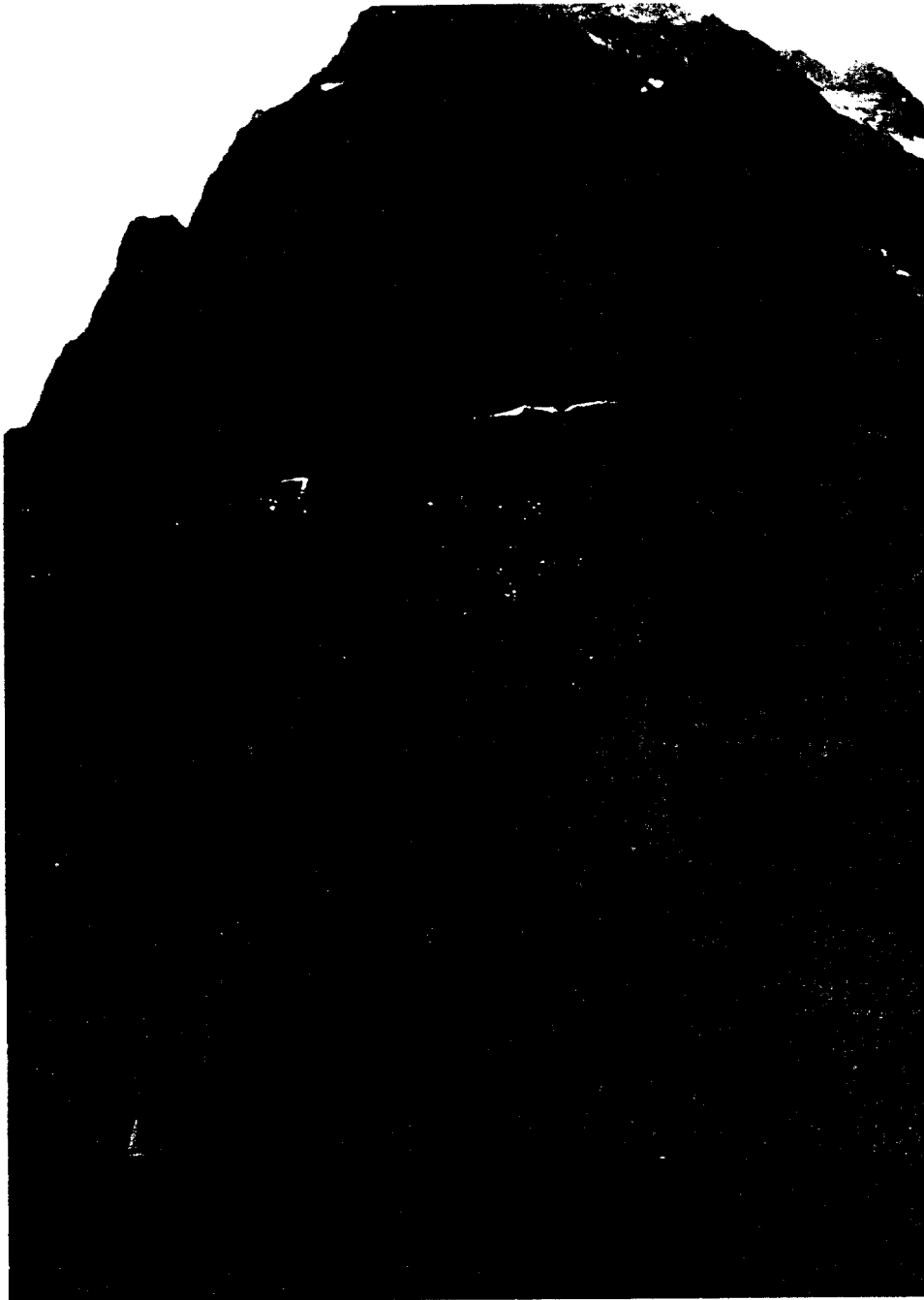


# THUMBNAIL 2000 EXPEDITION



## FINAL REPORT

Supported by The British Mountaineering Council  
Mount Everest Foundation  
The Sports Council  
The North Face UK  
Isis Technology  
Kelloggs UK

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## Expedition Summary

The Thumbnail 2000 expedition's prime objective was to make the first ascent of the face of Agdlerussakasit (1750m) otherwise known as The Thumbnail. The expedition hoped to make a completely free ascent with no drilled protection or belays.

The expedition succeeded in it's objective making the first and first free ascent of The Thumbnail with difficulties up to E6 6b. We thought the face would be big although the reality proved even more impressive than expected with our altimeters reading 4490ft on summit. At roughly 1350m this is one of the largest sweeps of rock in Greenland and as a sea cliff must be amongst the largest in the world. The ascent was made over 7 days with 5 1/2 days actually climbing and no drilled protection used. A small amount of rope was fixed occasionally between camps and above the half height ledge to assist the summit push.

Unfortunately within an hour of reaching the summit the expedition was hit by tragedy as Matthew Bransby, a member of the support team, was killed in an abseiling accident on a small peak opposite The Thumbnail. He had ascended the peak with Sandy Ogilvie to observe the success on the Thumbnail and it is presumed that during his descent the rope slipped off a blunt rock spike being used as an anchor. The Thumbnail team continued their descent and assisted with the recovery of Matthew's body. The Expedition returned to the UK as soon as was practically possible and 2 weeks early.

The sadness and loss of a good father, friend and climbing companion dominate the team's feelings concerning the expedition. The team is however proud of it's ascent of the Thumbnail and all felt it had been a privilege to visit this beautiful and relatively unexplored area; one that has superb potential.

## Team Members

**Ben Bransby.** 20 years old, Ben is already acknowledged as an exceptional rock climbing talent particularly in the area of bold onsight new routes and repeats. E9 new routes and a batch of E7 onsights have been coupled with an interest in wider adventures within climbing with an impressive first trip to the Alps last year. This would be Ben's first expedition.

**Matthew Bransby.** Father of Ben, 54 year old Matthew was the eternal enthusiast with a 39 year obsession with climbing including new routing and trips to Kenya, the Alps and the US. Matthew would be part of the support team assisting with the boat travel to the base of the cliff and remaining in radio contact with the wall team. He would also explore the area and make a series of 1-day climbs.

**Matt Dickinson.** Aged 28, Matt is the expedition veteran of the trip with many previous trips to Pakistan and Russia. Big mountains haven't slowed him down though with E6 rock ability alongside Scottish VII and ED3 ability Matt is one of the UK's strongest all round performers.

**Sandy Ogilvie.** 44 years old Sandy, combines his successful business Urban Rock with a life long passion for all aspects of climbing from 7c+ sport routes to Chalk EDs and Grade 6 ice. Sandy would be part of the support team and explore the area for 1-day new routes.

**Ian Parnell.** Nominal expedition leader, Ian at 31 is the old man of the wall team. Recent expeditions to Kyrgystan had yielded 8 new routes and a month previously a trip to Alaska led to a 1500m new ED4. It was hoped this spell of expedition good luck would run on in Greenland.

**Gareth Parry.** 26 year old "Gaz" would accompany Ben as the team's secret rock weapons. With E8 new routes, E7 onsights, 8b+ on bolts and 8a+ flashed it was hoped Gaz would have most angles covered. This would be Gaz's first expedition.

## Expedition Timeline

Luton - Reykjavik	24 July
Keflavik - Narssarssuaq	25 July
Narssarssuaq - Nanortalik	26 July
Nanortalik - Base Camp	27 July
First Attempt on Thumbnail	29 July
Second Successful Attempt	31 July
Base Camp - Nanortalik	7 August
Nanortalik - Narssarssuaq	7 August
Narssarssuaq - Keflavik	8 August
Reykjavik - Luton	9 August

## Expedition Details Outward Journey

We flew from Luton to Reykjavik, Iceland with British Airways GO; a new service considerably cheaper than previous alternatives. We had previously booked by the internet the Reykjavik International Youth Hostel and arrived at about 1am to find that our beds had been "sold" to others. It took the highly competent staff an hour and a 1/2 before they could sort us out alternatives. Lesson - reconfirm your booking on the day of the flight. The next lesson involved finding that there were two separate international airports in Reykjavik. The one called Reykjavik is actually 1/2 hour outside of the city while the city airport is called Keflavik and is the one used for flights to Greenland. We scoped out appropriate nightlife for our return celebrations but abstained on the outward journey due to the huge price of everything.

We had found booking outward tickets very difficult with warning of severely over-booked flights; the reality was very different with the flight to Greenland with Iceland Air only 1/3 full. We manage to catch some inspiring views over the icecap of remote huge walls before landing at the rather desolate Narssarssuaq airport. Here we found that our pre-booked helicopter tickets were actually for a company that only operates on the East Coast. To complicate matters further the new tickets were three times as expensive and there were no representatives from Iceland Air based at the airport. Instead we were forced to deal with an incredibly severe "lady" from Greenland Air. Luckily Matthew's credit card came to the rescue! The only hitch being that there were no flights that day so we were put up in the local hotel, which was modelled from the film "The Shinning". A dedicated bus service provided transport for the 300yards from the airport to the hotel. There were further delays due to repairs and fog before the helicopter was able to start its journey to Nanortalik. We had fretted about the 20kgs limit (inc. hand luggage) and various crucial items such as Sandy's two bags of porridge had to be discarded at the weigh in back in the UK. Again the reality proved quite different with seemingly no attention paid to weight limits.

We were met at Nanortalik landing pad by Niels, the Danish tourist officer, who proved very helpful. We stayed in the tiny hostel (room for 10-12 max) in the old historic quarter of town. This seemed reasonable value to me although Polish and French teams had camped on the outskirts of town. I guess if you are Poles you've got an excuse but I feel there is a question about supporting the local economy here. That afternoon we shopped for food and fuel, the

local supermarket was very well stocked with fresh fruit and veg, fresh bread, noodles, rice etc, cheese, milk, eggs plus lots of nibbles. The shopping crux came when we tried to pay for the £470 worth of food. Despite having checked by e-mail that it was possible to use a credit card this turned out not to be the case, we had also been told there was not a bank. We found this also to be a little misleading as there was infact a cash machine with a maximum withdrawal of £250, seen as we also had still to settle the boat hire by cash we had to pool our card resources. Several of us including our esteemed leader had conveniently forgotten their numbers, which meant that once again Matthew's card came to the rescue. The following morning we set off after loading our pre-shipped blue barrels on the chartered fishing boat. The Greenland skipper turned out to be a real character and wove in and out of the islands in the 4-hour trip to the Torssukatak Sound. While keeping a look out for a landing and camp spot he steered the boat underneath the Thumbnail which gave us an excellent chance to check out lines. We settled on a camp spot directly opposite the cliff on Pamiagdruk island with a sheltered inlet for the dinghy and a water source fairly close by.

## The Climb

On the morning of 29th July we made our first attempt ferrying the team across in three trips of the dinghy. The first two pitches gave reasonable climbing which proved trickier than expected due to the fact that our star rock climbers decided to climb in trainers. The next few pitches were easier although there were delays as the rope work with a team of 4 was taking some getting used. We found good ledges at about 200-250m where we decided to set up the first camp. Ben led a final pitch that evening, above the camp; a fine s-shaped crack and airy moves into the arete and grooves left of the central arch in the lower wall. The camp was set up on two levels, with the night being the first spent in portaledges for 3/4s of the team. Unfortunately it proved a bit of a baptism of fire with something of a deluge of rain and very strong updrafts which lifted and rattled the ledges about. The morning confirmed our fears with the wall cascading with water. We decided to retreat fixing 4 ropes and leaving our ledges. The pick up went smoothly due to the ease of radio contact with the base camp team, the only worries provided by a 30ft Orca (Killer Whale) that circled the boat.

Ian was certain that the wall would take days to dry and so spent the following day exploring the island with Sandy and Matthew, however the others were more optimistic and returned to the wall finding it climbable and managing another 3 pitches. On the 31st July we returned for another full-scale attempt regaining our high point and adding another 5 pitches. The climbing was proving slightly easier than expected but of excellent quality; superb granite and compelling cracks or corners. The day ended however with exceptions to the above. Ian begun leading from the 12th belay, its always the thirteenth pitch isn't it that provides the spice! The pitch involved a short struggle with an offwidth before ending at a fairly spacious ledge above a superb straight in hand crack calved the smooth wall above. This went at a strenuous E3 to a shallow corner with a terrifying hollow flake the size of a door but little more than an inch in thickness. Attempts to climb this only ended in a horizontal crack appearing halfway up the flake. Frantic emergency procedures and Gaz was brought up to belay over to the left far away from the drop zone while Ben and Matt hid behind the haulbags. The eventual trundle would have sunk any ships along the Thumbnails base let alone cut the ropes. Here we decided to call it a day and tied off the ropes to set camp up on the spacious ledge.

The following morning Ian was called on again to finish the job and aided to the top of the pitch preparing the way for a redpoint ascent, this was accomplished by Ben with the minimum of fuss, first go, at E6 6b. Above further tricky ground saw Gaz off route with E5 climbing and big fall potential, a hasty retreat let Matt take over and find the breakthrough to

below the overhangs guarding the "half height ledge". Ben found these surprisingly reasonable at E2. The hauling however was far from reasonable at this point. With a horrendous double haul followed by the ropes jamming and Ian volunteering to descend and sort the mess 4 rope lengths below. It was dark therefore before all the team made it to the ledge. This however proved an ideal staging post for the steep upper tower. The next day it was decided to fix our ropes as high as possible to leave a lightweight push possible for the summit the following day. Ian and Matt went first fixing 4 pitches, including an inspired lead from Matt over similar terrain to Cloggy's Midsummer Nights Dream with a similar dearth of protection. Ben and Gaz fixed another 3 pitches encountering some of the few sections of poor rock on the route.

Unfortunately the planned summit day was postponed by a day of rain. Again the Thumbnail dried rapidly to provide a summit opportunity on the 4th. Starting at 6am the team reached the top of the fixed ropes 3 hours later. The next pitch was the steepest on the route with dramatic laybacking by Matt. Above Ian shook his way through a fine Gogarth Yellow Walls style E3 and easier ground above. This led, not without interest, for another 4 pitches to a sudden culmination with a mantel onto the summit. This proved to be a narrow fin like ridge in places 6 ft wide offering incredible views across acres of big walls stretching out to the ice cap. We were able to share our celebrations with Matthew and Sandy who had climbed a small peak behind base camp and could see us clearly as we spoke on the radio.

## Descent and Accident

We spent just under an hour on the summit ridge, soaking up the amazing views across oceans of rock onto the ice cap, before beginning our descent at 5.30pm. We had a large amount of black one inch wide webbing which was non-tubular and rather flimsier than normal climbing tat. We had carefully left anchors on many of the upper towers belays equalising two point anchors with the webbing. Our first abseil was around a large spike on which we backed up the webbing with a standard sling. The second to descend I swung over the edge only for the others to animatedly declare that the webbing was about to snap. At first I thought they were joking before they persuaded me to climb back up. We found that the webbing was totally incapable of taking any kind of weight and would stretch and tear under any load. We had pre equipped many of the belay stations with this tat on the way up and now were forced to remove this and use proper climbing tape. We became somewhat paranoid about safety after this and bounce tested rigorously every piece, using double anchors plus back-ups. In view of what was to come this now seems like the correct level of concern.

We had agreed to radio in that evening at 9pm but from then until we reached the halfway ledge camp at 10.30pm we received no response. We took apart the radio and changed batteries to no avail. We had also noticed some disconcerting lights around base camp. At 8am the following morning we did receive radio contact from Sandy with the terrible news that Matthew had died the previous evening during the descent from their peak. It seems likely that while abseiling his rope looped round a blunt spike had rolled off and he fell the 1000ft length of the mountain. Sandy was able to descend with difficulty and then use the inflatable to raise help from another British team camped on the other side of the sound and also locals in Augpilagtoq (who contacted the Police). We were obviously very shocked and distressed and decided the most important thing was to get Ben off the mountain as soon as and as safely as possible. Gaz accompanied Ben with two ropes and a rack with Ian and Matt following with two haulbags full of as much gear as they could carry. The bottom of the descent gully proved pretty serious with the team forced to abseil off the side of the glacier about 40ft before climbing out again. Both teams were met by boat by Sandy and villagers who were helping from Augpilagtoq.

## **Return Journey**

The rescue services were able to retrieve Matthew's body by helicopter on the 5th August. They were also able to take Ben and Sandy to Nanortalik to assist with the arrangements for our early departure. After Ben and Sandy had flown out in the rescue helicopter, the three remaining members of the team decided to take the dinghy and visit the other British team for the night before returning to The Thumbnail to remove the remaining gear. The following morning there were further problems when we found that a storm that evening had flooded the dinghy and the petrol tank had floated away! This meant the team had little option but to abandon the remaining gear on the mountain and wait for Ben and Sandy to return with the fishing boat. The boat arrived on the 7th with flares proving necessary to attract their attention in thick fog. Niels had been able to arrange a flight for us that afternoon to Narssarssuaq and on to Iceland. We then had to buy extra tickets (covered by insurance) on Iceland Air to make the final leg back to the UK.

## **Recommendations**

This area offers immense potential. Those in search of big wall routes will find the Torrsukatak Sound a paradise of opportunities. From the summit ridge of The Thumbnail we could see a hundred or more substantial rock walls. Notably it seems much of the rock is better featured than the Tasermuit Fjord for free climbing having copious crack systems for natural protection. Those looking for aid technicalities should look to the right-hand upper wall of the Thumbnail as well as some promising big walls further up the sound beyond Augpilagtoq. The island of Pam has one of the best walls in the area dubbed Flat Top. Although only "500m" this should give superb 12-15 pitch routes from E4 upwards. The area is riddled with alpine rock ridges, spires and unclimbed peaks, although the rock is often fractured and loose on this easier ground.

When making the travel arrangements for this trip we enlisted the help of the Nanortalik Tourist Office who were a great help. Arrangements were made by e-mail booking our boat, dinghy and accommodation. Their help was also vital in the recovery of Matthew's body and our evacuation.

## **Contacts**

Nanortalik Tourist Service - Niels Taekker Jepsen - Hostel Nanortalik and Boat arrangements  
(Greenland) 61 36 33  
nanortalik@greennet.gl

Greenland Air - Helicopter Narssarssuaq to Nanortalik  
61 32 88

Air Iceland -Iceland to Greenland  
(Iceland) 570 3030  
[www.airiceland.is](http://www.airiceland.is)

GO - UK to Iceland  
08456 054321  
[www.go-fly.com](http://www.go-fly.com)

Lemans - Freight and shipping to Nanortalik  
01274 693231

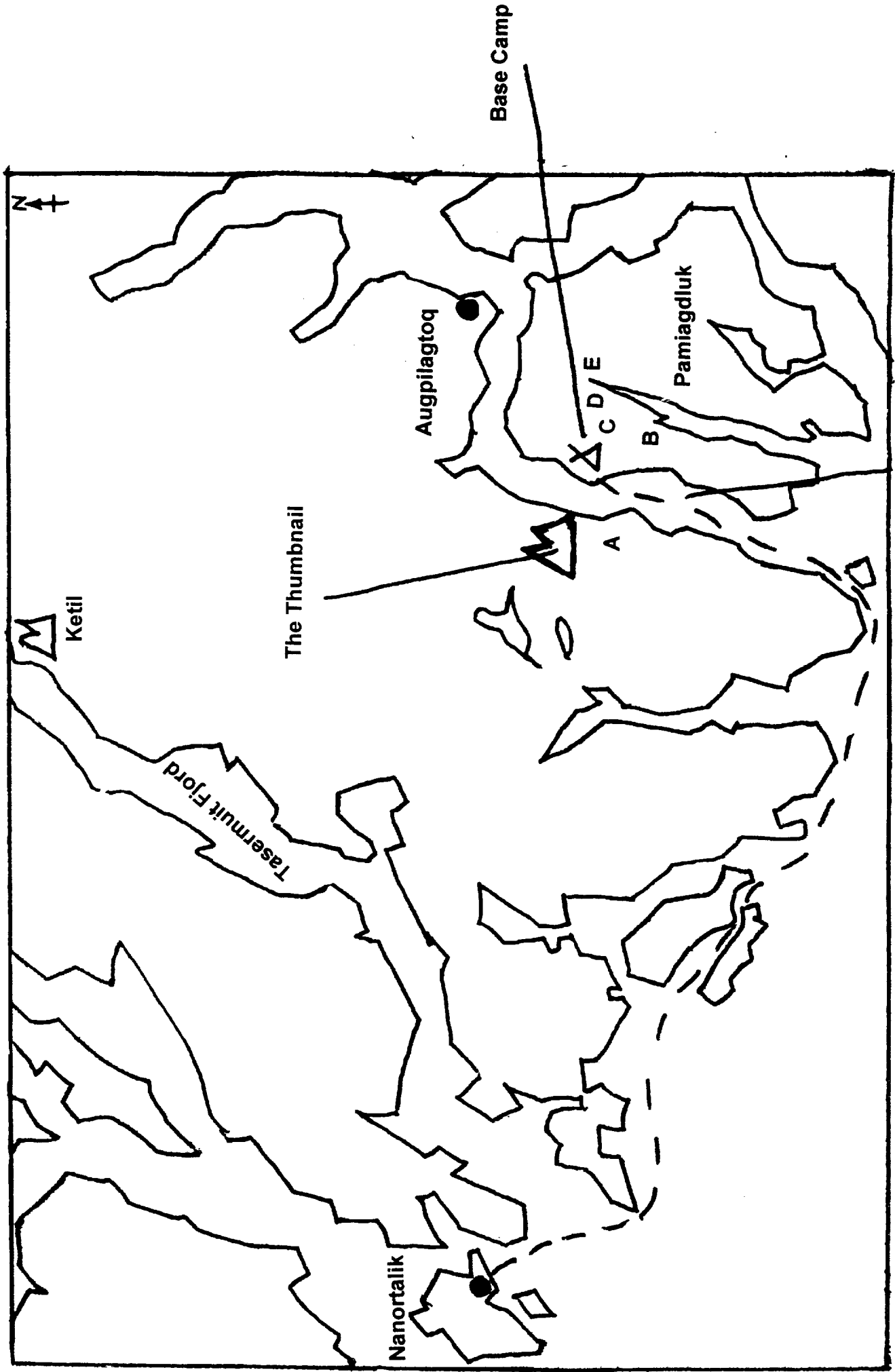
## Thanks

The expedition was very lucky to have a comprehensive range of support without which the trip would have been much more difficult. Our thanks for generous grant support from the Mount Everest Foundation and UK Sport through the British Mountaineering Council, both crucial to the new generation of British exploratory mountaineering, that The Thumbnail expedition represented. We also received valuable financial support from Isis Technology and from Kelloggs UK, who also provided over 300 Nutrigrain bars (particularly good with custard!). The North Face UK title sponsors for the expedition provided an amazing amount of superb gear including our three portaledges, haulbags, rucksacs, plus all our clothing from duvets to Waterproofs to socks. Their support and quality equipment was a great help in achieving our goal of the climbing the World's biggest seacliff and climbing it free. Support, equipment and knowledgeable advice was also provided by the specialist climbing shop Urban Rock.

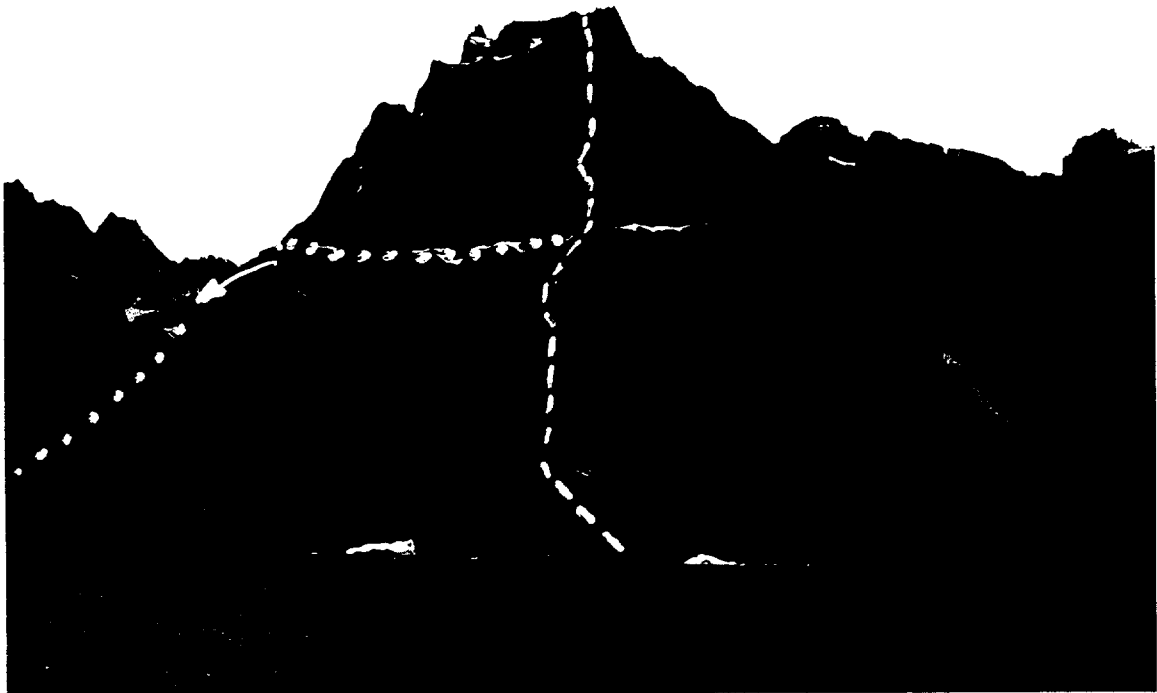
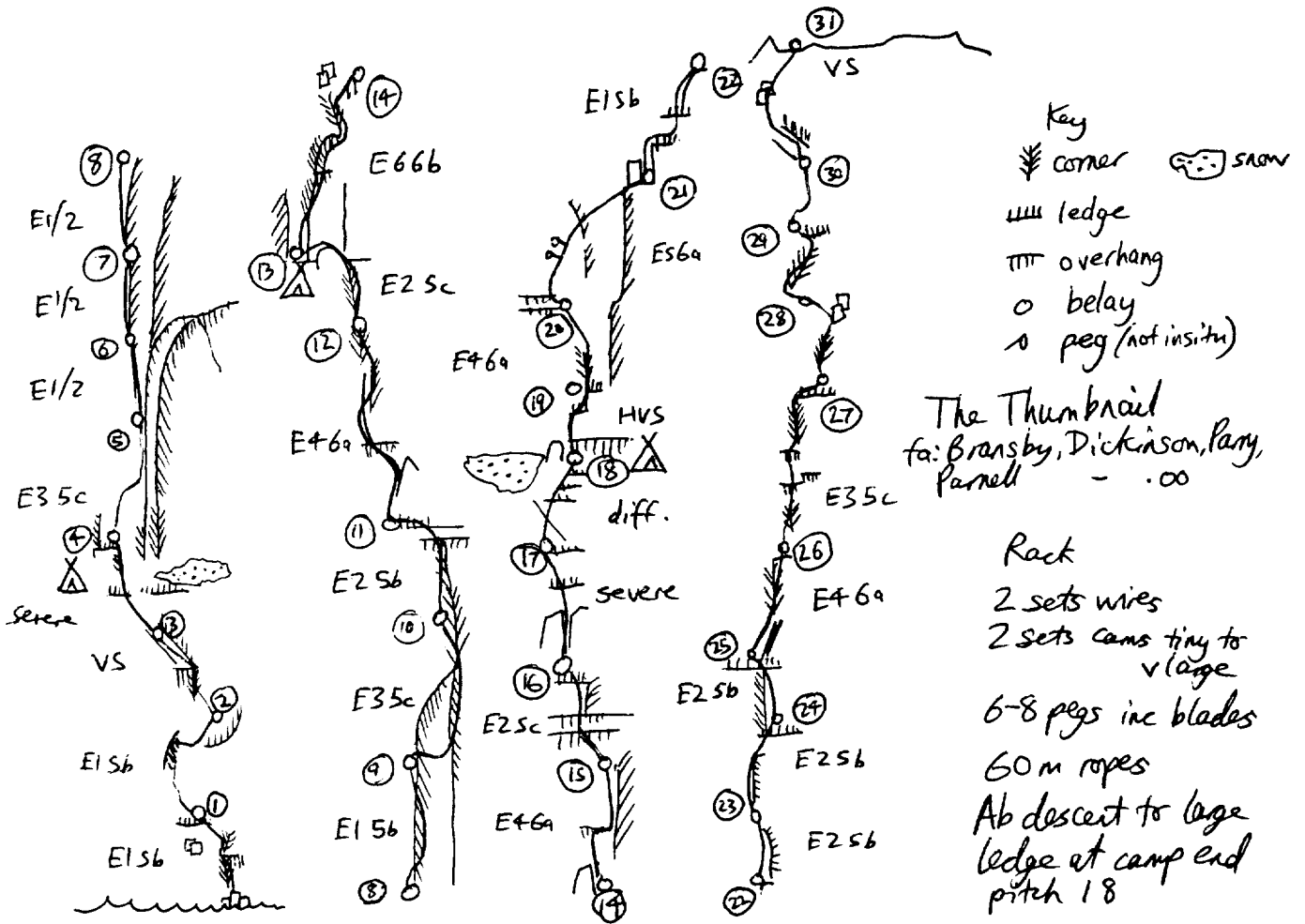
## Budget

Expenditure		Income	
Flights to Iceland	840	MEF	1200
Flights to Greenland	2478	BMC/Sports Council	2400
Other transport	122	Isis Technology	1000
Boat & dinghy	856	Kelloggs UK	500
Accommodation Iceland	75	Personal Contributions	
Accommodation Greenland	103	Wall Team (127x4)	508
Barrels	136	Support team (907x2)	1814
Shipping	690		
Food and Medicine UK	367		
Food etc. Iceland	34		
Food etc. Greenland	480		
Fuel	22		
Equipment	1066		
(Not including sponsored equipment Estimated at £3000)			
Sundries	153		
Total £	7422		7422





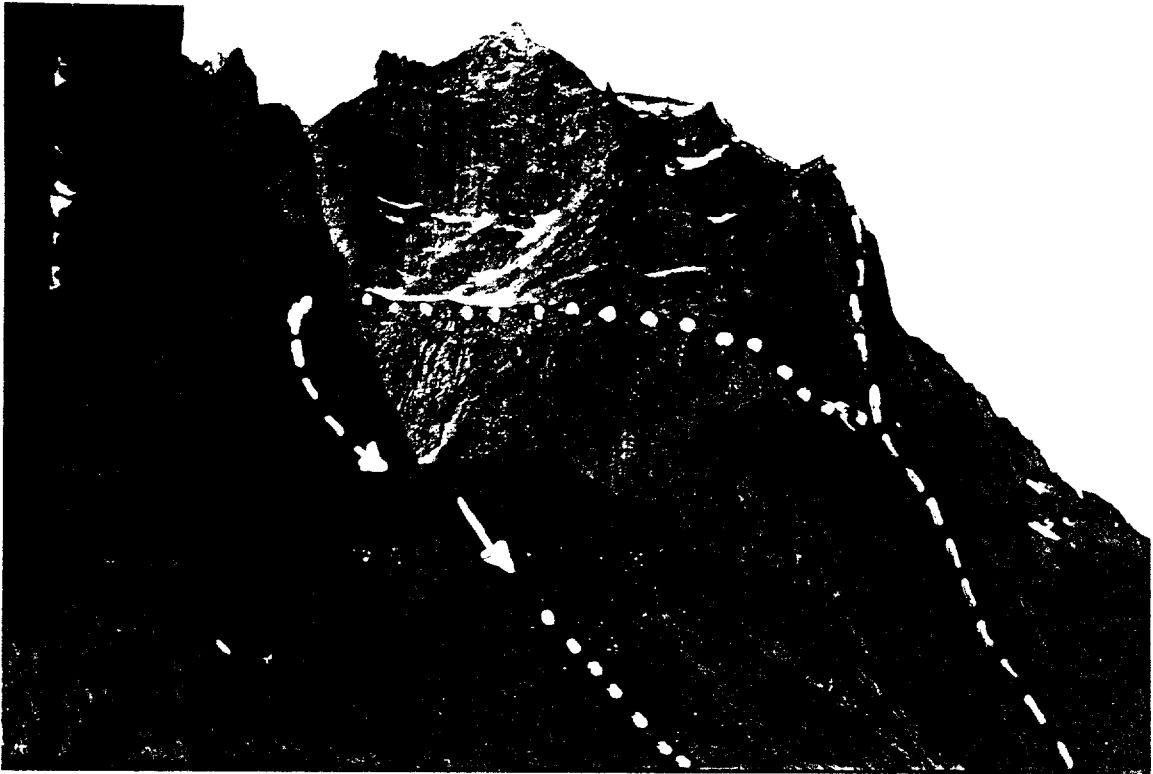
# Topo



The Thumbnailed with the line of ascent and descent indicated.

## Photos

Approaching the Thumbnail with the ascent and descent line indicated.



Base camp on Pamiagdruk island with the Thumbnail in the morning sun.

The motor boat (bottom left) approaching the base of the Thumbnail.



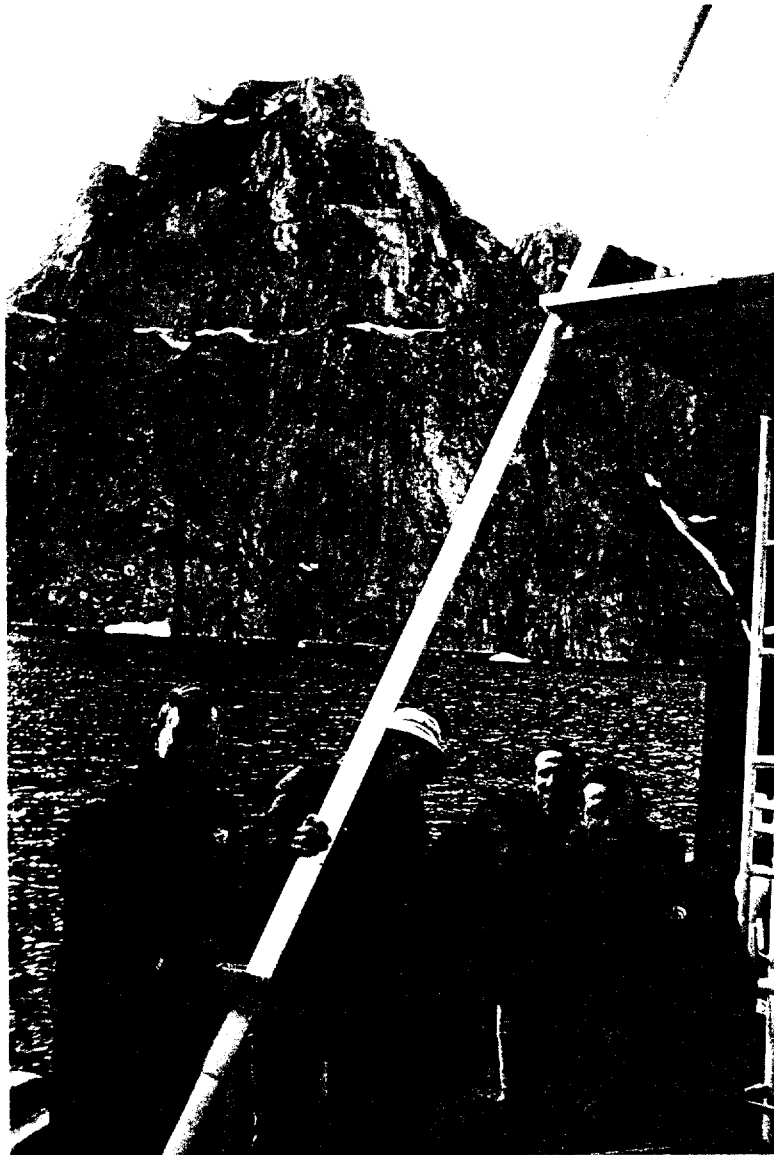
How big? Gaz, Ben and Matt scope out the route.

Ledge life: Ben and Gaz breakfasting on Kelloggs Nutrigrain bars.



Ben 3000ft up on pitch 26(E4 6a).

**In memory of Matthew Bransby  
A great father and friend**



The Thumbnail with from left to right: Matthew Bransby, Matt Dickinson, Ben Bransby,  
Sandy Ogilvie and Gareth Parry

Ian looking for a way through on pitch 21(E5 6a).



Gaz jubilant on the summit ridge.

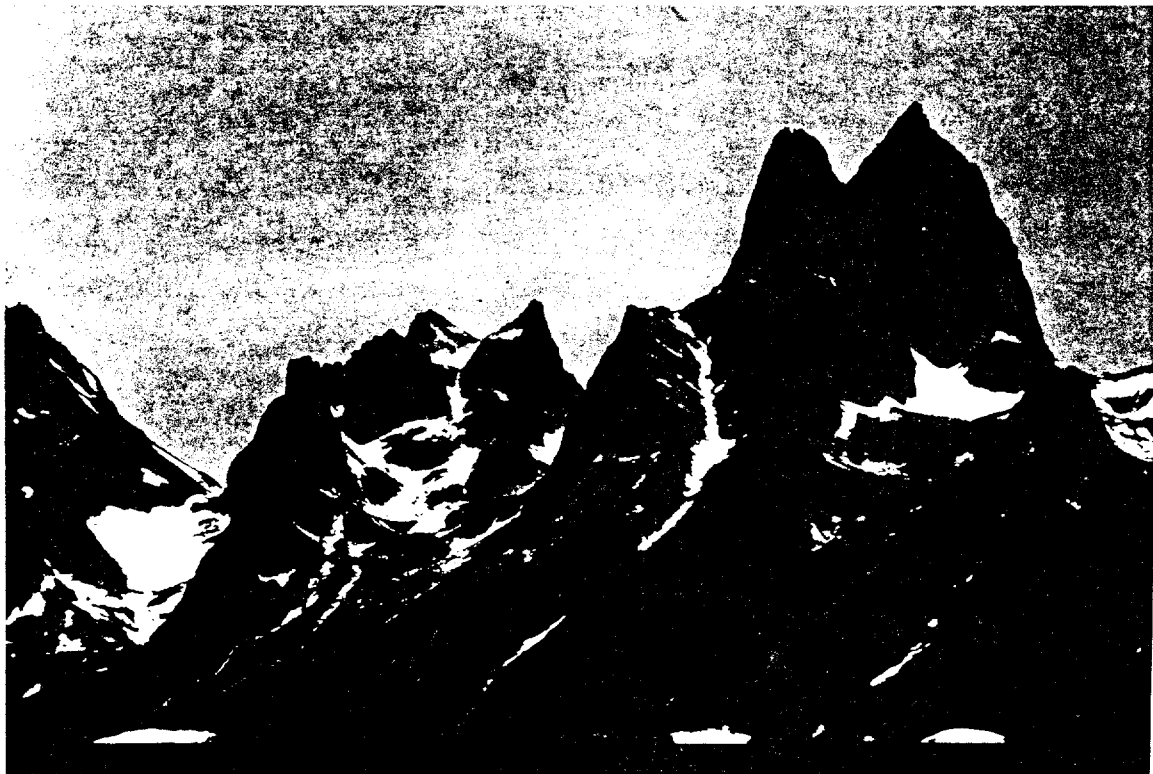
Flat Top (approx 5-600m high estimate 15 pitches at E4+) (C on map)



Unclimbed objective? 100m steep wall then 4-500m slabs. (D on map)



Unclimbed objectives (3-800m in length) just south of The Thumbnail. (A on Map)



Pt 1340m (right) (B on map) and Flat Top (black vertical rock spire left) on Pamiagdhluk island. (C on map)

Matthew exploring as ever with Pt 1300m in the background (E on map)



Looking north from Pamiagdhluk island up towards Nuk and the icecap.