

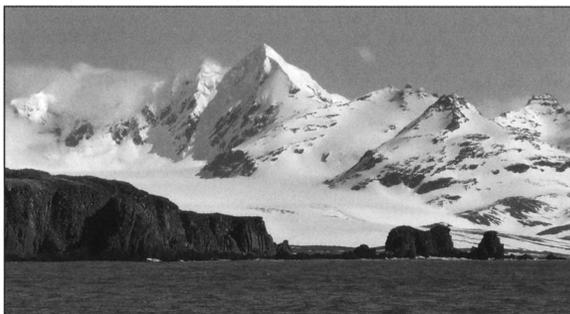
of mountain on earth. The highest point is Lars Christensen Peak (1,640m), which is guarded by steep cliffs of rock and ice and rough seas with much pack ice. The seemingly unstoppable French managed to get onto the eastern side of the mountain on March 5, only to be stopped after 500m of climbing, by bad weather and large crevasses. They escaped to *Ada II* and were in Ushuaia two weeks later, finishing an expedition of 75 days. A stunning collection of photos from the expedition can be seen at <http://nomansland.project.free.fr>.

DAMIEN GILDEA, *Australia*

SOUTH GEORGIA

Punta Billy Budd and other ascents.

In January 2009 Italians Giovanni Cristofori and Maria Cristina Rapisardi, a globetrotting couple from Milan who spend most of their free time sailing their sloop *Billy Budd* in Arctic or Antarctic seas, visited South Georgia with guides Luca Argentero and Matteo Pellin. The plan was a leisurely counterclockwise circumnavigation of the island, making touch-



Mt. Ashley, looking south from Bay of Isles. *Crag Jones*

and-go ascents from the boat, thus avoiding the need for overnight stay permits. An adventurous and light approach was to be used—no contact between ship and climbers, no on-call weather forecasts.

While the sailing went well, difficult landing conditions and typically unstable weather limited climbing time. Nevertheless, in addition to several repeat ascents, Luca and Matteo climbed four peaks in the Nordenskjold area thought to be previously virgin.

The most interesting was Punta Billy Budd (ca 1,800m), where the long access from the coast was made more interesting by enormous crevasses that required ingenuity to cross. Steeper slopes and crevassed areas led to the base of the main ridge. An avalanche cone, a snow gully, and a 50° snow slope led to three technical mixed pitches, which Pellin found reminiscent of climbs on the Tour Ronde (Mt. Blanc Massif). The overall grade was TD+.

The other three peaks—Punta Luca, Punta Caterina, and an unnamed mountain near Nordenskjold—provided less technical but eminently enjoyable ski mountaineering. Pellin, who has a reputation for exploratory climbing on the south side of Mt. Blanc, feels that South Georgia is a treasure chest of unexplored technical lines.

LUCA SIGNORELLI, *Italy*

Mt. Ashley (1,145m, 1,136m GPS). Our main target had been Nordenskjold (2,355m), but we were beaten back below the summit ridge by a typically ferocious South Georgia storm. Sailing back along the north coast of the island in clear weather, we made an impetuous decision as majestic Mt. Ashley came into view. Skip Novak and I decided to make a one-day attempt

during what would be our last day on the island. While with a group of Swiss and Italians in 2006, Skip had bookmarked Ashley as a nice unclimbed summit, easily accessible from above Salisbury Plain. We camped ashore on the night of October 29, behind Start Point on the edge of the Plain. It was a filthy night for weather. We got up at 2 a.m. and by 4:00 were skiing up the Grace Glacier. We reached its headwall at 5:30, stashed skis, and climbed to the col. The back end of the range is a broad, undulating glacial slope, overlooking the outer part of King Haakon Bay. After many waits for visibility, we identified what we thought was the highest point, the second of four summits in a chain stretching more than 1.5 km to the southeast. We proceeded up easy slopes to a col between the first and second summits, from where 100m up a steep icy dome led to the second summit. We belayed the last pitch from ice screws.

I waited for a clearing to confirm that we were higher than the distant third or fourth summits, but Skip noted that the ridge behind us, leading to the first summit, rose worryingly for more than 100m until it disappeared in cloud. We descended to the col and climbed the ridge to the first and highest summit. Though spectacular, with vast drops to the north, the broad ridge gave straightforward climbing, and we moved together through hoar-frosted towers to a flat summit, where we took a GPS reading of S 54° 06.963', W 37°21.650', 1,136m. It was 1 p.m. [Ed. note: The southern side of the Mt. Ashley falls gradually down to King Haakon Bay, the starting point for the legendary traverse in May 1916 by Tom Crean, Ernest Shackleton, and Frank Worsley.]

CRAIG JONES, *Alpine Club*

QUEEN MAUD LAND

Orvin Fjella, various ascents. The first Austrian expedition to Queen Maud Land comprised Karl Pichler, Paul Koller, and me. Our goal was to ski east from the well-known Ulvetanna Group in the Fenriskjeften to the Holtedahlfjella, Kurzefjella, and Conradfjella. In November we flew from Cape Town to Novo Airbase and from there were lifted by Twin Otter to our starting point near Holtanna base camp. Our route, traversing some of the most spectacular rock and ice scenery in the world, was challenging. On the way we climbed 15 summits, of which 11 were first ascents.



Part of Holtedahlfjella, showing peaks climbed and named by Austrian expedition. (3) Roteck. (4) Austrian Peak. (5) Tiroler Spitze. (6) Styria. (7) Alexey Turchin. (8) Kamelbuckel. (9) Galileo Nunatak. (10) Steinskar Nunatak. (11) Galileo. (12) Peak of Silent Solitude. *Christoph Höbenreich*

We repeated Tungespissen (2,277 m), Mundlauga (2,455 m), and Sandneshatten (2,208 m). The first two, relatively close to Ulvetanna, were first climbed in January 1994 by Norwegians (*AAJ 1996*), the last in 2006, again by Norwegians (*AAJ 2007*). Sandneshatten in the