



AAC Publications

Mirror Wall, Reflections

Greenland, East Greenland, Renland

Other than expedition organizer Leo Houlding, the journey to Greenland was a first for us all. Joe Mohle from South Africa, Waldo Etherington, photographer Matt Pycroft, and I (U.K.) were relatively inexperienced and very apprehensive about the journey we were about to take. After a Twin Otter flight across the North Atlantic to Constable Pynt, we jumped into a helicopter on June 25 and flew ca 150km deep into Renland and onto the Edward Bailey Glacier. This really was the middle of nowhere.

Mirror Wall (ca 2,050m) is set back in one of the many tributary valleys coming down from the ice cap. In August 2012 the Swiss team of Basil Jacksch, Christian Ledergerber, Vera Reist, and Silvan Schüpbach made the first ascent via two beautiful routes up each edge of the 1,200m west face: Ledge way to Heaven and Midnight Solarium (AAJ 2013). From our base camp 5km away the cliff looked surprisingly small: "How can this be bigger than El Cap?" But slowly we realized the scale was confusing us. The ice cap that hung like a huge serac above the neighboring cliffs was a serac 100m high!

Two weeks later, after several load carries up the highly crevassed glacier, we were alone on the wall, trying to find a way to the top. After a 200m, heavily loaded snow slope, we made good progress up the first 300m of rock climbing, swinging leads and climbing onsight. This led to our first wall camp, Bedouin Camp, named after the huge, Saudi Arabia-shaped flake it sat upon. It had a little roof above that we assumed would protect us. Many rocks whizzed by over the next few days, but nothing came close until one night we were awoken by unmistakable whistling, and then a rock the size of a tennis ball hit Leo right in the nuts. Lucky or unlucky? A meter to either side would have been a different story, but a head shot might have been the end.

Difficult and dangerous climbing led straight out from the portaedges. Joe aided and cleaned a stellar, 60m pitch up a loose corner before I returned to free it at 5.12b. After 200m we reached a sizeable ledge system over to the left via a tricky diagonal traverse followed by a diagonal rappel. This became our second wall camp—the Arctic Hotel—and provided a good base to launch our attack on the headwall.

Living up to its name, the central Mirror Wall is blank. With limited time and unstable weather, a wrong turn on the huge expanses of featureless granite could easily have led to failure. Taking advantage of the 24-hour daylight, and working in teams of two, we climbed around the clock to get through the harder pitches. We climbed until we were exhausted, rested until we recovered. Heading back right toward the center of the face, we climbed five pitches up to 5.12c leading to a 30m blank section. A crack line could be seen farther right, and we placed 10 bolts to get there. To our utter disappointment, the apparent crack system turned out to be a horrifically thin seam, and it took all of Leo's experience to overcome 45m of A3+ climbing, with 50 pieces of gear placed over six hours.

Thankfully this led to more featured rock, which gave several more great pitches up cracks and corners, typically around 5.11c to 5.12a. At this point a rock thrown from the wall took 20 seconds to reach the glacier below. Finally, 200m of easier climbing led to the summit ridge. With a 1,200m drop on one side and a steep snow slope on the other, we precariously walked along a meter-wide rock

ledge to the highest point. After 12 days on the wall, we took some time on the summit to look back over the long road we had followed to complete our goal. The route had stirred the soul of each of us.

Matt Pickles, U.K.

Images



Leo Houlding starts the first pitch (E5 6b) above the Arctic Hotel, 600m up Mirror Wall.



Bedouin Camp in a brief moment of sunshine. Shortly, the mist rolled in and didn't leave for around two weeks.



Matt Pickles on the crux pitch of Reflections: Behind the Mirror (E6 6b), with an Astromanesque chimney and a difficult pull through the roof. Arctic Hotel camp can be seen below.



Mirror Wall from the glacier approach. (1) Midnight Solarium (2012). (2) Reflections (2015). (3) Ledge-way to Heaven (2012).



Leo Houlding above the Paper Flake, a 20m-tall, 10m-wide granite formation that was just 1cm at its thinnest. However, it provided a key link through the blankness.



Leo Houlding leading pitch 13 (E5 6b), 600m above the snow, a beautiful pitch that was initially rappelled to reach the Arctic Hotel bivy site, 30m to the left of the route.



In the vast, golden granite expanses of Mirror Wall. The crux pitch of Reflections seen from the Arctic Hotel camp 600m up Mirror Wall.



Mirror Wall from the southwest showing the approximate lines of Reflections (left) and Ledgeway to Heaven.

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