



## **Grundtvigskirchen, East Face Attempt, and Ascents from Skillebugt Fjord**

Greenland, East Greenland, Renland

**Imagine sailing to Yosemite, amid an array of glaciers, with the ocean lapping the base of rocky slopes. Enzo Oddo and I had arrived at Renland aboard Isobelle Autissier's yacht Ada II, and before our eyes lay more virgin rock faces than we could ever climb, even if we stayed the rest of our lives.**

Our first target was Grundtvigskirchen (1,977m), which looms above the fjord separating Renland from Milne Land to the south. In 2010 an Italian-Swiss team climbed the central pillar on the ca 1,300m east face (Eventyr, 7a+, AAJ 2011). We had come to find a way up the steep, compact wall to the right, already attempted once before, in 1999, by Norwegians, who retreated due to heavy rockfall. Close inspection showed this wall to be hopelessly smooth, so we tried the first feasible line to its right. After free climbing three pitches we realized it would not be possible for us to continue without placing bolts, which we were reluctant to do, so we retreated and headed back left along the face to attempt a dihedral on the right flank of the central pillar.

After six pitches in the dihedral, the logical line took us back to the pillar and the Italian-Swiss Route, which we continued to follow. However, the weather worsened, with rain eventually turning to snow. On our fourth bivouac we remained confined to the portaledge for 36 hours, watching rain and hail produce waterfalls all around. When the sun finally burst through, we decided to attempt a lightweight push to the summit. The rock dried slowly throughout our ascent, and the climbing, in corner systems of splendidly colored granite, was superb. Then the sky once again darkened and hail began to fall, and we could only progress by improvising something between free and aid climbing. Just 150m below the summit, we were faced with a compact slab that had to be free climbed. It was not possible, so we retreated to the bivouac, soaked to the skin. Disappointed, we elected to keep going down through the rain. We later made an attempt on the magnificent south ridge, climbed by the Norwegians in 1999, but were again beaten back by rain and snow.

With the aid of the boat we transferred base camp to the head of Skillebugt Fjord, from there aiming to walk up the Apusinikajik and Edward Bailey glaciers to attempt a route on the Shark's Tooth. On our first day we realized that ferrying all our big-wall gear to the base of the peak would take too long, so we opted to try something nearer to base camp. On one of the best days of our entire stay, we climbed a 400m ridge immediately above camp. The Pointe de l'Observatoire had maximum difficulties of 6a in cracks, and took us to a summit that provided a fine viewpoint of the surrounding objectives.

A magnificent spire caught our eye, with a wall that featured huge dihedrals at its base. These corners led to a sandy chimney, an exposed roof, and a series of excellent cracks. A few pitches required aid from skyhooks and copperheads. We made the most of the daylight until the weather took a turn for the worst and we ended up, once again, sheltering in the portaledge until a lull allow us to complete the climb. From our third and last portaledge camp, we climbed 150m with difficulties up to 5c, followed by an easy arête, to the summit. As we started down, the short weather window closed and we made our descent in snowfall. We named the 600m route Midnight Rainbow (7a A3). It required cams to number six and a selection of standard pitons, beaks, copperheads, and skyhooks.

Our last route in the area was a fine pillar that we managed completely free, albeit with a little run-out

climbing. Pilier du Camp de Base was 400m, mainly in cracks up to 7a, but with a face-climbing crux of 7a that was not protectable.

All three routes lie above the end of a narrow glacier running south into the head of the Skillebugt from the Kloftbjerge Glacier plateau. Little gear was left in situ; we generally rappelled as directly as we could, most of the time away from the line of the route.

Philippe Batoux, France

## Images



Which way to go? Enzo Oddo on the east face of Grundtvigskirchen.



Foreshortened view of the east face of Grundtvigskirchen. (1) Eventyr. (2) Batoux-Oddo variation and high point (H). This team first tried to climb the smooth wall to the right.



Enzo Oddo iceberg-climbing in the waters off Renland.



Pointe de l'Observatoire (400m, 6a in cracks), above the Skillebugt base camp, climbed by Philippe Batoux and Enzo Oddo.



Midnight Rainbow on an unnamed summit north of the head of Skillebugt Fjord.



On the big roof of Midnight Rainbow. This belay was the site of the second portaledge bivouac.



Polar bear tracks on Renland.



Philippe Batoux in the initial dihedral (7a) of Midnight Rainbow.



Philippe Batoux after passing the roof about halfway up Pilier du Camp de Base, the fine pillar that was climbed as the final route during Batoux and Oddo's stay at the head of the Skillebugt.

## Article Details

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