



AAC Publications

Ingolfsfjeld, Southwest Face

Greenland, East Greenland, Kangertitivatsiaq Fjord

This summary article appears in AAJ 2023. [Click here](#) for a more complete history of attempts on Ingolfsfjeld and in-depth account of the southwest face by Steve Chadwick, one of the expedition members, along with photos from the 1970s climbs and a pitch-by-pitch description of the southwest face route.

One hundred and twenty kilometers northeast of Tasiilaq, at 66°25'19.35"N, 35°38'14.95"W in Kangertittivatsiaq Fjord, is a spectacular 2,232m peak, its existence known from the early explorations by Georg Carl Amdrup, Fridtjof Nansen, and the botanist Tyge Bocher. It is named Ingolfsfjeld after the old Scandinavian King Ingolf and is visible from the sea.

Following a late 1960s attempt on the northeast ridge by a British party, in the summer of 1971 two teams made Ingolfsfjeld their goal. A Croatian party arrived first and completed the northeast ridge, placing four camps. Marijan Cepelak and Nenad Culić reached the summit after climbing a vertical height variously reported as between 1,200m and 1,500m. The final eight pitches on the summit tower were V and VI. This was the first major ascent outside mainland Europe from an area that would much later gain independence from the former Yugoslavia.

The second team, a British party, attempted a line on the right side of the southwest face—one of the biggest rock faces in Greenland—until forced to retreat below a 190m wall with no apparent weakness.

The main feature of the southwest face is the central pillar, falling directly from the summit. In 1973, an Anglo-Croat team tried a difficult line to the right, hoping to traverse onto this pillar, but narrowly escaped disaster from rockfall in the central couloir.

Two of the 1971 team, Steve Chadwick and Tony Mercer, returned in 1975 with Jim Davenport, Henry Mares, Keith Myhill, and Keith McDowell. Learning from previous failures, they decided to forge a line directly up the steep lower wall to the base of the central pillar, using fixed ropes. This lower section involved hard free climbing, aid climbing including four hook moves, tension traverses, long runouts, and a few bolts.

After waiting out bad weather at the base, they began a summit push, which ended 350m up in a storm. On a second try, with the leader fixing ropes for the other five to ascend, they passed the previous high point and then climbed through areas of friable granite and ledges heaped with rubble. They realized this ground was too dangerous for a large party. They also got their first view of the upper buttress and saw it was far harder than envisioned.

Everyone went down to base camp, where Mares and Chadwick decided to attempt the northeast ridge, which would form the descent route for the southwest face team. Davenport, Mercer, and Myhill would head back up the southwest face. These three climbed for five more days, overcoming hard and loose pitches, many of which were led by Myhill, and eventually moving into the central couloir and climbing its impressive headwall to the top.

In the meantime, Chadwick and Mares climbed rapidly up the superb northeast ridge (mostly III and IV, but with two grooves of VI) until the 200m headwall. Here, they found snow-plastered rock and icy cracks, and about 100m below the summit, they began rappelling, reinforcing the existing anchors and leaving a food cache for the face team's descent. Davenport, Mercer, and Myhill got down in a day and a half (40 rappels with some downclimbing).

The 63-pitch route up the southwest face (around 2,000m of climbing) was graded ED+ UIAA VI+ A3 (VI+ being the upper limit of free grading at the time). Located in a remote area, it was one of the hardest big rock climbs in Greenland, probably only rivaled at the time by the French activity in Tasermiut Fjord.

– **Lindsay Griffin, AAJ**

Images



The enormous southwest face of Ingolfssjeld, showing the 63-pitch line of the first ascent in 1975. Previous attempts had been farther right on the face.

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