

Midnight course without a headlamp.

Palle Møller Nielsen, Jens Pedersen, Grete Nedergaard

Members of Odense Orienteringsklub, Denmark - Class 60+

A trip to Greenland like this, all retired people should be granted.

Possibilities are pretty good because some flight-tickets for people over 60 years are given up to 60 per cent discount. This is DKK 6.000 or EURO 800, and that is pretty fair.

Come on Danish orienteers – by now the class Men 60+ is the largest one.

OK – we have heard and read a lot of orienteering in Greenland, and NOW the time had come to go there.

We are members of Odense Orienteringsklub like Olav Odgaard, who is the pioneer of orienteering in Greenland.

So one morning we went to Copenhagen airport. Flying clockwise we were in Ilulissat at noon local time. It was a long day as Greenland is 4 hours behind Denmark.

An very exciting week was ahead of us.

At that time it was really summer – the local temperature was 18 – 20 degrees.

That evening a course was arranged with a common start. We were a little bit scared of the hilly country, when we had to go out into the rocks with icebergs in the background. But pretty soon we got a good grip of the controls, and then we had to take a lot of controls within the limited time.

We are used to take care of time, but this landscape was so beautiful that we had to stop and admire it again and again.

The map was perfect and the variation (about 40 degrees) was marked, so this we soon solved.

Two people read the instruction in two languages – Danish and Greenlandic. You have to remember that orienteering is a very young sport in Greenland, and there were a lot of wonderful young people.

We all enjoyed their spontaneity – shouting and applauding young people greeted all competitors.

We got hot fruit syrup and water at the finish and though it was after midnight a lot of competitors were sitting enjoying the sunshine – really strange to sunbathe in the middle of the night.

Fortunately it was rather windy, because at that time of the year there are a lot of aggressive mosquitoes.

Some areas at the map were marked with red colour. That was the area for huskies – we should not come too close to them even they were chained.

Our accommodation was fair, an apartment for air staff and Danish craftsmen. Our neighbour was a Danish orienteer. She had to buy new shoes, because one of the puppies ate one of her shoes.

The host of the Youth Hostel told us that he had met with one of his guests – this man had left his artificial leg, and our friend had really trouble in keeping a straight face, when the leg had disappeared.

The next day was Greenland championship in the airport-area.

It was a rather rocky ground, which the local competitors passed just as it would have been a plain terrain.

Jens had more trouble because he fell down awkward injuring his head – nothing serious, but he had to visit the hospital and have a suture.

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Two girls (F21) had come into the runway at the airport, and a car from the staff was sent out to chase them out.

At the finish cake and hot tea was served for the competitors.

Arctic Midnight Orienteering.

Now we had reached one of the highlights of the trip.

Arctic Midnight Orienteering. We had to start high up in the stiff rocks in the city-area with a fantastic view over the landscape.

Nevertheless some young guys were biking up the mountain.

It was rather cold and windy – about +5 Celsius degrees and unfortunately cloudy. A choir of young girls were singing so beautiful for us, while we were waiting for midnight.

It was daylight, and it was not necessary to use a headlamp.

The common start went on and again we passed rocks, valleys and streams. The courses were 20, 15, 10, 6 and 4 kilometres, so everybody could take part.

The finish area was a sports-arena in Illulissat.

Again soup, cake, coffee and tea were served, and again a lot of people were applauding the competitors.

3 competitors had not shown up at expiration of the limited time.

They had not passed the radio control (to which all equipment had been brought by huskies) and a search was established.

It turned out that one person had come outside the map and the others (a married couple) had just missed the radio control.

But finally at 6.15 in the morning all competitors had returned safe home.

We had time for a walk in the rocks to see the Bitch's cleft. The place about which the myth says, that the old women went out when they felt to be a burden to the family and jumped out into the Arctic inlet.

In the same area were burial chambers for Eskimos with skulls and bones.

We also visited the course with fixed controls close to the airport.

Of course there was a party for us. It was in the sports-arena, and at first there was prize giving.

The Prizes were seal-claws for the class winners. And the Greenland champion got a trip with helicopter to the Ice Cap.

The entertainment was a choir, disco-girls and a pretty cheerful masked dancer – dancing around with his drum, looking all the girls deep into their eyes.

The menu was a fish-buffet with a lot of specialities.

I learned to eat a small dried fish with seal blubber – very tasty – and I never thought I would taste that sort of food (!)

The next day we attended the confirmation at Zion's church. The door was open and everybody could come and go, as they wanted.

Small children were running up and down and the candidates for confirmation and their families were dressed in national costumes. Very nice.

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Our general impression of the Greenlanders is that they are very obliging and frank to the guests, and they look relaxed - this is what we could learn from them!

The last evening.

The final highlight of the trip was saved until our last evening in Greenland. It was the trip with the ship "Smilla" into the inlet between the icebergs. It had been a little rainy during the daytime, but the weather was clearing up, when we turned out, so we enjoyed the beautiful panoramas. The temperature was +3 degree Celsius. We were pleased to have chosen a closed boat.

And finally we'll mention that it is a laudable initiative, which Olav Odgaard with support from local people, Greenlander and Danes – has taken in founding a club for Orienteering in Ilulissat.

That deserves also support from people here in Denmark.

It is really trendy to be an orienteer for people in Greenland, and a lot of the members are young people.

Grete Nedergaard