



AAC Publications

Perfection Valley, Belly Tower, east face, The Door; White Wall, east face; Mt. Cook, northeast pillar, Levi is Coming

Canada, Baffin Island, East Coast

Big-wall climbing on Baffin Island was a personal dream for many, many years—a dream that was always in my mind but simultaneously far from becoming reality.

In June 2012, Riky Felderer, Ben Lepesant, Matteo Mocellin, William Peterson, Eneko Pou, Iker Pou, and I traveled to Perfection Valley on Baffin Island's east coast. We arrived in Clyde River by plane on June 3 and then traveled with our outfitter Levi Palituq by snowmobile across the frozen Inugsuin Fiord to Perfection Valley, which lies approximately 70km southwest of Clyde River.

During our 43-day expedition (June 7–July 20) we established four first free ascents. The longest and hardest of these was the Door (630m, 16 pitches, VI 8b), which climbs the east face of Belly Tower and contains a super-hard crux pitch (8b), freed by Iker Pou and I. The 16-pitch route was established between June 20–July 7, and required 27 bolts, five pitons, and three beaks.

On July 13, Mocellin, Lepesant, and I opened Hotel Gina (320m, 6 pitches, 6b+) while Felderer, Eneko Pou, and Iker Pou opened Hotel Monica (320m, 6 pitches, 6b+), both on the east face of the White Wall. And, on July 17, the Pou brothers and I climbed one of the most beautiful routes we've ever opened, Levi is Coming (420m, 11 pitches, 6b), on the northeast pillar of Mt. Cook.

Hans' Expedition Log from The Door:

Big-wall climbing on Baffin Island was a personal dream for many, many years—a dream that was always in my mind but simultaneously far from becoming reality. Baffin Island has the highest concentration of big walls on the planet. It has always been a place to make history. Charlie Porter's route on the south tower of Mount Asgard in the early 70s was the world's first Grade VII big wall. Nowadays, times have changed. The place and the walls have lost none of their beauty and challenge for climbers, but their feeling of remoteness has disappeared. The famous peaks like Mt. Asgard, Mt. Thor, Mt. Turnweather, and many more are located in the Auyuittuq National Park, where climbing activity has increased over the years and the major lines have been already been done.

But exploration has continued. In 1987, big-wall legend Xaver Bongard led the first climbing expedition to the east coast of Baffin Island. The small Swiss team had an incredible trip to Sam Ford Fjord, northwest of Clyde River, where they opened three routes and didn't make a big deal out of it. It wasn't until Eugene Fischer published information about the area in Sam Ford Fjord, Stewart Valley, Eglington Fjord, Inugsuin Fjord, Gibbs Fjord, and Scott Inlet. Climbing on the east coast of Baffin Island is not comparable to climbing in Auyuittuq National Park. The logistics are more complicated, the region is more remote, the temperatures are much lower, and the polar bears roam freely. The knowledge of all this makes very difficult. For a climber, the conditions on the walls are the biggest problem. The main season is in April and May, but the massive cold and snowy conditions make only artificial climbing possible. Free climbing on Baffin Island's east coast is still not common. As far as I know, there have been no expeditions with the focus on hard free climbing except for German climbers Stefan Glowacz and Kurt Albert.

Why? It's easy to explain. The rock is not as high quality, and many walls lack the crack systems or

features to climb free. Then, there is the issue of a basecamp. While in April and May it's easy to make camp on the frozen ice, there is just open sea during the arctic summer; however, it's necessary to be there during June and July to get the perfect combination of temperatures and as many days without precipitation for climbing. The final problem is water. With many peaks and towers capped by ice, water easily finds its way down the most direct lines. *But it can happen:* You will come to Baffin's east coast, you won't find a base camp, you won't find a crack system on the entire wall, and, if you do find one, after a few warm days, you will get a massive shower combined with rock fall. In the end, all these facts only increase the challenge of an expedition to the east coast of Baffin Island.

Starting the Route

Stormy and cold. It's our second night in the portaledge—not on the wall, but on a big boulder at the entry of the wall. Yesterday we came up here. Ricky, Matteo, Ben, and I have seen unbelievable rivers. Within days they became un-crossable. We had to look for a different way. Over the moraine on the western side towards strong headwind we walked up to the entry of the wall. Iker and Eneko are waiting in base Camp for our call. Today we managed to climb two pitches. *Two pitches!* It was unbearable due to the strong, cold wind. After awhile I could not feel my toes anymore, not to mention my fingers—not a good state to do technical climbing. When I reached the first stance, I immediately lowered back to the portaledge to warm up. In the afternoon, it was Ben's turn, traversing to the right in difficult conditions. The two pitches today were very important. It was a tough fight under those circumstances but I hope that the weather will change soon.

First Day of Free Climbing

What a day! We free-climbed the pitches till the end of the arch. I climbed pitches 1-5, Iker did pitch 6. We are four climbers working on the same project. It's now the morning. There's blue sky. Iker and I are laying in the sun in front of our tent. Actually, the weather report was correct, but the wall still looks wet. If everything goes as planned then Ben and Eneko will open the upper part of the route while Iker and I free climb. But now it should get really difficult, the cracks above the arch are rounded with a hard move on the top.

Reaching the Summit

I lay in the sun right under the Eastern wall of the Belly Tower. I am super exhausted and very tired. Yesterday, at 5 a.m., we started from basecamp, and everything went perfectly. The others let me open the last pitches to the peak. At 1 p.m. we reached the summit—a really nice moment. It is the end of a long project. But we are not at the end of our climbing. Now, I only need to free-climb the last key part of the route. I placed the bolt for it yesterday.

Free Climbing the Crux Pitch

Oh yeah! Yesterday was a perfect day—amazing. A spectacular ending at Belly Tower. On a fixed rope I climbed up to the key pitch of the route. I warm myself up. Iker will be my belayer. The mind game starts. I start to climb but cannot hold the key part. I try it again but cannot hold the edge of the roof. Oh my god. I take a break. The, I start again; I can barely hear the cheers from the guys at the bottom. Can this be real? I stay surprisingly calm, even if this would be the perfect moment to get nervous. I take off my jacket; today is the warmest day on the wall so far. Suddenly, I can climb the move and I clip the second bolt. Now the scary part starts: the rest of the pitch is super technical and you cannot make a mistake here. I feel really good and only once, as it gets critical, does my left foot slip. After around 15 minutes I reach the stance. I am super happy. Amazing. It could not had a better ending

than this. I hang at the belay and still cannot believe it. Within the last hour Iker and I have been able to free-climb the last missing pitch and finished what is likely the hardest free climbing of Baffin Island. At around 9 p.m. we put our 40kg haul bags to rest in basecamp. What else can you say to an experience like this? Today we all sit together at basecamp, enjoying the sun and thinking back on the project. You can see a look of relief in our faces.

Hansjörg Auer

Images



Hotel Gina (left) and Hotel Monica (right).



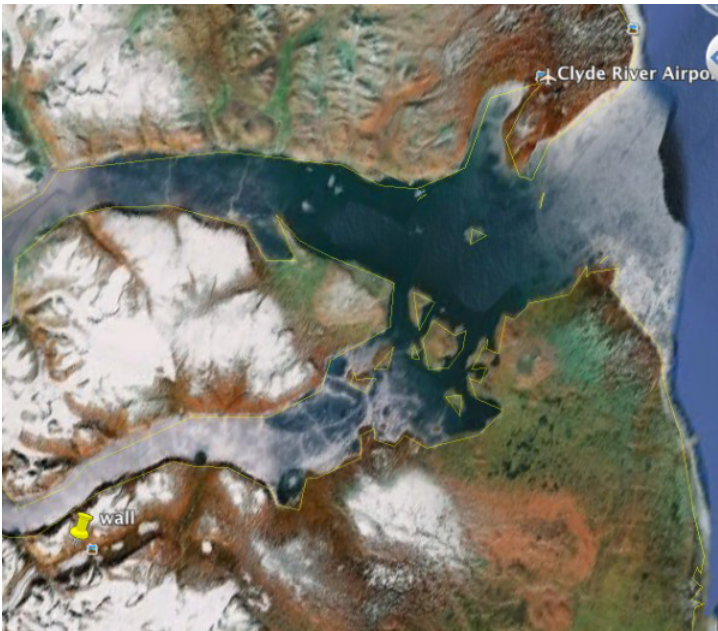
Levi is Coming on the northeast pillar of Mt. Cook.



The Door, shown here, climbs compact granite on the east face of Belly Tower.



Approaching Belly Tower.



An overview of Perfection Valley in relation to the Clyde River airport.



Auer attempting the crux pitch of the Door.



Auer attempting the crux pitch of the Door.



Iker Pou working a crux section of the Door, protected by fixed gear.

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