

Rocking and Rolling in *North West* *Greenland*

A Sea Kayaking and Rock Climbing Adventure

Article and images By Olly Sanders

Level 5 Sea Kayak Coach Olly Sanders puts together a team and once again sets of the mountains and seas of Greenland for an expedition to remember.



The wind had slowly picked up during the night, I say night, but it was actually still light and we were at 72 degrees North on the North West coast of Greenland on the second night of our expedition. We had camped in a col between fjords to give us a breeze to keep down the Mosquito and while this had been a good idea earlier, it now meant the tent was getting a real hammering and we were now forced to try and move it at four in the morning! We finally managed to move it between brief lulls and were now having a brew...

It was my fourth trip to Greenland, the other three being on the east coast, so I had a good feel for what Greenland had to offer and the expedition had the same premise as the others, load the boats with as much food and climbing kit as we could and go and have an adventure on the sea and in the mountains.

This time I had persuaded Sid Sinfield and Nigel Robinson to come along. Finding paddlers /climbers who can look after themselves in both environments, is not always easy, but we now had an experienced team albeit with two Greenland first timers!

We had shipped the boats and food over from the UK two months previously and after three days travelling, we met Nikolaj our contact in

Upernavik and we walked down with him from the airstrip to his house where our kayaks were being stored. Our boats were stored right near the sea and all we had to do was load up and leave. We wanted to get away as soon as we could and with all the food already packed in the barrels, and all the gear having arrived, all we had to do was squeeze it all in to the boats.

We had twenty-days worth of food, all our camping gear plus a climbing rack, two 60-metre ropes and a rifle. It was tight, but with some of the gear strapped on to the decks of the kayaks we finally slid into the water at about 2pm and we were off! For me this moment is always a huge relief; all the planning and travelling are over and now all we need to do is just have to look after ourselves, live in the now and have an adventure.

We had a problem with our fuel first night. We had managed to get marine diesel instead of unleaded and we were told that firewood was scarce on this coast, so we were forced to return to Upernavik, pick up the right fuel and then carry on. This was more of an inconvenience than a problem and we were soon back on the water and heading away back in to the wilderness. We had a vague plan to circumnavigate the island of Nuarmiut and then head up to the carving glacier of the ice cap and to try and climb along the way, it was soon apparent there was no shortage of rock!

The Drunken Sailor

We headed north and on our second night a storm hit us and kept us tent bound for a while, but it soon cleared and we loaded up and once again set off.

It was the next evening that we set up camp and found two yachts moored in a sheltered bay. We wanted to keep away, keeping the wilderness experience, but they came and found us and invited us onboard for food. The big yacht was stunning and the smaller boat was owned by the



reverend Bob Shepton, who had provided me with a little information on some of the climbing. He had with him a formidable team of Belgian and American climbers. I had met one of them, Nico, before and these lads had already done some big, hard routes. Free climbing too! Bob is in his 70s and knows this area well and guides climbers around in exchange for crewing his yacht. The climbers also had their musical instruments with them, a mandolin, squeezebox and penny whistle, which they took up on the climbs. We were given a few songs, my favourite being the drunken sailor although Bob seemed reluctant for them to sing the third verse for some reason? A brilliant night in the company and generosity of strangers!

Rock On

The following morning it was back to reality and a visit by our first Arctic Fox, who ran around sniffing and generally providing the morning's entertainment. The climbers had told us of some more venues to check out and we set off looking to do some climbing.

We came across an Alpine Pillar they had talked about, it was stunning, but as we all looked at each other and it was obvious that it was a little too ambitious for the team and the kit we had. We camped at the end of the fjord and did some climbing that evening on some more realistic crags. We put up a couple of routes and got a flavour of the climbing. The next few days were spent climbing, having to retreat of one route due to the run out nature of it, but also having a brilliant day on a mountain route w with six pitches of excellent climbing at about E1 that we named Fjord Fiesta

Out in the Open

Having got a big route done we set of again in the sea kayaks and started out towards the carving glacier. We had a mixture of weather, but always interesting scenery around each and every corner, and when we finally set up camp on a rocky peninsula we had a breathtaking view of the icecap and the carving glacier. On the map we had our camp should have been under the ice, which just showed how much of the icecap had retreated, but we were grateful for the view that we now had.



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We climbed on the island, although it was not a great experience due to the midges and the quality of the rock. But the three days we spent there were one of the highlights of our trip, big icebergs and the deafening silence, only broken by the huge sound of ice breaking off of the ice cap.

We were now almost two weeks into the trip and headed back to check out some more climbing; and to give us a bit of leeway, as we had decided to try and paddle a committing bit of open coast to take us towards Sanderson Hope. Another great day's climbing with two new routes on brilliant rock and we headed off for the start of the open coast. We left in light drizzle, but the wind picked up as we were trying to get round a very steep headland. And with gusts hammering away at us we finally retreated to a miserable, wet camp.

A New Day

The next morning brought good weather and another stunning day's sea paddle along the open coast with wind and tide pushing us along. Helped further by the residual swell of yesterday's storm we finished the open section with relief and satisfaction. We now had a couple of days of easy paddling to finish and to reflect on a successful expedition. Five new mountain routes put up and the two big islands circumnavigated, adding up to almost 300km paddling.

We had stayed friend, had a brilliant time and, unlike my last visit, thankfully had no polar bear encounters. Once again Greenland had delivered in all aspects and I am sure I will be back again sometime very soon. Truly a trip to remember! 📷

AUTHOR

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A BCU. Level 5 Sea Kayak Coach and ACA. Advanced Open Water Instructor, Olly has been playing on the Snowdonia and Anglesey coastline for 20-years. Expeditioning also plays a large part of his life, whether it is on big walls or big mountains. 12-years as a Senior Instructor at Plas-y-Brenin and co-owner of Rock and Sea Productions, his own DVD production, and guiding company (www.rockandseadventures.co.uk), has helped him work at the highest level in instructional awards. Running courses with other rescue organisations, as well as self-rescue courses with recreational climbers and instructors, has given him a unique



insight into all aspects of the sport. He remains keen as long as his body holds out, the trips are still a good laugh and there's plenty of decent coffee and no polar bears.

Info



For more great sea kayaking articles, gear tests and paddling routes set a course to www.canoeakayak.co.uk



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