the shovel knocked the fire down before any damage was done. Ian, though, had learned the knack of safely lighting the temperamental stoves issued, and passed on the knowledge to me over the next few days. He knew how to organize a winter tent and soon had us comfortable and in good order, or "all feng-shuied" as he was want to say.



*Evening camp at end of day 1*

Progress day 1 – 6th May  
16:00 – 18:00 2,96km

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015

I was awake at 06:30 after the first good sleep in weeks. It was good to be in the wilderness again with its diminished responsibilities. The temperature was just above freezing, and the wind light from the East. Bengt, our guide, reckoned there was an unusual amount of snow this year. This made our passage up through the icefalls relatively straightforward. Embarrassingly, I had to re-learn the importance of a stable load and a low centre of gravity: My pulk capsized twice on awkward ice formations. The katabatic wind eased off during the course of the day, so by the evening camp we enjoyed a pleasant warm stillness amongst blue-ice formations, with views of the western hills as we sat outside preparing our dinners. We saw the helicopter in the far distance on the supply run to dog-camp. It was carrying up 110kg of food, gear and dog food for both parties, and returned with one of the girls who'd driven the dogs across from Isortoq.



*Bengt Rotmo*



*Tom Douaherty*



Progress day 2 – 7<sup>th</sup> May  
09:00 – 18:00. 11.04km.  
Trip Total 14km.

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Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2015

We were up at 06:00 and by now settling into a routine. Ian's experience counted for a lot. Just his camp-craft made a big difference: how to pitch the tent, keeping sufficient water, digging the cold-trench. I learned and contributed as best I could. We had similar humour, and spoke with nautical exaggeration on this high frozen sea.

Bengt mentioned a concurrent attempt to break the classic Greenland crossing record by 3 Norwegians (who else?). They had left a day before us and were covering 70km per day. It made our 16km today seem rather insignificant and there was still a long way to go. In the next 19 days we would have to walk 540km and I was starting to feel a long way from anywhere.

The way forwards was icefall and seracs as far the eye could see to the east. To the south the ice looked black and jagged. As we continued the blue seracs gradually eased off until we only had the occasional ice outcrop of a few centimeters as reference points. For the next 18 days our view would only be snow: Flat snow, sastrugi snow, windblown snow, crusty snow, wet snow, gently undulating snowfields, along with one very peculiar radar station. Seeing a groove cut in the ice, caused by last year's melt water, was a sensation. We all gathered around this Disneyland attraction, fascinated by something different to see.

The days, however, were not monotonous. They passed in gentle conversation during our hourly stops. Once out of the seracs I had less to concentrate on and could switch on Håvard's i-pod. The music show started with "Gummi-Bjørn" (jelly-bear), an old children's favourite which made me smile.

*Håvard, my whimsical son was born in 2002. His interests are mainly technical, but he can be persuaded to go on adventures too, particularly if it involves climbing. He likes gear and manuals, whether lego, minecraft books or gadgets. An artist and writer by nature, there's usually some gentle mischief in his works. He lent me his tiny i-pod for this trip, and of course many of the tunes on it were children's favourites I'd become accustomed to hearing.*



#### Nordic Skis

*The FIDS men had skis but weren't taught much technique. Skis have been in use in Scandinavia for millennia, not for downhill fun but as a practical means of travel in winter. The Viking sagas mention at least one occasion when a long overland raid had to be made, so they waited until winter when all the bogs and boulder fields were covered in a smooth carpet of snow. Today there are many varieties of Nordic ski: cross-country, mountain, telemark, waxing, waxless. They can be used with skins, and there are different binding types.*

*Rescue of infant King Håkon Håkonsson by Birkebeiner warriors 1204*



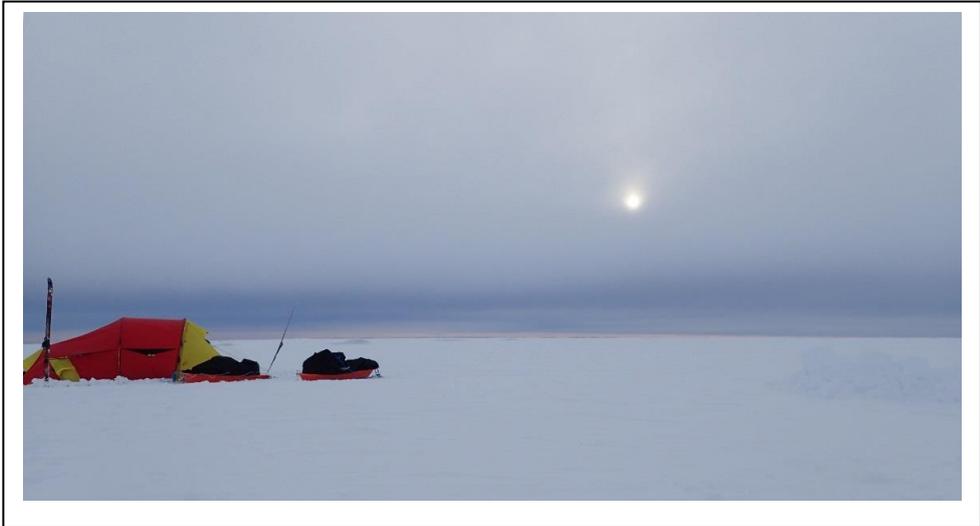
We finished skiing at 18:00. The second half of the day's walk was in a temperature of +2°C to +3°C. The snow was sticky and many people had snow cladding onto their skis, even when they took their skins off. Most people had waxless skis with a pattern carved into the ski's base to prevent the ski sliding backwards, but in today's conditions this was sufficient to cause snow to stick and make motion difficult. I was able to keep my skins on and I had no clad. The cool southerly breeze helped to make the snow less sticky. In the evening, haze came in and the horizon along with the west

Greenland mountains started to disappear. A weather shift was happening and the possibility of a strong wind existed. We pitched our tents so as not to cause each other to drift up.

Already at this stage we were starting to question the schedule. The original plan was that we'd meet the dogs on about 9<sup>th</sup> May some 50km from our start on the Russell Glacier, but we were still 83km from where we would eventually meet them. The dog drivers, it was said, had problems coming over from the west coast, and so would not be stopping within 50km of our present position. Although Bengt tried to be optimistic, at our current pace that was still some 4 or 5 days skiing. Another 4 days of just pulling a pulk for 20km a day over featureless terrain wasn't the advertised plan and didn't seem so appealing, but these were the cards that circumstance has dealt us and we had to just ski on.



My first Friday night, of several in Greenland, was a long way from the traditional family Friday evening in Oslo. There we would always have a relaxed evening of pizza and a family film. Instead I had an hour's worth of tent pitching, snow melting, diary writing, navigation interpretation, before tucking into a reconstituted dinner in a bag. Just add boiling water and one of Ian's war stories.



Progress day 3 – 8<sup>th</sup> May  
09:00 – 18:00. 16.00km.  
Trip Total 30km.

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Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2015

We were up at 06:00 to a snowy breeze from the south. The infinite visibility of our first days was now reduced to a few hundred metres. We made our usual 09:00 departure, with “The Proclaimers” singing through the i-pod that they’d walk 500 miles, which seemed appropriate. I was fantasizing about food, and what meals I would make for the family on my return. I also planned sailing in Sweden, mountain walks with Ingeborg, and cycle rides with Håvard. Meanwhile Bengt was following a route he’d been on many times, and at mid-day his GPS indicated he was entering a crevasse field. Without saying anything he took out a sounding pole, and then felt for crevasses whilst proceeding slowly for the next 2 hours. The pole was then re-stowed, just as silently, and we continued in line ahead at our normal cruising speed.

Bengt Rotmo

*Bengt had left behind his engineering past when he skied along the North West passage route one winter. The experience and book he wrote of the adventure have given him an enjoyable living as an ice-guide in extreme places. He dragged a massive pulk across Greenland, and lives in Trøndelag. He clearly enjoys being with the people he meets on these trips, and is keen to learn from those around him.*



In this featureless terrain with limited visibility the focus came down to not hitting one’s ski tips on the pulk in front, or whatever sound that the i-pod was making.



At about 18:00 the wind died down, and we stopped at 19:00, still 60km from the dogs which had now been resting for 3 days. Huskies must rest frequently when working or they rapidly lose strength and condition. They’d had a difficult trip over from the East coast so the rest had been necessary. Although they were now rested and could have moved further west, they were now so close to us that if both parties moved at the same time, there was a chance that we’d pass each other and not meet up. Due to the limitations of navigation, communication and visibility, it was only when both parties were camped that the guides could be certain of calling each other on the satellite telephones and comparing their precise positions.

We were climbing an imperceptible gradient of about 1:100, but in the misty conditions it was hard to sense whether we were going up, down or flat.

Progress day 4 – 9<sup>th</sup> May  
09:00 – 19:00. 19.56km.  
Trip Total 49.56km.

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### Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2015

I was awake at 05:30. There was a breeze outside, temperature -5<sup>o</sup>c and rime inside the tent. We had the usual 09:00 departure, and skied 22.65 km until 19:15, under overcast skies, with an occasional weak sun and a maximum visibility of about 1km. As with other days, we stopped every hour to eat whatever we pleased: nuts, crisps, dried fruit, dried reindeer meat, chocolate.

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Progress day 5 – 10<sup>th</sup> May  
09:00 – 19:15. 22.65km.  
Trip Total 72.21km.

### Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015

At 07:00 there was suddenly an ice-cap panorama, with a view of the west Greenland mountains on the far horizon. The weather gradually improved all day. What we thought might be the dogs coming towards us turned out to be a small flock of geese standing on the snow. I strapped my sleeping bag outside the pulk to dry off in the sun as it was quite wet after it had collected several days' condensation.

Tom's ski caused problems today. First his ski kept coming off the boot, which was the classic 3 pin Rottefella problem; the pins had damaged the front area on the boot's sole where they fit. He clamped the binding down hard to secure the boot, but then the whole binding came off the ski. Bengt stopped for an hour to re-fix it slightly further along the ski.

Then "Lomond Waltz" came up on the i-pod. This is the tune to which Yngvil and I learned our wedding dance, and so a long way from home I suddenly felt quite alone. Fortunately, and unusually, Bengt delegated the lead to me, so I took the convoy for the last hour to camp. I had something to focus on, and in practicing my direction finding I realised I have a tendency to drift to the right in the absence of any reference points.

The evening routine was normal by now. We pitched, normally some metres from other tents so that we wouldn't drift each other up. It took about an hour to put the tent up, dig a cold trench, inflate the air mattresses, move all the personal gear and food inside, melt snow, make dinner. Dinner was usually a reconstituted dried dinner: stew and rice, pasta and meat sauce, or the dreaded curried cod, of which the organisers seemed to have a disproportionately large amount. After dinner there would be writing up the diary, checking position, height and barometric pressure on GPS, calculating distance run and distance to go, chat about the day's events or whatever family/sea/war stories came to mind. There'd be some reading on the kindle before settling down to sleep – gear for drying inside the sleeping bag, ear plugs in, and a thin hat or buff pulled down over the eyes to block out the midnight light.



*A camp during the pulk phase*



### The Heroic Age

*Most of us were well aware of the giants who walked the ice a century or more ago, and we talked of them. They were from many countries. Nansen was the first to walk across Greenland, and our Irish friends were loyal to the Antarctic memories of Shackleton and Crean. My map of Greenland shows pioneering routes across the ice by Mikkelsen (1910), Rasmussen (1912), Hüygard (1931), Koch-Wegener (1913), and De Querrain (1913). Many of them had astonishing stories and took people to the limits of endurance.*

Progress day 6 – 11<sup>th</sup> May  
09:00 – 19:00. 24.26km.  
Trip Total 96.47km.

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### Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015

There was a strong breeze in the night and we woke to a bright day with pulks buried in snow. On days like this I felt I was deep in one of my father's Antarctic slide shows.



*Evening and morning with buried pulks at Camp 6*

The strong breeze from the south moderated in the course of the day. At 13:00 we could see Dog Camp, and at 16:00 we were with Salo Ødegaard, Sigrid Ekran and 32 Greenland dogs. The weather was warm and calm, and so we could sit out to eat. Although Dog Camp was much further east than planned, we'd reached a psychological turning point. We had now covered about a quarter of the distance and used about a third of the planned time. Life felt good this evening.



*12<sup>th</sup> May: Salo, Sigrid and 32 dogs waiting for us at dog camp.*

Sigrid's evening briefing for driving the dogs and the remainder of the trip was brief. She was nervous about this first time as a guide and had wanted to get it right. So we learned that in Greenlandic, "Yo" means left, "Riii" means Right, "Go" is go, and "Arunya" means lie down, though it would be a week before we realised what was really meant by this. We understood the plan was to be out of the tents at 9am, send some people skiing in front and drive after them with the dog-sledges. With some previous experience of dog driving in Norway and Sweden I would drive a sledge with Ian, and we'd see how it all goes. As most of the group had never encountered sledge dogs before it wasn't much information to go on.



Ian and I pitched close to a dog span. They were very shy about us and most of them were quite frightened of the new faces and voices. There was of course howling, some fighting, and mating going on. I think I slept well enough as I wasn't too tired the next day. I took the skins off my skis at last; I wouldn't be needing them again. From now on the speeds could be faster, and whether hanging on to a sledge or breaking trail in front, I'd want as little ski-resistance as possible.

### Greenland Dogs

*These dogs are an eskimo breed and are thought to have been in use by Inuit people for 2000 years. They are descended from wolves, but are larger boned, have broader heads, shorter snouts and a tightly curled tail.*



*The female Greenlander that Ian and I wanted to take home – quiet nature, hard working, kind face.*

Progress day 7 – 12<sup>th</sup> May  
09:00 – 16:00. 16.82km.  
Trip Total 113.29km.

### FIDS Dogs

*In 1946 huskies from Labrador were taken to the Antarctic Peninsula, and remained through 13 generations for the next 50 years. They were bred for strength and size. Precise genealogical records were kept, with dogs often swapped between bases to prevent inbreeding. Over 900 dogs have been recorded on the British bases. Use gradually declined as more modern means of transport were introduced and the final 14 dogs were taken away in 1994 due to environmental demands on non-native species.*



*Keith Allen with the "Komats"*



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### Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015

We were out of the tents at 09:00, not yet used to this more relaxed start, and saw the pulk team on their way. This was the group of 6, led by Bengt who had been a part of our fortunes for 9 days. Now they would carry on with double pulks, having re-stocked from the depot taken by helicopter to dog-camp. Whilst we had new stimuli and challenges, they had to continue the same routine for the next 2 to 3 weeks.

The pulk team were followed by Mike, Tom and Ania who would go on skis today as a moving beacon for the dogs to follow on this featureless ice-scape. It took us until 11:00 to load the sledges and hitch up the dogs, by which time our skiers were, worryingly, over the horizon. Salo had the first, large, sledge with 16 of his own dogs. Ian and I were next with 8 of Salo's dogs. Last were Sigrid and Clare with 8 dogs belonging to a neighbour of Salo.



Our first dog departure was chaotic and exhilarating. The dogs had been resting for about 6 days so were full of energy and keen to run. Salo's team took off to the west, so he shouted at them until they turned right through 180° to go homewards. Mine took off after them, over the snow drifts left from the camp with myself hanging off the back of the sledge in an iron-grip. I assumed Ian was also hanging on until I looked to my left and realised my co-pilot was no longer there. I managed to push my left ski into the footbrake and brought the juggernaut to a halt. Ian caught up, gripped the handlebars again, and so we took off once more in the general direction of the east coast and Salo's team. Behind me though, Sigrid, winner of 2 Finnmark 1000km dograces and as expert as they come was struggling with the Salo neighbour dogs. At one time I saw Sigrid's companion, Dr Clare thrown off in a cartwheel. This team became known as the Funkies, being a bunch of youths more interested in fighting and love-making than anything so serious as co-ordinated work. After a few hours Salo put a long rope from his sledge to Sigrid's to at least keep them pointed in the right direction, and I was relegated to driving in 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

We stopped at 5pm, and I was more tired than I'd been for a long time. In the evening it took about 2 hours to do all the jobs: span the dogs on a steel wire, feed them, set up tents, melt snow, bring in the gear, make up the dog food for the following day. My recollection of the dog phase of the trip is that it was constant hard work, awareness, and thinking for more than 15 hours each day.

There appeared to be little physical advantage to crossing Greenland with dogs rather than pulks. Both methods require significant effort and work. Under some conditions a pulk team can travel when a dog group remains confined to camp. Much of the dogs' capacity was taken up with at least 100kg of dog food per sledge. There is, however, a psychological advantage on the featureless plateau to having 32 affectionate, semi-disciplined, irrational, easily distracted, sometimes hardworking, sometimes lazy dogs with us. They were a diversion from other worries, required constant attention, and several of them wanted close contact whenever possible.

At this stage they were a sea of faces and not easy to tell one from the other. By the end of the trip individuals were well known and most of us had our favourites, and recognized various characters amongst them.

On our first few days with the dogs we enjoyed good weather. I also found that my imagination played tricks: although on a featureless plain, I had a memory of previous ski trips, mainly in Norway and could imagine that tonight, for example, we were camped by a frozen lake. I don't why I had these semi-conscious thoughts, but over Greenland I've passed imaginary mountains, forests and dwellings that I would have been accustomed to seeing in the Norwegian winter landscape.

In the interests of knowing everyone better, Sigrid had decided to rotate people through the various tents, which worked for a while. I had these first 2 nights of the dog phase billeted in Sigrid's tent. Everyone came in to share dinner and experiences together. Ania came with a massive fruitcake which was very well received.

Ania Schikarski

*A speech therapist from Germany, she lives close to the Alps and goes to her cabin there at every opportunity. She's a member of the German alpine club, and has followed Shackleton's footsteps across South Georgia. She has 2 teenage children and is keen on dance, even persuading Bengt to waltz on the ice.*



Bengt's pulk team overtook us in the evening and camped about a kilometer beyond us. Despite the theoretical speed advantage our dogs gave us, we never really separated from the pulkers and would continue to encounter them over the days to come.

Progress day 8 – 13<sup>th</sup> May  
11:00 – 17:00. 19.15km.  
Trip Total 132.44km.

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Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015

It was windy in the night, and the Funkies team made a lot of noise. As Salo's team had pulled them yesterday, they weren't tired. While the other 24 dogs just slept, this crew concentrated on more important things like escaping, howling, fighting and mating. Today I was skiing out in front, and skied all day, 31.15km total, first with Ian and Clare, and then with Tom and Clare.

We overtook the pulk team again in the late morning. A strong breeze started at lunchtime, which brought down the visibility to about 500m, just as Sigrid was having dog problems with the Funkies team. Out in front on skis, and out of communication range we did not know the problem, but assumed it was nothing too serious. We just had to turn our skis around and wait for half an hour on the edge of visibility. The weather cleared up at the 20km mark. In the evening at the 25 km mark, Clare, Tom and I could see on the far horizon, still 25km away, the DYE-2 Distant Early Warning station, a tiny white golf ball reflecting the evening sun on the far horizon. Having a fixed mark to aim for made the direction finding easy, although it wasn't easy to see at such a distance. We stopped in atmospheric and cold evening light and waited for the dogs to catch us up.

Everyone was delighted with the distance covered, and seemed genuinely impressed with how I can keep the momentum going. I fed the dogs, and then they were quiet. So was I, having broken trail for probably about half the distance today.

Howling Huskies

*Nobody really knows why wolves and huskies sing. In an evening, one will start to howl, and then the whole team or pack joins in. It is the most Arctic of sounds and for me a joy to hear. Not everyone has this point of view.*

Progress day 9 – 14<sup>th</sup> May  
09:45 – 18:00. 31.15km.  
Trip Total 163.59km.

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015

We were away at 09:30 after a cold night. Sigrid and I were driving the Funkies. Whilst hitching up I failed to stop 2 couples from, coupling, so we had to wait 20 minutes before nature ran its course and they could painfully uncouple. This was due to my inexperience, but this trip was a marvelous opportunity to learn much about Greenland dogs. I was soon able to handle the whip, and learned when and where to crack it to persuade the dogs to do as I wished.

During the pulk phase I'd used my old "Gearfreak" skiing jacket. I'd been in 2 minds whether to bring my heavy Fjällraven coat in addition. Today, however, whilst being relatively immobile on the back of the sledge in the strong cold wind it was perfect. With the hood up I had a personal micro-climate and was very comfortable. After an hour Sigrid left Tom and myself in charge of the Funkies. We had discipline problems and several stops for tangles. Salo came and whipped our dogs in an attempt to instill discipline, and then Sigrid re-joined me for the last couple of kilometres. They responded immediately to her voice and really picked up, put their tails up, and actually pulled our sledge.

*Centre Trace of Fan Trace? Apparently the FIDS men had long arguments about which of these was best. The centre trace is used in North America where mushing routes are through forests. Wherever the lead dog goes, the rest of the team has to follow. The inuit travel on sea ice, and for them the advantage of the fan trace is that the dogs can spread out and choose when and where they jump over cracks in the ice. The problem is that it doesn't take long for the traces to become tangled, but after 2 weeks of sledging we were able to keep the dogs disciplined for long enough at breaks to rapidly de-tangle.*

*Many of the FIDS used a modified fan trace on the crevassed terrain of the Antarctic Peninsula. If a dog went down a crevasse, it wouldn't take the others down with it, and would be easier to rescue.*

*FIDS Fan Trace*



We arrived at DYE-2 at about 14:30 in brilliant sunshine and no wind. It felt very warm. Just as we arrived Salo's tow rope snagged round the back of my sledge, and behind both my ski bindings. With his 16 dogs pulling there was tremendous tension in the rope and it dragged my feet into the sledge runner. It was difficult to extricate myself. This situation was quite hazardous, and came close to causing a serious injury later in the trip.

Mike and I dug a wind break for all 8 of us to enjoy a chili con bolgnese dinner together; one of the meals we'd made earlier at Kangerlussuaq. It's the first time I've felt well fed this trip, though a cool evening breeze sprung up so it wasn't so warm sat outside.

Salo then took us on a guided trip inside DYE 2. This Distant Early Warning radar station became operational in 1958 and is worth an article in itself. It was abandoned hurriedly in 1988, when the cold war was coming to an end and the ice on which it was built had moved. There's still beds made up, engineering drawings in the technical offices, and stores full of spares and consumables. Snow has drifted in places inside, and the living areas have suffered frost damage. It's an impressive structure to have been built in such a remote and hostile place. On our return to the tents a couple of hours later Sigrid had made us brownies, served on a snow shovel.

In the evening I repaired my “Gearfreak” salopettes in Salo’s tent. They were made almost 15 years ago by John Nortcliffe and have done thousands of kilometers, but this will have been their last trip.

The pulk team strode into the camp quite late, at about 20:30 and visited DYE-2. I was asleep by 21:45, having today moved into Salo’s tent.

Distant Early Warning & DYE-2

*The Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line was built in the Cold War, and extended from Alaska to England. Four stations were built in Greenland, of which two were on the ice-cap. DYE-2 became operational in 1958 and was abandoned in 1988 when it was thought the ice on which it was built had become unstable.*

*DYE is the code name for the Greenland stations, and refers to Cape Dyer on Baffin Island, Canada, which was the regional coordinating base (DYE-Main) for the Greenland stations DYE-1 through to DYE-4. The end of the cold war and the use of satellite reconnaissance left the DEW line obsolete.*



Progress day 10 – 15<sup>th</sup> May  
09:30 – 14:30. 21.63km.  
Trip Total 185.22km.

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Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2015

I woke at 06:45 to find the efficient and permanently happy Salo had both stoves going, one right next to me. It was a cold night so I had on a fleece besides both sleeping bags. Outside there was fog, with a weak sun and no wind. At 09:30 we were still in the tents and fog-bound. We couldn’t see more than about 50m, which would make travel difficult. The dogs were bored and howled. Sigrid decided we would attempt to leave at 12:00, so I read some Lord of the Rings, slept, and then Salo and I entertained ourselves by teaching knots to each other.

The fog lifted sufficiently for Clare, Tom and myself ski off ahead of the dog teams at 12:50. We crossed the nearby ice runway, and weren’t halfway across before the dogs caught up. It was very

warm so I put on an old white office shirt which was effective at reflecting the sun, but earned me the temporary moniker of Gandalf (the White).

A Hercules could be heard overhead and occasionally its shadow seen on the low cloud above us. Eventually when we were about 5km from DYE2 it came in to land, right in front of our pulk team friends. The weather gradually improved. I stopped skiing after 28km, feeling quite tired and with battered toes. It was a beautiful evening and everyone was happy with our progress.

#### New York Air National Guard

*This USAF reserve squadron flies to the ice shelves in Greenland and Antarctica in specially modified LC130 Hercules. They use an ice runway at DYE-2 for training, the old radome being a visual reference for pilots in an otherwise featureless landing zone.*



Phot: Bengt Rotmo

#### Saloman Ødegaard

*A native of Isortoq in East Greenland, Salo spoke no English and very little Danish. He was clearly a man of great character and resource. It's unusual to find Greenlanders travelling across the inland ice. He was well equipped with 16 powerful dogs, who clearly adored him, but also had modern trappings of satellite navigation and communication systems. He enjoyed drinking hot sweet coffee and talking to his large family in the evenings. He's tried living in the large township of Tasiilaq but the 2000 inhabitants were too many people for him.*



We had been averaging 25km per day since we met the dogs. The speed-time-distance calculation showed that to complete the trip on time we needed to average 32 km/day. Sigrid reckoned we could run 50km per day on the downhill side, but we would also need good weather and the right snow conditions to maintain the momentum.

Progress day 11 – 16<sup>th</sup> May  
12:50 – 19:30. 27.74km.  
Trip Total 212.96km.

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#### Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2015

This is a special day in the family: Norway's Constitution Day, our wedding day, and my departed father's birthday. I awoke in Salo's tent at 05:00 after a cold and bad night's sleep. My sleeping bag was full of gear to keep dry and warm, so consequently there was less room for me. I felt claustrophobic and had various aches & pains. It was blowing such a storm outside that we couldn't travel as the dog drivers would lose sight of the skiers. I opened the card from Yngvil and Ingeborg sent for this day and reflected.

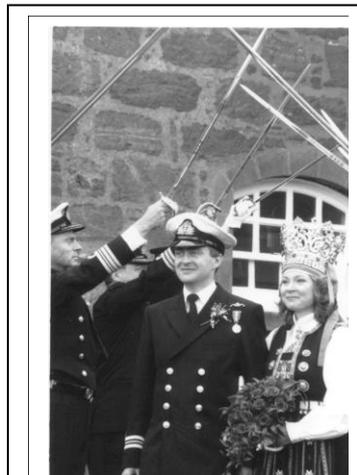
Saló and I started the stoves, had a porridge breakfast and warmed up. At 07:00 I walked across to Sigrid and Tom's tent, taking video of the blizzard. Sigrid was still optimistic we'll come through on time, as the long term weather forecast is apparently quite good. She never discussed speed, time and distance calculations with us, so it was difficult to know what her optimism was based on. After several tries I called Yngvil, Ingeborg and Håvard. They were in Bergen for 17 May, but it was of course raining. Ingeborg was brave and Håvard wished me luck.

I talked with Tom about his family; 3 grown-up daughters who have adventurous lives of their own, and about friends we've lost along the way. We concluded that one has to experience life whilst one can, life for now being blizzards in Greenland and accounts of people who'd gone before us.

At 10:00 it was still blizzing and the Funkies were howling. Salo slept whilst I repaired his gloves. I read Lord of the Rings and listened to Håvard's ipod.

At 16:30 it was still blowing, possibly harder, but the barometer was going up to 1008mb. Salo has no English and only a few words of Danish. We communicated happily enough and he showed me photographs of his home life and family. He hunts polar bears, and in isolated East Greenland villages they don't have snow-scooters which need mechanical expertise, but travel with dogs. In 2013 when a Pitera hit a group on the East Greenland icecap, Salo came closest to rescuing them with his dogs.

At 17:00 we were all in Sigrid and Tom's tent. I explained about Keith's special history and how I came to have Ben Nevis and other whisky miniatures given to me many years ago by the Lochaber Mountain Rescue Team at Leirvassbu just before Ingeborg was born. We had decked the tent with Norwegian, Greenland and British flags so it was quite a party atmosphere. The group was interested in Keith and so we talked about Antarctic characters from the heroic age, particularly the Irish. At 20:00 I called Yngvil, at midnight in Oslo. They'd returned home safely enough and so we had a good chat. Meanwhile the weather had abated, with some breeze but blue sky and good visibility. It was almost tempting to pack the sleds and travel, but after a whisky miniature each, nobody was too motivated. The Funkies were of course in trouble again. Three of them broke loose by biting through their steel wire lanyards. Salo and I caught one each but they were still whining. I was hopeful about the next day.



*Yngvil Solheim grew up near Bergen and works in Oslo as an Architect. In 1999 she was on a trip to the Smørstabbreen glacier in West Jotunheimen. Through a number of coincidences I was on the same trip, and the rest, as they say, is history. We married on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2003 at the Chapel of the Seaforth and Cameron Highlanders, Fort George, Scotland.*

Progress day 12 – 17<sup>th</sup>  
May  
Zero km.

Constitution Day

Norway's constitution was written in 1814 at the end of Napoleon's influence over Europe, although Norway did not achieve full independence again until 1905. It is celebrated every year with school parades, cheerful flag waving, and consumption of hot dogs and ice cream. It is a great day out.



From Sigrid's weblog: The crew celebrating with single malt miniatures.



17th May. Norway's national day

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015

I was up at 05:30 and lit Salo's stoves. There was some wind, but also visibility and the plan was to go, hopefully, at 08:30. Sigrid came around at 07:20 and said the weather is expected to quieten at mid-day and to be re-evaluated again at 10:00. She explained that the dogs don't like running into a strong wind, but a tail wind would be ok.

The 2 smaller sledges weighed about 300kg each at the departure from Dog Camp, each having about 6 x 20kg bags of dog food. Two of these bags were left at DYE 2, and the dogs ate 1½ bags per day. With our own food and fuel consumption we we're becoming lighter by about 40kg per day, and already had about 150kg less mass than when we started.

Meanwhile the barometer was going down and the wind was coming up, gusting about 20 knots from the East. Sigrid was still confident about the long term weather prospects, but to me the schedule looked blown.

I went tent-wondering; first Mike & Clare, then Sigrid & Tom. After mid-day the barometer fell rapidly and the wind was up at 20 to 30 knots. It became warmer. I had less clothes on in the sleeping bag so felt less claustrophobic, and slept better. I felt as if I was trapped in a Kittelsen drawing, with huge trolls throwing bolts of wind at each other. They were playing with us, and with our resources we couldn't move from them. I can now understand how superstitions about other-worldly beings built up in old days when there was less understanding of nature's phenomena.

Extract from Kittelsen's drawing of giants fighting in the Jotunheim mountains.





*Husky curled up in the storm*



*Our camp in the storm*

The wind suddenly eased off at about 17:00, but lots of was snow coming from the west. Digging out the sledges and tents took a lot of time and energy. Sigrid was confident of 30km the following day, discussed as we ate another communal chili-con-bolognese in Sigrid's tent. The schedule still looked a mess and one had to work at being optimistic. The main problem was the outside civilized world that we were so separated from. We had enough food and fuel for several days delay, but most of us had schedules, flights, & commitments to re-engage with, and it was not knowing how these would work out that probably clouded our thoughts. I leaned on Keith's and Yngvil's optimism in situations when we've been in the back of beyond and we've no idea about how to get home:

Keith - "Something will turn up, it always does."

Yngvil - "Allt går bra til slutt. Hvis det er ikke bra den er det ikke slutt." (Everything goes well in the end. If it isn't going well, then it isn't the end)

Finally there was the thought of Ingeborg being 14 the following day, and Ingeborg always brings good luck.

Progress day 13 – 18 <sup>th</sup> May Zero km. Trip Total 212.96km.
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### Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015

It was 14 years ago that I said "It's Ingeborg!" on the arrival of our daughter at Oslo's Rikshospital.

The weather was good enough today: a breeze from the west, visibility ½ km, -17°C and feels cold. Ingeborg had brought us luck.

I was up at 05:45 having been too warm, and unusually had not found much sleep; likely to have been a consequence of inactivity and tent-claustrophobia. We were outside by 08:00 to dig out the sleds and tents. I found a little bird sheltering by a sled runner. I thought it was dead, but when I picked it up it was still alive, just. 2 or 3 small birds had been following us since Kangerlussuaq, feeding off our wastes, but this was the last day that I saw any of them.



The weather deteriorated with a biting north wind that threw up lots of spindrift. I drove the last sled, now much lighter and easier to handle. I also learned more about driving. At the stops when one shouts “Arunya” the dogs are to be pushed over to the left by myself walking round to the starboard bow of the sledge with the whip in hand. They then understood clearly that this was a break and they were to relax. It meant that there were less tangles on the traces, and the dogs were under better control during the frequent stops.

With the visibility limited to just a few hundred metres it was difficult to remain in visual contact with the skiers. It all felt quite frustrating at first: trace tangles, undisciplined dogs, constant stops to fix things, but we persevered. Clare and I came into a routine and covered 14km of sled driving together. The sleds had 17 Mai flags on but I suspect only Ingeborg would have appreciated the gesture. It didn't seem appropriate in the half gale.



Dogs wishing Ingeborg a happy birthday...

From Sigrid's Blog. Much appreciated by the birthday girl.

#### Ingeborg

*It was a revelation to me in 2001 that a 4kg baby could turn one's life upside down. Today she was 14 and I was a long way from her. She is everything one could wish for in a daughter, and I was in Greenland with her kind permission.*



We stopped to change jobs at 14:00. I was to ski, but before everyone became too cold I was able to make a quick phone call to Ingeborg, the time being 18:00 in Oslo. Then I skied with Tom and Clare, sometimes in front, sometimes at the back. Clare had a heavy cold but wasn't slowing down. I tried to keep a fast pace going but had no visual references which seems to make one feel very tired. I had to ski with one stick, the other stowed on my rucksack, so that I could have one hand free to hold the GPS. This was more accurate than the compass, which I felt was important. We skied on past 3 flying geese about a ½ km away, and Bengt's midday tent up for a lunch break, though we didn't go over to socialize: We needed to keep the pace up. We finished the day with just under 30km covered and 80 km from the summit. We reckoned on three more days and then it would be downhill to the coast.

Progress day 14 – 19<sup>th</sup> May  
09:30 – 19:00 29.95 km.  
Trip Total 242.91km.

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015

I awoke to bright sunshine and no wind. It was cold in the night, cold enough for me to pull my down socks on and fill the sleeping bag so full of gear that I was feeling claustrophobic. I was pessimistic about the schedule.

It started off well with perfect skiing weather. Bengt and crew came skiing past us, but before we could start the weather changed. We left at 09:30, Clare and I driving the last sled. Fortunately the wind was from the west and didn't bother the dogs. As the wind became stronger the visual contact with our 3 skiers in front became more tenuous. The weakness in our arrangement was that the skiers out in front, showing the way for the dogs, had no food, fuel or shelter with them. If separated from the sledges because of bad weather and visibility, it would be unlikely that they could make contact again in the huge featureless expanse of Greenland. Hence losing contact here is not an option. So I suggested we try with everyone on or behind a sledge. We tried towing the skiers but in the limited visibility they repeatedly fell and we made no progress. In fact it was already complicated enough with a tow rope connecting the 2 lead sledges, and a bitch in heat half way along who kept pulling backwards.

*Bengt leading the pulk team*



Ian was sent to drive the Funkies, and inevitably the tow rope came round the back of his sledge. In the blizzard Salo did not see that Ian was stopping his sledge to de-tangle. The tow rope caught under his right ski, dragging it forwards, but his left ski was caught between the sledge runners at the back of the sledge. His right knee was being pulled apart. I left my sledge to help and in hindsight should have cut the tow rope, but managed to pull sufficient back tension on the rope for Ian to release himself. Ian needed surgery after the trip, but never complained about the pain.

Sigrid tried for a little longer by leading on skis, but with 50m visibility and high wind it was too risky and so we stopped to camp at 12:30. Putting the tents up was a trial. My hands froze, and it was an hour and a half before we could get inside. I was now sharing with Ania, and we were both a bit subdued after the experience of the last few hours. It took us some time to bring the tent and our belongings to a state of order.



*Drifted in*

Much of my gear was wet and I froze my hands more on the cold petrol tin. I found I was contemplating too much at this time. It was important to find some optimism, as Greenland is brutal: fingers, nose and toes get cold during the constant grind to achieve anything. Just setting up or breaking camp takes at least 2 hours. It's a constant effort to persuade dogs to pull and remain untangled. Sitting in a tent in a howling gale, with wet gear, a stove that didn't want to function, and not knowing how or when we would pull through this was probably the low point of the trip. Reading Lord of the Rings was too dark for this occasion, so I switched to a satirical and lighter Terry Pratchett story about 3 witches on a foreign holiday. His tales are an amusing reflection on human nature and it's hard to be pessimistic when reading them.

#### Mental Resilience

*At his lectures Børge Ousland talks about isolation and monotony on polar travels. It's possible to become focused on negative issues and allow these to build up in one's mind. I had to concentrate on the positive and use humour. Reading material, conversations, and the antics of dogs all helped. The sense of progress and learning were vital. I used the stations on the Bergen-Oslo railway, almost exactly the same length as our trip, as a mental benchmark for our progress. Family is important, and small reminders of close ones and everyday life help a lot.*

*As we gained experience and found the dogs less frustrating I became more buoyant. As with submariners, we developed a language and humour that might not have been politically correct, but kept us happy and positive. When I read my father's sledging diaries, I sensed the FIDS men had similar strategies in their approach to mental wellbeing.*

The ever-cheerful Sigrid came in at 17:15 and talked of a possible weather window at 03:00 tomorrow morning. This was when we started thinking radically and found ways to ski between storms. Meanwhile Bengt and the pulkers had stopped somewhere close by, and a near-Pitera was forecast in 2 days' time. Sigrid was worried about how long the food would last as she did not have an overview of the stocks we were carrying, and we were now clearly behind schedule. Over the next 36 hours we all ate very little, so I had just a little noodle and half a boil-in-the-bag dinner.

Progress day 15 – 20<sup>th</sup> May  
09:30 – 12:30 7.87 km.  
Trip Total 250.78km.

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#### Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015

I was awake at 03:00, and out of the tent at 06:00. The sledges were dug out, loaded, and dogs hooked up by 07:30. I was definitely not on form today: feeling dizzy, light-headed and faint. I had to kneel down and rest out of the wind whilst everybody else worked at breaking the camp. Afterwards I realised that this could have been hypoxia. The previous day I had trouble starting the stove in the tent as the matches kept burning out immediately after striking. The tent's vent holes had bunged up with drift snow, and the consequent oxygen loss is a recognized hazard of polar travel.

Fortunately I was co-driving the last team today. They're my favourites, so let's call them the Komats. They're scruffy and caked in seal-fat, but they work as a team, mostly. They're easy to understand and lead. Ian and I chatted happily about family and professional life. I felt immediately better: fresh air, a companion with my values, making progress again.

#### Hope Bay Dogs

*The FIDS men named their dog teams. Keith often drove the Komats, named after a type of Greenland sledge (komatik). The team was:*

<i>Flush (lead)</i>	<i>Rufus</i>
<i>Till</i>	<i>Castor</i>
<i>Dizzy</i>	<i>Ringwood</i>
<i>Satchmo</i>	<i>Ranter</i>
<i>Sleek</i>	<i>Rover</i>

*They were a popular and strong team.*





Later on I skied in front with Ian for a couple of hours, until we stopped at the declared summit of our route over Greenland, at an altitude of some 2500m. This was the good day we needed at last.



The bad weather forecast hadn't materialized. We had a communal chile-con-bolognese in Sigrid's tent. The team was tired and conversation reflected this. I suppose we felt we'd had the Greenland experience and could now go home with ambition satisfied. I talked to Yngvil on the amazing Iridium satellite phone, and without saying it as such, we both understood that by now my need for adventure was satisfied.

Progress day 16 – 21 <sup>st</sup> May 07:30 – 18:00 38.53 km. Trip Total 289.31km.
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### Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015

This morning the wind had deposited snow on the tent and wouldn't let me open the door; instead I had to open the zip from the top and carefully ease myself over the tent entrance. I used an hour to dig out the tents. At 08:00 Sigrid visited and told us this storm is forecast to remain on us all day. It was reckoned to be a Piteraqq on the coast.

I did not enjoy being tent-bound, but had at last found the means to relax and accept the condition we were in. Tom, now my tent companion, and I found positive things to talk about.

It was warm inside the tent, about +16°C, so it was a good drying and snoozing day. Dinner was a cup of pasta and cheese in Sigrid's tent. The main concern on everyone's mind was how to return home after the delays in schedule. It was an unknown and potentially severe expense to organize a charter helicopter and change flights, coupled with not knowing when we return to families and jobs, that occupies too much of the mind.

I was up at 21:30 and started digging out tents and sledges. Others appeared at 22:30. The tents came down and sledges were loaded in absolute still calm at about -17°C. Tom and I skied away from Camp 15 at the stroke of midnight. It was a “trolsk” feeling; the ice-cap lit by starlight and some sunlight refracting from over the horizon. Almost calm, few clouds, and plenty of scope for the imagination to play.

Trolsk

*An untranslatable Norwegian word for that feeling out in nature, sometimes late at night or early in the morning, when all is other-worldly and it feels good to be alive.*

Wasn't it monotonous?

*I've often been asked whether I was bored with the view of endless flat snow. Such a view is no worse than being at sea, and definitely better than being under the sea. There were no mountains to see inland. There was endless variation in weather, sunlight, starlight, and snow formations. Dogs and people provided endless distraction. There was always plenty of work to do, so no it wasn't monotonous.*



*Dogs and Sun-Dogs*

Thomas P Dougherty jr.

*Tom is a resident of Texas, but has strong connections with New York. He has been a soldier, lawyer, oil company executive and investor. He's found the time to walk to the South and North Poles, and despite experiencing a Piteraq in 2014 he returned to join us. For Tom, Greenland just had to be crossed. Tom had researched many issues before this trip including the history of the DEW line and the classic age of polar exploration. He was usually my companion when forerunning and kept good visual contact with the dog teams. He loves skiing as much as I do. It was a pleasure sharing a tent with this urbane, patient, and companionable soon to be grandfather.*





Progress day 17 – 22<sup>nd</sup> May  
Zero km.  
Trip Total 289.31km.

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### Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015

Tom and I were wary at first as a snow shower drifted over us and reduced visibility, but once it passed we went to cruising speed in the blue-grey twilight. We settled into a routine that would serve us well for the last week: 2 people out in front on 2 hour skiing shifts, usually with Clare or myself as combined snowplough and pilot, and 2 hour or 4 hour shifts co-driving a dog team. Soon enough I had 32 dogs right on my tail, but Salo just halted them a few metres behind Tom, and waited 10 minutes until the gap opened up to a few hundred metres again.



*The view behind – nocturnal skiing with Tom Dougherty*



*Sunrise at 2am.*

I had no visual references so was skiing with one ski-stick and one hand holding my amazing GPS, but we were still able to average 5km/hr. The GPS has a mathematical algorithm (kalman filtering) that constantly re-calculates direction based on recent position information, so its red pointer is highly accurate and easy to read. This is important as being just 5° off course adds a 90m tangent for every kilometer skied. The error becomes 50km, or 2 days, when it is scaled up to a 560km traverse.

For the first time I sensed the terrain was below me, not above. Daily GPS height observations confirmed we were now going downhill. Driving the dogs became a real pleasure, but the skiers were now so fast that skier speed closely matched dog speed. With much lighter sledges and a downhill gradient, 40km per day was becoming a previously unattainable norm. For long stretches on the hard snow conditions at this altitude, the only significant physical effort for a dog driver was occasional snow ploughing to control the sledge speed.

I was however feeling that I was running on empty, the only meal in the last 36 hours being a cup of pasta and cheese, and previous to that just half a re-hydrated bag of stew.

We stopped at 08:15 after 35km with an increasing westerly wind in order to erect tents before being hit by an expected storm. By 10:30 Tom and I were melting snow for breakfast and dog food, and almost ready for a good sleep. I did not, however, unpack my sleeping bag. At 11:30 it was blowing a storm outside and -11°C, but inside, solar radiation on our dark skinned tent had brought the inner temperature up to +28°C. I lay on my karrimat in underwear, and slept the most comfortable sleep I'd had in 2 weeks.

At 19:30 we had another communal spaghetti-con-carne dinner in Sigrid's tent, then went straight into preparations for another nocturnal excursion. We were digging out well drifted sledges at 21:30, and by 23:30 Tom and I were skiing east in the twilight. We had to wait 10 minutes on the edge of visibility before we could sense the dog teams moving at 23:50. I enjoyed these long nocturnal ski trips with Tom. We chatted amiably. He was happy to let me lead and navigate, but kept a close eye on our dog teams; he feared as much as I did the loss of visual contact with the sledges carrying our food, fuel and shelter.

<p>Progress day 18 – 23<sup>rd</sup> May Midnight – 08:15 34.94 km. Trip Total 324.25km.</p>
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### Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015

By 02:00 Tom and I had run 11km and handed over pilotage in a very cold north wind. This became a day of various problems: a sledge handlebar broke, and whilst trying to fix it, Clare and Anya, skiing out in front disappeared from view. Without a plan being briefed for lost contact, Ian and I thought

to drive around Salo's and Sigrid's teams, but only caused a major inter-team dog tangle. Later, after we'd found our skiers, Tom's ski binding broke. I couldn't contemplate repair in about -25°C, so he had to ride on the last sledge for the rest of the day.

By 10:15 we'd covered 40km and I stopped to camp before the next storm came through, just a few kilometres short of a depot and psychological objective. My subconscious was telling me we were camped in a Jotunheim corrie. Ian and I had alternatively driven our team hard to pull their sledge and Tom up a long slope. We literally had to carry them to their spans as they were too tired to walk the 5 metres to their beds.

I had a good tropical tent sleep in the afternoon. I was now sharing a tent with Ian again, and would remain with him for the rest of the trip. The forecast easterly wind dumped snow from 16:00 as I repaired Tom's ski with cold & hurting finger tips.

Dinner was at 20:00 in Sigrid's tent. There was some debate on how and when we would come home. It blew hard outside, with snow piling up and it feeling cold inside. Back in our tent I lit the stove so my hands would be warm enough to finish off the repair to Tom's ski. And then slept well.

Sigrid Ekran

*Completely at home in the harsh Greenland environment for weeks at end, Sigrid went to Alaska in her teens to learn how to drive dogs. In Norway she's well known for twice winning Norway's Finnmarksvidda 1000km sled race. She was one of our guides for the dog phase of the trip. When not in Greenland, she's training her own dogs in Trøndelag, or working out in the field for the Svalbard Governor. In 2016 she will return to Alaska to compete in the Iditarod. One of life's optimists, nothing ever seemed to trouble her.*



Progress day 19 – 24<sup>th</sup> May  
Midnight – 10:15 40.43km.  
Trip Total 364.68km.

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Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Up at 05:00 for an 08:50 departure with Tom, ½ hour ahead of the dog teams. Tom was so delighted with his ski repair that he promised to name his next born child after me. With 44 years of contented marriage behind him this would be an unlikely prospect, but it made me smile. I only hoped my engineering was good enough for his skis to reach Isortoq, still 200km away.

We found Sigrid's "Snåsa depot" at about 10:30, 6km from our last camp. I spotted it from about a kilometer away; a tiny shin high snow cairn with some green string, amongst the sastrugi. I dug down and found an orange bag with 9 dehydrated dinners and 6 oatmeal breakfasts inside. It was so light I don't know what benefit there was in making this depot, but it was another day's rations and helped with our possible food shortage. Tom and I proceeded onwards, in an increasingly warm day. My GPS was now displaying the next waypoint 150km away which is a huge distance that we knew would take several days effort to reach.



The snow was deep and hard going in places. Of the day's 38km, I lead for about 19 of them in 2 x 2 hour shifts. We finished at about 19:00, it becoming cold as the tents went up

There was lots of discussion in the evening over how to finish the trip. We had in theory 3 days left to reach the turn point 117km away, and then probably an overnight descent to Isortoq. Those with serious work commitments the following week wanted to hire a helicopter to pick up on the ice before the descent, which would leave others in a quandary: to pay for an expensive early ride out, or to be several days late home. The civilized world and its schedules imposed themselves on our capacity to enjoy and focus on what was important for safely completing our crossing.

Progress day 20 – 25 <sup>th</sup> May
08:50 – 19:00 38.71km.
Trip Total 403.39km.

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### Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Ian and I were up at 05:30, and had an early visit by Sigrid who described the transport plan after she'd been talking to HQ in Norway. A helicopter charter from the ice on Thursday, or the ice front at Isortoq on Friday. It was expensive, but the only real option and solved most people's departure problems. Once again I started off in front, with Tom, now much happier for having an exit strategy worked out. We ran 10km between 08:45 & 11:00 in -3°C & a fresh northerly breeze.

Whilst I focused on pilotage, trail breaking and skiing, Ian had found his forte as a dog driver. He could keep the dogs motivated for hours on end with just gentle words and no whip. I had some minor problems with my back which I was able to keep under control. Keeping it in motion with skiing helped a lot, but digging and hanging onto the sledge did not. I hung on to Ian's sled until 16:45 when he and I took the last trick skiing, covering about 12km up to 19:00. The day's total was 41km, and again I broke trail for half of it. In the late afternoon the wind was calm and the sun turned the snow to mush. I put on an old white office shirt again.

For the first time we could see "sea-blink" today: To the south east, the underside of cloud is dark, reflecting the colour of the sea, about 70km away. We were starting to feel demob happy with the prospect of seeing the coastal mountains the following day. As it turned out our hopes were early and optimistic.

Clare O'Leary has climbed the world's 7 summits and walked to both Poles. Quietly spoken and highly competent, Clare and I shared the lead-skier role. She works as a Doctor in Galway, Ireland, and has been a folk dancer on Riverdance. Clare is well known in Ireland for her experience of the world's coldest places.



Progress day 21 – 26<sup>th</sup> May  
08:45 – 19:00 41.16km.  
Trip Total 444.55km.

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### Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2015

We were up at 06:00 for a normal daylight 08:30 departure. The snow was wet mush at about -2°C, but Tom and I happily covered 10km in the first 2½ hours. The plan as briefed by Sigrid was to ski 45km, rest and then ski 30km very early the next day to a helicopter pick up point close to the ice front. As the day progressed the weather clagged in, making a helicopter transfer doubtful. News leaked out that Friday's bad weather forecast might be a Pitera. I skied the last hour to 17:00 and it was hard work, despite being quite a lot of descent. The snow conditions made for tough going and the hoped for view of the mountains was blocked by cloud.

In the late afternoon we made camp, ate, rested, and were up again at 23:00 for a very early breakfast. I don't recall any sleep, maybe an hour's doze in my Fjällraven coat.

#### Clothing & Personal Equipment

Ousland provided pulks, tents, cooking gear, food, iridium satellite phones and fuel. The rest we had to bring ourselves, but they gave good advice, and in some cases it was possible to modify gear I already had. The "Alfa" boot, with integral gaiters was excellent. I bought about 2 sizes larger than normal to allow for extra socks, and these boots were as comfortable as carpet slippers. Åsnes Breideblikk fjellski were bought. These don't have steel edges, so are "dog-friendly". This year was the first time I'd used New Nordic Norm bindings and they worked well. Two sleeping bags were used, a thin summer inner and a thick winter outer, which proved to be a flexible and comfortable solution that used what I already had. Two large thermos flasks, a Nalgene bottle, a karrimat and an inflatable therm-a-rest. were the key domestic arrangements. A goretex bivy bag would have helped prevent condensation in the sleeping bags. Two Olympus "Tough" cameras were excellent. I invested in a Kindle for this trip and didn't regret it. The solar cell was fiddly, and it would be better just to take a large capacity lightweight battery. I had several pairs of multilayered mittens, fleece jumpers and a puff jacket which was excellent. Outer shell garments were by "Gearfreak", and despite their age worked well.

Progress day 22 – 27<sup>th</sup> May  
08:30 – 17:00 28.66km.  
Trip Total 473.21km.

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### Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2015

We were moving at midnight to drive East to "The Turn" waypoint. Mike was my companion for much of today, and this was the first chance I had to chat much with this gregarious Irishman. He's clearly an authority on polar history and I enjoyed hearing his accounts of Irish contributions to the heroic age.

Mike O'Shea

*The other half of the Irish contingent, this giant extrovert is never short of something cheerful to say. He seemed impervious to cold, and whilst the rest of the group were looking forwards to home, he would be looking to his next ice adventure. Hard working under difficult conditions, he had energy, determination and initiative needed to get things done when items broke and storms were bad. He has a strong sense of Ireland's rich polar history, plenty of self-confidence, and a humorous approach to direction finding.*

*He runs safety and adventure guiding businesses. His claims to fame are the "Ice Project" which aims to take himself and Clare across all the world's ice caps, and work for the latest batch of Star Wars films.*



I had the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (last) skiing shifts, meaning I broke trail for 21km. I pushed hard as I wanted to be within reasonable range of the agreed helicopter rendezvous: At this distance from Tasiilaq they would not fly more than a few kilometres west of "The Turn" waypoint. At 13:15 Mike and I stopped just 4.5km short of it. We put up 2 of our tents and gathered in Sigrid's tent for a final coffee together. The dogs were spanned out and a helicopter landing site identified. Sigrid contacted Tasiilaq, but at 15:00 she understood there would be no flying because of high winds there. Some people were dispirited, but Ian and I were used to military minds springing bad jokes on us, put up our tent and ate a bag meal. We were too tired to think of anything more than practical solutions to immediate needs.

There was possibly a little sleep in my Fjällraven coat, before another midnight start. A Piteraqa was forecast at 14:00 and we had to be on the coast by then.

I was quite tired after 70km in 36 hours on no sleep. Much of this time I've been on blind pilotage, navigating with no visual references and a GPS in one hand. The helicopter failure was a setback but also a blessing. I would have felt I had not completed the trip from coast-to-coast. Now I would have the satisfaction of skiing right up to the sea and visiting Isortoq.

Progress day 23 – 28 <sup>th</sup> May
Midnight – 13:15 43.55km.
Trip Total 516.76km.

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Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015

At midnight, as the camp was being packed, I built a depot to stow our unpopular noodles as extra rations for Bengt's team who were about 2 days behind us and safe above the Piteraqa zone. We were in a storm blowing from the East. As a Guide in Norway I would not have left the mountain hut in these conditions, but with the prospect of something far worse coming upon us in 12 hours' time, we had little choice.

Sigrid led me south, and the 3 dog teams followed me. She skied for 2 hours into the blind storm, and then we started sharing the lead with ½ hour tricks each. When I was in front I could navigate accurately purely by the feel of the wind on my face and direction of spume over my skis, though my left nostril and eye blocked up with ice that had to be repeatedly cleared. Whenever I was in front my brain was sending strong signals to sleep. All I wanted to do was just stop and sleep. The view to the front was just a mesmerizing white wall, as if I was inside a ping-pong ball. I could just make out all 3 dog teams behind me, though there were times when Ian, driving the last sled, lost contact and just had to hope he was going the right way. For about 5 hours we continued on a gradual descent,

until I detected a waypoint reached. We turned to have the wind just over our left shoulders, which was marginally more comfortable, and the descent steepened. At times Sigrid and I separated as we had to do steep turns through blue ice projections but we could retain visual contact. Telemark turns worked for me. It was easy to imagine the terrain I was skiing through was steep farmland in Norway. The dogs came through the steep terrain ok. At times it was blizzing very hard. For a very short distance we tried being towed by Salo's team, but the deep wet snow at low altitudes and tired dogs meant no progress was made. Sigrid went in front again, and I skied right in front of the nose of Salo's lead dog to keep his team motivated.

We descended to an altitude where we experienced wet snow clad on several skis. This stopped us and we tried different ideas; using a scraper, some swapping of skis, and just heavy plodding on at a frustrating pace. Then we saw something not seen in 24 days; rocks. A lateral moraine, which led us into a broad snow chute, equivalent to a red ski run. There were bare mountainsides on both sides of us, and a grey view of a frozen lake beneath with cloud above. It became increasingly steep, and for the dog drivers some of the descent was a fast, steep surprise, with dogs coming close to being run over by their sledges. Ian commented afterwards that this was one of the more exhilarating experiences of his adventurous life.



We stopped to de-tangle by very respectably sized paw-prints left by a passing polar bear. Salo towed us for several kilometers along the lake before Sigrid and I took the lead over a low ridge and down to the sea ice where Salo's family had brought out boats.



I was aware a great journey had been accomplished, and I had for a short while lived a life not unlike my father's in Antarctica. We shook hands, hugged, and took photographs. There was still much to do, now that we were on the very edge of the civilized world again. I had skied for 100km in 60 hours, at least half the time as trail breaking pilot, and on less than 4 hours sleep. I was tired and probably anxious about how I would get home from here.





*Unpacking at the ice-edge. Salo's family have brought their boats to collect us.*

It was a 20 minute boat ride to Isortoq, and then a walk over sea-ice and up to Salo's guest house. We talked to HQ in Norway and hoped to make our flights home the following day. We took a shower at the community house, and fully appreciated the amazing technology of hot water running through copper pipes. We had a chicken dinner and slept very well.

Hope Bay

*This was one of about 17 FIDS bases. It was located at the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula and had a reputation for its uncompromising sledging and survey schedule. 15 men were based here, but most were out in the field for much of the time.*



Progress day 24 – 29<sup>th</sup> May  
 Midnight – 14:30 41.90km.  
 Trip Total 558.66km.

Isortoq

A village of about 90 people tht is a long way from anywhere. The population lives through hunting, tourism and government subsidy. There are 100s of dogs, electricity, internet, mobile phones, but no running water.



### Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2015

It was good weather in Isortoq when we woke at 06:00 with some sunshine, a high cloud base and no wind. We made ready to fly out. On talking to HQ we found out that Kulusuk airport was closed due to wind, and we faced an uncertain wait to see if our charter helicopter could bring us to Tasiilaq.

At 10:00 we walked round to the supermarket to stock up for the weekend. Of the 3 aisles, the centre row was just crates of Carlsberg stacked chest high. All food was either frozen (bread, butter, vegetables), dried, or in cans. There were lots of sweets, chocolate, lead-acid batteries, anchors, and lifejackets, but no clothes. I located the helipad on the way back and then settled down to a long afternoon of eating, an occasional beer, sms-chat with many friends, and watching B-Movies on a huge plasma screen. This was akin to submarine life: no interest in the outside world, but happy to watch trashy films, with nobody wanting to be the first to leave the show and do something sensible.

Salo produced some weighing scales and I found I was 64,8kg, meaning I'd lost 7kg. I ate well and in good conscience. The local weather was good for flying all day, which was frustrating as the helicopter didn't come due to conditions 40 miles away in Tasiilaq. I slept upstairs on the floor.



*Chris & Ian in Salo's spare house*

Progress day 25 – 30<sup>th</sup> May  
Confined to Isortoq. No flights  
due to weather in Tasiilaq.

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### Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015

A message came on my mobile phone at 07:30 that the helicopter was on its way. Four of us rapidly evacuated the shack, loaded our gear onto a small sledge and worked hard for 15 minutes to push it around the rotten snow, emerging rubbish, and steep paths of the village to the top of the helipad hill. We could hear the beat of the helicopter's rotor about 10 minutes before it landed.

I sat on the port side and had a beautiful ride over ice floes and mountains. Early on I could see our descent route down the ice to Isortoqfjord. At Tasiilaq heliport we were met by the hotel bus, and taken first to the hospital to search for bags supposedly sent to one of the Doctors (on leave) and then to the hotel. It was comfortable and a good Scandinavian standard. In the shop I bought some items, the prize being a model kayak. I needed a couple of hours to pack it for flights, and I dried out some gear. A lot of people at the hotel were waiting for flights, having been delayed on their business or holiday trips by storms. The bay was full of ice that had been blown in.

#### Jean Allen

*My mother grew up in wartime Derbyshire and has always had a sense of adventure. Thrift meant that we often experienced the wilderness close to home, but I learned to respect just how wild the local mountains could be. She enthusiastically supported my father's 2½ year absence in the south, and was keen for me to complete the Greenland crossing.*



View from the helicopter on our flight out. The red line is our route down from the inland ice.



Greenlandair

The only practical means of rapid travel in Greenland is by air. There are no roads between townships, and ice blocks sea routes for much of the year. In the Tassilaq area, Greenlandair has a solitary Bell 212 Helicopter to serve about 2000 people in the township and 4 neighbouring villages and link them to the airport at Kulussuk, 24km away over an ice strewn fjord. Greenlandair's administration systems seemed archaic and it's difficult to book with certainty. In Greenland you can wait a long time for a flight.



Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm

The Royal Navy's Antarctic guard ship, HMS Protector carried two Mk1 Whirlwind helicopters. Powered by a single rotary piston engine, they were limited by today's standards in range, payload and safety. Nevertheless they gave a lot of flexibility in the summer season, and were a means of evacuation from remote places. They could carry an underslung sledge, and a dog team in the cabin. The aircrew would turn up the cabin heating to ensure the dogs slept whilst onboard.

The middle of the day was taken up with walking all over town on a sunny afternoon to try and find some bags that had been sent over by air from Kangerlussuaq: hospital, police, & post office all asked before Ian found them by ransacking the heliport warehouse. The next crisis was we were not on Air Greenland's manifest for the 10 minute helicopter flight to Kulusuk airport the following day, and therefore wouldn't make our 48 hours delayed Air Iceland flight to Reykjavik. With their computer

system down there was no chance of finding out on a Sunday what could be done. By a stroke of luck, or maybe experience, Ian talked to the hotel manager about our problem. Suddenly it wasn't a problem: His brother had just bought himself a helicopter and had his first commercial flight scheduled the following day, to pick up a party from Kulusuk airport. For a reasonable price he agreed to fly us to meet our Iceland flight.

We could now have a relaxed dinner with plenty of white wine. It was enjoyable, but I didn't sleep afterwards: The bed was too soft, the bedroom too warm, even with all the windows open, and I'd had too much to eat. I was not used to comfort.

Progress day 26 – 31<sup>st</sup> May  
Flight to Tasiilaq. 70km, 15 minutes.

### Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015

The minibus collected us at 09:45 and we were airborne by 10:00. It was another scenic flight across the fjords to Kulusuk. We heard that the pulk team had come down to Isortoq in excellent weather, and then had promptly fallen asleep. We don't know if they had to eat the terrible noodles we left in a depot for them at the last camp.



### Tasiilaq

*This township of about 2000 people is the largest settlement on the east coast of Greenland. On a sunny Sunday afternoon it provided a pleasant walkabout with people outside enjoying the weather. There's plenty of modern housing and amenities.*



There was a few hours wait before the Iceland Air turboprop took off from the gravel runway. Two hours later we were in Reykjavik, and I took a taxi to Keflavik with Ian and Tom. On checking into my flight for Oslo the next day I found I had the last available seat.

### Denmark's Atlantic Empire

*Through Viking enterprise and quirks of history Denmark was a colonial power across much of the North Atlantic. At various times Denmark's territories have included Norway, Orkney, Shetland, Faroe, Iceland and Greenland. Iceland became independent in 1944. Greenland is a self-governing region, with defence and foreign policy retained in Copenhagen. Denmark has taken criticism for high levels of alcoholism, suicide and unemployment amongst native Greenlanders, though whichever way it would have happened, the Inuit went from a Stone Age culture to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the course of 2 or 3 generations: Huge societal problems were inevitable. My perception is the Danes have taken their responsibility seriously, and still contribute much, in money and competence to the development of modern Greenland.*

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Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015

It was another early start as I pushed a trolley across to the airport at 04:00, but Icelandair was efficient and I was home by 14:00. Whilst waiting at Gardermoen for my baggage, DNT called me and confirmed I'm the main guide for as long as I wish for their flagship A1 trekkhundur around Hardangervidda every March or April. This was started by Claus Helberg 60 years ago, so at the end of a respectable journey I have been given a great inheritance to look after for a few years.

<p><u>Progress day 27</u> –1<sup>st</sup> June Flight to Kulusuk. 30km, 10 minutes. Flight to Reykjavik. 2 hours</p>
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Of course as a family we took delight in being re-united. I was two days behind schedule coming home, with the two days of contingency consumed by the pulk phase of the crossing. We ate for dinner all the things I had day-dreamed of over the previous weeks. Ingeborg squealed with delight that her 51 years old father had a "six-pack", though this has long since disappeared.

Was it worth the time and money spent? Definitely. I've had a unique and life-enriching experience, a journey I'll recall for the rest of my life. I'm told that more people have stood on Everest than have walked across Greenland. It was sunny, warm, cold, stormy, frustrating, claustrophobic and rewarding.

Experience, physical, strength, mental toughness, teamwork and good luck were needed, and I found that my companions had these qualities in spades. It's taken me close to my physical and mental limits, but thankfully not beyond them. I've learned much, and much about myself. If earlier I had respect for my father, and those who went before him in the classic way of polar travel, it is magnified now, and I feel I can now read and understand their stories, maybe as more than an armchair observer:

To read is to forget.

To see is to remember.

To do is to understand. (Confucius. Also a mantra used by the RN submarine service)

<p><u>Progress day 28</u> – 2<sup>nd</sup> June Flight to Oslo. 3 hours Home</p>
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Chris Solheim-Allen is a former Royal Navy nuclear submarine engineer officer. He lives in Oslo, Norway with Yngvil and their 2 children and works in the Oil and Gas industry. He was formerly training officer for the Assynt Mountain Rescue Team in North Scotland, and is a Winter Guide for the Norwegian Mountaineering Association ([www.englishdnt.no](http://www.englishdnt.no))

#### Acknowledgements



Keith Allen (17 May 1932 – 19 April 2004) worked on the Antarctic Peninsula for the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS, now British Antarctic Survey) from 1958 to 1960. For much of this time he drove dog teams on long journeys for map-making and ascents of many peaks to set up trigonometric survey points. One of these now bears his name – “Allen Knoll”. He subsequently worked as an Engineer in constructing some of Britain’s earliest nuclear submarines (I served in one of them), and the oil & gas industry.



Richard (RAS) Adams (4<sup>th</sup> May 1952 – 16<sup>th</sup> August 2014) was my training officer at RNEC Manadon and subsequently my boss in HMS Conqueror. Our paths crossed many times in the years afterwards, both in the nuclear navy and the subsea construction industry. He was great company at any occasion from crises to parties, and an adventurous yachtsman. I continued to learn from RAS to the end. His parting advice rings true; if there’s something you must do, do it now, don’t wait.

Ian Clarke, Salo Ødegaard, Tom Dougherty, Bengt Rotmo, Sigrid Ekran, Clare O’Leary, Mike Dingle, Anja Schimanski for companionship and craic.

Ingeborg Solheim-Allen, Håvard Solheim-Allen, Yngvil Solheim-Allen, Jean Allen for tolerating my absence. Distance does indeed make the heart grow fonder.

John Nortcliffe for technical advice, and gear that worked, quite possibly to his surprise.

Thirty Two Greenland Dogs, names unknown, for traction and distraction.

This trip was organised by Børge Ousland, Bengt Rotmo and Lars Ebbesen. See [ousland.no](http://ousland.no) for interesting adventures.



#### Glossary

*Katabatic wind. A wind caused by cold dense air forming over ice and falling down over terrain.*

*\*Piteraqaq. Translates from Greenlandic as “That which attacks you”, being an exceptionally violent storm experienced in East Greenland in winter and spring. It occurs when a high pressure system over the icecap coincides with a low pressure in the Denmark Strait. In 1970 a Piteraqaq devastated the township of Tasiilaq. One of the very few Greenlandic words I’ve learned, and the one I’m unlikely to forget.*

*The FIDS used language inherited from the Royal Navy:*

- *Black Cat (v). To out-tell somebody else’s story. They might have told you of their big black cat, but yours is a bigger blacker cat.*
- *Demob happy. At the end of a long tiresome trip at sea, crews are happy as the prospect of demobilization and going home draws near.*
- *Gash (n). Rubbish.*

## Gear and Logistics

This was a complex trip for the organisers, being in total 3 crossings of the Greenland ice, all interlinked.

It started in Isortoq in April, with 2 Norwegians and 1 Greenlander driving 3 sledges and 32 dogs up onto the ice and west towards Kangerlussuaq. They should have travelled to within 40 or 50km of the drop off point, above the ice seracs on the Russell Glacier. Due to bad weather and an undisciplined dog team, they progressed to a place that was 113km from our drop off, hence the extra 4 days of skiing we had to do. The sledges had only dog food for the crossing west, and the gear and supplies needed by the 3 drivers.

Once stopped, the dog teams were re-supplied with a 900kg load taken by a Greenlandair S61 helicopter operating from Kangerlussuaq. This included 560kg dog food for the eastward trip, along with the rations and fuel needed by all the participants crossing eastwards to Isortoq.

Bengt Rotmo lead 2 groups out of Kangerlussuaq. One group, mostly in their 20s would use about 25 days to pull pulks all the way across the ice. The other group, of somewhat older folk, pulled pulks as far as dog camp. For this first week we were all pulling pulks weighing about 45kg.

At dog camp, the dog group gave up their pulks to the pulk team, who would now be pulling double pulks. They loaded up food and fuel from the helicopter depot. The use of a double pulk had advantages of low centre of gravity and wind resistance. Having gained altitude, their total weight pulled could be increased without causing much extra effort. Meanwhile the sledges were loaded with 28 x 20kg bags of dehydrated dog food.

Bengt continued to lead the 6 pulkers eastwards, and Sigrid now had responsibility for the dog sledge participants.

The sledges belonged to Salo Ødegaard and were of local build. The largest at 14' (4,3m) was driven by Salo with 16 dogs. The 2 smaller sledges were 12' (3,7m) long, narrower and had 8 dogs each. The sledges were of a heavier construction than the Nansen sledge. The various parts were lashed together to allow flexing over uneven terrain.

Stoves were MSR multi-fuel (XGK), with petrol as the fuel.

Tents were 3 man Helsport Svea Camp. We slept 2 to each tent, so there was room inside for cooking.

Skis & Boots were bought specially for this trip. For the first time in my life I used the New Nordic Norm (NNN) binding as its freedom of movement lowers the risk of blisters. I bought the Alfa boot with integral gaiters. Being 2 sizes too big I had plenty of room for wool socks and a soft inner boot, giving me the most comfortable skiing experience I've ever had. They were like carpet slippers and I had no blisters. Skis were Åsnes Breidablikk. They were maybe a little too wide, but without steel edges they were unlikely to injure the dogs' paws.

Ousland reckon on 1kg food per person per day, and 4kg fuel per person for the trip. The dogs consumed 30kg of food per day. Hence we started out from Dog Camp with about 900kg combined (all 3) sledges and payload weight, which decreased by about 37kg per day. By Isortoq our combined sledge weights were about 270kg. On average, each dog was pulling its own body-weight at the start.

## Data Table

Date	Position	Place Name	Height (GPS)	Environment	Day's Distance	Total Distance	Notes
03 May	Oslo to Copenhagen						
04-06 May	67° 00.657'N 050° 44.001'W	Old Camp	57m				
06 May Wed	67° 09.161'N 050° 03.055'W	Drop Off 660	516m	14:00 - 18.6°c & 1029 mB	0	0	
06 May Wed	67° 08.441'N 049° 59.393'W	Camp 1	575m	16:00 - 11°c	2.96km	2.96km	Skiing 16.00 – 18:00
07 May Thu	67° 08.545'N 049° 44.078'W	Camp 2	836m	06:30 – 1.5°c & 1016.5 mB 18:10 – 1018.8 mB Max temp 5°c. Light East breeze.	11.04km	14.00km	
08 May Fri	67° 08.555'N 049° 21.896'W	Camp 3	1065m	06:00 – 1018.3 mB, Light East breeze. Mild. 18:00 – 1013.8 mB, +2°c, Wind S, Fresh.	16.00km	30.00km	
09 May Sat	67° 08.226'N 048° 54.853'W	Camp 4	1439m	06:00 – Breeze southerly, 10-15 knots. Snow. Vis several 100m. Temp range today -2°c to +2°c	19.56km	49.56km	
10 May Sun	67° 00.308'N 048° 31.100'W	Camp 5	1441m	Temp -5°c all day. Wind S, 5-15 knots. Vis 100m to 1km.	22.65km	72.21km	
11 May Mon	66° 52.880'N 048° 03.718'W	Camp 6	1574m	07:00 – 990.90 mB. Breeze and snow, occasional good view of ice-cap.	24.26km	96.47km	Saw a flock of geese sitting on ice.
12 May Tue	66° 48.100'N 047° 44.125'W	Camp 7 Dog Camp	1679m	07:00 – Bright sun, strong breeze 10 knots from south. 994.18 mb. -6°c. 18:30 – 993.20 mB	16.82km	113.29km	Sighted dog camp 13:00. Reached dog camp 16:00.
13 May Wed	66° 41.691'N 047° 23.517'W	Camp 8	1801m	06:30 – bright sun, strong breeze S, 10-15 knots. 992.94 mB. 19:00 – 989.86 mB.	19.15km	132.44km	
14 May	66° 34.272'N	Camp 9	1975m	07:00 – 979.72 mB, strong winds in the night.	31.15km	163.59km	

Thu	046° 45.649'W			20:10 – 981.86 mB. Temp about -1°C all day.			
15 May Fri	66° 29.519'N 046° 18.993'W	Camp 10 DYE-2	2120m	06:30 – 987.84 mB. -15°C. Light breeze SE. 16:30 – 989.45 mB. 18:00 – 994.07 mB 21:45. -10°C, clear sky.	21.63km	185.22km	Crossed the Arctic Circle - 66° 33'N
16 May Sat	66° 27.046'N 045° 42.169'W	Camp 11	2238m	06:20 – 995.65 mB. Thin layer of fog, calm, weak sun.	27.74km	212.96km	Fog bound until 12:50.
17 May Sun	''	Camp 11	''	06:00 – Blizzard, 20 knots S. 06:30 – 1006.0 mB 16:30 – 1008.0 mB	0	212.96km	 Storm bound
18 May Mon	''	Camp 11	''	06:40 – 1001.0 mB. - S 15 knots. 08:20 – 998.9 mB 12:00 – 997.07 mB 14:00 – 992.61 mB – 20+ knots 14:50 – 990.1 mB 15:50 – 988.53 mB 16:50 – 987.65 mB. Wind W. 21:00 – 990.8 mB. Wind W.	0	212.96km	Storm bound
19 May Tue	66° 25.012' N 045° 02.222' W	Camp 12	2337m	06:15 – 986.02 mB, -17°C Wind N F4/5, veering east later. 21:00 – 974.80 mB	29.95km	242.91km	
20 May Wed	66° 24.428' N 044° 51.721' W	Camp 13	2358m	06:30 – 970.90 mB 14:45 – 979.31 mB 18:30 – 981.54 mB	7.87km	250.78km	Short ski trip in a storm. Tried towing skiers behind Salo's sled.
21 May Thu	66° 24.269' N 043° 59.988' W	Camp 14	2452m	05:10 – 991.13 mB	38.53km	289.31km	Summit.
22 May Fri	''	Camp 14	''	06:00 – 991.66 mB. -18°C. Gale from South. 11:30 – 992.83 mB 19:00 – 992.37 mB 21:30 - -17°C.	0	289.31km	½ rations. Storm bound
23 May Sat	66° 20.144' N 043° 14.293' W	Camp 15	2451m	10:30 – 991.10 mB 17:30 -11°C outside, storm. +28°C inside tent, no stove on.	34.94km	324.25km	Up at 22:30 previous evening. Started skiing shortly before midnight. Stopped 08:15. Dinner 19:30 and then preps for next midnight ski run.

24 May Sun	66° 17.137' N 042° 20.698' W	Camp 16	2234m	Estimate -19°C to -25°C with wind chill. Strong north wind. 18:10 – 994.35 mB	40.43km	364.68km	Started skiing 23:30, dogs following by midnight. Stopped by 16:00. Broken sledge and ski binding.
	66° 16.806' N 042° 12.375' W	Snåsa Depot					6 breakfasts and 9 dinners in an orange bag.
25 May Mon	66° 11.744' N 041° 30.807' W	Camp 17	2133m	06:00 – 995.56 mB 20:50 – 1013.1 mB	38.71km	403.39km	
26 May Tue	66° 04.497' N 040° 39.140' W	Camp 18	1855m	06:15 – 996.71 mB, -3°C. 20:25 – 1010.3 mB	41.16km	444.55km	
27 May Wed	66° 00.548' N 040° 02.470' W	Camp 19	1618m	06:00 – 1001.8 mB, -2°C, Wind SE, wet snow. Skiing on deep semi-wet mush. 18:00 – 1032.3 mB	28.66km	473.21km	
28 May Thu	65° 56.341' N 039° 05.921' W	Camp 20	1443m	16:00 – 1000.9 mB	43.55km	516.76km	23:00 start. Stopped 4.5km short of the planned waypoint at 13:15. Helicopter couldn't leave Tasiilaq.
29 May Fri	65° 46.580' N 038° 55.069' W	Descent Turn 1		Full storm from East.	(19.91km)		Midnight start
	65° 39.858' N 038° 56.581' W	The Moraine			(12.52km)		
	65° 38.734' N 038° 58.356' W	The Chute	85m		(2.49km)		
	65° 35.313' N 038° 54.555' W	Isortoq Ice Beach	6m		(6.98km) 41.90km	<b>558.66km</b>	Storm in Tasiilaq. Helicopter grounded.
30 May Sat	65° 32.917' N 038° 58.500' W	Isortoq Village		Still, very light breeze. Cloud base circa 200m			Storm in Tasiilaq. Helicopter grounded.
31 May Sun		Tasiilaq		Still, very light breeze. Cloud base circa 200m			Early flight to Tasiilaq
01 June Mon		Kulusuk / Reykjavik					 Helicopter to Kulusuk. Flight to Reykjavik.
02 June Tue		Home					 Flight to Oslo.



