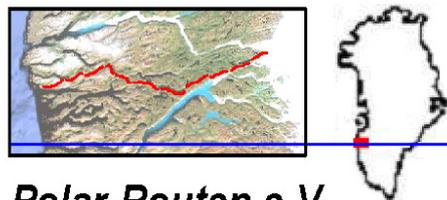


To
The Municipality of Qeqqata
City Hall
3911 Sisimiut



Polar-Routen e.V.

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Til Qeqqata Kommunia / To the Municipality Qeqqata
Rådhuset
3911 Sisimiut

Memorandum of hikers on the Arctic Circle Trail on the planned ATV trail between Sisimiut and Kangerlussuaq

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear citizens in Greenland,

as hikers who have traveled to Greenland during the summer of 2016 [2017] and some of us also during the last year, we heard about the plans of the municipality Qeqqata to create an all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) trail, which should extend to a significant part where now a hiking trail runs, i.e. the "Polar-Route" or "Arctic Circle Trail" (ACT). Among all people worldwide, who are enthusiastic about the Arctic nature, this hiking trail is well known as almost no other one, and it should remain so.

The municipality Qeqqata published plans on its website to build the ATV trail and may already start construction in summer 2017.

According to those published plans the ATV trail would coincide with the ACT for about half of the current hiking trail, concerning mainly the western part of the ACT. On about one-sixth of it - the section from Sisimiut to Kangerluarsuk Tulleq and a small piece at the east end - hikers and ATV would share the same route. On the section between Kangerluarsuk Tulleq and Eqalugaarniarfik, which is about a third of the ACT, the ATV trail would use the track of the present hiking trail, while the latter would be moved to the south, where it passes near Sarfannguit.

Qeqqata's report argues that an ATV trail along the Southern route would be too steep for ATVs to pass. The statement literally says that, with regard to slope angle and other characteristics, the ATV trail should be passable for an "average citizen and tourist". The municipality's report does not raise the question whether the envisaged Southern trail may be too steep or dangerous for a "average citizen and tourist" hiker. However, the second edition of the guide book "The Arctic Circle Trail" (in German)¹ explicitly warns hikers not to use this southern route. Apart from merely being a dotted line on the hiking map, the southern route is completely unsuitable for the average trained hiker, even dangerous. The book says literally² (translated from German):

"On the one hand, hikers often (involuntarily) disturb locals in the exercise of their profession (hunting / fishing). On the other hand, the main path [through the valley Nerumaq] is undoubtedly the safer option, not only with regard to the trail

¹) Grönland: Arctic Circle Trail, Outdoor, 2004, 2nd. edition 2014, page 79 f. The southern route in the plan for the ATV-trail departs for some km from that described in the book. At time we cannot estimate, what differences this might cause.

²) Grönland: Arctic Circle Trail, Outdoor, 2004, 2nd. edition 2014, page 79 f.:

"Nicht selten stören Wanderer, zum Teil aus Unkenntnis, die Einheimischen bei der Ausübung ihres Berufs (Jagd/Fischerei). Zum anderen stellt der Hauptweg [durch das Tal Nerumaq] zweifellos die sicherere Wegvariante dar. Dies hängt nicht nur mit den Steinmännchen und den vorhandenen Trampelpfaden zusammen, die eine Orientierung erleichtern, sondern auch mit dem zu begehenden Gelände. Insbesondere einige Teilstücke der südlichen Variante des Weges, die direkt am Fjord (Imertuninnguaq/Amerloq) verlaufen, sind nicht nur strapaziös, sondern stellenweise extrem steil bis nicht passierbar. Nicht nur bei schlechtem Wetter und feuchtem Untergrund können Sie hier in ausweglose und **lebensgefährliche Situationen** geraten. ... Von unserer Seite sei somit an Sie die ganz eindeutige Bitte herangetragen: Bitte respektieren Sie die Anliegen der einheimischen Bevölkerung und bringen Sie sich selbst nicht unnötig in Gefahr. Wählen Sie daher den markierten und in der Karte als Polar-Route bezeichneten Hauptweg."

*marks and the existing beaten tracks that facilitate orientation, but also with regard to the terrain itself. In particular, some parts of the southern trail option, which run directly along the fjord (Imertuninnguaq / Amerloq), are not only exhausting, but at times extremely steep if not impassable. Conditions can easily become hopeless and **even life threatening**, even without bad weather or damp surfaces ... We thus request you to please respect the concerns of the local population and not bring yourself unnecessarily in danger. Therefore, select the main path, which is marked and designated as Polar Route in the map."*

This is not only the opinion of the authors of this Tour-Guide. Hikers, who have experienced the southern 'alternative' to the main route of the Arctic Circle Trail have confirmed this information. Taking this for granted we do not consider it as acceptable to move the present hiking trail to the southern route, to make room for ATV trail.

The public statement, which calls the southern route from Kangerluarsuq Tulleq to Eqalugaarniarfik an alternative to the present hiking trail from our point of view conveys the wrong picture to the public. The offered alleged alternative is no real alternative, because it is impassable for the hiking "average citizen and tourist". By all practical means, the hiking trail would be sacrificed to the ATV trail.

Besides that the ATV trail will obviously cause significant harm to the landscape. We remind of the significant damage that has been done to the short section between the Maligiaq and the dam construction site above the hut Eqalugaarniarfik by ATV traffic of the workers. The road there looked like a gaping wound, and it took years for modest plant growth to reappear.

On top of that, the economic reasons brought forward in support of the ATV trail are in our view not supported by facts. Neither do the modest economic benefits justify such damage, nor are the arguments of such economic benefits convincing.

The council member Marius Olsen, responsible for living resources, supports his case for the ATV trail mainly by means of economic reasons. In his view, ATVs may bring significant economic benefits to transport of passengers and cargo. They may serve tourism, encourage the exchange of products between the inland and the coast, grant cheap access to Kangerlussuaq International Airport and so help Sisimiut open the door to the world. These reasons, however, are not convincing to us. So far we have not met a single tourist traveling Greenland by ATV. The same applies to "cargo" based on ATV and the hoped-for "opening the door to the wide world" by means of ATV.

Next to the fishing, tourism is the most important economic source of Greenland. We fear a decisive drop in tourism not only with regard to the southern trail-variant near Sarfannguit. Additionally, there is also a psychological aspect, which can in fact be observed for comparable hiking-trails all over the world. None of them, as we see it, runs parallel to a highway, railway-line etc. Insofar the absence of a street or other traffic-connection on land is a mental precondition for the touristic attraction of the Polar-Route.

On the one hand, hikers may refrain from travelling to Greenland or Qeqqata, respectively, because it loses its appeal due to the ATV trail. On the other hand, they may also avoid the hazardous hike over the southern route via the Sarfannguit area. We estimate that the ATV trail project will cause a negative impact on tourism for Greenland in general, and for Qeqqata in particular.

Without doubt, transport links to the coast as an alternative to air transport during the summer would be important for Kangerlussuaq. But to us, reuse of local shipping lines along the coast seems to be a far better option than an ATV trail. We propose to establish a shipping line for passengers and freight circulating at least once a week between Sisimiut and Kangerlussuaq with connection to Sarfannguit and Ililleq. Of course, such shipping line needs public support and especially good marketing. But costs for that will be far lower than annual maintenance costs for the ATV trail, even ignoring its one-time construction costs. The cited study of the municipality Qeqqata is quite silent about these ongoing maintenance costs. A shipping line would not only be significantly cheaper, it also would leave neither environmental traces, as ATVs do, nor comparable damages to the living resources of the municipality Qeqqata. A shipping line could further become a first class tourist attraction, much like attractions such as the Norway cruises through the Sogne or Geirangerfjord or with Hurtigruten.

With our memorandum we appeal to politicians and citizens in the municipality Qeqqata to drop plans for an ATV trail. We still hope that one day our children will be able to hike on the Polar-Route/Arctic Circle Trail.

The memorandum was opened for signing in July 2016 in Greenland (Kangerlussuaq) for hikers on the Polar Route and completed the following year with 300 signatures. In January 2017 it is presented with 214 signatures together with the result of a counting of the hikers on the Polar-Route - 1,290 in a year - to the municipality Qeqqata. An answer is still awaited (August 2017).