Canadian Arctic 1987

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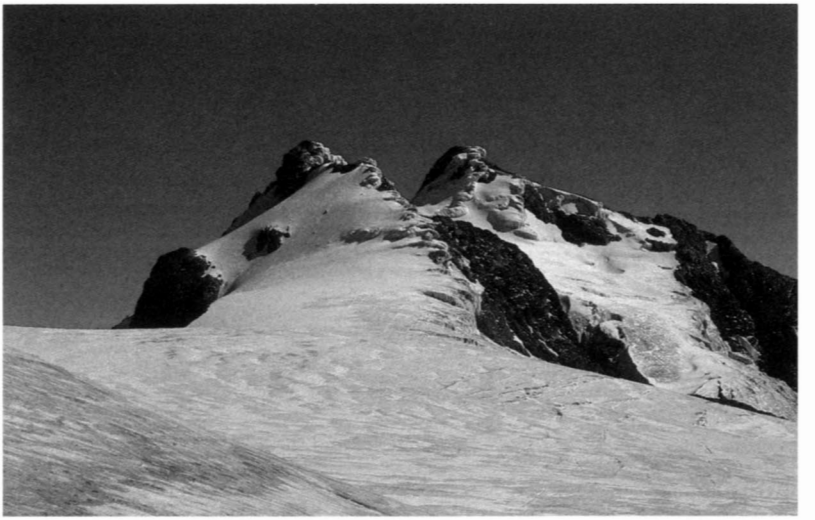
Ellesmere Island has, at Cape Columbia, the northern-most land in the world, at latitude about 83.1°. It is a very mountainous island, particularly on the north-west and the east sides, and its mountains almost reach the north coast – the northern-most mountains in the world.

It was from here that most of the attempts to reach the North Pole have started, including that of Peary – reputedly, but perhaps not actually, the first man to reach the Pole. Nowadays, tourist flights to the Pole by Twin Otter from Resolute Bay are common, but are somewhat expensive. The topography of Ellesmere is dominated by several large and small ice-caps which almost bury the mountains, and only the Agassiz Ice-Cap, which is immediately west of Kane Basin, has a name. On the north-west side there are two large and unnamed ice-caps, the larger of which straddles 82°N and the smaller straddles 81.5°N. There is also a large unnamed ice-cap immediately west of Smith Sound, a smaller one on the south-east tip of Ellesmere Island, and another north of the settlement of Grise Fiord on the south coast.

The north coast of Ellesmere was the home of great ice shelves, but, at about the turn of the century, the ice shelves started to break off and float away as so-called 'ice islands' that circulated for many decades around the arctic ocean, and still do. They have often been used as natural platforms for scientific expeditions. Perhaps nine-tenths of the original ice shelves have floated away.

The Independence I people lived there about four millennia ago, when the earth was warmer than it is now, and were followed by the Independence II and then the Dorset people, who disappeared about 1000 years ago. The island was rediscovered by Europeans in 1616 when the ship *Discovery*, with Robert Bylot as master and William Baffin as pilot, made her fifth journey into the region and discovered Whale Sound in latitude 77°, near the present Thule, Jones Sound, and Lancaster Sound. It was a magnificent journey, but was forgotten or disbelieved for 200 years, until James Ross verified Bylot's and Baffin's discoveries.

The east and north coasts were explored by several parties in the latter half of the 19th century. The major contributors were Otto Sverdrup and his party, who spent four years exploring much of Ellesmere and Axel Heiberg Islands, leaving behind such names as Butter Porridge Point (they ate some there). Much of the remaining geography was explored in outline by Robert Peary during his attempts to reach the North Pole for the first time. The mountains were first seen, by Europeans at least, by Adolphus W Greely from Lake Hazen in 1882. He went there because the Second International Polar Conference in 1880 planned several circumpolar stations for the years 1882–83. One of the two American contributions was to Fort Conger on Lady Franklin Bay, just west of Hall Basin, which is between Ellesmere Island and



83. Ruwenzori: Alexandra (5091m) and Margherita (5109m) from the Stanley Plateau.



84. Bowman Island, Makinson Inlet, Ellesmere Island, from the S.

Greenland in latitude 81.5N. In 1882 May, Greely and three men went to Lake Hazen and reported seeing for the first time the northern ice-cap of Ellesmere Island, and they named Mount Whisler. Their relief vessel did not arrive in either 1882 or 1883, and they were not rescued until 22 June 1884, when only seven of the original 25 men were still alive.

Mountain climbing in the high arctic of Canada started in 1935. Then, A W Moore of the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition and Sergeant H W Stallworthy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police travelled by dog-sled from Etah in Greenland and climbed Mount Oxford (1840m) at 82.2N, 73.1W. They saw and named the British Empire Range to the north-west. This lead was followed only 22 years later, when Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith and Keith Arnold, of the Canadian Defence Research Board, made the second ascent of Mount Oxford and determined its height by triangulation.

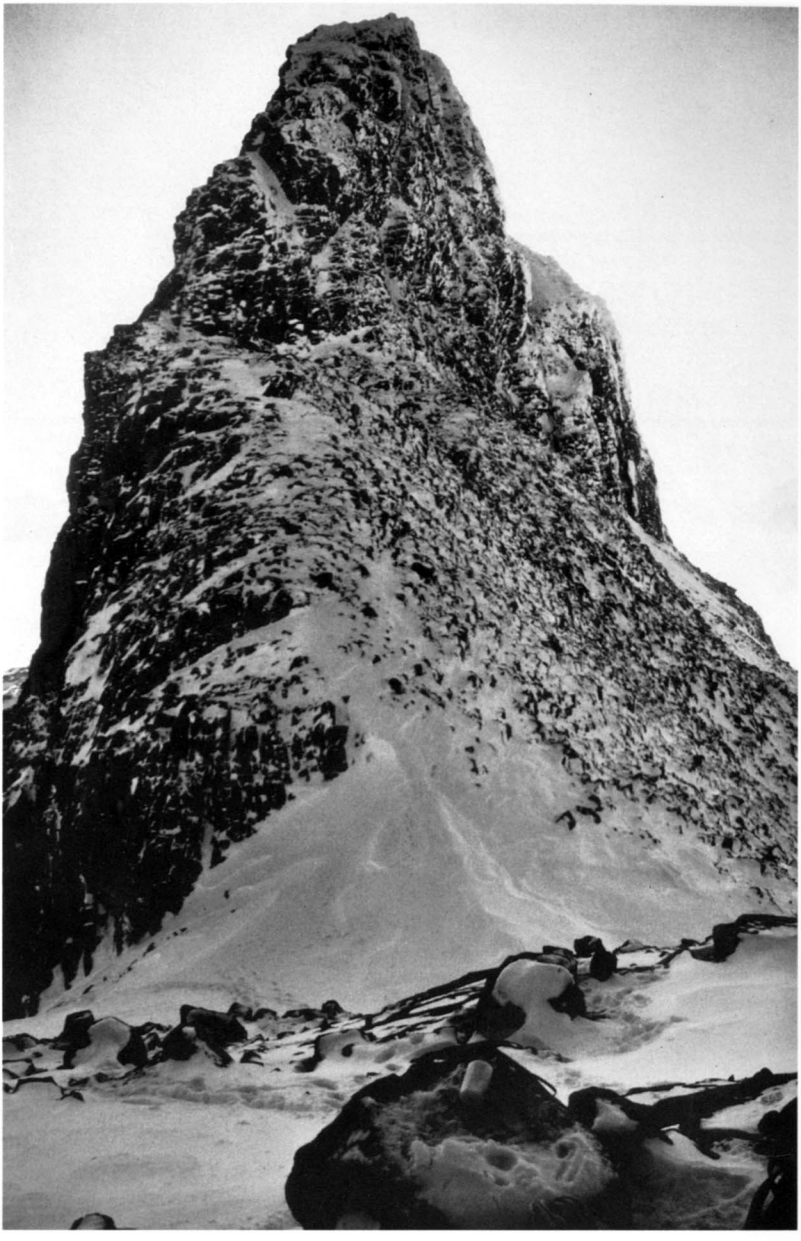
Between 1957 and 1967 G Hattersley-Smith and several companions explored the northern ice-cap, which has no name. They measured the heights of the highest mountains and climbed the highest, Barbeau Peak (2605m), which is also the highest point in North America west of the Rocky Mountains, jointly with a Royal Air Force party which had been climbing in the British Empire Range.

The next climbing in the northern Ellesmere was by Van Cochrane and his party from the Explorer's Club in 1982. They flew by Twin Otter from Resolute Bay and landed on the ice of the outer edge of Yelverton Inlet at latitude 82.3N. The snow on the fiord was unexpectedly deep, and so they set up Base Camp on 8 May near the snout of the unnamed glacier that flows into the inlet from the east. They ascended several peaks up to 1800m. Their return aeroplane brought Alan Errington, Steve Trafton and six others to a Base Camp north of Mount Whisler. In the next two weeks this party made 13 first ascents and the third ascents of Mount Whisler and Barbeau Peak.

The only other climbing of consequence on Ellesmere has been done near Makinson Inlet, in the south-east of the island. In 1976, Lori Dexter of Pond Inlet, Baffin Island made several climbs near the settlement of Grise Fiord on the south coast, such as the prominent 800m spire that is 6km north-west of the settlement, and several ice-filled gullies leading to the 600m plateau just north of the settlement. He, George Wallerstein and two others also climbed the 1300m unnamed ice-cap about 15km north-east of Grise Fiord. The party was then joined by Roly Reader and myself and flew to Makinson Inlet in a Twin Otter of Ken Borek Air, found a small hole in the clouds above Makinson Inlet, and landed on a gravel strip.

The prime objective was Bowman Island, in the middle of the inlet. Unfortunately the season was late that year and the ice never cleared from the inlet, so we could not reach the island. Nevertheless, about 10 mountains were climbed.

Van Cochran and Ted Whalley and their parties returned in May 1978, with Bowman Island as their prime objective. The last part was over the steep E face, which made a good climb. Van Cochran has been back to the area in both the Inglefield Mountains and the Thorndike Peaks, which are north and south respectively of the east end of Makinson Inlet. The Thorndikes were reached by



85. *The summit tower of Bowman Island, from the E. It was climbed up the ridge, the snow-ramp to the L, and the crack to the R from the top of the ramp.*

Twin Otter from Resolute Bay, and the first circuit of the Thorndike Glacier System was made. Four first ascents were made.

Lloyd Freese of Kluane National Park reports that 19 groups, comprising 90 people in all, were climbing or skiing in the Icefield Ranges in 1987, and spent 1765 person-days in the mountains. Two groups climbed the E ridge of Mount Logan, and six groups failed. One group was successful on the King Trench, and Dave Cheesmond and Catherine Freer are presumed dead on the Hummingbird Ridge. Two routes were completed on Mount Steele and one on Mount Wood, and another party failed on Mount Upton.

Tom Elliot, Chief Park Warden of Auyuittuq Park Reserve, Baffin Island, reports that nine groups totalling 39 people from five countries were in Auyuittuq for climbing or glacier skiing. Some of the climbs were of Mounts Tyr, Asgard, Thor, Bilbo, and Frodo, Breidablik and Freya Peaks. Five parties were from the US and there was one each from Spain, Germany, Canada, and the UK. The Warden Service completed two glacier ski-touring routes and climbed Gauntlet and Tuniak Peaks in order to increase its first-hand knowledge of ski touring and mountaineering routes in the Park.

Dave MacAdam continued his lone wanderings on the E coast of Baffin Island and spent several weeks in the fiords south-west of Cape Hooper. He climbed several mountains during his trip, all previously unclimbed.

I am very grateful to Van Cochrane, Lloyd Freese, Tom Elliot and Dave MacAdam for providing information.

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