

Greenland and Arctic Challenge 2004/2005 Year 1 (2004)

Being gale bound with two anchors down out here in Barden Bught in North West Greenland (77° 08'N) gives a good opportunity to write a report of our activities:

Late June/early July It was a difficult Atlantic crossing. Though not as stormy as sometimes on this northern North Atlantic crossing from Scotland to Greenland, we were eighteen days on the wind, hove-to for twenty six hours off Cape Farewell, and had one pleasant day of flat calm in sunshine on the last day approaching Nuuk.

After Nuuk we put into the fifteen mile long fjord of Kangerdluarssugssauq as our first climbing objective, an area of scenic but serious mountains. The climbing is not technical in the sense of needing two axes or proper rock climbing, but the scale is big and objectives always further than expected, the Saga maps being wholly inadequate (for mountaineering), the route finding therefore difficult, and the terrain difficult, often loose, bouldery and unconsolidated. Also this summer the weather was unusually poor in Greenland (both for sailing and mountaineering) which rather restricted what we were able to achieve as clear visibility was needed, on the tops especially, with the difficult route finding and inadequate maps.

All climbs were from the boat at sea level. Heights by altimeter or from the Saga maps:

July 25 Keith Geddes, Bob Shepton climbed Pt 1650 (N66° 19.06' W50° 51.64). This had possibly been climbed before – having slogged all that way there was a dirty great cairn on the top! But it was so well built, was it to do with surveying? But we believe in any case this may have been the first British ascent, and almost certainly the first ascent from the west side (Kangerdluarssugssauq) via the west buttress (not recommended, loose and very exacting terrain). The ascent involved 1650 metres of height, 30 kilometres distance, and took 28 hours. Keith Geddes, twenty three years an instructor at Glenmore Lodge, was heard to comment afterwards 'that was the hardest mountain day I have ever had'; the old man felt quite pleased with himself!

July 27 Keith Geddes, Phil Ham, Bob Shepton made the first ascent of 'Mt Stevenson', 1115 metres (N66° 18.39 W53° 05.30) Geddes, 'a perfect mountain day'

July 27 Nigel Harrison, Emily Brooks made the first ascent of 'Mt Peter' Pt 1430 (N66° 12.97 W53° 02.80). A fine looking peak climbed via its northern glacier. A very fast descent was made in deteriorating weather.

We continued north via Sisimuit, Aasiaat and the Vaigat to Ingia Fjord and the Akuliarusinguaq peninsular at the northern end of Uummaanaq Fjord. The principal objectives here were four 2000+ metre peaks left over from my two previous expeditions to this area. But they were left over because of the length and difficulties of the access and we were not altogether successful! All the remarks regarding the serious nature of the climbing apply here also, plus big fields of unconsolidated boulders, glaciers and hanging glaciers, and lateral and terminal moraines.

The obvious approach for the first two 2000 metre summits appeared to be a long but gently ascending glacier leading eventually to another glacier and the summit plateau. A strong party, Keith Geddes, Phil Ham, Nigel Harrison, Emily Brooks set out fully equipped with skis, skins, boots, tents, sleds etc which turned out to be entirely the wrong gear. The gently ascending glacier became a series of icefalls reminiscent of the Khumbu icefall! The party had neither the equipment nor the mind set for the terrain. The attempt was aborted.

We went round to the southern end of Akuliarusinguaq via the Nugatsiaup tunua channel to attempt the other two 2000ers.

August 9 After waiting for weather, Keith Geddes, Bob Shepton set off to make a gear dump on the glacier, which Bob had used part way in 1998 when climbing Pt 2060 with Danuska Ryckerz, ready for a subsequent attempt. Keith, who had not enjoyed the terrain on the way up, persuaded Bob to stay up and at least make an attempt on Spot Height 1790 'whilst we are here'. This we duly did, up soft snow and unconsolidated rock on the slope up to the nearby summit (highest point) at 1815 metres (N71° 44.18' W52° 40.79') which turned out to be a little way to the north west of the Spot Height. But the old man did not have enough left to do the 2000 metre peak as well, so we came down.

Meantime Nigel Harrison and Emily Brooks had gone up the Kugssinerssup auvfa valley to see whether it was possible to reach the original 2000ers via a glacier from this side. They were repulsed by moraines which did not appear on the map, impassable rivers and heavy rain.

August 11 Keith Geddes, Phil Ham made the ascent of Pt 1511 on Qeqertarsuaq (Nugatsiaq). Probably climbed before; cairn on top.

August 11 Nigel Harrison and Emily Brooks climbed two summits on a ridge via a glacier from the same approach route, but mist prevented continuing along the ridge. No positions, they forgot their GPS!

All attempts to persuade Keith to go back up to the glacier gear dump and on to the 2000 metre summit fell on deaf ears. 'Don't tell me the hard man of Glenmore Lodge is really a man of straw'! All to no avail. He had brought his gear down with him and would not be persuaded! This was a pity because it meant I had to go up on my own.

August 13/14 Bob Shepton made the first ascent of Solo Snow Dome 2065 metres (N71° 43.52 W52° 35.37). Emphasis on the solo as a little dig. The apparently easy snow ridge above the glacier leading to the steeper summit slopes turned out to consist of soft, energy sapping snow. It was a long way down afterwards!

August 16/17 Keith Geddes, Phil Ham, Bob Shepton in different combinations and from different directions made the first ascent of the following peaks on Qeqertarsuaq which lay roughly speaking along a ridge but with ups and downs in between: West to east:

Pt 1735 (by altimeter) N71° 39.11 W53° 10.41

Spot Height 1750 N71° 39.22 W53° 09.52

Twin 2 1715 (altimeter) N71° 39.47 W53° 08.56 well defined twin peaks when looking from the fjord

Twin 1 1645 (altimeter) N71° 39.65 W53° 07.17 below

Exactng: very loose rock on the ridge and unconsolidated rock/scree on the approach the far side.

A total of twelve summits were climbed in the two areas, ten of which at least were first ascents, we believe.

Before the next phase there were various crew changes. Nigel and Em managed to hitch a lift south on the oil supply vessel from the settlement of Nugatsiaq, and Keith and Phil left by air after we had taken the boat round to Upernavik. Polly Murray, Tash Wright, Jessy Howarth ('Bob's Angels' as they called themselves with which I readily concurred!) arrived in Upernavik to take their place.

The objectives for this phase of the expedition included: to sail as far north as it was possible to get a fibreglass boat, to make a reconnaissance for possible future climbing in the north west, and if possible to climb anything accessible and suitable.

We succeeded in reaching Etah, formerly the most northerly Inuit settlement at 78° 17'N, but now abandoned, and which various explorers used as a base in the past, and got the boat as far north as 78° 32'N in Smith Sound/Nares Strait which is probably furthest north an ordinary yacht has been in Greenland before. We also got across to Ellesmere Island undertaking a scientific project for the Scottish Association of Marine Sciences at Dunstaffbage. And we discovered some attractive possibilities for first ascents by ski mountaineering in north west Greenland for the future (hopefully), but we did not get across to the Canadian side as originally planned.

September 20-23 Polly Murray and Tash Wright made the first ski traverse the length of Herbert Island (77° 25'N), from east to west (Wally Herbert spent a winter on the island but it was not named after him!) This was a considerable achievement involving 30 kilometres in exactng soft snow conditions, at an average height of 850 metres after getting up to the ridge and plateau.

We sailed (and motored) back to Upernavik. Now I am preparing for wintering near here in the boat in the ice ready for next year's expedition.





QANAAQ  
THULE



570

480

MAC CORMICK FJORD

KAP  
CLEVELAND

530

RED CLIFFS

650

QUANAAQ

MURCHISON SUND

30'

KAP  
LEE

DODD'S  
DELIGHT  
PICK UP

888

866

HERBERT IS.

CAMP 3

865

CAMP 2

DROP OFF

CAMP 1

BASTION  
POINT

KAP  
HENSON

ORTHUMBELLAND  
IS.

HYALSUND



710

Length of Herbert 28 km



70"