



AAC Publications

Cape Farewell: Four New Routes

Greenland, South Greenland

Lionel Daudet invited me to take part in his Big Seas, Big Walls expedition, and I quickly accepted this incredible opportunity. At the end of June, Lionel and fellow Frenchman Enzo Oddo departed Scotland on Ada 2, skippered by the renowned French ocean sailor, writer, and environmental activist Isabelle Autissier. She would take care of the "Big Seas" part of the expedition, transporting us to South Greenland in our quest for virgin lines on "Big Walls." Because of obligations to my studies, I left Europe two weeks later by plane and jumped aboard the boat in Greenland.

Our first stop was Torssukataq Fjord, where Ada 2 dropped us below the Baroness, opposite the giant sea cliff of Maujit Qoqarssuasia and the Thumbnail. Our main objective was clear: We wanted to climb a new route on the Thumbnail. However, first we aimed for something a little smaller. On the ca 650m northwest face of the Baroness, on Pamiagdruk Island, we climbed a new line from July 5–8, using fixed ropes. The route is 13 pitches and 665m long, has eight belay bolts and one protection bolt, and was climbed at 7c A2. Pitches six and 11 were not free climbed but should go at approximately 8a+ and 7c, respectively.

We then waited out some windy weather before committing to reach the base of the Thumbnail using inflatable kayaks. During this period, we made a one-day, all-free ascent of a new route on the west face of Mark (400m of climbing, seven pitches, 7a), higher up the Baroness valley. [This ca 900m summit was probably first climbed via the west face, by a line named Called into Question (450m, British E2 5b, Mehigan-Sonnerdale, 2003), well to the right of the new Belgian-French route.]

The sun came out and the fjord now looked like a lake. We packed 15 days of provisions for the Thumbnail, as retreating in bad weather wouldn't be easy: There is no dry ground below the wall, and in bad weather the waves might be too big to use the kayaks. So, a heavily loaded big-wall climb it was!

Starting on July 13, it took us three days, moving camp every day, to reach the massive ledge that divides the wall in two. On our fourth day we fixed lines for a further 200m on the impressive second part of the wall. The fifth day we were forced to lie back in the sun after a night of constant rain that soaked the wall and Enzo's sleeping bag (due to a damaged portaledge fly). On our last climbing day we ascended the fixed ropes and continued, light and fast, free climbing our way to the top of the Thumbnail. Here we found the best pitches of the whole route. The exposure was great, the rock was solid, and crack systems offered us two pitches of high-quality 7a. From the summit we could see the mighty Atlantic Ocean on one side and the thrilling Greenland icecap on the other. Many granite peaks rose out of the breathtaking landscape, while higher mountains were covered in snow. We could see a complicated labyrinth of fjords and some massive, icy blue glacier lakes. It was by far the most beautiful summit view I've ever had.

In clear blue sky we descended to our camp at half-height on the wall, and the following day went across the massive ledge to the left side of the wall and then followed a snow gully straight down to the fjord. It was a scary but exciting experience sliding with 40kg haulbags to the base of the gully, where Ada 2 was able to pick us up. Our all-free route was 24 pitches and 1,355m of climbing. Pitch nine, the crux, was 7b (but felt like 7c+, as it was wet). The route lies entirely to the right of the 2000

British route (E6 6b, Bransby-Dickinson-Parnell-Parry). We spent a few days on the boat, resting, before being dropped off in Prins Christian Sund, below the 800m seaward (west) face of Igdlorssuit Havn Tower (1,160m). There are three existing climbs on the central section of this wall, and we opted for a possible new line going straight up the middle, via a system of cracks on the left of the main massive dihedral.

Impatient to get on the face, we started up a small corner that would lead via a series of roofs to the 500m crack systems. Unfortunately, we didn't read a 2003 British expedition report carefully enough to discover that Miles Gibson and Steve McClure had tried to go the same way. The second pitch was a house of cards, with 70m of massive flakes piled up in the corner. We carefully retreated.

We began again at a different point, and it took three days of fixing rope, aid climbing, and then freeing some pitches in a slanting dihedral before we reached the roof system. The rock was not of the best quality, and we did not climb pitches three, four, and five free. Pitch four might go at 7c/8a, and five at 8a+ or harder.

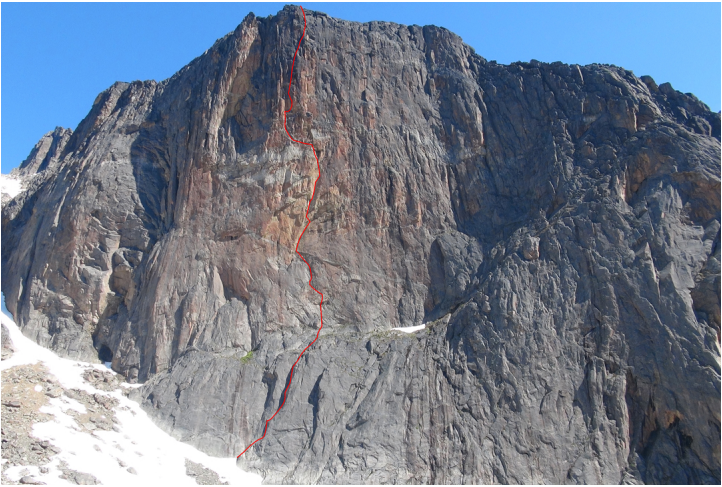
Pitch six brought us above the roofs. After a rest day back on the ground, we continued the climb in capsule style with a portaledge. We followed sustained hand and fist cracks and stemming corners; all were long and between 6c and 7b. After three days we reached the summit and were satisfied with our line, by far the most obvious on the wall. We called the route the Mechanician (850m of climbing, 19 pitches, 7b+/c A1, July 23–28).

On the last 300m of the Mechanician, our eyes had been drawn to a 120m splitter crack on the smooth face to the right of the main dihedral. Enzo and I decided to return, and on August 2 we ascended the static ropes we had left in place to the top of pitch six of our previous route. We then free climbed nine more pitches to reach the base of the splitter. (We assume our pitches 11 to 14 share the same line as the Gibson-McClure route Twenty-one (British E7 6c, 2003.) We installed our portaledge at the top of pitch 15 and next day free climbed the entire finger-size splitter, which gave three pitches up to 7c+ and a fourth ending in poorly protected face climbing. For me, these pitches were the best of the expedition; the jamming was of very high quality and the exposure was incredible. We named the entire route the Splitter (950m of climbing, 23 pitches, 7c+ A1).

During our stay of more than a month, we nearly always had great weather—we didn't seem to waste a single day. I learned a lot about big-wall climbing and tactics, and just as I had jumped on the boat in Greenland, I also jumped off it there, flying back to Belgium to have a few weeks at home before taking off for Yosemite in the autumn.

– Siebe Vanhee, Belgium

Images



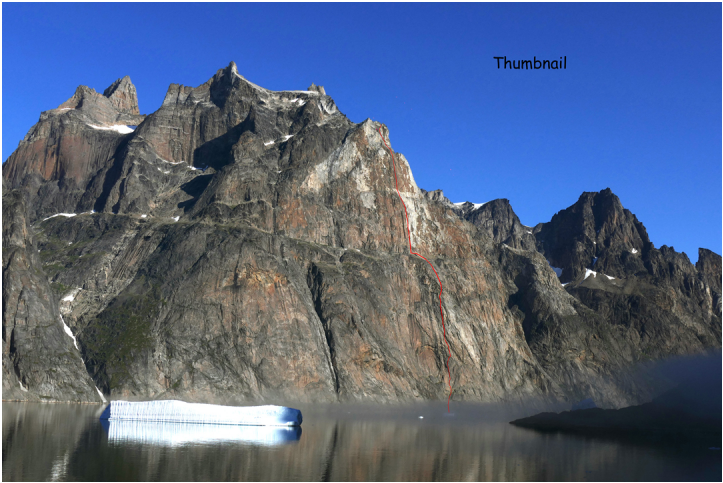
The northwest face of the Baroness with the line of the 2016 Belgian-French route. There are at least four other lines on this face, all established by a British party in 2001.



The lower half of the west face of Mark showing the line of the 2016 Belgian-French route. The lines of the original route in 2003, and an attempt on the compact walls left of the Belgian-French route, can be seen in AAJ 2004.



The 800m west face of Igdlorssuit Havn Tower showing the two new Belgian-French routes, the Mechanician (left) and the Splitter. There are at least seven other routes on the entire face, mostly put up in 2001.



The east face of Maujit Qoqarssuasua with the line of the 2016 Belgian-French route to the summit of the Thumbnail. For the lines of the other four routes on this vast wall, see AAJs 2004 and 2008.



While climbing a new route on Igdlorssuit Havn Tower, Enzo Oddo and Siebe Vanhee kept staring at the 120-meter crack to the right. They returned for a second new line: The Splitter.



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Siebe Vanhee climbing on Igdlorssuit Havn Tower.

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