



Svartfeldjokul

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View from Svartfeldjokul

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During the summer months of 1961 a party from the University College of Swansea visited the Øksfjord Pensinsula, which lies halfway between Tromsø and Hammerfest some 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The main aims of the expedition were scientific, including workers in geology, botany, zoology, ornithology and geomorphology. However, with a small grant from the Everest Foundation the expedition leader was satisfied that mountaineering was compatible with the scientific work, and so we set off.

The region was gained after five days sail from Bergen on the coastal express; the biologists landed at Skaervoy and took the local boat to the south side of the peninsula whilst the rest of the party travelled to Øksfjord and did likewise to reach the central part. The division of the peninsula by the Finnmark-Troms county boundary means that no one boat service serves the whole area, and direct communication between the central and southern areas is impossible. The journey north was uneventful, but nobody will ever forget the sight of the Lofoten rising out of the sea and covered with a swirling mist like an enormous Tryfan repeated over and over again, or seeing the Lyngen Pensinsula by a waning midnight sun.

In one respect the area was rather disappointing in that all the peaks, due to their common evolution and rock type, were of similar height, but this was amply compensated for by the presence of four small ice-caps and the total lack of vegetation, as the region lies beyond the coniferous zone.

Climbing activities were centred at the head of a small fjord called the North Tverfjord, about four miles to the south of Bergsfjord Village. The mountains were those associated with the Øksfjordjokul and Svartfjeldjokul (the two main ice-caps). Connected with the latter is Svartfjeld (1218m) which is the highest peak in Finnmark. This may be climbed direct from Bergsfjord Village or from N. Tverfjorddalen; the former route is the more exciting and involves climbing up the side of Svartfjeldjokul to gain the ice cap proper; the latter route is easier and the ice cap is gained by taking the north side of one of the left-hand streams that lead into N. Tverfjorddalen. A simple traverse then leads to the summit. On this trip the party were accompanied by an ex-Free Norwegian who produced on the summit a bottle of the local brew, which was excellent and particularly welcome in a prohibition area. His position in the local community forbids the mentioning of names!

From Svartfjeld a very fine ridge runs in a north-west direction

to the village of Bergsfjord. The ridge is characterised by looseness and sheer drops on either side. Several peaks occur on the ridge, including N. Tverfjordfjeld (831m) and Slaatfjeld (854m), and can easily be approached from N. Tverfjorddalen by taking the first stream on the north side of the valley, which leads up to the summit of Veiviserfjeld. From this peak the ridge provides good scrambling with the occasional use of the rope as far as Bergsfjord. The north side of this ridge gave some good climbing routes.

To the south of N. Tverfjorddalen lie the mountains that surround the Øksfjordjokul, the highest and largest of the four ice caps, and these peaks resemble to a very high degree those on the opposite side of the valley. Most of the main ridges were climbed by the expedition, and whilst not being of an exacting standard the mountains have a charm all of their own; a complete absence of paths and cairns, and their characteristic looseness. An added attraction of North Norway is the complete freedom of time; with daylight for twenty-four hours Alpine starts become a blurred memory. However, one is frequently motivated into making one by the persistent attacks of flies.

No account of the region would be complete without a mention of the Lapp population. The Øksfjord Peninsula is a centre for summer herding and one frequently comes across the tripod of an old tent down in the valleys. On many occasions the Lapps would herd reindeer for fifty hours at a time in home-made boots filled with treated grass, and wearing their traditional costume.

For anyone who wishes to combine a sailing holiday with mountaineering then Norway is ideal, and the lack of a boat is offset by the friendliness of the Norwegian people and their willingness to offer lifts to one and all on their small fishing boats. This friendliness is illustrated by an incident on the return journey; the captain of the coastal boat inquired as to why we cooked our own food when the ship was amply victualled, and on hearing that the reason was poverty he immediately offered us all the facilities of his galley. The cooks were amused by this and in the end we were cooking for ourselves the same food as was being eaten in the First Class saloon !