Baffin Island 2022

Expedition Report

Photo: Gauntlet Peak from camp at base of Mt Turnweather

Contents

1. **Location**

We flew into Pangnirtung, Nunavut, Canada (on Baffin Island). From here we travelled up Pangnirtung Fjord into Auyuittuq National Park. Our main objective was Mt Turnweather which is located a few kilometres east of the park boundary, up the Turnweather Glacier.

2. **Team**

Maria Parkes, Neil Chelton, Owen Lee.

3. **Trip Dates**

30th June to 20th August 2022

4. **Trip Details**

We flew from Vancouver to Ottawa on 30th June, where we spent several days preparing food and equipment (some of which was stored in Ottawa from our planned and postponed trip in 2020). On 3rd July we flew from Ottawa to Pangnirtung, and then used a local outfitter (Peter Kilabuk) for boat transport from Pangnirtung to Overlord (30km) on 5th July. We were dropped off around 1km south of the Overlord Shelter close to high tide.

From here we hiked to a preliminary campsite 3km up the Weasel Valley, utilising pack rafts to drag upstream, enabling us to move a large amount of gear more efficiently. We scouted out a feasible new route on Mt Turnweather - we had initially planned on climbing the centre of the north face, based on existing photos and route information, however upon arrival this face looked loose and unappealing. However, on the NE side of the mountain (at the far left of the north face) we found a good looking line with approach pitches up a steep side glacier to a vertical wall. This wall led to a large ledge / ridge on the east spur of the mountain, under the summit tower. Observation from the base with binoculars showed continuous crack systems with several possible lines.

We shuttled food and equipment to the base over the following 9 days, moving camp to a moraine near the bottom of the side glacier. Our initial hike up the Turnweather Glacier involved traversing several difficult and dangerous moraines, however we managed to find a much safer alternative route up a more stable moraine immediately to the south of the main river flow. The hike from our initial camp to the base of the side glacier was approximately 12km over varied moraine, dry glacier and boulder fields. The last 1.5km over flat glacier was very slushy in early July and we opted to bring our dry suits up the glacier to make shuttling this section more enjoyable!

Once our food and equipment was all at the base, we climbed and fixed ropes up the initial steep glacier, climbing ice up to 70 degrees. We then hauled up the glacier to a belay at the base of the rock.

We climbed the first rock pitch of the route and fixed a rope on it. The forecast then gave several days of bad weather, so we opted to hike down to the main Weasel Valley to sit this out, and to meet up with friends who were arriving at this time.

Once the weather improved we hiked back up to Mt Turnweather and ascended our fixed lines, sleeping on portaledges at the base of the rock. The following day we climbed pitch 2, and hauled to this belay.

We spent the next 18 days climbing capsule style, with camps at belays 5, 8, 10 and 15. The weather was consistently poor throughout our climb, with rain at some point every day. This slowed our ascent down considerably, however we still managed to climb every day except one, sometimes just fixing a short pitch.

Most pitches were aided and followed obvious crack systems and weaknesses. The rock was generally good, although the removal or avoidance of many obvious detached blocks was necessary. The route generally followed a series of left trending diagonal weaknesses, with other pitches linking these. We found no evidence of previous ascents in the first 15 pitches.

After 15 pitches we reached the lower angle east ridge of the mountain. We ascended this to the base of the summit tower at 4th class, fixing ropes straight down a blank wall to our previous camp (belay 10) and hauled direct to the ridge, avoiding hauling over the loose and traversing ground we had climbed.

At the base of the summit tower we found two sets of bolts - one very old (80s?) and the other much newer (probably <10 years). These were both located at the top of obvious corner systems on the north face.

We climbed the summit tower in a further 4 pitches, finding excellent quality golden granite. We rappelled back to the ledge using the existing newer bolts, however we think that this party had climbed a different line to us on the tower, due to the location of the bolts. From the ridge we rappelled our route back to the glacier, taking a full day for the descent.

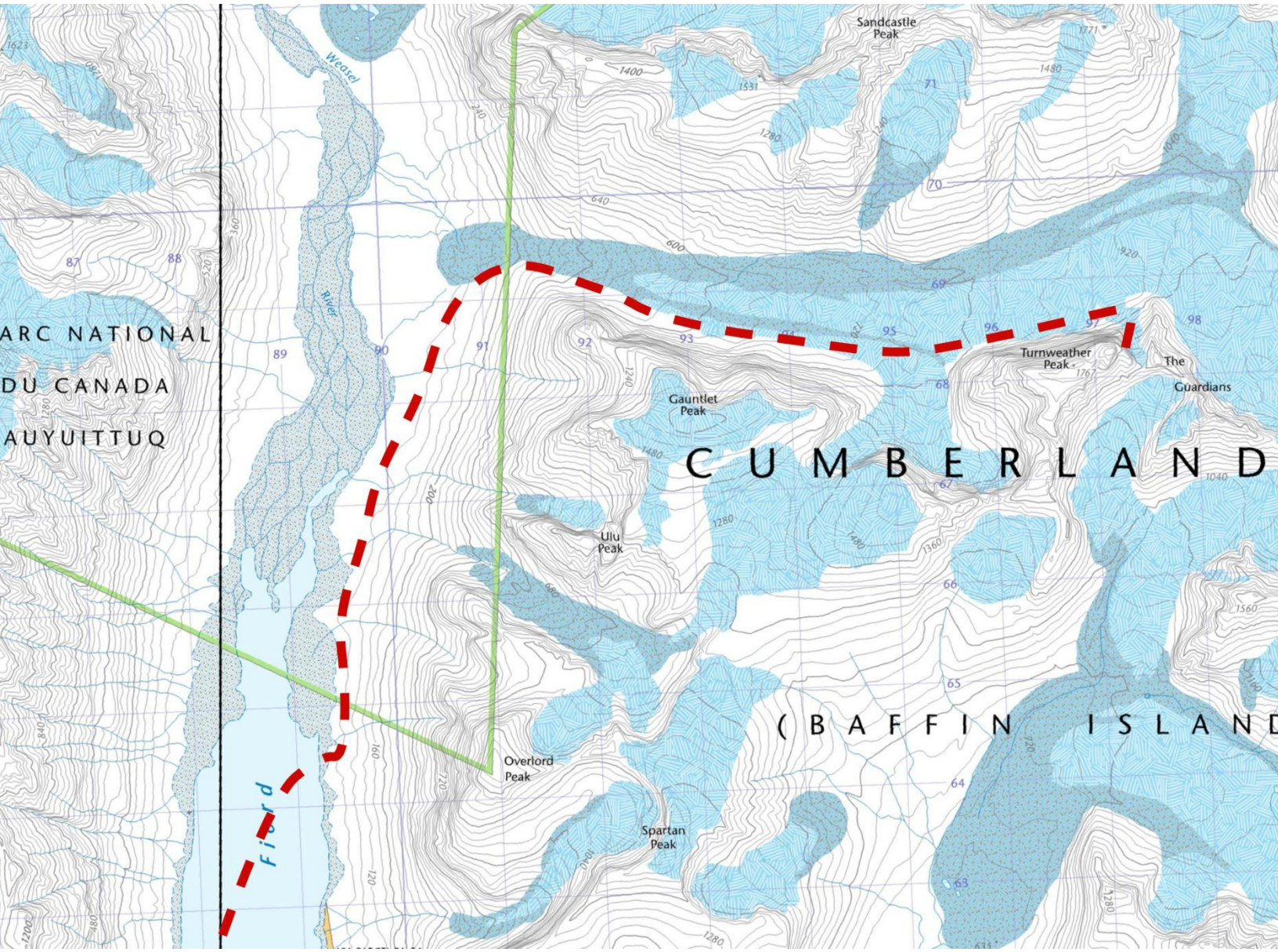
After hiking multiple loads out of the valley and back to our first camp, we spent a few days exploring further up the Weasel Valley.

From our first camp we packrafted back to Pangnirtung, a distance of around 30km. This took 3 days, paddling for up to 5 hours each morning before the southerly headwinds picked up making progress very difficult. The large tidal range in the fjord (up to 7m) meant that we had to use discretion when picking camping spots so that we were not cut off by large tidal mudflats. After one night in Pangnirtung we flew back to Ottawa on 20th August and on to Vancouver.

5. Maps & Route Topo

A short video of the expedition can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY4NEaLzg0Q

The red dotted line shows the approach from Pangnirtung Fjord to the base of the climb.



The line of ascent on the Northeast face of Mount Turnweather:

On the following page is a topo of our climb which shows the pitch lengths, pitch difficulties, gear required and the descent route:

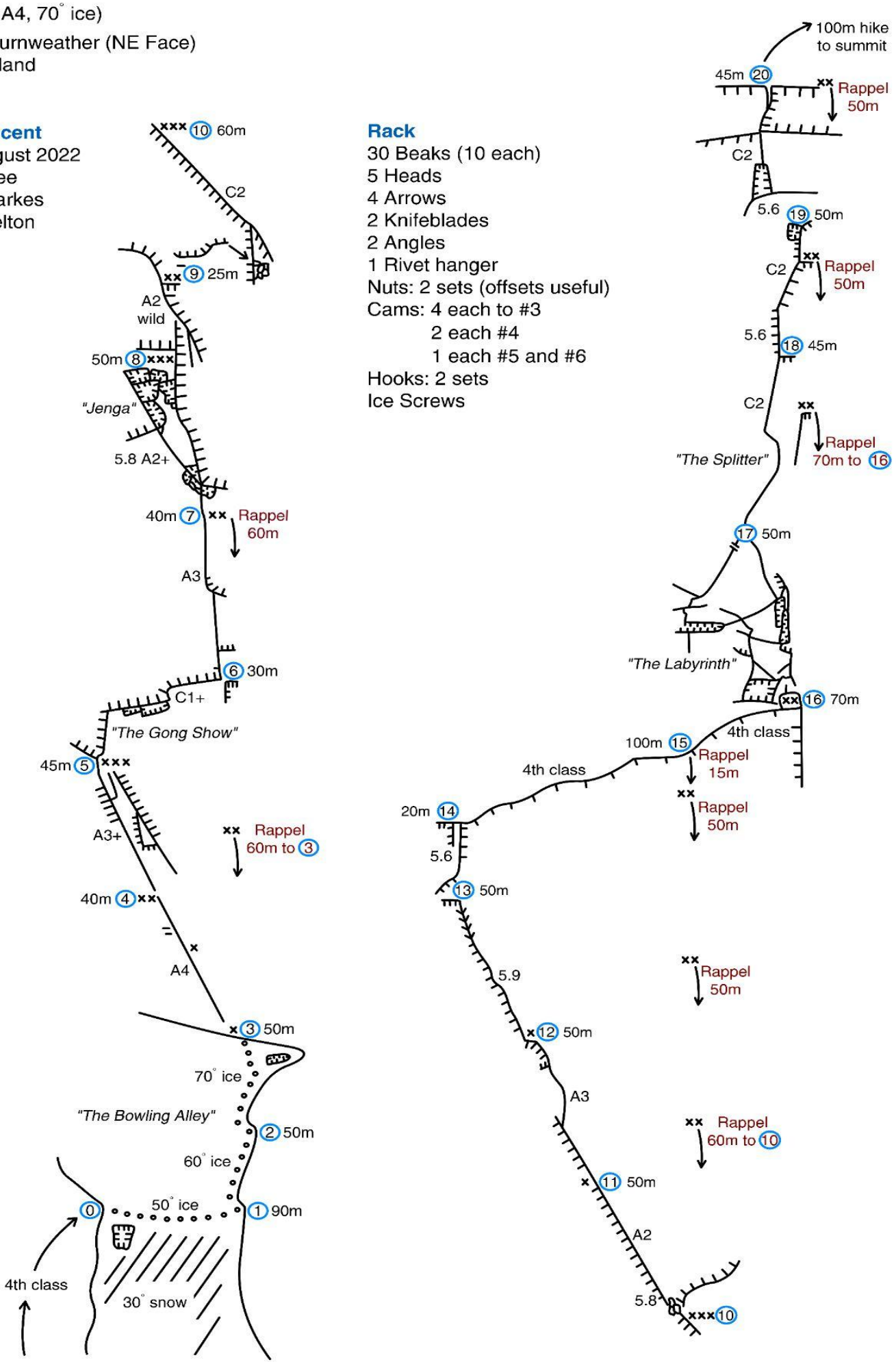
Rainy Day Dream Away

(VI, 5.9, A4, 70° ice)

Mount Turnweather (NE Face)
Baffin Island

First Ascent
July-August 2022
Owen Lee
Maria Parkes
Neil Chelton

Rack
30 Beaks (10 each)
5 Heads
4 Arrows
2 Knifeblades
2 Angles
1 Rivet hanger
Nuts: 2 sets (offsets useful)
Cams: 4 each to #3
2 each #4
1 each #5 and #6
Hooks: 2 sets
Ice Screws



6. Useful Information

We feel this information may be valuable to future parties travelling to the area.

Pangnirtung Facilities

There is a by-donation campground in Pangnirtung (Pisuktinu Tunngavik Territorial Park) immediately SE of town. We didn't end up staying here as on our arrival there had been a polar bear sighting in the campground that morning which several locals warned us about, so we found alternative accommodation in town.

There are two main stores in town, where you can find a reasonable selection of everyday groceries (including dried goods and fresh food) at roughly 2-3 times average Canadian prices. There are very limited camping and outdoor supplies. White gas (naptha) is easily available in the stores and is cheap ($8 / gallon).

The National Park office is open daily and staff are friendly and helpful. You are required to complete an orientation here before travelling to the park - email the office in advance to book this. They will also provide you with registration forms that must be completed. They kindly provided loans of bear spray and bear bangers free of charge for the duration of the trip.

Boat Transport

We arranged boat transport several months prior to the trip, by emailing Peter (details on https://kilabukoutfitting.com). This was $150 / person, one way. The sea ice in Pangnirtung Fjord only broke up around a week before our trip - an earlier departure could prove impossible. Peter told us late April is usually the cut off for snowmobile transport, so travelling in May or June is often not possible unless hiking from Pangnirtung.

Terrain

The west side of the Weasel River is commonly hiked, and has a good trail (although we did not use this). The east side has a much rougher and hard to follow trail in places, and no trail in others. On either side there are a significant number of river crossings that should not be underestimated. Some of these are fast flowing and waist deep, whilst others just involve wet feet in cold water for longer distances over braided rivers. Having a strategy to change footwear / clothes or use dry pants is essential.

Glacial retreat in the area has left many large and unstable moraines which are time consuming and difficult to travel over.

7. Environmental Impacts

Pangnirtung is a remote community, necessitating air transport to get there. We tried to keep the rest of our transport logistics as environmentally friendly as possible - car sharing to/from airports, and packrafting out at the end of the trip. By opting to not send our food and equipment to be cached ahead of time, we eliminated the need for two snowmobiles to be driven into the park by a local outfitter, as well as the extra transport needed for cargo/shipping.

On expedition, human waste was disposed of in line with best practices outlined by Auyuittuq National Park (left on the surface away from trails, to speed up break down in the Arctic environment). Rubbish was burned when outside the park (no fires are allowed inside the park), with non-burnable items and rubbish generated within the park carried out and disposed of in Pangnirtung. We packed our food to minimise plastic waste generated.

8. Expenditure

Expedition Costs	**$CAD**	
Flights	8681	
Excess Baggage	920	
Water Taxi	450	
Park Permits	471	
Food	2000	estimated
Equipment	3000	estimated – this will also be used for future trips
Insurance	1474	
InReach subscriptions	30	
TOTAL (CAD$)	**17026**	
Support Received	**$CAD**	
Mount Everest Foundation	5200	£2000 from MEF £1250 from Alison Chadwick fund
Gino Watkins Trust	4800	£5000 grant total for 5 people including two friends who were climbing independently so not included on MEF grant application
NZAC Expedition Fund	738	
TOTAL (CAD$)	**10738**	