

The ATV Road Dispute

Link: <http://www.polarrouten.net/index.php?la=en&d=main/en&f=main/en/150.txt>

Polar-Route - Arctic Circle Trail - Arctic Circle **ROAD**?

In 1990 Johanne Bech, an experienced tour guide from Sisimiut, marked the first long-distance hiking trail in Greenland between Kangerlussuaq, where Greenland's international airport is located, and Sisimiut, Greenland's second largest city. Within a few years it became the best-known hiking trail in the Arctic. On the hiking maps (hiking map of West Greenland, scale 1: 100,000) it bears the name "Polar Route", after which our association is also named. Soon the name "Arctic Circle Trail", abbreviated "ACT", spread for it. And more recently you can also read the name "Arctic Circle **ROAD**", because in 2015 the municipality of Qeqqata decided to build a road between Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut. Whether to build a road between Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut had been a contentious issue between the municipality and the central government for more than 50 years, which was now to be brought to a conclusion with the construction of an ATV road. Since a real road would be too expensive, the first step was to build a road for "all-terrain vehicles" with the abbreviation "ATV". Soon a link to an [article](http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/atv-road-da.pdf) (<http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/atv-road-da.pdf>) appeared on the website of the municipality of Qeqqata to publicise this decision.

And soon a slightly larger [PDF file](https://www.qeqqata.gl/-/media/naturvej/samfundskonomisknaturvejdk.pdf?la=da) (<https://www.qeqqata.gl/-/media/naturvej/samfundskonomisknaturvejdk.pdf?la=da>) was published advertising this road with the prospect of good profits for some. To illustrate the expected economic benefits of this road, the following photo was shown on page 15 of this text:



The comment of a guest at the campsite: "The Hell's Angels are invading Greenland." A slightly more polite explanation comes from the text commenting the picture, where the more precise term "ATV road" is now replaced by the euphemism "nature road":

"The rental of motorised vehicles and bicycles as well as guided tours along the [nature road](#) [The word "nature road" is now used in the municipality as a synonym for "ATV road"] generate profits for tourism enterprises ... Of particular interest is the fact that

hunters can make extensive use of ATVs for winter hunting in January and February. ... But ATVs can also be used for trophy hunting."

"Igloo Mountain ApS", a tourism company, has expressed the expectation on its website (source: href=<http://www.ski.gl/IglooMountainApS.aspx> - now deleted) that it will be able to start with 8,000 to 10,000 rides per year renting ATVs on this ATV road. But of course that would be far too much of an environmental burden on the region.

A third of the hiking trail ("Polar Route" / "Arctic Circle Trail") is to give way to the road, to be relocated to another trail south of it. [A German guidebook](#) (Woick, Meike, Oliver Schröder & David Kuhnert: Grönland: Arctic Circle Trail. Outdoor Handbuch. Band 137; 2. Auflage 2014; S. 79f.), however, had previously, when there was no talk of this ATV road, urgently warned hikers not to use this "southern route", saying that this trail was very difficult, and in some cases even life-threatening. Moreover, a road parallel to the hiking trail will devalue it. Based on this, 300 hikers on the Arctic Circle Trail approached the municipality [in a petition called "Memorandum"](#) (<http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/memorandum-en.pdf>) and demanded to refrain from building an ATV road and instead re-establishing a boat connection as it had once existed. Unfortunately, the municipal administration never answered the petition (the memorandum) and did not even present it to the municipal parliament. In doing so, the local government violated the right to petition, an important fundamental right.

The planned ATV road is to cross the World Heritage Site "Aasivissuit - Nipisat, Inuit Hunting Ground between Ice and Sea". In a similar case (the "Waldschlößchenbrücke", a bridge built through the Elbe valley near Dresden), UNESCO had already decided to remove an object from the World Heritage List. When the inscription procedure for "Aasivissuit - Nipisat" was underway, corresponding concerns [were also raised with UNESCO](#) (<http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/apl2018-02-12.pdf>), namely that the construction of the ATV road would violate the integrity of the World Heritage project and that practically the most important hiking trail in the Arctic would be sacrificed for the planned ATV road. When the WHC of UNESCO asked the Danish delegation, i.e. the applicant, about this, the delegation rejected it and replied: ["There are absolutely no plans to upgrade the Arctic Circle Trail to any kind of ATV or dirt road."](#) (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/163908>) According to UNESCO's statutes, our association does not have the status of a corresponding partner in this procedure, but only the Danish delegation as a state party. So we could not object to this. This changed after the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and we were able to appeal to UNESCO / WHC about the endangerment of the World Heritage Site due to the planned construction of the ATV road, and [request to be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger](#) (<http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/AplLoWHiD.pdf>). But on 5 June 2019, the WHC representative informed us [that she had forwarded our application to the Danish authorities](#) (<http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/AplLoWHiD.pdf>) for further processing. We have not received any response from them until now, except that an attempt was made to create a fait accompli and the construction of the ATV road started: In July 2020, the municipality of Qeqqata received permission of the government in Nuuk to start the construction of the ATV road. The permit initially contained a restriction: The road could only be built as far as the Kangerluarsuk-Tulleq fjord in consideration of the drinking water supply of Sisimiut. In the meantime, however, permission has been granted to continue construction as far as Sisimiut.

Road to Freedom - Propaganda and Reality

In Kangerlussuaq, construction of the ATV road started immediately in July 2020, following approval by the regulatory authority. However, as someone from Kangerlussuaq told me in the summer of 2020, the start of the project with the ATV road was apparently a big failure that did not come close to delivering what had been promised before. For example, it had been announced that the construction of 800 m of road per day was expected. The actual construction work, however, fell far short of these expectations. On the one hand, construction apparently did not proceed at the previously promised pace. And on the other hand, the costs may have threatened to get out of control.

Apparently, the management of the road construction project was under great pressure. Probably for this reason, an article in English about the road was published in the journal *"The Polar Connection"* of the *"Polar Research and Policy Initiative (PRPI)"* of 30.11.2020, which allegedly contains an interview with the mayor of Qeqqata, Malik Berthelsen, under the title ["The Arctic Circle Road: The Road to Freedom?"](#). At least writing it with a questionmark, is o.k. The article begins with a promising picture of the starting point of the road to freedom, which you can see here:



This photo is from the original link at https://polarconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IMG_2273-min-min.png. A year later, on 20 June 2021, I was there and took a photo of the same place. But the starting point of the "Road to Freedom" had changed its face, as you can see:

The ATV road near Hundesø 2021-06-20



By the way, in Danish the name "Road to Freedom" is "vejen til frihed", which in Denmark (and Greenland) is the title of the Danish version of the Nelson Mandela film "Long March to Freedom". And on the backside of the brochure on the construction of the ATV road, it is claimed that Prof. Minik Rosing gave the ATV road the title "vejen til frihed". Minik Rosing is very well known in Greenland. As a Greenlander, he is a professor of geology in Copenhagen and, together with Olafur Eliasson, melted twelve

blocks of ice from Greenland as a happening at the Paris World Climate Conference. In fact, however, two years earlier Laust Løgstrup, when he was still vice-director of the municipality of Qeqqata, had already called the ATV road "vejen til frihed" in Greenland's national newspaper "Sermitsiaq". Later, when he was project manager for the ATV road, it naturally looked better if someone like Minik Rosing had invented the name.

The start of the promised Road to Freedom

Allready at the start of building the ATV road, a profound change has taken place in the way the road was built. At first, the work still had a certain resemblance to the usual road construction methods: First, the grown humus surface and plant growth were removed from the future route of the road and the route was levelled. Then, a synthetic fabric was laid on top of it, which was approximately the width of the future road. A roadbed of stone chunks was then laid on top of this. And this was finally covered with a sand-like layer, which was then levelled. In this way, a road-like track was created, which one could have driven on at a walking pace in a car if necessary. However, this road construction already showed signs of erosion due to rainfall in the summer of 2020, a few weeks after construction, when there was still no traffic there. The following pictures show construction sections which were built in this way in the summer of 2020:



After not quite two kilometres, however, this method of road construction suddenly ended - I measured it with my steps: It was 1,625 steps. From then on, the road construction, if one still wanted to call it that, consisted of simply mowing down the plant growth on the marked route, just as happens when ATVs recklessly make their way through the wilderness in the tundra of Greenland, leaving permanent ruts. The only difference was that heavier vehicles than ATVs were used on the aforementioned route, and their tracks destroyed the plant growth correspondingly more clearly. Only

once in a while, namely when the terrain would otherwise have been impassable even for ATVs, were holes filled in or elevations levelled. Since most of the vegetation on the road has died off in this way, it usually appears grey to brown, while the vegetation to the left and right is still green.

Is this still road construction or already destruction of the landscape?

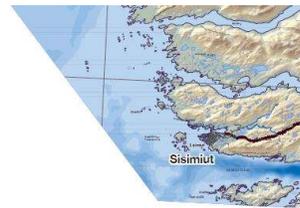
Of course, the road also crosses a number of rivers, streams and rivulets on the stretch from Hundesø to Kangerluarsuk Tulleq, which either carry water all the time or after rain or thaw. At not a single place that I have seen has a bridge been built over the rivers, streams and rivulets. This means that the ATVs have to cross the waters here, naturally sinking deep into the subsoil and thus leaving a trail of mire that is soon no longer passable even for ATVs. The next ATV then crosses the watercourse a bit above or below this spot. So what is supposed to be an ATV road soon becomes a very wide mud barrier.

For ethical reasons, I have not ridden along this route on an ATV and have only seen the structure called an ATV road in this way where it replaces the original construction style after the first two kilometres, where the hiking trail to Sisimiut crosses this route a little further on and where, a few kilometres north of the Eqalugaarniarfik hut, this structure continues on the original route (north route) of the hiking trail to its end. The latter stretch is about 50 km long. During my hike this year, my camera was damaged by water, so I was not able to take any photos of this section. The following five pictures, taken at the point where the hiking trail and the ATV trail meet, were sent to me by e-mail by a hiker who was there after me.





And compared to this, the advertisement in the municipality's brochure:



Arctic Circle Road —A GAME CHANGER



Arctic Circle Road between Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut is a game-changer, because:

- » Arctic Circle Road provides cheap, flexible and independent transport between two cities
- » Arctic Circle Road gives access to a large area
- » Arctic Circle Road secures the basis for hotel investments in Kangerlussuaq

In addition to Arctic Circle Road providing cheap, flexible and independent transport between two cities, it will allow tourists to visit two cities / destinations in Greenland far cheaper than now. Arctic Circle Road will give the opportunity to experience The Big Arctic Five with a combined stay in Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut. The advantage of cheaper transport is also attempted elsewhere in Greenland, with a focus on larger airports, but road transport not only provides cheaper transport like airports. Road transport allows the tourist operators

or tourists to carry out this part of the journey themselves, without being dependent on airlines' limited number of departures or the weather.

It will also provide possibilities for visiting even more cities than Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut, because if the transport here is cheaper, then a third city may also be visited for the funds that the tourist had chosen to prioritize on the Greenland tour. Now Iulusaat can for instance be visited in addition to Kangerlussuaq and Sisimiut. Or Sisimiut, if the tourist had prioritized Kangerlussuaq and Iulusaat.

In addition to Arctic Circle Road gives access to a larger area, it will allow for a travel experience through the landscape to special sights such as the UNESCO site at Aasivissut or the glacier at Aqutkitsoq. Thus, current inaccessible locations are made available, making a stay in Kangerlussuaq-Sisimiut a 5-day experience, for the tourist who might previously only choose to be 3 days in the region, divided into 2 days in

Can this still be stopped?

In earlier comments on the planned construction of an ATV road as a supposedly important transport link between Sisimiut and Kangerlussuaq, I still dealt intensively with the pseudo-arguments expressed there for the alleged economic importance of this "transport link". In view of the chutzpah with which an intervention in the landscape that destroys the environment and cultural heritage is passed off as an important transport link, a "game changer", a "road to freedom", etc., I am speechless. The pictures speak for themselves. I call for a stop to this before it is completely too late. On 11 June 2022, when I had not yet seen the construction called "ATV Road", I wrote a letter to Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. I call for sustained support for this protest.

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Please, read our

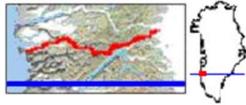
Letter to the Danish Prime Minister!

<http://www.polarrouten.net/dl/letter-stm-en.pdf>

Would you sign virtually this letter to the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen?

You can find an online signature form here:

<http://www.polarrouten.net/index.php?la=en&d=main/en&f=main/en/150.txt&p=4>



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