

Review

One Thousand Days with Sirius: The Greenland Sledge Patrol

Original Danish by Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen, 1986
English translation by David Matthews, 2005
The Steading Workshop, Cawdor IV12 5XT
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Since 1950 the Danish Government has patrolled some 2100 km of the coastline of northeast Greenland by means of a small group of men using dog teams in winter and small boats in summer. This attractive book is the account of one of the men, Peter Mikkelsen, who spent the winters of 1977 and 1978 with the Sirius Patrol. He has teamed up with former Fids David Matthews to produce an English translation which is now published at their own expense.

For this we should be very grateful, because it gives a splendid insight into a little-known activity, carried out each year by a dozen or so men, in some of the most hostile and beautiful parts of the polar world. The book is not a lyrical masterpiece on a par with 'Arctic Dreams' by Barry Lopez, but Mikkelsen has the power to evoke among old Antarctic sledgers feelings of nostalgia, which are enhanced by fine photographs. Its workmanlike account of the pleasures and techniques of dog-sledging tells how an operation very similar to that of FIDS and BAS was conducted.

Many readers will be fascinated to note the similarities and compare the differences with their own experience. The dogs, for example, seem identical, but in Greenland the Sirius men harnessed them 11 to a team, in fan traces, to a hard-runnered Greenland sledge. Each patrol had two men and one dog team, their barrel-shaped tents were utterly different from our pyramids, and they had recourse to numerous wooden huts, with coal-fired stoves, now increasingly reinforced by steel against attack by hungry bears.

Now part of the Northeast Greenland National Park administration, the Patrol in Mikkelsen's day was a military operation, and Fids will find

their training and operational approach quite different from the Survey's, which by then had sadly passed its peak. For Mikkelsen and his colleagues their time with Sirius seems to have been pure, paid, adventure, unencumbered by scientific distraction, but implementing, with sensitive efficiency, the government's desire and obligation to administer a very special wilderness.

I commend his book to you, and also Dave's website for links to Nanok. This admirable organisation, which Peter now chairs, documents and conserves the Greenland huts, in much the same way as our own UKAHT does in Antarctica.