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Dear Greenlandfriends. Bremen, Nov.17th 1996

Here follows a report about my Thule journey and it is dedicated to questions asked by several of you and covers for that reason a lot, which might interest of course perhaps not each of you - some knows the one or other already or has told it to me personally -, but I want save work.

Therefore lets start from scratch:

Starting point was my intent, to make a tour in the Mesters Vig area, which did not come true because of a lack in sufficient interest - from 16 people asking for the proposal about 8 met for a preparing meeting around November 1995, and most of them later decided to step out. As alternative I had proposed then the Thule - region, because this was a new area for me and here the smaller the group, the better. Finally we were 4 friends, from Bremen, Hamburg and Kiel - just the best group you could think. All experienced Seakayakers, three with experience in paddling in Greenland, we all knew each other from lots of tours. (Jürgen Becker from Hamburg, Member of the board of Alster Canoe Club (ACC), Dietrich Graefe, Oststeinbeck near Hamburg, also member of ACC and member of Salzwasser Union (SAU), Jürgen Stephan from Meldsdorf near Kiel - also member of SAU).

In September I had a date with Henning Thing from Polarcenter in Copenhagen, that time I was still in the process of preparing the east greenland trip. Henning is the head of the secretariat für research. The Polarcenter in Copenhagen is now nice situated in Copenhagen in the Strandgade 100H (Amager), DK-1401 Copenhagen K, Tel.0045-3288.0100, fax 0045-3288.0101. Contact person for the permits is Iris Madsen.

If some one intends to do any trip in the national park the application forms for expeditions must be filled out completely and send back to Polarcenter before December 31st of the year before you intend to do the trip: the application is then presented to several decision making groups including the government in greenland, the final approval will not come before April.

But for our intention to paddel in Thule Iris wrote me indeed:

Concerning sportsexpeditions: in the inhabited areas at south -, west - and northwestcoast (Nanortalikas - Upernavik) no authorization by the Polarcenters is necessary any more. Tours in Melvillebugt and Nationalpark must be still approved. The complete Thule - region can be paddelt without authorization (Cape Alexander to Savigsivik). However for the entrance via Thule Airbase an authorization of the ministry of foreign affairs of Danmark must exist. You have to apply for at:

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, att. Birgit Nybæk, Asiatisk Plads 2, DK-1401 Copenhagen K.

For this authorization a booking of the airline must be proved in advance. Therefore book first flight at Grønlandsfly, then submit confirmation of the flights and forms and wait (2-4 weeks). The form covers the following statements:

Name, first name, date of birth, place of birth, passport - number, home address, nationality, profession/ employed at, flight data (arrival at / departure from Thule); signature.

The flight from Søndre Strømfjord to Thule is carried out with a FIRST AIR Boeing 727 Combi, about 70-90 seats, on Tuesdays the aircraft flies up, Wednesday back. (Therefore only once the week in Grönland the connection to Thule is possible). There is for No-Danes and No-Americans a limitation on 15 passengers per flight. The reason is the necessity to stay overnight on the Airbase on the flight back, and the hostel has only 15 beds (2-bedrooms). This hostel is run by the former "sheriff" of Ammassalik together with his wife. I have just looked for name and phone number of the host - I do not have them/it/her in the moment. (Jürgen Becker has taken along our hostel bill but even there is deciphered nothing but: Grønlands Hjemmestyre, Lufthavns Væsenet, Speditøren, Thule AB). The hostel is not completely cheap (somewhat fewer than 500 DKK) and the price adds to the helicopter ticket price, but only once, only the flight back makes this overnight stay necessary, since Wednesday the BOEING starts around 8 o'clock from Thule AB, the chopper starts however the evening before from Qaanaaq.

We started our flights from Sønderborg, since a inland flights (inside Danmark, as we flew from Copenhagen to Greenland) can be added free to SAS flights). (For frequent flyers: Also Grønlandsfly earns miles on SAS's Eurobonus and so that well also on Miles & More of Lufthansa, since both work together, same for Iceland Air and United I guess)

If one wants to fly directly to Germany, he has to stay on the way back in Copenhagen for one further night as the Greenland aircraft arrives in Copenhagen too late - only the Sønderborg flight can catch that late.

Next nice thing in Sønderborg: one can park free arbitrarily long and quite surely his car - this possibility is however well only for North Germany. [TOP](#)

Flights 1996		
Route	Price	Airline
Sønderborg-København-Søndre Strømfjord and back	DM 1172,-	SAS
Søndre Strømfjord - Thule Airbase & back	DM 1006,-	First Air
Thule Airbase - Qaanaq & back	DM 586,-	Grønlandsfly

We have booked at Nordwindreisen, because I made me hope, to meet there with Greenland expertes. But now I can say: for such tours all German travel agencies are greenhorns Therefore it is the best to book just around the corner, it is simpler, though I want to say nothing against Nordwind, only with expeditionlike tours none of the arctic specialists are experienced.

Concerning flights: In Thule we met also people with other itineraries: Canadians and Americans prefer to fly to Resolute using the scheduled flight with Pacific Western or First Air, then using chartered Twinotters operated by First Air or Ken Borek, which fly direkt to the airstrip above Qaanaaq. This is not really legal because the airstrip is unofficial and normally every use of the strip must be approved by the Danish officials at Nuuk and Thule Airbase, but as we heard in Thule AB - Copenhagen is far away and the people in Qaanaaq don't care about these nasty european rules - aircrafts mean tourists means money.

As an info to polar areas (and with it possible alternatives) one can get from Canada e.g. the Explorers Guide of Canada's Northwest Territories and also the Fishing Guide with many very valuable addresses and infos of NWT's Econ. Dev. & Tourism. Here are informations about airlines, which fly from Canada to Greenland. First Air und Bradley Airservice fly to Greenland. Resolute is connected to the mainland by First Air and Pacific Western as well as Canadian Pacific (i think they are now called Canadian.)

Kenn Borek Air makes Charter of Resolutely, he/it flies also to Thule, the same is for First Air, possibly also Bradley Airservice; most chareters have been aranged by Bazel Jehudason before he died. His wife Terry is running still the business, but Steve Smith (running Whitney & Smith Expeditions) told me, that terry is heading mybe some trouble with a new hotel in Resolute which meets higher standards then hers, and she might become difficulties with the authorities because of the low profil of her high arctic hotel. (it would be a pitty as she is

running the most reputed facilities in the atctic - you know that Bazel has had is studytime in Hamburg/Germany, I have just recently met an engeneer in my company who had studied with Bazel. I have extracted lots of valuable infos from the Explorers Guide, but finally the way through Canada proved to be the most expensive way for us Europeans, it could only be a reserve if the direct way with SAS and Grønlandsfly is completely booked or the fixed dates of the weekly flight does not fit. Maybe it could be a benefit for the Resolute/Qaanaaq solution to take the boats to the plane more easily as the European (and in this way Grønlandsfly acts European) Airlines transport only 20 Kg free.

NWT-Adressen

Addresses see list.(push button on the left)

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We have taken along 2 Klepper Aeriis double in expedition version. That is altogether one in the meantime für me very approved equipment. We met here up north mostly Foldboaters. Thule/Qaanaaq is a Polar Paddle Paradise. While we were there, we met one of two french organized tours - Gilbert Kiner (see list) was there member, we met him in the helicopter. The Frenchmen appeared to run a rather bad organization, they paddled Nautiraid double with gigantic masses of baggage

mounted on top. And the poor Gilbert to sleep 2 days outside without tent at some minus degrees Celsius, because he could not discover his tent and his people in the small Qaanaaq community. The Frenchmen have taken a completely strange route to fly in: Via Montreal/Quebec to Sondre Strømfjord - Thule AB -Qaanaaq. Its the most expensive way, They too transported the boats by plane. The first tour paddled 14 days to Siorapaluk, the second group crossed to Herbert Ø to the Southside and into the interior of the Inglefield Bredning. From Ecosummer Expeditionary, Vancouver / Canada we heard, that they also were running two tours with 4 double Kleppers per 14 days in the internal fiord. Steve Smith, formerly Ecosummer, today with his own paddel tour company in Banff - he is known to have run the first kayak tour along the antarctic peninsula some years ago - was likewise with 4 Klepper Aeriis double and one single on the way. That as small digression. Concerning the subject Klepper folding boats indeed Steve told me some interesting details, and therefore one must know, Steve is running also lots of tours on Baffin Island and in the northwestern fjords of Ellesmere Island: He takes only Kleppers with expedition-Hypalon-skin, because Klepper in contrast to Nautiraid and Feathercraft has essentially better and stronger Skins.

Only Klepper boats can be dragged fully load across ice flows and even over ice edges, without risking at least any damage of the skin. Skins of the competitors show worse quality and against damages by ice they are essentially more intolerant. This is up to now also my experience. On my first tour into the northeast Greenlandic Nationalpark I have experienced, as a simple Klepper rubber skin (gray Klepperhaut) was slashed through new ice of one -8°Celsius cold night. The black Klepper Hypalon expedition skin of the boat I was sitting in contrast showed not a single scratch. That is the reason, and naturally also the lack of real corrosion resistance of the AL-frame, that Steve and also other tour operators relay on Klepper and avoid Feathercraft and Nautiraid in the

arctic.

We have built ourselves a big wooden box (about 2 x 1 x 1 m), packed the whole gear into it and shipped it via Aalborg to Qaanaaq for about DKK 1889.- (450kg / @1752m³). Two ships departed this year destination to Qaanaaq, one to Thule. Destination Qaanaaq the ship departed at the 9. July from Aalborg. In Nuuk it was reloaded and everything was scheduled to arrive at July 29th. Our arrival was on August 6th. The ship travelling up with our gear got stuck for 2 days in the ice of Melville Bugt and its bow was damaged. An extra demanded icebreaker had to assist the ship. A Canadian icebreaker was in stand by at Thule but was not allowed to help as it was in charter by the americans of Thule AB. Evidently the weak air base commander is not able to make decisions without backup from Pentagon, it seemed that the eskimoic people didn't like these people very much - they still fear the pollution of the H-bomb lost in the past - and even the millitary is still not very friendly to them.

Two days prior to our arrival the ship then arrived there. The Thule ship came and went on August 19th - to bad for our planning. The last ship leaving the region went to the September 9th determining the boundary conditions of our tour. The wooden box was also depot für some packing, which we finally did not take along with us, the box remained screwed on the beach of Qaanaaq, without any problems. The transport back cost only DKK 868 - and arrived October 6th in Aalborg.

In Sondre Strømfjord we arrived with rainy and relatively cold weather, even very gray and coldly for usual summer conditions in the middle west of Greenland; the continuation was only above overcast skys, in Thule AB the temperature was only little above zero. Lots of ice was lying in Mellville Bugt - we saw it through a couple of cloud holes.

In Thule AB the Danish authorities did not want to accept the ID card of Dietrich Graefe and Jürgen Stephan first (a passport was requested, necessary for travel to Greenland is only an ID-card for Europeans) and they wanted to send them back immediately. The Danish policemen behaved somewhat stubbornly (or is pigheaded a better word? My dictionary is not very accurate). The Danish Liaison Officer (a MarineOfficer) speaks German well and he conversed with us so far quiet nicely, until the policemen emerged again and wanted to save us exceptionally the immediate travel back of the both. Meanwhile we were invited from the Hostell and/or Guesthouse manager to a tour to Dundas to visit the house of Peter Freuchen. Thereby he explained us also, as we, if we paddle afterwards back to Thule AB, can phone him from the harbor phone situated just at the little shelter at the little quay, so that he can pick us up with his little pickup and bring us to the guesthouse thus avoiding any trouble with the millitary stuff.

The small Bell helicopter is an extra experience, he is vibrating so much, that one's teeth might fall off. In Qaanaaq we were welcomed by bad weather. A somewhat crazy dutch woman absorbed us - (thats what my automatic Power Translator translated, it sounds silly) lets say cought us at the helicopter, she introduced herself as Tess before (derived by Theresia). So grey-haired and sun eroded as she looked I thought first, she is an old Eskimo woman. Later it turned out, that she is only a stupid dutch tourist with a missionary behaviour. She advised us to show up at the community office the next day at 10 o'clock - she told it very officially, explaining us that we as ordinary tourist must be advised what to do and what to let, there we did not know that she is even only an ordinary tourist with no competence.

She dragged us into the office of Jørn, a Dansih community officer, who was not very pleased to be victim of Tess activities. Therefore, if you ever should met Tess, try to escape or send her to the devil, she has absolutely no official status.

At the heliport Robert Peary jun., grandson of the famous explorer Robert Peary, an outstanding personality in Qaanaaq, was also awaiting some guests. but we didn't come into contact with him, as he seems to be one of the busiest in town. He is apparently in constant stress.

As we had our first day to get accustomed - it was a lousy day with scattered snowfall, wet air, around 0°Celsius, foggy, you would not put your dog out of the door, we suddenly recognized the sound of a big ship and later a Russian icebreaker appeared in the Hvalsund, anchoring later in front of Qaanaaq village. It was the Kapitan Chlebnikov - which last year arrived just one day past our departure from/in Scoresby Sund. This year he is running excursion tours (Qark Expeditions) outgoing from Resolute heading to the Thule area with a visit in Qaanaaq.

Qaanaaq has a little museum exhibiting eskimoic objects besides some things of Robert Pearys time up there and besides the history around Knut Rasmussen and Peter Freuchen. This museum is only open on Sundays between 12 and 3 p.m. As we arived on tuesday, we would not have a chance to see the inside of the museum normally. But Torben, the museum custos was informed about the cruise ship arrival and opened the museum extra - so we seeing this also entered the museum, started a longer chat with Torben as he than told us that the tour leader of

the cruise ship is Wally Herbert, and that he will also come and visit Torben, while he is holding his museum open. and minutes after Wally Herbert entered the room.

My starting point for a chat with him was our stop at Loch Fyne Hut in 1994 on the round Clavering Ø Tour when we saw his remarks in the hut book. He stated, that him was send just recently a photograph of the hutbook page from a group member of a kayak tour - I hope I have not misunderstand him, but I wonder who could have been this.

It was another thing to get informations from Torben: he told us some things but nothing turned out to be valuable for our kajak trip: he could not tell us, where the Sonntags Bugt is situated - he told us the wrong place, and even he gave us wrong informations about the ice situation inside the Inglefield Bredning - he told us about an ice barrier 20 kilometers east of Qaanaaq which is not passable - igt turned out later, that this information was wrong, but therefore we decided to start our tour heading west for Canada. [TOP](#)

How the tour went:

Day	Date	Route	Dist.	Remarks
1st	8.8.96	Qaanaaq - Ikardlugtoq	12 km	
2nd	9.8.96	Ikardlugtoq - Ivnarmiut	19 km	snow falling
3rd	10.8.96	Ivnarmiut - Scarlet Heart Glacier	19 km	storm
4th	12.8.96	Scarlet Heart Glacier - Igpigssuag	18 km	
5th	14.8.96	Igpigssuag - Agpalersoq (Siorapaluk)	35 km	heavy snow falling for 3 days
6th	18.8.96	Agpalersoq - Cape Robertson	22 km	sun, snowy
7th	19.8.96	Cape Robertson - Neqe	28 km	snowy, ice barriers
8th	20.8.96	Neqe - Serfarssuit	24 km	hiking to the Sonntagsdal, western point
9th	22.8.96	Serfarssuit - Neqe	24 km	
10th	23.8.96	Neqe - Umivik	31 km	
11th	24.8.96	Umivik - Ikardlugtoq	35 km	
12th	25.8.96	Ikardlugtoq - Qaanaaq glaciers	7 km	
13th	26.8.96	Qaanaaq Gl. - Bowdoin Fiord Hut	25 km	
14th	27.8.96	Bowdoin Fj.hut - behind Quinissut	22 km	
15th	28.8.96	behind Quinissut - Qorupaluk	16 km	
16th	29.8.96	Qorupaluk - Qerqertat Ø, Ikerusaruq	27 km	
17th	30.8.96	Ikerusaruq - Qerqertat place (island round)	?	cloudy, afterwards snowfall
18th	31.8.96	Qerqertat - Quinissut	?	mostly sunny
19th	1.9.96	Quinissut - Bowdoin Fj. Hut	22 km	sun
20th	2.9.96	Bowdoin Fj. Hut - Qaanaaq	23 km	clouds

We had this year very bad conditions, the preceding winter was very cold and the summer was likewise extraordinary cold. The southside of the Inglefield Bredning, and the Hvalsunds were occupied still with much ice at the coast, so that we cancelled our idea of travelling by kayak to Thule AB. Because of the alleged ice barrier 20 km east of Qaanaaq we first paddled westward up to the Sonntagsbugt, with side-trips in McCormick fiord and Robertson fiord. Then we went back and into the internal Inglefield Bredning up to the island Qerqertat. We saw also in the interior of the Inglefield Bredning no narwhales - this was a certainly an disappointment for us, also paddling Eskimos met us only in Qaanaaq itself, if they paddle from their motorboat, which they have fixed to a buoy in the bay, ashore - with gasoline can on the aft. Both - no narwhale and no eskimo hunting with kayak - this is not normal! ! It was really an extraordinary year.

Still a couple of infos: Radio: In the Canadian Arctic the frequency 5281.5 kHz is the usual information and emergency frequency. Since it lies in the SW -band, it is comparatively far-reaching - still because of the polar situation cosmic distortions are common (the Van All ray belt has a gap because of the magnetic North pole. At the ERPIB's momentarily a system change is underway, giving up the old 121MHz frequency and also the second in the 200MHz range lying frequency will be scipped favoring a frequency at about 0,4 Ghz, which is caught also by the Inmarsat satellites, therefore only new ERPIB's should be use supporting the new communications - in the Thule region however lots of commercial airplanes cross on the way from Northern Europe to the Northwestcoast of the USA very frequently, They all have locked the usual 121MHz airband emergency frequency. If taking an

airband transmitter with you even can talk. Thule Airbase has 118.65 MHz radio frequency (Airband) to call for, at which best ask the helicopter pilot.

Money: Very important: Credit cards and checks (also traveller cheques) as well as Eurocheques have more or less no value in Qaanaaq. It's absolutely necessary to take along enough cash money, of coarse danish crowns, cash money exchange is possible only very limited as there exists no bank, only KNI the greenland sales organisation has an extremely limited service.

(Mainly in the souvenir shop for cruise ship tourists). The situation may change next, but in this year have met we a German tourist, who has come exactly in the situation, to have all common hightech - currency and to come still in acute financial straits.

Besides this: The weather can destroy the schedule totally. We have experienced, that for 2 weeks because of mists the helicopters could not come across from Thule AB and finally because of a defect a bigger helicopters had to fly in from the south. The connection with the First Air Boeing is then lost, hotel costs increase. IMAQA.

One should pay special attention to the theme preventing cold feet, if one paddles Foldboat, especially if one spares the boatskin and boards in the water. In principle rubber boots with removable felt inner boot are very well, e.g. which NOKIA Retki 3238, which is liked even by the Americans in the north. The boot is of course somewhat bulky and prevents from comfortable boarding e.g. in the narrow Klepper sprayskirt.

A woolen cap, a southwester, kayak poagies (the fured poagies, as offered by CKS, Wildwater and Artistic, are the wormest, Avilastik lies in the middle, Neoprene is bad, Neo - gloves I cannot recommend) and woolen gloves should be packed up in any case. It can be very chilly and clammy. Also the sleeping bag should be dedicated greatest attention. We had the best down sleeping bags with - however the back became always cold: down sleeping bags are stuffed at the back insufficiently - the down would be compressed if used in the back. Badly indeed, if one not steadily sleeps on the back. I have learned - the next time a synthetic fibre sleeping bag comes with, they are everywhere stuffed the same way. A Thermarest is quiet cold! I recognized this here the first time as we had lots of wet cold weather. A cheap foam mattress is here much more comfortable.

Us has been at fallwind a tunnel tent destroyed. With some long repair adapters for the cracked sticks, with much strong twine (and corresponding needle and thimble) as well as broad tape a repair was possible, which lasted even the whole excursion even at strong wind, 30cm snow and heavy rain. Adhesive tape generally sticks at the low temperatures quite badly. Heating was necessary.

Paddles: A couple of hint: GFRP-paddel blades (also CFRP blades) with cut edges tend to split and delaminate, especially at the low temperatures, especially while shifting ice flows. Therefore the nice Warner paddles, Feathercrafts, Nimbus and others are not fit for this cold area. To fragil. Wingpaddel and paddles with round edges are here better (Moll Touring Carbon, Rainbow WW-Carbon, Lettmann and others!). Wooden paddel are likewise friendly to the hands, but should have clean and even paint finish - I had some trouble with the painted surface in the grip area and wounded my thumb. With the cold climate a Alu shaft of modern wildwater paddle produce freezing hands and are therefore a horrible in the arctic.

Polar bears are usually not present at this coast in the summer according to all statements of the locals. Polar bears be here at the Northwestcoast also essentially more shy and much less dangerous than in Spitzbergen and Nordeast Greenland. We haven't seen any and even heart of any the time when we stayed in Qaanaaq. Guns can be bought at the hardwarestore in Qaanaaq but are officially not allowed to take to Thule AB. We had nono gun with us only lot of fireworks (flares, "bearbangs", other noisemakers like preasured air horns, etc. As we had no encounter with big animals and everywhere Eskomos were around hunting, there was no chance for a polar bear to stay alive I think. Walruses can be expected in the canal between Herbert Ø and Northumberland Ø, as was said to us. We don't have checked it.

With fishing we had no luck. The lines were too short again. Our experts have only cought a couple of seaskorpiones - unattraktiv to eat. At the bottom of McCormick fiord a river and a lake, which harbors well also atlantic salmon; as we were visiting this fjord, Eskimos were fishing but we personally have not fished there. Such river / lake - combinations are however very rare in the Inglefield fiord.

Circumnavigating to Thule AB there must be lots of better occasions with better conditions (flatter bank with lakes).

In Qaanaaq in the supermarket we found Mouskox - meat, frozen Dovekies (lat.Alle Alle), dried fish, Narwhalemeat etc. To the last 3 items I may say nothing, but musk ox baked is a delicious thing. In Sondre Strømfjord in the market across the street from the airport these items these things were not available anymore.

Therefore it was wise to buy it in Qaanaaq, if one wants to take such with home.

GPS: As long as one remains in Greenland and wants not stay overnight on a iceflow, a GPS is absolutely not necessary. compass to navigate in the mist is sufficient. The deviation is extreme, but magnetic anomalies we have not ascertained. But the reaction of the compass is extremely slow, since the earth horizontal component of the magnetic field is very weak. Current magnetic deviation should be asked previously (Geodætisk Inst. Copenhagen, Thule Airbase, observatory Qaanaaq), momentary the magnetic pole is going back again north with strong movement, it changes each year a lot .

Let me just add some things.

All Americans, we met, used the way via Resolute. They flew in with scheduled flights to Resolute and than chartered Twinotters to fly direct to the small airstrip above the village of Qanaq. The flight goes via a touch down at Grease Fjord and is operated either by First Air, by Bradley Air Service or mostly by Ken Borek.

Me was told that the people of Qanaq want to improve their connections to the rest of Greenland by looking for new arrangements with the Thule Airbase to avoid the bureaucratic way through the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even the helicopter operation between Thule AFB and Qanaq shall be exchanged to conventional aeroplanes to reduce the extreme costs - the question is only how they will get support by the Danish government.

To start and maybe at the end of the tour it might be favourable to have a hotel stay - there is a nice and cosy one where you can even see pictures with autographs from Reinhold Messner and other great adventurers - also from Bengt. It is the Hotel Qanaq, run by Birthe and Hans Jensen, see the address list which I have send to you already. It is a really nice but small guest house. And you will get lots of valuable information. I think, Hans Jensen - he is Eskimo - can do even a lot for you to help to make remote organisation in advance to the trip.

And think: Thule is the last area, where the Eskimo hunt narwhals still with kayaks. There is a municipal building where the Thule people still build their kayaks - maybe it is a strange idea, but the ultimate seakayak trip would be to build your own Eskimo kayak instructed by the natives and than do a trip with the hunters. Maybe this can be arranged also by Hans Jensen or by Robert Peary Jun. Maybe it's only a very stupid idea.

Maps:

There is a nice series of maps available covering also the Thule region : SAGA Maps No 17 and 18. Normally they should be sufficient for the usual tours. Should you intend to go beyond Kap Alexander, you must use the marine charts. Geographical maps seem not to be available.



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