



2018

**The Peaks of Greenland:
Mt. Gunnbjörn, Dome and Cone
(IMG66)**

Ski ascent of the highest peaks in the Greenland Arctic

- Expedition manual -



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Expedition overview

On this 11 day expedition the goal is to climb and ski the three highest peaks in Greenland. Our destination is the pristine area in the center of the Watkins mountains that arise from the ice covered interior of Greenland. To get into this wilderness on the east coast of Greenland, we fly in on a privately chartered ski plane and then establish a comfortable base camp under the slopes of Mt. Gunnbjörn. After climbing Greenland's highest summit, Mt. Gunnbjörn, we will move our base camp for our climb of Cone and Dome, Greenland's 2nd and 3rd highest mountains. From the third location of our base camp we will then have access to both great mountaineering and skiing.

This is a 11 day alpine ski expedition. We also offer [5 day expedition](#) usually run on snow shoes rather than skis – and only with the mission of climbing Mt. Gunnbjörn.

Note that there is a risk of delay of the flight from Greenland cause of weather. This must be considered when participants plan their flight out of Iceland. Book an open ticket!

Start of journey: Reykjavík

End of journey: Reykjavík

Elevation: 600-1500m per day

Alpine ski touring and mountaineering: 10 days

Max. ascent: 1700m (5600')

Accommodation: Tent

Group size: 2-12 participants

Further information and booking

Please contact us via expeditions@mountainguides.is for further information and bookings.

History of Mt. Gunnbjörn

Exploration and first climbs

The British Arctic Air Route Expedition was the first one to explore the area in 1930-1931 and the mountain range is named after their expedition leader, Henry Watkins.

In the summer of 1935 Augustine Courtauld and Lawrence R. Wager joined forces in the "Anglo-Danish expedition to East Greenland" (often referred to as The Courtauld expedition) with the primary aim of ascending the highest peak of the Watkins Mountains. Augustine Courtauld, Jack Longland, Ebbe Munck, Harold G. Wager and Lawrence Wager stood on the summit on the 16th of August 1935 after man hauling sledge 190 km from the coast. In the continuation L.R. Wager led the "1935-1936 British East Greenland Expedition" that is often wrongly claimed as being the first ascent of Mt. Gunnbjörn.

Mt. Gunnbjörn was not climbed again until 1971 by an Anglo Danish party. When Icelandic Mountain Guides made their first commercial expedition in the area in 1999, it was probably only the 12th ascent of the mountain.

This highest peak of the Watkins mountains was named "Gunnbjörn", after the first European to sight Greenland. Early in the 10th century, "Gunnbjörn" the son of Úlfur Kráka, was blown off course while sailing from Norway to Iceland. He and his crew sighted land he then named after himself, Gunnbjarnarsker (Gunnbjörn's skerries). As known, Eric the Red later changed the name to Greenland to make it more appealing to other Norsemen to follow him from Iceland and settle there.

The name of the mountain

Originally the mountain was named "Gunnbjörn" but later got the ending "fjeld" in Danish, "fjell" in Norwegian and "fjall" in Icelandic, meaning "mountain". The Icelandic letter "ö" is written "ø" in Danish and Norwegian and as "o" in English. In English, Mt. Gunnbjorn is commonly used.

Another name, Hvitserk, has recently been used for the mountain. That name is taken from "Grænlendingaþáttur", a part of the Icelandic Sagas that tells the story of Nordic settlers in Greenland. There, Hvitserk is mentioned as a name of a glacier visited on a late summer hunting trip. Even though it's unlikely that Hvitserk in this case refers to the Watkins Mountains, the name Hvitserk is now commonly seen and used.

The highest mountains in Greenland

Before the late discovery of the Watkins mountains, Mt. Forel (3.391m) was thought to be Greenland's highest peak. In 1997, detailed GPS measurements were done on several of the highest mountains showing that the Watkins mountains indeed contain Greenland's highest summits.

Gunnbjörn's height was measured as 3.694m, Dome (Qaqqaq Kershaw) as 3.683m and Cone (Qaqqaq Johnson) as 3.669m. The fourth highest mountain was given the name Qaqqaq Paul-Emile Victor (3.606m) but the fifth still only named after it's height, Peak 3.549

About the expedition

Expedition members need to be in Reykjavík, Iceland, no later than two days before departure since there is a preparation meeting in the morning before departure and to avoid any issues with lost or missing baggage. NOTE: This meeting is obligatory and our last chance to make adjustments to equipment etc.



Luggage allowance for the flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri is 20kg (plus 6kg of hand luggage of limited volume). All of the communal equipment will already have been sent to Akureyri. From Akureyri we take a private chartered ski-plane to the Watkins Mountains area. Due to the risk of delay for the outbound flight we advise our guests to pack fresh clothes and shoes. Bathing-gear also comes in handy, especially if we have a few hours to clean up on the way back. Swimming pools in Iceland are phenomenal!

On arrival in Akureyri the ski-plane will be loaded. In most cases the flight goes through the fishing village of Isafjörður to refuel before flying into the Watkins mountains. The total flight time is about 3 hours.

On arrival we will establish a comfortable base camp close to the landing site, right in the middle of the Watkins mountains. Our main objective will be to climb Mt. Gunnbjörn, Greenland's highest peak. As the peak is located high in the arctic, the air is thinner than on similar altitude summits elsewhere. We might decide to do one acclimatization journey with some nice skiing before we attack the summit.

Depending on the group, conditions and weather Mt. Gunnbjörn can either be climbed in a single push from BC or by establishing an Advance Camp.

For Mt. Cone and Dome an Advanced camp will need to be established.

From this second location, both summits can be climbed. If there is still time left the expedition is free to select other skiing and climbing objectives in the area. Plenty of summits can be reached in a long day from BC.

We are less likely to have delays on the departure as the expedition is able to give reliable information on the weather in the area. With lighter loads the pilots usually forgo landing at Ísafjörður on the way back and fly straight into Akureyri.

The regular schedule is to fly to Reykjavik that evening – possibly with a stop at the swimming pool in Akureyri and at one of the local restaurants.

Itinerary overview

Day -1: Mandatory arrival in Iceland.

Day 0: Preparation meeting in the morning with the expedition leader. Briefing and gear inspection. Afternoon free to sort out possible problems with baggage / gear.

Day 1: Flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri in the morning and from Akureyri to Greenland around noon. Building of Base Camp / stashing equipment and food. Possibly moving to an Advance Camp.

Day 2 and 3 : Summit attempt on Mt. Gunnbjörn. The climb to the summit takes between 7-8 hours or approximately 10 to 12 hours round trip. The summit is 3.693m (12.115') but because of the northerly location the oxygen level is more similar to 4000m (13.125') peaks in the Alps and we seriously feel the altitude on the last section of the climb to the summit. It's possible to move the camp closer to the mountain to make the ascent shorter. As well it is likely that the guide chooses to do a short acclimatization climb with some good skiing on the first day of the expedition.

Day 4 (June 8th): Camp moved closer to Dome and Cone, the second and third highest peaks in Greenland.

Day 5 (June 9th): Ascent of Dome, 3.682 m (12.080').

Day 6 (June 10th): Resting day

Day 7 (June 11th): Ascent of Cone, 3.669 m (12.037').

Day 8, 9 and 10 (June 12th to June 14th): Ski touring in the Watkins mountains.

Day 11 (June 15th): Flight back to Iceland. Flight from Akureyri to Reykjavík where the expedition ends at the domestic airport.

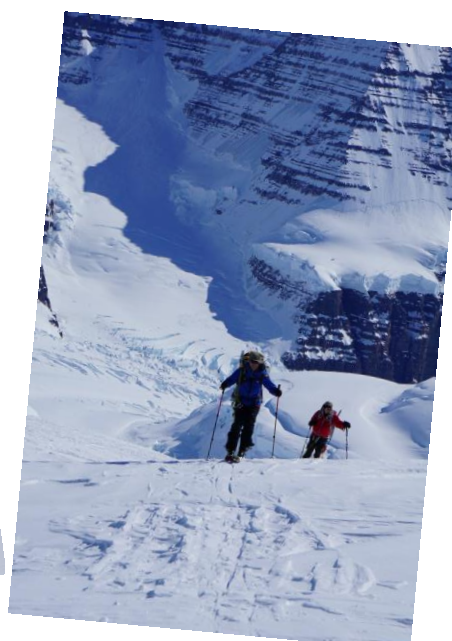


Expedition life

IMG puts great effort into making this expedition as comfortable as possible for all members. We will use a combination of tried and tested expedition tents such as the TNF Dome 5, VE-25 and Bastion.

The strength of the sun during the day makes tent life very comfortable, but as night falls temps will also drop significantly. Depending on weather we will either cook inside the tent or build a camp kitchen outside.

At least on two occasions, when establishing the advanced camps, we will need to haul sleds. We use the standard Paris Expedition pulka/sled for this.



Equipment list

A detailed equipment list will be sent to all participants upon confirmation.

The expedition timeframe

When choosing the appropriate time for this expedition there are always few things to consider. IMG has decided that early June is in fact the most opportune. Then the weather is stable, the days are long, the temperature reasonable and avalanche danger is minimal. It's common to find fresh powder snow on the slopes while the 24 hours daylight makes the snow in the bottom of the valleys more settled.



Baggage transport

Passengers are asked to follow the equipment list precisely, take only what is needed. The ski-plane has a limited capacity and the whole base camp will be relocated a couple of times.

Our first camp could be almost where we step out of the ski-plane. Twice we move the base camp and then all baggage is transported in sleds, each member hauls his own gear and a fair share of communal gear.

Weather

Most of the time, the weather conditions in the Watkins Mountains area are stable, but some variations have to be expected and taken into account. The temperature varies from +5°C in the sun on warm days where we have our base camp but goes down to -25°C on the mountain tops on cold days. On summit and ridges the wind often picks up – making it very cold, even if the temperature on the sheltered lower slopes is quite agreeable.

A good sleeping bag is essential. The radiation of the sun during the evening makes the tents reasonably warm and it is not uncommon to see -10 to -15°C on the outside thermometer and between +10 to +20°C inside the tents until shadow falls on them. Then the temperature goes close to or below zero.

Snow conditions

The Watkins mountains are close to the coast so it's a high precipitation area. The cold

climate keeps the snow fresh. On ridges and mountain tops it is likely that the wind leaves only hard packed snow but lower on the slopes the ski conditions are usually good, especially on the North facing slopes protected from the strongest sun.

Daylight hours

The day is already so long that little consideration needs to be given to early wakeups. As the sun falls below the mountains the temperatures will drop significantly compared to a sunny day. But it will still be bright enough to travel with ease. Make sure to see at least one sunset during your stay in the Watkins mountains.



Level of experience of expedition members

Participants in *The Peaks of Greenland: Mt. Gunnbjörn, Dome and Cone* expedition should be prepared for a fairly strenuous expedition. The expedition is for strong skiers, those who are physically and mentally prepared for some days out in a remote area.

Elevation gain in a day will be up to 1.700m (5.600'). Even though most slopes will have perfect skiing angle and good snow conditions, participants have to be able to ski in all snow conditions. There might be short sections of steep skiing – and steep skiing is easy to find for those wanting. As the skiing is on glaciated and crevassed terrain we expect participants to be able to skiing in control always.

Prior experience in ski touring and winter travel is mandatory.

One of the keys to a successful expedition is good teamwork and everyone helping out when needed.

General preparation

The best preparation for an expedition like this is to engage in long days of ski touring and hiking in the mountains combined with running or other aerobic exercise and needed.

It is important that participants are familiar with all their personal gear and equipment such as skis, boots, and clothes from the bottom up. The more comfortable you are with your gear, the easier everything becomes when adjusting to the communal gear and the expedition as a whole.



Booking and payment

Expedition members will have to confirm their participation by paying a confirmation fee of 300.000 ISK. This fee is not refundable unless Icelandic Mountain Guides need to abort the expedition. Expedition members are required to send in a résumé of their mountaineering experience for prior assessment by the expedition leader. **Full payment needs to be paid by February 10th, 2018, the deadline for signing up for the 2018 expedition.**

Included in the expedition price

- Privately chartered ski-plane from Akureyri to the Watkins mountains and back.
- Icelandic expert guide.
- Flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri and back with 20 kg of personal luggage (and 6 kg of hand luggage of limited volume).
- Expedition permits and all other permits needed for the expedition.
- Evacuation insurance for all expedition members.

- All common gear and equipment such as glacier travel gear, pulkas/sleds to transport bags, satellite phone for security, solar panel with 12V charger to charge the satellite phone (priority) and other gadgets, tents, stoves and all food in Greenland with one week emergency supplies.

Not included in the expedition price

- Excess weight of personal luggage on the flights between Reykjavík and Akureyri.
- Cost due to delay of flights.
- Hotel in Iceland before departure to Greenland and after the return from Greenland.
- Personal travel insurance.
- Personal mountaineering equipment and skis.
- Personal use of satellite phone (approx. 5\$/min).
- Everything else not mentioned in the “Included in the price” section.

Permits and insurances

There are quite a few permits needed for this expedition. All necessary permits as well as a Search and Rescue (SAR) and Evacuation insurance is included in the expedition price, however we recommend that all participants also have their own travel insurance. The included insurances cover evacuation costs from the area to the nearest town or hospital in case of emergency. Personal travel insurance should cover the loss of equipment due to evacuation and any medical costs in hospitals and towns. Most regular travel insurances should be sufficient.



All expedition photos by Einar Torfi Finnsson