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SUNDERLAND EAST GREENLAND EXPEDITION 1986

TEAM MEMBERS

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INTRODUCTION

In the Autumn of 1934, two members of the expedition team started to think about organising a climbing trip further afield than those already undertaken by themselves. Having progressed from Summer hillwalking through rock-climbing and Winter climbing to Alpine climbing it was felt that the next step was "Expedition Climbing".

There was an urge to travel to somewhere different than the traditional mountaineering areas of the Himalayas or South America. A place that would not only test our mountaineering skills but also the skills necessary to adapt to a new environment, of working together as a team and to cope with being isolated for a considerable time relying on a variety of skills to achieve success. Choosing a venue which would offer this "wilderness" experience became the problem.

Using books and old magazines our interest in East Greenland developed. It seemed to be an area which was wild and remote, offering massive mountaineering potential. Two more climbers were asked to join the team and research for an objective began.

RESEARCH

Initial research was through books and old magazines. These developed an interest in East Greenland. Further information from the B.M.C. confirmed the potential of the area. Contact was made with Derek Fordham who has extensive knowledge and experience of Greenland. The enormity of the area was at first under-estimated but our contact with Derek Fordham and Dolfi Rotounik of the Danish Mountaineering Association strongly made the point that any expedition heading for East Greenland should be prepared to confront a complex and serious set of conditions. From the that they gave the Ammassalik region seemed to be the most suitable area to visit.

Contact was made with Colin Richardson who was visiting the area in the Summer of 1985. He was able to provide us with useful information on travel to the area and also brief details of a peak, Laupersbjerg, which he had originally hoped to attempt though ultimately his expedition objective was changed.

Two days were spent in London at the Alpine Club and Royal Geographical Society. From this research we gained a further understanding of the area and a greater understanding of Laupersbjerg. The mountain had been climbed twice before; once in 1938 by the Swiss mountaineer Andre Roche, and once in 1932 by an Austrian expedition. Studying the reports of these expeditions showed that both climbs had been made by similar routes on the South-East face of the mountain. There was some doubt as to whether or not these were the only two ascents of the peak, but extensive research provided no more information.

A photograph from the Swiss expeditions' report showed that the South-West

face of the mountain comprised of steep walls, grooves and ridges and seemed to offer plenty of scope for a new route; further photographs supplied by Derek Fordham confirmed this information. The topography of the area is such that this face is 1600m. in height, an undertaking considerably more serious than most Alpine routes and one which we felt was suitable for an expedition objective.

AIMS

- a) For the expedition to operate as a cohesive, active unit, using a combination of mountaineering skills developed from the years of involvement each member had with mountaineering.
- b) To attempt the unclimbed, 1600m., South-West face of Laupersbjerg.
- c) For the expedition to climb other peaks in the area which offered suitable mountaineering objectives.

DIARY OF EVENTS

22 July

Departed from Glasgow Airport. Direct flight to Keflavik, Iceland. Problems encountered in transferring equipment and pulks to Rekjavik. Taxi hired from Keflavik to Rekjavik campsite.

23 July

Equipment transferred to Helgi Jonsons' airport for flight to Greenland. Overnight stay at Helgis'.

24 July

Flight from Rekjavik to Kulusuk, transferred by helicopter to Ammassalik (cost about £25 per person) ten minute journey. Camp set up in Valley of the Flowers.

25 July

Organising equipment and transport in Ammassalik. (Police may provide contacts for reasonably priced boat hire)

26 July

Boat hired through local Dane. Walk up Sailors Mountain.

27 July

Organisation and food buying in Ammassalik.

28 July

Loaded boat (Diesel considerably cheaper but slower than petrol boats). Journeyed to Tasilaq Fjord. Note marker on side of fjord showing landing area.

29 July

Load carrying up Tasilaq Kua to moraine at first Glacier.

30 July

Moved camp to Col at top of glacier due to mosquito problem. About 2500ft. of height gain.

31 July

Load carrying from moraine to Col.

1 Aug.

Load carrying 2 move more gear to Col. 2 take food and superfluous equipment to dump on West side of Kurale Glacier.

2 Aug.

Rest day. Depart at 10pm. for first pull. First glacier camp. North point of Karale Glacier.

3 Aug.

Short journey to bottom of col. Set up base to ferry loads up steep hill.

4-Aug.

Pully system to pull sledges over crevassed area of col. Headed towards Slangen and camped overlooking 16th September Glacier.

5 Aug.

From Slangen to set up base camp at foot of Rodbjerg.

6 Aug.

Storm clouds arrive. Snows heavily.

7 Aug.

Storm. Rain, snow, wind. Badens^s Birthday. Confined to tents.

8 Aug.

As previous day.

9 Aug

Brief respite from storm. Clouds break, sun appears. All equipment hung out on temporary drying lines. Four hours sunshine, then snow again.

10 Aug

Weather breaks - 100 plus hours in tents. Recce to base of Rodbjerg.

11 Aug

Rest and drying out day, waiting for mountain to clear before attempting a route.

12 Aug

Midnight attempt on S.W. Face by large snow gully. Retreated due to avalanche conditions.

13 Aug

Rest. Waiting for mountain to clear.

14 Aug

Midnight attempt by glacier on South basin of Rodbjerg. Turned back due to crevasses. Six hours sleep then another attempt by the South Ridge. Started

climbing ridge at 9.00 am. Climbed till 11.00 pm. on good rock up to V.S.
Bivvy at high point.

15 Aug

Set off climbing for two hours. Realised that we had a foreshortened view
of the summit. No food left. Decided to retreat via glacier on West Face
back to campsite.

16 Aug

Rest day.

17 Aug

Broke camp, headed back same route to Slangen. Camp.

18 Aug

Retrace route, descended steep col to camp at base of peak directly across
glacier from col.

19 Aug

Ascent of unnamed peak by couloir on North Face. Then along poor rock ridge
to summit. Descended by glacier West of summit, down North Face.

20 Aug

Retrace steps to food dump on West point of Karale Glacier. Then South over
heavily crevassed dry glacier to camp on moraine.

21 Aug

Morning departure, taking South branch of Karale Glacier. Long day to edge
of glacier followed by load carrying to coast.

22 Aug

Load carrying along coast to Kungmiut.

23 - 27 Aug

Kungmiut, resting, organising boat and waiting.

28 Aug

Boat journey to Ammassalik, camp at the Valley of the Flowers.

29 - 30 Aug

Ammassalik.

31 Aug

Piteraq hits town, 145mph winds badly damage tents. Shelter given by Australian
canoe expedition in a rented house.

1 - 3 Sept

Ammassalik changing flight dates to return one week early.

4 Sept

Helicopter to Kulusuk. Flight to Rekjavik.

5 Sept

Rekjavik and Keflavik.

6 Sept

Returned to Glasgow.

TRAVEL

From the outset of planning for this trip it was obvious that transport was going to be the major problem. Few travel agents had ever even heard of Ammassalik never mind having any idea of how to get a party of four climbers and substantial equipment there. Old expedition reports became our main source of information on the travel side, and one name, that of Regent Travel kept cropping up. They proved to be invaluable, arranging all our flights as far as Kulusuk efficiently and as cheaply as we believe it is possible. The flights comprised: Scheduled flight from Glasgow to Keflavik with Iceland Air. Charter with Helgi Johnson Air Taxis, Reykjavik - Kulusuk, then scheduled chopper from Kulusuk to Ammassalik with Greenland Air.

Once at Ammassalik we started negotiating with various people for a boat to take us and our gear to the head of Tasilaq Fjord. Various channels were explored with prices as high as £600 being quoted by official sources (the Ammassilik travel office). Eventually we negotiated directly with a Danish radio operator who agreed to take us during a few days he had off. Luckily he was "a friend of a friend" and therefore the price was somewhat more reasonable - however the Chief of Ammassalik Police had told us that he could organise a boat for very little more.

After our month in the mountains the negotiating process began again in Kungmiut, again befriending the local Danes proved useful as a means of ensuring accurate communication. This did however break down at one point as we hoped to sail on the post and supply vessel, which it turned out was full and could not take us and our kit. Eventually though our friends spread the word and a smiling Eskimo turned up, agreed a price and put us and gear along with dead seal and several Salmon in his boat bound for Ammassalik.

The final travel hurdle was bringing the return flight dates forward by a week

due to our earlier return than expected. The Ammassalik Travel Office were able to re-arrange Helgi's flight, but the Iceland Air flight was impossible to change from Greenland. Due to financial shortages we took the gamble of flying to Iceland and found there that the Iceland Air Office are not able to change your flight times and that the only possibility is to wait until everyone has checked in and then, if seats are available take these. Fortunately the flight exactly one week earlier than our booking was not full and the gamble paid off. Glasgow was just as we had left it - humid and busy but a welcome sight all the same.

EQUIPMENT

In this area two problems can be identified which were major contributory factors to the failure of the expedition to achieve its prime objective. First however a run through of the basic gear taken and used may be useful. The team took two Phazor Hex's from the BMC equipment pool which proved ideal for glacier camping and stood up to everything but very strong winds we encountered back in Ammassalik a few days before returning to Britain. Personal and climbing equipment was just as one would use in the European Alps except for sleeping bags, which we decided needed to be comfortable down to -20 C to be on the safe side. Petrol stoves (Peak 1s) were taken for general use since we knew petrol would be easily available, and Epigas Backpackers with Propane mix cartridges were taken for the hill. Towards the end of the trip one of the Peak 1s became blocked and impossible to clear but though this was inconvenient it never caused major problems - spare vaporising tubes would be well recommended for future trips as the quality of Greenland fuel cannot be guaranteed.

Transportation of ourselves and equipment while in the mountains proved to be the main source of problems. In order to avoid freighting costs and additional gear expenses we decided to use two Pulks between four and not bother with skis, relying on frozen conditions during the night when we could move on foot. Problem number one was that using two Pulks (instead of 4 - 1 each) made them very heavily laden and hence difficult to pull up any gradient. One Pulk per person would have eliminated this problem. Problem number two was the decision not to take skis; This decision made it virtually impossible to travel under any conditions other than a very well frozen glacier surface; even though the temperature dropped reliably every night we often came accross breakable crust which prevented a rhythm being built up and therefore pulk pulling became extremely tiring and frustrating. It was a combination of these two factors and the weather (see conclusion) which prevented us from getting as far as

Laupersbjoerg and hence not achieving our main objective.

Overall though it must be said that all our equipment performed very well in what were very demanding conditions and under very heavy usage.

FINANCESINCOME

| | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Personal cont's | 1900 |
| BNC | 300 |
| MEF | 550 |
| Vaux Brewery | 200 |
| Gilchrist Foundation | 150 |
| Gino Watkins Trust | 400 |
| Benevolent Fund | 200 |
| Fund Raisers | 250 |
| Overdraft | 400 |
| Bank | 50 |
| Joplins Store | 10 |
| TOTAL | <u>4410</u> |

EXPENDITURE

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Travel | 2380 |
| Insurance | 520 |
| Equipment | 580 |
| Food in advance | 140 |
| Food bought in Greenland | 250 |
| Postal of equipment | 100 |
| Sundries | 40 |
| TOTAL | <u>4410</u> |

CONCLUSIONS

Since returning to the U. K members of the team have spent some time analysing what happened (in terms of failure to achieve our intended objective) and attempted to put this in the greater perspective of the overall experience. Although this writing is essentially an individuals point of view I feel sure that it will reflect the views and hopefully conclusions of the other team members.

Already equipment problems have been identified as contributory factors to our failure to reach and climb Laupersbjoerg, but one further problem sealed our fate. This was a four day storm which developed after our first week in the hills. Confined to tents for four days it rapidly became apparent that pulking conditions were worsening due to heavy snowfall, and that the four day set back (plus at least two days wait for conditions to improve) would leave no room for further weather problems if we continued to Laupersbjoerg with our time limited by food. Accordingly we decided to attempt an ascent of Rodbjerg, a beautiful , red rock peak on the 16th September Glacier. The first two attempts to use glacier and snowfield approaches to the upper rocks of the peak were thwarted by dreadful snow conditions and the attempt was forced onto the long South Ridge - a route which is about 1200m. of vertical height , and considerably longer in climbing terms. On the first day of climbing about two thirds of the height was gained and a very comfortable bivvy site found. The next section looked to be a bit more technical (day 1 had contained nothing above V.S.) and, having taken only one nights food a split appeared in the team along the lines of a further night out with no food after another day of apparently hard climbing. The hungry members of the team won the arguement and the attempt was called off

The double failure, rather than spuring the team to salvage the expedition.

and find another major objective seemed to drain enthusiasm and commitment and to encourage a slightly premature return to the coast. On the return journey a small peak North of Ritterknoegten was climbed before our eventual return to Kungmuit.

In climbing terms, the achievements of the expedition were very limited, and as a member who set out with serious climbing objectives in Greenland I have spent many a long hour trying to rationalise this fact and put it in a wider perspective. I feel that all the members of the team have returned with a great experience from the trip;- good friends were made, an exciting and different culture was observed, a remote and beautiful area was visited and a great deal of personal learning took place. It is sad that the climbing went the way it did, but we are all thankful for the experience gained and indebted to the people who made it possible

Our thanks, for help in many forms must go to the following:

British Mountaineering Council

Mount Everest Foundation

Vaux Brewery

The Gilchrist Foundation

The Gino Watkins Trust

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Sunderland Polytechnic Students Union

Sunderland Polytechnic Publicity Officer

Raven Food Products

Kenco Cadbury Schweppes

Rowntree Macintosh

Epigas

Royal Marins