

Confluence 78° N 15° E

Niels von Festenberg

Vor etwa fünf Jahren wurde ein „Projekt“ gegründet, das zum Ziel hat, die Schnittpunkte (confluences genannt) geographischer Längen- und Breitengrade aufzusuchen. Wem dies als Erstem gelingt, berichtet über seine „Erstbegehung“ in Wort und Bild im Internet unter der Adresse <http://www.confluence.org>. Nach Abzug der Schnittpunkte, die in die Ozeane fallen, bleiben, wie errechnet wurde, 12.247 solcher Punkte zu begehen.

Unser Mitglied MALTE JOCHMANN hat als Geologe seine Diplomarbeit in Spitzbergen (Svalbard) geschrieben. Zusammen mit seinen Kollegen NIELS V. FESTENBERG, CHRISTOPH THIEN and KORA KELLER gelang es ihm, die Confluence 78°N 15° E (leider eine halbe Stunde nach deren Erstbegehung) zu erreichen.



Due to the weather and seasonal conditions on Svalbard there are just about a hundred days per year where the confluence 78° N 15° E is accessible. Considering the light conditions on 78° north it seems reasonable to assume in average 16 hours per day as possible visiting windows within those 100 days. In March 2004 about five years have passed since the beginning of the epidemic of confluenza. That makes ca. 8000 hours for possible visits. The geography of the glacier Passfjellbreen where the point is situated requires a staying duration of about one hour in the vicinity. Therefore one visiting team could be met there with a probability of 1/8000 during the last five years; i.e. the probability of this occurring was negligible.

Anyway on March 15, 2004 it was exactly this incredible event that became reality. In the morning KORA, MALTE, CHRISTOPH and me unsuspectingly set out across the snow covered tundra of Svalbard to accomplish our first confluence point, departing from the foggy valley of Longyearbyen.

On the way there we had already met a quite funny polar bear. Its track went parallel to a slope and every now and then it was interrupted by downhill sliding tracks sometimes a hundred metres long. Somehow, we couldn't imagine that it had done this for any other reason but just for fun. When it spotted us, it fled uphill, this so called *ursus maritimus*. Probably to go skiing again. At least it didn't want to eat us. Anyway, the weather conditions improved constantly.

When we finally arrived at the bottom of Passfjellbreen we slowly understood that there was already some human activity on the glacier. While digging out a sledge that had gotten stuck in the deep snow we met those people and our worst nightmares became true: TERJE and EINAR had taken the point before us, just half an hour ago.

After some minutes of hysterical laughter of a mixture of disappointment and surprise we decided to continue, since TERJE and EINAR didn't get any closer than 35 metres.

In brilliant sunshine we arrived at 78° N 15° E. We decided to walk there just two by two since the slope behind the point looked quite likely to comprise more than enough snow to bury us. The GPS-picture needed some digital polishing later; it was just a bit too scary with those avalanches.

However, no avalanches came down to cover us, so we could take the pictures and had some extremely delicious Zywiec- and Tyskie-beer from Poland to celebrate the point (the indispensable bottle of Bavarian Augustiner didn't make that far, unfortunately).

With mixed feelings we left heading for the great calving front of Fridtjovbreen.

MALTE JOCHMANN schreibt: „Ich möchte allen Mitgliedern das Angebot machen, auf Spitzbergen mit allem Möglichen behilflich zu sein oder Informationen zu liefern, sollte jemand einen Aufenthalt oder eine Expedition planen wollen. Ich kenne die Insel recht gut, da ich vor Anfertigung meiner Diplomarbeit bereits ein Jahr als Student in dieser faszinierenden Arktislandschaft war.“