



AAC Publications

Grundtvigskirken, Historical First Ascent by Southwest Face

Greenland, East Greenland, Renland

In 1999 a Norwegian-Swedish team climbed the south ridge of Grundtvigskirken (1,977m), thinking they were making the first ascent. Although this route had been attempted before to around half height (most likely by the British military in 1978), the peak was not known to have been climbed. However, when one of the Norwegians scrambled to the north top, he discovered a cairn and rappel slings. We can now confirm what is thought to have been the first ascent of Grundtvigskirken.

In 1989 a Belgian expedition (Nunatak 89) left Amsterdam and set sail for Ittoqqortoormiit (Scoresbysund) on a 17m yacht. The voyage took around one month. The objective was twofold: to beat the record for the furthest point north sailed on the east coast of Greenland, established in 1905 by the vessel Belgica, skippered by Adrian de Guerlache, and to climb an impressive rock tower on Renland that had been identified in 1985 by a previous Belgian expedition. The first goal was not achieved, due to very dense icepack that year. However, Jean-Marc Piron and Luc Reginster succeeded in climbing the tower.

They first explored the east face (climbed 21 years later by a Swiss-Italian team, AAJ 2011), but found it to be too serious for two climbers with neither portaledge nor bolt kit. So they moved to the opposite side of the mountain and climbed the southwest face. This started up slabby terrain to reach a bivouac below the 550m headwall, which they climbed the next day in 10 hours, via a prominent crack system in the middle of the face. The rock was excellent and the difficulties 5c–6a. Finding no evidence of a previous ascent, they built a cairn on a big block at the top and rappelled the route of ascent.

The 1985 Belgian expedition had dubbed the peak **Penguin Tower**, and the first ascensionists decided to stick with this, unaware of a previous name. [Grundtvigskirken was named in the 1930s after the famous Grundtvig Church in Copenhagen, whose tower the peak strongly resembles. See the notes here about the history of this name.]

The 1989 climbers spent three weeks in the fjord of Scoresby Sund, and then, when they tried to leave, the yacht was stuck by wind-blown pack ice and out of contact for a further eight days. Constable Pynt was not a commercial airport in those days, nor did the yacht have a satellite phone.

– Lindsay Griffin, with information from Luc Reginster, Belgium

Images



The southwest face of Gruntvigskirken and the line of the 1989 Belgian route, the first known route on the tower. Luc Reginster, one of the climbers, cannot remember whether their exit from the wall was to the left or right of the summit, but either way the two Belgians reached the top via the east face. At the time of the first ascent there was no snow on the face.

Article Details

Author	Lindsay Griffin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	191
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions