



AAC Publications

Long Live Exploration

Preface to the 2015 edition

Every year more blank spots on the map are filled and more peaks are crisscrossed with new routes and variations. Inevitably, many climbers decry the disappearance of exploration and adventure in our world. But exploration is only evolving, not vanishing.

To be sure, traditional exploration—stepping into a blank spot on the map—continues even in this age of Google Earth. This edition details many fine examples, from the first teams to explore the South Simvu Glacier in India [Online Stories: <http://bit.ly/1JwLtDy> and <http://bit.ly/1Lv03uOto>] to the two international expeditions that crossed the Southern Patagonia Icefield in search of distant unclimbed peaks [Online Stories: <http://bit.ly/1NFLxTb> and <http://bit.ly/1U3dl9n>]. Exploration also includes evolving methods and ideas. What, for example, might climbers accomplish if they visited the eastern fjords of Baffin Island in the summer months, when almost all teams before had gone in the spring? (Answer: a bonanza of huge, alpine-style free climbs [Online Stories: <http://bit.ly/1LwHbOS> and <http://bit.ly/1hXyRuR>].) And then there are frontiers of difficulty, of which no climb pushed boundaries further in 2014 than the Dawn Wall on El Capitan.

Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson's seven-year effort to free the Dawn Wall had some traditionally adventurous elements: long run-outs above marginal protection, two serious injuries, and significant icefall hazard. But no long route in history was better known before it was climbed, down to such minute details as the precisely correct angle of one's foot on a nubbin of granite. In this context, exploration can only be internal: Can it be done? Can I do it? This is very different from the adventures of Shipton and Tilman in Asia and Patagonia, or John Clarke in British Columbia. But it is no less valid or exciting.

The Dawn Wall turned off some observers because of the media frenzy that came to surround it. Apart from the bizarre and often amusing attempts to translate what was happening up there for a mass audience, there was genuine concern that something was lost among the Instagram posts and live television feed. During their earlier attempts, Tommy and Kevin had gone dark for days or weeks at a time. On the final push they shared their experience, and the world responded with fascination.

Ultimately, this is a personal choice, not the End Of Climbing As We Know It. Mobile phones and satellite connections have made communication possible anywhere, but many teams do only the bare minimum of communication necessary to satisfy sponsors. Still others whip out their credit cards and pay for trips themselves, with no sense of obligation or desire to post results, in real time or anytime. At the AAJ we are well aware that significant ascents each year never get reported. As journalists it pains us to leave these climbs undocumented. As climbers we say, "Right on, do what feels right to you." Happily, the world remains big enough to accommodate all forms of exploration, old and new.

– Dougald MacDonald, Executive Editor

Images



Myles Moser stares up Una Fina Linea de Locura on the Central Tower of Paine.

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