

GREENLAND 2009

Tilman in the Far North



By Bob Shepton

GREENLAND 2009

Tilman in the Far North

Precis

This was a Tilman-type expedition, sailing across the Atlantic in my Westerly 33ft sailing boat from Scotland to Greenland, and then making first ascents of mountains from the boat on the west coast. At Akuliarusinguaq after a couple of failures involving ice falls and huge distances, we found a prominent cirque we had not



explored previously on the south west corner of the peninsular which gave us ten unclimbed peaks, including the pleasing Snow Dome SW 1600 metres. Near Upernavik we put up a new rockclimb *Old Man's Benefit*, HVS, 5a, 8 pitches, Tom Howard, Bob Shepton on a 'day' cliff as opposed to the big walls, at the southern end of the Sortehul. But the main thrust of the expedition was a thorough exploration of Northumberland Island in the far north ($77^{\circ}23'N$). Here we investigated and recorded possible anchorages, not without opposition from ice floes, and made the first ascent of nine peaks, six of them via a technically difficult ski mountaineering traverse by Tom Howard and Andy Prosser along almost the full length of the island.

The expedition also set up an Automatic Weather Station on Littleton Island ($78^{\circ}22'N$) in Smith Sound/Nares Strait for the Scottish Association of Marine Science and the Danish Space Agency as part of their ongoing research into arctic weather and the ice coming down this significant strait from the Arctic Ocean. To our surprise it actually worked and is transmitting information back successfully!

We also survived two big storms and in the end left the boat in Aasiaat as winter had come early.

We are immensely grateful to the Mountaineering Council of Scotland for helping to make this expedition possible.

A summary of the climbing follows, and a topo and map are enclosed, and also a track chart of the passage up the west coast:



Akuliarusinguaq Peninsular (71° 50'N 52° 50W)

Spectacular failures and spectacular successes here. The failures involved 2000 metre peaks from sea level, left over from our explorations in previous years in this area, being more difficult of access. And that was the problem. The first of these peaks to the north of the anchorage at Puartdlarsivik, off Ingia Fjord, was guarded by an icefall at the foot of the approach glacier. My party in 2004 had approached the glacier expecting to ski up it; at least we now had two axes and crampons, but the icefall turned out to be huge. On and on it went and when we eventually reached the top, the glacier was still crevassed with another apparent icefall in the distance. With just three climbers available at any one time, the logistics of getting gear up this huge icefall and along the glacier in preparation for an assault were obviously impracticable.

The second group of two 2000 metre peaks defeated us through the sheer distances involved. We approached from Nugatsiaq tunua in the south, up broken boulder fields and under a hanging glacier (rather aware of objective dangers) onto a longer glacier. We bivied 'overnight' on the rocks of the lateral moraine further up and pushed on next morning up a long snow shoulder and rocky outcrop to the *Solo Snow Dome* I had climbed in 2004 – solo because my partner, an ex-Glenmore Lodge instructor!, would not come up for a second attempt! Our peaks lay well beyond this and in the end weariness, lack of a stove and food to save weight, and the sheer distance over a thin connecting ridge and up to the 2000 metre peaks defeated us. If there had been two younger members with Tom (half my age) moving fast they might have made it. We turned back. But at least we did establish that the *Solo Snow Dome* was 2090 metres not 2060 as I had made it on my own in 2004, and we took in a small subsidiary peak on a shoulder to the west at 2060 metres instead.

Chastened, we retired to the south western end of this peninsular, which we had not explored in previous years. Here in fact we found a spectacular cirque of peaks, climbed by Tom Howard and Mike Bowley, including the pleasing *Snow Dome SW* (1600 metres). Bob Shepton added four peaks on the south west ridge and two minor gendarmes after a long approach up a broken subsidiary ridge, solo again as Thomas preferred pleasant mountain days to the hard work of peak bagging! In all we climbed ten virgin peaks and two minor ones here. So honour was satisfied after all.



PHOTS:

Left: Bob and Tom high on shoulder by Pt 2090, Akuliarusinguaq

Right: In the horrible ice fall, Akuliarusinguaq

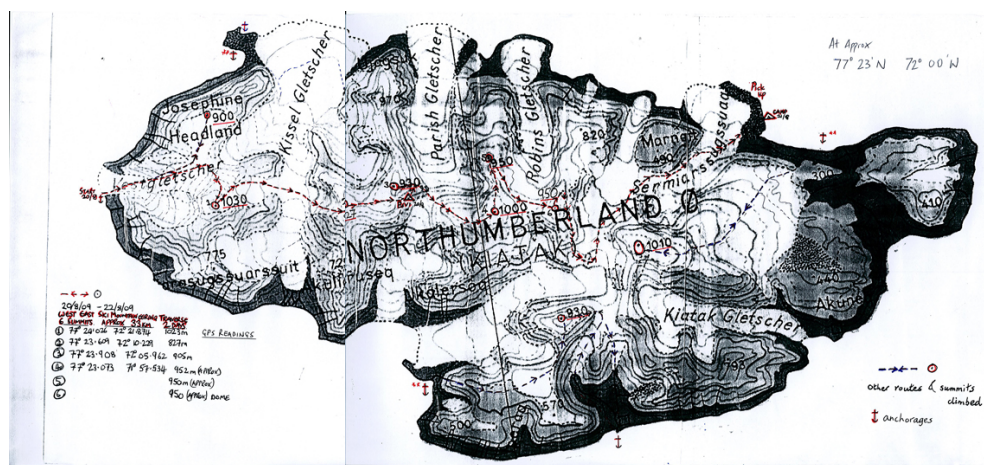
Sortehul by Upernavik (72° 40'N 55° 59'W)

Most of the rock climbs in this area are big walls and serious undertakings, but at Iterdlagssuaq at the southern end of Sortehul fjord there is a 'day' cliff giving routes of some 200 metres on good rock, and in sunshine, reached from a beach and short walk rather than straight onto the rock from a dinghy. Only one route had been done here to date by Italians Gianni Predan and Crisina Rapisardi in 2006; we added *Old Man's Benefit*, HVS, 5a, 200 metres (8 pitches), Tom Howard, Bob Shepton. This took the central of the three corner grooves on the main face and finished up the crux chimney groove immediately above after some wandering around to gain it. Guess who the old man was? But there is plenty to go here for the *under 70s*...

Northumberland Island (77° 25'N 72° 00'W)

Exploration and ascents on the unclimbed Northumberland Island in the far north was a main aim of the expedition. Andy Prosser and Tom Howard completed a two day, technically difficult ski mountaineering traverse across most of the spine of the island, making the first ascent of six peaks on the way. It involved steep descents, an uncomfortable bivvy on the tops, and big crevasses. Here is an edited version of Tom's journalistic type account:

'We landed from the dinghy and crossed the terminal moraine to the glacier. We tried Harscheisen and skins on our skis but it was too difficult crossing the deep glacier streams and we swapped to crampons. After some 45 minutes of ascent we put skis and skins back on and roped up on the col for the ascent of Summit 1 (Pt 1030 metres). The descent from here looked fairly heavily crevassed but we skied down a little more to the east. Excellent snow and a steep run, jumping some crevasses. Skins back on and a fairly straightforward ascent to Summit 2 (Pt 827), then we continued the ski traverse avoiding (at this stage) Summit 3 to a bivvy spot, but we were unable to pitch the tent due to steep snow and a large boulder field.





In the end we bivied in the boulder field using the tent as a bivy bag. It was a splendid evening! Next day (August 21) we traversed to the col, left out packs and made a quick ascent of Summit 3 (Pt 930). We returned to our sacks and then had to make a horrendous crossing of a gravel boulder field carrying our skis on our backs to the glacier. Fog was descending as we commenced the ascent to Summit 4 (Pt 1000). Big crevasses here required anchors and belaying. One crevasse was jumped with skis off. It was all hard going. As we got out of the crevasse field the fog cleared but it was very windy. From Summit 4 (Pt 1000) we went on to Summit 5 (Pt 950) and then very rapid skinning on snow led to Summit 6 (another Pt 950). An initially tentative descent took us to a narrow, steep gully between gravel fields and glacier streams, but on good snow which was just as well. We hit the top of Sermiarssugssuaq glacier which gave a crevasse jumping descent turning into Cairngorm skiing with ice, mud and 'mogul' fields. The finish comprised a never ending slog over the terminal moraine to pitch the tent on the sea shore. A good night's sleep was interrupted at 3a.m. when Andy realised we were about to drown with the rising tide. Next morning the boat made its way through ice floes and picked us up'.

A brilliant ski traverse over difficult ground. Just a pity the Alpine Ski Club had not supported the expedition, or even let us know one way or another in spite of prompting, which I did think was a bit discourteous! (This report was originally written for the Alpine Club!)

Bob Shepton and Mike Bowley set off at the same time and place, also initially on skis but quickly changing to crampons owing to the extremely unfriendly glacier, to make the first ascent of Pt 900 (metres). This intriguingly was on Josephine (Peary) Headland – the site of Peary's winter camp where Josephine had joined him was just visible across the water on the mainland in Mac Cormick fjord. Later Mike made the first ascent of Pt 930 on the southern side of the island, followed a few days later, when the wind at last allowed a landing from the boat, by Andy and Tom on skis. Finally Bob, Mike and Thomas Gough climbed Pt 1010, which had been unobtainable really from the direction of the ski traverse, to complete the round up of first ascents and the traverse between us of virtually the whole length of the island.

PHOTO:
Celebrating the successful ski traverse
- Mike, Bob, Tom and Andy



Summary of First Ascents

Akuliarusinguaq Peninsular

Main Cirque Tom Howard Mike Bowley

A.	71° 44.924N	53° 07.770W	977m	hit ridge at A
1.	71° 44.805N	53° 07.481W	1042m	
2.	71° 44.671N	53° 07.377W	1071m	
3.	71° 44.329N	53° 07.346W	1223m	
4.	71° 44.180N	53° 09.153W	1341m	
5a.	71° 44.33N	53° 9.9W	1370m	Viewpoint
6.	71° 43.416N	53° 06.636	1598m	Snow Dome SW

SW Ridge from subsidiary approach ridge Bob Shepton (heights suspect: GPS calibration)

3.	71° 43.505N	53° 10.930W	1311m
2.	71° 43.549N	53° 10.901W	1297m
1.	71° 43.532N	53° 10.690W	1296m
4.	71° 43.520N	53° 11.241W	1276m

Minor

5.	71° 43.50N	50° 11.609W	1202m
6.	71° 43.45N	50° 11.950W	1122m

Upernavik

Sortehul Iterdlagssuaq

Old Man's Benefit, HVS, 5a, 200m (8 pitches) Tom Howard, Bob Shepton

Northumberland Island

Ski Traverse Tom Howard & Andy Prosser

1.	77° 24.026N	72° 21.874W	1023m
2.	77° 23.609N	72° 10.229W	827m
3.	77° 23.908N	72° 05.962W	905m
4.	77° 23.073N	71° 57.534W	952m
5.			950m
6.			950m

Other Peaks

Pt 900m	Bob Shepton	Mike Bowley	
Pt 930	Mike Bowley		1 st ski ascent!- Tom Howard Andy Prosser
Pt 1010	Bob Shepton	Mike Bowley	Thomas Gough