
ANDERS LUNDAHL

Strandåtind

Climbing in Arctic Norway

(Plates 21–25)

In the summer of 1732, Carl von Linné, then only 25 years old, undertook his famous journey through Lapland. By the middle of July he had reached the Norwegian coast at Sørfold (*see map*) where he went ashore by boat at Rørstad. His host was the Reverend Johan Rask, but Linné is most fascinated by 'the daughter of the house, Sara, 18 years old, extraordinarily beautiful'.

For a couple of fine summer days Linné lives a life free of care in the old northern Norwegian vicarage. Around him a defiant alpine landscape rises up out of the deeply-carved arms of the fjords: Husbyviktind, Skeistind, Strandåtind and all the others. In Linné's day there were some thirty families residing here, reduced by 1960 to thirteen, and in 1980 I visited the last permanent household: three grey-headed siblings who treated me to cold cuts of salmon, and proudly showed off the remarkable church with its twelfth-century crucifix.

Another famous scientist, the geologist Leopold von Buch, spent 1806–1808 in Scandinavia. He visited Kjerringøy in Sørfold in 1807 and remarked of Strandåtind 'that its high mountain ridge is so sharp that it barely offers a resting place for a bird, and reminds one of the most impossible peaks in the Habcherental by the Brientzersee'. (*Reise durch Norwegen und Lapland*, 1810).

In 1851 Kjerringøy was again visited by a prominent scholar, the Scottish glaciologist James Forbes. In his excellent book *Norway and its Glaciers* (1853) he depicted the Strandåtind massif magnificently. 'A few miles more brought us to a scene of desolate grandeur, rendered more striking by the contrast. The headland which divides the north and south Folden fjords may vie with the Aiguilles of Mont Blanc in the fantastic singularity of its forms. I have nowhere seen summits more perfectly acuminate.' (See the lithographic view in *Norway and its Glaciers* by James Forbes, page 58, 1853.)

Unclimbable or not? The first to raise the question in earnest was the pioneer Danish climber Carl Hall (1848–1908). Hall was the son of the famous statesman Carl Christian Hall, Denmark's prime minister from 1858 to 1863. Between 1880 and 1900 Carl Hall made no fewer than 50 first ascents of Norwegian summits. On 21 August 1889 he made an attempt on Strandåtind, reaching the top of the western low peak and getting up to an

insurmountable 15-metre step in the col between the peaks – ‘Halls hammare’ [The Hall Step]. In his diary Hall remarked that the step is ‘absolutely impossible without a 30 or 40-foot ladder’. With his faithful companion Mathias Soggemoen he also made an attempt on the NE Ridge, but had to give up at about halfway. When they got down the renowned merchant Erasmus Benedikt Zahl held a lavish farewell party for the gallant pair. ‘I, Zahl of Kjerringøy, ask all those present to bear witness to my promise that if a Norwegian is the first to climb Strandåtind, I will give him a thousand crowns, cash on the table. A man is as good as his word!’ But Hall never returned to Nordland, and Zahl himself passed away in 1900. Prior to that he had generously provided the promising writer Knut Hamsun, who had sought a travel grant from the master of Kjerringøy, with both economic and literary support. The character Mack who figures in the works *Pan*, *Benoni* and *Rosa* is none other than Zahl himself. Hamsun has borrowed the settings and gallery of characters for several of his books from his stay at ‘Sirilund’ – the Kjerringøy trading-post.

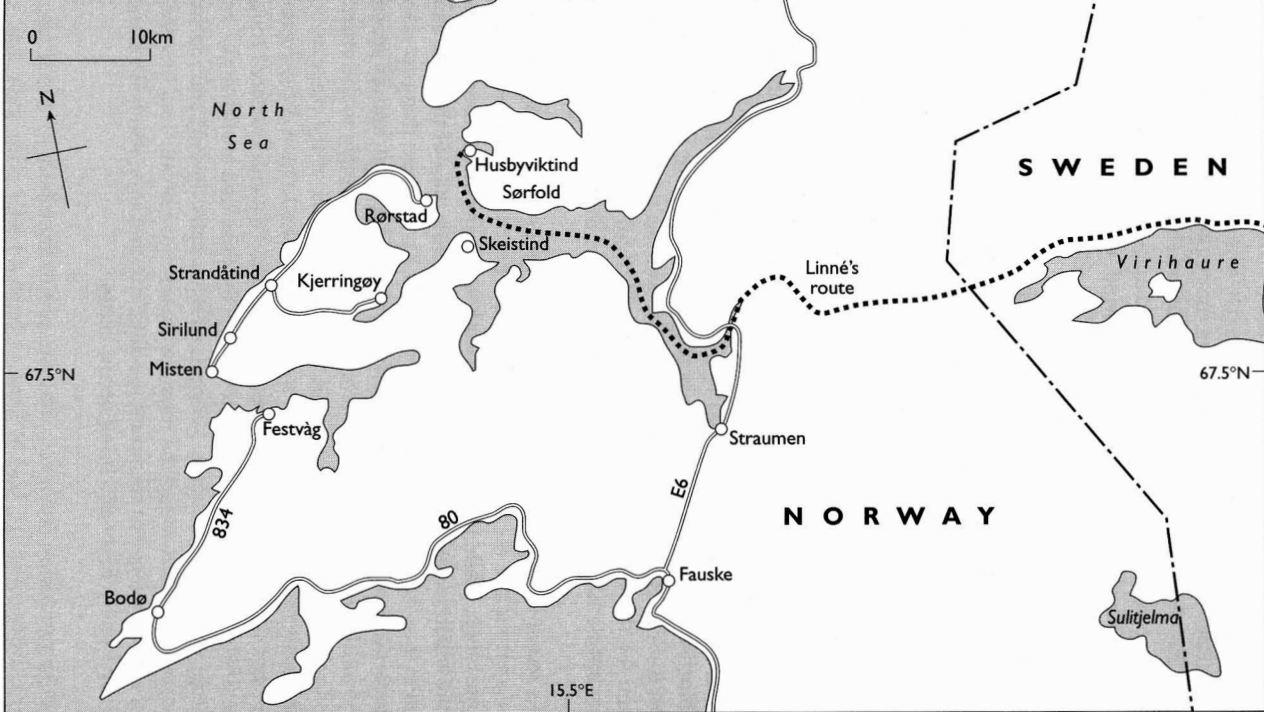
On 29 July 1912 the new master of the Kjerringøy trading-post, Gerhard Kristiansen, welcomed a group of travelling climbers comprising Carl Wilhelm Rubenson, Ferdinand Schjelderup, Harald Jentoft and William Cecil Slingsby. Rubenson and Schjelderup were founding members of Norsk Tindeklub – the Norwegian Alpine Club – in 1908. Slingsby, the father of Norwegian alpine sports, was quickly made the club’s first Honorary Member. The year before, Rubenson had set a new world height record on Kabru at 7280 metres.

The following day a ‘reconnaissance’ of the peak was on the programme. The Norwegian trio were soon squatting below the vertical step. There is no easy way past it, the walls fall away into the abyss on both sides. Rubenson, as the birthday boy, was given the honour of leading. It was a victory for courage and determination. Thirty-six years later he admits: ‘I don’t recall anything about hand or footholds on the last part; I just scrabbled and dragged myself up in a wild panic.’ The expedition took all of 27 hours; they reached the top, but it was a drowsy band that stumbled into the courtyard the next morning.

The broad-minded Rubenson refused to approve Schjelderup’s judgement in the printed account in the Norwegian Tourist Society’s Journal of 1913 that ‘Strandåtind’s first step will be a hard nut to crack for most others’. A new text had to be glued into all 5000 copies. ‘The Step,’ it now read, ‘will be a hard nut to crack even for most others.’ That Rubenson’s efforts, both here and elsewhere, were on a level with the top European standard of the time is indisputable: The Hall Step is still graded 5 minus (VS) today.

Ten days later the same team, plus the 63-year-old Slingsby, was ready to tackle the North Ridge. The gusts of a storm almost lifted them up the very exposed ridge. A gloomy and overhanging chimney – *Jentoft’s Chimney* – constituted the climax of the ascent. On the summit Slingsby was able to celebrate the 40th anniversary of his campaigns amongst Norwegian peaks.

The Strandåtind Area of Arctic Norway



Nowadays the North Ridge is possibly the most climbed route, and forms the natural descent route with several fixed abseil anchors.

In 1924 Ferdinand Schjelderup returned to Strandåtind, and together with Ketil Motzfeldt and Fridtjof Lorentzen made the first continuous traverse of the peak from west to east: one of Norway's finest alpine excursions. Schjelderup was the most enthusiastic and active Norwegian mountaineer of his time. During his most ambitious period, up to 1924, he accomplished some 27 first ascents. It wasn't until 1955 that he hung up his climbing boots for good.

Arne Naess, still going strong and rightly dubbed 'the father of modern big wall climbing in Scandinavia', was particularly active in Arctic Norway during the years 1935 to 1937. His magnificent route on the South Buttress of Stetind did not receive a second ascent until 1966. It is felt that Naess's creation from 1935 outdoes another of the great granite climbs of the thirties: the North-East Face of the Piz Badile. In 1936 Naess visited Kjerringøy with his female climbing partner, Else Hertzberg, and they made the first ascent of the South-East Ridge of Strandåtind. The route is actually a little easier than the climbs done in 1912, but longer and more sustained.

The following year the mountain was visited by a British team from Manchester's Rucksack Club led by Harry Spilsbury. Spilsbury climbed in the Norwegian mountains for six seasons, including four summers in Lofoten. Spilsbury tells of his experiences in the north in a witty article written for the Norwegian Alpine Club's 50th jubilee book in 1958. Let's hear what he has to say about The Hall Step on Strandåtind:

The rest of us approached the 20-metre wall, almost vertical, which barred the approach to the main peak. My second ensconced himself behind a large block, while I started to move diagonally upward to the right on a flake which seemed to protrude a bare 5cm from the mass of the mountain. There was virtually nothing for the hands; it was one thing to stand motionless on the flake, but quite another to move upward, and my second had to lift my rear foot to enable me to change my weight to the other. I was reminded of a Norwegian climber's description of the place as one where a well-directed push with a straw would send a man dangling into eternity. Cautiously I edged upwards and reached a crack where I found the first real handhold, and a piton. Here the flake had broken away, and a long step had to be made. I continued diagonally upward and reached a corner, where I found the most awkward move of all. I had to use a knee, but managed to surmount the difficulty, and soon reached a stance where I could belay and bring up my second.

Spilsbury confesses, however, that the senior members of the team, two unnamed 64-year-olds, had at least as hard a battle with their task – the first descent of the vast slabs on the south side of the mountain. 'When we reached the boat, we rather derided the senior members' stories of huge

boiler-plates and other difficulties which they had encountered and overcome on their route.'

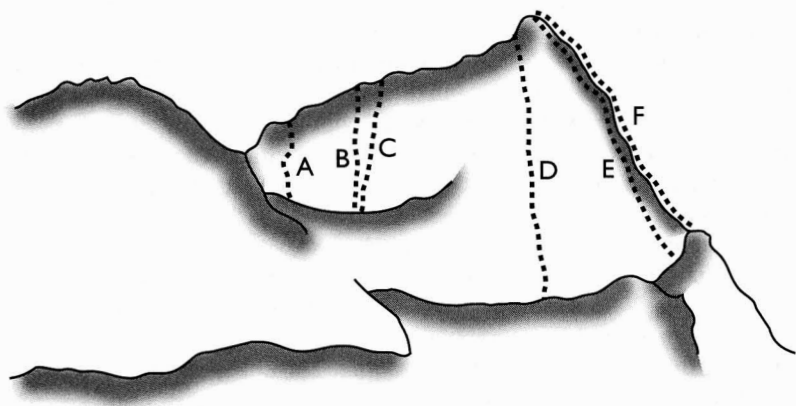
More recently the question arose of whether the vertical walls from the south and the north offered any possibilities. 'The walls are indeed terrible,' wrote Slingsby in his classic book on Norway, 'that of the higher being fully 2,000 feet of smooth rock, but the lines of the mountain are exceedingly beautiful' – a viewpoint that was agreed with as recently as last summer by an environmental expert from the Norwegian State Administration who proclaimed that Strandåtind is Norway's most perfect mountain.

Some attempts to climb the fine direct line on the South Face in the early 1970s came to a halt after only one pitch. The wide crack rapidly steepens to overhanging, and the sparsity of protection possibilities is hardly encouraging. Nonetheless, in 1985 Eva Selin and Anders Lundahl managed to overcome this obvious *direttissima*, which in its lower part offers exposed and committing grade 7 climbing. The upper part is considerably more accommodating and includes unique chimneying in some fantastic positions. With a height of 500 metres, the wall is one of the more imposing in northern Norway.

The North Face fell in 1988 to the same team; an elegant crack system with varied climbing on rough granite. Here the height of the wall is a little less, not quite 300 metres. Moreover the approach march is pleasant, since you follow a well-trampled path from Laater to the little lake at 270 metres above sea level, and from there, still on a track, you continue up to the pass at 500 metres, where you are standing in front of the almost kilometre-long northern facade of the mountain. You can comfortably reach this point in an hour and a half carrying a pack. There is water, of course, but not so many camping spots. Incidentally a couple of Bodö climbers attempted the north face a couple of years after the first ascent in the belief that they were first. They backed off the top section, and one can only hope that they didn't leave any bolts behind, as has been done on *Unnarennet*, a route which was free-climbed in 1992.

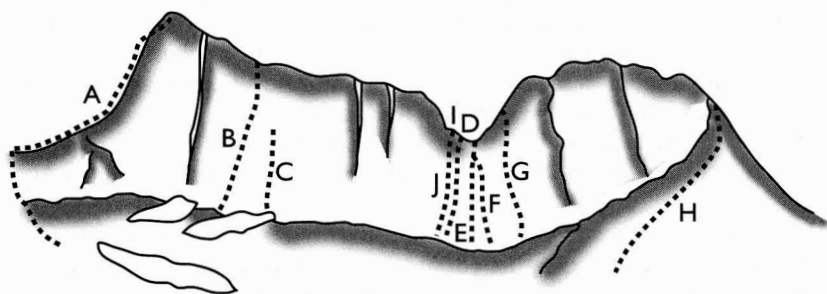
In 1990 attention turned once again to the southern side of the peak, where a couple of shorter new routes were put up at the left-hand end of the wall. *Landsstrykere* follows the obvious left-hand chimney and crack, and contains rather pleasant climbing in fairly wide formations. *Mysterier* starts further left again, directly below a massive roof. One follows cracks to the right of the roof, where excellent hand-jams prove useful. The crux pitch is strenuous, the rest is very entertaining. The approach to these routes follows the juniper and moss-clad slabs of the southern flank, and is not recommended in wet or misty weather.

At the end of the '90s the north face once again became the focus of attention. Torgeir Kjus and Björn Arntzen put up four routes of sheer aid. Among other things they had to contend with awkward cleaning in overgrown cracks. All of these lines, however, seemed ideally suited for pure free climbing, as was proved true last summer.



Strandåtind from the South

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|---------------------|
| A | <i>Mysterier</i> | D | <i>Direttissima</i> |
| B | <i>Landsstrykere</i> | E | South Buttress |
| C | <i>Sult</i> | F | South-East Buttress |



Strandåtind from the North

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| A | North Ridge | F | <i>Cuculus Noroculus</i> |
| B | North Face | G | <i>Lille Peder Edderkopp</i> |
| C | <i>Unnarennet</i> | H | West Ridge |
| D | <i>Jumarus Maximus</i> | I | The Hall Step |
| E | <i>Livet inni hodet mitt</i> | J | <i>Schlaraffenland</i> |

During a couple of superb weeks in the height of the summer Eva and Anders devoted themselves to tackling what would prove to be some of northern Norway's finest free routes. Sensationally good friction allows one to dance like a drunken fly over the richly-varied crack formations. Several overhangs have to be won over, but surprise holds where one least expects them keep one's spirits up. It would be hard to find climbing as entertaining as this anywhere else. There are good anchors on most of the belays, but on *Livet inni i hodet mitt* ('Life inside my head') there are also two completely unnecessary bolts. There are also bolts on *Cuculus Noroculus*. Otherwise a wide range of Friends and nuts is required, which doesn't prevent some sections from including long run-outs. The routes are five pitches long and the rock is consistently good. But give the routes a few days after rain to dry out.

They also took the opportunity to do a seven-pitch new route on the south face, namely the righthand of the two obvious chimney cracks. The approach includes a succulent alpine meadow, the lushness of which is beyond compare. Here grow tall violet-blue *Cicerbita alpina*. Cascades of *Saxifraga cotelydon* decorate the cliffs, and in the gloom of the chimneys can be glimpsed the winter-green *Polystichum lonchitis*. The section round a dreadfully large roof about halfway up looks terrifying, but is more psychologically than physically challenging. Here one really is confronted by large formations.

A few words about the peninsula's other facilities: excellent camping and bathing spots, opportunities for freshwater fishing, a well-stocked grocery store which doubles as post office, tasty cloudberry meadows, opportunities to eat out and to visit the Kjerringøy trading-post. One can also hire canoes, even motor boats. By the end of May there is already midnight sun, and thereafter there is 24-hour daylight until the start of August. It is quite possible to climb in September, and many of the neighbouring peaks have so far only been climbed from their least difficult sides. For pioneers there are still things to be done.

A final visit to Linné's Rørstad can be warmly recommended. Here tranquillity prevails, and up on the church hill one feels transported to the days of Sara and the Reverend Rask. Time is reborn forever young.

STRANDÅTIND, 863m

Timeline

- 1889 First ascent of West Summit (712 m). C Hall and M Soggemoen.
- 1912 First ascent of Strandåtind: West Ridge by The Hall Step (5-).
C W Rubenson, F Schjelderup and H Jentoft.
- 1912 North-East Ridge (5-). W C Slingsby, H Jentoft, F Schjelderup,
C W Rubenson.
- 1924 First west-east traverse. F Schjelderup, K Motzfeldt and
F Lorentzen.
- 1936 South-East Buttress (4+). A Naess and E Hertzberg.
- 1937 South Flank (2-3). Descended by British team.
- 1971 South Buttress (5, A1). H Hellstrøm & E Holmgren
- 1975 First winter ascent. A Meyer and B Schmidt
- 1980 First free ascent of crack on front of The Hall Step (5+).
A Lundahl and E Selin.
- 1982 First free ascent of South Buttress (6). K E Andersen and E Vike.
- 1985 South Face *direttissima* (7-/7). E Selin and A Lundahl.
- 1988 North Face (7-). E Selin and A Lundahl.
- 1990 *Landsstrykere* (6). A Lundahl and E Selin.
- 1990 *Mysterier* (7). A Lundahl and E Selin.
- 1990 *Unnarennet* (6, A1). O R Jespersen and T Kjus.
- 1992 First free ascent of *Unnarennet* (7-). E Selin and A Lundahl.
- 1997 *Livet inni hodet mitt* (A1+). B Arntzen and T Kjus.
- 1998 *Jumarus Maximus* (A2). B Arntzen and T Kjus.
- 1998 *Cuculus Noroculus* (A2+). B Arntzen and T Kjus.
- 1998 *Lille Peder Edderkopp* (A2-). M P Mosti and T Kjus.
- 2000 First free ascent of *Livet inni hodet mitt* (7-/7).
E Selin and A Lundahl.
- 2000 First free ascent of *Jumarus Maximus* (7-).
A Lundahl and E Selin.
- 2000 *Sult* (6/6+). E Selin and A Lundahl.
- 2000 First free ascent of *Lille Peder Edderkopp* (7+/8-).
A Lundahl and E Selin.
- 2001 *Schlaraffenland* (7+) E Selin and A Lundahl.
- 2001 First free ascent of *Cuculus Noroculus* (7+).
A Lundahl and E Selin.

ATTEMPTED BUT UNFINISHED PROJECTS

North Face

West Summit subsidiary peak: In 1997 B Arntzen and T Kjus climbed the obvious cornerline (A3), but retreated just one or two pitches from the top.

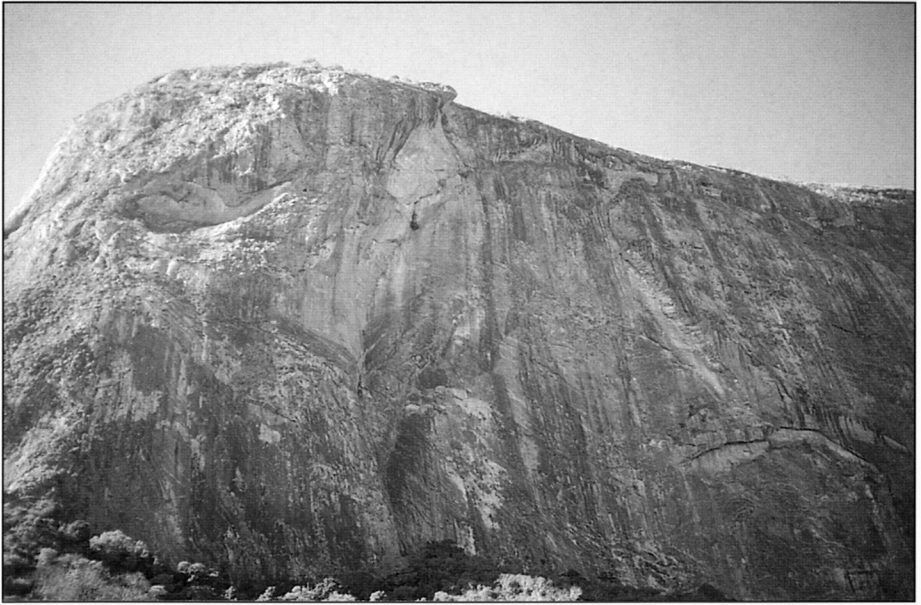
South Face

Approx. 125 metres to the right of the *direttissima*: In 1994 O R Wiik and A Aastorp climbed 2½ rope lengths (6, A2+), before smooth rock stopped them.

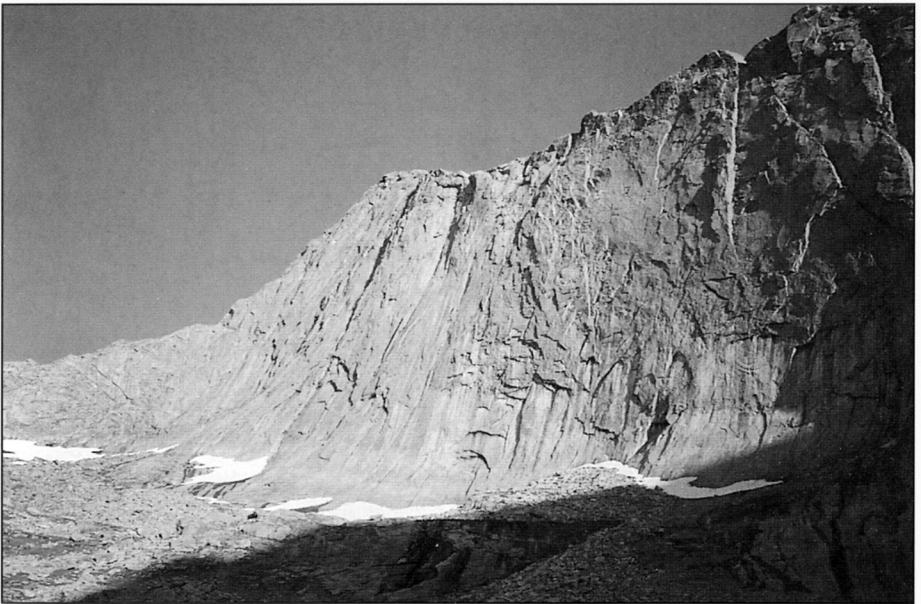
Grading comparison:

The Norwegian grading system is only apparently related to the UIAA system. In fact, the grading in both Sweden and Norway is harder than for instance in Germany. Present limit: 9+.

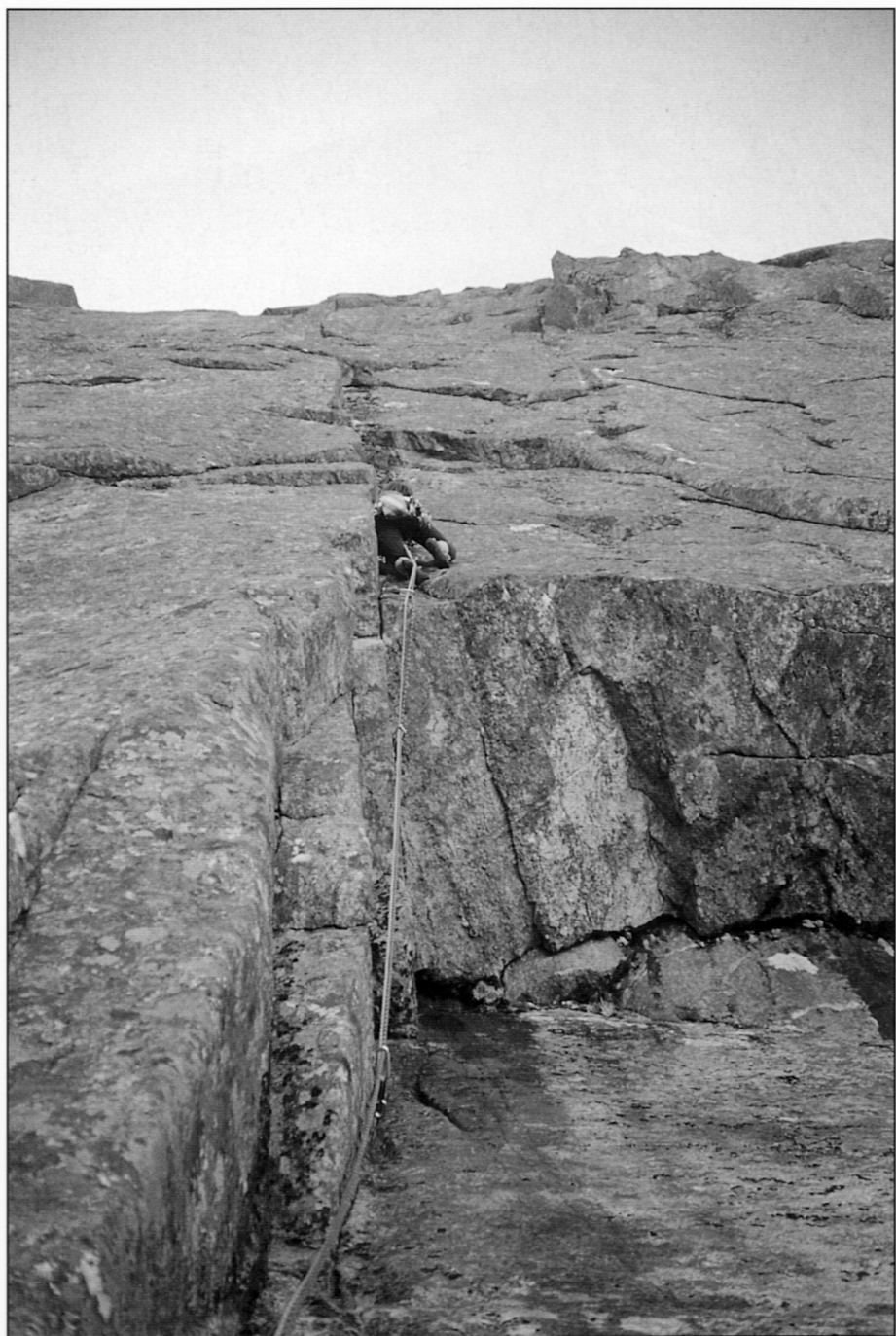
Scandinavia	England
5-	4c HS
5	5a VS
5+	5a/b HVS
6-	5b HVS
6	5b/c E1
6+	5c E2
7-	5c/6a E3
7	6a E3/E4
7+	6a/b E4
8-	6b E5



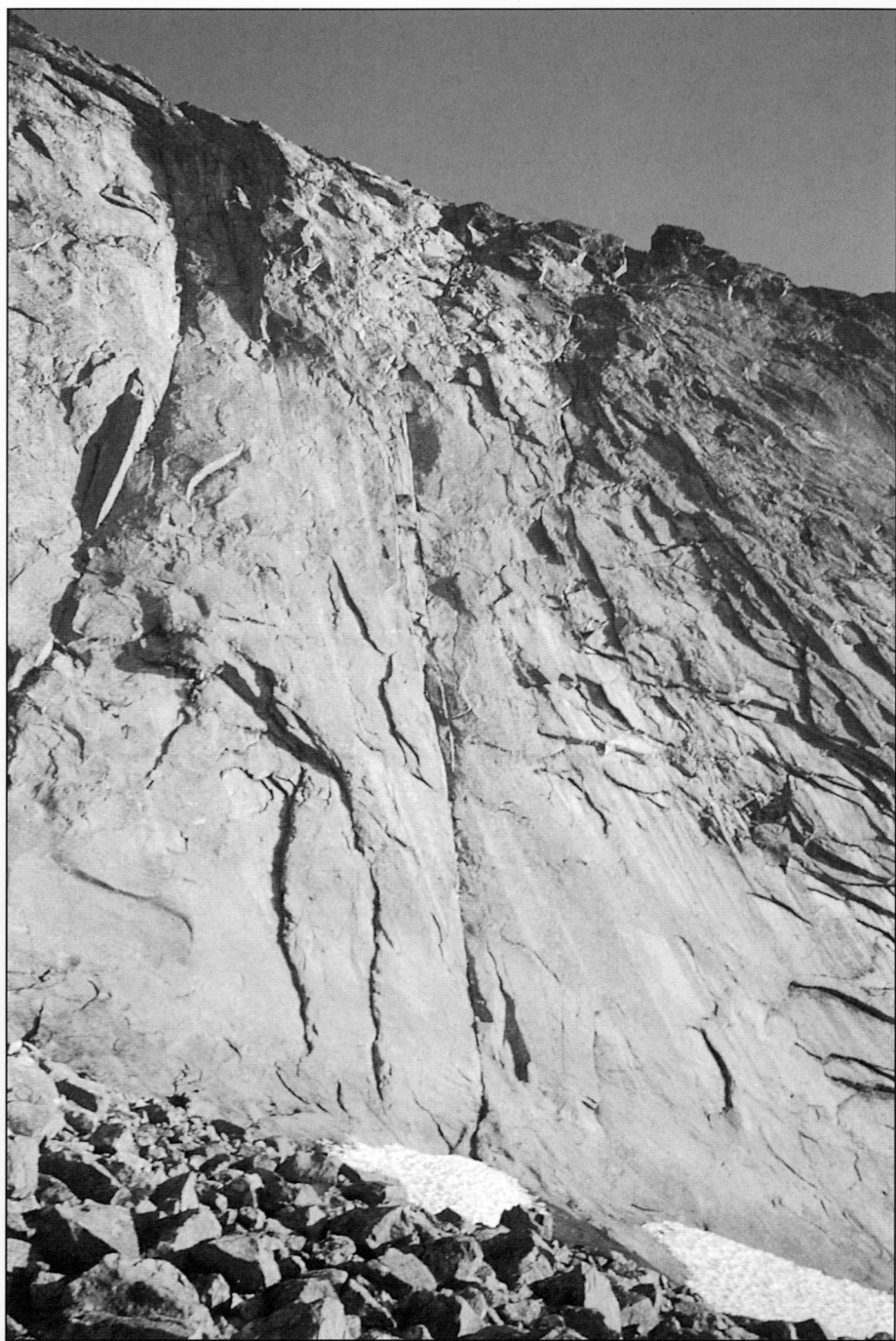
20. The North Face of Poi, Kenya, with the line of *Dark Safari* taking the big curving corner just left of centre. An American expedition also climbed a new line on Poi in early 2000, but chose to rappel the mountain first to bolt and clean their intended line. This irritated local activists. (*Pat Littlejohn*) (p24)



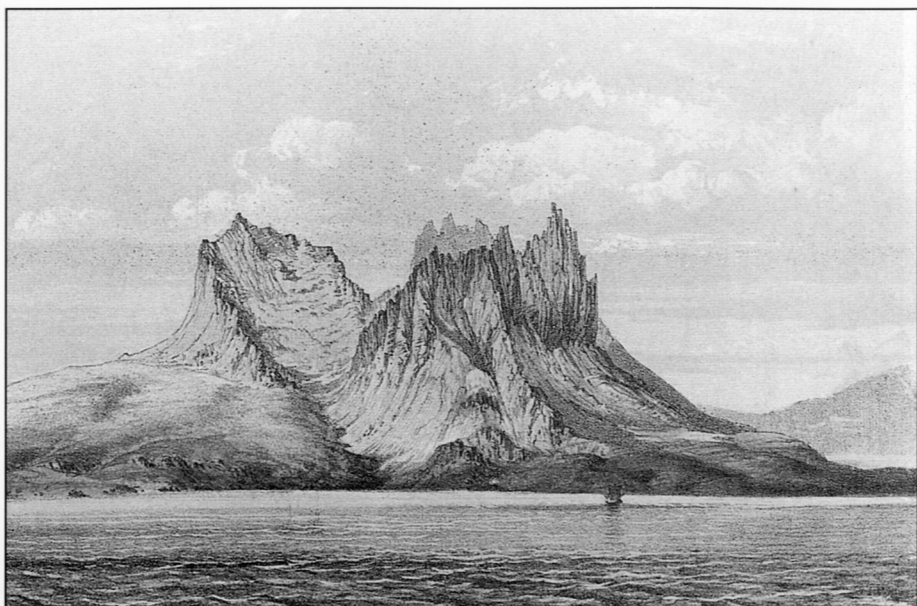
21. The North Face of Strandåtind, Arctic Norway. (*Anders Lundahl*) (p181)



22. Eva Selin overcoming the roof pitch on the first free ascent of *Lille Peder Edderkopp* (E5 6b), Strandåtind North Face, Arctic Norway. (*Anders Lundahl*) (p181)



23. The North Face of Strandåtind, Arctic Norway. (*Anders Lundahl*) (p181)



24. A lithograph by James D Forbes of the Strandåtind massif from his work of 1853, *Norway and its Glaciers*. (p181)



25. Believed by Anders Lundahl to be an unpublished photograph of Carl Wilhelm Rubenson (1885-1960) and William Cecil Slingsby (1849-1929) after their successful ascent of Strandåtind at Kjerringøy, in 1912. (*Unknown*) (p181)