Discovering 'Snowball Earth'

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GAINS Svalbard Expedition, Spring 2011

Three members of the Geosystems Group recently took part in an expedition to north east Svalbard as part of the NERC funded 'GAINS' (Glacial Activity in Northeastern Svalbard) project lead by Prof. Ian Fairchild.

The field party was Dr. Carl Stevenson, Dr. Emily McMillan and Ed Fleming from Birmingham, Prof. Doug Benn from the University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) and Dr Peter Wynn from Lancaster University.

With the support of the UNIS logistics department the team travelled on snow scooters to their camp site 120km from the nearest town and spent 12 days camped on a remote glacier. The daily routine involved covering up to 10km on the scooters to visit the field sites, mapping, logging and sample collection.

The aim of the expedition was to carry out reconnaissance on a series of nunataks where Neoproterozoic rocks that are exposed are thought to represent "Snowball Earth" conditions 650 million years ago.

The field party faced some challenging weather conditions and some tricky terrain where mountaineering skills were put to the test! The work was an overall success and now the group are planning for the longer, more detailed summer fieldwork season during July and August.

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