

The next few days were spent re-sorting equipment, resting and preparing for further sorties. In the meantime Libeck and Pringle had already begun preparation for an attempt on the north face of Father Tower via a logical and natural line that they would later climb in a 30-hour plus push to complete the first ascent of *Built Fjord Tough* (5.12, A2 V 1100m).

During the remaining two weeks Matt Bunn and Mike Royer climbed a 450m route on Hidden Tower, in a valley adjacent to their first route, and a few days later completed the *Torturer's Traverse*, summitting four peaks over three days, much of it on loose rock. They returned to basecamp bleary-eyed declaring it was a route not worthy of a repeat any time soon. For Steve and I there was more surprise and disappointment as we ended up retreating after a kilometre of climbing a chossy ridge line in a glacial valley north of the main cirque and later floundering on another attempt at a line connected to Father Tower.

Watching as the cirque slowly faded into the distance on our return to Tasiilaq, I felt my dreams slipping through my fingers and a creeping sense of doubt attempting to erode my confidence. I was relieved that one half of our team had succeeded on new routes but was disappointed that Steve and I were returning empty handed. Sometimes it's hard not to feel like you have failed when others around you seem to have done so well. However my memory of this coastal wilderness and the unique experiences I shared amongst new friends and old has overcome any negative feeling, teaching me that it's not necessarily what you've achieved but what you have learned, experienced and the stories you can share with others.



Base camp under moonlight.
(Matt Traver)

with made three attempts on the following peaks: Siren Tower, north ridge of Prometheus (retreating after 1km at D) and The Squid.

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Summary: An account of a five-week expedition to the Mythics Cirque of Kangertittivatsiaq, east Greenland, in August 2012. Mike Royer and Matt Bunn made first ascents of *Coronis* on Father Tower (5.9, 800m+), *The Torturer's Traverse* of peaks Prometheus, Tantalus, Sisyphus and Damocles peaks (5.4) and *Assembling the Tupilak* on Hidden Tower (5.10, 450m). Matt Traver and Steve Beck-

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BOB SHEPTON

Corner Cracks and Cured Cod



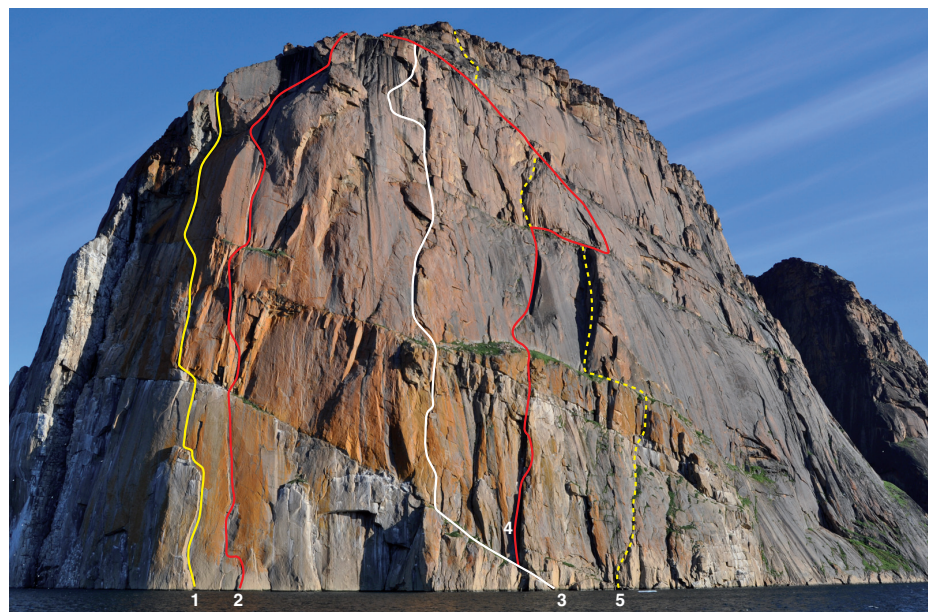
Acclimatising for Arctic climbing. Is footwear cheating or an allowable luxury?
(All photos Bob Shepton Collection, skipper and crew.)

It was another Tilman-type expedition, with a difference. But first we had to get there.

The Atlantic, usually stormy in these northern latitudes between Scotland and Greenland, proved positively benign. After clearing the Western Isles we enjoyed steady north and north-east winds for several days, *Dodo's Delight* bowling along at a great rate. Eventually a different wind slant drove us north-westwards and at 2am one morning we came up to a huge band of concentrated pack ice stretching 60 miles out from Nanortalik and Cape Farewell on Greenland. We hastily turned round and motored for several hours to work south before a favourable wind allowed us to sail west with a little north to round Kap Desolation, and so on to Paamiut to make our landfall. It had been a varied but good Atlantic crossing.

That west coast of Greenland is a long way. The crew for 2012, South African climbers, were the 'Nerdy Bunch' – they were continually at their laptop computers – as opposed to the 'Wild Bunch' of 2010 (who were not wild at all apart from high fives and yelling at the top of their climbs)¹. Three of the South Africans, Andy, Clinton, and Steve, had made the Atlantic crossing and now we picked up a fourth, Dave, at Asiaat on the

1. Shepton B. Greenland with the Wild Bunch, *AJ115*, 121-132 (2010/11)



Agparssuit, east wall, in the Sortehul. Named 'Red Wall' by Shepton's teams, or in Greenlandic, 'Where the guillemots stand together in a row'.

1. *Red Chilli Cracker* (E6, 5.12a, 350m), 2. *Seagulls' Garden* (E5, 5.11, 400m, Belgian/American 2010), 3. *Flight of The Dodo* (E4 6a), 4. *Don't Be Gull-able* (E3 6a, 5.10d, C1, 300m, 2012), 5. *Little Auk* (F7a, Italian 2011).

way up the coast. There were some curious antics climbing an iceberg on the way, with only one axe each and no crampons – and why this had to be climbed in the nude escaped me, a curious South African custom apparently – but we finally arrived in the Sortehul by Upernavik some two weeks after leaving Paamiut, and started to investigate the climbing here.

After surveying some of the possibilities the team decided, as the Belgian/American team had done in 2010, to warm up with some new routes on the Red Wall on the east side of Agparssuit, that pleasing playground for potential new routes. They landed by dinghy from the boat in rather turbulent conditions, and both routes started from the obvious diagonal slanting grassy ramp to the right of the *Seagulls' Garden* of 2010. Two new routes were climbed here: *Don't Be Gull-able* (E3 6a, 5.10d, C1, 300m), initially taking the line of a long corner crack with a small roof at the top. There was some pulling on gear to surmount this, hence the C1 in the grading, before Andy and Dave put together another corner crack and then a slab and crack to complete the route, being careful to avoid *Little Auk*, the Italian route of 2011. Clinton and Steve started a little higher up the slanting ramp, and took a more or less direct line to the top, a pleasing, varied, sustained route, *Flight of The Dodo* (E4 6a, 5.11d, 400m).

There was a slight hiatus on the descent. The wind having changed direction, the skipper (me) anchored the other side of the neck of the



Steve Bradshaw on Pitch 3, *Flight of The Dodo* (E4 6a) Red Wall, Sortehul.



Impossible Wall, Sortehul. Its Greenlandic name is Tingmiakulugssuit, meaning 'Seagull Cliff' or 'Bad Seagull Cliff' (and they were!).



Ice calls for respect. Sortehul, west Greenland: Shepton's yacht *Dodo's Delight* approaches a big iceberg that has calved off the Upernavik Isbrae.

Arctic Tern, an appropriate name since they were engaged in counting the sea birds on the same cliff. Kind, especially in view of the fact we had probably made the count more difficult for them by climbing there.

After a brief rest and much sorting of food, water and gear on the boat, the team was ready for the main project, another route on Impossible Wall. For me personally there was some disappointment here: I had hoped they would tackle a series of diagonal overhanging corner cracks and roofs which I was already calling 'Heavenly Hangovers', well away and different

promontory from what had been agreed before. One couple saw and reached the boat without any problem; the other missed us altogether and walked right round the fjord searching, one of them with his feet bound in climbing tape to avoid the agony of walking in rock shoes. They were eventually rescued by another sailing boat,

of cleaning of grass and some loose rock required – and sleeping occasionally on portaledges on the face. They finished up the top two pitches of the previous route that was in fact the direct line for their route. I was fearful that this fine effort would always be overshadowed by the pioneering Belgian/American route of 2010, at least in Europe and possibly America, because of its close proximity and similarity. But it made them heroes in South Africa.

Having communicated by VHF radio with them on the wall, and been assured they would take at least another six days, I took the boat off to Upernavik some 20 miles away. Afterwards there was some amicable discussion about this, as they had then become all too aware that they were entirely on their own and dependent on self help alone. But the anchor winch of the boat had ceased working and the batteries needed attention (perhaps it was all that nerding), and in the normal course of events climbing in Greenland they would have been dropped off and left by a fishing boat with an agreed date for a pick up. Fortunately anyway, when I returned, with the anchor winch repaired and having purchased a new battery at vast cost, they had only just come down to the camp which we had previously set up at the bottom of the descent down the back of the mountain. They came aboard in triumph and we went off to the only really safe anchorage in the Sortehul for the 'night'. Next day we returned and they walked up to the top again to retrieve some gear. After stripping the 'basecamp' and another

in style from the pioneering Belgian/American route of 2010. But having studied it through the binoculars, they thought there might be a blank section halfway up, so instead they chose a complementary route, close by and similar to that original route. It was a fine route in its own right; sustained, technical, and challenging at E6 6b, 5.12b, 850m. It took them nine days, in fine weather, to complete the route, redpointing to make a free ascent – there was a lot



Impossible Wall showing the line of (right) *Improbability Drive* (E6 6b, 5.12b, 850m). 1. Sword of Damocles, 2. Cornflake Ledge, 3. Rocky Horror Gully, 4. Window in The Sky. The original 2010 Belgian/American route, *Devil's Brew*, is to the left: A – Camp 1, B – Camp 2, C – Camp 3.

night at the anchorage, we returned to Upernavik for rest and recuperation – and nerding of course, to blog their success. A whole new world to some of us.

It was well that they did have this distraction as they now had to wait a few days in Upernavik, as the skipper had been invited to have dinner aboard a super-yacht *Billy Budd*, on which he had been employed the previous year, as soon as the owner arrived by air from Italy. Meantime we met up with the several yachts collecting in Upernavik, some going north and some preparing for the North West Passage. We also met a local friend of mine who invited us to dinner at his house, where he and his wife duly cooked and served us with several different kinds of exclusively Greenlandic food – some cooked, some raw, 'time cured' that is, including whale, seal, narwhal, halibut, arctic cod, and a curious small dried fish that was the only reason the Inuit had survived in the past as it could be dried and eaten at the end of the winter when all other food had run out. The meal was a highlight, if not the highlight, of the trip.

Next morning we set off for arctic Canada and made the four-day crossing mainly under sail in north and east winds. In Pond Inlet



Andy Porter belays Steve Bradshaw at the start of *Improbability Drive*. Note the cams used for mooring the boat.

we continued on some 40 miles past the settlement to the area of fjords to the south-west. The aim here was to discover new routes in this area to the south of Eclipse Sound. After some exploration we found what we were looking for in White Bay – a series of impressive completely unclimbed white cliffs and walls, even with its own miniature Half Dome feature. It was possible to anchor behind a spit on Curry Island opposite the cliffs

on the west side of the fjord. The clean compact walls looked particularly inviting in the evening sun and the team prepared to tackle them with anticipation.

In fact they were a great deal more difficult than they looked, owing to the nature of the rock. The inviting crack lines turned out to be so compact that they were dead and would not take gear. The team phoned on the VHF to say rather shamefacedly (knowing how ambitious was the skipper by proxy) that the big route we had in mind was simply impossible to protect and they were going to look elsewhere. In the end they found a more broken face, or at least with more features, but as there was also some loose rock it was still not easy. But they put up a pioneering route, *Bonfire of the Vanities* (E3 6a, 5.11a, 280m), making a free first ascent in this virtually virgin area of north Baffin. This is an area of huge potential but it will not be easy owing to the nature of the rock. But it is still important to preserve the unspoilt, pristine nature of the rock and terrain, and to make free ascents here as well as in Greenland.



Dave Glass seconding on *Improbability Drive*, Sortehul.

We returned to Pond Inlet and prepared for the third phase of the expedition. Pond Inlet is not ideal for this, being an open roadstead and shallow; everything had to be ferried out some distance to the boat in the rubber dinghy including all stores and fuel in containers. But we were in any case seriously delayed here at Pond Inlet. Navy Board Inlet, one of the possible entrances to Lancaster Sound was full of ice, whilst a curious long tongue of concentrated ice stretched several miles out into Baffin Bay from the north-east corner of Bylot Island, and the wind was from the east. We were effectively blocked in from starting the North West Passage.

At last after five days the ice charts showed that the ice in Navy Board Inlet might be lessening. We immediately left the library in Pond Inlet and set off for Navy Board Inlet, and were able to thread our way through 'two-tenths' ice right through to Tay Bay at the far end. Here we filled up with water from a glacial river, taking ashore the rifle we had purchased in Greenland ashore in case of polar bears. We had started the Passage at last. Suffice it to say it was a 'good' ice year and we made it right through, nearly 3000 miles, without too much trouble, by September 20. It did not help perhaps that probably the most unpleasant part of the trip was towards



Steve Bradshaw redpointing Pitch 16 (E6) high on *Improbability Drive*.

the end, running before a northerly gale on bare poles (no sail up) in the shallow Chukchi Sea between Russia and Alaska. But the boat is now safely ashore and resting for the winter in the gold rush town of Nome, Alaska.

And the climbers? Nerdy or not, they were strong climbers, and coped with whatever came their way on sea and land. Two of them had never sailed before. An Atlantic passage and the North West Passage can't be a bad way to start.



Line of *Bonfire of The Vanities* (E3 6a, 5.11a, 280m) on Polar Molar, White Bay, the only route so far on this extensive line of cliffs which lies 40 miles south-west of Pond Inlet, North Baffin.

Summary: A Tilmanesque expedition sailing to Greenland and arctic Canada to climb by Bob Shepton (skipper), Steve Bradshaw, Dave Glass, Clinton Martinengo and Andy Porter. Three new routes were climbed in Greenland in the extreme grades, one a major-nine-day new route on a big wall at E6 6b. A pioneering route was also made in north Baffin on a virgin series of walls and cliffs in White Bay near Pond Inlet. The expedition finished by traversing the North West Passage over the top of Canada and Alaska.

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Climbs: Greenland, west coast, Sortehul by Upernavik. Red Wall (start ramp 72° 39N 55° 53W), *Flight of The Dodo*, E4 6a, 5.11d, 400m, Clinton Martinengo, Steve Bradshaw; *Don't Be Gull-able* (E3 6a 5.10d C1, 300m), Andy Porter, Dave Glass (9 July 2012).

Impossible Wall (start 72° 39N 55° 45W), *Improbability Drive* (E6 6b, 5.12b, 850m), Steve Bradshaw, David Glass, Clinton Martinengo, Andy Porter (12-21 July 2012).

Canada, North Baffin, White Bay (in fjords approx. 40 miles south-west of Pond Inlet settlement), *Bonfire of The Vanities*, (E3 6a, 5.11a, 280m), Steve Bradshaw, Clinton Martinengo, Andy Porter (3 August 2012).