



AAC Publications

Adventures of the 'Mild Bunch': Coastal Rock Climbs From a Yacht

Greenland, West Greenland

The Tilman 2015 Sail and Climb Expedition had two main aims. The first was to climb new routes from my boat Dodo's Delight as I sailed it down the west coast of Greenland. The second was to bring the boat back across the Atlantic to Scotland after it had spent four years in the Arctic.

My team this year was not the "Wild Bunch," those talented professional climbers who joined me in 2010 and 2014 (AAJs 2011 and 2015), but the "Mild Bunch," a quartet of non-professional climbers doing standard routes. Apart from one glorious exception they stuck to shorter routes within their comfort zone, but they proved there is plenty of new-routing potential in West Greenland for holiday climbers.

We sailed from Sisimiut around June 6 and first visited the Evighedsfjord (Eternity Fjord, an old stomping ground of H.W. Tilman and the location of 2,190m Mt. Atter, the highest mountain in West Greenland, first climbed in 1956 by Denise Evans, wife of Sir Charles Evans of Everest fame). This is a long fjord with many rock walls and side glaciers. Numerous alpine peaks await first ascents. At the far end of this fjord lies an offshoot: Sangmissoq Fjord. On June 10, about 3 km up-glacier to the southeast of this fjord, Patrick Deacon and Trystan Lowe found a rock buttress they named Sangmissoq Buttress (65°48'N, 52°14'W). On the far right (east) side of the cliff they climbed the Rocky Road to New York (100m, E1 5a).

In this fjord we faced a difficulty that became even more apparent when we moved south to the Hamborgerland/Maniitsoq area, with its tremendous potential for new routes: The mountains were still in winter mode, with snow down to sea level. As the manager of the Maniitsoq Hotel put it, "This year in Greenland winter has lasted longer than in the previous 47." We had only brought rock gear, expecting it to be summer. To my knowledge, none of the rock walls in this area had been climbed, and there is also much scope for first ascents of prominent alpine peaks, rising 1,000m to 2,000m above sea level.

Thawing snow had soaked the rock walls. However, the four lads found a partially dry cliff, which we named Starter Walls (65°40'N, 53°06'W), quite close to the anchorage of Agpamiut, off Hamborgerland Sund. Deacon and Lowe, Rob Beddow, and Mark McKellar put up six routes: Shower Head (40m, E1 5a); Welly Welly Flaky (55m, VS 4c); Saucy Badger (40m, E3 5c); Friday Night Fever (25m, E2 6a); Chimney Sweep (155m, E2 5c), and Hallelujah, It's Raining Moss (110m, E1 5b).

Dusk Till Dawn and Midnight Sun on the east face of the Kin of Sal (a.k.a. Shark's Fin).

We then moved to Maniitsoq Island and a smaller island off its southwest corner called Kin of Sal (a strangely English name on Danish maps; in Greenlandic it is the Big Heart; we called it the Shark's Fin, for obvious reasons). On the east face (65°26'N, 53°04'W) the four climbers outdid themselves, climbing above their usual standard to complete two bold climbs: Midnight Sun (280m, E4 6a, Beddow-Lowe) and Dusk Till Dawn (280m, E4 6a, Deacon-McKellar). Both routes were climbed on June 28. On July 3 they added two shorter routes high on the back (west) side of the second summit of the Kin of Sal, above the obvious slab. Both started right of a prominent deep chimney and featured the best rock encountered so far on the trip: The Invisible Werewolf (100m, E3 6a, Beddow-Lowe, the crack line immediately right of the chimney, giving good varied climbing), and Rotten Rabbit (100m,

E1 5b, Deacon-McKellar, right of the previous route and taking the right side of a large flake). A French team, operating from the yacht Maewen, reported climbing on this face a little before us, but later said they "did not really do a route."

Fifty kilometers south, an attempt to climb the alpine ridge of Finnefjeld was thwarted due to the glaciated approach, for which we had no gear. Further south again, at Nuuk, we investigated the network of fjords to its north and east, but the team decided most of the walls were too big or steep. However, on July 8, Rob and Patrick climbed the prominent ridge between the Itossoq and Umanap Suvdlua fjords, crossing over the summit of Nakaigajutoq (1,180m). We initially thought this might be the first traverse but later discovered a traverse had been completed in 2009 by two Norwegians. The route required five roped pitches to negotiate the knife-edge start, and it took 25 hours boat to boat, at an overall grade of TD.

We discovered an inland crag immediately east of Paamiut that appealed to the climbers, but mist remained obstinately over the area, even though it was clear elsewhere. We finally gave up and motored a windless and misty ca 160km south to the region of Kap Desolation (Nunarssuit), where we anchored in the channel between Kap Thorsvalden and the line of islands at its base. On July 28, on the east side of a slabby face to the north of the Kap, the lads put up two routes: The Lost World (170m, E1 5b, Deacon-Lowe-McKellar), and McKellar's Pilates Masterclass (110m, HVS/E1 5a, Lowe-McKellar). An attempt on the Thumb, a prominent spire spotted on the other side of the fjord, was aborted due to loose rock and cold mist. Subsequently, the Atlantic crossing to Scotland was accomplished, but not without the usual stormy adventures associated with these high latitudes.

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Bob Shepton, Alpine Club, U.K.

Images



Trystan Lowe on the first ascent of Invisible Werewolf, west face of Kin of Sal.



Rotten Rabbit and the Invisible Werewolf on the west side of the second summit of Kin of Sal.



Trystan Lowe climbing on the Starter Walls.



Trystan Lowe during the first ascent of Midnight Sun on the Kin of Sal. Dodo's Delight is visible, moored in the waters below.



The prominent rock ridge at Nuuk that crosses the summit of Nakaigajutoq (1,180m), between the Itossoq and Umanap Suvdlua fjords.



Trystan Lowe and Rob Beddow getting started on Chimney Sweep, Afternoon Sun Wall, Starter Walls.



Trystan Lowe (leading) and Rob Beddow starting up the east face of Kin of Sal (a.k.a. Shark's Fin). They eventually aborted this line due to loose rock and climbed farther left on the wall.



Dusk Till Dawn and Midnight Sun on the east face of the Kin of Sal (a.k.a. Shark's Fin).



Chimney Sweep and Hallelujah, It's Raining Moss on the Afternoon Sun Wall, part of the Starter Walls

in Hamburgerland Sund.



The impressive Evighedsfjord in the remarkably snowy summer of 2015.

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