



AAC Publications

Arrigetch Peaks, Xanadu, Un Pas Més

Alaska, Brooks Range

Last summer I spent 53 days in the Arrigetch—36 days hauling loads and 17 days on the west face of Xanadu, where, from July 5 to 21, I completed a new route called Un Pas Més (530m, 6a A4/A4+). During this time, although I was not always completely alone, I had no external assistance, no GPS, and no radio, phone, or communication device to obtain weather forecasts.

The amazing pilots at Brooks Range Aviation agreed to pick me up on a specific day two months after dropping me off—an exercise in trust. From the airstrip, I spent 16 days getting my 150 kilograms of food and big-wall gear in position, repeating the approach 11 times. After the climb, I spent 20 days carrying everything down, doing the descent nine times. I estimate that I hiked around 540 kilometers total, not counting the multiple times I became lost due to not having a GPS.

In June, the little path that climbs the valley is barely visible, and it's easy to get lost. In August, the trail is easy to follow and accessible, due to the number of people headed in and out of the valley throughout the summer. To be alone in such a place is not easy. I did encounter bears and everything ended well, but I was really scared until I was able to transform my fear and enjoy the whole trip.

Instead of making base camp in the main valley beneath Xanadu's west face (which would have required additional load carrying), I climbed up to a pass on the north side of Xanadu, to the left side of the wall, to access a ledge that I'd seen in photos. This ledge system led to the base of the vertical face. Before the trip, I could see the ledge in photos, but I did not know if the access to the pass was feasible or if the ledge would reach all the way across the base of the wall. However, this approach allowed me to avoid the lower slabs below the main face—alone and with haul bags, it would have been a nightmare.

Most of the route's 11 pitches featured technical aid climbing (up to A4/A4+), which is the style that allows me to open a route alone and have the kind of experience and climbing style I am looking for. The hardest pitches had short but precarious crux sections—steep faces that featured multiple hook moves in a row. I placed three lead bolts (no hangers) and 12 anchor bolts on the route, and rappelled my line of ascent (not all the belays have bolts).

The west face of Xanadu, which prior to summer 2017 had never been climbed. The green line shows the first ascent by Golden Petals (Braasch-Bain-Boning-Engberg). Soon after this route was completed, Silvia Vidal finished soloing her new route Un Pas Més, shown in red. Later in the summer, a third route was completed farther left: Arctic Knight (Ferro-Musiyenko-Prince). Photo by Zeb Engberg

The rock was generally good granite, but was sometimes sandy, and therefore small copperheads didn't hold. There were some loose blocks, and more face climbing than crack systems. There are expanding and inverted flakes that made the solo ascent more complicated, as the ropes below me often got stuck and I had to rap down to remove them, sometimes multiple times in a single pitch.

While in the valley, I met four American climbers who put up a new route to the right of my route; they were the first to summit the west face of Xanadu. In August, when I was carrying my gear down, three other American climbers came to put up another route to the left of mine. Both camped down in the valley, and I stayed on the wall. Different base camps, logistics, styles, and dates allowed all of us to have our space and solitude.

After this kind of experience, being alone in a wild place for weeks with no communication and many uncertainties—only your doubts, fears, joy and happiness—the route is never the most difficult part. The challenge lies in the rest.

– **Sílvia Vidal**, Catalonia

Images



The west face of Xanadu in Alaska's Arrigetch Peaks, which prior to summer 2017 had never been climbed. This summer, three new routes went up on the face. The first ascent of the wall was made by Billy Braasch, David Bain, Gabe Boning and Zeb Engberg via Golden Petals (V, 1,400', 5.13+ or 5.12 A0), shown in green. Shortly after, Catalan soloist Silvia Vidal climbed a new aid line called Un Pas Més (530m, 6a A4/+), shown in red. Xanadu's first ascent was made via the right-hand skyline (Krakauer-Bullard, AAJ 1975).



Sílvia Vidal on one of her gear carries from Circle Lake to her basecamp in the Arrigetch Peaks. Vidal spent 16 days getting 150 kilograms of food and big-wall gear in position, repeating the approach 11 times. She went on to make the first ascent of Un Pas Més (530m, 6a A4/+) from July 5-21.



Sílvia Vidal cleaning the eighth pitch of her new route Un Pas Més (530m, 6a A4/+). Vidal spent 53 days alone in the Arrigetch Peaks to complete the route, 17 of which were on the wall.



Sílvia Vidal rappelling her route Un Pas Més (530m, 6a A4/+) on the west face of Xanadu in Alaska's Arrigetch Peaks. Vidal's route was one of three new lines climbed on this previously unclimbed wall in the summer of 2017.

Article Details

Author	Sílvia Vidal
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions