

THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

Vidar sneaked his way through the rough, packing ice. He was out seal hunting. The weather was nice and I sat by the tent studying the maps. We were half way through to King Williams Island - only about 400 kilometers left. Suddenly Vidar disappeared. I rushed towards the lead in the ice where I last saw him. When I reached the spot he was back upon the ice - wet to the skin. "Lucky you brought your ice axe along", I said, "Without it you wouldn't have managed". (The ice was about three feet thick.)

Vidar Sie (27) and I (45) were the two participants of "The North-west Passage 1988" expedition. We had been on the move only for a few weeks, but already we had seen and experienced a lot. And there were still three and a half months to go.

May 23 we left Copenhagen heading for Greenland's main transit airport - Sondre Stromfjord. From 30.000 feet we had a nice view of the huge icecap which covers 90% of the largest island in the world. We were excited since we both had crossed the ice cap on skis - I in 1971, Vidar in 1986. This experience which we had in common was the direct reason for my choice of Vidar as companion on this expedition.

I also wanted a Norwegian due to the fact that Roald Amundsen was the first ever to navigate "The Passage". With his 73 feet long "Gjoa" and a crew of 6 he sailed from Thule, Greenland in August, 1903 and reached Nome in Alaska in 1906. From Thule (where he also met the young Knud Rasmussen) Amundsen sailed through the dangerous Lancaster Sound, then headed south on the west side of Boothia Peninsula to King Williams Island. There he discovered a small bay where they decided to stay for the winter. The bay was named Gjoa Haven after the ship. Amundsen and his men stayed in Gjoa Haven for two years. The purpose for the expedition was to spot the Magnetic North Pole, and during the two years' period an enormous number of magnetic observations was done. In addition a large number of ethnological items were collected from the native people (mostly the Nechilli Eskimoes) with whom they established a close relationship. In the summer of 1905 Amundsen continued, but at King Point "Gjoa" stuck in the ice and they were forced to winter again. In 1906 they finally reached Nome - The Northwest Passage was conquered. But by that time the seaway north of America to the Far East was no longer of interest for commercial purposes.

During the last few centuries sailors, British for the mostpart, had fought the rough climate in the Arctic searching for the Northwest Passage. One of the real pioneers was Sir Martin Frobisher who discovered Baffin Island in 1576. 31 years later the huge Hudson Bay was discovered by another British explorer - Henry Hudson. Scandinavians also explored the Arctic in the 17th century. In 1619 a Danish/Norwegian sailer named Jens Munk entered the Hudson Bay. He was commanded by the Danish King - Christian IV - to search for the Northwest Passage. Only Munk himself and two of his men returned alive. The most famous disaster in the history of "The Passage" was Sir John Franklin's expedition in 1845. All 134 men died! Modern investigation of the skeletons of the bodies reburied in 1986 shows that they probably were poisoned by lead from their foodcans. Maybe that is the key for other Arctic mysteries from that time?

In March 1923 the Dane Knud Rasmussen started his 5th Thule expedition. The "Great Sledgejourney" began. With his two Inuit friends, Miterq (the Eiderduck) and Arnaruluunguaq (the little Woman), he dogsledged from Hudson Bay to King Williams Island where they stayed for the summer. That same winter the expedition headed further west and reached MacKenzie by the following summer. The final stage to Nome in the Bering Strait was done by boat.

In this century many expeditions have travelled through the Northwest Passage - some scientific, some more as a result of the search for adventure and excitement. None has ever travelled in such small crafts as kayaks, which is strange because the kayak was the way the Inuit people travelled for some thousand years in the same areas. The kayak is slow, but it is safe. But more interesting is that there is no difference between a modern kayaker and an Inuit in a kayak two thousand years ago. The circumstances are similar - the power of nature and the drifting ice. The problems of finding a safe place to go on shore are similar as well. The modern kayaker will choose the same small bay or beach to go on shore as the Eskimo - very simply because both will find exactly that spot natural. For this reason we ran into a lot of tracks from former Eskimo settlements. But even though this was exciting it was the search for adventure which was the basic reason for our trip. That is necessary if you have to live isolated for 4 months in the Arctic. Our main goal was to kayak through the Northwest Passage. We also wanted to map old Inuit settlements, and to try to find tracks from past European expeditions.

On a warm, sunny day in May the SAS DC-8 machine landed at Sondre Stromfjord Airport in Greenland. I am always in a good mood when I am here. A short walk to the top of the nearest hill and a gorgeous view will hit your eyes. Eastwards the Icecap forces its way between the friendly, grasscovered hills. In the west direction melting water meets the tight Sondre Stromfjord which disappears into the horizon. Greenland is a fantastic island.

We flew to Nuuk where our two kayaks and the equipment waited for us. The next day we flew to Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island. The aircraft carried four passengers and lots of goods. In the front part of the plane our kayaks were placed. Wrapped in the thick foam they more looked like two giant cigars. In Frobisher Bay it was still winter with lots of snow. This is the biggest city in Canada's arctic - 3.000 citizens. Here is no character; no dog-teams, no tiny wooden houses, no frames with dried fish and meat on them. All you see are huge cars, snowmobiles, and the famous "threewheelers" (a mixup of a car and a motorbike). We stayed here for two days before we headed further north to Resolute Bay. From the Boeing 737, 15.000 feet above sealevel, we saw Lancaster Sound - the famous entrance to the Northwest Passage, where enormous icefloats, several squarekilometers in size, slowly move towards Davis Strait. Some minutes later we land on the gravel airstrip in Resolute Bay.

There is no doubt; we are in "High Arctic" - latitude 75. The sun is shining, but the temperature is 10C below. We nervously watch the aircraft being unloaded, but....? we can not see the kayaks. I rush towards one of the Canadian Airline employees and ask him what has happened. His answer is short, but clear: "Too much cargo, maybe next plane, maybe next week, I don't know". We leave the airport without our gear and walk to the center of Resolute Bay.

180 people live here. It is quiet - 8 a.m. We walk to a small hotel with a sign on it: "High Arctic International Explorer Services Ltd"

A smiling woman meets us in the door. This is Terry Jesudason - married to Bezal, from India, who settled himself in the Arctic 15 years ago. The hotel is an exciting place because most expeditions aiming for the North Pole use as their basecamp "Bezal's place". The walls at the hotel, which looks more like an ordinary home, are filled with pictures from all kinds of expeditions. At the moment, the Russian/Canadian "Polar Bridge" expedition is the one people are talking about. Within a week they will reach the most northern part of Canada, Ward Hunt Island, after a 3 months' fight against the cold on their way from Russia and across the North Pole.

The weather turned bad and the plane from Frobisher Bay - or Iqaluit which is the new name of the city - was cancelled. For that reason we were stuck for another week. But we had a good time; we hired two snowmobiles from Bezal and made a two day trip to Beechy Island. There tracks and three graves from Sir John Franklin's expedition in 1845 are still remaining. Historically it is an interesting place. On our way we met two polarbears, but they were harmless. We got some nice pictures and videoshots of them because we could get fairly close to them with our fast snowmobiles. Back in Resolute Bay again our kayaks finally arrived - two weeks delayed. In addition one of the kayaks was severely damaged and our paddles were missing. (The paddles were traced to a freezer in Edmonton some thousand kilometers away, but they were returned the next day.) After repairing the damaged kayak we were ready to go. The ice was still permanent so we prepared to walk the first 800 or 900 kilometers - at least. But we did not mind. We had started, and Knud Rasmussen's words from his 1st Thule expedition were in our minds: "Out in the free, hungry for the sunrises. All muscles tightened, as hunting beasts of prey, we welcome You - The Start, The Journey against the North. All journies in the world are for the people who make them."

Our journey started with great sunny weather and 10C below. Tony, one of the Inuits who worked for Bezal freighted us with snowmobiles across Barrow Strait. Some hours later we reached Somerset Island where we and the equipment were unloaded. A short goodbye and Tony left - we were alone. The first thing we did was to pitch tent on a small, snowfree spot, fire the stove, and start packing the food for stage 1 to Gjoa Haven. First it looked impossible to put food for 40 days into a kayak, even though we only brought with us 1/3 of what we needed. The rest was to be obtained from hunting. But after some packing - and repacking - it was all there. The powder food was placed aft and in the bow where a kayak is narrow, which gave more room to the tent, stove, clothing, and the rifle. Our "ships" were placed on the sledges and strapped. Then we were ready to start our first day's work in the Northwest Passage.

The weather was steady, but we had a cold wind from the north the first couple of weeks. The snow on the ice was hard so the 160 pounds we each pulled did not bother us very much, but that changed. Suddenly the temperatures changed to plus and the snow turned slushy. The sledges fell through the snow so there was only one thing to do - go by night and sleep by day. By the night it was colder and the snow hardened. We had daylight 24 hours a day, so day and night were similar. After a while we had a routine more or less like this: Breakfast 6 p.m., ready to go 8 p.m.; around

midnight we had a quick rest and ate a couple of biscuits; by 1 a.m. we pitched tent and had hot lunch, after which we continued to walk until morning when we had dinner before we fell asleep. We soon realized that the food supply from nature was necessary. Our bodies burned more "fuel" than we gave them, so all fat was gone within the first 15 days or so. But the wildlife was abundant so hunting was not difficult. The only drawback was that hunting took time. Our daily distances dropped from 25 - 30 to approximately 25 kilometers a day. Also the leads in the ice cost time. We had to turn our crafts "up side down" i.e. take the kayaks off the sledges and put the sledges on the kayaks. Then we could paddle for 5, maybe 25 meters before we had to do the same operation over again the other way around. But very soon we got used to it, and spent less time on it.

Slowly we came closer to Belloit Strait - a tiny strait which separates Somerset Island from the mainland. The tide is strong and many expeditions had met their end here. But we were here early, so the ice was still permanent. We camped in a nice place with a view south to the Boothia Peninsula - the most northern place on the North American mainland. Westwards we saw M'Clintock Channel. In this area we saw 6 polarbears within two hours.

We were now 500 kilometers south of where we started and the landscape changed dramatically. We were used to tall mountains, but now the shore was more gravelly and muddy. Some times we struggled to come on shore to camp, and some times we gave it up and camped on the ice. We also had hard days pulling the sledges through packing ice, but it was all compensated for by the feeling of being so small in the vastness of nature.

The following days the spring really started and the sun fought the snow. The snow melted and we had a new situation; the fresh water on the ice was not deep enough for paddling and in some places it was just too deep for our rubber boots. But by jumping and careful walking we managed without getting too wet.

One day we saw King Williams Island. The only problem to reach there was the James Ross Strait which is so narrow that the tide and the currents had weakened the ice for us. Usually you can see from the colour of the ice how much it can bear, but not always. We passed without falling through, but some times we had to put on a little spurt to avoid having a bath. I was a bit unlucky when we should have gone ashore on King Williams Island - I fell into a crack in the ice and hurt my leg. That bothered me for the rest of the trip.

Also the hunting turned bad at the eastern part of King Williams Island. But we were excited. Daily we hoped to find something from Franklin's or Amundsen's expedition. We were in the heart of the Northwest Passage. Hopefully we looked into every bay, but we did not find anything.

Early July we reached our first goal - Gjoa Haven. We walked slowly towards the little group of houses. For us, who had not seen other people for a month, it looked like a big city even though only 600 people lived there. In this little bay Amundsen stayed for two winters only 80 years ago - it was stone age here at that time. Civilization has hit the Inuit people rapidly.

The people here were very friendly. Some were interested in what kind of wildlife we had observed (mainly caribou, muskoxen, and polarbears), others were interested in our mappings of old Inuit settlements.

One bad element of the arctic summer is the mosquitos. They are really thirsty. Amundsen called them the worst general scourge in the Arctic. But after 4 days in Gjoa Haven we left the nice people (and the mosquitos as well) and headed west. Now we could use the kayaks for several kilometers every day so we were quite satisfied with the distances we had covered by the time we dived into our sleepingbags at night. But good times always have an ending. Again we met the permanent ice, but now it was "less permanent" than it used to be - it was just before break up. There were open lanes and channels in the ice, areas with reasonably good ice, but worse were the areas with slush ice. You can not force the kayak through such ice so the only way to make some kilometers is to walk on it. It is difficult to see exactly how thin the ice is, and once Vidar had a bath. We also were close to the shore all the time and that cost time because we visited all the small bays on our way. After a week we again came to a strait with strong currents. This was Simpson Strait - an area we were warned of by the Inuits. In this particular strait, which has been so difficult for many to come through, we had our first real day in the kayaks. Non-stop paddling for 30 kilometers! It was great. But at the other end of the strait we met bad ice conditions again. Again we were forced to stick close to the shore, but as a matter of fact that was interesting because it was in this area M'Clintock discovered the remainings of Franklin's men in the late 1840's. For some unknown reason the starving men built cairns before they died. It was a strange feeling to be at the same place as this had happened 140 years ago. Nothing had changed since then. We also saw the place where Knud Rasmussen stayed for the summer in 1924, waiting for the ice so he could fulfill the dogsledge journey through the Northwest Passage.

Two weeks after we left Gjoa Haven, it was time to wave goodbye to King Williams Island. We had three straits to pass before we could reach the big Victoria Island. The first, Alexander Strait, was a mess of drifting and packing ice. To move out there without knowing how the ice moved would be suicide. For two days we stayed on a little islet when I studied the movements of the ice. (It was not noiseless either when the ice crashed together.) After two days I made a decision. We had to go 5 km south and try to cross over on low tide, and move as quickly as possible before the tide returned with the ice. 28 hours later we were safe on an island on the other side of the strait. 25 km in 28 hours is not very impressive, but the ice had been difficult so we were lucky.

Now the weather really turned bad so the next week we only progressed 20 kilometers in total. It was foggy, raining and bad ice conditions.

The date was July 20 and we had to be in Cambridge Bay 26th. With 250 kilometers to go we realised that it was impossible. We decided to try to find the American/Canadian radarbase (DEW line station CAM 2) on Jenny Lind Island. That was on the other side of strait number 2 - Victoria Strait (45 km). Our foodrations were pretty low so we hoped to get some kind of foodsupply at the radarstation. One morning the fog disappeared and we decided to cross the strait. The ice conditions were better than in Alexandra Strait, but the distance was twice as long. The course was easy - 270 degrees, or directly west. But after a few hours the fog came again and we were

in real trouble. Sitting in a kayak with drifting ice, unable to see more than 30 meters ahead is not a very funny situation. We changed course all the time even if we tried to go directly west. Some times we paddled north of an icefloat, next time south. If it seemed to be a big float we walked across it pulling the kayaks, but the floats were drifting so we lost the direction all the time. Vidar's kayak was damaged in the ice, and water streamed in. Every hour we stopped to scoop it out. After a day we camped on a huge float - we needed a rest. Vidar's kayak also needed to be repaired. We slept for 5 - 6 hours, and continued. In two days we paddled and walked only by using the compass. Vidar lost faith with the direction, and thought we should continue till we hit Victoria Island. But I assured him that we could not miss the 25 km long island.

We continued, and close to the evening the horizon darkened. "Water", I said to Vidar. He did not answer. He looked straight ahead, and I heard him say slowly: "Have you seen the radarstation in front of you"? I turned around and I saw it. There - 200 meters ahead we saw the shore, and further back we saw buildings and the radar. This was just unbelievable. We danced and shouted on the icefloat. One thing is for sure after this. I will always trust the Silva compass. One hour later we entered the DEW line site. We were not seen before we stood in the kitchen. There we met the cook - Frank from Hungary. He smiled and said: "Welcome, you guys must be the two kayakers. We have been looking for you for a week. We were afraid you hadn't made it. I'll bring you some food". The next two days we ate, rested, and repaired equipment. We will never forget the men on Jenny Lind Island and what they did for us. After two great days we were ready to set off again. The radarmen helped us to the shore with the kayaks, and one hour later we could not see them any more. Next day we paddled across strait number 3 - The Icebreaker Channel. But we did not run into any kind of trouble there, and in good spirits we reached Victoria Island at lunch time. We had a good lunch on shore while we watched 3 friendly muskoxen grazing in a little hill 100 meters away. The wind bothered us a bit the last 100 km to Cambridge Bay. But we had called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Cambridge Bay from the DEW line site so for we were not in a hurry. One week after departure from Jenny Lind Island we entered Cambridge Bay a late Saturday night.

In Cambridge Bay we were met by the nurse Donella. She lived in the family Hayhursts house while they were on holiday. This was luxury - food, bed, and room. We also met another expedition which tried to go through the Northwest Passage with the yacht "Belvedere". The owner - John Bockstoce - showed us the boat before we left Cambridge Bay. Later we heard he had made it to Greenland.

Even if civilization was good, four days was enough. It was the middle of August and we had to continue west. Donella, Frank (her boss), Cyril (the plumber who invited us to dinner, and when we came there he had to leave, so his wife had to take over), and some other people arranged a little "beach party" with pie and ice before we turned our backs on Cambridge Bay. We were glad to be on the trail again. You get lazy in the cities. Cambridge Bay was the largest town on our way with approximately 1000 citizens.

We paddled close to the shore. Victoria Island is nice. It's so green that it looked more like the west coast of Ireland. We saw muskoxen everywhere, some single bulls, some bunches - the biggest bunch counted 25 animals. The following week was just great. We had real summer; sun, 10 - 20 degrees plus, and no wind. Additionally the fishing was good and we had some good dinners of arctic char. We managed to move quite a distance every day - the longest one day stage was 58 kilometers. Quickly we came closer to the most dangerous move on this stage - crossing from Victoria Island to the Mainland. The strait, Dolphin and Union Strait, is 60 kilometers wide and there is an island 20 kilometers from the Victoria Island side of it. One nice morning we headed for the little island. The currents were strong but they did not give us any real problems. We had lunch on the island but when we ate it started blowing so we had to delay the rest of the crossing. But it was a nice island. We had a walkabout and found old settlements from the Thule culture and a whale skeleton. In the evening the wind decreased and we decided to try the rest of the crossing. Again we were lucky and crossed Dolphin and Union Strait with no trouble. We were glad when in the darkness we pitched tent, had a good dinner and chocolate pudding. We were very optimistic about the next 600 kilometers to Paulatuk.

We should not have been that optimistic. The first day on the coast of the North American continent started windy. We did try to paddle, but after a couple of kilometers we gave it up and camped. And the wind continued. We were lucky that we had crossed Dolphin and Union Strait, but it would not help very much if we got stuck here. We had to wait two days before we could enter the kayaks again. We understood that the fall had started so from now we had to use the time effectively when the weather was good. The shore became more and more cliffy, and combined with the wind it was a problem to move safely. Another problem was to come on shore. Close to the shore the waves rose like huge surfing waves. But the water is colder in the Arctic than in Florida so we did not want to surf. After some exercise and two spills we learned to ride on a wave until it hit the beach and then immediately jump out of the kayak and pull it onto land. Usually we managed without getting too wet. Once when we stranded on a nice beach after a "surfing-exercise" I said to Vidar: "This is like the beaches in Denmark, let us look for some sunbathing girls", but all we saw were tracks from polarbears (mother and two cubs). We did not like that very much because on this time of year they are hungry. We looked around nervously, but we did not see any bears. But suddenly we had other things to think on. A storm was blowing up. We pitched up the tent quickly, fired the stove, and let it blow. Actually it is a nice feeling to sit in a warm tent in the Arctic when it is storming "outside".

We also had our duties. While the food cooked, I logged the distance for the day, and drew it on the map. The maps were not very precise and the scale was 1:250.000, but in the long run the small errors equalized each other. I also noted temperature, wind, and the old settlements. Vidar logged the wildlife. The number of caribou, muskoxen, geese, falcons, and all the other animals or birds were noted with reference to the map. Finally our diaries had to be updated before we had an 8 hour sleep. Next morning we would spend two hours packing the equipment and loading the kayaks. But this particular morning we could sleep as long as we wanted. There was a storm.

High winds meant high waves. Some times they were up to 5 meters or so. It was sinister to be lifted by the wave, see Vidar some meters away, and then fall down between the waves and see nothing but the water. Once we were stuck out in the sea. The wind increased, the waves got higher, and the shore was too cliffy to try to go on shore. We were desperate. We knew there was a small bay some kilometers further west. There was nothing else to do than to go for that one. We made it to the bay but the view that met us was not very promising. The wind blew and to us it looked like the whole Beaufort Sea tried to enter the little bay named Albert Bay. I shouted over to Vidar that we had to try. We paddled backwards against the shore. When the wave hit us we paddled against it to have control on the kayak. The wave moved us some meters backwards and closer to the shore. Just before I hit the shore I turned the kayak, paddled all I could for the last few meters, and when I hit the sand I jumped out of the kayak onto shore. I turned around and looked for Vidar. My pulse accelerated - where was he? Then I saw him in the water holding his overturned kayak. But it was quite shallow so he reached the beach. When he was on shore he undressed while I pitched up the tent. We also made a huge fire of drifting wood and had a hot meal. We both agreed that this should not happen again.

We were stuck in Albert Bay for four days before the wind decreased and we could set off again. This was late August and on the 31st the fresh water froze to ice. Even if we only moved 15 to 20 kilometers during the next few days we were just glad to progress.

The days passed and one day we saw Cape Lyon. This was the last really difficult place before we reached Paulatuk (ca. 1.000 kilometers from Cambridge Bay). Cape Lyon is a steep cape with stonewalls (50 to 100 meters high) falling directly into the water. For 25 to 30 kilometers there is absolutely no chance to go on shore. We had our last experience with tall waves fresh in mind so we were in no doubt - passing Cape Lyon had to be done in extremely good weather. Anything else would be absolutely stupid. But we did not trust the weather here. It changed too quickly. We had seen the wind change direction 180 degrees within an hour or two. We both agreed to the most slow and laborious, but safest, method; crossing the land.

We started by pulling the kayaks up a delta towards a little creek. It was a strange feeling to use the harness again. It was close to two months since the last time we had done it and we very soon realised that we were not pulling our crafts on ice, but on the ground. The noise from the kayaks was terrible when we dragged them over sand and stones. It was like they shouted: "How can you do this to us?" It is incredible that they made it, even if the bottom was of six layers of fiberglass.

The creek became drier and finally there was no water left and we had to carry the kayaks. We moved them one by one so it took some time. Fortunately the surroundings were great, and we really had the feeling of being out in nature. The first day we made 6 kilometers and we were 100 meters above sealevel. Not bad, and from now on we would come across some small lakes which we could paddle across. The next day we had a thick fog, but that did not bother us. We paddled from one lake to another and in the evening we were close to the place where we had decided to follow a little creek back to the ocean. The third day we paddled and pulled our way

back to the sea. We felt safe. We were in sheltered from the strong northwest wind and Vidar said with a smile: "We fooled Cape Lyon". Of the tall, steep waves in Amundsen Gulf only the swells reached here into Darnley Bay.

It was only 60 kilometers to Paulatuk. Most of the shore was sheltered by lagoons and sandbanks. Two big rivers, Brock and Hornaday, floated out in two deltas of mud. We had some bad weather again so we tried to paddle into one of the deltas but we ran blind and had to use the compass to find the way to the ocean again. We lost a day, but that did not bother us very much. On September 15 we arrived Paulatuk.

We were met by two smiling Inuits who gave us food and offered us a room. (We had absolutely no food left when we arrived in Paulatuk).

We were now 3 weeks behind schedule and we were afraid the winter should arrive at any time. The next day I spoke with one of the Inuit people about what we should do. Was it possible to reach Tuktoyaktuk before freeze-up? He drew a route over land across Parry Peninsula. That would save us a week's paddling. On a lake along that route three Inuit families were hunting. He could arrange a lift there by boat and threewheeler. We were glad and on September 19 we left Paulatuk. Paulatuk was a really nice place, and I will always remember the nice people there.

In the evening we were met by the hunting Inuits. We camped with them for the night and when we left them the next morning they gave us caribou meat.

We headed for Foothill Creek and followed the river for three days before we were again in the ocean. I have never in my life seen so many ptarmigans as I saw along that river. There were hundreds of them - and many falcons hunting them.

Back in the ocean we paddled northwest alongside the famous Smoking Hills. When you are there you understand why they have that name. It is an impressive view. Volcano hills, with snow on the tops (the winter was coming), and sulphur smoke was something new for we Scandinavians.

Now the temperature fell. By night it was approximately 10 below, and by day around zero. A late and dark evening we arrived at the delta of Horton River. Many years ago the river broke through the Smoking Hills and met the ocean on the east side of the peninsula. We camped by the delta, but we did not find fresh water. Fortunately the river brought with it ice from further up so we melted that in stead. In Paulatuk we had bought candles, and now we had to use them every night. September 23 (equinox) had passed and rapidly the period of daylight became shorter. But it was nice to have dinner by candlelight.

We had heard that close to Horton River it should be an abandoned DEW line site and a rope-winch which we could maybe use to get the kayaks up 120 meters and paddle the Old Horton River out of the other side of the peninsula. But it did not happen like that. To cross by land we had to paddle back to the delta and up the river. We discussed what to do. Turn and cross by land or take the chance of good weather and stick to the sea. For the moment the weather looked good. Vidar voted for the first alternative. His experience with tall waves and strong wind did not tempt him very much to trust the weather. (This journey was his debut in kayak.) We decided on the safer way, even if it would cost us more time.

It was now late September and I started worrying as to whether we would make it to Tuktoyaktuk or not. Somewhere between us and civilization an inhabited DEW line site was located. Without that station I would not have started from Paulatuk.

We had a day of nice arctic fall when we returned to the Horton River delta and camped. While I rigged the stove and started cooking Vidar went out for water. That was how we had done it for the last months and now it had turned into a routine. By chance I looked out from the tent for Vidar, and I saw him - running. He was running towards the tent. On the other side of the creek a grizzly rushed around. For some reason the bear was frightened. I ran out of the tent with my shot gun loaded. But suddenly I heard a helicopter. The helicopter headed for the bear and scared it away. "I saw the black nose between his eyes", Vidar said. The helicopter landed and two Inuits came over to us. They were tagging grizzlies and had busted this particular bear without getting close enough to shoot with their drug bullets. We talked for a while and when they left we waved and said optimistically, "See you in Tuk". After dinner we fell asleep and did not see or dream of any bears. But there were grizzlies around. All together we saw four of them.

When we woke up next morning it was cold and our little creek was frozen. We dragged the kayaks on the ice and the ground, and two days later we reached a big lake. At the end of this lake a river was marked on the map. The plan was to follow that river and paddle with the currents out to the sea. We paddled closer to the place where the river should start, but we did not see any river. We could not even see a little creek. We did not like the situation, and when we reached the end of the lake the disaster was confirmed - there was no river there. The only thing which looked like water was a number of small ponds with ice on them. "That's it", I said. "We have to finish at the DEW line site on Nicholson Peninsula". Vidar still thought we had a chance to make it to Tuk(toyaktuk), but I did not agree. Four days later Vidar was convinced as well.

For three days we struggled. I was glad no one could see us. It must have been strange to see two men pulling a kayak on the ground in the middle of nowhere. However, the weather was very clear and the vegetation was in fall colours. We also saw a lot of caribou, ptarmigans, geese (on their way south), falcons, and some owls. The snowy owl is a fantastic bird - completely white and big as an eagle.

When we reached the sea we had a blizzard for a day, but we needed a rest so we were not sorry. We had food enough now when we had decided to stop at the radar site. If we were lucky we could reach there within three or four days.

On October 1 the winter hit us. It was 10 below and snow. I had a frostbite in my right thumb. We did not freeze at all apart from our hands. We had to paddle an hour before our hands were warmed up by the paddling. After noon it stopped snowing and it cleared up. It is incredible how much the weather influences your mood when you live outdoors.

On October 2 we had a feast. This was camp number 100. We had travelled 116 days, but some places we were stuck and other places we just relaxed, so we counted the number of camps. We had a heavy dinner and pudding. Out in the field pudding tastes just great. Later we talked for a long time of all the different camps we had made. Of course we could not remember them all, but we both agreed that one particular camp on Somerset Island had been the best. We were a bit sad that it would soon be over. After four months outdoors you get quite used to it, so it would be a change returning to "normal" life. Only very few times had we fought each other - and we had fulfilled fullfilled or goal; Kayaking through the Northwest Passage. We had not made it to Alaska as we had hoped to do, but there were reasons for that. First of all it was a strange year regarding iceconditions. All the ice from Cambridge Bay and west was gone. More ice would have stopped the waves and we could have paddled in more wind. The second reason was that Canadian Airlines sent our equipment all over Canada. Additionally they damaged one of the kayaks. Well, we fell asleep and next morning when we woke up we could see the lights from the DEW line site on the other side of Liverpool Bay. We packed the kayaks for the last time and in the sunrise we crossed the bay. The sun was low, and within a few weeks the winter would make the ground cold and white.

After three hours paddling we went ashore at Nicholson Peninsula. We walked towards the buildings, but before we reached them a car came towards us. It was the boss of the station, Frank. He was a bit surprised to meet people here and at this time a year. We explained the situation and that we wanted to return to civilization somehow and somewhere. His answer was short and clear: "No problem, just call a plane".

We lived at the radarsite for two days. Then a little Cessna 185 on floats picked us up, strapped the kayaks to the floats and flew us to Inuvik at Mackenzie. It was a strange feeling to see trees again. In Inuvik we stayed a day at Larry's (the R.C.M.P. in Paulatuk) house. He also bought the kayaks. From Inuvik we flew to Whitehorse and Anchorage. From Anchorage we took the direct SAS flight to Copenhagen across the North Pole. We had a fantastic view from the plane and I started thinking of my kayakexpedition to the North Pole which I had already started planning. Hence my notebook was filled with detailed notes on my experiences from the Northwest Passage.

John Andersen
Expeditionleader