



AAC Publications

Five First Ascents

Greenland, Watkins Mountains

After climbing the standard route from the east on Greenland's highest mountain, Gunnbjornsfjeld (3,693m), Carlos Calderas, Carlos Castillo, Marco Cayuso, Martin Echeverria, and I climbed several peaks to the north of Gunnbjornsfjeld that Paul Walker of Tangent Expeditions told us were previously virgin. He had advocated the northwestern flanks, as the glaciers on this side are higher, leaving a relatively short ascent to the summits. However, it would have taken two or three days to travel around the northern side of the group to a suitable campsite, so we opted to try from the east, establishing our new camp at 2,400m on the glacier that flows northeast from Gunnbjornsfjeld.

On May 6 we climbed Peak 3,047m (68°57.502' N, 29°53.026' W). From camp we headed west-southwest into the cwm below the peak, zig-zagging on skis to the bergschrund. The slope above was steep and had evidence of windslab. At one point I generated a small avalanche that swept down on my companions ca 30m below, fortunately without consequence. We reached the corniced north ridge and followed it to the summit. We returned to camp after an 11-hour round trip.

On the 8th we set off for summits on the ridge trending north, then northeast, from Peak 3,047m. We climbed into a huge bowl west of camp and then up a 450m snow slope, which steepened to 55°, eventually moving right to hug the rocks and minimize avalanche risk. Once on the crest we headed southwest to our first summit, Peak 3,003m (68°58.278' N, 29°52.511' W). Retracing our steps, we followed the ridge easily northeast to a second summit: Peak 2,873m (68°58.418' N, 29°51.439'). North along the ridge lay Peak 2,950m (as marked on the 1:100,000 Hvitserk East Greenland map). This is a beautiful pyramid, recommended by Paul Walker. Carlos Castillo and I decided to try it. The slope steepened toward the summit, and on several sections we used ice screws for protection. The summit ridge was deep snow and we sank up to our hips, literally swimming to the rocky top. In our effort to move light and fast we forgot the GPS and have no data for this top, but compared to surrounding mountains the quoted height seems about right. We all returned to camp after a 12-hour day, and due to the lateness of our descent found the slope down to the glacier in shade, and therefore in much better condition.

On the 10th, with the weather still stable, Castillo, Echeverria, and I climbed our fifth and last previously virgin peak, this time on the opposite side of the glacier, on the long ridge running northeast from Gunnbjornsfjeld. For this we needed to ski southwest up the glacier and then come back in a northeasterly direction up a glacier ramp above seracs and crevasses. We reached the col north of U-Turn (3,307m), then continued up the corniced ridge to the virgin summit, placing screws in the ice 100cm below the snow surface. Our GPS recorded 3,001m and 68°56.681 N, 29°49.660' W.

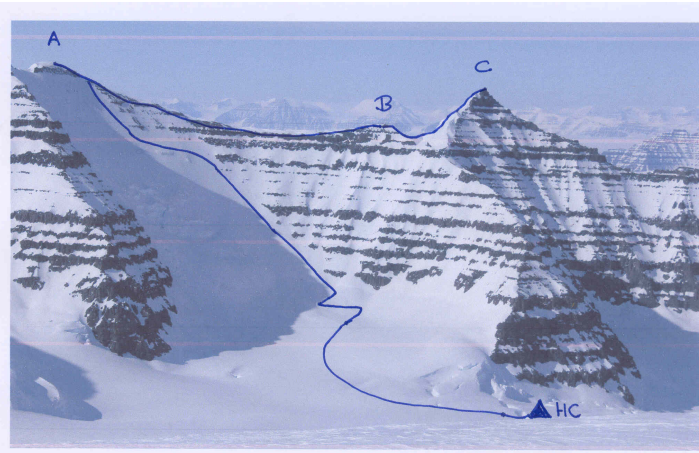
On the 14th we were flown out by Twin Otter to Iceland. On the previous day we were surprised to find footprints of an Arctic fox that had visited our glacier camp the night before. We'd not heard a thing. These animals have gray fur in summer and usually follow the polar bear, eating the remains of their catch.

Marcus Tobia, Venezuela

Images



(A) Peak 3,047m and (B) Peak 3,003m, with routes of ascent. The higher rocky summit left of B is most likely unclimbed.



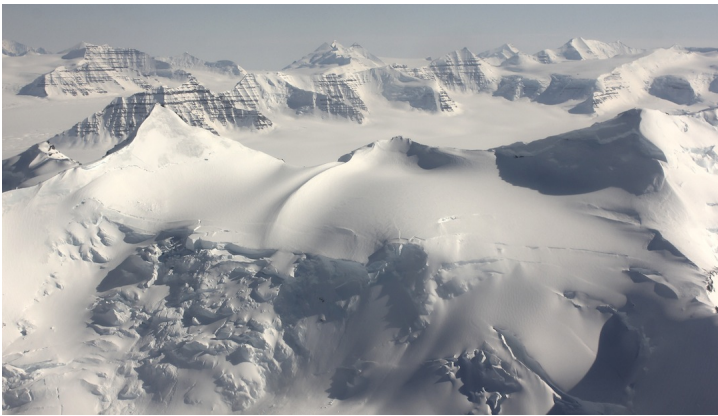
(A) Peak 3,003m, (B) Peak 2,873m, and (C) Peak 2,950m from Peak 3,001m to the east. (HC) is the 2,400m camp on the glacier.



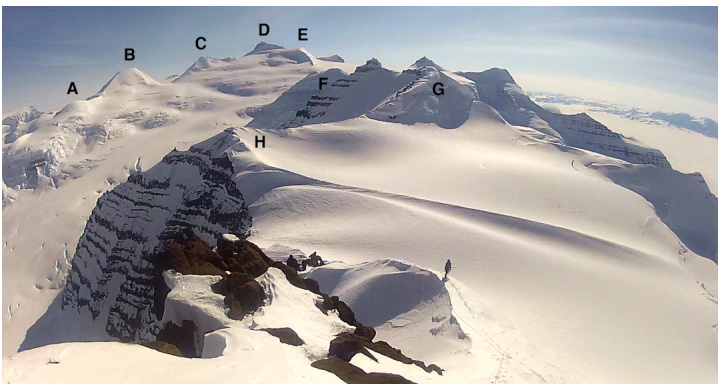
Looking north at Peak 2,950m from the summit of Peak 2,873m.



U-Turn (left) and Peak 3,001m from the east. The 2012 first ascent of Peak 3,001m reached the col between the two peaks from the far side, then up the crest of the ridge to the summit.



Looking east over the Watkins Mountains north of Gunnbjornsfjeld. The three foreground peaks are, from left to right, 2,950m, 2,873m and 3,003m, all climbed on May 8, 2012, following the ridge from right to left, approaching from the far side.



Approaching the summit of Peak 2,950m. (A) Peak 3,001m. (B) U-Turn. (C) Peak 3,400m. (D) Gunnbjornsfjeld. (E) Peak 3,480m. (F) Peak 3,047m. (G) Peak 3,003m (higher summit left is most likely unclimbed). (H) Peak 2,873m.

Article Details

Author	Marcus Tobia
Publication	AAJ
Volume	55
Issue	87
Page	191
Copyright Date	2013
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions