

**GINO WATKINS MEMORIAL FUND
PRELIMINARY REPORT**

EXPEDITION LEADER	EXPEDITION NAME	EXPEDITION DATES:
Ross Hewitt	2016 Baffin Steep Skiing Expedition	24 th April - 19 th May 2016

Our trip started with a massive food shop in Ottawa and a night in a cheap hotel discarding unnecessary food packaging and sorting our rations into duffle bags for each week on the ice. After confirming that we had sufficient food for the trip, and with stomachs rumbling from a long day travelling, we hit the diner across the street for a burger before calling it a day and getting some much needed sleep.

Jet lag had us up bright and early for a 6 am taxi to the airport where a few further packaging shenanigans were required to keep the excess baggage cost down to a level just less than completely staggering. 2 flights later we stepped off the plane mid afternoon in a relatively balmy Clyde River. We soon got a ride into town (no taxi available) and within an hour had permission from the (village) elders to stay in the shack on the shore. The last time we stayed there I had repaired the door and it was a pleasant surprise to find the shack had undergone some renovations which included a porch, fresh coat of paint and a space heater. It is an ideal stepping-stone for final preparations before heading out onto the ice.

The next day revolved around securing a ride into the fiords, buying white gas and last minute supplies, checking in with the Mounties and making some final packing adjustments. By the end of the day we had arranged a 7 am pick up the following morning for an estimated 15 hour komatic trip into the fiords.

The day dawned fine and by the time we were crossing Sam Ford Fiord it was exceptionally mild and we were shedding layers despite the 40 kph wind-chill. Our Inuit guide commented 'that it felt like being in a sauna'. Thankfully by the time we reached Scott Island it had started to feel cooler and we encountered deep powder and spent a lot of effort with the snow machines and komatics getting bogged down. Once in Clark Fiord there was less new snow that made the going easier and we started to see some ski lines. However a bear with her cub and decided run alongside the snowmachines and we decided to press on to the branch from Gibbs Fiord (west of Sillem Island). Although the peaks are high there, the terrain didn't offer what we were looking for and we continued onwards to the junction with Gibbs proper. On the approach to Gibbs around 11 pm we spotted a 1200 m wall spilt with a couple of aesthetic couloirs. Knowing there was good skiing throughout Gibbs made it an easy decision to camp. We had chosen to take a significant proportion of real food and we guessed it would be a week before the weight had reduced enough to move under our own power.

The fine weather made setting up camp late at night as civilised as it can be and by 1 am we were in bed. The next day dawned fine and we headed off to our first

1200 m couloir that turned out to be absolutely incredible. It was a great feeling to hit the jackpot straight away after 2 years of planning, and with the support of so many.

In the middle of the night the weather changed and we were up out of bed, building walls to protect the tents from the wind. We stayed at camp 1 for the next 8 days and skied continuously despite very variable and often 'Scottish' type weather. This hindered us more due to low cloud and the ability to spot how far lines went. Simon and myself had kites with us and we really benefitted on the windy days being able to travel for 'free' and conserve some energy for the boot packing and skiing. With regular new snow our vertical rate of ascent was dramatically reduced.

We were still heavy with supplies when the time came to move camp forcing us to put up our heel raisers to have any chance of pulling our sleds. A 6 hr stint and 12 km later put us under an inspiring looking tower where we made camp 2.

Camp 2 offered good options on both the south and the north side of the fiord. However, the south facing slopes were now frozen hard after the heat at the start of the trip had brought down winter cornices and caused some slides. They required solar to make them skiable. Across the fiord, the north facing slopes were still in great shape and getting top ups of new snow as the variable weather continued. We stayed at camp 2 for the remainder of the trip exploring both sides of the fiords. As our kiting skills improved I even went on a recce kiting 10 km upwind by tacking back and forth across the fiord and returning to camp in about under 20 minutes.

Towards the end of the trip the weather was very unsettled and we recorded a daytime temperature of 9C at sea level causing significant avalanche, serac and rock fall. The trip was coming to an end but exiting the fiords did not go smoothly (ref field log entries) and by the time everyone was safely back in Clyde River we had used up our weather contingency, missed our flights to Europe, but had an incredible adventure and collected some all time memories.