

The Journey begins....

DATE: 8th May 2009
LOCATION: 66.45570, -38.55060
HEIGHT: 1190m
WEATHER: SUNNY, LIGHT WINDS
TEMP: 1°C

Diary entry

Our journey up onto the ice cap was breathtaking. The journey took 20 minutes, we saw lots of frozen over inlets, rocky shores, ice floes and snow cover mountains. The helicopter took us up to the ice cap 1207m high. As we approached the landing site we saw 36 Greenlandic sled dogs, two tents, 2 dog mushers, and Carl our expedition leader. They looked so small compared to the vast ice cap surrounding them. The realisation of the scale of the expedition suddenly dawned on us.

The police had escorted us up onto the ice cap as they were going to evacuate a Danish team from the ice cap after one of them had suffered frost nip in the latest storm. They had told us that 9 out of the 10 teams that had attempted the crossing this summer had failed. Walking around in the snow without skis on was very difficult as it was really deep. We were introduced to Ullric and Salou the best dog mushers on the East coast of Greenland. They spoke very limited English in fact the main words were 'good' and 'bad' and many hand signals.

We soon realised that standing around was not an option as the temperature was 0°C, so within half an hour we were packed away and raring to go. Skiing was tough and five hours of it had some toll on our bodies. We got into camp exhausted but relieved to have started the expedition. Camp was set up smoothly due to careful planning and we bedded down for a night in temperature of -6°C in the tent.



Picture 1 - View from the Helicopter



Picture 2 - Just landed on the ice cap



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FACTSHEET

NAVIGATION

Navigation is a real challenge as finding landmarks in the white desert was almost impossible. The trick is to walk on a bearing. Keeping in mind we didn't have enough battery power to leave the GPS on all the time due to the cold. Instead we used the map to establish a bearing, set up the compass to this bearing and then checked we were on track a number of times using the GPS through the day.

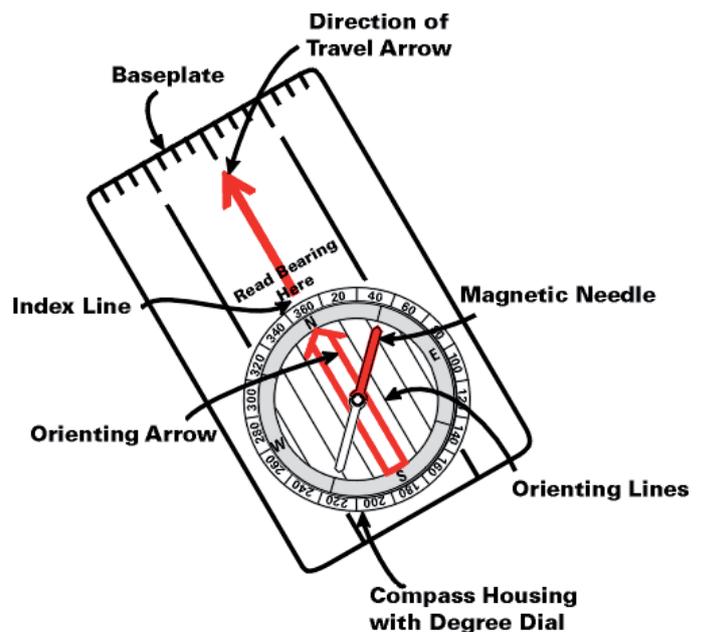
As navigation was so difficult it was important that the whole team travelled together and that we could see each other at all times. The dogs wanted to move much faster than us which meant there were times when they'd have to stop for 30mins to wait for us. On days of poor visibility skiing was impossible not because of our ability but because we would lose sight of the dogs within minutes and it would only take for us to be navigating a degree out from the sleds for us to lose them after a couple of hours.



Picture 3 - Danny with his compass attached to his waist leaving both hands free to ski with

When making trail (being at the front and putting in ski tracks) I tended to choose something a little way ahead like a sastrugi (sharp irregular ridges of snow formed on a snow surface by the wind) to keep me inline. Needless to say we didn't get the navigation right all the time and on occasions we made huge dog legs across the ice cap adding to our distance and time.

You could practise this across your school field. Get your teacher to show you how. Try to walk across the field just looking at the compass rather than looking up. Can you stay in a straight line?



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