



3.3 Expedition Summary (English)

Greenland, Knud Rasmussens Land Ranges, Watkins Mountains, Gronau Nunatakker, Paul Stern Land. Greenland Top 4 by ski and several first ascents. In April/May 2008 Georg Csak and Dominik Rind, members of the DAV (Deutscher Alpenverein), were the first German expedition to summit the 4 highest peaks in Greenland (up to 3693 m) and the first ever to also descend all four of the highest mountains north of the Arctic Circle on skis. Further, six first ascents in the *Gronau Nunatakker* and *Knud Rasmussens mountain ranges* added to the success of the "Arctic Summits Expedition".



Ski descent from Dome 3683m, *Dominik Rind*

In order to reach Greenland's remote mountain ranges we covered 321 km on skis across the inland ice. We also used snowkites to advance in a speedy manner, but only on a few days, conditions were actually suitable for kiting. Since the expedition was fully self-supported, we pulled all our equipment and food supplies in pulka-sleds, each weighing in excess of 100 kg to start off with.

The starting point of our expedition was Nerlerit Inaat (Constabel Point) in East Greenland. The chartered helicopter dropped us off on the icecap at position N69:30 W028:00. With stable high pressure influence, weather conditions were perfect to start our five-and-a-half-weeks-adventure, during which we were not going to see anybody but ourselves. In the beginning we were advancing quickly on a rock-solid and smooth surface. This was about to change soon. We encountered sastrugis (snowobstacles shaped by the wind) that slowed us down considerably. To make up for the lost time we walked late into the nights and as such were able to reach the first mountain ranges in *Rasmussens Land* after a few days.

As planned we achieved three first ascents in *Rasmussens Land* (names provisional): "Vollmondspitze (Full Moon Peak)" (2793m, N69:17.7 W028:47.3, NW ridge und W flank, PD+), "Peak Leni" (2554m, N69:16.2 W029:08.6, SW flank und NW ridge, AD+), "Geodom Pyramide" (2823m, N69:13.2 W029:09.7, NW ridge, D-). We also climbed the highest mountain in *Rasmussens Land*: unnamed (3073m, N69:13.0 W029:31.1, S flank, F), but believe this to be a second ascent. All ascents comprised ice climbs of mostly 40 degrees with passages of 60 degrees, on one occasion through combined terrain and rocks grade II, with the exposed terrain and numerous covered crevasses requiring the use of extreme caution.



Geodom Pyramide, 2823m, NW ridge, *Georg Csak*



After this first success we continued our route towards the *Watkins Mountains*. We reached the highest range in Greenland on day 14 of our expedition. We climbed the summits of the top three with relative ease: Gunnbjørn Fjeld (3693m), Dome (3683m) and Cone (3669m). Mostly PD, with 40 degree ice climbs, all those ascents however were extremely long and strenuous, ice conditions were poor. Frequently we had to climb very hard blue ice, which is fairly unusual at this altitude in Greenland. This may be due to an extraordinarily warm summer, the year before. Descending on skis right from the summit was rather risky. We therefore ensured, to always carry an ice axe in one hand for safety.

Climbing Paul Emile Victor (3609m) – Greenland's No. 4 – was one of the expedition highlights. PEV had only been climbed five times so far. We chose to climb it via the Western route - a first ascent route, and the most difficult one to summit this mountain to date. We started out from the Dome/Cone base camp (!) by climbing Deception Dome (3526m, PD+). With perfectly blue skies this was a wonderful ascent. Massive seracs, a huge labyrinth through towering ice, and a steep face made it a challenging climb, which was rewarded by breathtaking views across the entire *Watkins Mountains*. From the summit we descended SW to pass over a 5 km long and exposed ridgeline,



Deception Dome, 3526m, summit cornice, *Georg Csak*

which we named „Jubiläumsgrad" (Jubilation Ridge, 3520m) – in remembrance of the famous ridge in the Wetterstein Mountains in the Alps. Climbing off this ridge and traversing to the base of the PEV West face, proved to be the key passage of this trip: an ice climb of 60 degrees, mostly D-, with bad ice conditions and crevasses forcing several detours. The ascent of the PEV W flank itself was AD- and we reached the summit of PEV at 2319 local time. We enjoyed watching a magnificent midnight sun, before skiing down the W flank. On our way back across "Jubilation Ridge" however the weather deteriorated severely – we had never experienced anything like that! Within one hour around 0200 o'clock the visibility decreased immensely, a storm broke loose and it started to snow – total white out. We were hardly able to see each other at the other end of the rope. Without contours even widely open crevasses could hardly be recognized one meter in front of our feet! Centimeter by centimeter we advanced downhill from Deception Dome, for 1300 meters in altitude, trying to locate crevasses with our poles and axes. Our compass, the climb gradient and our memories of the ascent were the only available navigation tools. The serac zone we had to traverse took forever. We were extremely tired and exhausted by that time. During the ascent in fine weather we neither considered to take GPS fixes and save the key positions, nor did we use marking flags in order to find our way back through the serac labyrinth. Reaching the valley we were very



Gunnbjørn Fjeld (3693m) with midnight sun, seen from PEV (3609m), *Georg Csak*



happy that we had at least saved the GPS position of our tent, saving us from having to dig a snow cave for shelter. The bad weather continued for one and a half days, which we used to recover inside the tent. The climb of the fourth highest mountain north of the polar circle took us 28 hours!

Our primary expedition aims were now achieved. We left the *Watkins Mountains*, feeling very happy, setting off for the long march towards *Paul Stern Land*. With another 200 km to go, for sure a few more surprises would be awaiting us. We had to cross one of Greenland's biggest glaciers, *Christian IV*, which took us several days.

On the other side the Mountain range of the *Gronau Nunatak* was waiting for us. These mountains were discovered by the German pilot Wolfgang von Gronau in 1930 and have since been visited only four times by humans. It was hard work hauling the still heavy pulks 1000 meters up into our next base camp. But again we were rewarded: In the *Gronau Nunatak* we completed three first



Approaching the Gronau Nunatak across *Christian IV* glacier. 1st from left: *Wörthseespitze*, 3rd from left: *Pilotsbjerg*, *Georg Csak*

ascents to very prominent peaks (names provisional): "*Pilotsbjerg*" (2805m, N69.26.2 W030:13.0, N flank, PD), "*Wörthseespitze* (Mt. *Woerthsee*)" (2762m, N69:28.7 W030:18.2, E ridge, AD), "*Kirchl* (*Chappel Mountain*)" (2772m, N69:28.5 W030:15.4, W ridge, F).

On the route further up north we encountered changing weather all the time. Strong westerly winds enabled us to finally use our snowkites. At the rim of the icecap we had to be very careful, because of the huge crevasses, that are hard to discover in time while kiting at high speed. Most of the time it was a rough ride over uneven surface and fields of sastrugis. But we were very happy about our fast advance. One time the already strong wind changed into a *Pitera*q (extreme wind at high speed falling down from the icecap towards the coast) surprising us while kiting along at nighttime. Despite of all difficulties, we covered 80 km in only two days and reached *Paul Stern Land* earlier than expected.

In *Paul Stern Land* we placed the first cairn on what we named "*Tiger Nunatak*" (2048m, N70:24.8 W030:07.3). Whereas this is a steep rocky mountain seen from the East it was only a walk from our position on the inland ice, not worth being called a first ascent. Unfortunately bad weather prevented us from attempting further first ascents. Snowfall, storm and whiteouts forced us to stay inside the tent. The day of the planned pick-up came, but weather conditions made an aircraft landing impossible. The pick-up had to be postponed and we started to live on our emergency rations. After one full week the sky finally cleared and enabled the landing of a *Twin Otter* ski plane, which brought us back to *Nerlerit Inaat* .

For more pictures and details on our greenland mountain climbs see our expedition website www.ArcticSummits.de.

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