

Greenland East Coast Kayak Expedition 2006

Scoresbysund to Ammassalik

Martin Rickard - Peter Jones - Philip Clegg
Patron; Richard Watkins

Expedition Report – Martin Rickard

Having spent several summers paddling in the Ammassalik area of East Greenland, Pete and I came up with the very ambitious plan of a journey from Scoresbysund in the north, down to Ammassalik, a one-way trip of about 700 miles. In the summer of 1925 the Danish government relocated 90 Inuit from their original settlement of Ammassalik, then the major settlement on the east coast, to a settlement they created further north at Scoresby Sound. This expedition would attempt to reconnect the two communities by kayak, the original form of transport of the Inuit.



My research started and the plan soon began to come together. We decided to ship out all our gear, kayaks and food in the summer of 2005 and store this over the winter in Greenland. We could then fly out in early July, before the supply boat arrived, and get as early a start as possible, thereby making the most of the short paddling season.



One of the initial problems was finding suitable maps which covered the whole route. These were eventually sourced with the help of a number of people who would like to remain anonymous as some turned out to be restricted American military maps, others were similar Russian maps and the remaining sheets were Danish. Thanks to them for their support.

Companies were then approached for sponsorship. We knew we would require new, well tried and tested equipment as this would not be the environment to compromise or test gear in. Only the best would do, as our lives would literally depend on it. Many thanks to all of you, our sponsors, who are listed separately, without your considerable enthusiasm and support this expedition, would not have been possible.



Early on in the scheme of things Phil Clegg was invited to join us. Phil had just finished paddling round the UK, knew Pete well and had been inspired by the slide show of our 2004 Watkins trip. Having three people added greatly to our level of safety and enabled us to share group gear with one other person without having to take any more than two people would need. Although in theory three people is not ideal for group dynamics, for us it worked very well indeed and Pete and I were very pleased Phil was committed enough to give up his job as a kayak instructor and join us for the summer.

The logistics were a bit of a nightmare, as this section of the East Greenland coast is completely uninhabited and we would be unable to re supply or food and fuel. We also knew very well we would never be able to afford the cost of planes or boats doing food supply drops along our route. It was therefore apparent at an early stage that we would have to be self sufficient, with all our food and fuel in the kayaks for the duration of the expedition. Having experienced most of the conditions we were likely to be faced with, we calculated it would take about 60 days to complete the trip, given a large slice of luck! If need be we could hunt and fish to supplement our food. The menu would have to be basic and simple, so the three of us agreed on a simple selection of store bought goods that would give a bit of variety and help keep our interest for two months. On a trip like this there is no room for faddy eaters. Having shipped out all our stores in 2005 I was concerned the food would have taken on the flavour of fibre glass resin, fortunately this was not the case and everything tasted as good as it could possibly do. We did have a good spice kit!

To our knowledge no one had ever attempted an unsupported arctic kayak trip of this duration and until we loaded up on the beach in Scoresbysund we were not even sure if we could get everything in or on the kayaks or whether in the end they would be manageable once we got in – i.e. float. The boats weighed about 350lbs before we got in them and had large Nookie dry sacks with our personal / survival gear on the front and rear decks. Paddling with these sacks made the kayaks quite unstable and took some getting used to. They also caught the wind and as a result we were glad of our skegs, which were essential to correct weathercocking.

I for one felt very wobbly the first time we paddled out and spent a lot of time in the evenings at campsites, repacking and trying to adjust the trim of my boat. Quite a lot of the clothing and equipment, which had been supplied by sponsors and shipped out in the container was either given to the locals in Scoresbysund or shipped back to the UK as we were well over weight and in the end had no room for any luxury items. All our storage space was taken up with food.

The paddling team

Martin Rickard – based in Shetland.
25 years experience teaching outdoor education in the UK and Canada.
BCU Level 4 Coach - Sea, Inland and Canoe.
SCA contracted course provider.
Winter Mountain Leader.
RYA Instructor.
Circumnavigation of Ireland 1983.
Circumnavigation Prince Edward Island – solo.
West Coast of Scotland, Outer Hebrides, Orkney, St Kilda, Canada, Norway, Iceland, Shetland.
Greenland in 2000 – 2002 - 2004

Peter Jones – based in North Wales.
Freelance instructor.
BCU Level 5 Aspirant Coach - Sea.
MLTB Summer Award.
RYA Instructor.
Pete has taken part in many major sea kayak expeditions, including: -West Coast Canada, Nova Scotia, Israel, Holland, Spain, Ireland, Outer Hebrides, St Kilda, Orkney.
Greenland in 2000 – 2002 - 2004

Philip Clegg – based in North Wales.
Works as an instructor for Sea Kayaking UK.
A member of the Welsh Kayak Surf Team.
Experienced river, sea and surf kayaker throughout the UK and abroad.
Part of a three man team of kayakers, who 2005 circumnavigated Great Britain in 80 days, knocking 6 days of the record.
BCU Level 4 Coach - Sea.

The rest of the team

Our Sponsors - without whose support this expedition would definitely not have been possible – once again many thanks.

Nigel Dennis Kayaks - donated three “Explorer” expedition sea kayaks.

www.seakayakinguk.com

Lendal Products - donated 4 piece paddles and boots. www.lendal.com

Kokatat USA - donated Gortex dry suits and paddling gear. www.kokatat.com

Chill Cheater - donated transpire fleece thermals, spray decks and custom made shotgun and rifle deck mounted dry bags. www.chillcheater.com

Nookie Xtreme Sports Equipment - donated dry bags, deck bags and paddling gear. www.nookie.co.uk

Kari-Tek - donated midge jackets and portage straps. www.kari-tek.co.uk

Mountain Equipment UK - donated 3 x Snowline sleeping bags. www.mountain-equipment.co.uk

Hitch n Hike - MSR stove and GPS system. www.hnh.dircon.co.uk

DMM in North Wales – loan of ice axes. www.dmmclimbing.com

Seal Skinz - waterproof hats, socks and gloves. www.sealskinz.com

Sunshine Solar Ltd - 2 x solar battery chargers. www.sunshinesolar.co.uk

McMurdo - loan of updated PLB FastFind Plus. (Rescue beacon)

www.mcmurdo.co.uk

Eimskip UK / Royal Arctic Line - support with free expedition freight to Greenland.

www.eimskip.co.uk

Icelandair – considerable support with flights, baggage and schedule changes

www.icelandair.co.uk

Gino Watkins Memorial Trust - (Scott Polar Research Institute) financial support during 2002, 2004 and again in 2006. www.spri.cam.ac.uk

The Artic Club - financial support for 2006. www.arcticclub.org.uk

The Sports Council for Wales - grant aid support for overseas expeditions.

www.sports-council-wales.co.uk

Special thanks must also go to:

- Andrea Burgherr in Iceland and Morten Steen in Tasiilaq for their considerable help with logistics.
- Andrew Ross who explored part of this coast in 1970 and provided a wealth of knowledge, encouragement and support.
- Karel Vissel in Israel – our weather man who TXT us every day with accurate forecasts.

The Charity

Ectodermal Dysplasia Society - The charity we are raising support for.

www.ectodermaldysplasia.org

Expedition Progress

10th July: The three of us meet up at Manchester airport and fly out to Iceland. We have the usual last minute rush to get all the kit in our flight bags and then check in with our two pump action shotguns. The airport police come and check everything out, much to the interest of fellow passengers, all goes well and we are soon on the flight arriving in Iceland at midnight to catch the fly bus to the main campsite in Reykjavik.

11th July: We are forced to have a stop over day in Iceland waiting for the flight to Greenland, which only goes twice a week. We received a warm welcome from Steini Sigurlaugsson of Sea Kayak Iceland (www.seakayakiceland.com) and Hadas Feldman who is working there for the summer. We spent the day in coffee shops and the hot tubs and had a last few beers in the evening before we left.

12th July: Hadas drives us out to the local airport for our flight to Constable Point in Greenland. The flight went well and we had no problems with excess baggage, even though the bulk of our gear was shipped out last summer we still have huge flight bags and were well over weight. The plane was half empty so we were able to swap seats and get the best view out as we approach the coast. We were also invited up to the flight deck to check out the ice conditions and the pilot made quite a detour and flew some of our initial route so we could see what lay ahead, as we approach and prepared to land. The ice was very packed and stretched for over 50 miles out to sea. The fjord by the airport, Hurry Inlet, is completely blocked with a solid sheet of ice, it looked as if you could walk on it all the way to the other side. At this point we realised the conditions would be a little different from what we had expected. We get the helicopter flight to the settlement of Scoresbysund, and having struggled with all our bags end up with a good bivi site on the rocks by the town's fuel tanks for the night. It seemed as if a Walrus sighting excited the whole village and were all trying to shoot it. The hunters and fishermen had been unable to get out from the village as the ice has been so packed and everyone is a bit gun happy at the prospect of something to shoot. Needless to say nothing was shot.

13th July: After a restless night, which never got dark, sleeping on sharp stones and rocks, which punctured our Thermo Rests, we woke to the shot of a rifle. Only yards away as the Walrus hunt continued, and we found our little bivi site was surrounded by guns as the hunters looked out to sea in the vain attempt of being successful. As soon as the rest of the town woke we went to retrieve our kayaks and gear. We knew the shipping container had been damaged while being off loaded in 2005 so we were very pleased to discover that our kayaks had survived and were in good condition. However some bits of kit seemed to be missing, although nothing we would not be able to make do without. We spent most of the day on the beach, packing 60 days supplies in the boats before heading off. The local boys were fascinated by all our stuff and were a great help. They were very trustworthy and not even a Mars Bar went missing. This was particularly impressive considering the shop had run out of treats over a month ago. There were several modern fibreglass kayaks in the village, which the lads proudly paddled round to show us, and escorted us for a short while as we set out to cross Scoresby Sound. As we half expected the ice was too thick and we were forced back after several hours of trying to find a route through. We had made some progress and at least managed to get away from the noise of all the sled dogs in town. We camped that evening on the headland of Kap Tobin @ **70.26n/21.59w** on the southern end of the Scoresby peninsular and waited for the ice to clear. We had at least reduced the crossing to its shortest possible distance.

14th July: Climbed a hill behind camp today to see if we could locate a route through the ice, however the whole sound is clogged and the onshore wind will keep it that way for some time. Spoke to a local hunter who said they had been able to dog sled on it a week ago, although this time last year it had been clear for three weeks. It was obvious that this trip would be a waiting game.

15th July: No change in the weather so we slept in. Later we sorted our kit out a bit more and I tried to adjust the weight of each storage compartment so that the kayak would handle better, especially in a wind. Found some wood and cooked on a fire to save our precious fuel. Just waiting for ice to clear, might be some time. It was very cold camped on the headland with the fresh breeze coming off the sea and it became very tiring sitting around a smoky fire that gave off little heat.

16th July: Today we woke to find a polar bear's tracks in the snow close behind the tent. We had expected to see bears and were keen, if at a distance, however never expected to see any signs so close to the settlement. This one had clearly come off the fjord and was walking over the hill to the sea behind us. Now started sleeping with the shotgun loaded and in the tent at night and close at hand during the day. Again we climbed the hill for another view out over the ice. It was still very compacted but there is a small chance we might be able to find a way through tomorrow.

17th July: Packed up everything early and made a second attempt at crossing Scoresby Sound. Only managed about four miles of the twenty-four mile crossing before reaching impassable ice and it was quite tricky getting safely back through it to shore. We estimated that our loaded sea kayaks each weigh over 300lbs so it is not a realistic option to drag them over the ice as we had done on previous trips. Return to the same campsite where we at least have plenty of water and wood from an old hut to cook on. However we are worried this delay will eat into our food and fuel supplies.

18th July: The wind strength is increasing, unfortunately from the wrong direction, blowing more ice into the fjord from the sea, it's wet and cold and rather miserable in our camp. We really need a strong easterly wind to blow the ice out if we are ever going to get a chance at crossing the sound.

19th July: Another day of waiting. Conditions are much the same. We are getting bored, so paddle back into Scoresbysund for another mooch about the settlement. Having been forced to climb out and pull the kayaks over the ice, Pete livened up the day by nearly falling in the water as we rushed to re-launch before the kayaks are crushed between two huge bits of ice, much to our amusement, I couldn't stop laughing about it all day.

20th July: Walked up the hill behind our camp site again to have a look at the ice. For some reason there is far less of it today, even though there has been an onshore wind for the past week. Will have another attempt at crossing tomorrow if the wind isn't too strong. We walk out to the point and explore an old weather station, the buildings are full of hard packed wind blown snow. Look for the hot springs we were told are in the area but there is no sign of them. Also we come across a modern day plastic sea kayak, which is smashed up and crushed under storm thrown boulders on the beach. We wonder what story it would be able to tell.

21st July: Today we made an early start and eventually after 8 1/2 hrs paddling crossed Scoresby Sound! It was 28 miles from launching to landing with a bit of a head wind. We were knackered, but glad to finally be moving. At least we won't have to do that crossing again, which in these waters is a serious undertaking and very committing. We had a wet landing at the end of the day on quite a rocky shore and got very cold @ **70.05n/22.06w**. The stove then refused to work so we made tea on a fire of twigs. We've eaten into our supplies quite heavily with the wait, so we need to put some miles in now and make up for lost time. Saw a pair of Arctic Hares still in their winter coats playing on the hill behind the camp.

22nd July: Sunshine, breathtaking views and not much sea ice. A fantastic day. Wind picked up to a strong headwind in the afternoon so cut it a bit short and camp early in a sheltered steam bed we call "Dingle Dell" which is nice and sunny and out of the wind. @ **70.00n**

23rd July: The wind and swell had increased over night, so we couldn't paddle today. Shot and ate a Grouse for tea and had a good wash in the stream. Rather depressed at this new hold up as we thought we were on our way. Launching in this surf would have been a problem and the paddling far too cold and exhausting for any mileage gain. Not quite sure where we are at present as the maps and GPS don't match up. Will go with the GPS as our maps are taken from 1932 originals.

24th July: Thankfully we experienced good weather today with not much ice. Managed to paddle a good 25 miles to Stuart Island through some large bits of ice. The wind picked up as we started the hour and a half crossing from the mainland and we were glad to reach land and start looking for the huts that were supposed to be on the south side of the island, however after a tough day we gave up and landed on a rough beach below the only grassy bit of ground in the area. We camped within the ruins of an old Inuit settlement @ **69.53n/22.48w**. The round houses were like Igloos but made of rock and earth and there were many gravesites, indicating a long established full time settlement was flourishing here several centuries ago. We also found several old fox traps, which work on the dead fall principle it was a fascinating place to explore.

25th July: Started off in reasonable weather. However we were soon slowed down by thick ice of Manby Island and things again looked a bit grim. Paddled further out to sea and managed to make headway. The steep cliffs of Turner Island prevented us landing where we had planned as we were in constant danger from rock fall. This forced us to take a committing open crossing in very thick fog. We were a bit anxious at this time, as we were unsure of the magnetic variation, which varies considerably along the coast. Paddled 40 miles in 10 hours. Landed tired, but happy and made camp on the NE finger of Henry Land @ **69.38n/23.36w**. We had been about right with plus 20 degrees.

26th July: A cold and very foggy day, with a couple of large open crossings, which had to be done on a bearing as the visibility was down to about 50 metres. On the south coast of Henry land we found a hot spring coming out of the cliff and had a hair wash and shave while rinsing the salt off our dry suits. Didn't linger as the area was exposed to rock fall from the 1000 ft cliffs which pepper the narrow shoreline with a regular volley of stone fall. Continue on, looking for the remains of a hut at Kap Dolton. Surf the crossing in the mist with an increasing following sea and made good time. The map was very misleading at this point, however we eventually locate our site @ **69.27n24.13w** and spent the evening exploring and cooking on an open fire. The hut has long gone past its best, but will be a welcome source of wood for many

years to come. Find a huge polar bear skull with teeth, which we extract for a dentist friend back home.

27th July: Another foggy and cold day. Rounded Kap Dalton and Kap Ewart and eventually make land on the west side of Knighton Buqt @ **69.19n/24.39w**. The sun came out in the evening and we were able to have a good wash in some large fresh water pools. Hopefully the weather is changing for the better. The kayaking is committing with several reasonable crossings each day to headlands where it is impossible to land and our day is broken down to “thumbs”. A crossing of 3 thumbs – and 5 thumbs before we can land – another thumb before we raft up for a mars bar – a total of X thumbs today etc. A “thumb” was an hour’s paddle and about 4 statute miles, given good conditions. Looking inland as we paddle everyday reveals a mass of fantastically impressive mountains, which stretch as far as the eye can see. We know no one has even been close to climbing them and some of the corries we walk into when exploring of an evening have never been visited before, ever!

28th July: Leave Knighton and head off round Kap Barclay. The cliffs are huge with the usual stone fall, however the ice prevents us staying outside the danger zone and at times we are forced to paddle only feet away from the bottom, often pushing our way between the rock on one side and the ice on the other. Do the 12 mile crossing which takes 4 hours, taking it in turns to lead for an hour, and then camp at a point of low ground @ **69.10n/24.59w**. Pull the kayaks up the snow bank, there was no beach, and discover loads of fresh bear tracks. No option but to set up camp. Secured the kayaks to the snow with ice axe belays and our toelines.

29th July: We have fallen into quite a relaxed routine, getting up each morning when we want and then getting on the water after about an hour and a half of getting ready. It doesn’t get dark at night so there is no rush, as we are only able to paddle so far each day, either because of our energy or because of the available landing sites and there is no need to watch the clock. We do try however to be off the water before it gets too cold in the evening and if the weather forecast dictates we can get our act together. The tides seem very unpredictable and we struggle to fathom out their mysteries. We have to force our way through a lot more ice now days as we are coming into a much more heavily glaciated part of the coast. Fortunately, the weather is staying stable which is allowing us to maintain our progress. Camped at Kap Caster and got a weather forecast from Karel from Terra Santa. We have a satellite phone, an Iridium 9505A, which sends and accepts text messages so communication with the outside world is pretty good and in fact free as we got a good deal with the rental and texts are free. We also had a solar recharger for the phone, which was fantastic, as we never had to worry about running the batteries down.

30th July: We knew from karel the weather was changing and we could also see the barometer on our watches falling fast. However we still managed to fall into the trap and got stuck out in the pack ice of Kap Beaupre. The ice was grinding and smashing into its self as wind worked against the tide and we had to climb out onto the ice, as the strengthening offshore wind caused the leads to close and threatened to crush the kayaks. I broke my little toe when in the panic my kayak was dragged over it. To add insult to injury it was self-inflicted. Spent over an hour pulling our boats from ice flow to ice flow with our tow lines until we got to a lead that stayed clear long enough for us to get in and eventually paddle back to land. Only 15 miles covered today but we are glad to be safe and had learnt an important lesson. Camped @ **68.52n/25.43w**

31st July: The wind from last night had increased by the morning, forcing another day off the water. Heavy rain kept us in the tent until the afternoon, when it eventually cleared, allowing us to dry out our kit. Pete lost the large cooking pan while trying to wash up in the sea. A silly thing to do but fortunately we can get by without it, this time. It brings home how dependant we are on our gear and how isolated we are.

1st August: Lots of very thick ice all day today, which we have to paddle hard through to make any headway. The kayaks and paddles have stood up remarkably well to the abuse we are forced to give them, although I still cringe at the sound and thump as the bows of the boats are smashed into the ice. We took it in turns to lead and follow inches behind the guy in front, who has parted the way and made a narrow channel for us to try and follow.

Paddled 38 miles in the sunshine and camped by the old hut at Sokongens Bugt @ **68.41.30n** A great spot with good water and plenty of wood. In fact the base of the hut had been used to store coal and there was still about a tonne of fuel left over from the old days when it was an important winter refuge. It would have been good to see it in its hay day.

2nd August: Another calm, sunny day, which started off really well, however there was lots of ice that got thicker as the day went on. When we got to Kap Dursey the ice became impenetrable and we had considerable difficulty landing on a rocky beach, which was dwarfed by a huge cliff. We walked up a high rubble mound to have a look and soon realised there was no way we were going any further that day. Not a good camp site with considerable risk from stone fall but we had to make the best of it. @ **68.39n/26.51w** As with most landing sites there are polar bear tracks in the gravel and snow around our camp. Spent the evening listening to stones whizzing and clattering off the cliffs and crashing on the ground behind our tent.

3rd August: Woken several times in the night by the sound of stone fall and have to laugh inside about the futility of curling up into a ball inside our sleeping bags to lessen the chance of getting struck. The ice is still too thick to go anywhere. Rain and the cold kept us in the tent most of the day and we spent the time reading. Barometer dropping all the time.

4th August: Still blocked by ice. Barometer continued to drop all day. Rain and wind increased, but not too badly. Karel, our weather forecaster, says same for tomorrow. Big rock fall in the night splashes into the pond behind the tent and wakes us all up with a fright.

5th August: Still blocked in by ice. Barometer staying low. Began discussing how long we can afford to stay here, time being the main factor with the short summer season. Don't need to make that decision yet as we can't go in either direction. Rocks continue to fall from the cliffs and we stay close to the camp to reduce exposure.

6th August: Still blocked in by ice. This afternoon the barometer started to rise. The wind and rain stopped and the ice started to open up slightly. Not much but a start. Getting very frustrated and concerned by our lack of progress.

7th August: Still stuck. Woke up this morning to thick fog, which adds to our misery. On its own this wouldn't normally stop us however in such packed ice you need reasonable visibility to spot the leads and any way we know there aren't any. All we can do is hope it clears tomorrow. Spent a cold damp day trying not to think about rock fall. This is a very impressive place; we are definitely on the edge.

8th August: Today we decided to have one final go at paddling south. The day's route was 18 miles of coast where landings were impossible, the first part of this was a crossing of 12 miles of extremely packed ice. We managed about a mile before we once again hit impassable ice that we knew went out to sea for about 20 miles and was impossible to paddle around. We had already decided this would be our last attempt, we were running out of time and expected to encounter further long delays even if we were able to continue. With great sadness and reluctance, we turned around and headed back towards Scoresby.

Continuing south would certainly mean having to call in a rescue pick up. We all felt this was not an option and the only realistic thing to do at this stage was to try and make it back under our own steam, knowing there was still a strong chance this would not be possible at least we were doing the most responsible thing. Being self sufficient, with our approach to this journey also meant getting ourselves out of trouble and home safe. We had paddled nearly 300 miles down the coast and were over a third of the way to Ammassalik. Turning back would mean retracing this distance and undertaking again the formidable 28 mile crossing of Scoresbysund. After a team meeting on the ice we unanimously agreed to turn round and head north with a complete sense of loss, no one spoke for several hours. Later that afternoon we spotted a large polar bear swimming towards us. A couple of warning shots persuaded it to keep its distance and it eventually swam off. After a long hard day we managed to make our way back to Sokongens Bugt @ **68.41.30n** through thick, but passable ice. Seeing the polar bear so close in the water was a fantastic experience and helped raise our spirits after the disappointment of turning back.

As we were unloading the kayaks and establishing our camp we had a second polar bear come to within 50m of our camp. It had been sun bathing on the land and was very inquisitive of our strange smell. This time we were able to get some good photos, only swapping the camera for the guns at the last minute. It left at speed, and swam out to sea and was soon hidden by the ice. We were relieved it was more scared of us than we were of it – I think! It was a very impressive animal, magnificent, and we were very relieved we had not had to shoot it in self-defence. That night we cleared the loft of the old hut and bivi out on it. Silly but it felt safer.

9th August: A foggy but warm day. More long open crossings on a bearing kept us concentrating. Pete found a Narwhale skeleton and managed to extract the tusk and I found two harpoon heads that were attached to floats and had been used to hunt and kill the narwhale many years before. Its body would have drifted at sea and been washed up on the shore. Eventually it would have rotted and the harpoons would have fallen out. Bears had also been around and had chewed the bones. Camp @ **68.47n/26.08w**

10th August: Managed 20 miles before the wind and tide action in a thick area of ice caused us to hastily retreat and set up camp early. This was in exactly the same place at Kap Beaupre where we had been caught out before and we were not going to make the same mistake twice. Camped again @ **68.52n/25.43w**

11th August: Swell and ice in the morning. Felt like Jason and the Argonauts going through the clashing rocks. Swell replaced by fog in the afternoon, interesting trying to find and follow leads and stay on a bearing in the fog. All cleared in the evening allowing us to do a respectable 24 miles after a very long day. Camped on Kap D'Augney, in a great spot @ **69.03n/25.17w**

12th August: Foggy but had a following sea and not much ice. 24 miles. Camped on a small rocky beach on Kap Barclay @ **24.50w** to the right of Hosts Havn. Find human remains on the beach as we look for firewood and a small piece of bone, which had been made into a deck line adjuster for an original Inuit skin kayak. Most tent sites require landscaping and the term orthopaedic gravel has become a familiar expression to describe our sites.

13th August: The biggest tides in 10 years today, world wide, other than that ideal paddling conditions, not much ice or wind. Put in a long day as there are few landing places and we eventually return to the hut at Kap Dolton @ **69.27n/24.13w**. We are another 36 miles closer to home.

14th August: Ideal paddling conditions. A good crossing before we went past the hot spring waterfalls again on the coast of Henry Land @ **23.35w**, had a shower in our dry suits again to rinse the accumulation of salt off to help return their breath ability. Were forced to put another hour and a half in at the end of an already long day as the drinking water had dried up at our previous camping spot and the only other place was on the south side of Turner Island – a crossing of 6 miles. Paddled 28 miles today. Eider duck for tea – shot from the kayak. Stopped @ **69.41n/23.35w**

15th August: Strong head winds today so we only covered 15 miles. For a change we paddled round the inside of Turner Island. Heard the low haunting sound of whales calling to one another, but were unable to see them in the mist. I was knackered today, just couldn't get into a rhythm. Stopped on a gravel beach and cooked noodles for lunch and afterwards had a short snooze in the sun. Continue into a head wind however the tide was with us and although a bit choppy and damp as a result we make reasonable progress, finally make camp at the north end of Turner Island @ **69.46n/23.13w**. While exploring I found a cast-off deer antler on the hillside, this must have been very old, as these animals have not lived on the east coast of Greenland for over 100 years. We tried to predict our return day in Scoresby so as to book flights, however it is near impossible and probably bad luck to tempt fate. A good campsite with plenty of driftwood and good water.

16th August: A flat calm day that reminded me of paddling in the UK, not the calmness but the lower headlands and light were different from what we have been experiencing and it seemed like home. Good going with the wind behind us and no sea ice. Stop and raft up for lunch, watching a huge ice burg, which was the size of the Albert Hall, being literally swept along in the tide. We reckoned there must have been deep underwater currents acting on it, as we were stopped still but the ice burg was moving south. It was very impressive to watch, unstoppable. Camped on Stewart Island again by the old settlements that we had stayed at before. Over 20 very big icebergs within view, one of which groans and grumps all night before it splits in half in the morning. It was like watching a naval fleet at sea. In the past we have been persuaded on several occasions by Phil to paddle close under these so he could get some good pictures – a change of cameraman was now perhaps in order.

17th August: The swell has come up during the night and our launching becomes a team affair and a bit damp. Stay out from the cliffs and try to avoid the rebounding waves and confused sea. Our first landing is about 24 miles up the coast, at the site of an old hunters cabin so we head for that, hoping we are able to land. Quite a swell today but nice and calm once we were away from the cliffs. Reach our intended campsite @ **69.59n/22.20w** and are forced to make a very bumpy landing in the surf on a steep rocky beach. Cant believe how well the kayaks have stood up to this, I

am always very hesitant approaching the front of my boat expecting holes and cracks – so far so good! and hopefully only a few days to go. The hut is more like a dog kennel, however we clean it out and settle in.

18th August: Only two good paddling days away from Scoresby, but bad weather and the resulting big seas prevent us from launching from our rocky beach. Pull the kayaks further up the rocks so they are not damaged by the waves.

19th August: Too rough to paddle again. This morning, the strong wind stopped only to pick up again from the opposite direction. Barometer has been rising all day so conditions should get better. Very cold and spend the day in our sleeping bags, trying to re read books with cold, numb hands.

20th August: Today the weather finally eased. After a rough wet launch we paddled 15 miles to where we want to start the crossing of Scoresbysund from. Whilst scouting for a place to pitch the tent Phil startled a sleeping polar bear and vice versa. There was a mad dash back to the kayaks, which had the guns in – fortunately the bear was also dashing off, in the other direction. We followed the bear's tracks to make sure it had left the area and can clearly see where it took to the sea for safety. Camp@ **70.07n/22.05w** A very rocky site but at least sheltered from the wind. Later while exploring we found some good examples of fossilized wood.

21st August: A force 6 today so we were reluctant to do the 28 mile crossing. The barometer started to rise so hopefully tomorrow would be better. Spent the day sleeping and eating and did some 'extreme sledging' on our large Nookie dry sacks. Getting very anxious about the weather as the flights only leave on certain days and we all envisage having to wait another week for flights out to Iceland.

22nd August: An early 6 am start and 7 hours paddle saw us back at Scoresbysund. The crossing went well as we stopped and rafted up every hour for a drink and snacks and played silly games to help take the mind off it. How many paddle strokes can you do with your eyes shut and stay on course? We paddled into the village very chuffed at our safe return, only to hear the devastating news that one of the local 14 year old boys, who had helped us pack up our kayaks on the first day, had been out alone in his kayak the day after we departed, capsized and drowned. Very sad!! The youngsters here tear round in open boats with large engines on and the few with access to kayaks don't wear any special warm clothing or have any safety gear. I doubt any of them can swim. Arranged to leave the kayaks and some of the gear safe with a friend in Scoresbysund as a return visit is on the cards.

23rd August: We manage to sell our two guns to a local and eventually get the helicopter to the airport landing strip at Constable point. Half the village seems to have come up to the helicopter landing pad to see a young lad off to school. He will now spend the next few years of his education in a boarding school on the west coast. The flight from Constable Point leaves late, but we are soon on our way back to Iceland. Having spent so long on our own and at one point being nearly 300 miles from any other human it was quite a shock to be back in the hustle and bustle of a modern European city. Stay at the campsite in town and gradually break our selves back into civilisation.

24th August: Spend the day in the shower and hot tubs at the swimming pool and then have a few well-earned beers.

25th August: Get the flight back to Manchester, problems at check in with no record of our flight changes are quickly resolved, thanks to our Icelandair contact in London – once again thanks for the support.

Personal thoughts

Martin Rickard

It's hard to sum up in words how you feel after a trip like this. All the hard work planning and organising for a year and a half was for me, as much of the expedition as the paddling was, and I was almost disappointed when this part was over and it was time to start paddling, the anticipation was now over.

I got very low waiting for 9 days for the ice to clear so we could start the crossing of Scoresbysund and then again for another 6 days before we were forced to retrace our route and return home. However without those lows I would never have appreciated the highs and these were numerable. Exploring such a wild and remote coast under your own steam in a sea kayak, knowing you are totally dependant on your self and two mates, and being able to get to places and seen things no one else has ever seen before is beyond description. As is the coast line itself and the ice. We knew it would be wild and impressive but never realised how much so. Nor did we appreciate how insignificant we would feel in such a huge and remote world. Seeing the polar bears, close and in the wild on their terms was amazing and if nothing else was worth all the effort.

The three of us got on very well together and we knew when to bite our tongue and say nothing, those moments were very few indeed.

My thanks to Pete and Phil for joining me and helping to make the trip such an experience and success, for although we didn't reach Ammassalik the whole experience including our return was fantastic.

Getting sponsorship for trips like this is always a difficult thing. What can you possibly offer in return, just a few photographs of your kayaks with stickers on, a bit of feed back about the gear, and a mention at lectures, which only encourages others to pester folk for further help. The support we received was generously given in the spirit of adventure and I can't thank everyone enough – there was no way the three of us would have been able to do this trip without the considerable support from all those companies and individuals. I only hope the photos and story of our adventure is of interest and worth your investment.

Shetland Island Council also deserve a mention for allowing my extended leave during the school summer holidays.

Finally I must thank my wife and children for their support and encouragement, before and during the trip.

Personal thoughts

Pete Jones

When we last spoke Pete's comments to me were;

What a fantastic trip. What a place, never seen anything like it!

Thanks guys for an incredible time.

Thanks Mart for organising most of it and thanks to all the sponsors for their very generous support. Hope all the photos come out.

We'll have another crack at it next year.

Personal thoughts

Phil Clegg

The one aspect of this expedition that had the largest impact on me was the kayaking environment and how different it was to anything I had ever paddled in before.

I had to place my trust in Martin and Pete when it came to the decisions that had to be made in the preparatory stage, as their previous experience of the conditions we were likely to face was vital.

I remember finally coming face to face with the situations that they had described to me so many times before.

Our initial attempt to do the 24 mile crossing across Scoresby Sound was my first time paddling amongst ice. We spent several hours trying to find a route through the closely packed sea ice, often climbing out onto the floes using ice axes, to scout the way ahead. We didn't even manage to cover a mile but we spent several hours doing it and the learning curve for me was so steep it was vertical. I can remember on this first day, when we had to turn back, not even feeling disappointed, purely because I was going to get a repeat of this magical experience.

The learning experiences didn't stop there, and indeed there are many aspects of the behaviour of the ice that I never got to grips with. At one point we got ourselves trapped in a wind driven mass of pack ice unable to paddle off as there were no open leads, and only after a few hours of frantically dragging our boats, and leaping from floe to floe were we able to get to a lead that stayed open long enough for us to paddle out of the situation.

On another day we had a big swell and thick sea ice and we had to paddle through the gaps in between, timing it to avoid being crushed as the floes came together. We got separated several times that day and often had to paddle a long way round to rejoin with the others.

It was the impassable ice that finally stopped us, and forced us to turn back. Although this was a bitter disappointment at the time, it was also an amazing experience as part of the trip.

For myself, who had never seen frozen seas before, to be confronted with so much ice that there was no way through, round or over it; was awesome and something I won't be disappointed to experience again.

APPENDICES

Equipment

Kayaks

Explorers, made and donated by Nigel Dennis Kayaks in North Wales had been shipped out in 2005 and stored in Greenland during the winter.

The kayaks were standard lay up with full keel strips. They held up well to the considerable abuse we gave them. Two of the boats had rope skegs, which were far better than my wire skeg, as the wire got kinked by running over ice and had to be doctored with an ice axe pick.

Changing the steel wire to thick trimmer cord would be a good option.

Large dry sacks, donated by Nookie, went on the front and rear decks with clothing, tentage and sleeping bags. All our other equipment was stored in smaller standard Nookie dry bags within the kayaks compartments.

The guns were in special dry bags made by Reed and stored on the front deck, as were spare paddles, buoyancy aids, fuel and thermo rests.

Paddles

Phil and I used Lendal 4 piece carbon fibre Archipelago paddles, which were very light and had no problems standing up to the considerable abuse we gave them.

Pete used heavier Kinetic touring blades, which were several years old and still show little sign of wear.

Tent

A 3-man Force Ten expedition dome tent, with extended porch was loaned to us by Nigel Dennis. It stood up well and provided plenty of space for those waiting days, and the snow valance was invaluable for putting rocks on. Most of our campsites were on rocky beaches where we had to level a space and arrange orthopaedic gravel!

Stove

An MSR XGK2 Shaker was donated by the HnH store in Bamford, Derbyshire. We did have problems with our fuel and constant maintenance and the knack was required to keep it going, having said this I know, no other stove would have worked as well. We ran it on Benzene and started off with 35 litres of fuel in an assortment of containers. This would have easily lasted the expected 60 day's, as we were often able to find enough wood to cook on.

Sleeping Bags

Mountain Equipment supplied us with 4 season Down bags.

They were always double bagged and never got too damp.

We all took Gortex hooped bivi bags in case we were unable to pitch the tent, and we elected to bivi out on many occasions.

Dry Suits

Kokatat generously supplied us with a variety of equipment, which included breathable dry suits. We knew from past experience this was the only practical way to safeguard ourselves in the event of a swim either from falling through the ice, rough landings or a capsize.

Although exposed to about 450,000 paddle strokes they showed little sign of wear, and we were please with their performance.

Clothing

Reed Chill Cheater donated sets of transpire fleece clothing, which was great. Seal Skinz supplied socks, gloves and most useful of all peaked hats. Lendal supplied knee high neoprene boots made by Chota.

Trainers were used on land, as was Buffalo gear.

Repair kit

The usual comprehensive fibreglass repair kit was taken.

We were unsure of the condition of the kayaks or what damage they would get in the ice and as a result we were prepared to do some serious work if needed.

However apart from a bit of duct tape round a hatch rim nothing was required.

Camera Equipment

Pete had a waterproof Pentax zoom and used 35mm slide film.

I used a Sony Cyber shot U - digital waterproof camera on the water and a better Sony digital with a zoom lens when on the land.

Phil also used a waterproof Sony and had a Sony video camera.

We thought batteries would be a problem, however we took two solar re-chargers which worked well and as a result we never ran out of power.

First Aid

The standard stuff for an extended wilderness trip, with some very strong pain relief from my local doctor. I had problems with my little toe and the cold affected my feet.

It was some days after the trip before the circulation finally returned to them.

However nothing major was used from the kit, only a few painkillers after our last night out in Iceland.

Food

There was some variety in the meals and although we had cut back on food from our previous trips we generally ate very well.

We could easily have supplemented our food by fishing and hunting if required.

The following is one of our better day's rations: - for one person

Oats so simple 1 plain, 1 Raspberry.

1 sachet of hot chocolate.

Tea, and powdered milk.

1-pkt Super noodles with curry sauce.

Boiled sweets etc.

2/3 of a Bean feast Mix.

Powdered mash potatoes.

Custard powder and shortbread biscuits.

Tea / coffee / hot chocolate.

NB - When we returned home from Scoresby, having spent 43 days in Greenland we left behind at least 2 ½ weeks of food. Our fear of running out of stores was never an issue.

Guns

Polar Bears are a considerable risk so we had to have a suitable gun.

I knew the type of weapon we could expect to get in Greenland so went to the trouble of getting a licence and purchased two section 1, pump action shot guns.

These fired rifled slugs and a selection of ammunition for fishing in shallow water or shooting birds.

The guns were left in Greenland at the end of the expedition. Be aware rifled or solid slugs are illegal in Greenland, ours went out with us on the flight. We had no problems with customs.

Phone and PLB

This year we took a satellite phone an Iridium 9505A with a solar battery re charger. The phone was used for weather updates and calls home. McMurdo again loaned us a Fastfind Plus PLB, which was never used.

Weather Forecasting.

We knew from experience how fast the weather could change and how little warning it gave you. On one of our previous visits in 2000 we had experienced a Pitera and as a result new first hand how serious it would be to get caught out by one at sea. Regular weather updates from our contact karel in Israel, proved reliable and were a great help, we also relied on our experience, a weather eye and our barometer watches.

Navigation

All maps were either 1:250.000 or 1:200.000 and the set consisted of 20 sheets. Each set was laminated and we each used standard Silva mountaineering compasses.

Magnetic variation was at times 20 degrees and changed considerably throughout the trip. Whenever possible we would use map and magnetic bearings to work out a rough guide for ourselves.

This year we had two hand held GPS. They were worth their weight and I would take one along in the future. Unfortunately they were not as waterproof as I had thought and the unit donated by HnH got wet inside and then fogged up.

Our recommendations for similar expeditions

- MSR – XGK stove and spares kit.
- SealSkinz hats or Lowe Alpine hats.
- Buffalo gear.
- Breathable dry suit with relief zip and built in socks.
- Full length Karrie mats as our Thermo Rests got many punctures.
- A good 4 season down sleeping bag.
- New, all gortex bivi bags ours had nylon bases – not so good.
- Oats so simple breakfast cereal.
- Lendal padlock system paddles.
- 12 gauge pump action shot gun with solid slugs or a suitable rifle.
- GPS.
- Good expedition dome tent with extended porch and snow valence.
- Waist towlines for dragging kayaks over ice.
- Bug Hats.
- Watch with barometer for weather predicting.
- Neoprene paddle pogies.
- Double your” Duty Free”.
- Lots of good books for those “waiting” days.
- Good warm paddling boots with good ankle support.

At this stage the three of us have already committed to another attempt next summer, using the same kayaks and all the same equipment from this years expedition.

The only difference will be a 303 rifle to save weight, rather than the 2 shotguns.

Karri mats rather than Thermo Rests and a new extended library for those waiting days.

We will keep you posted of our progress.

Many thanks.

Martin Rickard.