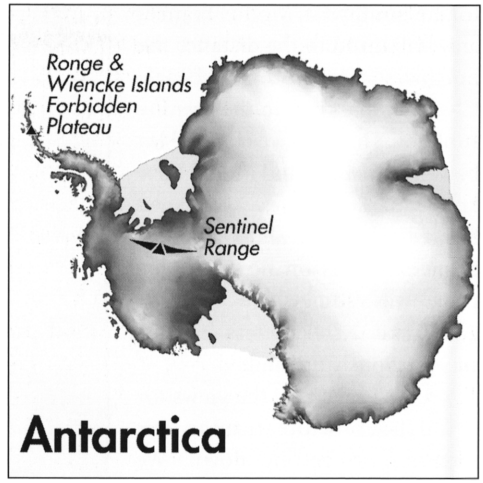
Antarctica

SOUTH GEORGIA



Three Brothers, first ascent. Sailing aboard the yacht Pelagic, Alun Hughes, Skip Novak (captain of Pelagic), and I arrived at South Georgia with the aim of making a five-part series on sailing, climbing, and the history of wildlife on the island for Welsh television. The unclimbed Three Brothers were on my list since I first spotted them while working as harbor master on South Georgia during 1990-91. The 1991 South African Mountain Club Centenary Expedition led by John Moss had a go at the highest peak and got as far as the col. They reported straightforward skiing across the Neumayer Glacier. However, after a dry winter and a hot summer the glacier was now as dry as a bone and constant zig-zagging was required to make any progress. It took us a week to ferry everything in to the mountain, carrying roughly three loads each in order to establish a well-stocked camp below the headwall leading to the western col. The site was at an altitude of ca 450m and was occupied around January 18. The three of us were then stuck for a week of constant bad weather in a two-man tent.

We eventually received a forecast that a weak ridge of high pressure would arrive on what would effectively have to be our last day. We started at 4:15 a.m. but the weather was still bad with lots of spindrift avalanches being blown across the face in high winds. Al and Skip decided against it and turned back. I managed to work a way through the lower icefall and across the bergschrund via a hole to get onto the face. I climbed this in difficult conditions to the col. The weather then started to improve as forecasted, so I began to move eastward towards the summit tower. My planned approach via the southern ridge looked too steep to solo, so I traversed shale terraces and ramps to the crest of the north ridge. I then followed this on fairly steep glass-hard ice, past two false summits, to the main top at 2040m, arriving at around 12:15 p.m. on January 25. The summit has five high points, all about the same altitude within 70 meters. They were icy with a covering of hoar frost and dropped away spectacularly to the east. The western flanks were more slabby.

I traversed all five high points, crossing an à-cheval section and descending some precarious awkward steps, then began the descent. Instead of following my line of ascent I went directly down the icefields below the north ridge, then traversed around to the col at a lower level. I then reversed the face below the col, sticking to the rocks as much as possible to minimize any avalanche risk. I reached the others at 5:30 p.m.

CRAG JONES, *United Kingdom*

Nordenskjold attempt and Normann ascent. John Griber, Hilaree Nelson, and Rick Armstrong along with film crew Tom Day and John Teaford, made up a strong U.S. team, led by Doug Stoup that visited the island in October and November. They traveled aboard *Golden Fleece* and had ambi-

tious plans for filming climbing, snowboarding, and skiing on the island's highest peak, Mt. Paget, as well as on Nordenskjold Peak and Mt. Roots. This group arrived to find the thinnest snow cover in the mountains for over 20 years and experienced atrocious weather for most of the trip.

On November 2 Stoup, Griber and Armstrong attempted Nordenskjold Peak. Climbing in very high winds Stoup and Armstrong turned back after frontpointing over 1000m of hard blue ice at around 55 degrees. Downclimbing from this point still took them around three hours. Griber continued on, reaching the summit ridge at around 2135m. Though only 200 meters below the top, changing conditions dictated descent, which amazingly Griber decided to do on his snowboard. Watched by the rest of the team, Griber descended the extremely icy face in around 15 minutes. Stoup, who has made a number of difficult snowboard descents in Antarctica, described it as, "One of the most amazing things I have ever seen." The next day their base camp tents were destroyed, hit by winds measured at over 70 knots. The team retreated to the boat. They then changed plans to make shorter ship-based forays.

One of these forays, on November 15, produced the second ascent of Mt. Normann (1265m), by a new route. Stoup, Armstrong, Nelson, and Griber climbed the 1200-meter east face of Normann to exit on to the narrow east ridge, which they followed to the summit. The climb gave over 1000 meters of 50-degree snow and ice, beginning at the water's edge, like all of their climbs. Most of the descent was done by ski or snowboard. Mt. Normann was first climbed in January 1991 by members of the South African Mountain Club Centenary Expedition aboard the yacht *Diel.* Stoup's team went on to do a number of other shorter climbs and ski descents on features close to the shore in Larsen Harbour, and spent time studying and filming the island's wildlife, before returning to Ushuaia.

DAMIEN GILDEA, *AAC, Australia*

THE MAINLAND

Sentinel Range, overview. In the 2001-02 season 67 climbers, including only four women, attempted Vinson by the normal route. Sixty reached the summit, producing a success rate of 90 percent, slightly lower than usual. No new routes were climbed in the range during the season, though the experienced Antarctic guide Dave Hahn, guiding a geological excursion, summited a number of minor points in the Marble Hills area.

There was only one expedition attempting anything other than an ascent of Vinson Massif by the standard route. The Omega Shinn GPS Expedition proposed to take an accurate GPS height reading of the summit of Mt. Shinn. In 1998, when I wrote *The Antarctic Mountaineering Chronology,* a reference book on ascents made in Antarctica, I realized there was no single, accurate, and accepted figure for the altitude of Mt. Shinn, supposedly the third highest peak in Antarctica. The figures given in various publications range from 4800m down to 4650m. The latter would make it the same height as Mt. Craddock, supposedly Antarctica's fourth highest peak.

The original surveys of the high Sentinel peaks in the early 1960s put *Vinson Massif* at 5140m, later changed to 4987m after a resurvey in 1979 and the republishing of the USGS topographical map to the area in 1988. The second highest peak, Mt. Tyree, was reduced to 4852m, but no new figure was given for Mt. Shinn.

The USGS publication *Geographic Names* of the Antarctic, by F.G Alberts (2nd ed. 1995) gives no numeric height for Shinn, but says, "A mountain over 4,800m...." The USGS