

GREENLAND

Gunnsbjørnsfjeld. Our expedition made the third ascent of Gunnsbjørnsfjeld, Greenland's highest mountain, on August 8. It lies in the Watkins Mountains of East Greenland, north of Kangerlugssuaq Fjord. The peak was first climbed in 1935 by a party that included Courtauld, Wager and Longland. The second ascent was made in 1971 by a party led by Alastair Allan. Our 1987 group consisted of Robin Illingwood, Rob Ferguson, Steve McCabe and me as leader. We landed in Sodalen, Mikis Fjord, on July 22. We spent two days carrying stores and sledges over two miles of moraine to the Sodalen Glacier, where we could use cross-country skis and man-haul sledges. The route was initially difficult, taking a line between the East Frederiksborg and Sorgenfri Glaciers. We lost and gained much height. We crossed the Black Cap Pass, named by Wager, and descended to the Sorgenfri Glacier and across it to the Christian IV Glacier via another high previously uncrossed pass, south of Wager's Icefall Glacier Pass, from which we had a 200-foot, much-crevassed descent. This glacier is some 100 miles long and 15 miles wide. We had been delayed for two days by icefalls on the Sorgenfri Glacier, but once beyond there we found better sledging. By August 4, we had crossed the Christian IV Glacier after some difficulty with melt streams and crevasses. The 1935 and 1971 expeditions ascended Gunnsbjørnfjeld via Gino's Glacier which flows north-northwest from the summit. We did it differently. We left a depot, including one of the Nansen sledges, at the foot of Gino's Glacier and then sledged around the flank of the Watkins Mountains until we could attempt the ascent via an unnamed glacier on the peak's northern side. We made a depot at the foot of the unnamed glacier and established a high camp on August 7. After a summit attempt that same day which was frustrated by lassitude and soft snow, on August 8 we all reached the summit, which we feel to be about 4000 meters (13,123 feet), but which appears on the official Danish maps as 3700 meters (12,139 feet). There were few technical problems and we made the greater part of the ascent on skis. At the base of the summit pyramid, we joined the 1971 route on the northwest ridge. The 1935 party had ascended the south ridge. The northwest ridge did include a 150-foot pitch with a 40-foot section of ice, directly under the summit. Time prevented further climbs, as we were due back on the coast by August 19 for the flight out. On the return, we crossed the Christian IV Glacier to the Sorgenfri by Windy Gap, used and named by the 1935 expedition on its return to the coast. We checked one of their depot sites at Dumpen, unvisited in 52 years. Pemman and butter were in good order, albeit the tins were a little rusty. The prize find was a sealed tin with some 80 bars of chocolate, still in perfect condition. Because from the summit of Windy Gap we could see that the surface of the Sorgenfri Glacier had deteriorated badly, we deposited the sledges and other equipment and backpacked to Sodalen, arriving there on August 18 after a round-trip of just under 200 miles.

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