



AAC Publications

Cumberland Peninsula, Gateway Glacier Group, Ascents and Exploration

Canada, Nunavut, Baffin Island

Situated between Pangnirtung and Kingnait fiords on Baffin Island's Cumberland Peninsula, 35 kms northeast of the village of Pangnirtung, is a rugged, glaciated group of alpine peaks: the Gateway Glacier complex. Here, glaciers have carved an impressive selection of walls, narrow arêtes, and nunataks, and there are fine opportunities for ski touring circuits.

Grant Dixon (Australia) and four Canadians—Greg Horne, Louise Jarry, Marshall Netherwood, and Terry Winkler—spent a month in the area, April 16 to May 17, skiing from Kingnait to Pangnirtung. Including day trips, we traveled 225km and climbed 15 peaks, including 10 probable first ascents.

We made our way to Pang in two separate waves. On April 16, local outfitter Joavie Alivaktuk arranged for Louise, Grant, and Greg to be snowmobiled to the mouth of an unnamed valley on the west shore of Kingnait Fiord, across from Qaiqsuki Point. We called the drainage “Tupeq Valley” after the peak at the head of the valley.

While we waited for Terry and Marshall to catch up to us, the three of us made the first ascent of an unnamed 1,554m peak. We skied up the steep lower northeast slopes, a jumble of giant boulders and snow mushrooms that felt like a big-mountain position, with no room for slips or tumbles. A 1,350m elevation gain took us to a broad upper plateau, which led to a glacier dome sharpening to a razor arête at the actual top. We had a superb vantage point to assess the terrain we planned to explore over the next few weeks.

With our full crew assembled, we slowly made our way up-valley, breaking trail in 25cm of new snow. With effort, we reached the mouth of our chosen side valley to “East Gateway Glacier.”

A small, spiky peak (spot elevation 1,291m) we'd dubbed the “Little Matterhorn” drew Grant and Greg to make a 5km day trip to the summit. Skiing to a high shoulder, we cached our skis and scrambled to its small, rocky top. With ski boots on, one small section of the ridge was traversed “à cheval.”

Ferries of gear and food were made up toward the “East Gateway Glacier.” During the evening of April 25, the dreaded sound of rain on the tent fly put us to sleep. (A few days earlier it had been -25°C overnight.) With warming temperatures, avalanches could be heard and seen immediately. At the peak activity, we could see five slides at once running from various aspects, both point releases and soft slabs. Then the weather got cooler again, all avalanche activity stopped, and the snowpack turned rock solid.

At the crest of the eastern glacier, we camped two nights at “Gateway Pass.” Peaks 3 (1,440m) and 4 (1,600m) on each side of the pass were ascended, both likely first ascents. With a hoar frost-covered camp, the morning of May 1 hinted at clear skies above. Grant and Greg skied, then cramponed, up the twin summits of Peak 5: west (1,617m) and east (1,620m). The remains of a note under a single rock at the west summit of Peak 5 was evidence of an ascent. Only the words “1st August 19-- , -- Carey, Jonas[?] --, Dave” were readable. A belayed traverse across a ledge followed by a crack with crampons reached the eastern summit, which was small enough we took turns on our knees. Cloud banks filled the “Tupeq Valley” and lapped around the granite walls along the sides.

Moving across "West Gateway Glacier" and over 1,260m "Aanisittuq (South) Pass" put us at a high camp for several day trips to neighboring peaks. A peak 2 kms south of camp was the first objective. When conditions degraded to whiteout, Louise and Terry turned back, leaving Grant and Greg to finish off the ascent in fog. A small cairn was found with another weathered note, this time some of it was readable: American David MacAdam and his son made the first ascent in 1974 from a lake, which we assume to be the 3km-long body of water that lies 4.5km to the southwest. From 1971 to the mid-1980s, MacAdam visited Baffin Island most summers, often solo, to explore many alpine areas.

The highest summit of our trip, Peak 7 (1,708m), just west of "Aanisittuq Pass," was skied to its west col, then we cramponed and short-rope to the top, where a cairn and no record was found. Peak 8 (1,650m), 1km to the west, permitted skiing to within 100 vertical meters of the top before switching to crampons.

We moved off the Gateway Glacier system by descending south from a high camp to above "MacAdam's Lake," then east to the toe of a 6km-long glacier southeast of Gateway. Then we moved up to about the 1,000m level and established our best camp of the expedition, a hub for numerous day skis and climbs. Time was up for Terry and Marshall; they started their return to Pang ahead of the rest of us.

With an afternoon clearing, Grant and I sprinted to a tiny subpeak (Peak 9, 1,281m) to scout the area. The granite top of the higher north summit had a Patagonia-like character, and Peak 11 (1,528m) an impressive northwest ridge and overhanging rocky knob.

In fine weather, on May 9, the three of us skied east to an 1,170m pass requiring we carry our skis for 100m then a gentle ski down to the west and then up the south slopes of Peak 10 (1,530m) and its summit.

Just before reaching the pass on our return trip, Grant and Greg broke off north while Louise carried on over and back to camp. An hour of steep skinning had us to a high shoulder at 1,440m. Caching our skis, we traversed the east slopes of subpeak to a notch with a couple of rock moves and then zigzagged up south slopes, weaving around rock outcrops, to the small, airy summit of Peak 11 (1,528m). Atop probably the finest summit of the trip, we soaked in the landscape, reviewing where we had been so far and making plans for our time left.

The following day our objective was a narrow granite ridge (1,440m) a bit more than 1km north of Peak 9. Louise skied with us to near its southwest base then left us for the ascent. Steep cramponing, followed by a belayed pitch, brought us to a narrow rock crest. Our very lean rack of a few hexes and stoppers left us under-equipped to follow the ridge directly. We retreated and tried a diagonal line on the sunny south face, but, again, lack of pro and clunky footwear had us turn back about two pitches from the top.

With only one more day left before moving camp, Grant suggested an ambitious ski circuit around and over the mini-range south of camp. Leaving camp at 1,000m, we descended to nearly 800m then climbed up a lateral moraine and across a glacier to a nunatak with a spot elevation of 1,356m (Peak 12). We crossed over a glacial divide to 1,000m, where we left the glacier and ascended Peak 13 (1,422m), and then descended back to 1,000m. We soon intersected our earlier route to Peak 10 and returned home by the 1,170m pass. This was a 14.5km tour involving two passes and two summits.

Degrading weather on May 12 helped soften the regret of needing to begin our journey back toward Pangnirtung. Soon off the glacier and across a couple offrozen lakes, we established a camp at 503m above the second unnamed lake. The sound and sights of snow buntings, patches of grass, and open water signaled we were now into true spring.

"Q Range" peaks were calling us for a couple more ascents. Seen on and off for the last couple of

weeks, Qajaq Peak, in particular, but also Qilalugaq Mountain would be our final mountains of the trip. Our descent to Pangnirtung Fiord at Aulatsivikjuak Bay, with the full onset of spring, made for interesting snow, water, and grass skiing.

– Greg Horne, Canada

Images



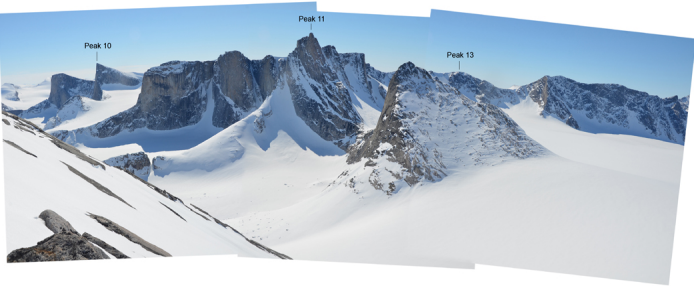
Skiing up the "Tupeq Valley." The 1,440m peak right of center on the far horizon was attempted but not summited.



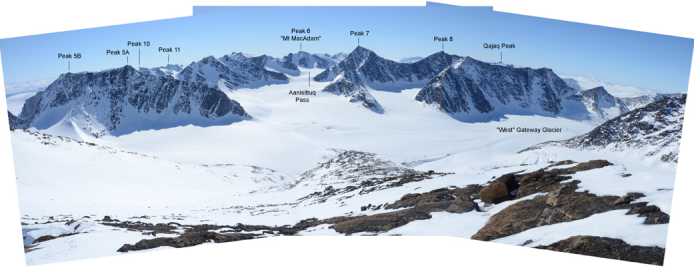
Descending Peak 5 and looking south at an unnamed, likely unclimbed peak.



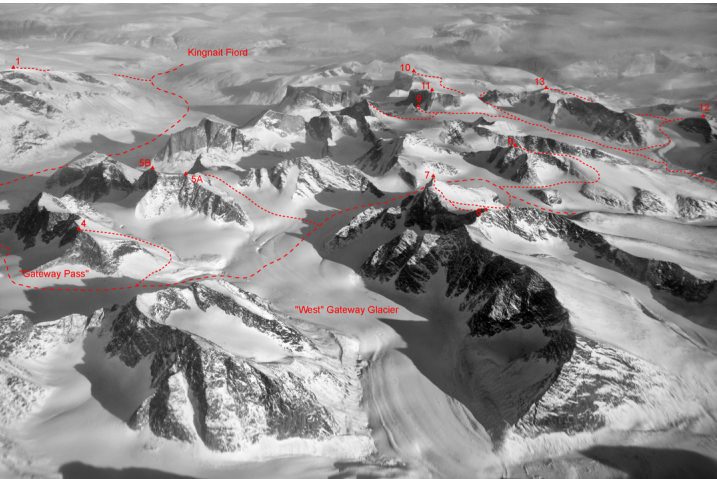
View from the summit of Peak 9, looking south-southeast toward Peak 11.



Panorama from high on the unsuccessful attempt of Peak 1,440m looking south to Peaks 10, 11, and 13.



Panorama from Peak 4, looking south into the heart of the area explored by the 2016 team. In all they traveled 225 kilometers and climbed 15 peaks.



Aerial view of the 2016 team's route into and around the Gateway Glacier complex.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Peak	Altitude	Route	Ascent	Date	Who	Lat	Long
2	1	1554	NE face & SE ridge	1st	18/4/16	GD & GH	66 21.962	64 55.285
3	2 "Little Matterhorn"	1291	S ridge	1st	23/4/16	GD & GH	66 25.730	65 04.102
4	3	1440	S slopes	1st	28/4/16	GD, GH, LJ & TW	66 24.205	65 11.832
5	4	1600	S basin & E ridge	1st	29/4/16	GD & GH	66 23.584	65 12.246
6	5A	1617	SE basin	2nd	1/5/16	GD & GH	66 22.556	65 10.270
7	5B	1620	SE basin & W ridge	1st	1/5/16	GD & GH	66 22.690	65 09.672
8	6 "Mt. MacAdam"	1604	SW ridge	3rd	3/5/16	GD & GH	66 19.747	65 11.754
9	7	1708	SW basin & W ridge	2nd	4/5/16	GD, GH, LJ & MN	66 21.189	65 13.168
10	8	1650	SE basin & E ridge	1st	4/5/16	GD & GH	66 21.365	65 14.932
11	9	1281	W face & N ridge	1st	8/5/16	GD & GH	66 18.597	65 05.273
12	10	1530	W & S slopes	1st	9/5/16	GD, GH & LJ	66 17.287	65 01.225
13	11	1528	S basin & S ridge	1st	9/5/16	GD & GH	66 18.180	65 04.711
14	12 "Nunatak"	1356	SE slopes & NE ridge	1st	11/5/16	GD & GH	66 16.244	65 10.803
15	13	1422	S slopes	1st	11/5/16	GD & GH	66 16.757	65 06.376
16	14 Qialugaq Mtn	1276	NE ridge	?	14/5/16	GD & GH	66 16.111	65 24.418
17	15 Qajag Peak	1447	E & SE face	unknown	14/5/16	GD & GH	66 15.987	65 26.398
18								
19	NAD 83, Altitudes from digital elevation model							

List of peaks climbed by 2016 Gateway Glacier team.



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