



Kangia Icefjord, Greenland

Midway along the west coast of Greenland, the town of Ilulissat takes its name (*icebergs* in the Greenlandic language) from the profusion of icebergs that adorn the adjacent Disko Bay after emerging from the Kangia Icefjord. This is among the Arctic's most prolific sources of icebergs, because it is one of the main outlets from the Inland Ice (which is how the locals refer to their great icecap). Geophysical surveys have shown that the sub-glacial floor of the Greenland Icecap has a deep valley system feeding out to the head of the Kangia fjord, which itself is 1000 metres deep. Ice therefore flows this way, to the tune of 20 million tonnes per day, and continually pours out into Disko Bay. The smaller icebergs soon melt away, but the largest survive for longer as each can be hundreds of metres high and wide. They ride the current round the bay, then out into the Davis Strait to follow a grand loop northwards, before heading south into the Atlantic; it was probably an iceberg from Disko Bay that was encountered by the *Titanic*. During the Neoglacial, Kangia was a powerful glacier some eight kilometres wide reaching through the coastal mountains to the sea, but it has since retreated due to global warming. By 1850 the glacier front was 20 km inland, and it is now 60 km from the open sea, with its ice cliff almost in line with the main edge of the Inland Ice. But the entire length of the fjord is choked with a jumbled mass of icebergs all slowly moving towards the sea. Looking like a glacier from afar, Kangia is instead a beautiful sight with just patches of open water between its chaos of floating ice. Perched on a knoll of ice-scraped Greenlandic gneiss, this remote campsite on the southern side of the fjord was reached by a day's walk from the village of Ilimanaq; it provided a spectacular experience in an unusual variety of glacial wilderness. © **Photograph and text by Tony Waltham Geophotos**