

Greenlyon Expedition – The John Lyon School 2014

In July 2014, a small team of four John Lyon School boys and two leaders set off for the barren landscape of Liverpool Land, Greenland, as part of a Mountaineering Club expedition. We were fortunate for it to be our third time in the area, exploring and carrying out a multitude of research projects with the object of gaining further insight into an uncharted yet vast expanse of territory. The main project was the scientific enquiry, where we would measure the degree of ocean acidification in a typical Fjord, hoping to identify emerging patterns over the past three years. Additionally, with our dedicated team, we now had Geology, Physiology, Art and Geographical projects running alongside.

The trek was a principal segment, composed of three weeks of unaided exploration- it was a real test of character. Being all alone has always seemed slightly daunting but it gave us a real opportunity to connect with such a beautiful environment and also with ourselves. It is honestly one of the greatest challenges I have ever faced, being away from all the simple conveniences and comforts like flushing toilets, coca cola and warm water - three things I will never take for granted again.

The physical aspect was extremely arduous with long days and ten hours of trekking in the relentless sun, but this allowed us, with light bags, to excel and go further than we had imagined in terms of distance. On the way up to the Istorvet Glacier, due to some confusion with transport, we were fortunate enough to enjoy a once in a lifetime helicopter ride over the Hurry Fjord and rock outcrops the typical terrain in this area, with a bird's eye view on an extensive range of beautiful landscapes. We enjoyed many long days out on the ice cap a total of 145 km trekked in the three week expedition; something that I am truly honoured to have done; the thought of being one of the youngest people to have ever done that is still hard to comprehend.

We were lucky to have witnessed many wonders of the physical world, such as dominating icebergs, rising from the ever blue fjord, sinister crevasses that stretch for hundred of metres and mountains that commanded the landscape. My favourite part of the expedition had to be our last day on the glacier; after a long and almost never ending trudge we finally reached the top of the peak we had been sizing up for days. When we reached the apparent unclaimed peak of a mountain 850m of loose rock, the view along Mariager Fjord was breath-taking with a superb view over the sea-scape and the sense of triumph indescribable. The blue fjord looked untouched except for a lone iceberg in the middle, and the mountains on either side rose steeply, with their jagged peaks appearing unconquerable. The mental challenges of being away from home, and the serious responsibilities of looking after ourselves and each other in such a hostile environment, were intimidating, but I believe, as individuals, we had all succeeded in pushing our levels of endurance and motivation a very considerable distance - skills that prove vital when times are difficult.

This expedition is one that I will cherish forever, as my teammates and I have learnt so much about ourselves. I would like to think that Greenland is the place where I have progressively grown up over the periods of our visits. Such a successful expedition would not have been achievable without the tireless efforts of Mr Durbridge, who had done all the planning and preparation; as a simple metaphor, this work formed the bulk of the mountain, and all we had to do was climb the snow patch on the top.

Solly Mathias (Mountaineering Club Chairman)

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The expedition was now in its third and final year of exploration and research. This was our final year obtaining water samples to measure the acidification levels and the second year of a geological study.

We departed the UK on 28th July 2014 from Luton Airport to Keflavik, Iceland, hired a large car and drove across the impressive landscapes of the lava lined route to Akureyri, then a flight onto Constable Point, Greenland. After several disappointments mainly connected to our boat crossing of Hurry Fjord to Liverpool Land start our expedition an overnight stay meant we travelled directly to our Advance Base Camp by helicopter arriving here on 30th July. We had arranged for barrels of kit and supplies to be dropped into this location in March / April 2014.

Our expedition trek aims were to explore the northerly reaches of Istorvet area bordering Himmerland, to reach Storefjord and explore peaks surrounding Mariager Fjord. We achieved all of our objectives on time and as planned. The only plan that was changed was to leave our Advance Base Camp in situ and to trek lightly each time to our various destinations. Due to the ages of the team we approached the expedition in a graduated manner exploring routes that would lend itself to later long days to reach our main objectives, as described.

The boys, Expedition Leaders, tents and equipment survived very well, the boys making good use of their time exploring, reading, playing cards and skimming stones on our campsite lake! Generally the weather was good, we experienced one day of rain, several cloudy days and mostly sunny clear days with excellent visibility, but were pleased we had prepared the team for high winds having been struck twice on this expedition. We were fortunate to have seen two herds of musk ox, one very near to our Advanced Base Camp although they didn't seem too concerned by us and were good neighbours! We saw an arctic fox and several arctic hares and a small number of birds.

Corbyn who continued with his geological study of rocks, also the metamorphism of rock found in Liverpool Land and he managed to increase his already vast collection from 2012.

Following the completion of yet another successful expedition on Liverpool Land we dropped down to Hurry Fjord where we continued to collect water samples every five kilometres from the head to the mouth of the fjord, we had nine sample locations, the last being closer to the sea. The samples were collected at surface and ten metre depths. We have been blessed with excellent guidance and support from Dr Helen Findlay of Plymouth Marine Laboratory. At the end of the fjord we continued to the Inuit settlement of Ittoqqortoormiit where we stayed for one night but also continued to research weather patterns in this area by visiting the manned weather station and interviewing the manager Tor.

On 18th August we returned to Constable Point we had a spare day and explored the Jurassic region of Jameson Land searching for ammonites.

On 19th August we departed Greenland and returned to Reykjavik, we enjoyed two days touring the city, Geysir and Gulfoss before enjoying our rest in the geothermal spa at Blue Lagoon. We returned triumphant to the UK on 22nd August.

Ralph Durbridge (Expedition Leader)