

# Field report from the journey to Northeast Greenland in the summer 1999

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Sandodden 1999

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[Danish version](#)

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## Introduction

NANOK's management can look back on the summer of 1999 with satisfaction, since we succeeded in carrying out the majority of our goals, which were:

1. renovating the station Germaniahavn on Sabine Island and do a field research of historically interesting localities in the area;
1. inspecting the cultural-historical collection on Sandodden at Daneborg and agree on the future location of the collection;
1. renovating the Hoelsbu station in Moskusoksefjord;
1. renovating the Myggbukta station

1. if possible, visit Alabama House on Shannon Island, including establishing a runway for the STOL aeroplane.

We succeeded in the tasks 1-4, hereby adding a further three stations to the list of cabins renovated by Nanok since 1991.

The good result of this year owes to several favourable conditions:

Firstly, the weather was good during the whole period, i.e. from 23 July - 18 August. Many days were quiet and sunny - ideal for both transportation and outdoor work.

The ice conditions were in general also satisfactory, although the ice at Mestersvig and near Sabine Island obstructed sailing until around 1 August. Furthermore, it proved useful that one Nanok man had been sent out ahead to Mestersvig to prepare the season's activities.

Last, but not least, planning and logistics were done in a very close and constructive co-operation with the local authorities, including with the Patrol Service North and North East Greenland, The Sirius Sledge Patrol, Forsvarets Vagt Mestersvig, and Danish Polar Center's logistics group in Mestersvig.

Originally it had been planned to send off only two Nanok teams, but since Nanok has for many years wished that the renovation of the old Norwegian main station, Myggbukta, should be carried out by a Nanok team of purely Norwegian staff, and when this wish suddenly became realisable in the spring 1999, the plans were quickly revised. It is thus a particular pleasure for Nanok to have accomplished this wish.

We are happy and also somewhat proud to have succeeded for the ninth year in a row to send "Nanoks" to North East Greenland - on a voluntary and honorary basis - to maintain the old buildings on the coast. Buildings, which not only have a culture-historical value, but which, are also a continuous joy and benefit for travellers in the region.

On behalf of Nanok

Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen

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### **Nanok team 1: SANDODDEN - GERMANIAHAVN**

After arrival on 24 July with C-130 to Mestersvig (MVG), we could - as planned - continue the next evening to Daneborg (DNB) with Twin-Otter (TWO).

We arrived in bright sunshine and a clear sky, and were very friendly received by Sirius staff and other good friends. For the four of us - Magnus, Claus (Tavse = the Silent, red.)), Hasse and Peter - it was a lovely reunion with Daneborg and Sirius, not least for the latter three of us, who, as former Sirius men, once had this place as our home. It was a great experience to see how nice and well

functioning Daneborg is and to re-discover the fantastic spirit of team work and hectic enterprise which still characterises the patrol unit.

We were installed in Sandodden, and after agreeing with Sirius on the time of assistance for the further transport to our final destination - Germaniahavn station on Sabine Island - we could spend the next three days readying our gear and construction material, tidying, stock-taking and reorganisation of Sandodden, as well as to estimate and decide on the future location of a historical collection, which according to plan should be established in year 2000 in connection with Sandodden.



Photo: Hotel Karina, where a historical collection will be established. Sandodden is seen in the background to the left.

In later years, Sirius has carried out a substantial extension and renovation of Daneborg. This has given the patrol ample new storage room and thus made it possible to leave the cabins Black Shed and Hotel Karina - situated close to Sandodden and Fur Shed - to Nanok. Seen in relation to the expected scope of the mentioned culture-historical collection, it was quite natural to pick Hotel Karina - the largest house apart from Sandodden - for this purpose. Sandodden, though, will be emptied as much as possible of "movables" and must in the future stand ready as habitation and base for Nanok's summer activities in the North region, as well as for other travellers, who will here get a realistic impression of what living in a real trapper cabin used to be like.

On 29 July Sirius' motor boat "Lone" was loaded to the rail with building material, and with Sirius "fup" Martin as captain, and Hans-Ole and Mikkel as crew, we sailed northward with course towards Germaniahavn. The day was sunny and we reached Cape Wynn without problems. Here, however, only a few kilometers from our target, the further journey was obstructed by a brim of compressed ice in the Clavering Strait. In spite of persistent efforts to find a way through the ice and scouting from the Cape Wynn mountain, we had to acknowledge that our path was blocked. We were therefore forced to return to Daneborg and unload the boat.

While waiting for a new opportunity to reach Germaniahavn, we could continue our work at Sandodden and its attached cabins. Here we made shelves for Skind Skuret and Sandodden, and welded new pasteboard on Sorte Skur. We could furthermore assist Sirius, e.g. help tending the fishing nets that the patrol had set out for Daneborg. The fish were cooperative, and within a few days we had caught 130 handsome chars.



After a comparison with an old photograph Sandodden regained its flagpole.

Then on 31 July this year's supply ship "Kista Arctica" arrived, and we had the opportunity to assist Sirius during the unloading activities. The ship was moored at Sandodden, a scenery much resembling an old photograph from 1937, where the sealer "Quest" was anchored in almost the same position. This photograph shows that Sandodden had a flag pole on the gable then. When the flag pole disappeared is unknown, but the photograph spontaneously lead to the idea of a re-installation, and soon the Danish flag once more waved over Sandodden on a provisional pole. With regard to flagging otherwise, the Greenland Home Rule has kindly sponsored Greenlandic flags to Nanok, and these are now used in connection with our work "in the field".



Photo: The helicopter surveillance to Germaniahavn showed that there were large, open holes in the roof. Inside, the walls were running.

On August 3 there was an opportunity to do some ice scouting to Germaniahavn with the helicopter from "Kista Arctica". This proved very useful, since it could now be confirmed that wind and current in the meantime had opened the ice for sailing all the way to Germaniahavn. At the same time, we got a very useful impression of the condition of the house and which tasks were waiting us there.

On August 5 we finally succeeded, helped by Sirius' motor boat "Dorthe", and the "fups" Niels, Sven and Henrik, in reaching Germaniahavn. Material and equipment were unloaded, and we could now begin our next mission.

Germaniahavn's condition was not hopeless, although very poor - running walls and a stench of mould. The combination of an unfortunate inner ceiling construction and a leaking roof have for several decades made the house practically uninhabitable from moisture. With now only six days left for the restoration, we concentrated our efforts on making the roof 100 % okay, so that the house becomes water-tight and usable, whereas we had to leave the finishing touch to future Nanok teams.





Photo: The old rotten wood from roof and ceiling were burned. The rotten boards were exchanged and the roof waterproofed with plywood plates.

Thanks to good weather we succeeded, and when we left Germaniahavn for good on 13 August, the house had a new, extra roof cover over the repaired plywood roof, and outermost a brand new cover of roofing felt. The pasteboard on the sides of the house were also repaired. On the inside, the damp ceiling of masonite and the rotten boards were removed. Walls and floors were washed clean of mould and dirt. A new stove was installed and the house was dried out.



Photo: A new stove has replaced the old, useless one. The oven was put to the test, to dry out the house thoroughly. The old ceiling plates were torn down, so that the beams are not visible. Floor and walls are washed clean of mould and dirt.

Already on 10 August the house proved its resistance during a wind that left 5-10 cm of snow - but only outside the house. It is our belief that Germaniahavn has now become a good and well-functioning house. The task for a future Nanok team lies in exchanging the pasteboard on the sides of the house (the necessary pasteboard is now on the site) and possibly repairing/exchanging the floor of the back room, which is rotten and only needfully mended with two left-over plywood plates.

During our stay in Germaniahavn we had a serious accident, which luckily ended well. While applying the roofing felt, Tavse cut himself in the wrist with a hobby knife. The wound was deep, and it was necessary for us to find additional medical care.

Fortunately, this was quickly taken care of via radio contact with Mestersvig, where Poul quickly and professionally packed the needed means in a barrel, which was dropped a few hours later from a TWO on its way from MVG to Zackenberg. The wound was closed with four stitches, and the patient was fully fit for fight already the next day.



Photo: Germaniahavn ready for use again - and we just made it before winter set in on 10 August. From the left: Hasse, Claus and Peter.

Plans to visit and register culture-historical, interesting localities in the Sabine Island area were unfortunately strongly minimised because of lack of time and ice conditions. It was therefore neither possible to reach Alabama House or Bass Rock.

We did, however, manage to investigate the Germaniahavn area, including finding and marking an app. 180 m long, acceptable STOL runway. It can be found on the GPS position: 74° 32'418"N, 018° 51'202"W on a flat, dry area in the bottom of Germaniahavn, and is marked by four stones painted red.





Photo: From the return trip from Germaniahavn to Sandodden. It was a great advantage that we had chosen to bring kayaks. On the whole stretch between Dronning Augusta Dal and Cape Berghaus the ice lay quite densely and close to the shores.

On 12 August we reached Hansa Bay and paid a brief visit to the old German station from World War II. Here - as later - it turned out to be a tremendous advantage that we had chosen to bring kayaks for transportation in the area. They were exactly able to pass between the dense drift ice, often in the very narrow and shallow waters by the coast, where neither motor or rubber boats could have gone through.

On 13 August we began our home journey to Daneborg. Via tent sites at Dr. Augusta Dal and Cape Borlase Warren, we arrived at Sandodden in the evening of 15 August. Also along this route the kayaks proved perfect means of transportation. The ice was once more pressed closely against the shore, and only in two places did we have to carry the kayaks over stretches longer than 100 m.

In connection with the journey we had, apart from sites in the Germaniahavn area, visited and by GPS precisely identified the following localities: Hansa Bugt hytten, Ingrid Havn, Hansa Bugt ruins, Koppernes Hytten, Gåsenes hytten, Liavåg, Augusta Dal hytten Hermannsbu, Borlase Warren hytten, Valdemars Håb, Borganes, Kap Herschell, Grønlænderhuset and Kap Berghaus hytten.



Photo: Cape Herschell station in the summer of 1999. The house in an advanced state of decay, and an expedient restoration is needed if the station is to be preserved.

On 18 August we struck the colours at Sandodden and flew by TWO via Ella Island to Mestersvig, from which we returned to Denmark on 19 - 20 August via Keflavik.

We give our warmest thanks to "fupper" and other good people at Daneborg and in Mestersvig for a really good summer!

Claus "Tavse" Birkbøll - Hasse Nielsen - Magnus Elander - Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen

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## **Nanok team 2: HOELSBU**

Jannik and Niels departed on 24 July with C-130 from Værløse to Mestersvig. Wagn had left three weeks earlier - to work as handyman in Mestersvig. We were accommodated at the Grand Hotel, where Wagn had till then lived alone.

When we arrived the ice had unfortunately not yet broken up in Kong Oscar Fjord, so sailing with "Agsut" was impossible for the time being. Each day we ice scouted from land, and otherwise made ourselves useful where we could. After well over a week the ice situation seemed to improve. The Mestersvig people launched their new rubber boat and took us scouting into the fjord. Still a lot of ice, but with a bit of caution we managed. We therefore decided to launch our ship the next morning - and succeeded, with great help from the Mestersvig people, with Dan behind the steering wheel of the loader tractor. Then we loaded Agsut with roofing felt, gas bottles, food supplies, etc.



Photo: The Hoelsbu team used the motor boat "Agsut" for transport to and from Mestersvig. Here the Blomsterbugten is visited.

Sailed on 1 August at 1 p.m. towards Cape Peterséns, where we arrived at 4.30 p.m. Here we picked up some tools and other gear which we had left last year. Great joy at seeing the station again! It is still in very fine condition. After a bit of supper we sailed on towards Ella Ø. Saw Kongeborghytten on the way. Had to give up Nordborghytten because of much ice. Arrived on Ella Ø early monday morning. Here we had a reception worthy of kings - with a large breakfast in "Pynten". Were offered to spend the night in "Ørnereden" which we accepted, since we had to do a minor rudder repair. Agsut was put on the beach at high tide, the repair done at low tide - and the boat launched again at next high tide.

Then departure towards Hoelsbu via Strindberg, where we landed Helle and Tommy at Nordfjordhuset. We also spend the night here - after a formidable salmon course at the night's beginning. Wednesday morning we pressed on towards Moskusoksefjord and Hoelsbu, in very nice weather over Nordfjord. Bright sunshine and glassy water - with Waltershausen Gletcher at port side.

On 4 August at 1 p.m. we anchored at Hoelsbu. On the same date 69 years earlier, the good ship "Veslekari" had anchored here to land John Giæver and Otto Johnsen with material to erect the trapping station.

On arrival we were met by the depot team from Ella Ø in motor boat "Ulla". Our luck! Not only did they unload all our gear with their rubber boat, they also dragged everything from the beach, over the bankside to the station. A big help for us seniors! After having said goodbye to the Sirius crew we made ourselves comfortable in the house - and went scouting in the area. We immediately had to acknowledge that it would be a hopeless task to straighten up the lopsided house, in spite of the jack we had brought along. We therefore re-arranged the bunk beds and the table in the living room a bit, to make them more or less horizontal.



Photo: Jannik on the roof of Hoelsbu. Especially the north side roof needed the repair badly.

We had been informed that the roof of Sirius' storage room was leaking. We therefore concentrated on the station's north side first. However, it turned out to be in poorer condition than first assumed. The roof boards on the north side of the main house had in many places crumbled or rotted away. Since we did not have any boards, we decided to sacrifice an old fur house, situated app. 200 m north of the station. The house was not up to much, but the boards were in fairly good condition. The roof beams on the main house were reinforced and new roof boards nailed on. Then new under-felt - and in the end top felt welded on. The top cover of the main house's north side was repaired, since it was partly rotten. A peat wall was dugged up and roofing felt prolonged to the bottom of the house. Furthermore we applied new under- and top felt on storage room, bath, coal room and workshop. In the workshop the roof was reinforced with a 4 x 4 inch beam, which we took from an old cage.





Photo: Before!



Much later!

We have also been looking for the grave of Knut Brandal, unfortunately without result. Knut Brandal died in Hoelsbu in 1933, and was buried at a stream bed 600 - 1000 m west of the station. We are convinced that the grave must have been washed into the fjord during a violent spring thaw.



In the beginning of our stay at Hoelsbu we had some problems with the water supply. The water in a small stream east of the station was very muddy and filled with mosquito larvae. Luckily, after some days ice floes stranded beneath the house. We managed to pull some of them above the high tide mark, and they gave us fine water for the remains of our stay.



Hoelsbu has again become a very fine station, which can be the basis of many good and cosy days stop by! From the left: Jannik, Wagn and Niels.

for Sirius crew and other good people happening to

On 14 August it was time to sail back to Mestersvig. On the way south we visited the following cabins: Nordfjordhuset, Strindberghuset, Kap Ovibos hytten, Ragnhildshytten at Grejsdal, Varg hytten in Blomsterbugten, Bjørnheimen (Nanortalik) and Maria Ø. We also sailed to Ella Ø on the home journey, and the welcome we received there early in the night we will never forget. A true firework display started on shore when Agsut entered the Solitaire Bay.

Monday morning we moved on to Mestersvig. We had planned to visit Bådhytten on Traill Ø on the way, but had to give it up because of ice and fog (an unfortunate combination!).

On 16 August at 10 p.m. we anchored in Nyhavn after a very successful trip. Here as well we were received warmly - by a car on the docks and refreshments in the Tower. The next couple of days were spent getting Agsut landed and made ready for the winter and driven to its winter quarters in the helicopter hangar. Finally, we made stock of Nanok's depots in Nyhavn. On 19 August we returned to Denmark by C-130 via Keflavik.

Although we did not accomplish all the things we had planned at Hoelsbu, we hope that what has been done this year will help this fine station give many more years of shelter for Sirius crew and other good people happening to stop by.

We give our warmest thanks for the great helpfulness and hospitality we have met at Mestersvig and Ella Island, and thank you for this year.

Wagn Kromann - Jannik Berntsen - Niels Lindegaard

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### **Nanok team 3: MYGGBUKTA**

The purpose:

Myggbukta (MYG) was first built in 1922 as a Norwegian trapping, weather and radio station, which was finally closed down in 1959. New buildings were erected in 1930 and it were these which Nanok team 3 should now restore and renovate. MYG was in its day the largest trapping station and building in North East Greenland (NEG), with a main house of app. 50 sq.m. as well as a first floor of app. 22 sq.m.

Until 1959 MYG was the "capitol" and meeting place for all Norwegian activities in NEG, and played a dramatic leading part during the Norwegian occupation in 1931-32.

The main house was in very poor condition and needed immediate repair.

Nanok team 3:

Nanok wished that a purely Norwegian team took care of renovating MYG, and the team consisted of:

Ivar Ytreland (73), trapper/fisher 1946-51, tourist 1996, Nanok team 1997 (Drøbak)

Thor Melhuus (70), professional photographer and outdoor man from Trondheim (Norway)

Øystein Killie (63), radio operator and chief of Hopen and Bjørnøya Radio, Slettnes (Norway).

The journey out and back:

We travelled with a regular airline from Oslo to Akureiry, where we arrived on 21 July in the evening. Flugfelag Iceland flew us to Mestersvig (MVG) and took us on 23 July almost to the doorstep of MYG in their Twin Otter (TWO). The trip back was on 17 August, and with an adventurous deroute via Daneborg (DNB) and Sandodden we were safely back in Oslo on 19 August. An efficient, fantastic and pleasant journey in clear weather over wonderful landscapes. App. 300 m from the station there is a quite natural runway for TWO which this summer was often used by plane and helicopter. A brand new two-wheel Nanok cart made all transport from the "airport" go swimmingly.

Equipment and supplies:

On arrival in MVG we were met by Wagn Kromann, Nanok team 2, who immediately took us to Nanok's storage rooms in Nyhavn, where we picked out food supplies and tools. Wagn already had a large quantity of materials and other equipment ready at the runway in MVG. Because of limited landing conditions in MYG, the TWO could not carry more than 1000 kg, incl. passengers, on the first flight, and it was uncertain when, and whether, there would be more flights. But after a short time we were practically flooded with equipment and supplies, and what else we needed we found at MYG.

Nanok, with solid back-up from Sirius, took good care of us in every way, the climax being when two Sirius staff, Poul and Lars, brought us a completely new stove and oven pipe, which they installed instead of the old one, an unrepairable wreck. We got what we needed, and we worked like donkeys, lived as barons and ate like horses. The satellite phone we had brought along worked okay.

MYG's condition:



Photo: This is what Myggbukta looked like shortly after arrival. Work has begun. The felt has been removed from the porch. The first lane of roofing felt has been nailed on to the south gable. The roof angle is measured.



Photo: Here the rottenness must be removed and new boards put in.

On the outside, seen from a distance, the station looked pretty well. Inside, it was a catastrophe of dirt, rot and peeling paint, still falling. The floors in lounge and kitchen, in total 22 sq.m., were in very poor condition and partly rotted away, and should be replaced as soon as possible.

After removing the remaining part of the outside roof and wall felt, as well as the dirt walls, the misery was revealed as large areas of rotten woodwork and loose wall plates, where the original, unfortunately blank nails had rusted away. These conditions were not visible from the inside, since MYG is built of 4x4 inch beams with outside and inside wood panelling, and the inner panel looked fine. The station has a total of 14 windows and nine doors, most of them in poor condition. Some winters, the station has been filled with snow! The area outside the station was marked by large quantities of wires and rope, and a lot of other scrap.

What we did:





Photo: Øystein cleans the kitchen ceiling of dirt and loose paint.



Photo: First phase accomplished. We take a step back to enjoy the sight of the new Myggbukta.



Thor builds a new dirt wall



"Oh yes, you have come to exactly the right place!" The pilot on the visiting plane is also Norwegian and son of former radio operator Egil Rogstad, who wintered as a radio man in Myggbukta 1938-39. He is flanked by Ivar - with the new Myggbukta sign - and Thor.

We removed the poor and rotten woodwork and replaced it with sound wood, taken from inner walls in the motor house and storage shed. Nailed on a new 2.9 mm under-felt and welded 4.3 mm

top felt on, a total of more than 40 rolls of felt. Mended and painted new outside barg boards, lists, door and window frames. Repaired and reinforced many windows and put in a large number of new plexi-glass. Installed and painted new window shutters, repaired and reinforced doors. Established new dirt walls and removed all wires and ropes. Secured motor house and storage shed for the winter. Inside, we scraped and washed roof and walls in lounge and kitchen and painted the ceiling in the lounge with the last bit of grey paint. Cleared inside and outside, and burned all old felt, rotten wood and other trash on the beach.



Photo: The Sirius guys Poul and Lars paid a visit and installed a new stove. From the left: Ivar, Poul, Øystein, Lars and Thor.

What still needs to be done:

The poor floors in lounge and kitchen must be removed and the site drained. New floors made of compregnated material be laid out. Several of the rooms and ceilings should be painted. Parts of the porches must have new felt in two-three years. The motor house is in good condition, the storage shed by the lake is bad, but can be repaired. We had neither time or material to do any work there.

Other conditions:

We had very fine weather and working conditions. Except from two-three days with clouded weather and a little rain, and one day with snow, the sun was shining almost all the time. Enormous swarms of mosquitoes (Myggbukta = Mosquito Bay) attacked during the first days. We saw several musk oxen, but not in groups. We saw a large and spectacular white arctic wolf inspecting the "airport" before disappearing in the mountains. We saw hares, fox and ermines, various sea and wading birds and large flocks of geese. We saw seal, but caught no salmon. All the time, and as far as we could see, the sea was packed with ice. We were often visited by planes and helicopters with various passengers, a.o. five oil geologists from Norsk Hydro, who find the geology here similar to the one found off the mid-Norwegian coast, where there is oil and gas!



From the cabin logbooks 1980-99 it becomes evident that MYG is popular and very used by many expeditions, scientists, tourists and trappers from Scoresbysund. Probably the most visited station in all of NEG - and free of charge!

#### Conclusion:

MYG is now in good condition and will be able to survive new decades. It will probably be used a lot, for free, in the years to come, by expeditions, scientists and others. It is easily accessible all year, the surrounding geography is enormous and it has many and good facilities and equipment. We hope Sirius can now use the station more often, thus also keeping an eye on its condition and its use.





Photo: Myggbukta seen from north-east the morning snow came. Autumn is near.

Finally:

We three Norwegians in Nanok team 3 had an absolutely wonderful time in MYG and NEG. We give our warmest thanks to Nanok's management for giving us this opportunity. We shall be happy to return. We thank Sirius and its chief for professional back-up and assistance. We wish Nanok all the best in its culture-historical preservation efforts in NEG.

Ivar Ytreland - Thor Melhuus

- Øystein Killie

Please also refer to our detailed final report, various sketches, supply lists, photos, etc.

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## Conclusion:

Nanok could not have carried out all these tasks without the great help and attention from all around us.

We wish to thank all our friends at Sirius Sledge Patrol, Patrol Service North and North-East Greenland, Forsvarets Vagt Mestersvig, Danish Polar Center's "tower owls" in Mestersvig and Royal Arctic Line. Furthermore a special thanks to Hans and Stig for technical support.



The warmest thanks to the many private persons, as wells and funds and trusts, who have made this expedition possible.



NANOK team 1999

Standing (from left): Wagn Kromann, Thor Melhuus, Ivar Ytreland, Jannik Berntsen, Øystein Killie and Niels Lindegaard.

Sitting (from left): Hasse Nielsen Staunstrup, Claus Birkbøll, Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen and Magnus Elander.

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List over North East Greenland stations repaired by Nanok 1991 - 1999:

| No. | Name         | Repaired year |
|-----|--------------|---------------|
| 438 | Zackenberg   | 1991 - 1992   |
| 350 | Loch Fyne    | 1993          |
| 425 | Sandodden    | 1994 - 1999   |
| 429 | Moskusheimen | 1994          |
| 514 | Ny Jonsbu    | 1995          |
| 510 | Hochstetter  | 1996 - 1998   |
| 308 | Kap Humboldt | 1997          |

|     |               |      |
|-----|---------------|------|
| 218 | Kap Peterséns | 1998 |
| 405 | Eskimonæs     | 1998 |
| 335 | Myggbukta     | 1999 |
| 356 | Hoelsbu       | 1999 |
| 447 | Germaniahavn  | 1999 |

Source: Station numbers and -names including historical information referred to:

Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen: *Nordøstgrønland 1908-60, fangstmandsperioden*. Danish Polar Center 1994.



## North East Greenland Company NANOK

Further information about Nanok and North East Greenland can be found at [NANOKs homepage](#)

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