
Greenland 1996

(Plates 1, 20-25, 33)

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1996 Ice Cap Crossings

Without a doubt the most important expedition was the record-breaking Norwegian Greenland Unsupported Expedition. Rune Gjeldnes and Torry Larsen succeeded in making the longest unsupported ski trek in history, covering the full length of the Greenland Ice Cap from S to N.

Gjeldnes and Larsen were airlifted to the southernmost point of the Ice Cap on 19 March and set out on 1 April pulling sledges of 175kg each. Two months later, on 2 June, they abseiled down the last ice face to reach land and then walked the final 60km to **Cape Morris Jessup**. This trek of 2771km must be considered one of the greatest feats in Polar exploration.

There were several more regular Ice Cap crossings. One member of the 5-member Norwegian Grønlandsekspeditionen 96, which started just W of **Tasiilaq**, was airlifted out with back problems after four days of travelling, but the remaining members continued to **Søndre Strømfjord** in a total of 21 days. The attempted crossing by the all-female Norwegian team of Siri Skare and Janne Molland ended almost as soon as it began when Janne Molland slipped and fractured her ankle minutes after the helicopter left. Once back in Norway Siri Skare was invited to join an E-W crossing led by Odd-Arvid Rønning. All five members completed the 560km crossing from **Nagtitvit** NNW of **Isortoq** in 19 days. The 3-member Norwegian Argupek 96 expedition made the crossing from the head of the **Hahn Glacier** in 21 days, while the international team of Sabine de Bourmont (France), Franco Copetti (Italy) and Einar Torfi Finnson (Iceland, leader) took 24 days. Injury to Carl Wilkinson forced Steve Bull's Integrated TransGreenland Expedition to return to **Isortoq**. The Norwegian Støren family (father, son and daughter) crossed from Nagtitvit to **Søndre Strømfjord** in 21 days in August.

These expeditions show that Ice Cap crossings are no longer the preserve of the élite. Moreover, although chartering helicopters remains expensive, the cost of a Bell 212 carrying 5-6 people has fallen from 20,000 DKK per hour in 1994 to 11,000 DKK.

1996 Mountaineering

There was significant activity this summer on the granite walls of **Tasermiut Fjord** in the Cape Farewell Region. The area was visited by a strong team from North Wales (Nigel Shepherd, Louise Thomas, Mike 'Twid' Turner and

Ian Wilson). Shepherd and Wilson attempted the right-hand tower of **Nalumasortoq (2045m)** but Shepherd took a bad fall after 8 pitches and they retreated. Thomas and Turner spent three days climbing the crack system between the left and central towers to a point well above the col, finishing at just below the summit of the left-hand tower, to give *Umwelten* (650m, E5 A1). Thomas and Turner made a fast second ascent of the controversial 1994 bolted route *Moby Dick* (1300m, 9- A2) on the W Face of the W Summit of **Ulamertorssuaq (1830m)** (see *MEF Reports, ref. 96/7*). Another British team was also in the Cape Farewell region. Simon Inger, Chris Bedford, Henry Lickorish and Alastair Mitchell climbed 10 new routes on 7 previously unclimbed peaks.

Also on the W Face of the W Summit of **Ulamertorssuaq**, Lionel Daudet and Benoit Robert spent 13 days on the impressive *L'Inespérée*, offering 26 pitches with free-climbing difficulties up to F7b (7a obl) and a crux aid pitch of A4+. On the same face another new route (27 pitches with sustained difficulties at VIII and a crux of IX+) was added by Christoph Hainz and Claus Obrist, possibly between the two Piola routes. After two weeks preparation and bolting they made a complete free ascent of the route.

Christian Dalphin (Switzerland) returned to **Nalumasortoq** for a third attempt at a direct line on the central tower, in the company of Jannick Flugi (Switzerland), Patrick Berthet (France), Paoli Vitali and Sonja Brambati (both of Italy). They succeeded on *Cheese Finger at Three O'Clock* (the name inspired by a cheese-slicing accident suffered by Paolo Vitali just prior to the climb), climbed mainly on aid sustained at A2/3 with a crux of A3/4. A 230m rock-band was followed by a 670m pillar

Another international team (the Slovenian Silvo Karo with British climbers Jerry Gore and Tony Penning) visited **Nalumasortoq** and climbed *Mussel Power*, a direct line up the cracks in the W Face of the left-hand tower to the left of the 1995 British route. The 750m route was climbed in 6 days, mainly on aid (up to A3+) but with free climbing up to British E4 6a. **Nalumasortoq** was first climbed by a French party in 1960 but the three granite towers that form satellite peaks to the west remained unclimbed for over three decades. In July 1995 the left-hand tower was climbed by a British team, David Anderson, Craig Dring, Ian Dring and Paul Tatersall.

Two expeditions visited the slightly smaller granite spires and Alpine peaks in the **Igdlorssuit Havn region** near the village of Augpilagtoq in S Greenland. Croatians Boris Cujic, Darko Dular and Vlado Pausic, with Igor Kalan and Miha Kajzelj from Slovenia climbed *Ujarak* (American grade VI with technical difficulties up to UIAA VII+ and A3) on the 800m W Face of the **Igdlorssuit Havn Tower (1160m)**. On the nearby **Narsap Sarqa Fjord** the 4-man British team of Chris Bedford, Simon Inger, Henry Lickorish and Alastair Mitchell made first ascents of 7 peaks, including the granite spire **Magic Arrow (1200m)** which yielded a route of TD- with several pitches of V+.

On 6 June a French expedition led by Pierre Grossmann and assisted by Chamonix guide Bernard Müller and local adviser H C Florian flew from Iceland to the **Watkins Mountains**, approximately 500km N of Tasiilaq. **Gunnbjørnsfjeld (3710m)**, the highest summit in the Arctic, was climbed by

its S Ridge on 8 June. **Cone and Dome**, the second and third highest summits in the Arctic, were also climbed, together with two of the other high snow peaks to the SSE of Gunnbjørnsfjeld. Cone and Dome were first climbed by Ingemar Olsson in 1988, followed within days by Jim Lowther who also made the first ascents of the other high peaks on the snow ridge SSE of Gunnbjørnsfjeld. In 1996 a Norwegian group led by Sjur Mordre spent a short time in the area after the French and were followed by the Eagle Ski Club Gunnbjørnsfjeld Expedition led by Derek Fordham who made an ascent of Gunnbjørnsfjeld on 3 July before beginning a long ski journey to the coast (see *'The Voices Heard'*, pp 37-38).

The **Stainings Alps** were visited by an 8-member team from the Scottish Mountaineering Club. From a base camp on the Col Major (2040m) they made a number of first ascents and added a new route on the NW Ridge of **Danketinde (2795m)** at TD (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 96/27).

The Oxford University East Greenland (Schweizerland) expedition led by Richard Pash were boated from Kulusuk to the **Knud Rasmussen Glacier** on 8 July. After skiing up glaciers to reach the area SE of the **Pourquoi Pas Glacier** they made 24 first ascents in an area with excellent rock-climbing (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 96/19).

The British Tangent Expedition spent six weeks in the Kronprins Frederiks Bjerger in E Greenland (July-August) and made 55 first ascents (see *'Snowy Summits in East Greenland'*, pp 39-46).

There are now three huts on **Amassalik Island** and a hut at the entrance to **Schweizerland** built by the Tasiilaq Mountain Club.