



**2015**

**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 10 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](#) in this area if you are more interested in snow-shoeing.

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, June 5<sup>th</sup> (On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June there is a meeting with the expedition leader)

**End of journey:** Reykjavík, June 15<sup>th</sup>

**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](mailto: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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> ascent of the mountain.

This highest peak of the Watkins mountains was named "Gunnbjörn", after the first European to sight Greenland. Early in the 10<sup>th</sup> 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 him self, 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 early Tuesday, June 4<sup>th</sup> for a preparation meeting in the morning. NOTE: This meeting is obligatory so that the gear each member has brought can be assessed and advises given if there is a need to replace something. That can then be done in the afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup>.



Luggage allowance for the flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri is 20kg (plus 6kg of hand luggage of limited volume). From Akureyri we take a private chartered ski-plane to the Watkins Mountains area. It is possible to leave something in Akureyri (e.g. fresh clothes, computers or other gadgets) to be retrieved right away after coming back from Greenland.

20kg of luggage (plus the 6kg of hand luggage) for each participant should be enough in this case. It's possible to take more weight from Reykjavík to Akureyri if that extra weight is to be left waiting in Akureyri until the group is back to there from Greenland. The airliner charges for weight exceeding 20kg.

In the morning of June 5<sup>th</sup> there is a flight to Akureyri. There the privately chartered ski-plane will be loaded for Greenland. After taking off from Akureyri a brief stop will be made in Ísafjörður, a small fishing village in the Westfjords of Iceland, in order to fuel up to have a completely full tank and the shortest direct distance to destination. Because of limited capacity of the ski-plane, more than one flight might be needed to get the group to Greenland.

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.

Mt. Gunnbjörn will be climbed in one long day from base camp. Gentle slopes lead to the summit ridge where skis will be left behind and the rest climbed using crampons. After climbing Mt. Gunnbjörn, the base camp will be moved closer to Mt. Cone and Dome. From this second location both of the summits can be climbed. From the third base camp location we have plenty of possibilities of skiing and mountaineering. The expedition leader will choose suitable subjects according to snow conditions and interest of the group.

From the Watkins Mountains we fly back to Akureyri and from there to Reykjavík where the expedition officially ends.

## **Itinerary overview**

**Day 0 (June 4<sup>th</sup>):** Preparation meeting in the morning with the expedition leader. Briefing and gear inspection.

**Day 1 (June 5<sup>th</sup>):** Flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri in the morning and from Akureyri to Greenland around noon. We put up our base camp at the landing site or head higher up before setting it up, depending on conditions.

**Day 2 and 3 (June 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup>):** 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 8<sup>th</sup>):** Camp moved closer to Dome and Cone, the second and third highest peaks in Greenland.

**Day 5 (June 9<sup>th</sup>):** Ascent of Dome, 3.682 m (12.080').

**Day 6 (June 10<sup>th</sup>):** Resting day

**Day 7 (June 11<sup>th</sup>):** Ascent of Cone, 3.669 m (12.037').

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

**Day 11 (June 15<sup>th</sup>):** 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. In base camp we will use strong North Face VE-25 for sleeping and have a larger tent for the whole group to gather in for evening meals and breakfast.

The 24 hours daylight makes the temperature inside the tents comfortable, especially if the sun is shining on it. It's different how high the sun is and that affects the temperature. If shadow falls on the tent the temperature gets a lot lower. So the temperature can vary quite a bit.

We will be doing day tours from the base camp, we climb different summits and ski back to the camp in the evenings for warm drinks and good food.

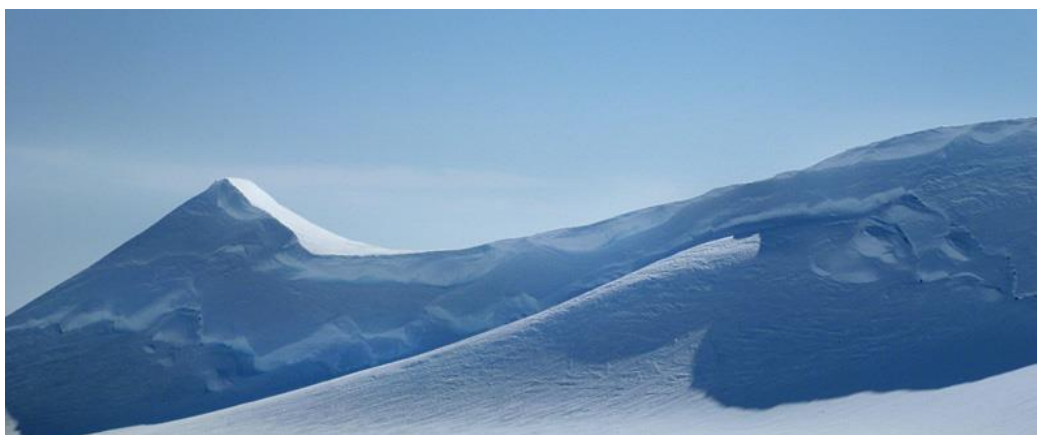
Twice we will pack the tents and transport all our gear on pulkas (sleds) to a new location where different peaks and fresh snow is waiting for us.

## **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 pulkas made of plastic where each member hauls his own 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.

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.



## Daylight hours

In June, continuous daylight is something to look forward to, especially for those who come from regions where there is little or no fluctuation in the daylight hours.



## 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 experience. 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. They have to be able to ski down short sections of steep 40° slopes. The skiing is done on glaciers and that requires participants to have good control over the skiing and being able to follow the route selected by the guide.

Prior experience in ski touring and winter travel is important.

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 intensive alpine skiing.

The better we prepare ourselves, the better the outcome will be. The value of all general exercise in preparation for an expedition of this kind should not be underestimated.

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 250.000 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 Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 the deadline for signing up for the 2015 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