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MOUNT
EVEREST
FOUNDATION

**THE 1995
SAVTAKKERNE
EXPEDITION
TO SERMERSOQ ISLAND
(SOUTHWEST GREENLAND)**



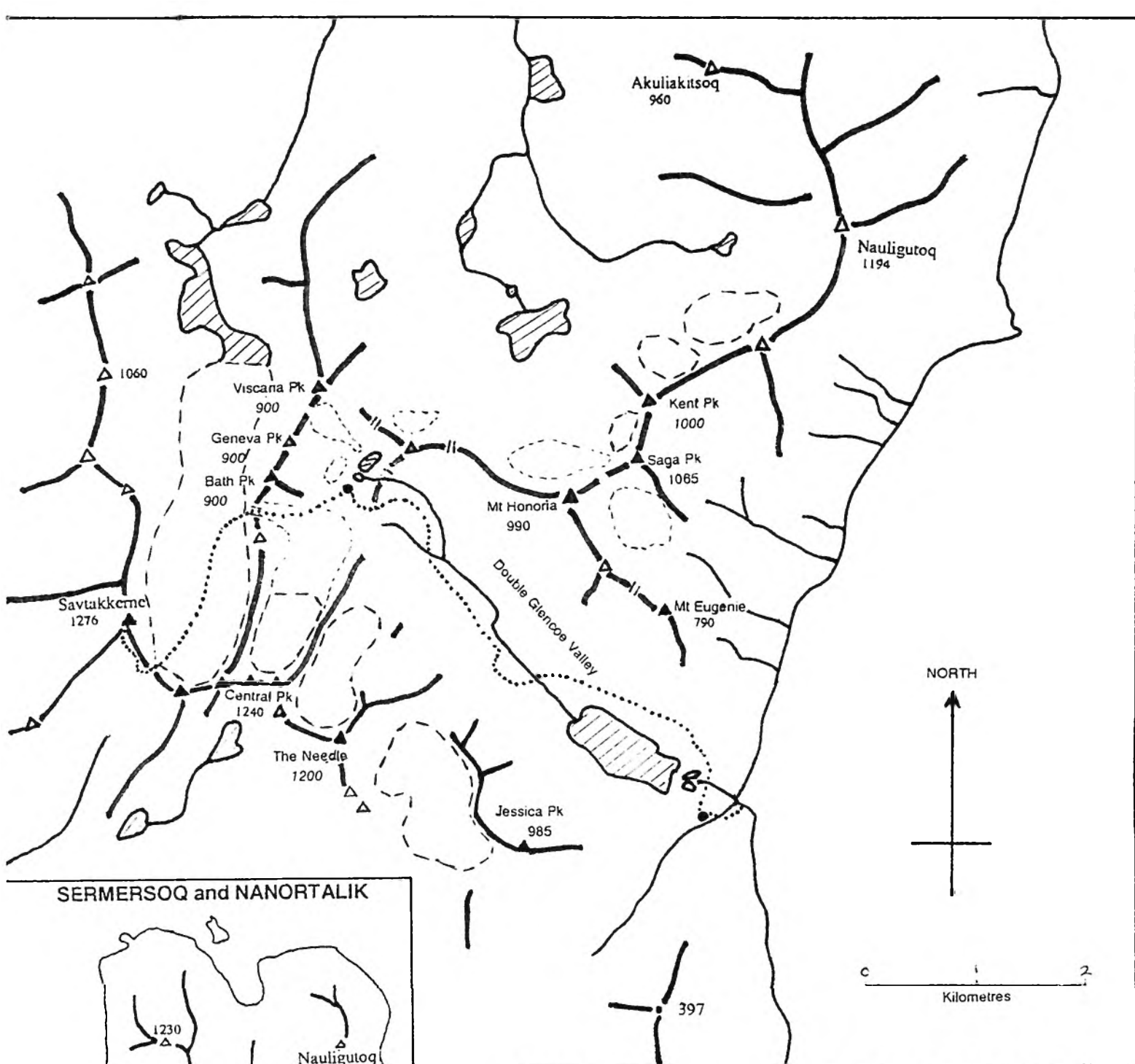
Report by Paul Marshall

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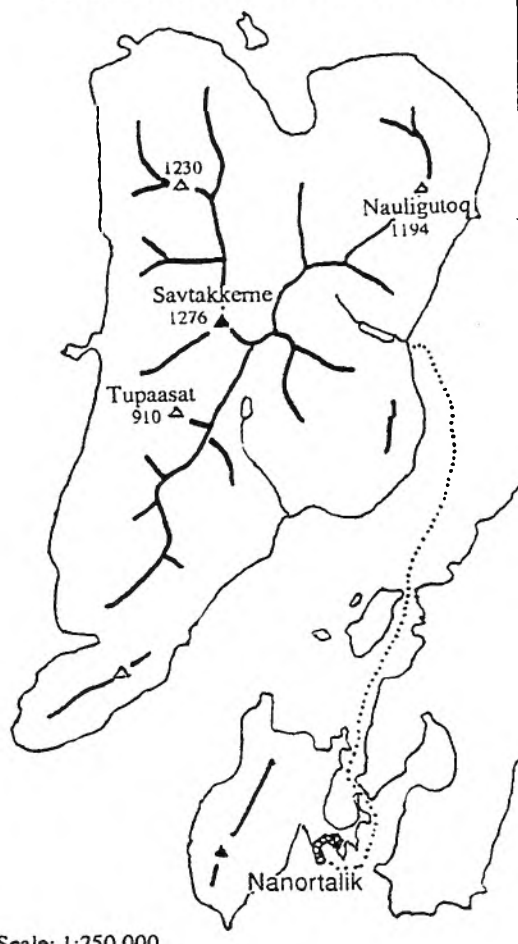
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SERMERSOQ and NANORTALIK



Scale: 1:250,000

GREENLAND



**PART OF SERMERSOQ
To Show
APPROACH TO SAVTAKKERNE**

Scale: 1:50,000

Key:	
Savtakkerne 1276	Names and heights from 1:250,000 map
Jessica Peak 985	Names given by the 1993 expedition
985	Heights by Aneroid as measured by the 1993 expedition
900	Heights from contours
	Approach and camps
	Edge of glacier
	Edge of snowfield

Local Geography

Sermersoq is a mountainous island 195 Square Kilometres in area, lying to the north of the town of Nanortalik in south west Greenland. It can be reached by a fast inflatable boat in 45 minute. Journeys can sometimes be complicated by pack-ice which has been carried round Cape Farewell by the East Greenland Polar Current and then driven into the fjords by a South West wind. In particularly bad ice conditions the crossing is impossible. Due to the close proximity of Cape Farewell the weather is changeable. Dense fog is common, often low lying, though sometimes covering the highest peaks.

A ridge of Granite peaks runs across the island from east to west. These peaks are not large. The highest Savtakkerne (Danish for "Saw Tooth") is only 1276 M, they are however alpine in nature rising from glaciers or extensive snow fields. The valleys are generally filled with boulder scree and dense low lying vegetation is common at lower altitudes.

History of climbing on Sermersoq

It is surprising how little climbing has been done on Sermersoq. Although its peaks are readily visible from Nanortalik climbers have been lured away by the greater challenges of Tasermiut Fjord's big walls. All recorded climbing has been done by British parties.

In 1957 Godfrey Francis and Tom Fletcher made the first ascent of an elegant rock spire which they named The Needle and graded V. For nearly 40 years this was to remain the hardest route put up on the island.

In 1971 a St Andrews University expedition led by Phil Gribbon climbed several of the easier southern peaks.

In 1977 Mike Banks and Angus Erskine climbed 5 easy mountains and attempted Savtakkerne, retreating because they lacked sufficient gear.

Banks returned in 1993 accompanied by Roger Birnstingl, Joss Lynam and Bill Hannon. In the course of a very successful expedition they repeated the Needle, climbed 11 other peaks and reached 1/3 height on Savtakkerne, retreating when the climbing got harder than VI.

Background

Paul Marshall was impressed by a picture of Savtakkerne that he saw in High Magazine, and decided to try it in 1994. Arrangements with a partner fell through, but he went anyway, enjoying a good holiday, scrambling some easy peaks and doing some valuable reconnaissance. The following year his climbing friends still seemed more interested in Alpine north faces, Marshall therefore enlisted the help of his old school friend Jeremy Lee. Marshall and Lee had started climbing together at Leeds University, Lee however had no alpine experience and had not climbed since being second man on an epic ascent of the V Diff Pencoed Pillar. A lot of practice was going to be needed. This was done and by the time they were ready to leave Lee had, with a pragmatic approach to free climbing ethics, followed a multi-pitch E3. They were in with a chance.

Approach

On the 23rd of June they flew from Gatwick, London to Copenhagen Airport. On the 24th they flew to Narsarsuaq, Greenland. A complete lack of sign posting to the correct check-in desk led to a very late check-in which meant only one of their bags arrived. This was turned to an advantage when they convinced the airline to pay for their stay in the local youth hostel. Since they declared that the baggage would be "Only a couple of Kilos overweight", about 25 Kg of excess baggage charges were waived. They flew to Nanortalik by helicopter on the 26th, the baggage following on the 27th.

At Nanortalik they stayed at Rene Neilsen's excellent youth hostel. Food and fuel were bought at one of the towns three well stocked supermarkets. On the 28th Neilsen took them to Sermersoq in a powerful inflatable boat. Conditions were not ideal; the fog was down, rain was heavy and the ice was so thick that it sometimes had to be pushed aside. Lee and Marshall had a good opportunity to appreciate both Neilsen's handling skills and the survival suits he had lent them. They managed to find a flat site that Marshall had reconnoitred the year before and set up Base Camp.

On the 29th and 30th they carried plenty of food and an extensive selection of gear up a rather tedious valley that was filled with bolder scree and dense thigh high vegetation . Advanced Base Camp was set up by a pleasant tarn lake.

Climbing

On the 1st they felt that they deserved a day of relaxation. They climbed Bath Peak. Having reached the summit, via the North Ridge in 1 hour from A.B.C. they felt like a little more excitement and decided to descend the unclimbed South East Ridge. This proved quite exciting, it was Lee's first Alpine route, they had no harnesses and one nine mill rope. The traverse, if done the other way, would probably give a first rate route of PD or AD standard with some IV.

The 2nd was a fine day and they decided to approach Savtakkerne, bivy and start at the crack of dawn the next day. A snow col led to a glacier which led easily to a col in the South East ridge of Savtakkerne. It was a dry year and crevasses were visible, though snow covered. A couple were 20 M across and it felt comfortable to have an almost full rope out. Easy climbing from the col led to a flat section of ridge. A very comfortable bivy was found on a large flat slab. The night was fine as they fell asleep, 3 hours later they woke to fog and rain. They sheltered under rocks as best as they could, but the wet fog seemed to get into their bivy bags and soak their down bags.

On the morning of the 3rd the rain turned to sleet then snow, hot water was obviously needed, the wind and the wet made the stove uncooperative, at least 100 matches were struck before the first bowl of water was melted. At 10 pm the rain stopped and the fog lifted. They made a dash for the col and then onto the glacier. The fog came back. Marshall got out his trusty compass, which had somehow suddenly grown a bubble, but he realised that he soon wouldn't be able to see Lee to use him as a target and what with wet snow bridges it seemed better to follow their tracks back to the col. It snowed that night.

On the 4th the fog cleared just long enough to get across. An indication of how cold they had got was that before descending Marshall noticed that Lee, lacking the auto-pilot facility that experience brings, had tied into the rope through one leg loop, with an incorrect knot.

The 5th was a day of mediocre weather.

The 6th looked unpromising with heavy mist at 5 AM. They decided on a re-supply trip to Base Camp. At 9.30 AM they were about to set off when Marshall spotted a patch of sunlight on the Central Peak glacier, the mist was thinning, there could be no harm in giving it a try. The sun had evidently been on the glacier for a while because Lee went down a couple of crevasses. They left the bivy gear that had been brought in case of weather change at the flat section of the ridge. At 1 PM they were geared up and ready to go, Marshall checked his pockets for aerial photos and a description of the Banks line, instead he found mosquito repellent and a head net -ideal for a trip to Base Camp. They followed

the Banks line for two pitches, before Marshall followed his nose left into a corner system that landed them below the summit bastion. An easy traverse led to the west ridge where the walls were easier. The ridge itself offered a couple of offwidths but a better protected corner crack at the edge of the face was taken. Easy climbing above led to the summit monolith, a crack in the east side led to the top. It was by then nearly 7 PM. It seemed prudent to cross the glacier at dawn, so they decided to descend through the night. This was straight forward because it never really got dark. It was however time consuming; the traverses had to be reversed and the whole business was new to Lee, there was no time for sleep. By the time they had stashed the gear below A.B.C. put the tents up and eaten it was 8 AM.

There was plenty of time in hand, Marshall however felt that it was best not to try any more routes. He felt that they were not a strong enough team to try harder routes and that pitching their way up easier ground was an unnecessary hassle. This decision was neither product nor cause of dissent between climbers. Each was grateful to the other for an opportunity that would not otherwise have been available. Marshall had not had to wait another year to climb Savtakkerne, Lee had got to go on a mountaineering expedition.

The following nine days, of excellent weather, were spent bouldering, scrambling easy peaks and making a photographic trip round to the south face of Savtakkerne. The only slight discomfort was that they could not cook. Lee had left the stove's fuel bottle on the flat section of the ridge on Savtakkerne. On the 18th Marshall was scrambling a peak when Lee spotted some Innuits on the beach. He persuaded them to take a message to Rene Neilsen asking to be picked up early. Neilsen arrived the following evening. This proved very fortunate since the next week's weather was bad and much ice accumulated in the channel between Sermersoq and Nanortalik. Pick up would certainly have been impossible on the date arranged and they might even have missed their flight to Narsarsuaq. At Nanortalik they met four climbers who had just done a new big wall in Tasermiut Fjord. These climbers had hired a boat and invited them on a trip to the hot springs at Unartoq. The sheltered route to the north of Sermersoq turned out to be totally blocked with ice and an attempt to get round out at sea proved too exciting in a seriously overloaded boat with a high swell on an ice filled sea. They had to content themselves with bouldering and walking. The journey home went without event.

Route Description for Savtakkerne

Gradings are UIAA standard.

Overall standard: TD

Approach from the north east by an easy glacier.

Gain the col in the south east ridge.

Climb easily to a flat section of ridge.

Move out left onto the south face and take the line of least resistance, aiming for an obvious slabby bay (III, IV). From the back of the bay climb left and up to another bay (short section of V). Climb a short corner (move of V) and move left in to a corner system. Climb the corner system (VI, sustained V inf) to end up on a large ledge at the start of an obvious traverse line crossing the face. Follow this easily (II) to the base of the last corner before the west ridge. Climb the corner (section of VI sup). Move right to the summit block, go round the back to the east side (III). Climb the crack to the top (feels V sup with all the lichen). 11 pitches from the flat section of ridge. Descend largely by rapell; all anchors tat, save one nut at the top of the crux corner.

First ascent: Paul Marshall (who led the whole route) and Jeremy Lee 06/07/95.

Rack: first ascent party used rocks 4-10 and a set and a half of friends. Parties building normal alpine belays will take less.

Time: first ascent took nearly 6 hours from the flat section of the ridge. Balanced parties, with route description, will probably consider 5 hours a slow time.

Expedition Diary

- 23 June Flight from London to Copenhagen
- 24 June Flight to Narsarsuaq
- 25 June At Narsarsuaq
- 26 June Flight to Nanortalik
- 27 June At Nanortalik
- 28 June To Sermersoq, Base Camp established
- 29 June Carry of gear to site of A.B.C.
- 30 June Food carry, A.B.C. established
- 1 July Traverse of Bath Peak
- 2 July Approach to Savtakkerne bivouac at S.E. col
- 3 July Bad weather
- 4 July Descent to A.B.C.
- 5 July AT A.B.C. (bad weather)
- 6 July Ascent of Savtakkerne
- 7 July Descent to A.B.C. and rest
- 8-11 July Walking bouldering and scrambling
- 12 July Evacuation of A.B.C.
- 13-18 July Photographic and reconnaissance trip, bouldering and scrambling
- 19 July Return to Nanortalik
- 20-27 July At Nanortalik
- 28 July Flight to Narsarsuaq
- 29 July Flight to Copenhagen
- 30 July Flight to London

Useful information for future expeditions

Future potential of Sermersoq

There is still considerable potential for those who seek adventurous mountaineering at a moderate standard. Some virgin summits in the range F to AD remain, unclimbed ridges and faces abound, many appearing to be of high quality.

For the rock climber there are the as yet untouched cliffs of the Double Glencoe Valley. These are about 500m high and will offer adventurous E climbs at all grades, with no chance of seeing another party. The rock is generally good but the odd XS will also be available on certain areas where iron deposits in the rock have completely oxidised out leaving a brown cake like substance.

There are hard alpine rock faces available. The southern aspect of the main east-west chain offers many steep walls of good rock, in fact the only area of poor rock is the south face of Central Peak which should not be harder than VS but is made of the cake stuff. First rate routes will be found on the peak to the east of The Needle, the south west face of The Needle, the west face of a subsidiary summit of Central Peak, the south west face of the peak to the south east of Savtakkerne, the south and west faces of Savtakkerne. All these faces are small (no higher than 500m), several could be climbed in a single holiday but those seeking "big walls" will have to look to Tasermit.

Information on routes in SW Greenland

The most extensive record of climbing in the area has been compiled by Mr Steen Madsen, Hylderej No 2, 9560 Handsund, Denmark. Michel Piola is rumoured to be bringing out a guide book.

Permission

Permission is not currently required for climbing in southern Greenland unless one is going onto the inland ice cap. Insurance companies and grant giving bodies will probably require one to obtain a written statement to this effect. Contact the Danish Polar Centre, Husegade 3, DK 1128 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

Travel

Narsarsuaq is the international airport for southern Greenland. It may be reached from Copenhagen or Keflavik (the international airport serving Reykjavik). S.A.S. (Scandinavian Airline Systems) run a service from Copenhagen to Narsarsuaq. For information on the route via Keflavik contact Ian Dring (leader of the 1995 British expedition to Tasermiut), 22 The Orchards, Mere Lane, Pickmere, Cheshire.

From Narsarsuaq one can travel by Helicopter to Nanortalik. All services are run by Greenland Air, whose agents outside Greenland are S.A.S. One can also catch a ferry (cheaper but services are less regular and dependant on ice conditions). For a sailing schedule and other travel information contact the Gronlands Rejesbureau (Greenland Travel), Gammel Mont 12, PO Box 130, DK-1004 Copenhagen, Denmark Tel +45 01 131011.

From Nanortalik one must charter a boat. This can be done through Rene Neilsen at the Nanortalik Tourist Office Tel +299 33441, Fax +299 33442. This is very expensive. To be dropped off at Sermersoq and picked up again we paid DK 1200. The walls of Tasermiut cost DK 7000. These inflatables do not take well to overloading, if you need more than one boat trip to ferry your supplies in it will cost half the price again. Another possibility is to hire a boat, this can be done by the month for DK 8000. This seems like a good idea since it allows flexibility when it comes to objectives, removes worry about having insufficient supplies and allows prompt evacuation in case of injury.

Air Baggage

The weight allowance on helicopter flights is 20 Kg per person, including hand baggage. Hardware is best carried in pockets and in hand baggage which has been checked in prior to being filled.

Supplies

Narsarsuaq has a good general store. Nanortalik has 3 well stocked supermarkets, Visa card is accepted. Food is generally 30-50 % more expensive than in British supermarkets, there are sometimes considerable differences between brands. Alcohol is very expensive, especially spirits -DK 380 a bottle on average. It would seem to be a good ploy to take full advantage of duty free allowances, if only so as to trade with the locals. Kerosine can be bought from the petrol station or, if cleaner fuel is preferred, the supermarket. Gas is not available. Pots and pans can be hired from the Tourist Office.

Shipping

Gas, equipment and food can be shipped to Nanortalik. This requires a change of ship in Denmark, the Royal Arctic Line is the only company which carries freight on to Greenland. Two months should be allowed for the journey, if ice is very bad freight can be delayed. For further information contact Ian Dring.

Accommodation

One may camp where one pleases outside town in Greenland. In Narsarsuaq no one seems to stop you sleeping outside the airport, though there are good dosses in derelict buildings along the road out of town. There are youth hostels in Narsarsuaq and Nanortalik, the one in Nanortalik is quite small so it seems worth booking in advance (through the Tourist Office).

Communications

The post to Greenland is slow and not entirely reliable, Fax is the best method of communication. A maritime band radio can be carried for distress communications. Channel 16 (156.8 MHz) is the emergency channel. Radios can be hired from the Tourist Office for DK 500 per month.

Expedition Accounts

Income

Mount Everest Foundation	700
British Mountaineering Council	600
Bath Youth Adventure Trust	50
<u>Personal contributions</u>	<u>1737</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>3087</u>

Expenditure

Insurance	308
Boat Charter	139
Excess Baggage	60
Flight: London to Copenhagen	266
Flight: Copenhagen to Nanortalik	1890
Food and Fuel	280
Accommodation in Nanortalik	95
<u>Report</u>	<u>49</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>3087</u>

Notes

1. All costs in Pounds Sterling. Costs in Danish Kroner have been converted at DK 8.61 =£ 1
2. Personal contributions do not include the purchase of equipment for the trip or replacement of worn or lost equipment.
3. The flights from Copenhagen to Nanortalik were far more costly than they would have been if money had been raised in time to purchase Apex fares.

Acknowledgements

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