



Sisterhood of Adventure

A Novice Kite Ski Crossing of Greenland from East to West

April 28 – May 8, 2019

Report submitted by Katie Crafts on Dec 29, 2019

Introduction

This report outlines a self-supported, two-woman novice kite expedition across Greenland. We are two polar-savvy women who set out to up-level our expedition skills, and experience kiting as a method of travel. Kiting added some challenges and some highlights to a fantastic learning opportunity. Greenland was a perfect location to experiment with kiting. This report shares with the reader details and insights about our first ever kite ski expedition; we hope it provides tips and insights for others contemplating doing the same.

Acknowledgements

We are beyond grateful for the support we received for this expedition. To friends, family, businesses and organizations who donated time, knowledge, and financial support to make our Greenland experience come to fruition, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all. Thank you for being the giants that allowed us to stand on your shoulders. We certainly could not have pulled this off without your generous support; we are immensely grateful.

Friends and family
Gino Watkins Memorial Fund
Natural Habitat Adventures
NOLS
Sirius Wilderness Medicine
Feathered Friends
Smartwool
Ozone Kites
Gruyere Cheese
Food for the Sole
Kate's Real Food
Backcountrygear
Patagonia Provisions
Backpacker's Pantry
Lindt Chocolates
Honey Stinger
Wild Friends Nut Butters
Picky Bars

The Route

We debated many ways to cross Greenland, and ultimately decided on a relatively short, relatively known route from East to West. As it was to be the most committed expedition either of us had done, we decided to go with a route that we had high confidence in our ability to manage.

Some logistics during the prep were challenging; we fortunately had support from friends and colleagues in Kulusuk and Tasiilaq from Katie's previous work experience in the region. These individuals were immensely helpful with some small but crucial details like what kind of fuel was available at the local store, and where we could ship our cheese.

We are glad we chose this route for our first crossing and first kite expedition.



Expedition Team

Celine and I met during a 30-day mountain instructor course in Alaska through NOLS in 2017. We enjoyed each others company and worked well together, and found that regardless of the day or situation, we could generally laugh our way through most anything. During that time, we realized we had a shared goal of crossing Greenland.

Celine has extensive outdoor experience, both trained and experiential, and was the obvious choice for trip leader on our crossing. She's also close friends with several individuals who have done this expedition before; their generous shared knowledge provided useful advice, and also confirmed our hope that we were ready and prepared for an expedition of this caliber.



Celine Jaccard, 27, Expedition Leader

Celine holds an Outdoor and Adventure Tourism bachelor's degree and a Remote Emergency Medical Technician certification. For the past 8 years she has specialized in outdoor education and remote settings emergency management. Her career path led her to the Canadian Arctic in 2013, where she now lives, works, and adventures. Among her long list of accomplishments is becoming the first woman and the first person to ever solo run through Baffin's Aksayuk pass in Fall 2019.



Katie Crafts, 35

My home base is in Oregon, where I come and go from my work as a guide and naturalist in the polar regions: Antarctica, East Greenland, Churchill, and Svalbard. When I'm not working in high latitudes, I've devoted the last 5 years of my offseason life to building a foundation for an expedition of this caliber. My offseason has been adequately filled with climbing the cascade volcanoes, spending more time alone on multi day trips in the backcountry, volunteering as a glacier cave porter for scientific expeditions, and more.

Detailed Expedition Notes

These notes are taken from our trip journal as documented each night during the expedition, with additional notes provided for the purpose of the thoroughness of this report.

Day 1 – April 28

Heli from Tasiilaq to N65 51'59.6" W 038 58'04.0"

Started moving at 11:45 am

Distance covered: 43.31 km over 7 hours, 45 minutes

Notes: Started with 6m kites, winds 20-25kph. Lost a solar panel, Katie's fingers continually seized up, a few kitemares as we got used to hauling heavy sleds. Overall, excellent first day, superb conditions, ending very hungry!



Tasiilaq, the east coast village where we waited 12 days for the weather to clear. We stayed at The Red House, and were immensely grateful for the tips and insights from the hostel owner, Robert Peroni, who himself has crossed Greenland some 13 times. His tips were relevant and helpful, and his knowledge of local weather systems significantly helped us with our decision of when to go or no go on low visibility weather days.

Day 2 – April 29

Wakeup: 5:30am. Breakfast and packing.

Started moving at 8:45am. Bad winds and poor visibility led to multiple kite changes and a slow start.

No progress until 11:45am.

Distance covered: 58.5 km over 5.5 hours

Total distance covered: 101km to date

Notes: Winds picked up, several scary moments including almost losing a 15m kite due to strong winds and a lot going on. Once the winds settled and we got into the swing of things, we cruised with the 6m from noon to 5:30pm. Cruising downwind! Happy with the distance but worked. Set up camp, done with dinner at 8:30pm.

Camp coordinates: N66 02'19.0" W 041 09'03.2"

Camp elevation: 1977m



Breakfast: 1000 calorie baggies of mixed cereals, dried fruits, nuts, and the occasional chocolate/peanut butter pieces for extra hard days!

Day 3 – April 30

Wakeup: 6am

Distance covered: 25km travelled over 1.5 hours

Total distance covered: 123km to date

Notes: Started moving at 9:30am under good tailwinds and great lighting until 11am. Then winds picked up far too strong for even our smallest kites. We pitched a tent hoping the winds would decrease, but they never did.

Camp coordinates: N66 11'19.8" W 041 37'28.1"

Camp elevation: 2117m

Day 4 – May 1

Wakeup: 5am

Started moving at 8:30am, struggled for some time with the kites, started actually kiting at 9am.

Distance covered: 107 km over 8 hours

Total distance covered: 230km to date. Total left to cover: 284km

Notes: Morning winds were low so we started with our large 15m kites. The large kites made for challenging travel straight downwind. Not ideal. Eventually the winds picked up and we were able to rig our 6m kites and travel straight downwind.

We ended up rocking 107km!! For the second half of the day we took breaks every hour or so to rest our knees. Stopped at 5pm, exhausted but very happy. Today we passed the Arctic circle. The lesson of the day was to not judge the end of the day by the start of the day.

Camp coordinates: N66 42'30.7" W 043 39'14.9"

Elevation: 2460m



Celine under the evening sun

Day 5 – May 2

Wakeup: 5am

Distance covered: 83km

Total distance covered: 313km

Notes: We pumped underpowered 6m kites downwind in the morning, then sped along with good tailwinds for the 6m in the afternoon. Hard packed bare sastrugi was very hard on the knees. 200 km to Kangerlussuaq!

Camp location: N66 57'08.9" W045 28'14.7"

Camp elevation: 2175

Day 6 – May 3

Wakeup: 5am. Too windy, stayed in bed until 7am.

Started kiting at 9:45am. Great winds, good kiting on the 6m straight downwind.

Distance covered: 100km

Total distance covered: 413km

Notes: Came across an NSF remote science camp that had snowmobiled in from Kangerlussuaq a day prior. The timing was impeccable – we had just run out of hot cocoa that morning! We stopped and enjoyed a long laugh with the researchers, who were very generous with their hot water and even refilled our cocoa supply. As we left the camp winds picked up, but we were feeling still motivated and didn't want to stop. We experimented with ways we could use the kites to go faster than just skiing, including each of us holding one side of the kite with the lines wrapped up. It was comedic, and we laughed a lot, but it really didn't work. 100km left to destination Point 660!

Camp coordinates: N67 04'14.5" W047 44'56.6"

Camp elevation: 1584m



The only picture of us kiting together, as we leave the research station with re-rations of cocoa! Pic: Sasha Liedman, NSF.

Day 7 – May 4

(Minimal journal notes this day. It was a hard day and we both were a bit frustrated in the evening).

Distance covered: 28km

Total distance covered: 441km

Notes: Strong winds started the day so we skied through the morning. Very slow going with nonstop gear problems from Katie's kingpin bindings. The carbon heel piece broke due to ice build-up, so switching from ski mode to walk mode required adjusting the dins. Additionally, her neoprene overboots impeded the tech toe connection, so the skis fell off several times due to lack of a good connection. Kited a bit in the afternoon – happy to make fast progress once again. Strong winds forecasted; anticipate staying in the same location tomorrow.

Camp coordinates: N67 07'12.9" W048 23'14.5"

Camp elevation: 1460m



Plastic expedition sleds, hand rigged with hand-sewn sled bags. Each sled system had 2 layers of sled in case one broke during the expedition. None did, but the hard ice was hard on them and we were glad for the redundancy. We each hauled two sleds side by side so that the sleds wouldn't flip over while traveling quickly; it was a good strategy and worked well. Also, the additional volume of hauling two sleds each was awfully helpful.

Day 8 – May 5**Distance:** 0km

Notes: Strong storm winds through most of the daytime, so we spent the day in the tent, mastering the art of napping and eating chocolate. Think we nailed it. Beautiful evening light made for an excellent backdrop for photos. The night prior we built a storm wall for the tent and situated the gear for storm conditions. Nothing was lost, a small hole was pierced in the tent from poorly placed ski boots. It was quickly repaired with a patch and created no further issues.

Day 9 – May 6

Camp coordinates: N67 10'36.8" W049 48'53.8"

Distance covered: 62.21km (some days those tenths of a kilometer merit noting!)

Total distance covered: 503km

Notes: Kited most of the day but skied the last 6km. It was a very challenging transition to skiing, as the terrain changed from ice sheet to outlet glacier and we realized how much surface meltwater there was. We kited through the initial transition, hoping to make slightly quicker travel than just on skis, but the glacier features ended up being far too challenging and unsafe for our novice kite skills so we transitioned to skis. The warm afternoon temperatures made the small slush ponds a constant challenge, and we ended the day tired and with wet boots.

Camp elevation: 754m



Katie hustling down a glacial ridge, each of us always trying to out-manoeuvre our heavy and unwieldy sleds.

Day 10 – May 7

(This is a belated entry written on the journey home; we were SO exhausted this day and just passed out in the evening.)

Wakeup: 1am (after 3 hours of sleep)

Distance covered: 7.69km

Total distance covered: 511km

Notes: We awoke early to try to maximize progress during the frozen “night,” before the surface turned slushy. The early start led to less slush than yesterday, but still very wet boots. It was slow travel

through challenging and seemingly endless glacier terrain. There were a few large crevasses and moulins that we gave a wide berth to. We each hauled our two sleds up and down and around glacial features, often letting them float over sizeable meltwater ponds as we walked around the side.

At one point we had challenging passage along a steep ridge, which required us to both clip into one sled at a time (one of us in the front and one in the back to keep the sled from sliding down) and walk each of the 4 sleds, one at a time, some 40m to more “flat” terrain.

The highlight of the day was during one of our scouting walks, which often Celine did alone as she has significantly more glacier travel experience. This one we did together, leaving our sleds at the bottom of the ridge and walking together to the top of the ridge to pick a route. When we hit the top of the ridge, we saw for the first time Point 660! This is the previously nebulous point we had plugged into our GPS 10 days prior and had constantly been working toward. It was a magical moment of rejoicing, with happy and exhausted tears and the biggest hug of the trip.

Set up camp around noon and napped then ate then fell asleep for the night by 7:30pm. Fell asleep anxious for what was yet to come.

Camp coordinates: N67 11'01.07" W049 59'32.3"

Camp elevation: 620m



Hauling a single sled along a steep ice ridge with both of us clipped into it to keep it from sliding. Hard team work!

Day 11 – May 8

Wakeup: 1am (not knowing yet that we would be up for over 24 hours!)

Notes: LONG DAY of pushing hard. Very challenging glacier travel as the ridges got steeper and it became impossible for us to haul both sleds at once. We had to haul one sled at a time, around .5km forward, then drop it, mark a waypoint, walk back to pick up our other sled, and bring it to our new starting point. 4.4km became more than 12. Celine crushed it on challenging route finding.

Finally arrived at Point 660! But to get off the ice we had to cross a glacial river, and then a moraine. We were so exhausted by the end of the day, but when we finally left the ice and set foot upon the tundra, we were still half a km down a steep grassy slope from the road for pickup. The hill was too steep for us

to even haul one sled each, so we both clipped into a single sled and walked arm in arm up the slope, dropped off a sled, then repeated for all 4 sleds.

None of it was impossible, but we were very tired in every way.

Yves (Celine's partner) had called for a taxi from town, but by magic there was a red pickup with pasta salad and a couple military members were there to drive us to Kangerlussuaq. On the road to town we saw 2 arctic hares and several reindeer.

So nice to shower and sleep in a dry bed ☺

Feeling tired and fulfilled, and proud of our efforts. EPIC! We sent it!

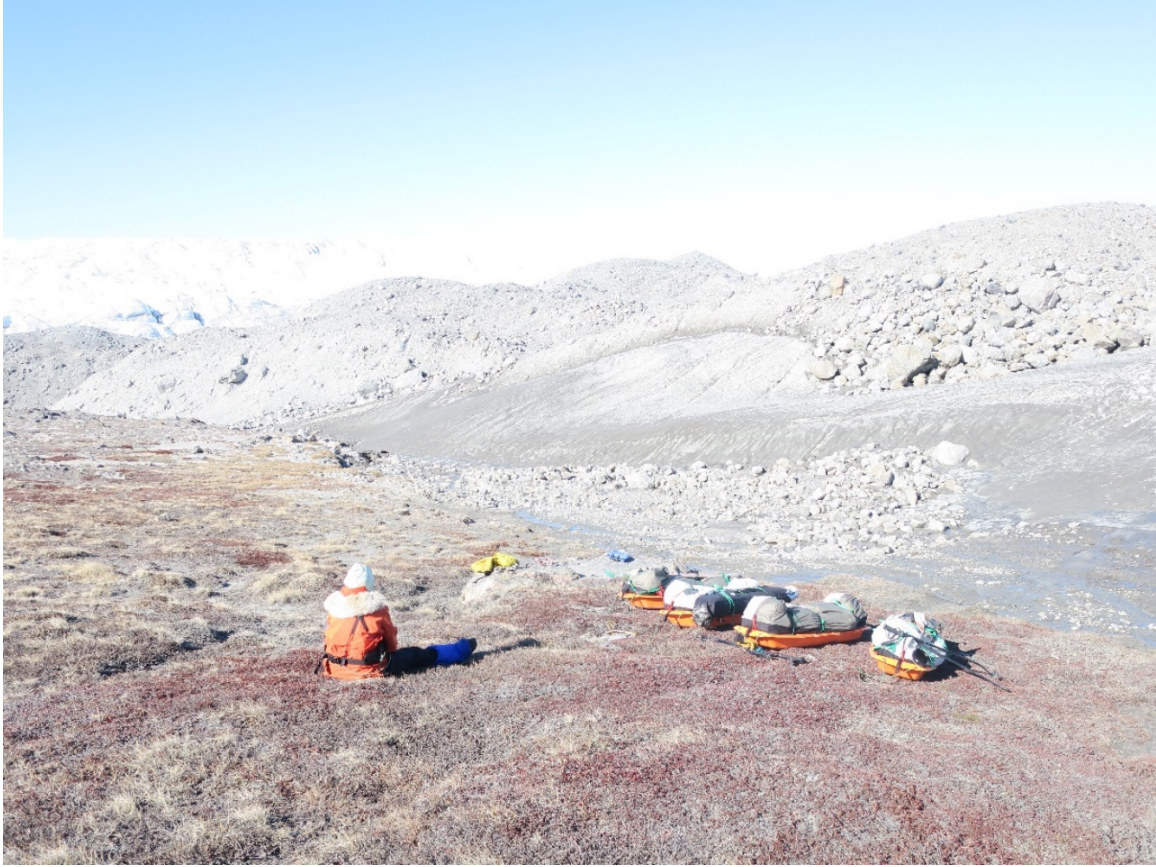
Distance covered: 4.4km

Total distance covered: 515km



Point 660 circled in red on the West coast of Greenland near Kangerlussuaq.

Photo by Sasha Liedman, NSF



Celine sitting on the tundra, exhausted from a long day but mentally prepping for the final task of hauling our sleds uphill to the road, arm in arm, two women per sled in our very exhausted states.

Conclusion

Kiting as a mode of travel is brilliant – we were able to cover over 100km on a few days with good conditions. Those were long days for us, but with additional training and experience we think the daily distance could be greatly increased.

Additionally, kiting is (usually) fun! Every single day, despite the many daily challenges, we had pure, big-grin fun.

Kiting also came with a wealth of challenges. Here are some that we encountered, and our suggestions for other first-time kite expeditions:

- For a majority of the trip we had the winds at our backs, so it was mostly a downwind crossing. Recreational kiting is generally done at about 90 degrees to the wind, so the experience of kite expeditioning merited a heightened need for a more robust kiting skillset than recreational kiting demands. We should have spent more time training to go in any direction relative to the wind (while also hauling heavy sleds).
- Constantly changing wind speeds made for constant gear struggles. Rigging the wrong size kite lost us no less than 30 minutes each time, despite the continued exertion of postholing to set up the lines. We used an anemometer to measure wind, though the varying surface conditions impacted what kind of kite was most appropriate for varying wind speeds. Ultimately we found that it was easiest and safest to have our smallest kites (6m) in the air, even if it meant constantly “pumping” them in figure-8s to keep them in the air with enough power to pull our sleds in lighter breezes. If we were to do it again, we’d bring an even smaller kite (3 or 4m) for the super windy days, which seemed like a missed opportunity. The anemometer was a very helpful piece of gear.

Ultimately, kiting is a fantastic method of polar travel and we were pleased with the opportunity to try it out. We also give high respects to other polar travellers who use kites, as we recognize that while it does facilitate the covering of ground quickly, it also creates other challenges that ski expeditions do not encounter.

In the end, we are both very grateful for this experience. Thank you for your support in allowing us to make it happen.