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Oxford University



BAFFIN EXPEDITION



CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Mad dogs and Englishmen | 3 |
| Mountaineering Report | 7 |
| Geological Report | 10 |
| Handlines | 15 |
| Baffin Island Blues | 18 |
| What's the matter with Innuits? | 24 |
| Wish you were here | 30 |
| Appendix - | |
| Equipment | 32 |
| Food | 34 |
| Climate | 35 |
| Finance | 37 |

Cover photograph - on the final stages of the 'Watchtower'.

Inside cover - the team members

left to right: Aidan, Phil, Jon, Bob and Steve.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford University Baffin Expedition (1976) consisted of a five-man team namely:-

Aidan Ward (Univ.)
Bob Thompson (Univ.)
Jon Brewer (Oriel), who carried out a geological survey
at the head of Kingnait Fiord,
and Phil Bartlett (Queens)
Steve Parr (Trinity), who formed a mountaineering side to
the expedition and were active in
the Panqirtung Pass area.

In most respects, therefore, the Expedition divides quite logically into two separate sections, although the organisational side of it was carried out by the five of us working together. This report is intended as a general survey of events which occurred between October 1975 and August 1976. A more detailed, scientific, report of the conclusions of the geological team has been brought out by Messrs. Thompson and Brewer through the geology department at the University. It will therefore be noticed that there is a bias in this report towards the mountaineering side of the expedition and I hope that my attempts to ensure that the emphasis has not swung too far in that direction have been successful. I hope also that the report will be useful to other mountaineers interested in the area and at the same time provide reading for anyone who is generally interested in the Arctic, showing the attractions it has to offer and the problems involved in getting the best out of it.

Steve Parr. Oct. '76. Oxford.

MAD DOGS AND ENGLISHMEN

In February 1976 when we added together our personal contributions of £150, the finance we already had or had been promised and the money we might reasonably expect to get from "University sources" the expedition was left with an anticipated deficit of at least £500. The organisational side of the trip was only in its preliminary stages and so there were still a lot of problems ahead that we knew had to be dealt with; however the most pressing one was the immediate financial crisis. We had to go ahead and book our flights and order food supplies and pay for them on an overdraft with the possibility that in the end we would all have to contribute at least another £100. The deal was simple enough. We had a 50:50 chance of getting the expedition off the ground if we moved decisively; but it might entail a total personal cost of £250 or more if extra finance could not be found. Some bargain! You pays your money and takes your chance! We did, and fortunately it worked out alright in the end; looking back with hindsight though and in view of the way our expenditure rocketed in the next few months I would say that our chances in February of ever actually getting to Baffin were more like 200 to 1. If we did get there, it might well rain and blow for a month or two and restrict all movement to the valley. The craziest gamblers would have turned their backs on the cards like that; but by then we had been bitten by a more consuming bug and decided to push on. I later came to the conclusion that anyone who leaves England in the middle of the hottest summer in living memory to go to the Arctic has to be just a little bit crazy anyway.

We were all still coasting along on a little wave of idealistic enthusiasm. Jeremy Nason, who had first thought of the idea of

going to Baffin early in 1975 and had been the moving force behind the whole idea up to now, had a more realistic view of things. It was at this point that he decided to get out whilst the going was good. How many times over the course of the next three or four months did I wish I had followed him? The daily effort of keeping things in motion soon brought us all down to earth with a bump.

The first blow was the news that Pangnirtung had been hit by a storm and was in chaos. Was the place still standing? Would the Hudson Bay Co. still be able to supply our food, we wondered? The copious letter writing for sponsorship carried on unabated into the small hours regardless. Questions were asked in (relatively) high places as to whether we had enough permission. The Easter holidays came and Bob and Jon went to London in suits and ties, looking more like two of 'The Brothers' than a couple of field geologists just returned from a preparatory course in Scotland. They returned with brief cases crammed with the necessary papers, grateful for the help of certain individuals within the Canadian High Commission. They also returned with helpful ideas and borrowed equipment from the Institute of Geological Sciences. Most importantly they had drummed up support in the City! Various mining concerns had shown an interest in our project and promised support. Meanwhile back on the Home Front, Phil and Steve were putting in some sterling work in the hills. 'In preparation' they said. It seemed less self-indulgent, however, when dinner with an Everest hero and a little diplomacy in the echelons of the British Mountaineering Council secured valuable financial assistance and helpful R.G.S. status.

The summer term started and we all came back to College quite excited, and with re-newed enthusiasm in view of our improved

financial status. At the same time the organizational crises were occurring with increased regularity. Would our freeze-dried food be waiting for us? Would the Eskimos be willing to provide transport? How much money ought we to allow for it? A turning point was certainly the 21st April when Laker cancelled 3/5 of our flights over the Atlantic. There was over-crowding on other scheduled flights because of the Montreal Olympics and Nordair seemed unable to cope with the change of reservations we requested as a consequence. We carried on writing letters asking for sponsorship and reached the 500 mark about the beginning of June. The air-strike in Canada and the continued devaluation of the pound both seemed as if they were part of the natural run of things by this time.

Then finally the last letters were written, the bills were paid and packing commenced. There was a garden party in Trinity - Oxford University Baffin Expedition "at home" - and generous sponsorship of it by a number of interested breweries and the 'Eviction Disco'! The Oxford Mail was there and sent us off with the headlines 'Rock foray date' :- we were away, with the memory of that Wednesday evening still in our minds and the music still thumping in our ears.

Just over a day and a half after leaving Gatwick I stood on the gravel air-strip at Pangnirtung surrounded by nine pieces of luggage and watched Phil walk over to a few houses nearby and ask the way to the Hudson Bay Store. I was going to see it at last. The food off the list that I had stayed up to 3 a.m. two nights running to check through slightly the worse for alcoholic wear. Now it was a reality. The food was there, we were there and the hills were there, or perhaps I should say, the hills were a lot further over

there! One chapter closed and the one we had come all this way and waited all this time for was just beginning. But that is another story. Please read on - it's a much more interesting tale.



'The Watchtower'

MOUNTAINEERING REPORT

- 1) Smaller of 2 peaks between Tirowaka and Mt. Thor
Probably unclimbed prior to our ascent
17 hours climbing time. About 3000 ft.
Mostly climbing on loose rock up to III, with a few notable
itches of V, Vsup., and VI.
Camp to camp (at Windy Lake) in about 36 hours.
- 2) 'The Watchtower' (c.5500) by the N.W. ridge (on second attempt)
Situated above a glacier dropping into the Weasel Valley just
south of Tyr Peak.
23 hours climbing time. About 2000 ft.
Sustained lower and upper thirds of the route at V and Vsup.
with a total of 60 points of aid. Tremendous slab and crack
climbing in the middle section of about IV.
Camp to camp (near Summit Lake) in about 48 hours.
A previously unclimbed peak.
- 3) Pingo (c.5500)
A satellite peak to Mt. Asgard.
Enjoyable Scottish Gr.III climbing, 1500 ft. 1½ hours solo.
Probably a virgin summit.
- 4) Mt. Friga (c.6,500)
by the west face. About 3,000 of climbing (8½ hours from foot
of face). Considerable objective danger. Technical rock
standard low - Scottish type buttress climbing up to Gr IV.
One (short) steep ice pitch not unlike Comb Gully in upper
couloir.
Very few ascents of this peak to date. An original route on a
long and previously unexplored face.

5) Mt. Asgard (c.6,500)

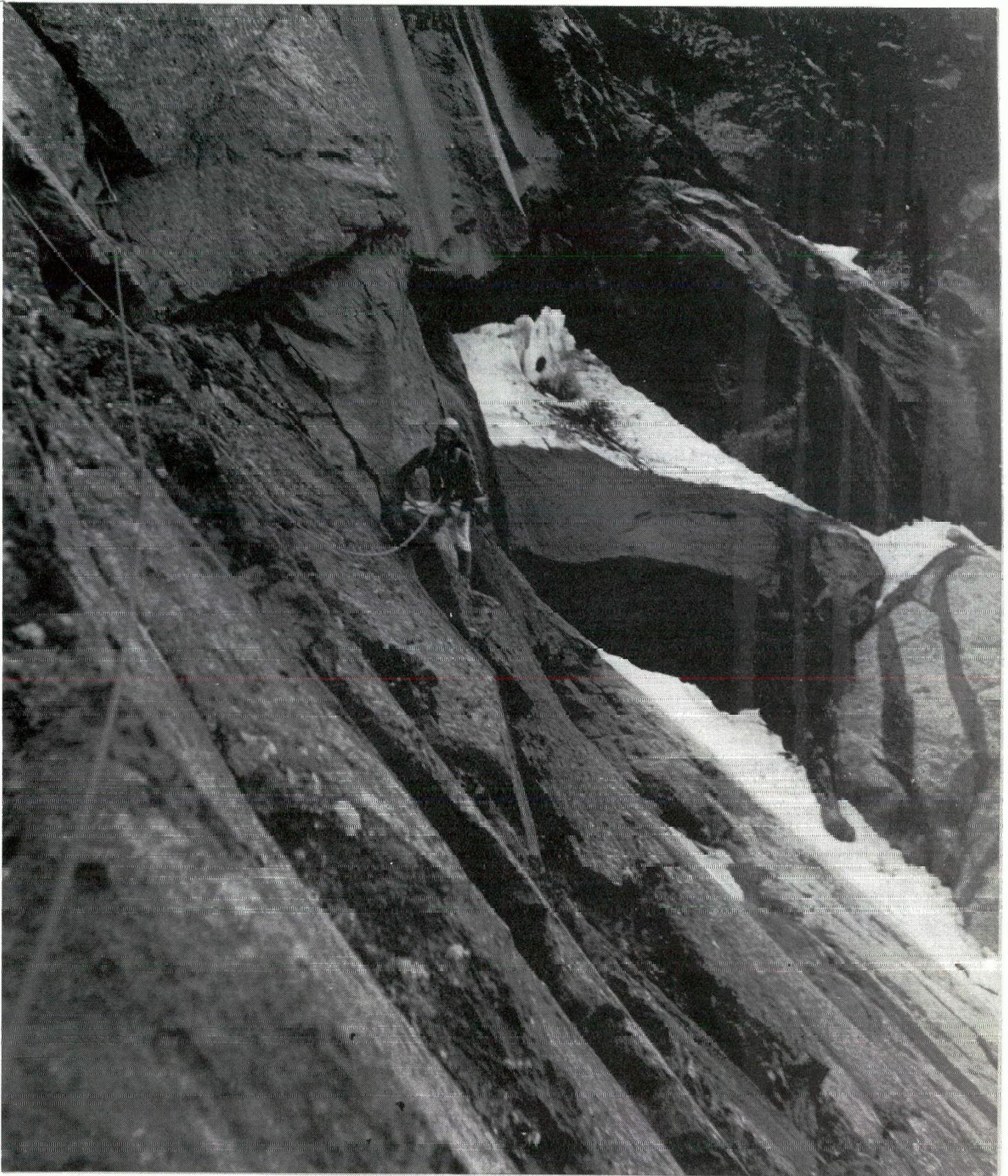
the original route to within 300 ft. of the summit.

Very cold conditions. Strong wind. Heavy snow cover (there was an extra 2-3 ft. on level glaciers free from drifting).

Rock climbing difficulties encountered because of 3" coating of snow on slabs above col between summits.



The summit - Watchtower



Phil following an awkward traverse on the first climb.

GEOLOGICAL REPORT

The three geologists of the Expedition met up without the expected hitches in Montreal airport having been forced by the air controllers strike to make their way from England separately via the U.S. As we flew north over Hudsons Bay the first of our problems became apparent: the pack ice had not broken and we were relying on canoe transport to reach our final destination.

After an uncomfortable night in the airport lounge at Frobisher Bay, route centre of Arctic Canada, Torremolinos of the Tundra, and considerable delay due to cross-winds on the gravel strip at Pangnirtung we eventually boarded a battered old DC3 and flew north across the Cumberland Sound and in between the vast rock walls of Pang Fiord. We were welcomed by Ernie Sieber, the controller of the local National Park, who proved a great help in tackling the problems we came across.

The ice, already several weeks late in breaking up, but already with sufficient leads opened up to prevent journeying by motorised sled (Skidoo) looked like staying put for another week, so we decided to make the best of unfortunate circumstances and walk up to the head of Pang Fiord where the National Park starts and where the biggest peaks and rock walls are: scenery by now famous in climbing circles the world over.

We started off over typical tundra terrain - deep, boggy moss that made progress very slow, but soon cottoned on to a faster route - a narrow shelf of sea-ice adhering to the edge of the land. We made fairly slow progress through wind, low cloud, sleet and rain, but covered the twenty miles to the fiord head in two days after which the weather cleared and gave us three days of blistering sun. We spend an excellent day exploring the area, climbing up

the loose moraines which afford the only routes up the steep rock walls of the valley, and onto the snow-fields and glaciers at the top.

With ice melting fast in the heat we hurried back to Pangnirtung only for the weather to change. The first night back one tent uprooted itself in a gale and forced a midnight retreat to the other tent. The second night on a more sheltered site by way of variation the tent flooded as torrential rain turned the settlement into a sea of mud.

The storm abated somewhat the next day and by the following day, with the wind having cleared the fiord of ice one of the eskimos was prepared to chance a trip round to the next fiord - our destination, Kingnait.

We bought 50 gallons of gasoline for the trip and loaded the canoe up with that and our food supplies until the water was slopping over the transom and the outboard had to be kept running to keep the boat dry. We set off, running through big waves with the wind, getting drenched in spray and chilled to the bone within minutes of what promised to be a 12 hour trip. Conditions, however, soon became impossible, so we jettisoned out gasoline onto the bank and beat our way back to Pangnirtung.

There followed a very frustrating week with just sufficient wind to stop us leaving though not enough to stop most of the eskimos leaving with unladen boats on hunting trips so that it began to seem as though we would never make it. Finally though one evening we set off to journey through the relative calm of the arctic night out into Cumberland Sound then 50 miles winding up the incredibly impressive Kingnait Fiord with rosy beams from the

rising sun picking out distant snow peaks above the sombre rock walls.

We unloaded our supplies at three in the morning and set up camp in a beautiful spot overlooking a small lake, not a little apprehensive about five weeks completely cut off (we had no radio and it was four days walk through very difficult terrain back to Panonirtung) but reassured by the warm sun and the sheer beauty of the place: glaciated rock slabs dotted with small lakes, arctic flowers growing in patches of gravel, the pale blue fiord stretching into the distance and all surrounded by massive cliffs backed by snow peaks.

Reconnaissance of the area quickly identified the problems we were faced with. First and foremost the rocks clearly did not fit the general descriptions given us by the Canadian Survey: we were going to be on our own in elucidating the geology. Secondly there was an abundance of powerful glacial streams which were obviously going to be difficult if not impossible to cross: half the area we had planned to map was cut off from us by the main river joining the head of the fiord and a second joining it from the side about a mile above our camp seemed likely to prevent us moving up the valley as well.

Notwithstanding we started on what mapping we could do and made some limited progress. The weather good at first soon deteriorated: at one time we were pinned down for three days by a wet, bitterly cold gale coming off the ice-caps behind us. Then warm damp weather set in and mosquitoes began to be a problem.

Jon and I decided to gain access to the upper valley by wading across the mud-flats round the end of the barring stream at low

tide and establishing a new camp on the far side. Initially for a week we made rapid progress mapping and climbed some of the smaller peaks in the area. At times idyllic we nevertheless cursed the place when the mosquitoes reached their peak and it took great will-power to move from the security of the tent.

Encouraged however by our moderate success we brought another week's supplies across and moved seven miles up the valley to the pass between the Sound and the Atlantic coast. The geology now proved disappointing, indicating further mistakes on the part of the Survey, but the scenery was spectacular. We spent a long day up on the snow, climbing and naming four peaks over 5,000 ft. surrounded by immense vistas of sharp rock peaks, snow domes and winding glaciers.

We returned to camp, misjudging the tides and perhaps unwisely decided on a waist-deep, lengthy stream crossing instead of waiting for the tide to allow us easier passage to our dinner. Luckily our painfully acquired technique proved equal to the challenge.

Only a couple of days remained until we were due to be picked up - time happily spent fishing and photographing the huge mushroom shaped icebergs that a change in wind-direction had brought in from the Sound. With the one rod we had between us we fished in shifts all day long to eke out our food supply in case our transport did not arrive on time. The arctic char (similar to salmon) we were fishing for proved satisfactorily elusive and all the better tasting for that.

The day we were supposed to be picked up we mounted a 24 hr. vigil since the camp was not visible from the fiord and sure enough nothing came. By the end of the next day we were worn out with

anxiety and slept right through some 303 shots let off by two Americans who had come to find us. They had come round to pick up a gear cache they left earlier that summer near where we were working and had remembered we were due back.

It transpired that the Eskimos had run out of gasoline and were unable to come and get us.

We had a rough journey back, at one point being forced to stop on a small island when the boat seemed likely to sink, but were soon back at Pangnirtung where the hospitality of the clerks of the Hudson Bay Co. provided the food and warmth we were deeply in need of. We dried our gear which was soaked to the last item by the trip and a days driving sleet convinced us we were none too soon in returning to sunny Britain.



Geologists at work in Kingnait.

HANDLINES (fishing report)

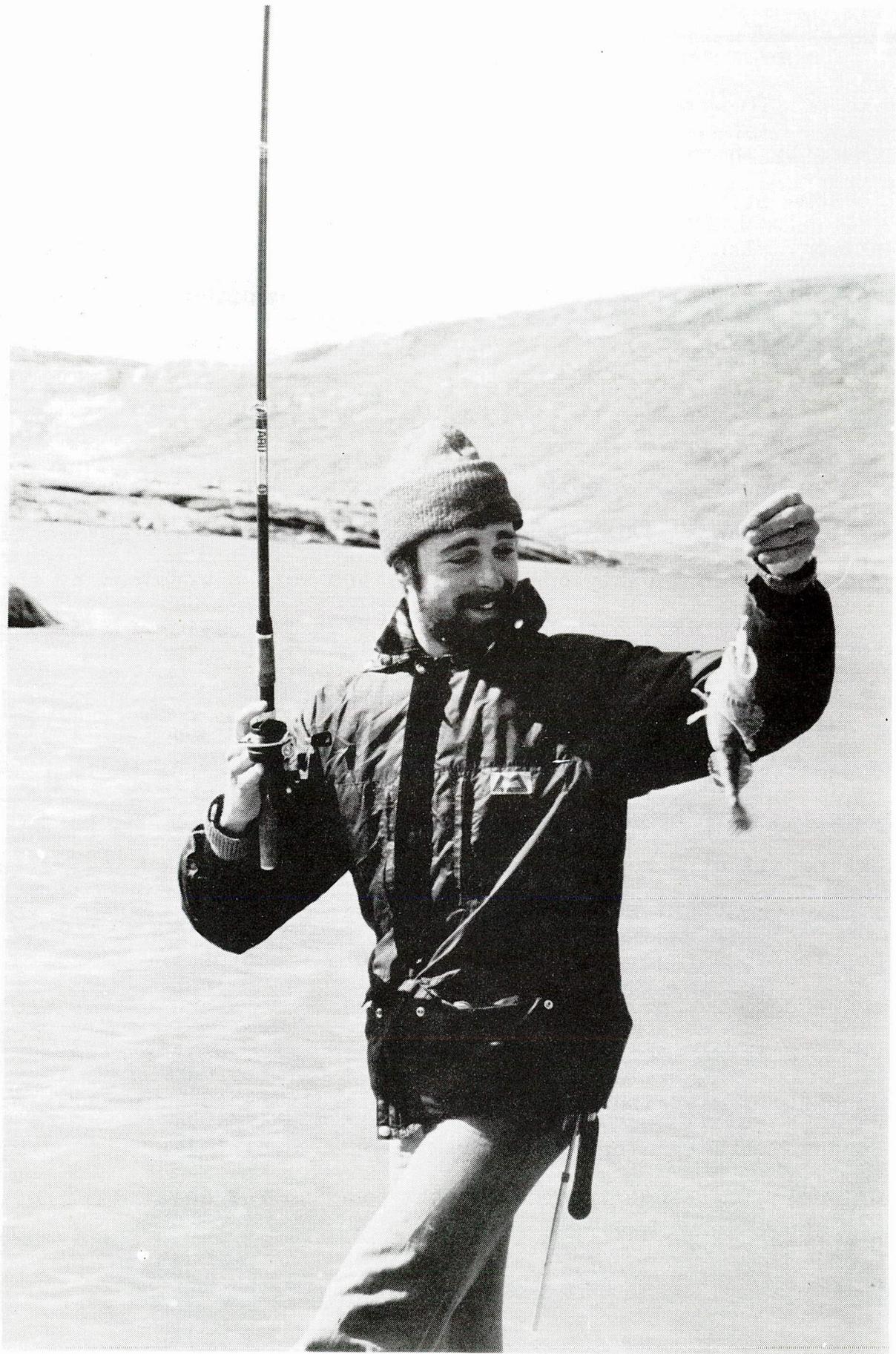
Pangnirtung on this Friday evening was a divided community:- some people were captivated by 'Monty Python' showing on TV; others by an equally potent religion - fishing.

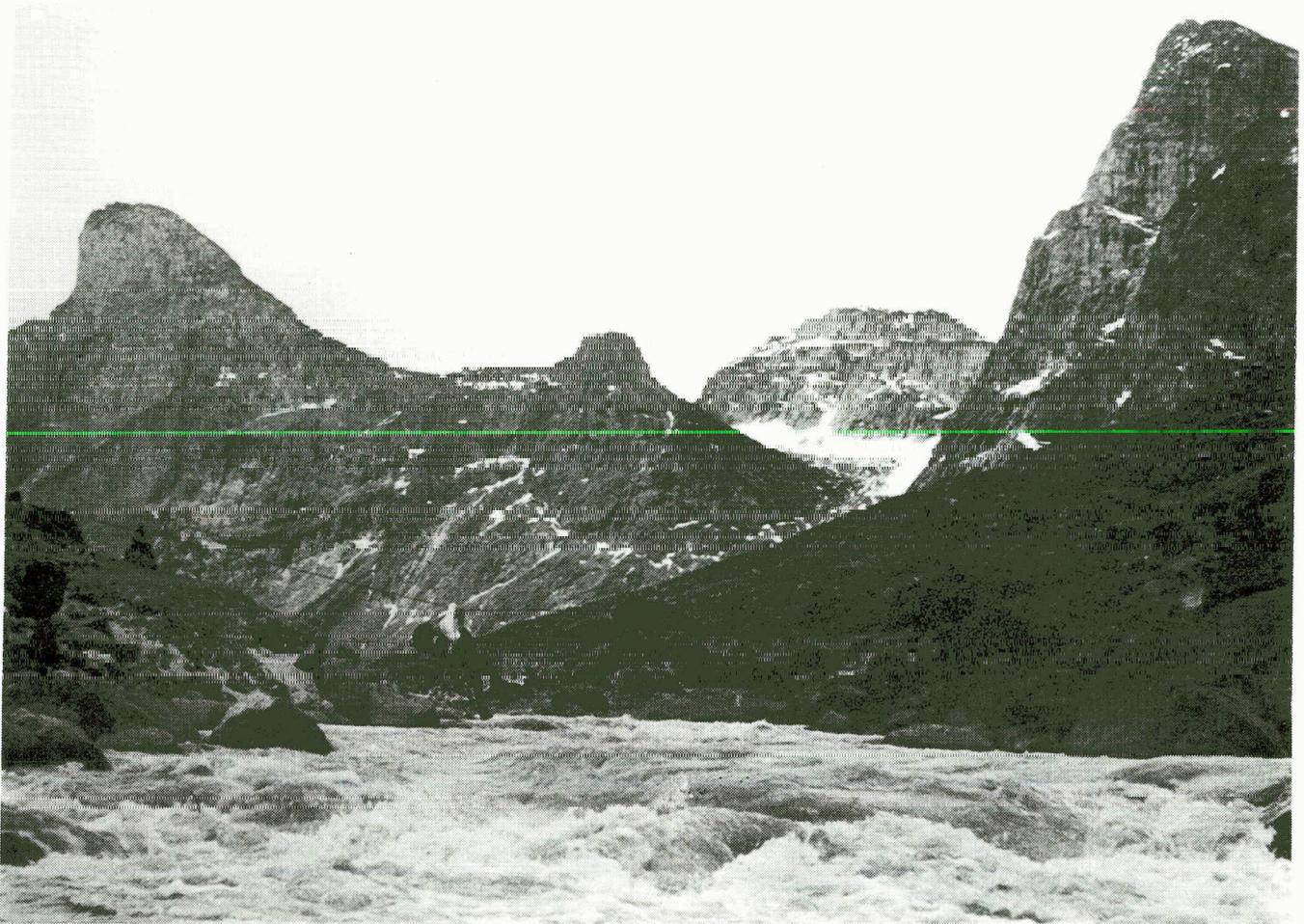
Some 50 solitary figures lined the fiord beside the hamlet. Eskimos, with Korean tackle bought recently from the stores, nonchalantly cast their fluorescent lures between the ice flows. I approached the scene with confidence:- my tackle was Swedish(!). Dorsal fins were frequently cutting the water surface and so glory was imminent....

Two hours past slowly - no fish, only 'smiling' hands (Eskimos say their hands are smiling when bitterly cold). The Eskimo fishermen had been equally unsuccessful, and were now joined by their womenfolk (Eskimos also have a delightful expression for nagging wives - I could never pronounce it!).

With Monty Python over, numbers were swelled by denim-clad teenages - king-size cigarettes drooping lazily from their lips. Two girls with handlines (handlines!) began fishing nearby. Casting all of 5 metres, they had contentedly drained several cans of coke when the water exploded in front of them. Screams, abuse, soothing encouragement and uncontrollable laughter fought for dominance. Two people fell in unnoticed before the silver tinted Arctic Char was defeated. Token slivers of crisp flesh were immediately distributed - the flesh dissolving succulently. With 'Bonanza' starting on TV, the remaining anglers withdrew. Except for one:- 'smiling' ironically, his Swedish rod casting all of 50 metres.....

Over - Bob 'smiling'.





BAFFIN ISLAND BLUES

Arriving at Pangnirtung fiord head at 1 a.m. on Monday, July 12th was miserable. The two Eskimos who had brought us seemed to think so too. According to them the cloud had hardly lifted above the 100 ft. contour for more than about four days in the last six months; a depressing picture. Good old Parks Canada had erected a couple of tents, their first step on the road to 'recreational improvement' no doubt. However, it did seem perverse not to use them, so we unloaded the gear and dozed off.

Next day Steve announced that he had spied The Scott snoring in a nearby tent; this didn't fit in with my information, meticulously acquired, of Doug's plans. My credulity was well and truly destroyed a couple of hours later when he sauntered in grumbling about ten-day storms and the worst spring ever. Rather like Cham. really. Just to confuse us further the next morning marked the beginning of an unprecedented six-day heatwave so Doug and Dennis, being wise men of experience, hastily packed their gear and plunged off in search of rock. For some inexplicable reason Steve and I assumed the Riviera sunshine to be quite normal and decided to while away all the good weather load-carrying. After a couple of days Summit Lake, some twenty miles from base, hadn't been sighted and anything seemed better than 80 lb. sacks so we climbed. Incidentally, on a previous visit Scott and Hennek are said to have made Summit Lake in a day and a half with 130 lb. sacks; a monstrous feat which surely deserves the B.M.C. Gold Medal for masochistic enthusiasm.

The Weasel Valley, rising from the head of Pangnirtung Fiord, is an impressive place with some sizeable lumps of rock rising out of it. Unfortunately however, much of this looks better from a

Previous page - top - fishing at Pangnirtung.
bottom - crossing the River Weasel.

distance (or on photographs!) than in fact it is. The route we tackled was a very loose and dangerous with a lot of technically easy ground and, rather incongruously, a couple of Vsup/VI pitches half way up. The descent, which can only be described as a 70 boulder field, didn't inspire much confidence either. Clearly there are good climbs to be done but many of the obvious possibilities, such as the East Pillars of Mt. Odin, are unattractive on closer acquaintance.

After this Steve was determined to do a 'big wall' climb, which seemed to mean something as close to the Nose of El Cap as we could find. I treated the project with a certain reticence: relations became more and more strained as we spent the remaining good weather searching for one which met my rigorous criteria of good rock, safety and aesthetic (rock) architecture. Then we argued about how much gear would be needed. The trouble was, our priorities were different; I rather fancied myself as a super-lightweight man, frontpointing tenuous ice couloirs (almost non-existent from what we could see) with a minimum of gear and trotting into camp in time for a late lunch. On the other hand, Steve saw himself as a second Warren Harding (or Dennis Hennek perhaps, the vision of the real thing still being fresh to mind) pegging inexorably up hairline cracks, returning to camp haggard and half-dead on the fifth day. We began to think it would have been wise to do some climbing together before leaving England, if only on Stanage - or No.2 Gully.

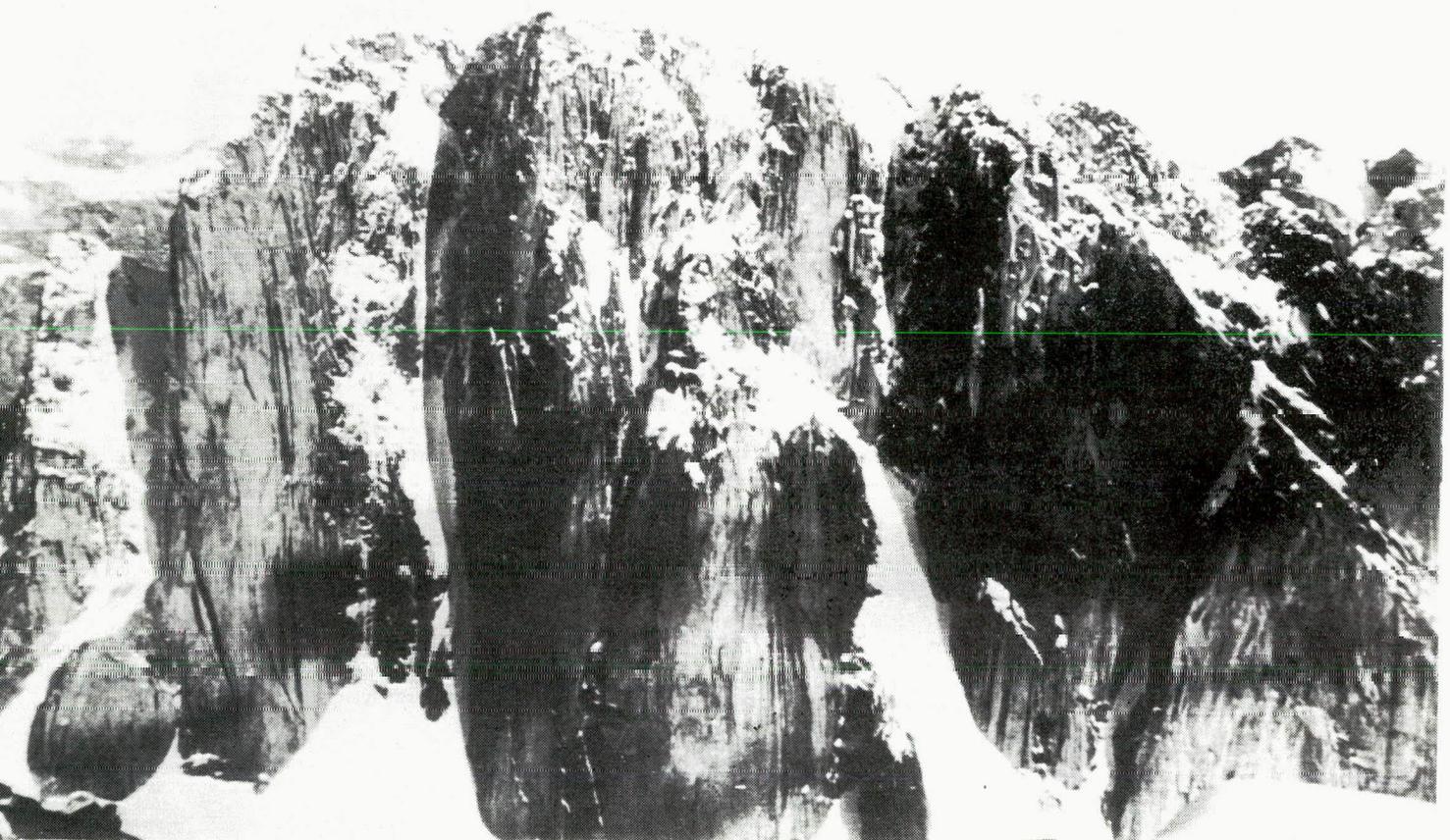
Eventually it dawned on us that, as in Cham., the higher the rock the better it was and we settled for an unclimbed summit close to Tyr Peak. Our first attempt was defeated partly by

storms, partly by exhaustion. Four days later we were up again, better equipped. Armed, rash thought, with knowledge of the approach we decided snowshoes would only be dead-weight and left them at camp. Three hours later we were crawling through the snow on our hands and knees, Tut's advice never to leave them behind echoing in our ears. Most of the climbing on the route itself was V and Vsup. with some A1 and A2. The majority of the cracks seem to be designed for nutting and far fewer pegs are needed than one would anticipate needing on a climb of similar length in the Alps. Unfortunately we took enough gear for an ascent of El Cap and consequently had to sack-haul most of the way. As a result it took us two days to do sixteen pitches (the slowest rate of ascent ever recorded in the area?) and we finished off two sacks and a rope. After that I thought it was my turn to choose a route.

In the event the rock/ice conflict resolved itself. We spent twelve days camped below Mt. Asgard on the 'King's Parade', the name given to the glacier below Asgard's East Face; this was advantageously placed for climbing on both Asgard and Mt. Friga. Asgard is rightly regarded as the centrepiece of the area, quite apart from other considerations, being one of the few summits with impressive faces on all sides; but the West Face of Friga is equally impressive in its' own way and of particular interest since it is one of the few really attractive mixed faces we saw. We made a climb on this face which provided a combination of Alpine and Scottish winter style climbing - Alpine positions but Scottish character. The hardest pitches were Scottish IV and the face as a whole suffers from considerable objective dangers in the form of heavy snow avalanches from the upper couloirs.

Opposite: Top - Mt. Asgard.

Bottom - Mt. Friga.



We did two other climbs which were easier, one about Grade III, a small subsidiary peak of Asgard, the other an attempt on Asgard itself. This failed, due to extremely heavy snow conditions, lack of equipment and time.

It is worth emphasising that good mixed climbing certainly does exist in the area but it's scarce and what there is, is rarely in condition. In June/July the twenty four hours daylight would seem to prevent the snow from freezing satisfactorily whereas in August (which can be counted as the onset of winter) when night is coming in and it is cold the sheer volume of snowfall precludes any possibility of its' consolidating; at least, these were our experiences. It was these problems which frustrated further attempts on Friga - several superb lines still remain!

Eventually the snowfall became so heavy that we left, fearful of being marooned for ever, snowshoes or no snowshoes. The ones we had were the plastic sort which retail at about £11 - they were bloody awful so I withdrew mine from service, planning to sell to the Eskimos at vast profit. These delightful capitalists are willing to buy just about anything, and have the means to do so. Living off huge government subsidies, anything less than a \$20 bill is small change. The Canadian administration has been pouring money into the area in the last four or five years in the belief, presumably, that enough money solves anything. As a result the indigenous Eskimo culture has been perverted and must now remain only in a handful of isolated camps on the island, remote from air links and other outside influences. With particular regard to the town of Pangnirtung, this must remain the area of highest commercial pressure because of the impressive scenery and consequent

hiking potential. The whole question of National Park organisations and their development of wilderness areas is a highly emotive one; here the same old depressing story is repeated, the improvement of 'recreational facilities', and with the best will in the world, the destruction of the very thing one is trying to preserve. Certainly as far as Pang. is concerned Parks Canada seem to me to pose as great a threat as other concerns such as hiking organisations and mining companies, but in a different way.

Perhaps the most frightening feature is the sheer rate at which progress is catching up with Baffin Island. Anyone visiting the mountains surrounding the town of Pangnirtung in five years time and wishing to see something of the popular image of the Canadian Arctic is likely to be disappointed.



Weasel Valley with Mt. Thor on the right.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH INNUIT?

- a personal impression of the Eskimo people

The INNUITS of Pangnirtung are descendants of the Thule race, which spread from the north about 1000 years ago. After the first landings in the Cumberland Sound by the Viking Bjarni Jerjulfsson who began trading with the 'Skraelings' in the 11th century contact with the white man was restricted to explorers such as Martin Frobisher (1576) and William Baffin (1616), searching for the north west passage to Cathay. Davis in 1587 recorded that the Eskimos were gay and simple but also a mischievous and 'thievish' people who cut ships cables and pilfered like jackdaws.

From the 16th century whaling became important in the Davis Strait and along the east coast of Baffin Island. Eskimos were often employed in whaling stations set up along the coasts in winter and earned a reputation for hard work and reliability.

It was not until the first International Polar Year in 1882-3 when scientific stations were set up on Baffin Island that it started to be opened up and major developments occurred after the Second World War with the building of the D.E.W. Line when, for instance, Frobisher Bay became a boom town. Geological exploration and exploitation has resulted in the surveying of the remotest islands of the Canadian Arctic and the exposure of the Eskimos to the white man's civilisation bringing in its wake serious sociological problems. The Eskimos are in danger of loosing the native skills with which they have been able to survive in the Arctic without outside interference.

Pangnirtung had a disturbing, temporary, shanty town atmosphere. It always looked a mess and especially so when we were there because it had been flattened and only partially rebuilt after 150 mph gales in the previous January. It was worst in the wet,
Opposite: 'they wonder what all the fuss is about'





muddy unmetalled streets that were defined only by rows of pre-fabricated shacks. Skidoo tracks, bits of packing case, toys, clothing, household equipment and all the scum of materialism lying in the mud gave the place a sadly deprived air. The smell of maktak, skidoos, large dogs chained to stakes and sealskins lashed to frames and leaning against houses were the only features indicative of an Eskimo or Inuit (People of the North) community apart from the inhabitants, who often dressed in extraordinary combinations of western and Eskimo clothes with knitted woolly caps with 'Pangnirtung N W T.' sewn in.

Nordair and the Hudson Bay Company are the only two commercial enterprises operating. Nordair provides a twice weekly service to Frobisher Bay and the Hudson Bay Co., which ceased active trading in 1960 and is now a chain of retail stores, supplies everything to the Eskimos from building materials, carpets, 26" colour TVs, skidoos, outboard motors and guns, to Pilot Biscuits, chocolate bars and sew on patches with such slogans as "I've visited Canada's Arctic". The goods are usually mass produced, of a poor quality and not cheap. Sea-lifts take place twice a year in the 3-4 month period free of ice. While we were there an 800 ton lift brought 120 tons of Pepsi (approx. 1 can per person per day for a year).

A combination of hunting, welfare benefit and the subsidisation of heating and housing puts the average Eskimo in an above average income bracket. Distinct economic and legislative bias's exist against the white man in the North reflected in terms of the restrictions on liquor, hunting and conservation. This works against the section of the community with commercial acumen, but

Opposite: Pangnirtung Fiord

it is an attempt to prevent the exploitation and breakdown of Eskimo communities that has occurred further south in Newfoundland and Labrador. Clerks of the Hudson Bay Co. had eye-opening stories to tell of the lack of morality, high rate of alcoholism (Pangnirtung is dry) and other social diseases rife in these communities.

Pangnirtung is run by an Innuit Town Council, the Hamlet. This has a commercial outlet through a co-op where fuel, fishing licences and tourist goods are sold. Active attempts are made to keep local crafts such as carving and weaving from disappearing and so act as a means of keeping the community afloat as a distinct cultural and economic unit. The Hamlet exhibits an extraordinary lack of foresight and responsibility in the running of the community and apparently expects large donations from the Government of the NWT when required. By the middle of August the Hamlet had run through its fuel although the next sealift was not due until the end of September. The town reservoir, filled in the ice-free summer months, with water taken from a nearby river by lorry, therefore also remained empty. The post office never had any stamps.

We obviously spent little time in Pangnirtung and these are therefore 'spot' impressions. However, our personal contacts did little to alter our basic opinions of a people dependant on a seal economy until 1962 and who since then, had experienced a radical transformation of life style and the steam-rolling effect of an alien culture. The Eskimo has acquired all the sociological problems and diseases of Western materialistic society with little of the financial acumen and responsibility required to handle it.

We had problems of transport from Pangnirtung to Kingnait at

the beginning of the Expedition first because ice floes and bad weather prevented canoe travel and secondly because our Eskimo let his father use the canoe to go hunting. Parks Canada eventually found another Eskimo and we acquired on this trip intense admiration for his skill and stamina during a 10 hour open boat journey in rough weather. In their arctic element Eskimos are tough and self reliant and will readily revert back to ancient techniques of arctic survival such as eating grass, dogfood and maktak (raw whole meat). They were always polite, smiling and pleasant to talk to but largely unreliable - as we found out when they failed to collect us on the appointed date.

This occurred in the first place because the Hamlet had learnt of mining company finance for our Expedition and secondly due to falling fuel stocks in Pangnirtung. With not enough food and too much equipment for the 7-8 day walk to Pangnirtung we would have been in poor physical (and mental!) condition had we not been collected by two Colorado University glaciologists. The Inuit blame the few seals, and no Caribou within 50 miles of Pangnirtung as being due to the activities of scientific parties and exploration work rather than Eskimo overkill and lack of conservation.

We therefore left Pangnirtung with mixed feelings towards the Inuit themselves who have learnt to exploit the presence of the white man, but with regret and depression at the inevitable swamping and relegation of a primitive and backward culture by commercialisation and exploitation of the Canadian Arctic.

WISH YOU WERE HERE

It was about three in the morning and darker than we could remember it being at any time in the previous few weeks. The celebrated midnight sun seemed somewhat elusive in the mists as they played amusing games of hide and seek up and down the rock walls all around. Formed by just a million billion water droplets held in suspension against the force of gravity, playing a dancing game with unpredictable little gusts of wind which took them in and out of canyons and crevices; the mists acted out their comic role in the magical mountain theatre that was everywhere around us. We were actors too; extras, and because we only played small parts we were able to stand detached in the wings and watch the mysteries as they were unfolded before us.

We were on our way home. Home was a little orange tent beneath the mists in the valley we could not see below us. The memory of the comfort we had forsaken there a few days earlier beckoned us onwards; but the spectacle before us prompted delay.

Exhaustion after the days on the climb numbed our minds as well as our bodies and our willpower was low. I lingered and watched and in memory re-enacted the parts I had taken in a play which had lasted a few days with no lines except the ropes on a pitch above me and no cues except "taking-in" and "climb when you're ready". There would be time for encores later when the films were developed. But the special effects had been magnificent. It had been the most spectacular rock show on earth! That was all very fine but the memory fades in time and the perfection of everything gets lost amidst the run-of-the-mill activities of normal, everyday life on returning to England, and it seems you really do start wondering if you have exchanged a walk on part in a war for a lead role in

Opposite: Wish you were here

the cage.

It's good to be back though, running over the same, old familiar ground, but what have we found? The same old fears. Wish you were here.

Apologies to P Floyd.



(a) EQUIPMENT

(1) Clothing and camping equipment

Very little of the specialised gear one would expect to take on a high altitude Himalayan venture is required for climbing in Baffin during July and August. If one is equipped as for a Scottish winter that is sufficient; as there, it is necessary to be prepared against wet/cold conditions rather than extreme cold.

For body warmth the climbing team used a combination of synthetic fur garments and Damart Thermawear underwear. The latter surpassed all expectations and were warm and comfortable in all conditions encountered. G. & H. Cagjacs and overtrousers provided protection against wind/rain. Again most satisfactory, with minimal condensation, well designed and light. Two members of the expedition took new wool sweaters made by Skye Venture; these were very warm indeed but it did seem a pity to give attractive garments like these such wear and tear.

The geological team took no special equipment for body warmth. It was found that a combination of one or two sweaters worn under G. & H. Cagjacs provided very good insulation. The Cagjacs and overtrousers proved their extreme usefulness on two long open canoe journeys which turned out to be very cold and wet. They are to be highly recommended.

The Geological party used two tents, a Good Companion and a Blacks Tunnel Tent, the latter proving to be extremely valuable in the high winds that frequently blew the former down. No fly sheet was taken for the tunnel tent to save weight, and it only once leaked badly. The situation was saved in this case by placing the Cagjacs over the top of the tent. Future expeditions to the area would be well advised to take some form of mosquito netting with

their tents as there is nothing worse than lying in a battered down tent with the sun beating down and mosquitos plastered all over the outside.

The climbing team used a Vango Force Ten Mk 2 tent throughout and this proved its value yet again, as it has on many previous expeditions. Optimus paraffin stoves gave excellent service and fuel consumption was lower than expected - less than half a pint per day. In our opinion paraffin is a much more satisfactory fuel for this kind of venture than either petrol or camping gas.

(2) Climbing equipment

Broadly speaking, we took the same sort of outfit as for a summer alpine holiday. Clog and Troll provided technical climbing equipment, Brown Best and Karrimor International, rucksacks. In all cases the gear lived up to the standard one expects from these firms and their assistance is warmly appreciated. As far as climbing hardware is concerned it is worth noting that fewer pegs are needed than one would expect from Alpine experience - most cracks seem to be designed for nutting.

(3) Miscellaneous

Cameras from Rollei and Olympus were taken. For climbing photography lightness, robustness and simplicity of operation are of the essence and both firms provide excellent apparatus fulfilling these criteria. Some 500 colour slides and 700 black and white prints were taken. Any disappointments can be blamed on the photographers!

Snowshoes were among the more unusual pieces of equipment required by the climbers and were essential for crossing some - but not all - of the upper glaciers. The type we took were plastic,

relatively cheap and most unsatisfactory - the modern variety may be better - they are certainly more expensive.

Mosquito spray and cream remain essential items of equipment for any expedition travelling in the summer. Portable radios are also essential if no warden stations are in the area. They can apparantly be hired from the RCMP.

(b) FOOD

For the mountaineers the freeze-dried foods that we got at a very reasonable discount and had flown in to Pangnirtung free of charge, were some of the most successful items of our rations. Originally intended as lightweight substitutes for 'real meals' at camps above base they proved very filling and enjoyable. The Chili Con Carne together with spachetti was by far the most popular item on the menu. For meals away from camp the instant one-man, one-packet meals were most suitable. They were economical on fuel, lightweight, filling and above all appetising. Again Chile Con Carne flavour was available and assumed something of a luxury status. The powdered fruit drinks, instant coffee and drinking chocolate from Har-Dee lived up to expectations.

90% of our food requirements from the Hudson Bay Company were available because we put in an order in plenty of time (i.e. before the end of March). Most of the items were the same as those in any normal English supermarket; but one item that stood out was our consignment of Pilot Biscuits - a bread substitute. I can certainly recommend the flakey variety for use by future expeditions, in preference to the hard ones we took. My dentist does assure me, however, that the 'jaw-breakers' we took have left no lasting impressions! A very popular item amongst the climbers was

'Dream Whip'. It was used in almost everything, as a sugar and milk substitute when supplies were getting low at the high camps. On freeze-dried strawberries it was a delight in itself and became a bi-weekly treat that was looked-forward to by all concerned.

It seemed worth spending some time planning how much food to take. Once in Baffin we realized how close the calculations had been. This was especially important as food was the second most talked about topic on the expedition, and in view of the fact that it was the only one of the two that could be looked forward to in the near future it had to come up to expectations.

(c) CLIMATE

A few notes on this subject are worthwhile.

The weather on the Cumberland Peninsular this spring and summer was apparantly far worse than normal. Pagnirtung Fiord is normally free from ice from about mid-June - this year it had cleared sufficiently for boats to get through by the time we arrived in the first week of July. Overall, the weather pattern was one of instability, it could change from fine and sunny to storm conditions in an hour and one had to be prepared to climb in conditions which would be considered dangerously unsettled in the Alps. We experienced a clear, sunny and windless spell of six days duration and two or three others of shorter duration. During such spells it was warm enough, at sea level, to sit around wearing only shorts. A wind blowing off the ice cap to the North-West and/or cloud could cause a very rapid drop in temperature. Otherwise, we were unable to correlate wind direction with the weather pattern.

Generally, temperature begins to drop noticeably at the begin-

ning of August and indeed, from the climbing point of view this can be reckoned as the beginning of winter. Precipitation falls as snow above about 3000 ft. and in considerable amounts; avalanche danger became acute after 12th August. At sea level it was getting colder but still with some good clear spells. In a normal year the best time for climbing and hiking would be the last two weeks in June and the whole of July.



'Wilderness experience' in Kingnait.

(d) FINANCE

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S.P.

Over: The end of the tale. Pangnirtung fiord at sunset. Sept. 1976

