

Angmagssalik Expedition 2022



Mountaineering in East Greenland

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Summary

The Angmagssalik Expedition took place between July and August 2022. The main objective was a 25km unclimbed ridge above west side of Ikasagtivaq fjord. After two days traversing the ridge on mostly dangerous rock the weather deteriorated and it was decided to abort the attempt. The second objective was to explore a superb cirque of peaks which lay on the opposite side of Ikasagtivaq fjord. The team managed to climb a 700m new rock climb on the west face of Niniartivaraq. Basecamp under the cirque was shared with other members of the Scottish Arctic Club who summited several peaks (Map diagram Appendix 1).

The Team

The team consisted of 4 members. Mike Bauermeister, Noel Williams, Simon Tietjen and Will Rowland. Whilst the climbers attempted the ridge Noel journeyed through the glen below. He was also joined by two Scottish Arctic Club Members Simon Fraser and Fraser Melville. At Basecamp other club members were Hannah Mortlock, Bethany Carol and Tom Litchfield.

Travel and Accommodation

Travel to east Greenland we found to be fairly straight forward. However, there are plenty stories of bad weather causing delays to flights and boats. Even in summer High winds, fog, snowstorms and sea ice can often be the cause of such delays. On our outbound journey the flight was delayed a few hours but had no overall impact on our day or trip.

We flew from Glasgow to Reykjavik (Iceland), changed to Keflavik airport to fly to Kulusuk (Greenland). We then took a boat down the "East Greenland highway" to Tasiilaq a major town in this region. From Tasiilaq we used Arctic Dream to take us up the fjord to our objectives and back to Kulusuk airport.

We teamed up with the Scottish Arctic Club (SAC) to travel to Tasiilaq to reduce the costs. We booked through an agency Nonni Travel who were very professional and even honoured the price given to us two years ago (pre covid).

Travel between the North of Scotland and East Greenland took two days. Unfortunately, on our return it took three. Ultimately this comes down to the availability of the boat. As a result, we overnighted in Tasiilaq, Kulusuk, Keflavik and Reykjavik. Tasiilaq and Kulusuk have lodges, but we camped in both towns. Camping in Tasiilaq is either by the shore or up Valley of the Flowers and is payable to the redhouse. Camping in Kulusuk is free and can be found above town at the reservoir.

In Iceland we stayed with two different accommodation providers. During the outbound journey we stayed in the Bus Hostel in Reykjavik which can be reached by a bus directly from the international airport and close to the city airport. On our return journey we had luxurious stay at the Marriot hotel near to the international airport at Keflavik. On this occasion it was a good move due to early morning flight, however the taxi journey between the airports was not cheap!

The Ridge

Starting the ridge from the south-eastern end of the ridge the boat dropped the team off on the eastern flank of the first named peak Qerqikajik (Appendix 2). The first top was gained via steep broken ground. The top was similar to a Cairngorm summit, but the terrain soon became steep and interesting traversing towards the second peak. Approaching the steep second peak it soon became apparent that it was a no go. A huge colony of Herring Gulls populated the cliffs and had nest bound young (Appendix 7). The decision was made to drop off the ridge to the east and traverse across to peak 3. The decent was very loose and the last step to reach the snow was abseiled. After regaining the ridge, the traverse continued to a bivi site below peak 7 (Appendix 2), 12 hours after leaving the boat.

A large steep cliff lay between peak 7 and the main ridge below. A gully on the east provided another option to outflank difficult ground (Appendix 8). The terrain varied between fairly decent granite and loose gneiss. A few steps were climbed at around alpine III. After 10hrs a great bivi spot was reached between peak 13 & 14 (Appendix 3). The weather had broken, it was decided to stop for the night and reassess in the morning.

After a wet night the weather showed no signs of clearing. The ridge was bad enough in the dry but manageable. In the wet it would be a different story. Much of the rock was extremely lichenous and particularly slippery in the wet. From the col a gully led down back down to the fjord (Appendix 9) We re-grouped with our support in the glen and walked out to the far end where the agreed collection point would be at Kuugarmiit. The ridge would have taken at least four days and not the 3 days expected. The loose nature of the rock meant extreme care had to be taken which slowed things considerably.

At Kuugarmiit there is a private luxury yurt camp and a small jetty. The town of Tini (Tiniteqilaq) can be seen across the fjord (Appendix 1). The camp has a booster and mobile phones can be used with a Danish sim card. After another damp night under the tarp the boat arrived and took us across to our basecamp.

The Cirque

Across the Ikasagtiuaq fjord from the ridge lies the cirque of peaks. The majestic peaks have been explored by a number of parties but a great deal of exploring remains to be done. A superb basecamp above fjord gives quick access to the glacier and surrounding peaks.

Wee Dru

Front and centre a peak stand's out more than any. This has become known as the Dru or the Wee Dru. Despite its size and altitude this is no easy face. An attempt was made to climb a new line here, but it soon became apparent that we had not enough gear or the right tactics. There is a bolted line on the face, but it is uncertain of its origins (Appendix 10).

Peak 13 (1250m)

A taller peak sits to south of the Wee Dru and has a prominent ridge which climbs up above the glacier. Tietjen and Rowland climbed the already established route and attempted to traverse Peak 13 and the Wee Dru. When descending north to the couloir between the two summits rock fall was triggered from the flank of peak 13. The ridge on the Wee Dru looked unpleasant and it was decided to quickly descend the couloir to the trail on the glacier. 5 hours later back at basecamp a huge rockfall released into the couloir and down the glacier. This was likely a first decent off peak 13 and it is not advised (Appendix 11).

Niniartivaraq (The Big N)

The closest peak above basecamp is the rock tower of Niniartivaraq. The steep rock tower is an impressive feature, and it is easy to ignore the slabby west face. From a distance the west side appears to be largely broken however the rock is generally sound. From the centre of the wall Rowland and Teitjen climbed 13 pitches weaving across slabs and through overlaps until reaching a terrace and easier ground. A further 300m was climbed until an upper terrace was met and it was possible to break out up and left on to the west ridge. 700m HVS/VI (Appendix 12).

Other Excursions

With fine weather various teams repeated many peaks in the cirque which have seen very few ascents. Nialigaq 1171m was a superb peak with a straightforward glacier approach. Traverse in above seracs from the left and head southwest to a steep snow slope which leads to the col. The peak is gained by an easy ridge with one step which can be abseiled (25m). Niniartivaraq (The Big N) is a very fine peak with a superb west ridge. Straight forward scrambling up and down following the black lichenous granite.

Mike and Frasers day out

Looking Northwards from the summit of Niniartivaraq, the Sermilik Sound was heavily choked with icebergs. Bauermeister and Melville set out towards the Sapulik inlet to see these icebergs closeup. Leaving the camp in the morning to return that night, the low-level trek turned out to be a 23-mile trip crossing multiple glacial fed rivers that had to be waded across (Appendix 13). A path was picked up for a short while alongside an unnamed lake, presumably used by local hunters, whilst the rest of the trek crossed rocky tundra. On reaching the bay at Sapulik it was evident that this area was used as a camp for local hunters some of whom were fishing from a boat in the sound.

In Country Logistics

No permits were required for the area we explored and in general we experienced no red tape. Having a reliable boatman was essential and the quickest way access remote areas on the coast. Lars from Arctic Dream has three boats and several staff. He also has various essentials for arctic trips such as guns, sat phones and good local connections. There are more tour guide companies operating in the area now and it seems this region will become even more of a hotspot due to its access.

Being camped so close to the fjord it wasn't too much of a worry carrying luxury items. It was a real treat using boats to carry the weight and at basecamp we enjoyed novelties such as daily fresh milk (UHT).

Supplies

We visited the supermarkets in Kulusuk and Tasiilaq- both had enough to live on. Tasiilaq had by far more variety and had hardware shops where we bought Gerry cans and blue barrels to store food. Super markets had a good selections and prices here were far more reasonable than in Iceland. The most expensive mince and tatties imaginable was made at our Hostel in Reykjavik! Dehydrated meals were still taken from home along with some other home comforts. There were no issues with customs taking food items in from a non-EU country. Gas canisters were easily obtained in the main supermarket in Tasiilaq, and they had a variety of different types. In Kulusuk they had a weekly market on Friday at 11am where you could purchase hardware items.

Insurance

Care needs to be taken to ensure policies cover the arctic region as well as the activities taking place. Insurance that may be commonly used for alpine trips will often not be acceptable for arctic regions despite activities falling into the correct bracket. Global Insurance covered our trip and have been reliable in the past. Other companies offered competitive prices especially when group bookings were considered.

Synopsis of mountain region

Despite the geology maps displaying mostly granite rock we found equal amounts of gneiss when crossing the ridge. Here the rock is generally very poor. The steeper more technical sections were in fact mostly solid. In the cirque it was largely granite, though there are a few peaks made of gneiss. The black gneiss is the poorest quality.

On hot days it became quite blustery as wind would pick up and funnel through the fjords. This would be found at lower elevations, and summits would remain calm. Katabatic winds can be very serious in Greenland and warning systems are in place in towns and villages- although this would not be of help when in the mountains.

Mosquito and black fly were quite bad at lower elevations and near towns. Biviing on high passes and summits was most pleasant but a good midgie net is an essential piece of equipment – even the locals use them!

Observations

Glaciers were a strange place to be at 3am when it should be dark. It is easy to forget about time restraints when the sun doesn't go down, but alpine rules still apply- especially when traveling on snow and glaciated areas. On occasion we found it warmer on the glacier than it was at basecamp. Noel noticed that a glacier he travelled on had diminished from a wet glacier to a dry glacier in just four years!

Budget

Expedition Costs	
International travel	8100
Domestic flights and transport	1100
Accommodation	700
Equipment	1550
Permits and peak fees	N/A
Liaison Officer or Sirdar	N/A
Expedition members' insurance	1560
Porter / staff Insurance	N/A
Food and fuel (base camp and above)	1520
Agency fees if applicable	N/A
Porters and pack animals	N/A
TOTAL	14, 530

Timeline

- 22nd Flight from Glasgow to Keflavik
- 23rd Flight from Keflavik to Kulusuk and boat to Tasiilaq
- 24th Gather supplies
- 25th Boat to base of ridge and start traverse
- 26th Traverse ridge
- 27th Drop off ridge and cross glen through to arranged collection point (Kuugarmiit)
- 28th Collected by boat and dropped off at basecamp
- 29th Recce
- 30th Attempt on steep face of the wee "Dru"
- 31st Ridge traverse on peaks at back of glacier (repeat) but first decent
- 1st Washing, fishing and cragging
- 2nd New route on The Big N
- 3rd Rest day
- 4th Ventured up on to a pleasant glacier and pleasant peak Nialigaq 1171m (Appendix 6)
- 5th Packed up and travelled back to Kulusuk
- 6th Flight to Iceland
- 7th Flight back to Glasgow and drive to Fort William

Thanks

MEF, JMT, CRUX, Fire pot, Scottish Arctic Club, Noel Williams, Mike Pescod, Thomas Gilchrist, Clive Rowland, Pat Ingram and Gav Robbins

Appendices

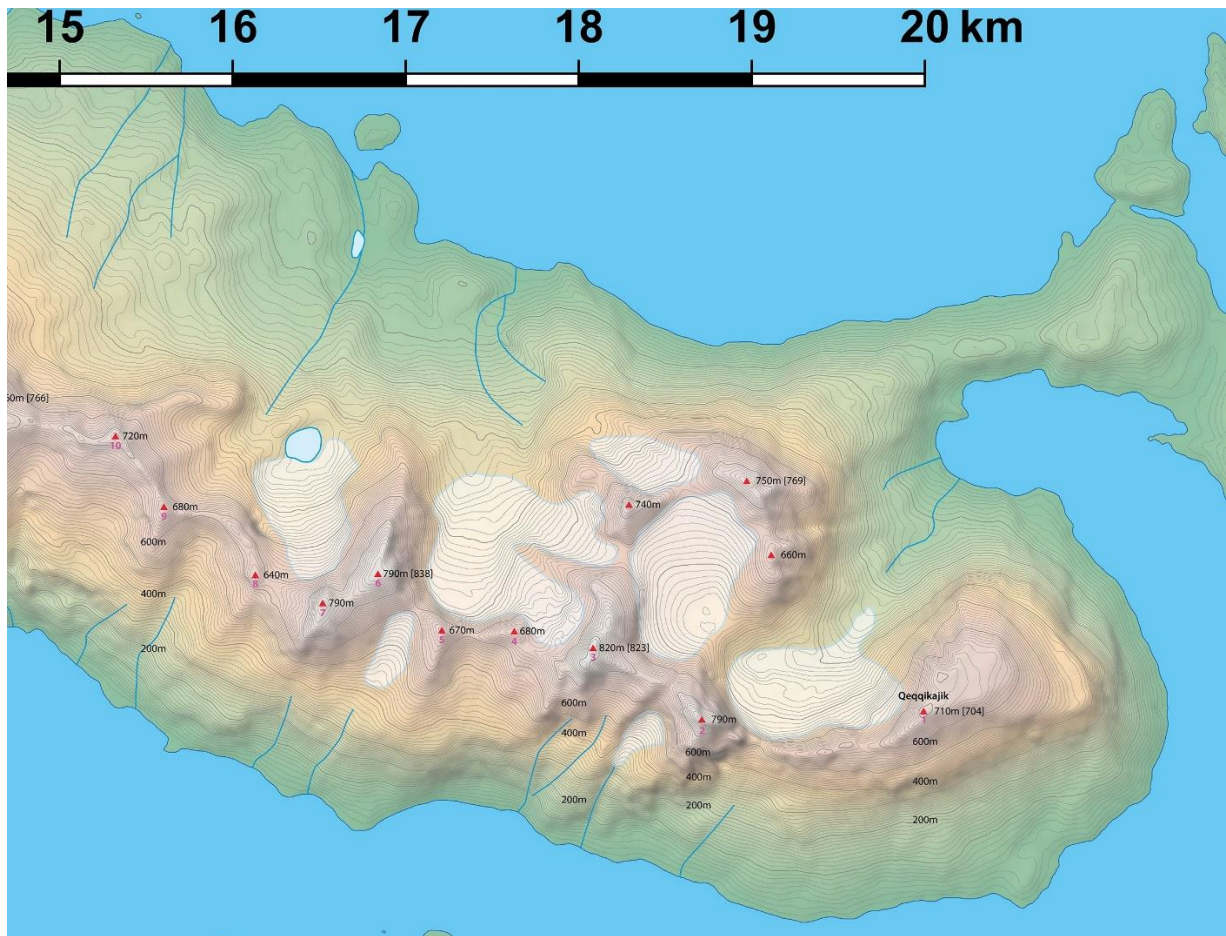
Appendix 1

Map of region



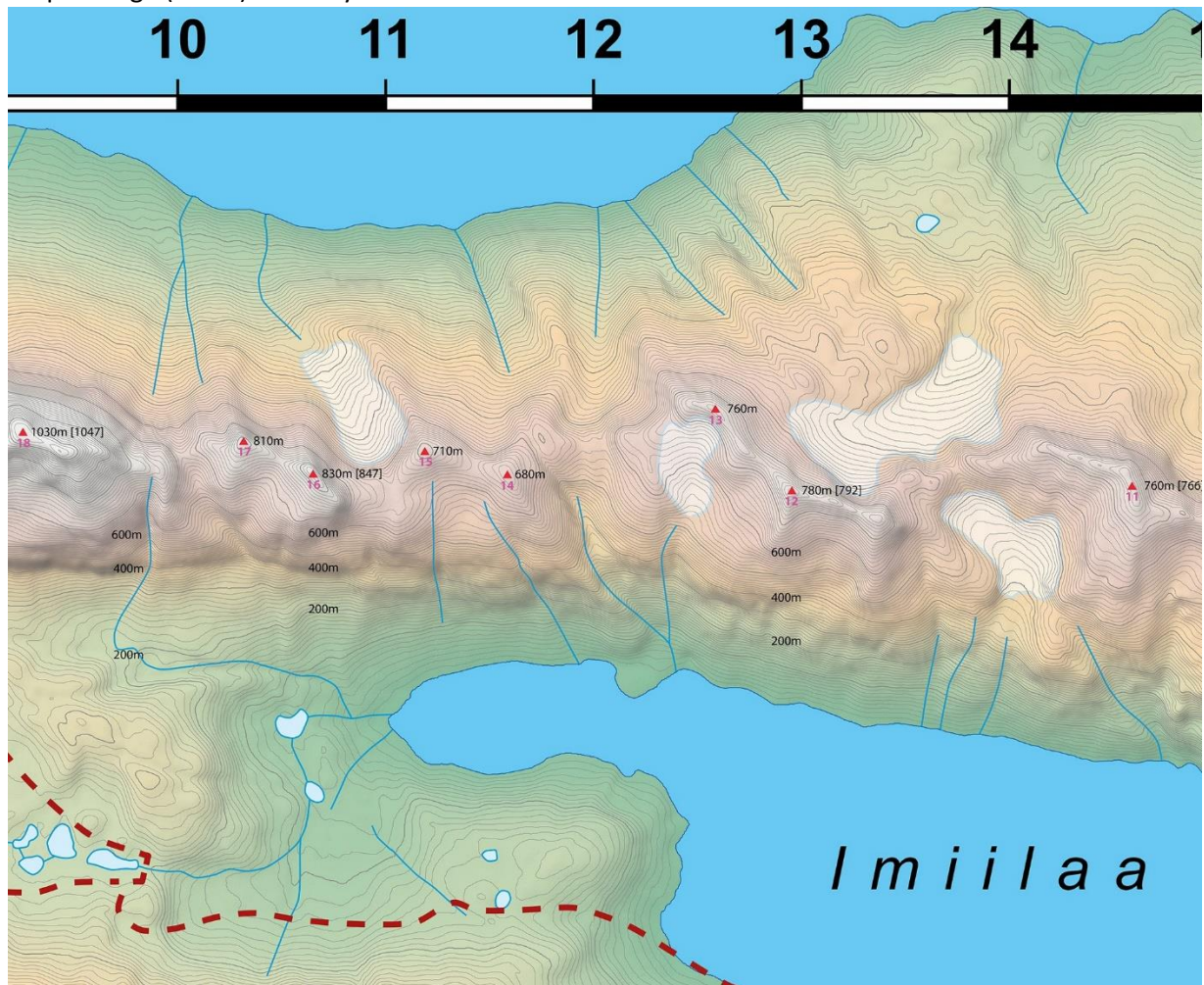
Appendix 2

Map of ridge (1 of 4) made by Noel Williams



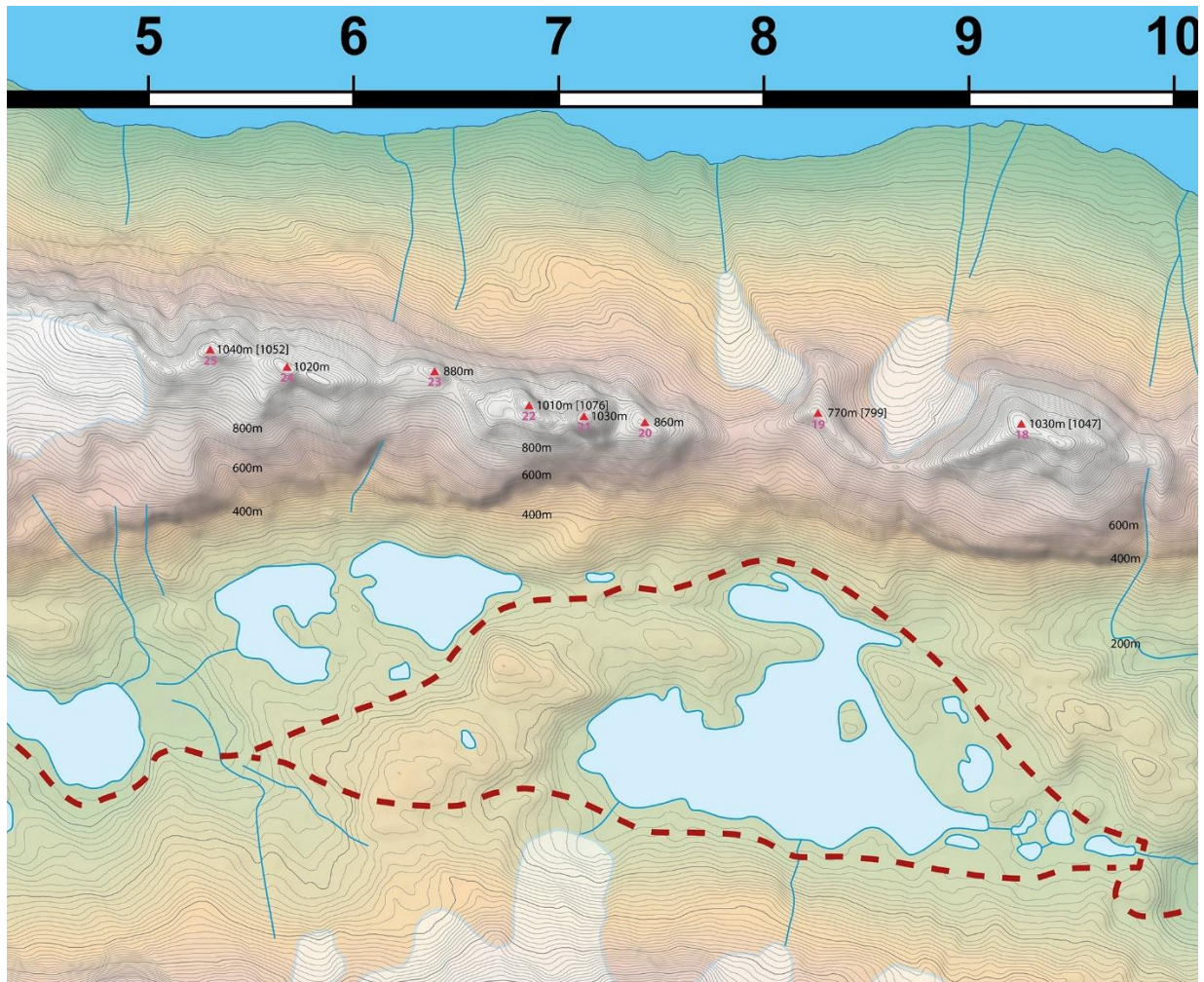
Appendix 3

Map of ridge (2 of 4) made by Noel Williams



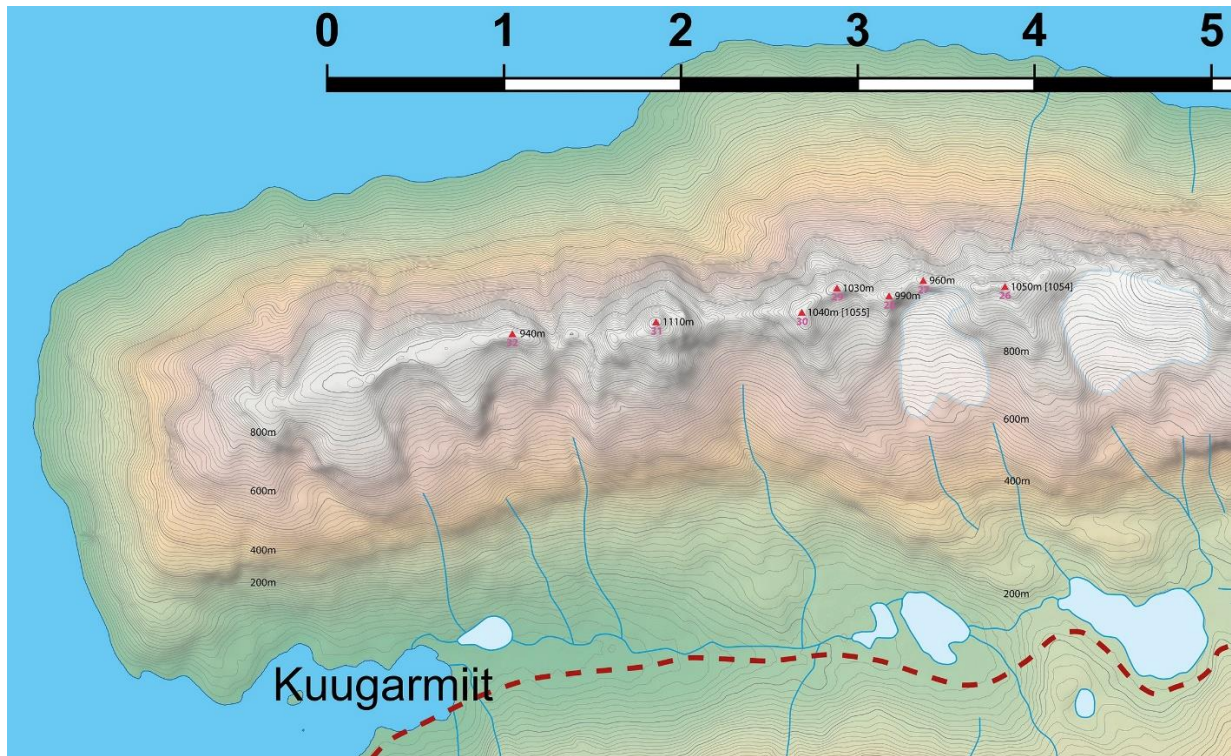
Appendix 4

Map of ridge (3 of 4) made by Noel Williams



Appendix 5

Map of ridge (4 of 4) made by Noel Williams



Appendix 6

Map of Cirque made by Noel Williams



Appendix 7

Unclimbed Peak 2 guarded by gulls



Appendix 8

Outflanking cliffs on peak 7. Decent in gully starting from col left of centre



Appendix 9

The last good escape on the west side



Appendix 10

Retreat



Appendix 11

Rock fall from peak 1250 down into couloir



Appendix 12

Dr Boom Fuzz's Circus. 700m HVS/VI



Appendix 13

Crossing swollen rivers on route to Sapulik (Pic by Mike Bauermeister)

