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Walter and Arthur Wellman Collection - Expedition Proposal

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Men enough to pull and lift the loads over the bad places without too much loss of time. Third—The weights distributed in small units (not over 700 or 800 pounds in any one load) in order that the men may easily handle the various parts of the equipment without breaking the bulk, unloading and reloading.

Without pausing to describe in detail our proposed equipment, the following features are worthy brief mention:

The boat used for the northern sledge journey will be a rubber or canvas-kayak, 16 or 17 feet long, from 4 to 4 1/2 broad amidships, decked Esquimaux fashion, with man-holes which can be covered with oil-skin, and large enough to carry six men, 20 or 30 dogs, instruments, spare clothing, and a large quantity of food. This boat will weigh about 200 pounds, and will be drawn upon a sledge weighing about 70 pounds. The deck of the kayak will be made to lift from the center, each wing or leaf assuming the perpendicular, and with a covering of oiled silk will thus afford (convertible in a few moments) a snug tent or living room, 12 feet long, four feet wide and five feet from floor to roof. Here the six men can cook and eat their meals and sleep in comfort. No time need be spent in pitching a tent, which is quite a task in windy weather or on bad ground. Being a decked, water-tight kayak, provided also with water-tight compartments fore and aft for safe keeping of instruments, records, matches, etc., the canoe will be a good sea boat, and if necessary can go through heavy surf, and is practically non-sinkable. The bow will be protected by a plate of thin aluminum for work in brash ice. These are ideas of comfort, convince and economy of weight and time acquired by the experience of the writer, supplemented by that of Nansen and others.

The other sledges will be both sledges and boats. That is to say, the supplies which they carry will be contained in light, water-tight cases lashed to sledges, so that they may, at any moment, without change or preparation, be thrust into water in crossing lanes or pools, precisely as if they were boats. Sledges of this sort were used by the undersigned at the north of Spitzbergen and they worked admirably. If Dr. Nansen had had such sledges he could have saved himself and Johansen many long detours and tedious delays.

The best season for sledging is in March, April and May, and again in September and early October, while the sunlight remains. In March and April the temperature ranges from 10 to 50 below zero F., with a mean of from 25 to 30 below. In May the range is from 10 below to 18 above. Below zero is the best sledging weather. The ice is firm, the crust of the snow strong enough to bear, leads less numerous. Warm weather softens the snow, increases the quantity of sludge and slush, and adds to the difficulty of the road. Progress is possible even in midsummer, and it is now and then facilitated by open pools and long channels running parallel with the course and through which the boats may be put.

Our plan is to use the first 80 to 100 days of spring and early summer, beginning March 1st or even a few days earlier, for a quick dash northward and back from our winter headquarters—making the most of the favorable season. During this period there is likely to be little detention by bad weather. The snow storms come later in the year. Now and then there may be short stoppage on account of high winds, but should these be at our backs they serve a good purpose, for sledge sails are then hoisted and we are helped along.

We shall start, about March 1st, with 100 days' provisions for ourselves and the dogs. Before the 100 days are up it is almost certain we shall meet game. This will be true whether we shall then have reached the land or not, for bear, seal, narwhal and even birds are found great distances from land in spring and summer. But without other sources of supply than our own loads and dogs we shall be able to use, in safety,

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The other sledges will be both sledges and boats. That is to say, the supplies which they carry will be contained in light, water-tight cases lashed to the sledges, so that they may, at any moment, without change or preparation, be thrust into the water in crossing lanes or pools, precisely as if they were boats. Sledges of this sort were used by the undersigned at the north of Spitzbergen, and they worked admirably. If Dr. Nansen had had such sledges he could have saved himself and Johansen many long detours and tedious delays.

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