



73 Majorteque from the W. This and next photo: R. D. Hoare

Majorteqe (Peak 1300m), 1974

R. D. Hoare

The island of Pamiagdruk in the Cape Farewell region of Greenland is large and temperate. Few of the valleys are choked with broken glaciers and loose moraines like the ice cap area to the N, but the major difference between the two regions is the rock. Greg and I are rock men at heart—snow and ice pitches are pleasant, and even, we discovered, satisfying, but 30 lb of ironmongery and tape had looked at us for 4 weeks and cried out to be used. And here at last on Pamiagdruk it seemed that we might have escaped the horrific gravel which passed for granite around the Kangersuneq Quingordelek Fjord, and which Greg had described as 'vertical Weetabix' after our first encounter with 1000 ft of it. No, the island looked promising, and right in the middle of the system, dominating the fjord to the N, stood peak 1300 m, looking like an artillery shell, thrusting its nose into the blue sky above. We had seen it first when far out in Ilua Fjord, but from the new base camp only its summit appeared above an intermediate range. Yet even at that distance it looked like good, honest, piton-whacking-type rock. It was hardly surprising that on the morning after our arrival we set out for a reconnaissance of the peak and its approaches, with a silent prayer that this time we would not be disappointed, and that finally we might be able to ditch our crampons permanently.

From the aerial photos it looked possible to circle the peak, so we headed S into what became known as Summer Valley. Willow herb, saxifrage, campions and even the shy cassiope covered the floor between the succession of lakes, until we reached a fjord which thrust in from the Atlantic. Traversing its W flank allowed us to reach another valley which led back to the N again. Here there was a complete contrast to the one which had just been left. On both sides great spires of rock, broken and erratic, cut out everything but the noonday sun, and the bowl was a smooth white. It was quickly dubbed Winter Valley as we plodded up snow and frozen scree. Between these two valleys lay our peak of interest, 1300 m. As we drew opposite it in Winter Valley the basin widened to accommodate a string of lakes, reflecting the rock walls on either side. It was an impressive setting, and over a bag of peanuts we discussed the summit above. From where we stood, a series of slabs and scree patches swept up to a snow slope 900 ft above. This in turn led to what appeared to be a dyke of black rock which looked broken and easily climbable for 300 ft to the col which separated Peak 1300 m from a minor spire to the N. Thereafter the climbing began. The ridge to the summit looked about 1000 ft long, and was broken in 2; firstly by a bulge after 200 ft, and then by a gigantic pinnacle after a further 300 ft. Above that the angle appeared to ease, although the summit seemed to be guarded by an overhang. 'That top overhang'll be the least of our worries,' said Greg after we had studied the route for a while. 'The main thing is, what's the rock made of?' If good, the route might be climbed in a day; but if bad, it would be a repetition of earlier epics on gravel. For my

part I felt that anything that steep could not be all that loose—there had to be some granite on it, or it would not be capable of standing without support.

The following morning saw us back in the valley with our wives; we were fully loaded for a 4 day attempt with enough gear to peg seriously should the need arise. The girls stayed until the sun left the valley and then, wishing us luck, set off for the warmth of Base Camp. It was a still, calm evening, with light until after 9pm, so while making supper we twisted our necks to look at the peak above. The NW face, which was directly in front of us, looked vast—2500 ft of cracks and ledges which would offer a superb route in the future . . . but we wanted the ridge first.

At 5am we were on our way with a cold N wind making us disinclined to stop, as we scrambled the scree and slab section up to the snow. From below, this had looked easy, but to our surprise it was over 400 ft high and very steep near the top. Having only one ice-axe and no crampons between us, we moved cautiously up the slope, Greg going ahead with the axe and kicking large steps. It was with considerable relief that we reached its top and moved on to the black dyke. The blocks were loose but large, and we reached the col by 7.30am as the sky changed from clear to cloudy and the N wind began to whistle across the neck.

Greg won the toss, and having roped up, climbed a crack system which, to our delight, showed every sign of being real rock. A delicate traverse to the right brought him on to the ridge proper. From the belay position the great NW face looked uninviting in the gathering mist, as it dropped a 1000 ft on to the snow slope below. I passed Greg and started up a series of flakes on a steep slab until they ran out. A tiny foot-rail allowed a traverse to a flared crack which was climbed using a lot of 'thrusting' and elbows. Greg arrived and faced the next problem—a smooth wall above on the limit of friction. But the cloud base had lowered and a fine, wet mist was making the lichen on the rock a death trap. Moving right he swung out over the face, and jammed up a slanting crack. Two loose nuts for aid were followed by a shaky peg and finally, a solidly placed nut. Then, forced back on to the now rain-soaked slab, he climbed a series of friction moves on wet lichen—an outstanding performance—to reach the top of the bulge. I voted to prusik the pitch, but forgot that the gear was in a slanting crack. As each loose item popped (the piton with two taps), I spun free out over the abyss, now a grey shadow in the drifting rain, as the adrenalin sent the blood pounding in my ears.

At the top of the pitch we held a conference, shouting to hear each other in the wind. Greg won the toss again, so I fixed my rope down the upper section of the 200 ft we had just climbed. There followed a quick descent to the col, where we decided to dump all the remaining climbing gear under a rock. The little of the ridge that we had climbed had convinced us that the route was worth trying again. Wet and cold we abseiled down the dyke and the edge of the snow slope below in 75 ft sections, using Greg's rope, and reached our tent at 2pm. Gordon, Tim and Jeff were camped nearby and had a brew ready for us. The afternoon was spent drying out while the wind, now gale force, howled

through the valley and shook our tents with a violence which I had not experienced since Patagonia.

The following morning was just as bad, and realising that we stood no chance of climbing again until at least a day of good weather had dried the lichen, we packed up and headed for the comforts of Base Camp, while I wondered how my unfortunate rope was faring on the exposed N ridge. The storm blew itself out that evening and the next day dawned cloudy but calm. The upper sections of all the neighbouring peaks were covered in a light sprinkling of snow, which promised little for our route. It was clearly the end of the arctic summer, and it was time to make departure plans. We took the little dinghy across the fjord to Augpilagtoq, the only village for 50 miles around. There we arranged for a trawler to collect our gear on the following Wednesday in order to catch the once-weekly ferry on Thursday. Back at base in bright sunshine Greg and I packed our kit and headed for Winter Valley again. There we dried out the tent and moved in.

The alarm watch went off at 3am, and we peered cautiously outside. There was high cloud similar to the day we had made our first attempt, and anxious not to repeat that occasion we decided to miss a day. To our intense annoyance, the dawn was still and the high cloud remained at about 5000 ft all day. We climbed a rock peak to the SW, both to pass the time and to get a good view across at Peak 1300 m. From where we stood, there was a profile view of the N ridge, and it became clear from our high point on the bulge that there was still a long way to go to the top. The main problem seemed to be how to get past the huge 200 ft pinnacle on the ridge. The alternatives seemed to be either to climb it and then abseil on to the connecting shoulder, or to turn it by traversing on to the NW face. The former would require an extra rope to fix for the descent; the latter looked holdless and exposed. Thus, for the sake of the former idea, we packed an extra rope for the morning's start. But the gods said otherwise, and we awoke to the tell-tale slash of rain on the tent. By the afternoon it was clear that the weather had broken again, so we packed up and trudged down to base, unhappy at the thought of so much climbing gear sitting 1200 ft above us, and getting less and less accessible with the passing of each day.

And so it transpired. Wednesday and Thursday were complete washouts. At sea level rain swept in sheets up the fjord, while above us the mountains disappeared into a swirling mass of storm clouds. So long did the storm last, in fact, that it was only late on Friday afternoon that we saw our peak again. But now its snow spire was plastered in snow and ice, looking cold and treacherous against a grey sky. It was, as Bonatti would have put it, the end. We had run out of time and summer, and our only hope now was to try and collect the gear at the col and cut our losses. We tramped up to Winter Valley that evening, dried out the tent, and moved in again.

Yet despite reason telling us that it was all over, I agreed with Greg's suggestion that we make an early start 'just in case it might take us a long time to the col.' It sounded convincing. We left at 4am and reached the snow slope after an



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hour. It was now icy with frozen rain, but we had both crampons and axes this time, and we moved up to the dyke without difficulty. There the problems began. Every block and crack was covered in powder snow, and it took over an hour and a half to reach the col just 300 ft above. A thorough search finally revealed the gear which had inadvertently been wrapped in a white plastic bag, and then the first pitch again. As we roped up, the sun hit the col, warming the cold morning air and making the snow and ice crystals sparkle on the rock.

But although beautiful to look at, they resulted in a fierce pitch on verglas covered rock, with Greg using tension to move across what had previously been an easy traverse line. But by 10am we were at our former high point, and on Greg's insistence, I had brought all the climbing gear.

The sun was warm, the view superb, and the ice, which had previously seemed to cover the entire ridge, was now falling off at a remarkable rate so that more and more honey coloured granite was appearing. 'Let's just see what it's like to the pinnacle,' said Greg casually. It was my lead. A superb 20 ft of aid using cow-bell nuts, and then a 100 ft crack line, never easy, never very hard, and leading in the right direction. Greg came past and hurried up a further good pitch on sound jugs and sharp cracks, bringing us to within 150 ft of the top of the pinnacle. But here our alternatives narrowed—the wall above was without a feature and overhung for the first 30 ft as well. So it was to be the traverse on to the NW face after all. I climbed a slab and peered over on to the cold wall, still covered in ice and shadow, and looking very exposed. Between my stance and the saddle behind the pinnacle was a smooth, vertical face which offered little for the eye, less for the brain, and nothing for the feet. And yet, once beyond that 50 ft of nothing, the remaining 500 ft to the summit looked straightforward. It would be plain sailing if only . . .

'Greg,' I shouted, 'this is your sort of pitch,' and retreated to the comfort of the belay. He climbed the slab and looked over. There was a long pause, followed by the ring of a piton, the piton which was, I later realised, the key to the whole problem. Roping down off this peg, Greg dropped 30 ft before finding a tenuous footrail, which, when used with a bridge on to a block which stuck out over the face, solved the traverse. We left one of our 2 ropes on the pitch to guard the retreat and climbed thankfully back to the saddle and into the sunshine. It was noon, and there were still 400 ft to the top. But now we had something going for us—what had started out as a retreat had turned into almost certain victory—we romped up pitches which would have stopped us completely at other times. We took chances, jamming straight into trouble and out again, confident that we could climb anything which the rock could put against us. It was the supreme sensation; knowing that we were at one with the granite, and that we could storm upwards without fear of being stopped. And the peak played it fair in return. No pitch was less than VS and A1, but always the cracks led towards that great overhang which was the summit. And when we finally reached the top, suddenly we were on a broad block 40 ft by 20 ft, with nothing but valleys beneath our feet.

To the S a myriad of islets and channels disappeared into the haze of Cape Farewell and the Atlantic; to the N the Ilua Fjord lay like a mirror, reflecting peaks and glaciers which repeated themselves in a never ending array of summits to the ice cap and far beyond, over and over again in a kaleidoscope of rock and ice, past our wildest dreams. We laughed. We shouted. We yodelled for all we were worth. We whooped at the summits around us and the valleys so far below. We grinned insanely at each other, and ran round in circles. We stood on top of the world and tried to drink in everything about us—all the

shapes and colours and textures, knowing that such moments are as fragile as an ice crystal in the morning sun and can be lost forever so easily. For how can one experience so much happiness in so short a time and not forget some of it?

Future prospects in the Cape Farewell area

An initial survey of the mountains between Tasermiut, Ilua and Lindenow's Fjord seems to indicate that the region is a rock climber's paradise. This, alas, is not the case. Great spires of tottering rottenness await the dinosaur men armed with their 3 ft long gravel pitons. The risks are frequently not worth the prize, and a survey of literature about the climbing prospects show that 3 out of 10 climbers preferred death by rockfall to the horrific job of abseiling down what they had just climbed.

The rock is generally gneiss, well metamorphosed into the unrecognisable and then fractured by severe weathering. The peaks which result are spectacular to look at: great slabs balanced at fantastic angles and aiguilles without a horizontal feature on them. As most of the summits are between 1200 and 1800 m high, first ascents can be made without bivouacs, although getting to the foot of the peak is frequently a problem, since most of the valleys are glaciated and heavily crevassed. For a good report on the type of rock climbing which Tasermiut Fjord has to offer, read Dr P. Gribbon's University of St Andrews Expedition Report of 1971.

In the ranges around Ilua Fjord and close to the ice cap we found the same situation—rock climbs are generally very long routes on blank walls or rotten ridges of dubious material and may be classified as 'granite crumble'. However, on the island of Pamiagdruk the aspirant artificial climber could happily turn a fruitful eye. Peak 1242 m was climbed by a French party in 1956, and Peak 1300 m by a Cambridge team in 1974. But the island has a great deal more to offer. Peak 1200 m just south of 1242 has an interesting W ridge which should be grade III, while several of its W spires might offer superb aiguille routes of up to 1500 ft. Farther S on the same ridge, Peak 1373 m, nicknamed 'Notre Dame', offers a short 500 ft of rock to its top. It is the highest peak on the island, and still unclimbed. Half a mile further S lie the 'Triplets' and Peak 1350 m. Although access may be complicated, as getting to the foot of them appears to be possible only from the fjord to the W, the rock making up the Triplets must be good, and will give high grade routes of 1500 ft or more on their W faces.

To the W of the Triplets, on the W arm of the island lie Peak 1340 m and a score of other turrets and towers. Many of them appear to be comprised of shattered rock, but the SE ridge of 1340 should give a 2000 ft route of grade VI on solid rock. (See 'La Montagne', December 1956 for several photographs taken in Torssukatak Fjord.)

The E flank of Peaks 1200 m and 1242 m is a huge rock wall, almost a mile long and averaging 1700 ft of vertical face. Access into the valley should be easy by following the valley past a large lake and several smaller ones. The situation is beautiful, the valley sheltered, and the fishing excellent. (The salmon take spinners.) It could be the ideal summer loitering spot.

Farther E lie the islands of Christian IV and Sangmissoq, where we saw plenty of scope for the rock climber: new peaks abound at every turn, and provided the expedition has a dinghy and outboard motor (5 hp minimum), access should be no problem. The fjords are generally still in the mornings, although inclined to get choppy later in the day.

To get to the Cape Farewell area, there are scheduled flights 4 times a week in the summer to Narsarsuaq, from where a once-weekly ferry collects you on Saturday, and after a 2 day stop in Julianahaab, arrives in Augpilagtoq on Wednesday evening. (Cost: Dkr 153 per head in 1974.) This village is small (about 200 persons and a little shop), but a boat could be hired here. However, parties are strongly advised to bring at least one boat. Inflatable dinghies and outboard motors can be sold without difficulty at the end of the summer.

One final area of note. When entering Torssukatak Fjord from the open sea, the peaks to the W, when viewed from a small boat, are very impressive. In few places have I seen such mammoth spires and needles. Since these peaks rise straight out of the fjord to a height of 1200 m or more, they offer a lot of vertical to the wandering eye. As to the quality of the rock I cannot say, but first impressions were that most of the granite was good. There are several pleasant spots for camp-sites in lateral valleys on the W shore, and with the prospect of stores being dropped off at your doorstep by the ferry once a week, logistics could be reduced to a minimum.

