



Just another melt-stream crossing on Ellesmere Island. Pete Dronkers

Camp V was placed on the edge of the glacier about four miles from its terminus near 100' ice cliffs. We lowered our equipment down these cliffs, because the only option was to attempt to cross several massive drainages that we had noticed in satellite images of the area. We touched down on solid ground after free rappelling and double-carried loads beside the remaining stretches of the glacier and one mile past its terminus. We put Camp VI just a few miles from the north shore of Lake Hazen.

When we reloaded our sleds on the deteriorating lake ice of Hazen, we wondered how much open water would separate us from the shore when we approached the air strip and warden station 11 miles to the east. On the last day of June we arrived safely—and eased the minds of the park wardens who had worried about us. This trip received the Helly Hansen adventure grant, and \$300 for the REI challenge fund.

PETE DRONKERS

BAFFIN ISLAND

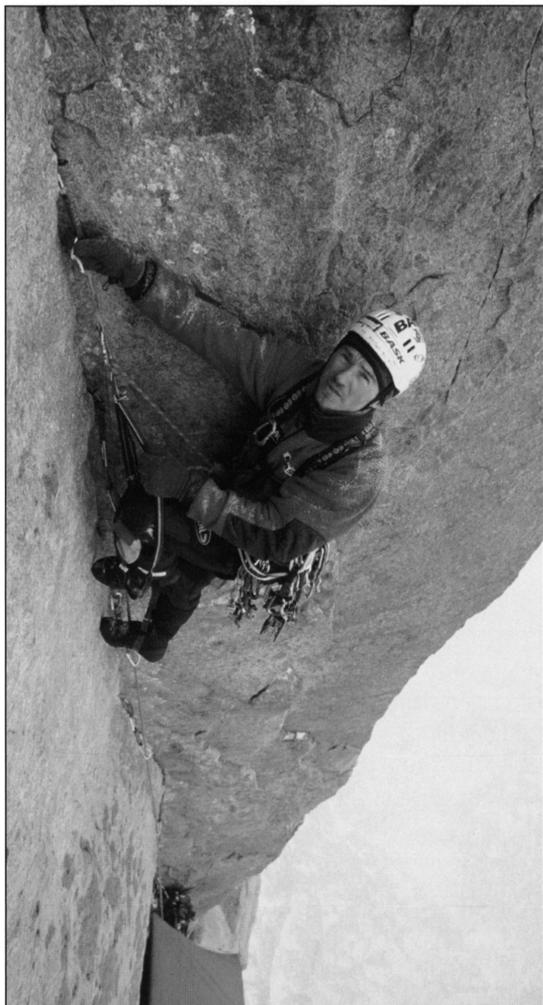
Great Sail Peak, Rubikon. Baffin Land—astonishing land of vertical walls, unearthly landscapes, permanent sun. And erotic dreams. Our gang included Alexander Odintsov (continuous leader of crazy project “The Russian Way—Walls of the World”), Valery Rozov (flight leader of even crazier “Russian Extreme Project,” Moscow Batman, Man with Wings), Alexandr Ruchkin (just climber, versatile, moves often, cosmopolite), Alexander Klenov (good climber, singer, doctor, has female fan club), Michael Devi (climber, partner of Klenov), Michael Bakin (kind doctor but jobless during the expedition), Ivan Samoilenko (coordinator), Lev Dorfman (tireless director of video scenery), Dmitry Lifanov (relaxed director of video scenery, singer of Russian folklore, Muscovite), Sergei Porodnov (businessman, porter, sponsor), Vladimir Morozov (Russian-Canadian adventurer and researcher, fisherman and hunter).

Getting to Baffin Land is difficult; it is difficult to get into any fairy tale. Russian emigrants met us at the Toronto airport. Their encounter with us only sharpened their nostalgia for

ungrateful but beloved Russia. Nowhere were we greeted with such warmth as in Canada, not even in Russia. Everybody was ready to help.

Iqaluit, capital of the vast Nunavut Province, is at the south end of Baffin Island. Native inhabitants: Inuit. In their struggle for life in polar conditions, where winter lasts for 10 months and night for six, northern people are similar in different countries. They are dumpy, but skillful and good-natured, and find fun even in long winters.

Our last civilized point: Clyde River. Finally we catch winter. Nipping frost and sun. The proximity of the wall surprised us; it can be reached in just seven hours. American team spent nine days, but weather was bad, and they were filming. After our last showers for a month, our caravan started to Stuart Valley and our goal, Great Sail Peak. For each two members of the expedition we had one sledge, ski-doo, and Inuit guide.



Alexandr Ruchkin on Rubikon, Great Sail Peak, Baffin Island.
Dmitry Lifanov

One day was not enough for reaching the Great Sail. Our way was blocked by steep moraine with huge stones—obstacles too difficult for ski-doo's. Alex Lowe's team went the same way, but there was much more snow. According to our map we'd stopped 25-30 km from the wall. It meant at least one, probably two, weeks of hauling stuff to base camp. We decided to find another way. We followed famous Sam Ford Fjord, which was just 12-15 km from Great Sail Peak.

Sam Ford Fjord's landscape is amazing. Perfectly smooth 600m walls rise from the ocean. Numerous walls are unclimbable at present, since there is not the smallest crack in several hundred meters of overhanging stone. Ideal sleek shapes, inflated to huge dimensions, impress the imagination. Silent world of incredibly straight lines creates an illusion of an outer planet. You are the Pathfinder. This is the island of modern and future mountaineering, BASE jumping, and things yet to be invented

Sam Ford Fjord did not let ski-doo's reach the wall either. Fifteen km to go. According to Russian tradition, we treated our guides to vodka, though violating their law. The Inuit left us on the fjord coast, with polar



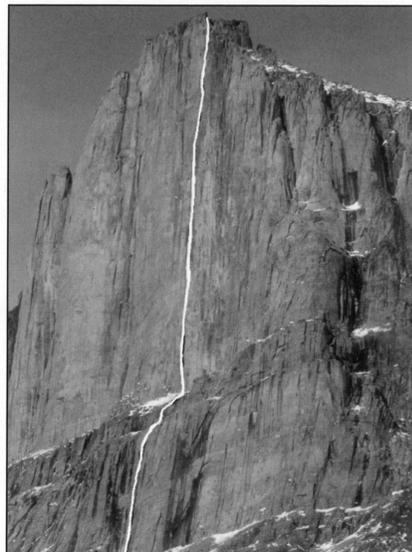
Alexandr Ruchkin on Rubikon, Great Sail Peak, Baffin Island. Lev Dorfman

bears. We set up camp on the bears' tracks and waited, with a small gun and a few signal flares to frighten the bears. We were lucky. Several days before American backpackers had passed by. The bears followed them and did not return. Either the Americans were fast or the bears were full.

For two days we carried loads to where the wall of Great Sail comes into view. There we set up our base camp. The weather was challenging. North wind tore our tents and blew snow through the smallest holes. Daytime temperatures were -10°C , dropping to -25° at night. No visibility, permanent low clouds, and very windy.

We set up ABC on May 6. The wall floated in mist. We traced a route following a system of ruined cracks, running to the sky. On May 9, too tired with inactivity to wait for good weather, Devi and Klenov started work below a ledge at the base of the main wall. In cold, wind, and snow Devi climbed 30m. The next day the weather worsened, and they came back to ABC. The same day Valery made a BASE jump from a vertical wall we called Pobeda ("Victory" in Russian, and May 9 is Victory Day in WWII). To reinforce the victory, Valery made another jump. The following several days were extremely windy. Even a bear would not leave his refuge. Neither would we.

On May 12 spring arrived, and the sun



Great Sail Peak, showing the Rubikon route. Alexandr Ruchkin

warmed the wall. Hard work started. Taking turns leading, we made one pitch a day. In six 75° to 90° pitches, almost exclusively A1-A2 aid, we reached the ledge below the main wall.

On May 16, together with the brave video operators who did not only their job but helped carry loads, we were ready for the main wall. With our support group so helpful and close, we had an unlimited supply of food, fuel, and gear.

There were five climbers, and everyone led, giving us reliability and recovery time. It was cold, and sometimes the wall threw a few stones. But there were cracks on the wall, meaning an opportunity to climb. All constituents of success were there. Despite our slow advance, two pitches per day maximum, the team finished the absolutely vertical wall in 16 days. Two of those days were spent accommodating our video operators.

The fun of being on a large wall was tempered by the weight of our gear. The wall's steepness deprived us of snow and water. We had to use sun and fuel to melt fallen ice into 60 liters of water in plastic containers. The water froze immediately and was put into haul bags. When the containers were cut, the ice was broken and melted again. Not an intellectual activity, but one does want to drink.

The team used two portaledges. Often after a good meal we sang Russian songs, and the sounds, reflecting from the walls of Stuart Valley, blended into a marvelous chorale. In general we have fun.

During most of the climb thick clouds hung at 500–1,000m, and we were like Santa Claus, covered with frost. But when we were above the cloud blanket, we became Children of the Sun, which caressed us all day long. The stubborn polar sun interfered with our sleep. We slept only when tired from climbing. Sun began shining on the wall at 3 p.m. and left at 3 a.m. We resisted, but our working day ended up fitting with Nature. We started at 3 p.m. and with effort went to sleep at 3 a.m. Unreal landscapes gave birth to unreal dreams. Women were not lacking in these dreams.

Vertical climbing is difficult in itself, but when complicated by corroded granite, it becomes tense and tricky. The climbing was like working in a minefield. Blocks were humming, hanging. Free-standing stones held our weight in some mystic way. Unwitting reminders of our unity with Nature. The wall was mostly A3, A3+, but sometimes A4.

We were just starting to enjoy the climbing when the wall surprisingly ended. In the sunny polar night of May 26-27 we reached the summit of Great Sail Peak. Fantastic view: an ocean of clouds covered everything to the horizon. We were on a huge ship, on the mast of the Great Sail. Ships moved in the ocean, tearing the clouds. New route: Rubikon (1,300m, 6B difficulty A4, 85-90°—note: 6B is the hardest category of the route in the Russian mountaineering classification) on Great Sail Peak (1,615m) in Baffin Land, Canada.

Our Batman, Valery Rozov—tired of waiting and wistful for freedom, Icarus—detached the ropes, spread his wings, and jumped from the wall. Fifty seconds of free flight in the wing suit, unbelievable! Many people do not believe and ask even now, “Does he have a parachute?” Descent from a wall in one minute and be alive—the dream of any climber. I am not an exception. Spread the wings and fly. The only problem is the climbing gear—somebody has to carry it down. But I think that soon this problem will be solved also. Baffin Island, Land of Future, waits for Pathfinders.