



AAC Publications

Fenriskjeften Mountains, Ulvetanna (2,931m), northeast ridge

Antarctica, Queen Maud Land

On January 20, 2013, Leo Houlding, Alastair Lee, Jason Pickles, Chris Rabone (all U.K.) and Sean Leary (USA) completed the first ascent of the huge northeast ridge of Ulvetanna, and fourth ascent of the mountain.

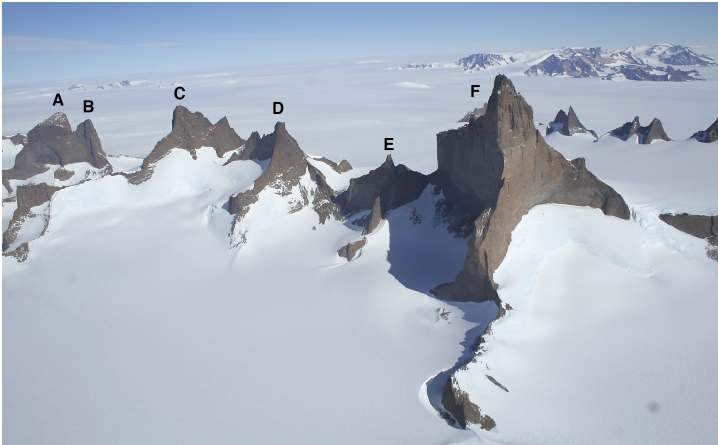
The nature of the ridge, the anticipated climatic conditions, and the commitment to film the entire ascent dictated that fixed ropes be used. Starting from the steep toe of the ridge, the route was hard from the start: coarse granite cracks, sometimes ice-filled and with hollow flakes and sections of crumbly rock. After around 17 pitches, fixed with 1,100m of rope, the lead climbers reached a col at the start of the Dinosaur's Back: the long, narrow are?te that turned out to be the "world's scariest British VS." Any wind when trying to cross this section could have been disastrous. Eventually, a two-portaledge camp was established on a good ledge (the Plateau of Great Expectations) below the 400m headwall.

On the final push, the five started from base camp, regained the portaledges, and started fixing the headwall. The first pitch, a steep compact slab, required two hand-drilled bolts, after which a spectacular series of cracks and corners took them 200m higher to a giant roof. Offwidths and chimneys led on to the Snow Petrel Pillar, at which point they were hit by a three-day storm. Summit day provided the worst conditions of the expedition, with wind chill bringing the effective temperature down to -35°C . Houlding and Leary had planned a BASE jump from the summit, an idea that was soon abandoned. It took five grueling days to descend to base camp, stripping the mountain of all ropes.

The ca 1,100m-high ridge had more than 1,700m of climbing (35 pitches), making it the longest rock climb on the continent. Technical difficulties were remarkably high, given the harsh Antarctic climate: British E6 6b and A2/C2. The initial pillar was said to be reminiscent of Half Dome's Regular Northwest Face, with the headwall more like the right side of El Capitan's southeast buttress.

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Images



The spectacular Ulvetanna group from the northeast. (A) Holtanna (2,650m). (B) Holsttind (2,577m). (C) Kinntanna (2,724m). (D) Stetind (2,558m). (E) Hel (2,335m). (F) Ulvetanna (2,931m). The northeast ridge divides the sunlit north face from the east face. The north face is around the same height as El Capitan, while the unclimbed east face is 300m higher. Peaks of the Filchnerfjella are visible in the distance.



Looking up the northeast ridge of Ulvetanna.



Leo Houlding free-climbing at ca -30°C .

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