

The Danish North Greenland Expedition, 1912–1913



Trek over ice cap

The “Danish expedition to Queen Louise Land and straight through Greenland’s ice sheet” was led by Johann Peter Koch (1870–1928), with whom Alfred Wegener had already worked during the Mylius-Erichsen expedition in 1906–1908. Other participants included the Icelander Vigfus Sigurdsson (1875–1950), who was in charge of the transport ponies, and the Dane Lars Larsen (1886–1978). The goal of this expedition was to survey the as-yet unexplored ice sheet, concentrating particularly on answering a set of glaciological and meteorological questions. This would require overwintering on the edge of the ice sheet and eventually crossing the entirety of the ice sheet from east to west. The starting point was Danmark Harbor, which had also served as the base for the Mylius-Erichsen expedition.

The trip was extremely difficult, and only with great effort were they able to reach their destination, Pröven, where they arrived entirely exhausted. Koch’s travel diary, which Wegener translated, was released in 1919 under the title “Durch die weiße Wüste” [Through the White Desert].

View selected pages from Wegener’s diaries [Deutsches Museum Archiv, NL 001] and their transcripts. For the complete original click [here](#) .

Source: Alfred Wegener, *Tagebücher*, June 1912–July 1913. Deutsches Museum Archiv, NL 001/008.

[020] 7. Juni [1912]. Gestern abend fuhren wir von Akureyri ab. Vigfus kam 1 ½ Stunden zu spät, dann aber im Galopp zu Pferde. Der Sysselmann war ihm begegnet und hatte ihn wegen der Tour über den Vatna-Jökul ausgefragt. Kochs Gelder haben gerade gereicht, es ist nichts übrig geblieben. Der Aufenthalt und die Reise auf Island waren erheblich teurer, als gerechnet worden war. – Nun sind wir mit der „Goothaab“ in See, ohne Lundager. Er war auf der Islandreise den Anstrengungen nicht mehr recht gewachsen und wünschte daher selbst zurückzutreten. Es ist noch unsicher, ob wir einen Matrosen als 4. Mann mitnehmen. Wir haben auch einen isländischen Hund für 10 Kr. gekauft. Er heißt Gloë. Vigfus ist seekrank im Bett,

[020] 7 June [1912]. Last night we departed from Akureyri. Vigfus came 1 ½ hour late, but when he arrived, he was galloping on horseback. He had met Sysselmann, who had asked him about the tour across Vatna-Jökul.

Koch's funding had just barely been enough; there is nothing left. The journey to Iceland and our stay there have been considerably more expensive than expected. Now, we are on the *Gothaab* on the ocean, without Lundager. During the Iceland trip he wasn't really able to cope with the strenuous demands anymore, and decided to leave the expedition of his own accord. It is still uncertain as to whether we will take on a sailor as a 4th man. We also bought an Icelandic dog for 10 kroner. His name is Gloë. Vigfus is in bed

Essay:  2013 Christian Kehrt

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Diary translation:  2013 Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society

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Related links:

- Alfred-Wegener-Institut für Polar- und Meeresforschung (AWI) <http://awi.de>

Websites linked in this text:

- <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/wegener-diaries/original-document>
- <http://www.deutsches-museum.de/archiv/>

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Source: Alfred Wegener, *Tagebücher*, June 1912 – July 1913. DMA NL 001/008.

[021] so daß Koch und ich die Pferde besorgen müssen. Vormittags sind wir auch etwas seekrank. Wir richten eine Dunkelkammer ein.

[021] with sea sickness, so Koch and I have to tend to the horses. We are constructing a darkroom.