
JIM GREGSON

Greenland 2019



Motoring in Uummannaq Fjord. (*Gabriel Clarke*)

There was a noticeable fall-off in expedition numbers to Greenland in 2019, at least in terms of grant applications from British climbing teams to the Arctic Club, the Mount Everest Foundation, the Gino Watkins Memorial Fund and the British Mountaineering Council. However those who did apply were successful in obtaining grant aid and some were also part funded by the Austrian Alpine Club (Sektion Britannia). Grants are also available from the Scottish Arctic Club for Scotland-based groups, although a number of trips with support from that source were cancelled or postponed. The Montane Alpine Climbing Fund has for reasons harder to understand decided not to award grant aid for groups heading to Greenland, potential expedition leaders should take note. [*Editor's note:* The current position for the Montane ACF is as follows: 'Grants will now not typically be given for the more well-travelled mountain areas in Central Alaska, Patagonia, or Greenland (unless the applicants are young members who are new to expeditionary climbing).'] This suggests remoter parts of these regions would qualify.]

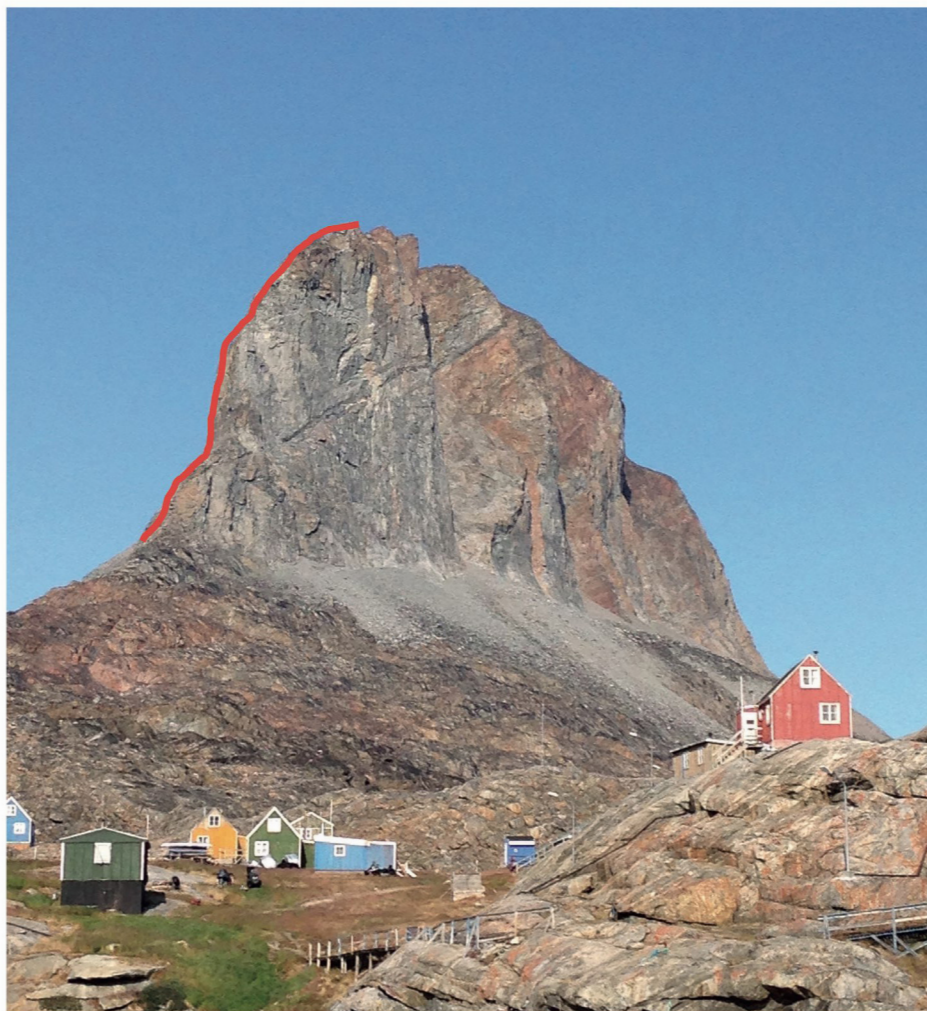
Tom Harding's team of four journeyed to Renland from the end of June until the end of July, and after being delayed by masses of sea ice inside Scoresby Sund were taken by boat to a landing on the south-east shore, together with all of their kit transported by air, as opposed to it being shipped



Topo of an unfinished line and *Arctic Heatstroke* (200m, E4) on Ukalilik, with Henry Francis on the crux. (Gabriel Clarke)

in advance. They then had quite a tough time over eight days relaying everything inland to establish camps on the unnamed glacier previously visited by Geoff Hornby's group in 2016. Eventually they made a high camp at 1,290m and over 13 days made first ascents of five peaks and also climbed three long rock routes. Their best ascent was **Northern Sun Spire**, climbed from the west, although they also noted the more impressive 700m east face, a virgin big wall for an ambitious group in the future. No less interesting was their decision to 'repatriate' to the UK all their garbage at the end of the trip, and also the creation of a superb detailed map of the expedition area that is far better than others currently available: see full expedition report via the MEF website.

The trend for sailing-to-climb trips continued as Gabriel Clarke used his own 32ft fibreglass sailing boat *Safe Arrival* to make the long journey from Cornwall to the west coast of Greenland. His crew of six experienced some rough north Atlantic weather en route with some sail damage along the way but eventually visited several landings in Nuuk Fjord, Storø island, Manitsoq, Uummanaq, Drygalskis Halvø, and then on to Disko Sound and Ilulissat. From these landings a number of quite demanding rock routes were made up to E4 standard. On Ikerasak Island two of Clarke's group also repeated the Ditto-Favresse E3 line *Married Men's Way*, climbed during Bob Shepton's Wild Bunch voyage. Clarke reported that as owner-skipper of the boat he found the expedition had greater stresses than anticipated. A successful return voyage back to the UK rounded out a trip that started in early May and ended in early September.



The instant classic *Married Men's Way*, climbed on Bob Shepton's Wild Bunch tour. (Gabriel Clarke)

Simon Baker led a team that visited the head of Permdal in northern Jameson Land, lying west of Carlsberg Fjord. This was largely an exploratory trip into an area not known for overly technical climbing but his group made a number of ascents in fairly impressive terrain. He also reported that there were periods of heavy rain – during July – which at one time would have been most unusual for east Greenland in the summer time. Baker had his team lifted into and out from their base area by helicopter from Constable Pynt airstrip.

Two groups awarded grants made kite-skiing icecap crossings, one of them a really long-distance journey, and the other the two-woman team of

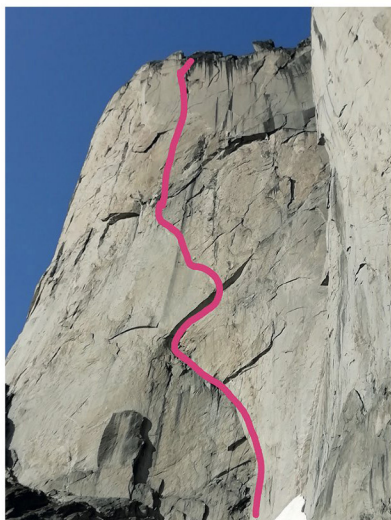


Climbing on Ummannaq Peak. (*Gabriel Clarke*)

Celine Jaccard and Katie Crafts, who made their first kite-ski crossing of Greenland as ‘Sisterhood of Adventure’: quite a steep learning curve for the 515km route from near Tasiilaq over to Kangerlussuaq on the west side.

Dave Gladwin made a solo trip to a location a short way north-east from Kulusuk to put up a new 620m rock route at 6a on a free-standing summit on an island at the opposite side of the fjord from the abandoned Second World War airbase at Ikateq. (This large area is covered in rusted derelict buildings, machinery and thousands of fuel drums). Gladwin reports that his new route took six hours to climb but his descent in rock shoes over scree, boulders and slippery grass took more than seven hours to reach the shoreline.

In August, Brian Jackson, Dave Head and IFMGA guide John Lyall went by boat from Kulusuk to a landing point near to the tongue of the Kaarale glacier. From a camp there they made six ascents of nearby peaks. It is not clear if any of these were first ascents as this area has had numerous



The line of *La Cura*, on Nalumasortoq's Middle Pillar.

visitors over the years, including one by the writer of these notes in 1991 (the glacier tongues in this area have retreated considerably since that time) and a particularly active Scottish group in 1966.

Apart from teams originating in Britain, three other groups made some new climbs in Greenland in 2019. Another sailboat expedition started out of Nuuk and went to a number of locations, including Tor-sukkatak Fjord where Canadian Charlie Long, Swede Andreas Widlund and Norwegian Rune Harejo

Jensen climbed three routes of 600m, 1,000m and 450m with difficulties up to 5.11.

Italians Federica Mingolla and Edoardo Saccaro were active in Tasermiut Fjord where they made a new big-wall route *La Cura* (525m, 7b+, A2) climbed over three days on the previously unclimbed south face of **Nalumasortoq's** Middle Pillar.

Much further north, on the south coast of Renland stands the prominent peak of **Grundtvigskirken** (1977m), which has had a number of ascents. Stefan Glowacz and four fellow Germans travelled first by train to Scotland where they joined a steel-hulled yacht to sail via the Hebrides in stormy weather to reach Scoresby Sund on 30 July. They were aiming to climb a new route on the peak's 1,300m north face. This attempt was brought to an abrupt end when Glowacz and Philipp Hans suffered a severe rock-fall issue as a table-sized block fell from 100m above them to hit a ledge after 50m showering the climbers with debris. Glowacz suffered injuries to his right thigh and forearm, Hans was unscathed. After this shock the team decided to switch objectives to an ascent of the peak's safer south ridge, previously attempted by a British army team in 1978. The Germans climbed 1,500m to a bivouac before moving onto the front of the huge summit tower where they climbed 15 pitches on the front face of the tower to the summit. They regained their bivouac 24 hours after leaving it and next day descended to their base camp on the shore. A 20-day journey by boat and rail got them back home to Germany. Glowacz and his team called their new route *Suffer and Smile: Boys Don't Cry* and claimed it was a 'by fair means ascent', although in their photographs a large power-drill is on show. Perhaps this was used to fix bolted belay stations.

At the time of writing, the Covid-19 pandemic is still at large across the world. Among its many impacts is the likelihood that expeditions planned



Just three of the large number of unclimbed peaks in Greenland to attract mountain explorers back when conditions allow. *(Jim Gregson)*

for 2020 may well be cancelled, and as many airlines will find it difficult to stay in operation in the future the prospects for already costly expeditions to Greenland may be in some doubt for a number of years. Nevertheless, Greenland still holds vast reserves of unclimbed peaks in areas already visited and some that have not yet been trodden by exploratory mountaineers. There are many prizes waiting out there, and wonderful experiences for those harbouring an ambition to go to this fantastic Arctic realm. As a means of whetting the appetite I have selected for these notes a number of images of still unclimbed peaks visible in or close to areas where my own expeditions have made numerous first ascents. There are many more fine peaks just like these waiting for adventurous climbers to get to them. No doubt there are also hidden reservoirs of impressive rock walls for those who may not wish to be based on icecap or glacier.