



**THE  
BRITISH  
POLAR SUN  
EXPEDITION**

*1995*

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REPORT**

# THE BRITISH POLAR SUN EXPEDITION 1995

## EXPEDITION REPORT

The unclimbed walls of Sam Ford Fjord on Baffin Island's East coast were first brought to our attention through the pages of Climbing magazine and an article on the area by Eugene Fisher. Although not a climber he realised the importance of the area during an extensive reconnaissance of the Eastern Fjords in the Winter of 1992. Following the release of the article in September 1994 Warren Hollinger and I set about planning an expedition to this compelling area of Arctic Canada.

The original team comprised Warren, myself and British climber Kevin Thaw. Unfortunately, right at the last moment Kevin had to pull out, as he simply could not come up with the funds. Warren and I eventually got hold of Mark Synnott, a very experienced Big Wall campaigner who had just completed the second ascent, and first Winter ascent, of the Quinlan route in the Black Canyon. We all met up in Montreal on the 12th May and our adventure began.

I have chronicled the events of the expedition below, but I would like to make a few points first. The logistics of this area are potentially very complicated but with hindsight I believe that we got it right. For interested parties the way forward is to go into the Fjords in the middle of May when the weather is cold but clear with low precipitation. Having climbed in all the major areas of the World I can safely say that the conditions we experienced were absolutely superb! And the local Inuit all said it was a bad Spring this year. As we were departing at the end of June the temperatures were alot milder (-5 Degrees to +20 Degrees) but it rained or drizzled constantly. Whereas earlier on in the trip, although the temperatures were as low as -20 Degrees with wind-chill, precipitation was negligible, we experienced no storms, and when the sun was out, which was often, temperatures soared to around +20.

Secondly, I thoroughly recommend Qulliklut Outfitters. From the moment they picked us up at Clyde River Airport to when they saw us off from Clyde for our flight out they catered for all our needs. They are not cheap, but then nothing is in the Arctic, but they are thoroughly reliable and very friendly. I have listed their address under the appendix USEFUL INFORMATION at the end of this report.

Finally, I commend this area of Baffin Island for Big Wall climbing only. We met a team of very experienced Spanish climbers when we were out there, and they attempted ice and free rock routes. Their conclusion was that there was no decent ice and that the temperatures were too low to make rock climbing a realistic possibility, without resorting to large amounts of direct aid. Otherwise the area is very accessible, there are many serious objectives, and the weather is good. GO FOR IT !

Jerry Gore  
October 1995

## SYNOPSIS OF EVENTS

After a quick tour of Sam Ford Fjord on the 17th May we very quickly decided to abandon our original objective, the North Face of Polar Sun Spire, as it was covered in early season snowfall and was very avalanche prone. We chose instead to concentrate on Great Cross Pillar, and let things warm up a little! The huge face on Great Cross was south facing and devoid of snow.

We set up Base Camp right underneath Great Cross and immediately set to fixing rope, working on a line up the overhanging central buttress of the 900 meter Pillar. Distances are very, very deceptive in this area of Baffin as the air is so clear, the walls come straight out of the sea ice and the whole scale of things is hard to discern. Suffice to say in the space of one 24 hour period we went from believing that contrary to Eugene's calculations there were no walls in this fjord bigger than 500 metres, to thinking everything was over 1000 metres, and then back to reckoning it was all tiny!

Consequently, we started out on Great Cross believing that we were embarking on a 600 meter climb at most. We spent five days on and off fixing, and then cut loose and blasted for the top. On the fourth day proper on the wall, having just belayed Warren for nine hours (in a storm!) on what turned out to be the crux pitch, we realised that with only another four or five days of food and water left we simply were not going to make it. With pitches averaging six hours to lead, and operating in temperatures of 15 degrees below, we could only realistically climb one or at most two pitches in a day. We were beginning to realise that this wall was much bigger than we had previously thought. The climbing was also very hard as we had chosen the most direct line up the largest, blankest piece of rock around! This was true Big Wall country involving the thinnest nailing as we linked up a series of discontinuous features.

As the weakest member of the team by far in terms of Big Wall experience I elected to go down. I knew it was the right decision at the time, and subsequent events backed up my action. On June 3, after 12 days of capsule-style climbing, Warren and Mark topped out on the wall; another mile of ridge put them on the true summit. Crossfire (VI, 5.10, A4) climbs nineteen 60 meter pitches, and ascends The South Buttress Direct of Great Cross Pillar.

Once safely down Warren got a really bad cold, so Mark and I started work on the now clean rock of Polar Sun's North Face. After two days and over 300 meters of ascent we both decided that it was too dangerous to continue as the route was threatened by huge hanging blocks of granite in the crack line we were climbing. As it was Mark nearly died when the rope he was jumaring on, as he cleaned one of my pitches, dislodged a large boulder that caused a minor landslide!

With only 10 days left before our scheduled departure all three of us ferried loads to the base of the 700 meter west face of Second Turret. We fixed five pitches during several days of bad weather, then blasted in a 40 hour push up and down, establishing Nuvualik (VI, 5.10+, A3+). Nuvualik is the Inuit name for the formation, and means "high point". Near the summit, the team was shocked to find a vintage bolt. No one seems to know who had previously climbed the face.

The climbing on The Turret was really extreme with pitches involving every conceivable form of upward movement and often all in the same pitch. One section, for instance, in the exit cracks, necessitated free moves, followed by direct aid, followed by a body -swallowing chimney that was iced-up, with a short snow and ice gully to finish! On one of the initial pitches Mark took a bad fall and had to rest for a few days.

Once back down we crawled back to Base having not slept for days, only to have to pack up camp and rush back to Clyde to catch our flight home. We ran straight into an horrendous storm, the skidoos got bogged down miles from shore in the early ice break-up, the machines stopped, we got absolutely soaked in the freezing slush, and suddenly frostbite and a slow death seemed a likely conclusion to our otherwise very successful expedition. In the eleventh hour an Inuit Team, also fleeing the storm, turned up out of no-where and together we made it back in one piece.....just! The end of a brilliant trip.

## DIARY OF EVENTS

May 12 The Team assemble in Montreal

May 17 Set up Base Camp underneath Great Cross Pillar

May 19 Started work fixing line on Great Cross

May 23 Cut loose from the ground!

May 26 Jerry descends due to lack of water and food

June 3 Warren and Mark reach summit of Great Cross

June 4 Warren and Mark reach Base Camp

June 8 Jerry and Mark start fixing line on Polar Sun

June 9 Jerry and Mark retreat from Polar Sun due to loose rock

June 12 We move Base adjacent to Polar Sun

June 13 We hike loads to Second Turret

June 15 Set up a portledge camp. Jerry and Warren start fixing on Second Turret

June 19 Mark takes bad fall whilst leading and damages his hand

June 20 Jerry, Mark and Warren ascend fix line and go for summit.

June 21 The Team reach summit of Second Turret

June 22 The Team reach Base after a continuous 40 hour push

June 23 We hike out to Base carrying 110 lbs. loads

June 24 We depart Base on epic three day journey to Clyde River

June 26 Depart Clyde River for Montreal

## USEFUL INFORMATION

Map Reference: The World Aeronautical Chart C-12 covers the East Baffin area

Resources: 1. Department Of Economic Development And Tourism NWT. Dave Montieth, Iqaluit, Baffin Island, NWT XOA OHO, Canada; Tel. (819) 979-5075, Fax: (819) 979-6026. Complete general tourism information about the island.

2. Air Travel: From Montreal it is possible to fly with either Canadiair or First Air. Flights go via Iqaluit to Clyde River, stopping at small communities on the way. Tickets can be purchased in the UK with difficulty as the flights do not show on most travel agent's computers. So either go direct or purchase at Montreal Airport.

First Air

Carp

Ontario. Tel. (613) 839-1247 Fax: (613) 839-5690

3. Qullikkut Guides And Outfitters, Beverly and Jushua Illaug  
Box 27, Clyde River, Baffin Island. XOA OEO Canada. Tel: (819) 924-6268  
Fax (819) 924-6362. A well-run and thoroughly professional outfit that can provide all types of logistical support, both Summer and Winter.

4. Food: We bought all major supplies in Montreal and took them with us on the flight to Clyde River. Do not aim to buy anything in Baffin because everything is very expensive.

## BUDGET

### COSTS

Travel	£3500
Food and Stores	£700
Equipment	£800
Qullikkut Guides	£1800
Insurance	£400
Contingencies	£400
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TOTAL	£7600
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### INCOME

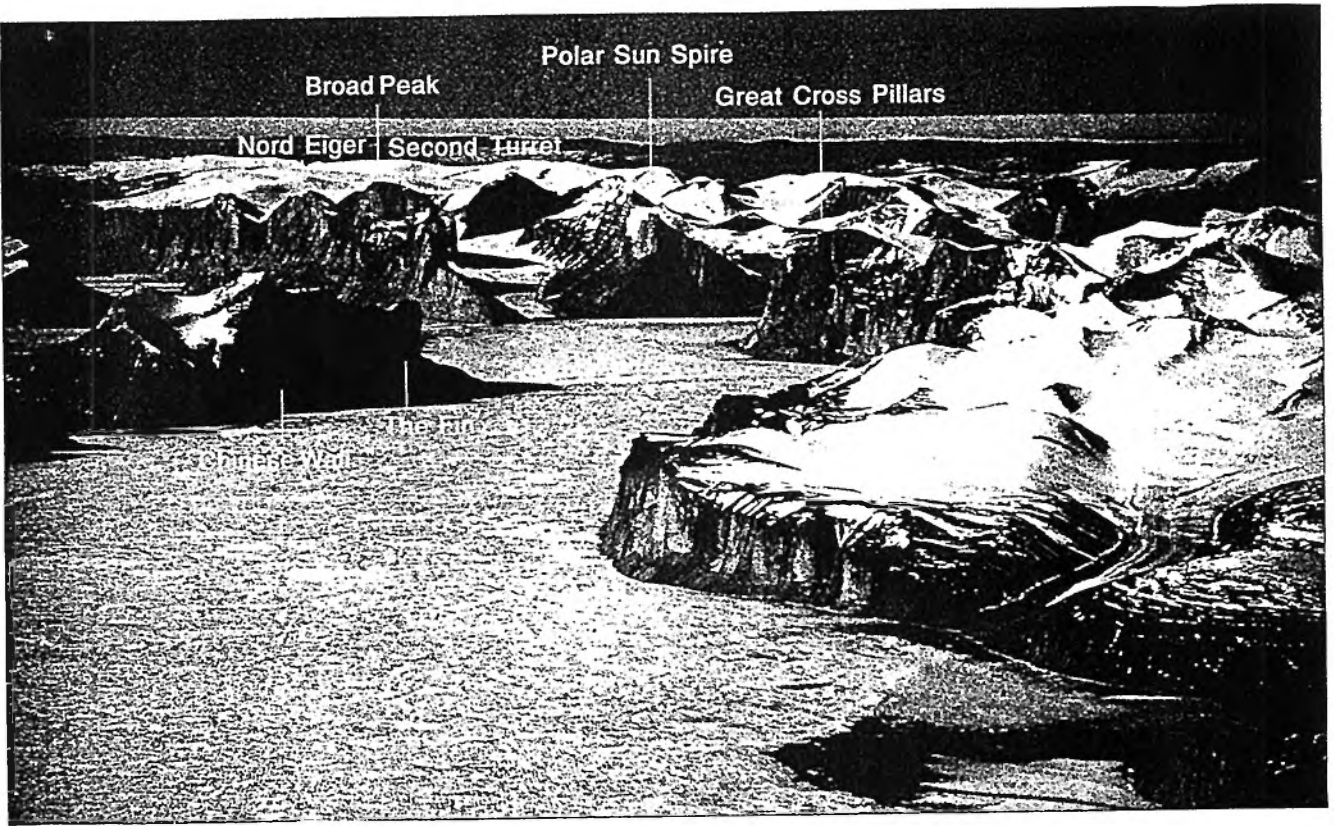
MEF Grant	£1000
BMC Grant	£1000
Personal Contribs.	£5600
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TOTAL	£7600
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

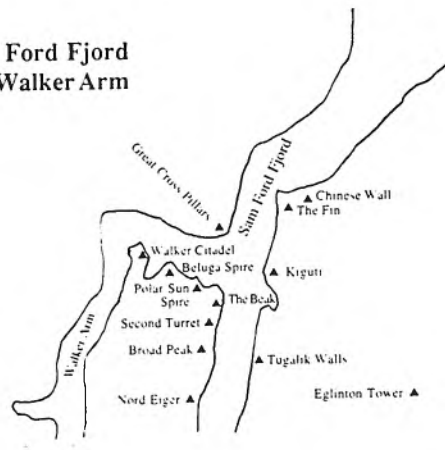
The Expedition would like to acknowledge the support, and thank, the following individuals and organisations:

The Mount Everest Foundation, Bill Ruthven  
The British Mountaineering Council, Roger Payne  
Cotswold The Outdoor People  
Doug Scott  
Paul Pritchard  
Conrad Anker  
Mick Fowler  
Brendan Murphy  
Jushua and Beverly Illauq  
Buffalo Clothing, Mark Carr  
Lowe Alpine, Robbie Mallinson  
Cairngorm Ropes  
Edelrid Ropes, Keith Barton

**THE PHOTOGRAPH OVERLEAF SHOWS THE VIEW INTO SAM FORD FJORD. OUR OBJECTIVE, POLAR SUN SPIRE, IS IN THE CENTRE OF THE PICTURE. THE DIAGRAM BELOW SHOWS THE SAM FORD FJORD, AND BELOW THAT THIS AREA IN RELATION TO THE WHOLE OF BAFFIN ISLAND.**



Sam Ford Fjord and Walker Arm





Canada's Northwest Territories

# Order of Arctic Adventurers

Arctic Circle Chapter  
Certificate

Arctic Circle

bear witness that

ᐅᐱᐱ ᐅᐱᐱ Jerry Gore ᐱᐅᐅᐱᐱ

having demonstrated the initiative, integrity and bold adventurous spirit of the true Arctic explorers who have crossed the Arctic Circle will hereafter be recognized as an honourable member of the exclusive Arctic Circle Chapter, Order of Arctic Adventurers

ᐅᐱᐱ 1995 June  
Date

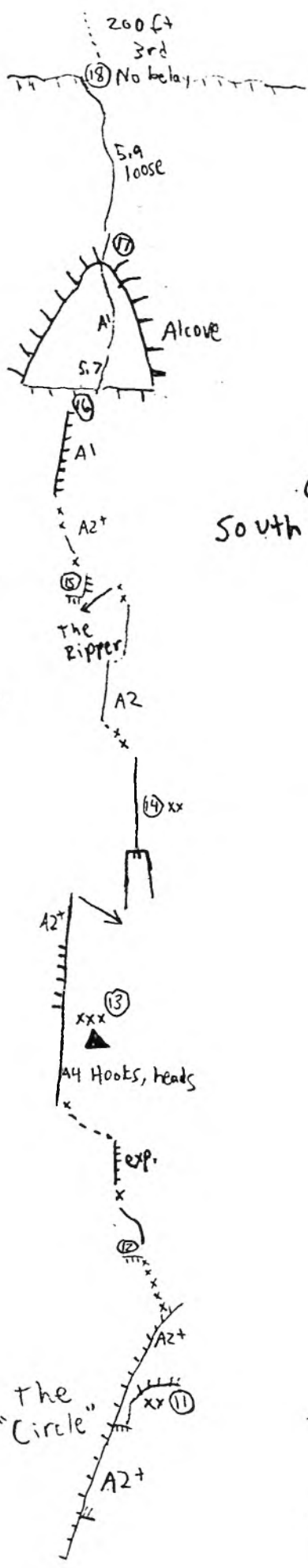


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Witness

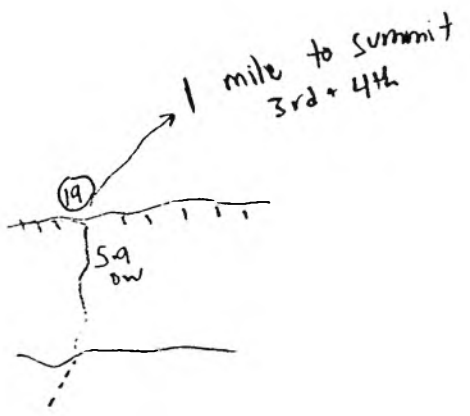
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Nunavik

The Tower



Cross fire VI 5.10 A4  
 South Buttress Great Cross Pillar  
 May 19-June 3, 1995  
 Warren Hollinger  
 Mark Synnott  
 Jerry Gore  
 3,000'



NUUVALIK  
 VI, S.10, A3+, 2000'  
 WEST FACE OF SECOND  
 TURRET.  
 JUNE 15-22, 1995

JERRY GORE,  
 MARK SYNNOTT  
 WARREN HOLLINGER

Jerry's Ice S/ot

