

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Jenter på langs—på ski over Svalbard*, by Kristin Folsland Olsen, Vera Simonsson & Ingebjørg Tollefsen (2006). Oslo: Fri Flyt AS. 119 pp. ISBN 978-8299643245.

At first sight I thought this book was going to turn out to be just another account of a personal skiing trip in the Arctic, of which there have been many in recent years. However, because I live in Svalbard and have participated in several ski expeditions (the last one traversed Greenland and was led by a disabled woman who accomplished the journey by sit-ski) I am always interested in reading other people's experiences of polar expeditions, as they may provide inspiration for a future trip or kindle new dreams. I'm also keen to learn from other people's mistakes and successes, as well as from their choice of equipment and experiences in its use.

The title can be translated as something like "Girls on tour—by ski across Svalbard". (In the phrase *jenter på langs*, *jenter* means "girls" and *på langs* means "length-wise", which refers to the south–north axis of their traverse.) The book is about three students—one Swedish and two Norwegian—training to be outdoor guides in Svalbard, who dreamed about wrapping up their stay in Longyearbyen with a long skiing trip. This was the beginning of their idea of traversing Svalbard from south to north on skis. The trip started from Sørkapp, the southernmost point of Spitsbergen, and followed a winding route over glaciers, mountain passes and frozen fjords before reaching Verlegenuken, the most northern point of the island, and covered a distance of 550 km.

The book caught and held my attention more than I had anticipated it would. The expedition is described with humour and, compared with most expedition accounts, in an unconventional way. The book makes light reading and is an interesting, well-balanced mix of narrative description, fact boxes and excerpts from the girls' diaries, interspersed with a number of good photographs. It covers most aspects of a successful expedition, from planning the logistics, pre-expedition concerns about the equipment, the physical conditions they were confronted with, and so on.

The fact boxes touch on almost all the aspects of expedition life the reader could want to know about when planning a similar or shorter expedition in Svalbard, and are a good starting point for finding out more on the

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different topics. Information in the fact boxes covers food rations, safety equipment, polar bears, glaciers, Svalbard weather, and flora and fauna. There is also a fairly comprehensive equipment list, and maps with the authors' route and camp positions marked.

Excerpts from the diaries of the participants add insights from each member regarding how she experienced the trip, as well as her relationship with the other team members. The diary texts switch between Norwegian and Swedish, which is a bit irritating at times, but it does lend a more personal touch to the book. Conflicts and problems encountered during the expedition are also touched upon from all three perspectives. Personal tensions often arise on such expeditions as a result of the participants' varying backgrounds, motivations and expectations, but they are often left out of such literature. It was therefore refreshing to read diary excerpts that dealt with how frustrations and conflicts developed, and how they were either confronted or ignored.

The authors have struck a good balance between describing the challenges they faced during this tough trip and how they got on with the tasks at hand, such as enduring long periods of bad weather, poor visibility and encounters with polar bears, without exaggerating the hardships as many other expedition books tend to do. I found the book an enjoyable account of three young women following their dream. By careful planning and attention to detail, and a bit of luck, they were successful in what was a very difficult and demanding journey. This book should appeal to anyone with a spirit of adventure for the Arctic, and readers planning a similar adventure will find a great deal of useful information.