



AAC Publications

Ulvetanna, Stetind, Fenris, and Many Other Peaks

Antarctica, Queen Maud Land, Orvin Fjella

From December 1–17 our team of seven climbers, ranging in age from mid-20s to mid-50s and comprising Jimmy Chin, Savannah Cummins, Pablo Durana, Alex Honnold, Anna Pfaff, Cedar Wright, and me, visited the Fenris Kjeften (Wolf's Jaw) in the mountains of the Orvin Fjella of the Drygalski Range. We flew from Cape Town with Antarctic Logistics Centre International (ALCI) to the Novolazarevskaya ice runway but were delayed five days leaving South Africa and four days once on the continent due to inclement weather. We accessed base camp at 71°51.3357'S, 8°17.4213'E—the tongue of the Wolf's Jaw—via a Twin Otter flight. We then split into three sub-groups: Alex and Cedar, Anna and Savannah, and Jimmy and me. Pablo floated between groups and was key in documenting the expedition.

Alex and Cedar, building on the speed climbing techniques they have perfected in Yosemite, were able to climb many summits in single pushes from base camp, including Fenris (north ridge, 5.10+), Hel, Thor, Odin, Long Worm, Midgard, Stetind (east pillar), and Kintanna. Stetind's east pillar was notable for the level of onsight climbing—5.11 in the cold and wind is a bit of a challenge.

Anna and Savannah climbed Philiptanna, Annatanna, and the Chimney, with the last two being likely first ascents. [Many of the peak names mentioned are still unofficial.] Anna, Savannah, Alex, and Cedar made the first ascent of the Penguin, a small rock tower, via the north ridge. The same four climbers also repeated Skywalk on the north ridge of Holtanna (450m, 10 pitches, 5.10-, Huber-Huber-Reichel-Siegrist, 2008) in a 16-hour round trip; the climb was reported to have bolts and rappel anchors, but only two bolts and a few other fixed pieces were found. A light and fast style of climbing is well suited to peaks in this range. By staying in motion, one stays warm.

Taking a more traditional approach, Jimmy and I climbed Ulvetanna—the highest peak in the range at 2,931m—via a new route on the west buttress and south ridge. We were stuck in our aiders and not able to free climb due to the steep and wide nature of the climbing. Jimmy and I summited in -30°C, and it took all of our effort to maintain warmth. This was the seventh overall ascent of the peak, and as of the 2017-'18 season, Ulvetanna has yet to be climbed in alpine style. [The peak was first climbed in February 1994, via the northwest face, by Robert Caspersen, Sjur Nesheim, and Ivar Tollefson; the south ridge from its base (27 pitches) was first completed in early 2014 by a British-Norwegian team after previous attempts by three different parties, one of them retreating just three pitches from the summit.]

The granite we encountered varied from solid and well bonded to loose and friable. Our greatest challenge was rope awareness and management; the coarse rock eats rope. The cracks are wide—be prepared with doubles in each size if you don't have the fortitude of Alex and Cedar to run it out. The team did not place any bolts or pitons and rappelled from standard gear and natural features.

With a small window of time, the team was active almost every day. The midnight sun compensated for the sharp, loose rock, biting wind, and constant freezing temperatures. We made the most of the hand we were dealt. Our expedition was commercial in nature, with support from the North Face and media partners National Geographic and CBS.

Images



Conrad Anker climbing the south ridge of Ulvetanna above a camp on the snowy shoulder. To reach this shoulder Anker and Jimmy Chin climbed a dihedral on the right-facing wall below.

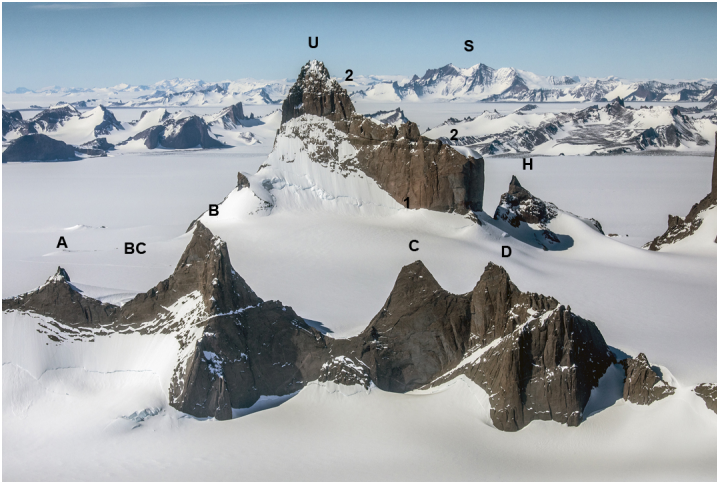


Conrad Anker on the west face of Ulvetanna during the partial new route put up in December 2017.



Ulvetanna from the south. The Anker-Chin route to the south ridge climbs a dihedral (hidden behind

the left skyline) on the lower wall in profile to the left. The 2014 ascent of the south ridge first climbed the 300m wall to gain the crest. The upper ridge was deemed technical on poor rock and graded 5.10 AA1+, where the double A signified Antarctic's "particular brand of loose rock".



Seen from the west; (A) Philiptanna, (B) Fenris, (C) Thor, and (D) Odin. These peaks are referred to as the Fenri on the original Norwegian map (supposedly the "teeth in the jaw"). (BC) Base camp. (U) Ulvetanna. (H) Hel. (S) the Sandeggtinde Massif (3,053m). (1) marks base of the dihedral on the west face of Ulvetanna used by Conrad Anker and Jimmy Chin to access the crest of the south ridge (2) above. The original Norwegian route climbs snow and ice slopes toward the left edge of this face, and then through the rock above at UIAA VIII A2.



Alex Honnold soloing on the north ridge of the Penguin. This was the first attempt on the unclimbed Penguin, which failed due to icy cracks. Honnold returned with Savannah Cummins, Anna Pfaff, and Cedar Wright to bag the first ascent.



Alex Honnold on the first ascent of the Fish Hook, a loose and horrifying ascent, which was climbed unroped and on-sight by Honnold and Cedar Wright at 5.7.



Alex Honnold making the second ascent of Hel.



Alex Honnold checking out the north ridge of the Penguin during an initial reconnaissance of the Fenris Kjeften.



Alex Honnold on the first ascent of the north ridge of Fenris, the first peak climbed by the Honnold-Wright partnership during the expedition. Behind, across the flat ice of the Fenristunga, is the west side of Ulvetanna.



Savannah Cummins and Anna Pfaff reversing Skywalk – the north ridge of Holtanna (2,650m) – after reaching the summit. Behind is Holsttind (2,577m).



Anna Pfaff on the upper section of the north ridge of the Penguin.

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