

NOTISER OG LITTERATURANMELDELSER

STORKER STORKERSON

26/6 1883—22/3 1940

En tragisk skjebne var ført til ende da vår landsmann polarfareren Storker Storkerson den 22 mars 1940 avgikk ved døden i Sørøysund. Egentlig het han Størker Theodor Størkersen, og var født i Trondenes 1883; men det er under sin amerikaniserte navneform at han har skapt sig et varig minne, ved sin innsats som deltager i Leffingwell-Mikkelsens og særlig i Vilhjalmur Stefanssons ekspedisjoner til de nordamerikanske polarområder.

Her i Norge er Storkersons medvirkning i disse forskningsferdene ikke blitt påaktet etter fortjeneste, blandt annet fordi han selv ikke lenge etter hjemflytningen til Norge blev brutt ned av sykdom. — Høsten 1928 mottok Det Norske Geografiske Selskabs sekretær følgende brev fra Vilhjalmur Stefansson, datert 25 september 1928:

»Just before he sailed for his Antarctic expedition, Sir Hubert Wilkins and I were talking about our comrade of the 1913-18 expedition, your countryman Storker Storkerson. There resulted the attached letter which we signed jointly. We hope you will take it as it is meant, for it is based only on our assumption that the book, *The Friendly Arctic*, in which Storkerson's work is chiefly described, is little known in Norway and that these notable Norwegian contributions to the advancement of polar exploration may, therefore, have received less appreciation than you would desire to give them if you were in possession of the facts.

Storkerson proposed a year or two ago to travel by sledge across the full diameter of the Arctic Ocean, living by hunting. He was unable to get support for that expedition, but Wilkins did get support for an expedition which was in part based on exactly the same ideas as Storkerson's. For Wilkins carried provisions for only two or three weeks and nevertheless announced in his program that he expected to be able to support himself by hunting while he walked out from any forced landing within the polar basin, even if this journey afoot should take two years from the landing place to the nearest Eskimo or other settlement.

I emphasize the correspondence between the Storkerson and the Wilkins plans because I understand that both Wilkins and his program made a strong impression in Norway.

As he was leaving Norway, Wilkins heard a rumor that Storkerson was somewhere in the north of the country, but Captain Gunnar Isachsen, who is now in New York, is of the opinion that he is not in Norway. I should be grateful for any information. I have written Storkerson two or three times during the last two years without receiving a reply. Presumably my letter have miscarried.

V. Stefansson.«

Fra denne side kunde vi snart derefter sende Stefansson den vemodige beskjed at hans gamle reisefelle var rammet av sinnssykdom og blev pleiet på sykehus.

Storkerson vokste op i Nord-Norge og dro til sjøs i 1899, 16 år gammel. Han kom til Canada i 1904, og gikk senere på navigasjonsskole i San Francisco. Hans deltagelse i de nevnte polarekspedisjoner faller i årene 1907—1918. Etter hjemkomsten til Norge i 1921 etablerte han sig som forretningsmann i Indre Billefjord. Dette var et meget uheldig tidspunkt — like før det økonomiske sammenbrudd satte inn — og Storkerson kjempet lenge med økonomiske vanskeligheter, inntil han blev rammet av den sinnssykdom som formørket resten av hans liv helt til 1940, da han døde.

Storkersons arktiske innsats i hans gode manndomsår kan vi nå ikke minnes på noen bedre vis enn ved å gjengi den fremstilling som vårt selskap mottok sammen med brevet ovenfor fra Stefansson og Wilkins. Den følger nedenfor *in extenso*:

September 21, 1928.

Det Norske Geografiske Selskab,
Oslo, Norway.

We have gathered that the work of Storker Storkerson, a Norwegian Arctic explorer, is little known in Norway, and therefore venture to send you this statement about a colleague in exploration whom we have long known — Stefansson since 1907, and Wilkins since 1914.

Storkerson was born in the north of Norway, perhaps at Harstad, a little more than forty years ago. He went to sea young, sailed in the ships of many nations, and became an Arctic explorer through engaging himself as a seaman in the expedition to the Beaufort Sea commanded by Ernest de Koven Leffingwell of Chicago, and Ejnar Mikkelsen of Copenhagen. Stefansson was anthropologist on this expedition. On it Storkerson was promoted to first mate, and accompanied the two commanders on their journey north from Alaska when they determined the near approach of the deep ocean to that coast. The view previously had been common that there was shoal water far to the northward, with islands probably rising from the continental shelf.

Storkerson became fascinated with the Arctic, and when the expedition disbanded he returned to the north coast of Alaska on his own account. He served for a time very competently on the Stefansson expedition of 1908—12,

and was also further associated with Leffingwell in the survey of the north coast of Alaska, which has since been published by the United States Geological Survey (monograph: Canning River District, by Leffingwell).

Storkerson is frequently mentioned in Mikkelsen's book »Conquering the Arctic Ice«, and also in Stefansson's »My Life with the Eskimo«.

When the Stefansson expedition of 1913—18 commenced operations on the north coast of Alaska, Storkerson had already been living there more than six years, and had become thorough master of Eskimo methods of life and travel. At this time, Stefansson had the plan of traveling north from Alaska with sledges and dogs but without provisions, planning to be gone a year if necessary, or even two years, and to live by hunting. At that time, it was believed by whalers and trappers on the north coast of Alaska, and by all the Eskimos, that seals, on which the Stefansson plan depended, would not be found in sufficient numbers, if at all, when you got out on the deep ocean far from land. Most of the members of the Stefansson expedition had the same view, and a practical mutiny resulted; for the plan was considered insanity, an unconscious attempt at suicide.

When Stefansson was unable to secure sufficient support from his own expedition, Storkerson volunteered to join and accompany him. This, and the assistance of two whaling ships, enabled Stefansson to make the journey in spite of the opposition of his own staff. Stefansson had the support, too, of a certain minority of his own expedition, as described in his book, »The Friendly Arctic«. Of this minority, Wilkins was one. He was therefore associated with Storkerson as well as with another Norwegian volunteer, Ole Andreasen, who had been a trapper on the Alaska coast and who was willing to take part in the proposed journey. (Andreasen now resides in the Canadian Arctic.)

Storkerson's joining the Stefansson expedition was therefore critical in permitting the sledge journey northward to be made at all. Later on, he and Andreasen made up with Stefansson a party of three who actually performed the journey according to plan. He thus helped to run a 500 mile line of soundings across the previously unknown ocean, the first line of systematic soundings ever carried by a sledge expedition on the Arctic high seas. (Peary's soundings, 1909, were only sporadic.)

On this journey was established the fact that seals are abundant and can be secured by skillful hunters even at distances hundreds of kilometers beyond the edge of the continental shelf.

In addition to the soundings and the routine scientific work, this journey was important in establishing the new view of the abundance of animal life in the Arctic. It also placed in the hands of Arctic travelers a new method of exploration. These accomplishments would have been impossible without Storkerson, and so he deserves a share in any credit that anyone gets for them.

The book, »The Friendly Arctic«, shows how consistently through five years, Storkerson was a mainstay of the expedition. His best work was probably that done in support of others, but he was himself leader in the mapping of Victoria Island, practically completing the coast line between

the farthest attained by the Amundsen expedition and the farthest attained by McClure.

The winter of 1917-18, Stefansson planned to travel, with a party of three or four, 200 or more miles north from the Alaska coast, camp on a substantial floe, and drift with it for a year, living by hunting and carrying on systematic soundings and other observations, coming ashore after the sun returned on whatever land was most convenient — in all probability some part of Siberia. But he fell ill with typhoid during Christmas week, when the preparations for the journey were only well begun. He was in bed with this illness for four months.

It was then that Storkerson stepped into the breach, organized the work, and led the sledgers north. According to plan, they did travel 200 miles north from the Alaska shore; they camped on a substantial floe with provisions for about two months, which they intended to save for use on the eventual journey ashore. During six months they drifted about 450 miles at distances between 200 and 300 miles from land, finding game abundant, and suffering no hardship. For by now the technique of living and traveling on the ice had been so developed that the four other men and Storkerson were unanimous in saying, when they came ashore, that they could have lived on the ice by hunting safely and comfortably for six years as easily as six months. This was the final demonstration of the new method, and again Storkerson had a part, this time the leading one.

After six months on the drifting floe, Storkerson was attacked with a disease which, in the opinion of American physicians at least, could have had nothing to do with any hardships. This was asthma. It worried Storkerson's colleagues perhaps more than him, and perhaps all of them unnecessarily. At any rate, because of it, they determined to start for shore at the very worst time of year for such traveling. It was October; daylight was already rapidly failing; and there were constant falls of snow, as there usually are on the Arctic ocean at this season. The snow kept the young ice from freezing solid so that a safe looking white surface would really be treacherous, letting men and dogs through into the water. Nevertheless, the journey, between 200 and 300 miles, was made safely in a month without adventure.

In this whole expedition of eight months, the men never missed a meal nor did the dogs, and they did not lose even one dog from exposure or accident, though some died from disease.

We feel that this record, if widely known and properly understood, would put Storkerson in the front rank of Arctic explorers. We feel especially that his countrymen in Norway have a duty towards themselves as well as towards him in seeing that this understanding comes about.

We have heard that Storkerson has proposed to make journeys afoot, running a line of soundings diagonally across the full width of the polar sea, giving one or two years to it as need be, and we gather that this proposal met little interest, being considered visionary. In our opinion, however, the plan is sound. That opinion is based on what we have seen of the northern ocean and lands, and on a critical study of books

on the Arctic which maintain every variety of view, both favorable and unfavorable. We have the greatest respect for the scientific attainments and for the field achievements of some of the explorers who maintain the viewopposite toours, but so far as we can judge, they are in error. We urge, therefore, that if Storkerson has any such plan now, or presents it hereafter, it may receive the most sympathetic consideration and study from Scandinavian geographers and explorers.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson.

Geo. H. Wilkins.«

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I sine bøker, først og fremst i »The Friendly Arctic« som er beretningen om ekspedisjonen 1913—1918, skriver Stefansson gang på gang anerkjennende ord om Storkersons dyktige og lojale medvirkning. I forbindelse med sledeferden i juni 1914 til Banks Land sier Stefansson følgende om sine to reisefeller Storkerson og Ole Andreasen: »I find an entry about Storkerson and Andreasen in which, as I felt at the time, I gave them less than their due: »They are as well suited for this work as it is easy to imagine. Neither of them worries or whines and both are optimistic about the prospects. This last is important. Traveling with an empty sled and living off the country is no work for a pessimist.« The longer the time that intervenes the more my feeling of gratitude to these men and my appreciation of them has grown. Those who have gone through a difficult experience anywhere will know that nothing more could be said, after all, than this: that if I had a similar trip to make over again I could not imagine any companions I should prefer to Storkerson and Ole.« (The Friendly Arctic, New York 1921 (1927), s. 236). Høsten 1917 ble ekspedisjonen reorganisert. Om dette skriver Stefansson bl. a.: »Storkerson, who had for a long time been in a sense our most important man, never had an official position aboard the ships, because the work of the ships seemed to me entirely secondary to that of sledge travel. He is an excellent sailor, well fitted for a ship's command, and this was one of my serious errors in tactics, for I can now see that many things would have gone better had I given him an official (although to my mind an empty) rank corresponding to his ability and his usefulness.« (The Friendly Arctic, s. 670).

Sommeren 1914 oppdaget Stefansson på vestsiden av Banks Land en bred bukt, som han gav navn etter Storkerson (Storkerson Bay, se The Friendly Arctic, s. 263).

Om den lange sledeferden som ble foretatt i 1918 under Storkersons ledelse ut over Beauforthavets drivis, og som varte i hele 8 måneder, har Storkerson selv, i MacLean's Magazine for 15 mars og 1 april 1920 skrevet en beretning, »Drifting in the Beaufort Sea«, som gjengis i Stefanssons bok (The Friendly Arctic, s. 589—703).