

Royal Holloway College
Meteorological Expedition
Svalbard, 1978

Graham Bunn FRGS FRAS

Why ?

In 1957 an accident in one of the reactor chambers at the Windscale Nuclear Plant in The UK caused a small cloud of nuclear material to be released into the atmosphere.

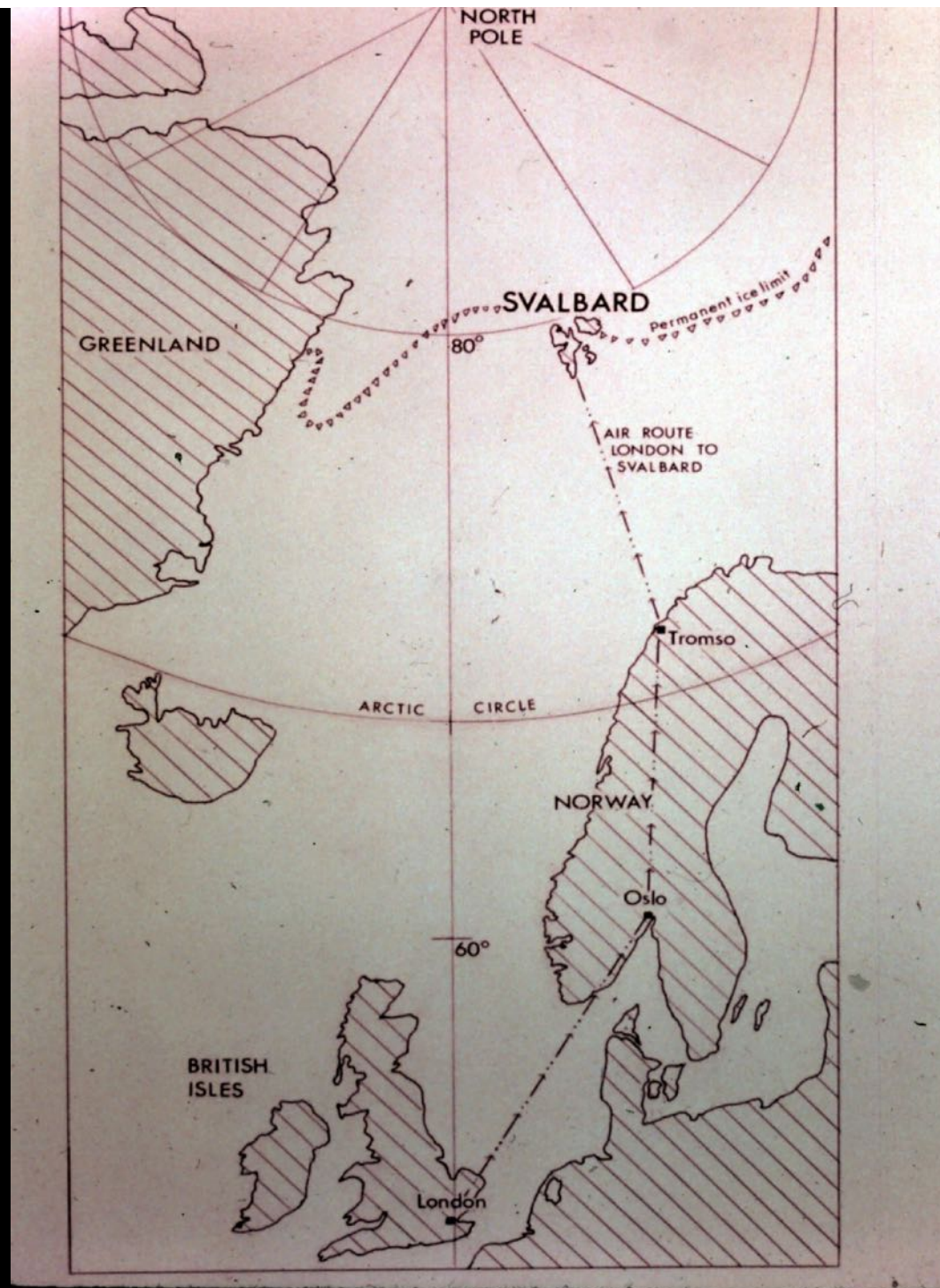
The UK Meteorological Office studied the atmospheric conditions and predicted that the cloud would drift east across the country, over the North Sea and approach Norway.

Unfortunately the lower level winds around the Cumbrian mountains hadn't been taken into consideration; the cloud was diverted south and dispersed over Liverpool....



Bruce Herrod, Graham Bunn, Andrew Wilson, Paul Strickland, Rod Clarke, Rob Heaton
Oxford Imperial C. RHC Bristol Oxford RHC

The plan



The 1:500,000 chart of Central Vestspitsbergen used on the expedition, with routes marked after the event.

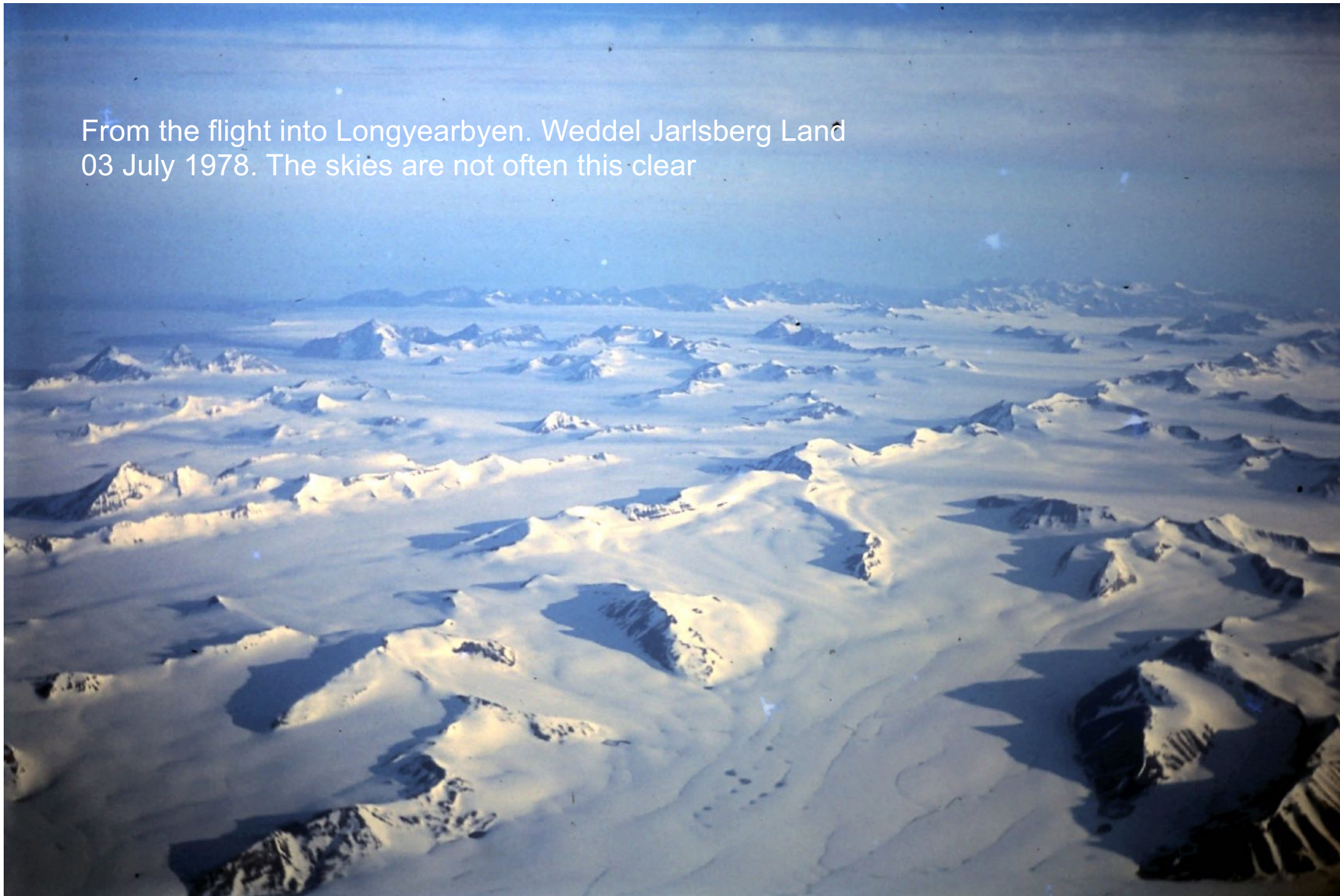


18 months of planning, organising & training:

Food, equipment, firearm permits & training,
Sysseman permissions, flights, marine transport,
insurance.. and fund raising



From the flight into Longyearbyen. Weddel Jarlsberg Land
03 July 1978. The skies are not often this clear





Closer to Longyearbyen

24 hours after arrival. Getting our bearings in Longyearbyen



PS

AW

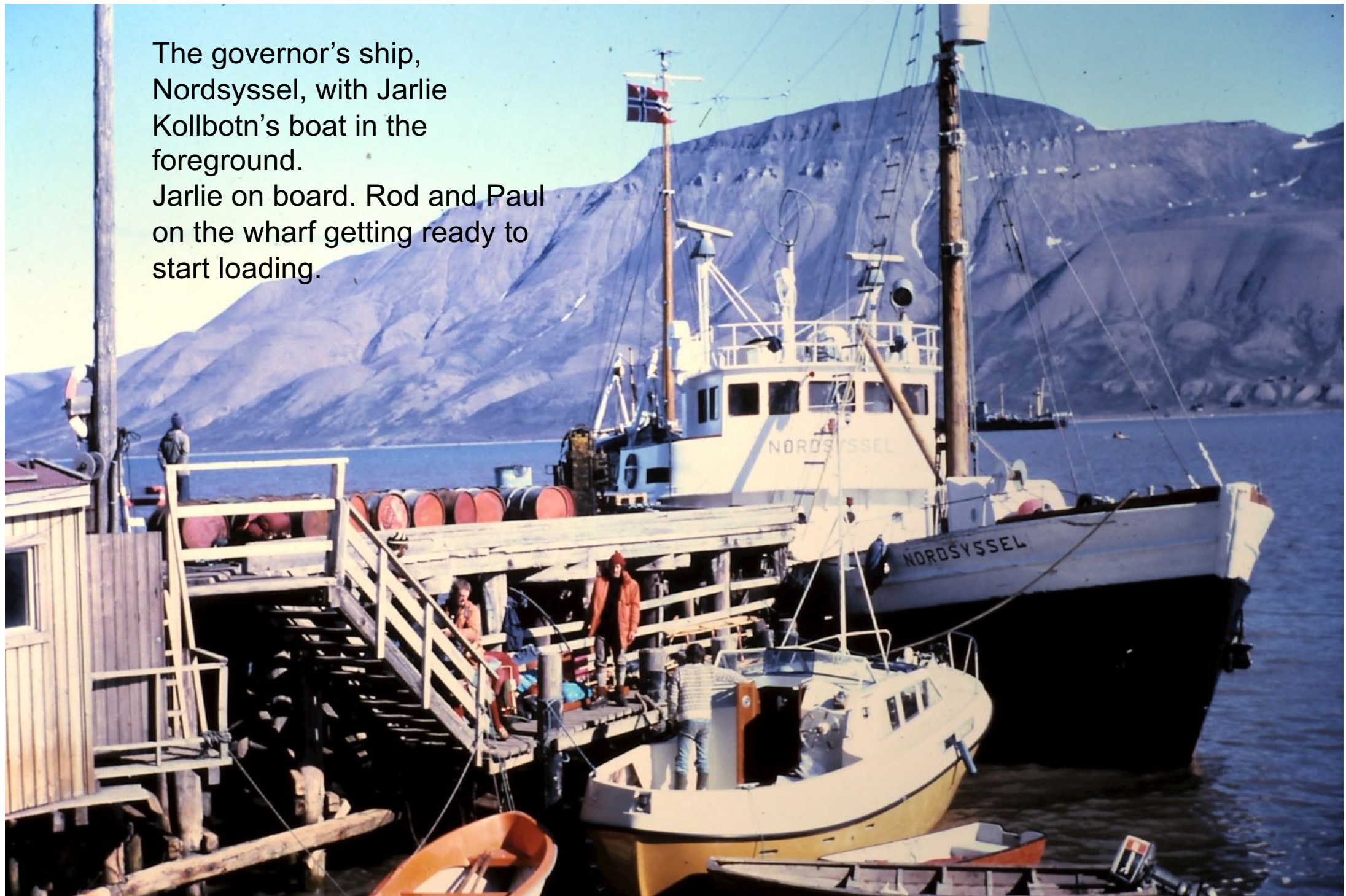
GB

RC

RH

The governor's ship,
Nordsyssel, with Jarlie
Kollbotn's boat in the
foreground.

Jarlie on board. Rod and Paul
on the wharf getting ready to
start loading.



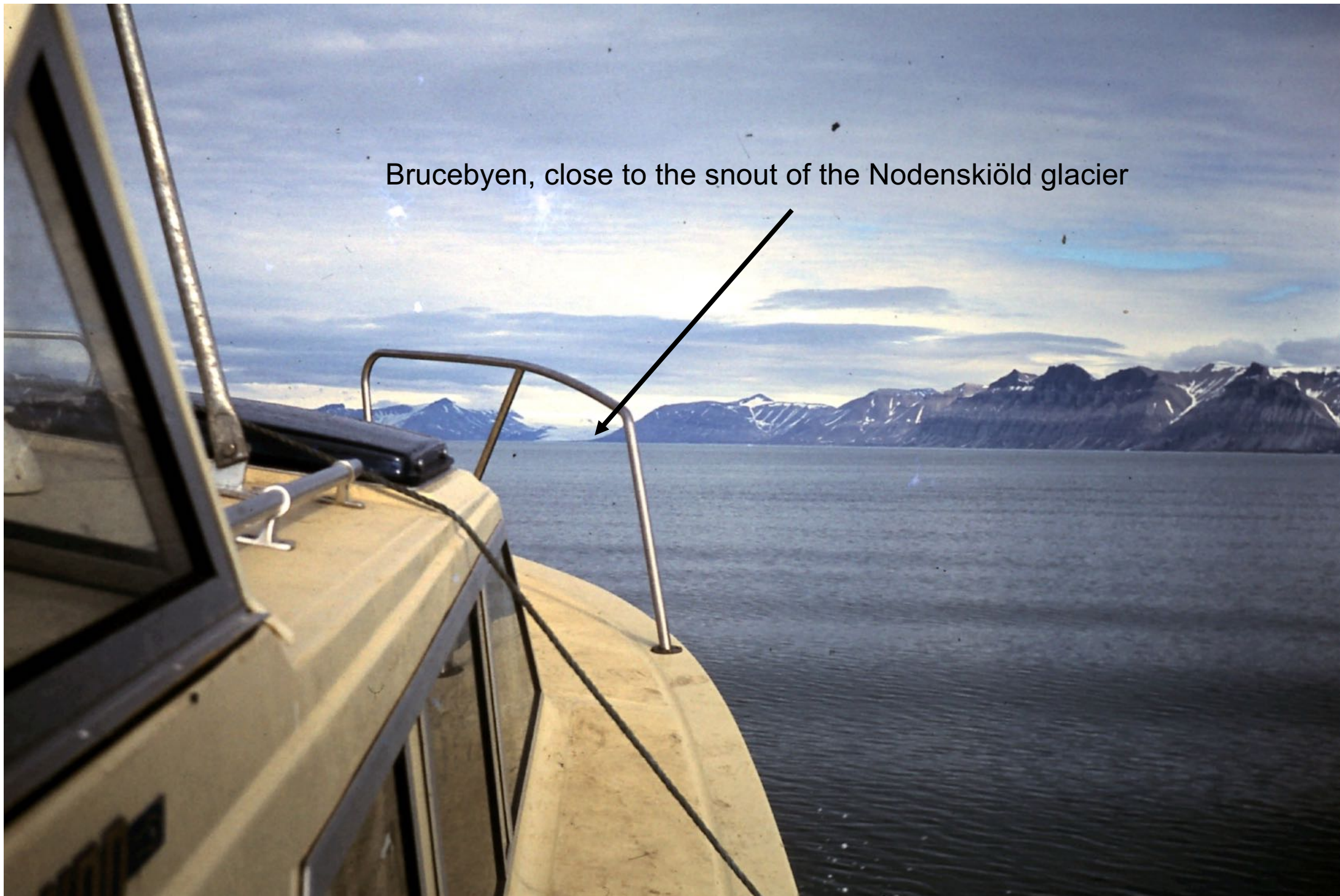
Jarlie Kollbotn. Our gear was mostly in the hold and in the cabin, but some remained on deck.



Looking back toward Longyearbyen
(This view remained easily recognisable in 2016)



Brucebyen, close to the snout of the Nodenskiöld glacier



Bringing supplies
and equipment
ashore at
Brucebyen



AW

RH

PS



We occupied two of the three huts at Brucebyen. The one at the back was for stores. The one at the front left, almost out of shot, was used by an expedition from Cambridge U.






Looking south. Note the abundance of drifted (sawn) logs. We were told that these were from labour camps in the Russian arctic



PS preparing fuel for the hut stove

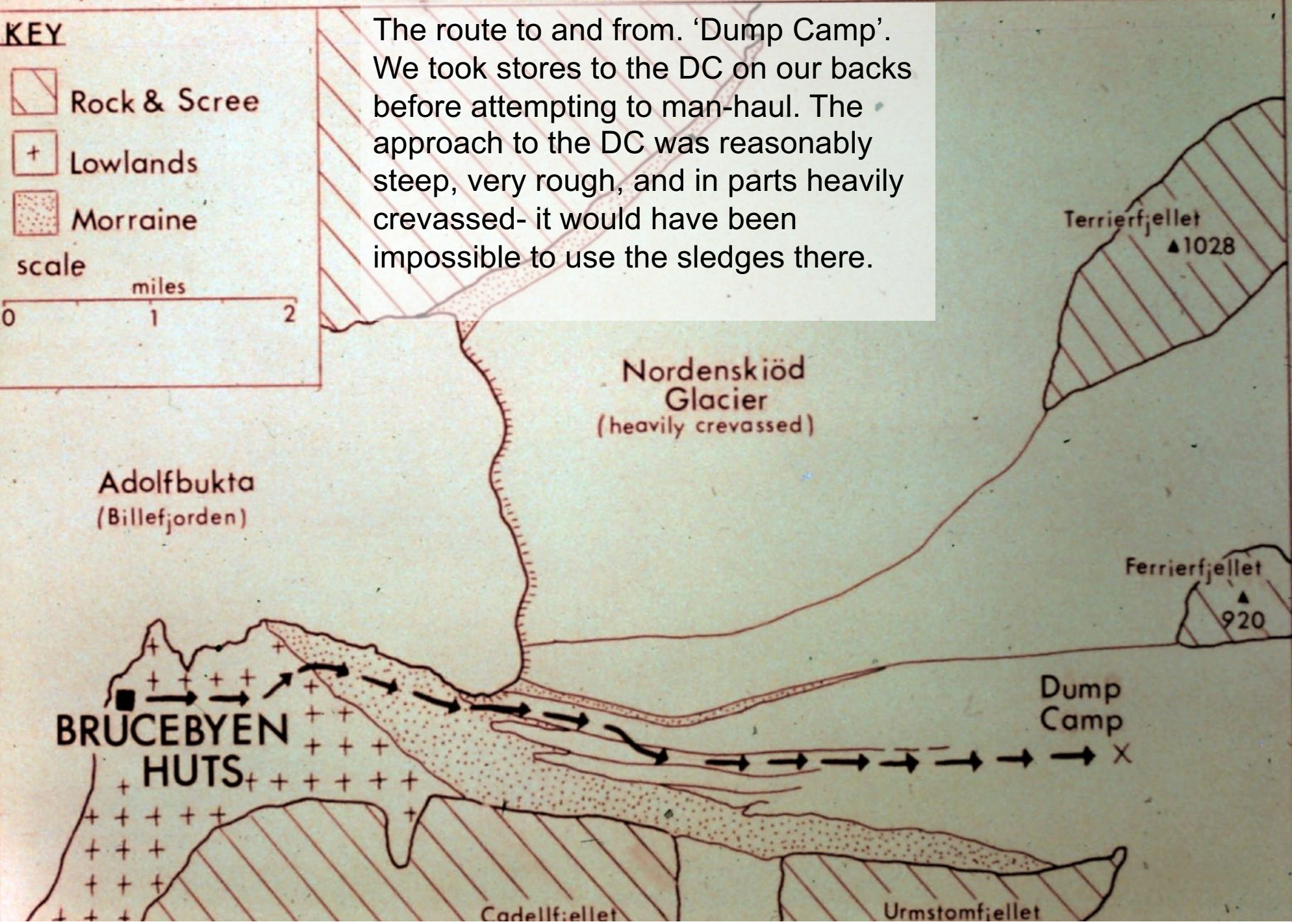
Backpacking Route Brucebyen to Dump Camp


KEY

-  Rock & Scree
-  Lowlands
-  Moraine

scale
miles
0 1 2

The route to and from. 'Dump Camp'. We took stores to the DC on our backs before attempting to man-haul. The approach to the DC was reasonably steep, very rough, and in parts heavily crevassed- it would have been impossible to use the sledges there.





Nordenskiöldbreen

X marks the spot; the Dump Camp location. Note the small coal wagons in the foreground; remnants of coal exploration activity in the 1900's

See also <https://www.spitsbergen-svalbard.com/photos-panoramas-videos-and-webcams/spitsbergen-panoramas/brucebyen.html>

Backpacking gear and supplies to the Dump Camp. This day was particularly pleasant.



PS^{RH} RC

GB

BH



06 -13 July. One of 6 x round trips
@ ~ 25Kg each/person

GB

RC

Dump Camp is just over this ridge



GB BH

RC



RH at Dump camp



A typical return hike to Brucebyen



BH

PS

GB

RC

AW

RH

Saturday 15 July 1978- Departure for Lomonosov Fonna & beyond



The final hike to the Dump Camp.
It had taken a week to get all the
gear up here

The route from Dump camp (x) to Astronomfjellet, thence to Newtontoppen, and the return to the the first camp after Dump camp (camp 3 & 8)





This is NOT the way to load a sledge



GB


PS

After hauling for ~24 hours from Dump Camp. 1 Km/day = not good.



July 19th. Four days later: clearing skies, falling temperatures





Time to go ??

Temperature now 0°C. Snow firming.
Rece' party is just visible on the horizon.

Yes. Time to go!

Yes. This way!!



Spot the failure... the snow shoes were already falling apart



RC

AW

RH

GB

PS

But the visibility was incredible. We imagined that we could see for 100 miles...
Billefjorden is just visible in the centre.





The route ahead.

PS

RH

And a few hours later- getting gloomy.

We had been man-hauling for 24 hours and were extremely tired.

Big Devil Glacier is clearly heavily crevassed and looked like its name was aptly chosen.




July 21.

After almost 24 hours of Hauling;

- exhausted
- confused by the map
- cloud rolling in





July 22. Fog lifting- we can see the way ahead

The steep cliffs and crevasses at
the head of Millingbreen are not on the map.

Perhaps because the contour interval is 100 metres?



BH RH RC

Saturnfjellet

AW

RC

RH





July 23rd- camp between Titanfjellet and Tethysfjellet

Phoebefjellet (Not 100% certain of location)



PS

GB

RC

AW

RH



July 26th.
Astronomfjellet summit, looking East
Toward Fantastiquebreen



Astronomfjellet summit; meteorological HQ on a survey day

July 26-27th:
RH making wind
velocity measurements

30 hours continuous
effort since leaving
camp for Astro



Wind + +
Temperature --
Cloud coming fast
GB looking the part



July 27th-August 3rd.





During "poor" weather



8 days later

What do you do while waiting for the temperature to drop? Explore your surroundings. Our tents were not more than 30 metres from here



PS

AW



From the inside, looking out.
Beware falling icicles- they can kill.

No, this was not comfortable.

[At the time, the Whillans harness was considered state of the art]



GB

August 4th- return to Astronomfjellet.

Emergency tent and supplies....



RC

August 6th 1978- Newtontoppen;
Svalbard's equal highest point at 1717 metres AMSL

(Because it's there)



9 am August 6th



Newtontoppen summit.
PS, AW, RH, RC, GB.
BH behind the lens.



Bruce was there too

South West from Newtontoppen

What a privilege....





Strange stuff we found on the ice...

This high school expedition from ten years prior had had some serious challenges, but cricket gear on the ice cap? Self-inflicted injury!

3 am Monday August 7th



L to R. AW, RC, BH, RH, GB

Does anyone have a GPS?

No- the GPSS has not been invented yet.

Navigation strictly by dead-reckoning

GB at the rear, holding heading with compass.

Everyone else in front.

(The two sledges are in tandem)



Too much UV burns the retina --> Snow blind in one eye.

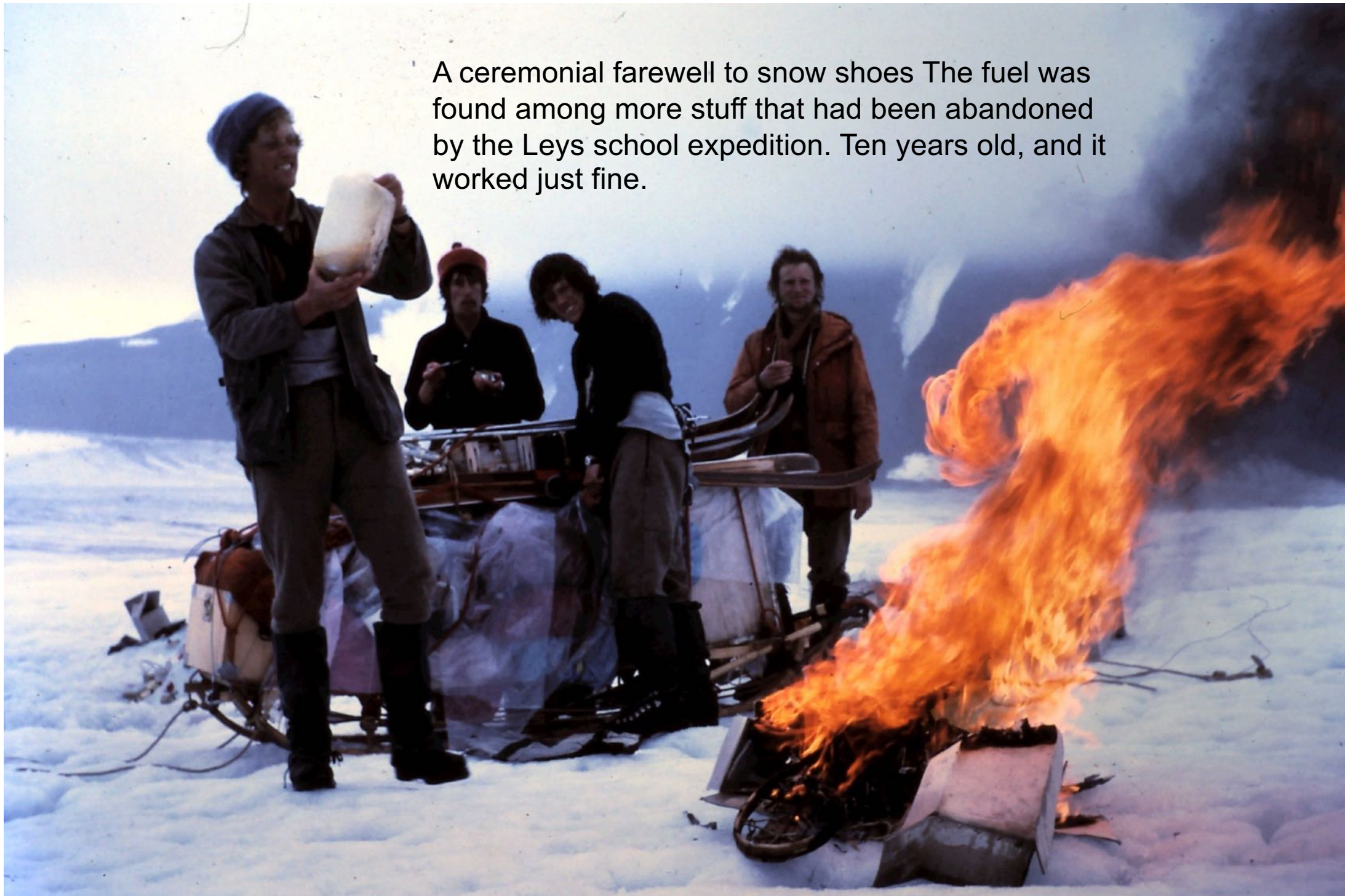
(GB. This was not pleasant
The rope was not for safety-
it was just to make sure I did
not get left behind).






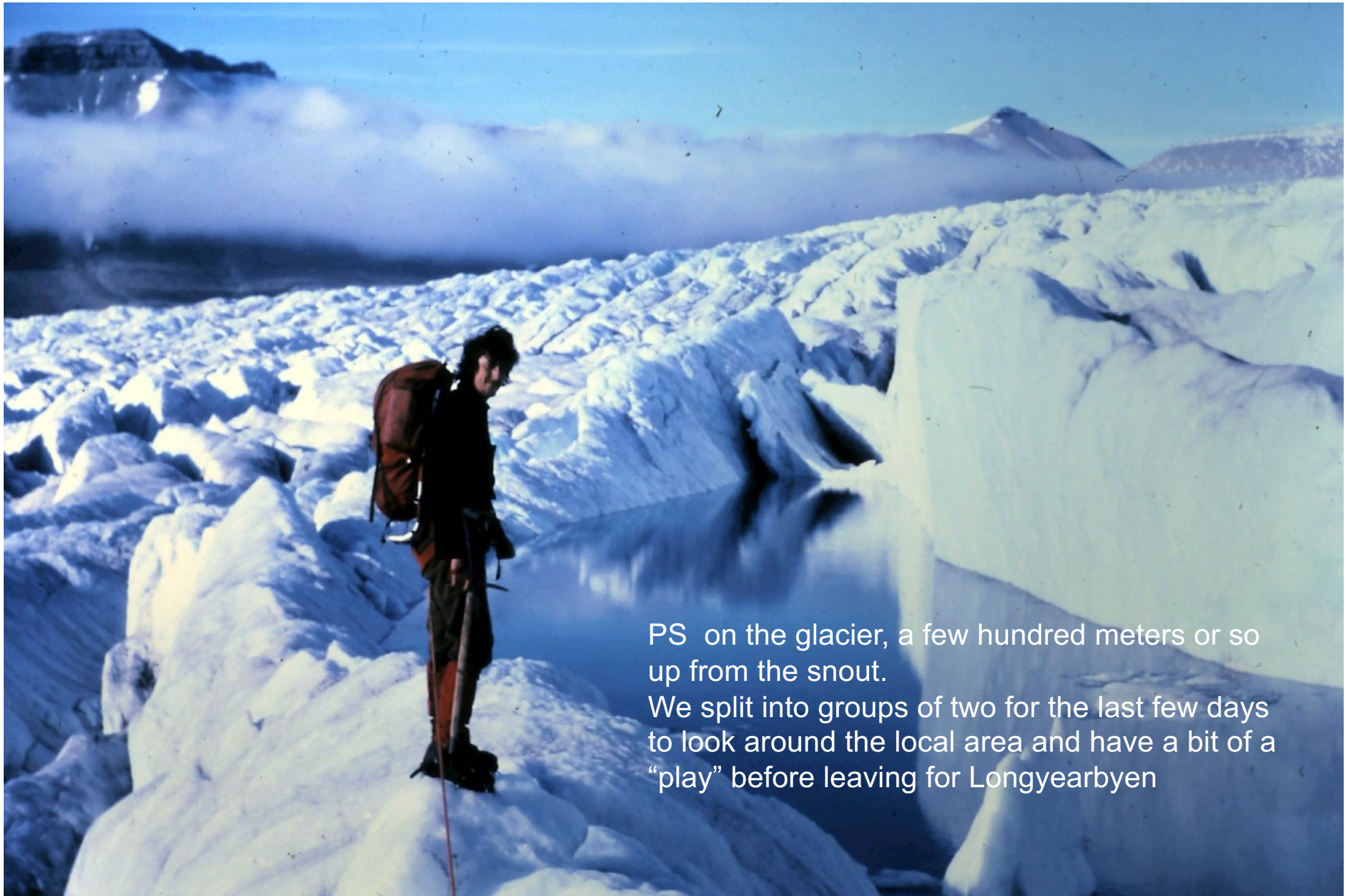
18/06/2016. We literally crossed our outbound tracks

A ceremonial farewell to snow shoes The fuel was found among more stuff that had been abandoned by the Leys school expedition. Ten years old, and it worked just fine.



A photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, there is a body of water reflecting the sky and the buildings. The middle ground shows a small settlement with several dark, simple buildings. A line of laundry is hanging between two buildings. The background features large, snow-covered mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting a low sun or overcast conditions.

After three weeks on the ice, you
can only imagine how good it is to
wash and put on fresh clothes



PS on the glacier, a few hundred meters or so up from the snout. We split into groups of two for the last few days to look around the local area and have a bit of a “play” before leaving for Longyearbyen

Phantomodden
Two guys, driftwood and Puffins.
(But no plastic at that time)





Between Tyrrelfjellet & Tjossasfjelle. Opposite is Nidedalen



PS contemplates the return of the MV Copious; about to pick up the Cambridge expedition team.

Epilogue;

In memory of Andy,
Bruce & Paul.

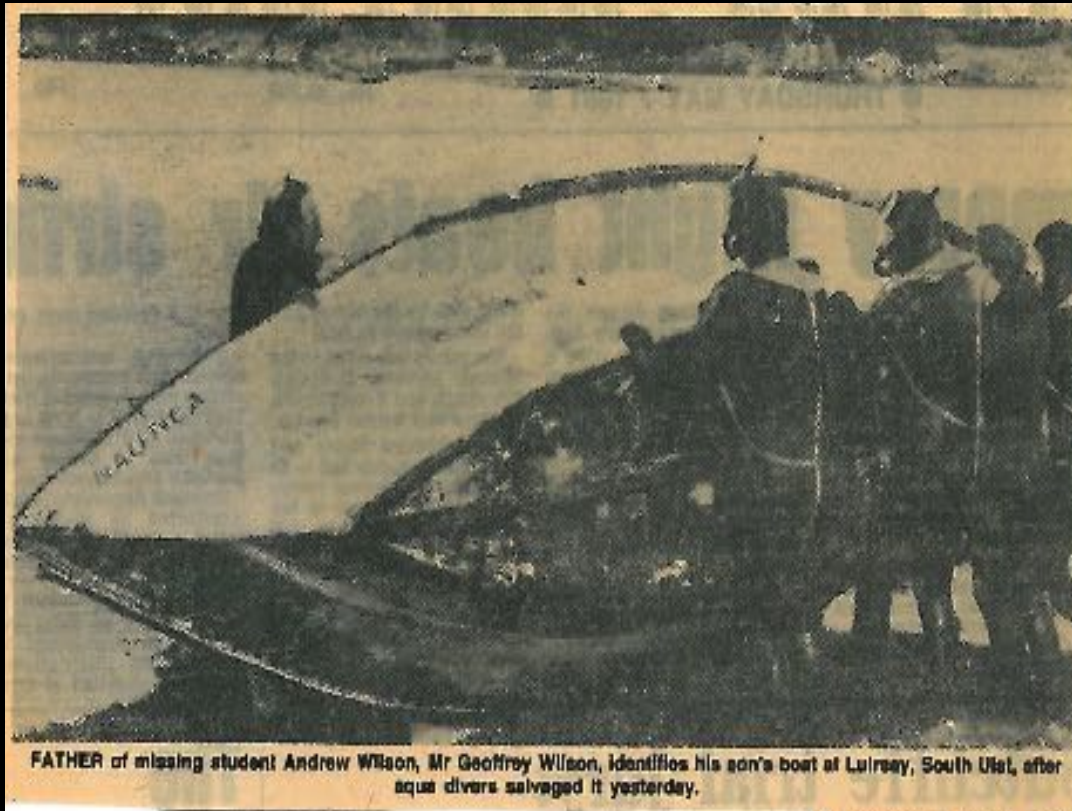
Andy departed St Johns, Newfoundland, June 24th 1980

He hoped to become the youngest single-handed rower to cross the Atlantic.
He and a friend had built the boat, 'Nautica' to a traditional design noted for stability.
It was in fact to prove unsinkable.
He had sufficient rations, a radio and a distress beacon...



.... but Andrew was neither heard from nor seen again.

Nautica was discovered on the island of Lairsay, South Uist, in the outer Hebrides almost 12 months later, on May 6th 1981



See also http://old.oceanrowing.com/logs/andrew_wilson.htm

Bruce Herrod was a member of the South African team on Everest in the horrendous 1996 climbing season

He was the last to summit Everest that season; at 17:15, 25th May 1996.

He was also the last to perish of the many who died living their dream on the top of the world that year.



Paul completed his medical degree at Bristol U in the UK, and went on to work in the Bristol Royal Infirmary before returning to Norfolk to work as a GP, and then teaching in the medical school at the University of East Anglia.

Sadly, while working that first job in Bristol Paul was exposed to asbestos dust. He passed away due to the resulting Mesothelioma forty years later on July 9th 2020





Paul at Mathiesondalen hut