



AAC Publications

Wiencke Island, Seven Sisters of Fief; Cape Renard, Southeast Tower

Antarctica, Antarctic Peninsula

Beginning on November 21, Laurent Bibollet, Emmanuel Chance, Yann Delevaux, Paul Dudas, David Lacoste, and I, operating from the yacht Podorange, made the first traverse of the Seven Sisters of Fief, above Port Lockroy on Wiencke Island. The first day we climbed the most southwesterly sister, Janssen Peak (1,085m, a.k.a. the Seventh Sister, first climbed in 2000), from the south. This gave ca 500m of snow and ice at 50–55°, with a 3m step of vertical snow right before the first top. We followed a fine snow ridge to the second top of Janssen peak and then made 10 rappels down the south side, from Abalakovs and deadmen, to the bergschrund, where we camped for the night. We had been unable to continue directly to the second peak because of ice mushrooms.

On November 22 we walked around Janssen Peak on the southeast side and climbed ca 300m of steep snow and ice to regain the crest before the Sixth Sister. We followed the ridge to an overhanging snow mushroom at the base of the summit, then made a 30m rappel on the east flank. From that point, two pitches (80° ice; 60° snow) led to the top. We continued along the sharp ridge, making three rappels down the center of a huge mushroom to reach the col between the sixth and fifth sisters. The ridge to the Fifth Sister had sections of steep snow at 60–70°. The descent was very steep and required three rappels, after which a snow ridge with a section of 65° led to the top of the Fourth Sister. We reached a large saddle below Sister Three and gained its summit via 50° snow. The descent to the next gap was a trial of route-finding, as we were in complete white-out. Keeping to the crest throughout (generally 50°, with two sections of 70°), we reached the summit of the Second Sister. On the far side we went down snow slopes of 30–40°, then made two 60m rappels to gain a wide, flat glacier. The summit of First Sister (first climbed in 2001) was one hour away. We reached this final peak at 7 a.m. on the 23rd. At one point a cornice broke and I fell 20m.

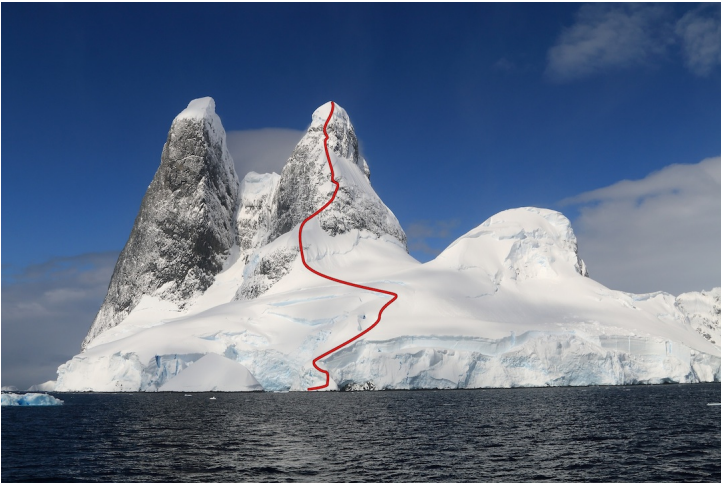
We descended to the south, then moved northeast before making eight rappels from Abalakovs and pitons down a wide couloir on the Port Lockroy (north) side, and finally reached our yacht at 3 p.m., after being on the go for 30 hours. It had been an exposed and committing route, more than 11km in length and graded TD+. Wings on ice axes were essential.

A few days later, Laurent Bibollet, Karine Payot, and I made the first ski and snowboard descent of a 300m couloir (50–55°) below Janssen on its northwest flank, after which we traveled to Cape Renard and on December 1 made the first ascent of the Southeast Tower (700m).

Starting from the ocean, an exposed approach under a serac was followed by slopes of 40° to reach easy glaciated terrain leading to the base of the southwest face. Once across the bergschrund, Laurent, Emmanuel, Yann, Paul, David, and I climbed 100m of 60° snow to arrive at a dome. A second bergschrund guarded three pitches of 55° snow, above which 200m of mixed rock and ice, where we got good belays from pitons and cams, was followed by another 100m of snow slanting to the left. The crux came right below the summit: 15m of M5, followed by a thin ice gully (70°), leading to 80m of atrocious snow. We slanted right, bypassing the final snow mushroom, to the flat and uncorniced summit. We descended our route in 10 rappels from deadmen and pitons. We named the 500m route (TD/TD+) Podronard after our boat, and completed it in a 13-hour round trip.

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Images



The Cape Renard Towers from the Lemaire Channel to the southwest, with the line of Podronard (700m from the sea) on the lower tower. Hart am Wind (900m from the sea, 17 pitches, 5.12c, Albert-Glowacz-Gotz-Hoeber-Hiedorn-Knappe, 1999), the route of the first ascent of the main tower, climbs directly up the rock face visible.



Exposed ridge climbing on the traverse of the Seven Sisters.



On the first ascent of the southeast Cape Renard Tower.



The Seven Sisters of Fief seen from the north. Janssen Peak, at far right, was climbed from the far side and rappelled on that side. The team then regained the ridge at the col to Janssen's left. Descent toward Port Lockroy was made via the gully marked far left.



Traversing a tricky snow mushroom during the crossing of the Seven Sisters.



Savoia Peak (1,415m, left), the highest mountain on Wiencke Island, and the Seven Sisters of Fief, seen from the northeast. In the distant background are Booth Island and the Lemaire Channel.

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