

## **Travelreport East Greenland 12-23 April 2023 A trip with successes**

If I have counted correctly, this is my 14th trip to Greenland.

Once I visited the west coast, all the other trips took me to the east coast, which is also where the Robin Hood project has taken its roots and where we were able to establish an overgrowing animal protection campaign.

I remember my first journeys well, my sleepless nights before, my stomach that contracted to the size of a nut at the start of the journey, fearing what would await me. The loneliness, the suffering of the dogs, the helplessness....

All that is in the past, because by now it is almost like coming home for me, I know a lot of people, I know where to get what, what to do.

Many things I have learned, such as patience, keeping calm, perseverance, all this helps me to go a step further every year and help the sled dogs.

Especially in Tasiilaq a lot has changed, emaciated dogs on completely entangled chains are a thing of the past. All dogs have water, many of our white dog houses provide shelter, again and again I see dogs being petted, puppies are protected in fencing, the dogs are well fed.

I am sometimes too modest and don't dare to say that in the end, a lot of these changes happened because of the tireless help of Robin Hood, but the local people assure me of this again and again and so I like to believe it.

However, every year I set myself more new tasks, meet new people and find new project partners. This year was no different, we concentrated on another water pipe, of course food is organized again and the freight costs are paid. More puppy enclosures are to be built and provided with roofs, because the ravens quite often catch the very young dogs.

Right at the beginning, when I spent one night in Kulusuk, in the small hotel where Jakob gave me a room for free (an advantage when you know each other) I met three women who are missionaries, all are nurses from Norway, one from Germany. They try to give the Inuit a sense of security, listen to them, offer refuge from difficult family circumstances.

In Kulusuk I would actually like to organize a meeting with the dog inspector if possible, but unfortunately, I did not succeed again, he is not in the village, I hope that I can soon obtain some improvements in this village as well. Nevertheless, I can visit some dogs that are doing well, which reassures me a bit.

The next day I fly by helicopter to Tasiilaq, where it continues a bit stressful. Fortunately, Sivert picks me up and brings me to my small room in Lars' guesthouse. I don't have much time, quickly change clothes, repack the backpack, then I run to the place where I have arranged to meet Max. He is a teacher in Tinit, for 30 years the Frenchman lives in the 60-soul village, he, who originally comes from Marseille. Together we go to his campsite at the frozen Arctic Ocean. He has spent the night on the ice with his 10 sled dogs, with which we drive 35 km to his home village.

This year summer comes early, the snow is soft and in many places it has already disappeared completely. Normally the snow should be good until the end of May, this year the conditions are already quite different.

Again and again the sled breaks in the water, but this is not dangerous, underneath is still quite thick ice, the dogs wade through and Max has to motivate them again and again to go on...they don't like the water so much, but they don't suffer from it and don't get sick...and quickly it goes on again over thick ice and snow.

The dogs are already waiting, happy that the journey starts, but it's really hard work, the dogs have to be harnessed and then put in front of the sled. That takes until all 10 dogs are where

they belong.

I have to stand at the back on the brake of the sled, so that they do not run off, until even the last one is harnessed. Finally off we go, over the ice. The dogs run fast like the wind, the sun shines and on the mountains the snow glitters. It's actually a dream come true and the dogs are really happy that they are allowed to run. But the snow situation changes constantly, it goes over rocks, stretches without snow... Again and again I have to get up and down from the sledge. Max constantly considers and monitors where we can drive. Uphill, of course, we have to get off the sled, that's perfectly clear, the dogs are not rushed and exploited.

Max is always quiet, even with the dogs and I admire his mental strength. For me, running behind is quite exhausting,

The snow is deep and soft, I'm dressed with way too many layers. Immediately I take off the warm sweater. The whole trip is beautiful despite adversities, but for us almost more exhausting than for the dogs. Max himself has to constantly get off the sled, up on the sled, he says under these conditions it is high performance sport. I am glad that I am relatively well trained, but I also notice how I jap uphill, simply also because it is much too warm for me with the clothes that I have put on not knowing exactly what to expect.

On the way we meet two other sleds and keeping the many dogs away from each other is not easy...we stop and Max chats with the locals whose dogs also look very good.

After a short gossip and a few sips of juice we continue our journey, it is 35 kilometers to Tiniteqilaq, which is already a few hours drive.

In the distance we see the village, approaching Max's house and the place where his dogs live. I may help to lead the dogs to their places, of course only with those who also accept me. Immediately I make friends with Chopin and Armstrong, Max is also a musician, hence these names :-)

Then the dogs are fed and a bitch, who had to stay at home because she is pregnant, is incredibly happy because we are all home again. At the following feeding she gets an extra portion of food for her babies in her belly.

Then we too go to the small but spacious house where Max cooks us pasta.

Max and I get along very well, we've known each other for two years and have a lot to talk about. I make myself comfortable in the small room under the roof, where I have stayed before.

Max and I talk long into the night over the next few days, about Greenland, the dogs, life...the next day his brother Michel comes for dinner and I amaze the two men with how good smoked tofu and vegan nougat chocolate tastes that I brought with me.

In the next few days I cook for Max vegan, fried potatoes with vegetables that I find in the small supermarket in the freezer... Fresh vegetables are few and far between. There are only potatoes, onions and garlic, nothing else. Only when the sea is ice-free, the supply ship can come again. Then there are also more fresh fruit and vegetables. Life in this small village with about 60 inhabitants is very different from what we are used to. There are no cars here, no asphalted roads, only one store, nothing else.

Max is a teacher here and he also plays the organ in "church" on Sunday, which is actually a converted classroom. Few people come to the mass, I also participate, it is of course held in Greenlandic and there is also singing and Max plays the organ.

During the days here I roam around the village, visit the dogs, which actually all look good. An old man who still has dogs is supported by Robin Hood with dog food, he is so grateful that he can still keep his dogs because we help him.

On my way through the village, while I am sitting together with some sled dogs on a rock, he comes with a small sled, accompanied by some puppies.

I greet him and he greets me, then he chooses one of the dogs, harnesses it in front of his little sled and trudges out onto the ice with it.

A very sentimental sight, the great sled dog handler of old now walks with only one dog, the dog

trots along beside him...both getting smaller and smaller, disappearing into the white horizon. I still stay with the dogs, thoughtful... A little outside the village I find another pack of dogs, a bitch has puppies peeking cutely out of a doghouse. The bitch is quite friendly, I pet her head and talk to her, with shining eyes she looks at me.

I remember how it was before, how desperate I was because the dogs were without food, without water, the chains entangled. Much has changed, the chains are unfortunately still there and I can not conjure them away, they are law and I am very happy that we have already been able to achieve so much.

On the way home I go through the garbage dump, where I find a nice book, which turns out to be a cookbook in Greenlandic and Danish, and a tin can with a bear on it - I can't resist, I have to take both with me, although I have no idea how to fit them in my small backpack. I proudly show Max my "booty" and he dryly replies that he threw it away. We both laugh tears, because just these things have come back to him :-)

At Max's there is no water pipe, no normal toilet as we know it, there is almost no such thing in any house. The contents of the toilet are collected every few days, water is fetched from a public water point in a canister. Showers and washing clothes in the house do not exist... I have to get used to that. Once I gathered snow, melted it and washed my hair with it...a different life.

The days fly by and soon it's time to say goodbye, the dogs have grown close to my heart, the bitch is heavily pregnant and I have shoveled her doghouse free, also freed it from the ice inside so that she has it warm and dry with her puppies.

On the day of departure I walk through the village once again, say goodbye to the dogs, my heart becomes heavy...my life consists of constant goodbyes....

The red helicopter from Air Greenland announces itself noisily from afar and lands precisely on the tiny landing pad. Luggage is loaded, new goods for the small store are unloaded, then the few passengers are allowed to board, the pilot puts on his radio headphones, we also put on ear protectors, because the noise of the helicopter is considerable. Quickly it takes off and Tiniteqilaaq disappears...I still see the individual dog groups and choke on my farewell tears.

Back in Tasiilaq, where it is almost summer, because there is hardly any snow here... I must confess, my first stop after arriving in the guest house lead me straight to the shower...

Then I quickly went shopping and set all the appointments for the remaining one and a half days left. I have to coordinate everything here that is important for the project in the future.

My travels are anything but vacations, no matter where I am, always under pressure. I have to make sure I can meet all the people who are important here, also still visit the dogs at the big dog park, take many photos and videos, because it is necessary to document everything, determine what can still be improved...Photos for the calendar I must not forget of course and anyone who has ever dealt with animal photography knows how hard it is to get a good photo...for the calendar I need 13 including one for the cover!

I have a meeting with the association Igdloo, more precisely with Hans, which turns out to be very interesting and important, because we now want to build additional enclosures for the puppies. The problem is that the puppies, when they run free, are sometimes killed by other dogs. For that reason some dog owners have already built temporary enclosures. In addition also the ravens go after the puppies, for this reason we also have to protect them from above with a grid.

We are planning presentations in the clubhouse and I tell him about the idea I had with Max to create another school brochure for older children. After all, our booklet for the younger students is already in use at schools all over East Greenland. This little booklet, in which the characters are depicted as a comic teaches children the proper way to handle sled dogs.

I also had a very nice meeting with Hanne from the Siu Tsiu project, which means future. She works with the young Inuit greenhouses, they had so much yield last year that they could already sell the vegetables in the stores. Potatoes, cabbage, radishes and herbs are already growing in East Greenland!

Hanne wants to continue building the hut with her "protégés", which I am very happy about. We also want to try to reach the media, so that finally the medical care of the dogs can be tackled.

Hanne was working as a journalist and will be happy to help me with this, which makes me more hopeful for the future.

I hear again and again, climate change is not an issue, it has always been so...maybe, but I do think that we humans are significantly involved in the change, since the industrial revolution we have unfortunately done nothing good to this planet.

One can notice the changes in Greenland as well, it rains very heavily and early. April should still be deepest winter actually, but it rained so much that the small airport Kulusuk stood nearly 50 cm under water and 14 sled dogs drowned, because the water came so fast.

Time flies, I meet another dear acquaintance, Hjordis, who lost her husband only in January...Egon, whom I have known for a long time and who keeps asking me to try that the dogs can finally be medically cared for - he has dogs himself that he treats very well.

The day of farewell comes too fast, again to the heliport, by helicopter to Kulusuk, from there with Air Iceland to Iceland, where I wait 7 hours in the night at the airport until my flight to Austria starts.

Then by train to Loosdorf, to drive home by car. Travel time 1.5 days - Greenland is always a challenge.

But we are on a good way, food is ordered again, this time also 5 pallets for "us", that means for Max in Tiniteqilaaq, also for the old man there and the dogs from the association Igdlou plus more than 20 pallets, for which Robin Hood takes over the freight costs.

The dog enclosures for the puppies are not cheap either, but we will try to finance this project. All in all, despite adversity a successful trip!

However, all this can only be made possible with the help of our loyal supporters!

At this point my heartfelt THANK YOU on behalf of the sled dogs for this!

I promise to continue to do everything in my power to continue to make possible and improve the lives of these wonderful animals. These dogs are very special, especially strong, persistent, frugal and yet so lovable, loyal and affectionate.

Max told me a very special story that I don't want to deprive my readers of.

One night he went from Tasiilaq to Tiniteqilaaq by dog sled, the route is not without danger, but Max is very experienced. Suddenly he could not handle the dogs anymore - no calling, no attempt to stop them helped.

Max knew on the side of the way there is a deep abyss and if they would fall down there, there would be no survival for man or animal. He thought the dogs smelled a polar bear and he braced himself for the worst. The ride continued at a hell of a pace, Max was powerless. Then the dogs ran into a giant arc, only to stop all of a sudden. What was going on? Max saw a man lying motionless in the snow, quickly he lifted him onto the sled, wrapped him up warmly and immediately took him to the next house that was on his way.

As unbelievable as it sounds, the dogs noticed from the great distance that a man was in distress. This story moves me to tears...what wonderful animals these are and they deserve our help, love and attention.

Let's give them all this together!

Yours,  
Marion Löcker