

1960 GREENLAND EXPEDITION

I. THE CROSSING OF THE NORTH AND
CENTRAL STAUNINGS

By JOHN A. JACKSON

EARLY on the morning of July 22 thirty-eight of us were assembled at Mestersvig on the North-east coast of Greenland. The party, led by Sir John Hunt, consisted of Lady Hunt, Susan Hunt, twenty-one young men all of whom had the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, three youth leaders and eleven others, all of whom had a long number of years of mountaineering experience.

Here on the jagged rim of the Greenland Ice-cap we were to do many things, which included glaciation research, filming and bird ringing as well as climbing, exploration and mapping.

Using a small boat named the *Polypen* we were able to establish a Base Camp at Menanders Bay, north-west of Mestersvig, on July 23. Weather signs were not good and low-lying alto-stratus clouds began to overcast the sky. Quickly the various parties organised food, tentage and other equipment prior to moving off into their various areas in the North Staunings. Sugden, supported by Lady Hunt, Susan Hunt and six of the young men, was to use the *Polypen* and go round to Alpefjord. There a base would be established for glaciation studies. Weir, Smart, and two others in support, departed for one of the Menanders Islands in the bay, there to make a film of the Arctic Tern and accomplish a programme of bird ringing.

Two other groups planned to established camps on the glacier named Bersaerkerbrae. The first of these parties, consisting of Hunt, Blackshaw, Streather, Jones and a number of the junior team, placed a Camp II on moraine at the lower end of the glacier by July 28. The second group, consisting of Slessor, Lowe, McNaught-Davis and Jackson, placed a Camp III on a rock shelf higher up the valley on July 30. Both parties were hoping to climb and explore within the region of the Bersaerkerbrae, and eventually we in Slessor's party intended to leave the glacier and cross Col Major to the Gully glacier, an area of which little was known.

After a week of exploration and climbing we had hoped that both groups would cross out of the North Staunings having located suitable passes and, using them, reach the Central Staunings via the valley of the Schuchert. The ominous layers of alto-stratus cloud were the fore-runner of many days of rain and sleet, and, at greater heights, of snow.

Many climbing days were lost, and an extension of stay was decided upon so the above plan was changed.

Hunt's Party

Snow fell for much of the time from July 28 to August 2, but in spite of this the party ascended two peaks of over 6,000 ft. Hunt, Streather, Jones and two of the boys climbed the first peak which they named Harlech. These three, plus Blackshaw, then moved about 7 miles to establish a light camp near the head of a subsidiary glacier to the north. The ascent from there of Caerleon was not completed and what might have been a very serious accident was prevented by the quick action of Blackshaw when a cornice gave way. Hunt was precipitated some 30 ft. down the steep flanks of the mountain before the fall was arrested. On the following day Streather and Blackshaw climbed another new peak named Elsinore.

Eventually on August 5 Streather and Blackshaw took four of the young men and climbed a peak at the junction of the Skel and Bersaerker glaciers. This they named Stirling Peak.

Slessor's Party

On August 2 the weather changed and instead of swirling mists and snow the sun shone brilliantly. Snow melted rapidly and revealed many a bright cushion of moss campion and clumps of dwarf willow.

We gladly dried out, stretched limbs, stopped strenuous games of Bridge and ascended a pleasant rocky peak of some 6,500 ft. behind the camp.

For the first time we had crisp, clear views of the promised land of the North and Central Staunings. Glaciers in this part of Greenland are long, but seldom rise to a great height, and in consequence the peaks soared magnificently for some 4,000-5,000 ft. above the ice. Granite peaks at the head of the valley were sharply outlined, and these first glimpses will be long remembered. The peak we climbed was named Tintagel.

The following day loads were put together for a carry to Col Major. Snow conditions were poor and loads heavy; this day was a genuine 'grunt and grind'!

The ice couloir to Col Major looked to be 800 ft. but was deceptive and proved to be 1,800 ft. of ice at an angle of 45 to 50 degrees. Some 750 ft. of fixed rope was placed in position in the couloir to facilitate future carries, and we eventually reached the top of Col Major eleven hours after leaving Camp III.

On return we were joined by Sir John Hunt. George Lowe departed for Menanders Bay to continue making the expedition film. We four (Hunt, Slessor, McNaught-Davis and myself) now formed the group to make the crossing of Col Major to reach Alpefjord by August 10.

STAUNINGS ALPER





GRANITE PEAKS ABOVE THE GULLY GLACIER.

August 5 was yet another brilliant, sunny day and ideal for a last climb in the Bersaerkerbrae. McNaught-Davis and Slesser climbed a fine rock needle of some 7,000 ft. which they named Bersaerker Spire. Lower down the valley Hunt and I enjoyed a fine climb on a peak with a final rock tower of 600 ft. or more. The mountain panorama was superb and the nine-hour day full of enjoyable incident, we gave this peak of some 6,500 ft. the pleasant name of Beaumaris. By the evening of August 6 we were at the foot of the couloir, and, once again, making the ascent to Col Major. Roughly 140 lb. of equipment was dumped at the foot of the couloir to be brought up later and with lighter loads the ascent took $3\frac{3}{4}$ hours. Tents were pitched, Mac's whisky consumed, and whilst a meal was prepared a quick review of our plans was made.

Davis and Slesser were to attempt the first ascent of the Hjørnespids, a peak of over 9,000 ft. and the second highest in the Staunings. They made an ideal pair, for Davis was quite the best rock climber with the expedition, and Slesser had quite obviously had his heart set on this ascent since he first saw the peak in 1958. Their fine ascent and traverse of the mountain is described below. During the twenty-eight hours they were climbing, John and I made two journeys back down the ice couloir to bring back loads, and also reconnoitred a route down on to the third ice-fall of the Gully glacier. This was a useful carry and reconnaissance which helped to speed up the journey to Alpefjord which began on the morning of the 9th. Clouds built up ominously and a cold wind was blowing as, amidst flurries of snow, we took a hurried last look at the fine peaks of the Bersaerkerbrae. Throughout the rest of the day we journeyed through extensive areas of very large crevasses, descended two ice-falls and finally camped well down the glacier towards Alpefjord. The scenery on this particular journey was remarkable. Exciting glimpses of tributary glaciers led the eye towards Chamonix-type aiguilles. On either side of us, set in a glistening white base of ice, were huge rock walls and soaring spires, an unexplored mountain land of firm granite warmly reflecting the Arctic sun. It will be a magnificent playground for the mountaineer for many long years to come.

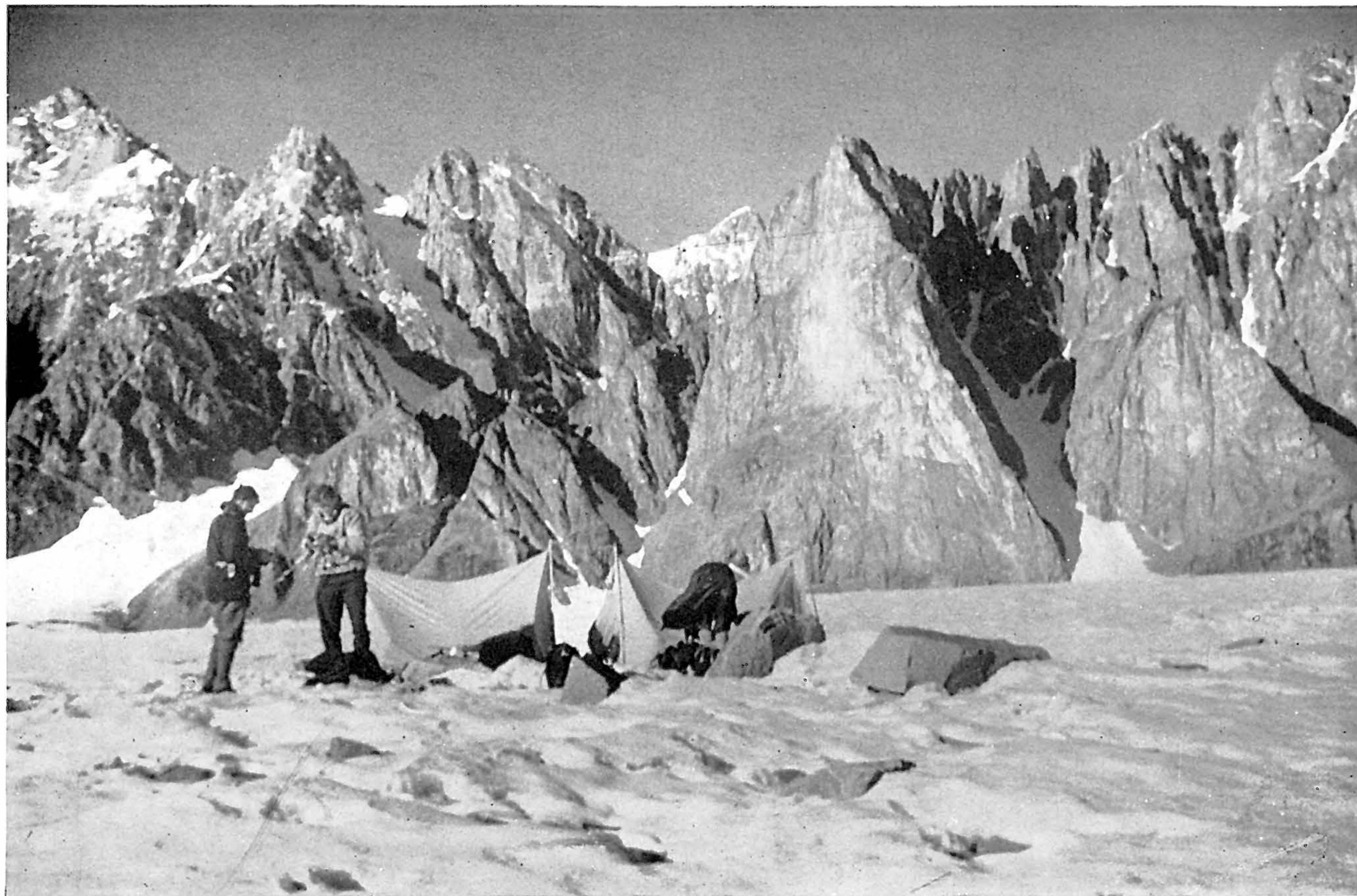
August 10 was the last day of the journey to Alpefjord. The route through the ice-fall, which entailed the occasional rock traverse, was always interesting. The majority of the expedition was reunited at Alpefjord by the evening of August 12, and all enjoyed this beautiful camp above the blue waters of the Dammen. Already it was early summer and the Arctic tundra was a riot of colour. Many members visited the Sefstrom glacier to see the progress made by John Sugden's glaciation party and others contented themselves with reading and occasional sorties to photograph the flora. Having photographed the *Silene Acaulis*, the *Sedum Rosea* and the *Dryas Octopetala* in Cwm

Idwal during May, it was fascinating to find such Arctic-alpines that are relatively rare in Snowdonia, so dominant at Alpefjord far to the north in August.

On August 14 two parties used the *Polypen* to cross the Dammen of Alpefjord and begin the journey through the Central Staunings. George Lowe, Tony Streather, Lady Hunt and Susan Hunt, with four of the boys, were to visit Syd Kap in Scoresby Sound and meet the Greenlanders at the settlement. Sir John Hunt, Alan Blackshaw, Frank Gwatkin and I, with two of the boys, intended exploring the South Staunings. The journey on the first day proved to be much simpler than envisaged as the much described ice-fall never materialised and progress was quickly made. John Sugden, Dick Allcock and six others of the glaciation party also gave excellent support and carried with us to the evening camp on the Spoerre glacier. Snow was falling thickly by this time and once again it seemed that the weather was going to break. Fortunately the weather improved throughout the 15th as we made progress over the Spoerre, and on to the Duart glacier which eventually leads to the Roslin col. Without skis the breaking of the trail was hard work, and each rope took a turn at leading the way. Nearer the col the area was heavily crevassed; some of the crevasses were quite enormous, and great care had to be taken. Late in the day the col was attained and camp for the second night was placed just over the lip on the Roslin glacier. The six boys were in good spirits and, although carrying loads of 50 lb., they remained exceedingly strong throughout the journey.

Good progress was made during August 16 despite fairly frequent halts to absorb the splendour of these Central Staunings. The fine peaks on the true right flank of the glacier which were outliers of the South Staunings gave promise of some interesting exploration to come. Snow conditions were changing and now that it was mid-August we were beginning to get a hard crust on the surface which would break annoyingly when least expected, but within a few days the crust was firm enough to make such glacial journeys less tiring. We camped for the third night well down the Roslin and, as it turned out, only four more hours from the Schuchert. Shortly after noon on the 17th we reached the snout of the Roslin glacier and entered the Schuchert valley.

One of the richest memories of my stay in Greenland was the sudden transition from a world of snow, ice, rock and glare of sun to the soft colouring and pastel shades of the Arctic tundra in the Schuchert. Here were sluggish streams reflecting the blue of the sky and running among lush green strips of grass, speckled with white blobs of Bog Cotton. Musk Ox grazed near by. It was a peaceful, pastoral type of scene, accentuated because it was so unexpected in that primitive Northern land.



CONCORDIA CAMP—LOOKING SOUTH.

II. THE FIRST EXPLORATION OF THE SOUTH STAUNINGS

By ALAN BLACKSHAW

The South Staunings Alps lie between the Roslin glacier to the north and Scoresby Sound to the south. A visit to them was an important part of the 1960 Greenland Expedition because, as far as we knew, they were completely unexplored.

Sir John Hunt had led a large party from Alpefjord up the Spoerre and Duart glaciers and down the Roslin glacier to a camp at its snout in the beautiful Schuchert valley. Half the party then went down the Schuchert to visit the Eskimo summer camp at Syd Kap on Scoresby Sound; the other half—Hunt, Jackson and I, with seven of the boys—set out to explore the South Staunings.

We camped the first night—August 20—in the Schuchert at the junction with the Main valley, and at noon the following day, we established a camp six miles further at the snout of the Main glacier. Five of the boys were left to man this and bring up stores; Jackson stayed with them. Hunt and I with two of the boys, Frank Baber and David Church, the same afternoon pressed on about nine miles up the very easy Main glacier and pitched camp late that evening in rather unfavourable weather, at a junction of glaciers which we named Concordia.

The morning of August 22 was fine and we were astonished by the quality of the mountains: views from the Roslin had suggested easy snow peaks with easy glaciers leading to the last 2,000 ft. or so, but here were impressive rock peaks, with a particularly fine one just opposite.

We were very sorry to have only three days for this area, as there was enough climbing to keep a much larger party busy for several weeks. We decided that to achieve the maximum possible it would be best to split into two parties each day, one to climb a peak, the other to travel up one of the very large glaciers as preliminary exploration. Accordingly, on this first day, Hunt and Church went about twelve miles up the most important of the other glaciers, which they called the Jupiter glacier, and reconnoitred the surrounding area, naming the glaciers after planets or constellations. Baber and I climbed a 7,500-ft. peak at the west side of the confluence of the Main and Jupiter glaciers, which we named Kilmory, after the Scottish base of the National Association of Mixed Clubs which had sponsored the Expedition. From there we could see most of the area, and were greatly impressed by the quantity of good exploratory mountaineering it offered. The following day, August 23, Jackson, who had now arrived with more stores, Baber and Church went about eight miles up a subsidiary glacier, which they

named Mercury; this led them into the middle of another group of exciting peaks. Hunt and I climbed a very easy 8,000-ft. peak to the north of the camp, which we named Kilvrough, and another, lower peak near it which we called Pevensey. On the col between the two we found many tracks of the Arctic hare and the Arctic fox.

On the third day, August 24, we all five, after breaking camp, went down the Main glacier, until we reached another smaller subsidiary glacier. We went up this fairly easily, and climbed the disappointingly easy East ridge of a 7,000-ft. peak. We called the glacier Leo and the peak Karabiner. From the summit we had a magnificent view of Scoresby Sound, twenty miles away, filled with icebergs looking for all the world like the old Combined Fleets drawn up for review. This was our last day in the South Staunings and we left the summit a little sadly.

When we arrived back at the main Schuchert Camp we discovered that a youth leader and some of the five boys whom we had left in the Camp at the snout of the Main glacier, had themselves climbed an easy peak which they had called Derry. We also learned that the Syd Kap party, which had left us for the final stages of their ninety-mile march with such high hopes of meeting the Eskimos, had unfortunately been disappointed, as they had not come up to Syd Kap that year.

A few days later, the various parties had safely returned to Mestersvig, and we left for Iceland and London on 31st August.

We had the satisfaction of rendering a small service to our Danish friends, when our charter aircraft, making a deviation along the inland coast to search for two members of the Mining Company who had gone out on geological survey and were missing, discovered them in Scoresby Sound and brought rescue services to the spot.

Future medium-strength parties would, I am sure, enjoy a lengthy visit to the South Staunings, as there is a great deal of exploratory mountaineering to be done. As the area is so remote there would, however, be considerable logistical problems. We did not go far enough up to be sure, but it might be possible to land a light aircraft high up on the Main glacier. Alternatively, the upper reaches of the Roslin glacier are snow covered, flat and uncrevassed, and would make an ideal landing strip; an entry could probably be made from this area into the western part of the South Staunings. From Alpefjord, a new method of possible approach would be to go up the Spoerre glacier into the head of the Main glacier. Unfortunately the problem of access to the Staunings as a whole is likely to become more rather than less difficult in the future, as we understand that the mine at Mestersvig, which was so valuable to us, is not likely to continue much longer; and the future of the air-strip is to some extent linked with that of the mine.

III. THE HJØRNESPIDS

BY IAN McNAUGHT-DAVIS

'The Arctic Riviera is the mountaineer's dream come true. Where else can you get 6,000-ft. climbs on peaks only 9,000 ft. high, perfect rock, and a unique sun that shines unobscured twenty-four hours a day for weeks on end?' I chewed this over as I stood on the threshold of the promised land. Grey clouds swirled across a wet featureless glacier, drifting rain soaked through my windproofs and ran down my back eventually to swell the rising tide in my boots. The surrounding peaks, as far as one could see, were like slag heaps yet lacking the excuse of man-made squalor. Rébuffat's 'Human Animal' was small and cringing inside me, I could never climb again, life was to be an agony ankle deep in glacier slush. What did Slesser call it? Schlumpff, schtumpff, trumppff—these Scots are a strange race and I would never be a conductor on the Trans-Siberian Railway. But I was wrong. Not about the railway, there is time for that later, and I realised the mistake as soon as I saw the Hjørnespids. A beautiful granite spire that towered over all its neighbours with no immediately obvious line of ascent. The big, fat plum of the Staunings Alps, ripe and ready for a mouth-watering plucking.

A week later we stood on Col Major at the foot of the long ridge leading to the Hjørnespids. Malcolm Slesser and myself were to attempt the climb with Sir John Hunt and John Jackson in support. The route we had chosen lay up the mile-long ridge from Col Major; a ridge with some fourteen major gendarmes and at the end the problem of the main peak itself. Once we had seen this ridge no other approach to the main peak seemed worth considering. Only the thought of thousands of feet of first-class rock climbing could make the packing of 70-lb. loads during the past week seem worth while.

The camp itself was on the exposed, windswept col only a few yards from the foot of the face leading to the summit of the first gendarme, almost a peak in its own right. The twenty-four hours of daylight eliminated the need for an agonising early start and with little ado we set out. The peak was being warmed by the early morning sun and already the ice in the cracks was melting and blackening the rock in streaks. It was a welcoming peak, a siren luring us into its bosom. No need for crampons, a quick climb in bright sunlight, why take spare clothing? A few pegs, slings and a couple of ropes, a few bars of chocolate and let's-leave-our-axes-at-the-foot-of-the-face. We laboured through the soft snow fifty yards to the foot of the face and left the axes, wondering casually why we had brought them. A few easy pitches without the rope and, almost surprisingly, the face

steepened. Yet still welcoming. No real difficulty here, no Eiger Nordwand; even the word Eiger seems to suggest zero compromise, harsh reality and the immediate proximity of disaster. But Greenland, who could take the word seriously?—a joke in a wilderness of ice or schlumpff or whatever. A system of cracks ran up the face to an overhanging capstone. Malcolm led up with a precision of movement that I had grown to admire as a complete contrast to my own more ape-like mode of progression. I swung my way up to Malcolm and into the continuation of the cracks; more ice, dare I use a piton? The crack seemed to lead nowhere; even at this stage we were to be defeated. The capstone above my head was overhanging by several feet but there seemed to be room beside a large blue icicle to squeeze myself behind it. Under the capstone it was like being in a refrigerator and the only way out was down. A piton, hammered in the outside wall of my small cold cell had a stimulating effect on my courage, which was waning, and using a long sling as a handhold I dangled out to grope over the overhang. At least I can look as if I am climbing it, then belay here and let Malcolm try it. I brushed away the snow over the bulge, half hoping to find nothing, then quite suddenly my hand was full of hold and I was up. The realisation that I could still climb after a whole night's sleep suffused me with enthusiasm as I sat and watched Malcolm climbing the pitch with almost effeminate grace. The rest of the wall was straightforward, and we soon sat on the summit counting the dozen others that separated us from the main peak at least a mile away. We had been climbing fast for three hours and like a small cloud on the horizon a nagging doubt that we had underestimated the size of the peak gnawed into the enjoyment of the sun-warmed granite.

From here the route seemed clear enough. 'Follow the ridge, climbing or avoiding gendarmes as one wishes (or can).' We followed the unwritten guidebook instructions slavishly. Each side fell sheer to its own glacier and the sun projected a shadow of the ridge in profile enabling us to keep a score of each spike we climbed or skirted. Long sections only two feet wide were almost horizontal and it was reminiscent of wall-walking as a child; a thin coating of 'Black Death', an indigenous frictionless slime, maintained the interest, and little skill would have been required to fall a long way. The first set-back to our plans was after an abseil down the flank of one unclimbable spike onto the steep bare ice at its foot. The long horizontal traverse, without crampons, bent double chipping steps with a piton hammer, made us feel foolish and at the first opportunity we scampered back to the ridge to continue our, now monotonous, gendarming.

Four hours of this brought us to the final barrier defending the main peak, a tetrahedron of granite set squarely in our path, no miserable descent here to creep round its base on all fours. No direct assault

either, so almost as a compromise, we took a line round its midriff. We had shared the lead rigorously throughout the climb and by chance it had fallen to me to decide which way round. Each side of the rock was vertical and although not without holds neither way seemed to offer much hope for the timid. The North face had an irresistible lure and after ascending a short holdless slab and crossing an exposed wall I was sufficiently committed to convince myself that it was easier to go on than to return. The way forward was barred by a bottomless chimney of smooth granite. I sprawled across the top of it and awkwardly hammered a prize-winning piton in the roof. A sling in place, a good swing and I was standing on a small ledge on the opposite wall. The ledge continued for a few feet then disappeared, but some 30 ft. below a large easy ledge seemed to lead to easy ground beyond our final spike. Malcolm worked his way across the traverse slowly and as he joined me on my airy stance we both became aware that the temperature was below freezing point and that we were on the mountain for the night. Malcolm traversed on, hammered in a piton and abseiled out of sight. At this point the face fell vertically almost to the glacier and from the casual, Sunday-outing atmosphere of the ridge in the sun, where the chocolate gave the impression of a picnic, we were nailed on an ice-bound wall where chocolate represented calories only and gave no pleasure. As I mooned, hanging from the peg, I could hear Malcolm some way below, giving a short soliloquy in which the word Sassenach was the most polite. Gradually he began to appear, forcing his way up an icy slab onto the ledge, hands groping for holds on the rounded rock, head with regulation check cap, faded anorak and neat feet deftly seeking out the small holds. Malcolm led across to easier ground and at last I could move. As I hammered out the piton I looked at the two vertical cracks leading from our ledge to the summit of the gendarme, less steep and holdless now that we did not have to climb them. They didn't look really impossible and despite the ice running down the back of each I couldn't understand Malcolm's unwillingness to come to grips with them.

As I slid down the rope the difficulties became evident. The abseil was over an overhang leaving the rope dangling some 15 ft. from the ledge. Malcolm had had to descend to well below the ledge, swing onto the iced wall and climb up again. This was no time for that sort of nonsense and as I came level with the ledge a pull on the climbing rope brought me directly onto it. A walk across the ledge and a short, wet holdless slab brought me to Malcolm, who seemed unduly upset that I had avoided his hard pitch.

We moved on quickly, taking advantage of the weakening rays of sunlight, to the foot of the final tower. It had taken some nine hours of fairly rapid climbing to traverse the ridge, the main obstacle ahead

would have to be climbed at night. As the sun swung into the north the blue sky and golden rocks, contrasting with the glistening ice, faded into the uniform greyness of an Arctic night. From full 'technicolor' to monochrome.

The way was now barred by a smooth wall with no inviting lines of ascent, but from the ridge we had spotted our weakness, a shallow couloir rising to a series of cracks some way over to the left. A long traverse down and once again we were beginning to make height rapidly. Easy cracks and chimneys led us into a bay in the centre of the face. The continuous movement set the blood running again and with the subsequent feeling of warmth I felt an unreasonable desire to sleep slowly overcome me. Above us a line of ice-choked fissures promised sustained interest and as I tried to overcome my drowsiness Slesser, The Prophet, resolved the situation in a sentence. 'There are easy angled slabs on the West ridge.' Without conscious thought I moved up the left-hand branch of the grooves leading to this nirvana of hands-in-the-pocket slabs and the slow realisation of the value of experience came to me. We might forget essential equipment, we might be over-optimistic in route finding but to sleep-climb instead of sleep-walk is the true test. We reached a small ledge on the ridge and stared, almost without surprise, at the blank vertical wall separating us from the summit. I almost became interested. While Malcolm was looking at his shattered dream I slipped off my boots, thrust my feet into my rucksack, lay down on a small square of foam plastic, and went to sleep.

The awakening was abrupt and Slesser's quivering blue face seemed almost unreal in the grey half-light. I waved farewell and he abseiled out of sight. Considerably refreshed I followed, relieved to see that the cracks leading direct to the summit had fallen back some twenty degrees. Without realising it we had solved a paradox. Malcolm was so cold that he claimed a bivouac would just about finish him off; I was so sleepy that I could have fallen asleep whilst actually climbing. The short nap on the ice-ledge had worked wonders and interest in climbing was once again revived.

Back in the bay, the cracks to the summit, several hundred feet above us, still looked uncompromising and with little enthusiasm we started to work our way up them. As they steepened and became sheathed in black ice we traversed onto the right wall and found a parallel line of thin fissures, steep but brimming with holds. Had we been less sleepy we might have been pleased. Physically we were both in good condition and climbing reasonably strongly, but as we watched each other progress a moment's inattention was enough to cause one to slump onto the belay—asleep. The line was direct, however, and with few deviations we arrived below the summit. The only excitement



BERSAERKER SPIRE. CLIMB RUNS UP FACE ROUGHLY ON LIGHT SHADOW BOUNDARY.



HJØRNESPIDS FROM COL MAJOR CAMP. DESCENT BY SKYLINE RIDGE.



HJØRNESPIDS FROM BERSAERKER GLACIER. COL MAJOR ON LEFT. ASCENT BY
RIDGE FROM COL MAJOR.

that awoke us both was in traversing round a bulge, hands on good holds, feet on a ledge out of sight below the bulge; a moment's sleepy inattention and we both in turn found ourselves hanging from our handholds—frozen Black Death.

A short vertical wall and we were standing together on the small summit. The sun was just bringing a pale white light to the snows of the highest peaks, below the glaciers were dark and immobilised in the cold as they threaded their way down to stud the Kong Oscar Fjord with more icebergs. It was 4 a.m. and we had been climbing, almost without a break for seventeen hours. A round of photographs delayed us sufficiently for the cold to get a grip and, too cold to speak, we fixed the first of many abseils.

Nine hours later we hammered home the last peg and slid over the bergschrund. We had used all our pitons, slings, and even the cord on our piton hammers in the dozens of abseils we had made descending the West ridge. Two specks on the glacier were making good time towards us carrying our skis, our sleeping bags were only two hours away. We had traversed our peak by its longest routes in some twenty-eight hours' climbing, perhaps we can persuade Sir John to let us lie in bed a little tomorrow; we couldn't.