



AAC Publications

Heim Peninsula and Sydkap Icecap, Ski Traverse and Various First Ascents

Canada, Ellesmere Island

The original plan had been a west-to-east traverse of the Sydkap Icecap from Baad Fiord to Harbour Fiord. However, advanced contact with elders in the hamlet of Grise Fiord was not able to confirm a snowmobile ride to Baad Fiord. Upon our arrival in Grise, we were unable to secure the all-day ride to Baad, so we settled for a drop-off by Symon Ningiuk at the head of Harbour Fjord, from which we would ski a counter-clockwise loop onto the icecap, climbing peaks along the way. The snowmobile ride took 2.5 hours on May 2. With loaded pulks and trail breaking, it would have been four to five days.

We first used skis and then crampons and ice axes to climb an isolated 722m peak on the Heim Peninsula. We then skied north up a valley leading to Glacier 17 (Area 46422B Glacier Atlas of Canada), passing a recently vacated polar bear den. A five-day ascent of the glacier led to the second-highest point of the Sydkap Icecap (1,265m). A gradual 13.5km descent to Glacier 179 (Area 46422C) positioned us for three ski ascents of nearby peaks, ranging from 875m to 936m.

The exit off Glacier 179 proved a bit tricky due to not being able to see a feasible descent ramp for our 2m-long, 60kg pulks. An extra night near the glacier terminus was required; we then backtracked 2km and, using a side lobe of the glacier, shuttled loads in a trench between the glacier and a mountain slope.

Over a long ski day from our 11th campsite, we traversed southwest over an 800m-high glacier dome, giving access to a long ridge and 788m summit overlooking South Cape Fiord. (All peaks climbed during this trip are believed to be first ascents.) The tidewater Sydkap Glacier, which has retreated 9km since 1961, still is producing thousands of smaller icebergs seen frozen in the fjord and is the only glacier flowing from the icecap still to reach the ocean.

We then returned to Harbour Fiord, where bear tracks criss-crossing the sea ice motivated us to ski hastily across the fjord and several kilometers inland to camp. In two more days we reached Grise Fiord, south of its narrows, followed by one more night out before returning to the hamlet on May 23, three weeks after departing.

– Greg Horne and Louise Jarry, Canada

Trip summary: May 2–23, 2017 (21 days), 197km from Harbour Fiord over eastern portion of Sydkap Icecap and return by ski to Grise Fiord hamlet. Seven summits ascended, 722m to 1265m high, likely all first ascents.

Images



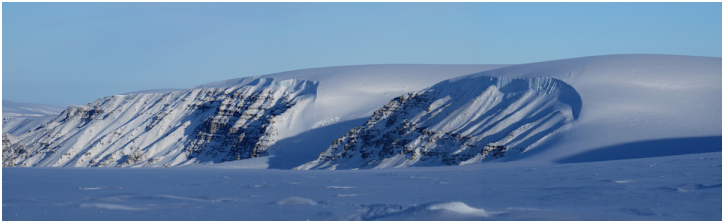
View from Peak 5 southwest toward the Sydkap Glacier. Greg Horne



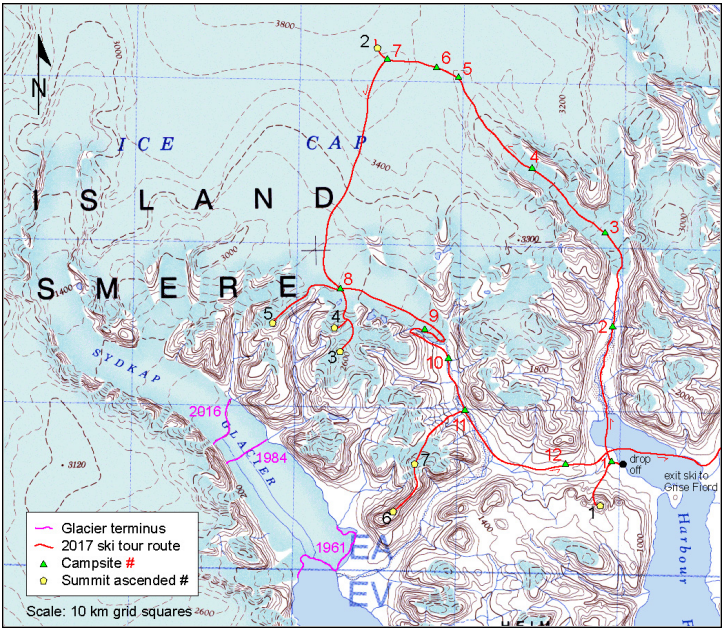
Glacier flowing into South Cape Fiord.



Heim Peninsula from Glacier 16



Icecap edge panoramic



Sydkap 2017 route map

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