

= Ice block expedition of 1959 =

The ice block expedition of 1959 (Norwegian : isblokkekspedisjonen) was a publicity stunt carried out by the Norwegian insulation material producer Glassvatt (today called Glava AS) . Responding to a challenge from the radio station Radio Luxembourg , Glassvatt decided to equip a truck to bring a three @-@ ton block of ice from Mo i Rana by the Arctic Circle , to Libreville by the Equator . There was no form of refrigeration applied , and the expedition was intended to display the efficiency of the insulating glass wool used . The truck also brought 300 kg of medicines to the hospital of Albert Schweitzer in Lambaréné .

The expedition then was followed by a worldwide press corps , and great crowds of spectators gathered in various European cities along the route . Crossing the Sahara , where the truck repeatedly got stuck in the sand , proved both a dangerous and laborious task . Once the truck had made it through the desert , however , and reached its final destination , it was revealed that the ice block had lost no more than 11 % of its original weight . The expedition was an enormous success , judged both by the end result and by the media attention generated for the company , and has been called " the world 's greatest publicity stunt " . To mark the 50th anniversary of the event in 2009 , the company made the original documentary of the expedition available online . They also released a new interview with the expedition 's leader Sivert Klevan , who was 84 years old at the time of the interview .

= = Background and preparations = =

In the autumn of 1958 , Radio Luxembourg launched a challenge to transport three tons of ice from the Arctic Circle to the Equator . The radio station would award 100 @,@ 000 francs for each kilogram (at the time , US \$ 202 @.@ 55 per kilogram ; \$ 1 @,@ 487 @.@ 19 or ? 1 @,@ 120 @.@ 19 per kg in 2009 currency) that remained at the destination ; the only condition was that no form of refrigeration should be used . Managing director Birger Natvik at the Norwegian insulation material company Glassvatt (today Glava AS) saw the announcement and suggested that the company take on the challenge . He estimated that by isolating the ice with glass wool (" glassvatt " in Norwegian) made from fibreglass , the driver could make several million francs . Once Radio Luxembourg realised the potential loss , they retracted the offer . By this point , however , the planned expedition had received so much attention that Glassvatt decided to go through with it anyway . Among the other sponsors were Shell , who provided the fuel , and Scania , who provided the truck . Altogether , sponsors from eight countries financed the expedition , including Glassvatt 's French mother company , the Saint @-@ Gobain corporation . The French sponsors wanted a French truck to be used , but the Norwegians insisted on a Scandinavian one . The latter position won through , and a Scania @-@ Vabis was selected for the task . The expedition 's leader later admitted that a French truck probably would have been more suitable for driving in the desert . On 22 February 1959 , at 9 : 15 am , the expedition left Mo i Rana .

Responsibility for the expedition was given to Sivert Klevan , an engineer with a good instinct for public relations . The ice was to be procured from the glacier Svartisen , and a glaciologist was brought along to give advice . It soon became clear that the entire three @-@ ton block could not be brought out in one go . Instead , 200 kg blocks were cut out with a chainsaw , carried away on a sled , and flown by helicopter down to the town centre . There they were melted together to make a block of ice weighing 3 @,@ 050 kg . The block was placed in a specially constructed iron container , which was insulated with wood and glass wool . The container was placed on top of a truck that would carry it all the way to the Equator , accompanied by a van carrying equipment and a sedan with a film crew .

= = Through Europe = =

The first stop for the expedition was Oslo . There it was greeted by a great ceremony at Studentertunden in front of the University . The truck was loaded with 300 kg of medicines , to the

value of NOK 50 @, @ 000 . These medicines were to be delivered to the hospital of humanitarian Albert Schweitzer in Lambaréné , near the final destination of Libreville , the capital of Gabon . From Oslo the expedition continued to Helsingborg in Sweden and Copenhagen in Denmark , where more medicines were brought along . For public relations purposes the expedition made its way through several European cities ? including Hamburg , Cologne , The Hague and Brussels ? and was received with ceremony and much attention everywhere . In Belgium a problem arose over a missing customs declaration for the ice , but this was solved when a customs official agreed to accompany the cars through the country . Klevan later received a personal apology for this inconvenience , conveyed by the Norwegian foreign minister Halvard Lange from Lange 's Belgian colleague and personal friend .

In Paris the expedition was escorted by police through the streets , and the crew members were invited to dine with the mayor . From Paris the truck continued to Marseille . There it was lifted aboard the freighter " Sidi Mabrouk " , that sailed the cargo to Algiers . In Algiers a special crane had to be obtained to lift the truck ? weighing a total of sixteen tons , including the ice ? onto the shore . The container was drained at this point to see how much of the ice had melted . In spite of unusually hot European weather for the season , only four litres of water had been shed .

= = Crossing the Sahara = =

Crossing the Sahara was considered particularly perilous at the time because of guerilla forces hiding in the mountains . The medicines carried by the truck would have been valuable loot for these groups , and for the first part of the desert the expedition was accompanied by the French Foreign Legion . The instruction the men received was " No stops , drive for your lives , even if you get a flat tire . " The crossing passed without violent incidents , however , and greater problems were presented by the elements . There were no roads in the desert , and the truck was heavily loaded and not especially adapted to the conditions . Several times it got stuck in the desert sand ; the crew had to place steel plates underneath for traction and spend hours digging out the sand from under the wheels . This took a great toll on the men , who had a limited supply of water , in temperatures approaching 50 ° C. The crew spent most nights in oases along the way , but on occasion also slept in sleeping bags in the sand .

At one point the expedition met a tribe of Tuaregs and greeted them by offering their camels water from the container . According to the commentary in the documentary film , the camels had never tasted anything as delicious as the Norwegian glacier water . This was not entirely true ; the water was contaminated by the glass wool and tar paper , and it was barely drinkable . The expedition arrived at the Hoggar Mountains near the Tropic of Cancer after fourteen days of travelling . A measurement at that point showed a loss of 96 litres of water . Once the Sahara was traversed , after 7 @, @ 500 km (4 @, @ 660 mi) of driving , 177 litres had melted away . On average 15 litres melted each day in the desert .

= = Arrival and aftermath = =

After approximately three weeks , the expedition arrived in Lambaréné and met with Albert Schweitzer . Klevan later described the meeting with Schweitzer as the greatest moment of the entire expedition . Later , the hospital received 500 kg of Norwegian klippfisk (dried and salted cod) , a particular favourite with the hospital 's patients . The medicines were handed over , and the container was opened . Even though the drainage had been monitored throughout the expedition , there was still great excitement associated with seeing the result firsthand . The block of ice turned out to be almost entirely intact .

The expedition arrived at its final destination of Libreville on 21 March , after twenty @-@ seven days . The block of ice was found to weigh 2 @, @ 714 kg ; it had lost only 336 kg along the way . Though it was unclear how much time the expedition would take , Klevan had initially estimated a loss of 10 % ; the end result was approximately 11 % . A French representative of the company met the crew in Libreville . A personal friend of President Charles de Gaulle , he presented an offer to

drive the ice back to Paris . If the crew accepted , the President himself would have received the crew under the Arc de Triomphe . The men , however , were too exhausted at that point to contemplate such an offer . Instead , arrangement were made for the vehicles to be brought back by freight , while the crew would fly home . The ice was cut up and divided between the citizens of Libreville , for whom this was a rare commodity . Klevan , always conscious of promotional opportunities , brought a portion of the ice back home with him . This ice was subsequently used in drinks served to journalists at the première of the expedition documentary back home in Oslo .

The expedition had been an enormous success , both in accomplishing the goal it had set out to accomplish , and by generating worldwide press coverage for the company and its product . The venture was reported on as far away as India . In 1979 , Oslo Marketing Association commemorated the ice block expedition with a special event titled " The world 's greatest publicity stunt " . To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the event in 2009 , Glava AS made the original documentary of the expedition available online . They also released a newly recorded interview with Sivert Klevan , who by that time was 84 years old .