Canadian Arctic and Alaska 1988

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Until recently, almost all the topographical maps of the eastern Arctic were on the scale of 1:250,000 or smaller and had contour intervals of 500 or 200ft, i.e. about 150 or 60m. We are delighted that the Canada Centre for Mapping of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources has recently announced its programme for new mapping on the scale of 1:50,000 for the years 1988–1992. It is particularly important for the eastern Arctic, because few maps on this scale have been published. The sheets derived from the 1:250,000 Clyde sheet will be mapped in 1988–89, and much of the eastern coast of Baffin Island is promised for 1989–90. The mountains of Auyuittuq National Park will be mapped in 1990–91, and similar mapping of north-west Ellesmere Island is promised for 1991–92. Many of these maps, when they are published, will be very useful for mountain climbers in the area. Almost all the 1:50,000 maps of Bylot Island have already been published.

We must realize, of course, that the new maps reduce the uncertainties of our mountain climbing: route-finding using a 1:50,000 map is quite different from route-finding using a 1:250,000 map. The 1:250,000 map causes us more surprises on the ground, and so may make the route-finding and the climbing more difficult. But we can always throw away the large-scale maps if we wish to challenge ourselves more.

A full account of a ski traverse of Bylot Island made in 1984 by Mike and Ulrike Schmidt, Fred Bushnell, Mike Wingham, and Dave Clay has at last been published.[1] The expedition flew from Pond Inlet on 7 May to the N coast of Bylot Island, one day inland from Maud Bight, and spent the next few weeks traversing the island and climbing about 56 mountains; half of the climbs seem to have been first ascents.

Christian Dalphin, Bernard Wietlisbach, Xaver Bongard and Peter Gobet, a group of Swiss climbers, left the settlement of Clyde, in the middle of the E coast of Baffin Island, with three Inuit and kamatiks and snowmobiles. They carried supplies for six weeks and reached the western side of Sam Ford Fiord after three days and 180km, and after abandoning a snowmobile with piston trouble. They climbed in seven days the S face of the 1000m rock tower that lies between Belvedere Ridge in the north and Broad Peak in the south. They graded it UIAA VIb, A3+. A few days later they climbed the 700m N buttress in 17 hours non-stop and graded it UIAA VIb, A3. Bongard and Gobet climbed the 1100m Beluga Mountain in two days. They then waited for almost three weeks while the Inuit tried to reach them on the ice-choked sea, and reached Clyde on 23 August.

Tom Elliot, the Chief Warden of Auyuittuq National Park – which is on the Cumberland Peninsula and has about the area of Wales – reports that the 1988 climbing season was busy, 30 people from five countries visiting the Park for mountaineering and ski-touring. There are many days each year when many

more people are on the summit of Snowdon or Helvellyn at the same time: the Park really is (still) an isolated and remote place. Most, but not all, climbers and walkers go to the area around Pangnirtung Pass because that is where most of the spectacular mountains, such as Mount Asgard, are. But there are other fine places where there is only a remote chance of meeting anyone.

The principal pass across Auyuittuq National Park is between Pangnirtung Fiord and North Pangnirtung Fiord. It has been called Pangnirtung Pass, but its name has recently been changed by a decision of the North-West Territories Executive Council to Akshayuk Pass, after the Inuk Akshayuk who pioneered the pass in the late 1890s. At the same time, the name 'Frobisher Bay' for the town at the head of Frobisher Bay, which was built during the war to help fly DC3s to the United Kingdom, has been changed to Iqaluit, the traditional Inuit name for the town. It seems inevitable that there will be more introductions of Inuit names in the east Arctic mountains in the future. The names often seem strange to western eyes and ears, but we shall no doubt become used to them. Few collections of Inuit names have been reported, one of the more extensive being a list of about 132 names along the coast between Home Bay and Cape Dyer on the east coast of Baffin Island, collected by K F Dudley.[2]

Dave MacAdam continued his lone journeys on the E coast of Baffin Island, this time in the region of Narpaing and Quajon Fiords in late June and July. At first the snow was very soft and deep, but it improved later and he managed to reach several minor heights.

Bob Seibert, of Denali Park and Preserve, Alaska, reports three solo winter attempts on Mount McKinley, of which only Vern Tejas's was successful. The High-Latitude Research Project tested a lightweight portable pressure bag for treating high-altitude pulmonary oedema, and also tested vasodilatory drugs. The flow of blood and oxygen to the brain is critical. There were 12 search-and-rescue operations, in one of which three Koreans were evacuated by helicopter in two separate incidents, probably the highest hoist operation in North America.

Bob Seibert reports that 916 persons attempted Mount McKinley in 1988, of whom 562 succeeded. Almost all were on the W buttress route. 103 climbers had acute mountain sickness; 12 of these were in danger of death. More than 18,000 climber days were spent on the mountain, of which 15,000 were on the W buttress; it is a busy place.

Some noteworthy climbs on McKinley and other Alaskan peaks are reported by H Adams Carter below. In addition, Mounts Hunter, Brooks, Silverthrone, Ragged, Dickey and Dan Beard, and East Kahiltna Peaks, were climbed by one or more parties.

The annual 'Accidents in North American Mountaineering 1988', which is compiled by Jed Williamson for the American Alpine Club and by Jim Whitteker for the Alpine Club of Canada, reports accidents that occurred in 1987.[3] It is an excellent report and it should be studied by all climbers so that we can learn from others' mistakes. It can be bought from either the Alpine Club of Canada, PO Box 126, Banff, Alberta, TOL OCO, or the American Alpine Club, 113 East 90th St, New York (10128–1589). It continues to astound me that

some mountain climbers are prepared to accept high risks of death in order to climb their mountain. Extreme climbing, particularly at high altitude, must be one of the more dangerous things that we do; too many of us, perhaps, adopt the philosophy that 'it cannot happen to me'.

The only accident that was reported in the Yukon Territory was the presumed death of Dave Cheesmond and Catherine Freer on the Hummingbird Ridge of Mount Logan. Much snow fell while they were on the ridge, and they probably died in an avalanche.

10 accidents were reported in our areas; a brief summary is as follows. Brian Zelenka and Ben Benson climbed Pioneer Peak in Chugach State Park. On his way down, Zelenka went off the route and tried to glissade, but fell to his death when he was tired and the light was poor. Dan Dougherty and Mickey Pratt set out to climb the SE ridge of Mount Foraker on 1 May 1987 and, independently, Ian Bult and Dan Guthrie set out the following day to climb the same route. All four men seem to have been swept to their deaths by an avalanche.

Ben Benson and Frank Jenkins were approaching the summit of Mount Hunter (4415m) when they triggered a slab avalanche which killed Benson. Victor Grosley and Thomas Jannik climbed quickly from 3000m to 4500 on Mount McKinley. Jannik contracted pulmonary and cerebral oedema and was taken down to 4000m, from where he was able to descend alone. Sachikie Tokada, one of a Japanese expedition of three to Mount McKinley, became ill at 5200m, so the party descended to 4300m. A French expedition noticed her and took her down to the medical office on a sled, as her partners seemed unconcerned. A day later she still could not walk. Hubert Eggert and his partner were on the W buttress. Eggert returned to the 5200m camp while his partner went to the top with another team. The following morning, Eggert was semi-conscious and had to be lowered to the 4300m camp. There he was treated with oxygen and Decadrin and was flown out the next day.

Charles Sassara and Dave McGivern were climbing on a double rope 50m apart, when a large snow-block collapsed on them. Sassara had a rope tied three times around his neck, and was blue and not breathing. McGivern removed the rope and gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; after several hours both could descend slowly. They were eventually picked up by aeroplane, flown to Talkeetna and then to the hospital.

Thomas Bohanon and Richard Strong climbed to 5000m on Mount McKinley, but retreated to 4300m because they felt the effects of the altitude. On the following day, Bohanon climbed solo to the summit but tripped and fell 450m. He was evacuated by helicopter.

Franziska Bracher and Ivan Seeholzer of Switzerland went to the summit of Mount McKinley, at −35°C, from their camp at 5200m. Both had frostbitten toes and had to be treated in the hospital in Anchorage. Piotr Jankowiak fell almost 800m to his death while descending the Messner Couloir on Mount McKinley.

One of the five tents of a guided party on the W buttress of Mount McKinley was buried under one metre of snow by a slab avalanche on 8 July 1987. Fortunately, all members of the party were recovered alive. However,

Brian Hoover started up the Cassin Ridge on Mount McKinley but failed to return. He was not found in an air search, and is presumed dead.

REFERENCES

1 D R Clay. *Can Alp J 71*, 26–28, 1988.
2 K F Dudley. *Arctic Alp Res 4*, 343–347, 1972.
3 J E Williamson and J Whitteker, editors. *Accidents in North American Mountaineering 1988*. American Alpine Club, New York, and Alpine Club of Canada, Banff, pp 17–25.

H Adams Carter adds:

In Alaska Vern Tejas started the season by becoming the first man to climb Mount McKinley solo in winter and return to tell the tale. This was the second solo winter ascent, but Japanese climber Naomi Uemura disappeared during the descent. Tejas was on the mountain from 16 February to 15 March. 'I probably had five sunny days,' said Tejas. 'One of them was the day I flew in and another when I flew out.' He spent much of the time holed up in snow caves, pinned down by storms. He carried a five-metre ladder as protection against crevasses. The entire Pioneer Ridge of McKinley was climbed for the first time by Randy Waitman, Rowan Laver, Chuck Maffei and Jim Cancroft. Starting on 10 June from Wonder Lake, they carried supplies to the mountain and made a cache part-way along the ridge on the Flatiron. They then descended to the Muldrow glacier and to the very start of the ridge. Much of the lower part was a knife-edge above the Muldrow and Peters glaciers with pitches of 70° ice. After a week they reached their cache. The broader, somewhat easier upper part of the ridge to the N peak took another 10 days. They were back at Wonder Lake on 13 July. Andy Carson and friends made a new variation on the S buttress ramp on McKinley to the right of the serac-fall line. They feel that, though their route was steeper than the 1965 Japanese route, it is safer. South of McKinley, Jack Lewis and Tom Bauman made the first ascent of the Eye Tooth. It took them three days to climb 22 difficult pitches. They reached the summit on 16 May. Nearby, Austrians Andreas Orgler and Thomas Bonaface made several remarkable climbs above the Ruth Gorge. These included the W face of Mount Barrill and the unclimbed E buttress of Mount Dickey. The latter involved 51 difficult pitches which took five days. They reached the summit on 16 July. Bill McKenna and Jim Sweeney did some excellent climbs on the elegant granite spires of 'Little Switzerland', including the E face of the Royal Tower. In April, John Bauman and Tom Walter made a fine new route on the E face of Mount Hayes, a 2000m-high face of 50° to 65° ice with occasional steeper rock bands. A three-day storm pinned them in a snow cave at the point where they reached the E ridge 250m below the top. After getting to the summit, they descended the E ridge.

In Arctic Canada's Cumberland Peninsula on Baffin Island, Earl Redfern

and three companions finally managed to climb the very difficult W face of Asgard's S tower.

Bengt Rodin adds:

A Swedish expedition completed a 43-day, 730km traverse in East Greenland. Bengt Rodin (leader), Franz Fischer, Tommy Sandberg and Per-Gunnar Bjurman flew by Twin-Otter to a glacier 20km north of Gunnbjörnsfjeld (3708m) which they climbed on 25 July. On 27 July they started the 500km journey to Mount Forel, pulling 80kg pulks by ski. By 9 August the team reached the ice-cap to join the route of Martin Lindsay's 1934 Trans-Greenland Expedition. Per-Gunnar Bjurman developed chest pains and was evacuated by helicopter on 23 August. On 29 August the reduced team climbed a new route on Mount Forel (3360m). The route down to Kungmiut ran down snow-free glaciers. 'Down on the Paris glacier we threw our pulks in a crevasse. After that we did go back-packing.'