



AAC Publications

Fox Jaw Cirque, Various Ascents

Greenland, East Greenland, Schweizerland

On July 10, Sion Brocklehurst, Robert Durran, Pat Ingram, Simon Smith, and I were dropped at the head of Tasiilaq Fjord. We began the first of three arduous hauls up the Tasillaq Kuua (valley) to the foot of Fox Jaw Cirque, where climbing potential had first been discovered in 1998 by Americans Dave Briggs and Mike Libeck.

After establishing that the rock type was gneiss rather than the granite reported by previous teams, we set off on our first forays on July 14 with bluebird skies and pleasant climbing temperatures. On a formation variously known as Milk Tooth or Baby Molar, there was mixed success but consistency in the evaluation of the rock: loose! Pat and Robert retreated while Simon and Sion plowed on, finding some terrifyingly chossy, though often splendid, rock. They reached the summit in five pitches to produce our first new line, aptly named Back Alley Dentistry (275m, HXS 5b/c). Unable to find the bolted descent described in a previous AAJ report, they rappelled a sketchy gully. Pat, Robert, and I later found the bolted descent after making a repeat of Tooth Fairy (300m, seven pitches, III 5.8). On this route we found superb climbing and were rewarded with stunning views above a cloud inversion.

It became obvious that the rock in the cirque provided very bold but high-quality slab climbing, with long runouts between thin, incipient, and often flaring cracks, and the occasional quality splitter thrown in. On an ascent of Left Rabbit Ear, Simon and Sion encountered stunning crack climbing, from tough fingertips to stomach-churning offwidth burls, and came away with the cracking new line of Rampant (400m, nine pitches, E4 6a or 5.11+). [This route appears to lie immediately right of the 2007 American-Canadian line, Naeterqaabin-Jebbananee (550m, 13 pitches, IV 5.10).]

Cavity Ridge twice proved a difficult piece of rock to climb, due to its unstable nature. Loose blocks dislodged during Robert and Pat's descent from a failed attempt on what initially looked to be a promising line prompted Pat to return home, not willing to take further risks in objectively dangerous terrain. Later Simon and Sion attempted another line, which again proved difficult on the lower slabs when damp, loose rock and gritty sand forced retreat. This pair also attempted a line on the Molar but were thwarted by wet rock and runouts deemed unjustifiable without recourse to bolting. Calamity then struck on an attempt to repeat the 2007 American-Canadian route Beers in Paradise (600m, 5.10+ A0), intending to scope out the descent with a view to a new route on the Incisor. After 10 enjoyable pitches Simon ripped off a large block on lead, resulting in an eight-meter whipper onto a spike below, fracturing his heel. The subsequent retreat proved a painful mini-epic. A second attempt by Robert and Sion reached the same high point, where they were unable to find the continuation of the route.

The team climbed two more new routes on Milk Tooth, both providing quality climbing on mostly sound rock, as Simon discovered the benefits of ice river treatment and copious amounts of painkillers: Days of Miracle and Wonder (355m, seven pitches, E2 5c or 5.10, Durran-Smith) and The Long Distance Call (385m, seven pitches, E3 5c or hard 5.10+, Alldred-Brocklehurst-Smith).

During our three-week visit bluebird sky days were plentiful and building clouds rarely produced anything apart from apprehension. We experienced two days of rain, but the valley wind meant the rock was quick to dry, causing very little disruption to our climbing days. When not climbing we explored farther up-valley for possible objectives. However, many of the glaciers looked very crevassed, or made approaching the rock very difficult and time consuming.

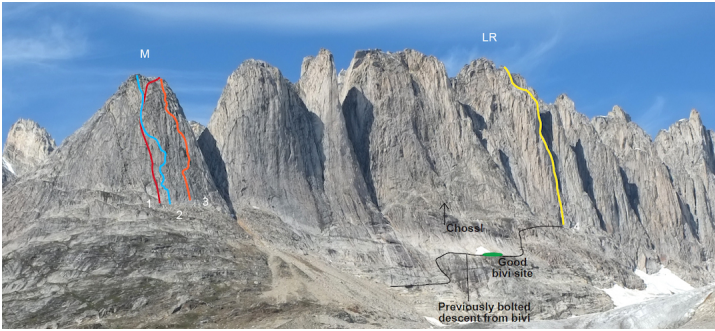
Robert and I also hiked to the Tasiilaq Hut, which overlooks the Karale Glacier system and is maintained by Hans Christian Florian. We spent one night here and climbed the first of the two peaks behind the hut. This gave a superb view up and down the Tasiilaq Valley.

We brought the bulk of our supplies from the U.K., but topped up with basics from the the Red House (Peroni Tunining) in Tasiilaq. Robert Peroni was extremely helpful in our planning and logistics, and was able to provide boat transfer, a rifle, and food supplies from Tasiilaq. The boys were a little worried about a girl planning the menu but were pleasantly surprised at a healthy food stock.

The Fox Jaw still has a great deal of climbing potential. There are unclimbed hard lines on the closest formations and a wealth of exploration up the glacier on the less easily accessible features, although a lot of loose and unappealing rock might also be encountered. Although I planned and led the expedition, I had very little experience for someone undertaking a trip of this sort—I only climbed my first multi-pitch route in July 2013 and, loathing the gym, began climbing (indoors) solely as means to getting fit after having three children. I now love the challenge of mountain days compared to local cragging. The expedition received grants from the Mount Everest Foundation and BMC.

Cath Alldred, with Simon Smith, U.K.

Images



Spires of the Fox Jaw Cirque. (M) Milk Tooth (a.k.a. Baby Molar) and (LR) Left Rabbit Ear. New 2014 routes marked: (1) Days of Miracle and Wonder; (2) The Long Distance Call; (3) Back Alley Dentistry; (4) Rampant. See AAJ 2008 for more routes on these formations.



Robert Durran and Cath Alldred, and the view north up the Tasiilaq Valley. The Fox Jaw Cirque is middle distance right.



Sion Brocklehurst attempting Beers in Paradise with the Incisor above.



Simon Smith on Days of Miracle and Wonder, with the Tasiilaq Valley below.

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