



AAC Publications

Polar Bear Fang

Greenland, East Greenland, Timmiarmiut Fjord

In early July my brother Andy and I boarded a plane to Tasiilaq on Greenland's east coast with the aim of reaching a remote fjord I had reconnoitered in 2014 with Andy Mann, and had failed to reach on three previous expeditions. I had flown to the east coast of Greenland seven times since 1998, but I had never witnessed as much sea ice as I now saw clogging the coastline. It was like a million-piece puzzle of white geometric shapes. After landing in Greenland, my brother and I planned to travel nearly 400km south by boat through this maze to reach Timmiarmiut Fjord. Already, the sea ice had damaged our first boat (which eventually sank), but that is another story.

A new friend, Bendt Josvassen, his wife, and two children agreed to try the voyage. We needed to take a second boat simply to carry enough fuel for the round trip. We expected the journey to take 45 hours. Before making a landing in our chosen fjord, Bendt sailed back and forth looking for polar bears; last time I was here, there were 11 bears in the area. We established base camp close to the shore and started carrying loads up the long valley toward an elusive tower I had dubbed Polar Bear Fang (62°50'49.30"N, 42°18'10.16"W), shotgun over my shoulder and flares and pepper spray in our pockets. We established a high camp at ca 900m, with food for at least 12 days. There was no doubt in my mind that no human had been here before.

After an easy crossing of the glacier and a bivouac at the foot of the tower, we set off. I planned to climb free, while Andy followed on jumars. My brother had only done two climbs before, both with me: a first ascent in China (2005), and another in Kyrgyzstan (2006). For the first time in Greenland, I took a satellite phone, which I felt would give him a fighting chance should something happen to me. We also took our Year of the Ram masks and a small bolt kit for emergencies.

We made one bivouac on the face and found the crux to be three pitches below the summit: a huge chimney filled with loose flakes and rotten stone-teeth. Andy finessed through the minefield without a problem, and our reward was an overhanging bombay chimney on the next pitch—one of the coolest 5.8s ever. The last technical pitch, a full 60m of clean 5.9 granite, took me to 20m of walkable, knife-edge ridge leading to the tip of the fang. My altimeter watch read 2,030m. We were on the highest summit for as far as we could see.

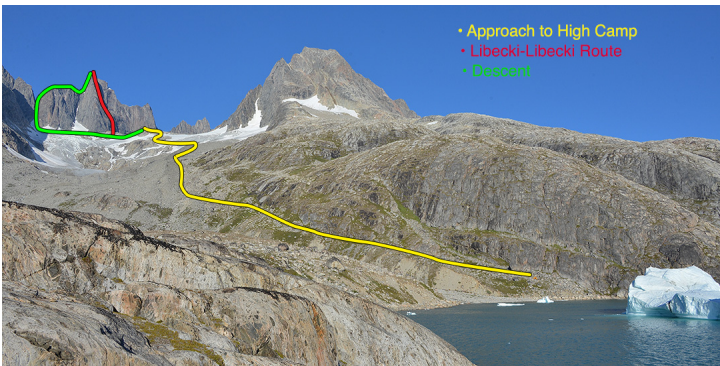
After a bivouac 3m from the top, we elected to forego the perils of the route we had climbed and instead descend the opposite side of the tower. After six rappels down really loose rock, we reached a ridge, followed it to a couloir, and made seven more rappels down this to the glacier. Not having brought axes or crampons, we crawled half a mile over a dangerous, crevasse-lurking glacier to our high camp, towing our bivy sacks as sleds behind us and laughing, just as we had our entire lives together. The Libeck-Libecki Route is ca 900m, 16 pitches, 5.11. Special thanks to the Mugs Stump Award and Shipton-Tilman Grant for helping to fund this expedition.

Mike Libeck, USA

Images



Andy Libecky during the ascent of Polar Bear Fang Tower.



Polar Bear Fang Tower from the fjord, showing the approach to high camp, route of ascent, and descent.



The Year of the Ram, the summit of Polar Bear Fang, and a wealth of unknown East Greenland peaks.



High camp below the Polar Bear Fang Tower with Timmiarmiut Fjord below.

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