

## CORRESPONDENCE

[Correspondence arising out of notes and articles is welcomed.]

## TOBIAS GABRIELSEN AND TECHNIQUE OF SLEDGING

On reading the *Polar Record* for July 1950 I was most upset to learn of the passing of that great Greenlander and "expeditionsman" Tobias Gabrielsen. The obituary notice<sup>1</sup> does not do him sufficient justice. Apart from the many Danish expeditions to which you refer, he assisted Alfred Wegener's German expeditions in 1929 and 1930-31, and is mentioned in *Mit Motorboot und Schlitten in Grönland* (Bielefeld und Leipzig, 1930), *Alfred Wegeners letzte Grönlandfahrt* (Leipzig, 1933) and other accounts. He was also my right-hand man during the winter of 1933-34 with the British Trans-Greenland Expedition under Martin Lindsay. In the latter's book *Sledge* (London, 1935) there is a portrait of Tobias opposite p. 48. It was from Tobias that we learned much of our sledging technique, and in this way he had an important influence on the success of the expedition, and indeed of two subsequent ones—A. R. Glen's Oxford University Expedition to North East Land in 1935-36, and P.-É. Victor's Trans-Greenland Expedition in 1936.

Since the war, no British expeditions have wintered in the Arctic. Exponents of the "true fan" system of dog driving, in which Tobias excelled, are not included in the organization or membership of British expeditions to the Antarctic. Nevertheless this sledging technique is most popular among northern races, for use in areas north of the tree line where surfaces are reasonably hard and windswept, even when crossing sea ice or crevasses. It has been used successfully on great journeys such as those undertaken by Peary and Rasmussen, and on the many expeditions which for over thirty years relied mainly on Tobias' prowess. The dogs, bless them, obviously enjoy this technique; they like to pull abreast of one another and to lick their neighbours' faces from pure *joie de vivre*; there are no traces ahead or alongside of them to chafe their legs and bodies, and, with a well-trained team, there is little need to unravel the traces.

The current British technique of dog driving is the modified Labrador method, ably developed by Rymill's British Graham Land Expedition of 1934-37. Here the dogs are usually in pairs on independent traces of varying lengths. This is probably an excellent system for Graham Land, where extreme temperatures are seldom encountered and the going tends to be soft. In other parts of the Antarctic, however, where the climate is essentially "continental", there would appear to be few advantages. If, on the present Norwegian-British-Swedish Expedition to Queen Maud Land, there happens to be an expert fan-trace driver among the Norwegians, it is possible he may convert (or, in deference to the British Graham Land Expedition, should I say pervert?) the British members.

<sup>1</sup> See the *Polar Record*, Vol. 5, No. 40, 1950, p. 637.

I can imagine that great-hearted traveller, Tobias, being interested in this or any other transport problem. During his lifetime he tried nearly every technique except the most recent luxury devices, such as the Snowmobile, the helicopter and the parachute.

It was Tobias who, in March 1909 as a young member of the *Danmark* expedition, found with Captain Koch the body of Jørgen Brønlund, and Høeg Hagen's sketch-maps of the hitherto unexplored areas around Independence Fjord. Indeed, his contribution to the exploration of Greenland is in certain respects unrivalled. One day history may record the fact. Meanwhile it is a privilege to salute my old master, who during the happiest months of my life was my constant companion, counsellor and friend.

KELVEDON, ESSEX  
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ANDREW CROFT