



AAC Publications

Majlis al Jinn Cave, Out of the Dark, and Other Routes

Oman

In December I returned to Oman, where I had lived from 2008 until 2017, to reunite with my longtime climbing partner and first-ascent collaborator Jakob Oberhauser, who has been guiding in Oman since 2003 and has done untold new routes there. Also joining us were Alexander Huber (Germany), Aleksandra Taistra (Poland), and Guido Unterwerzacher (Austria).

Herwig Kaschka and Beatrice Mollaret were our gracious camp managers, keeping us fed and hydrated.

For Jakob and me, the primary objective was a ground-up free line out of the Majlis al Jinn cave. A little background on the cave: The name means “seating place of the spirits.” The cave is considered the second-largest chamber in the world by surface area. It is only accessed from above, and the only exit is to ascend fixed ropes for 165m—or climb out. It is remote, too, atop the lunar landscapes of the Selma Plateau at 2,000m altitude, requiring an exposed off-road drive that begins at sea level. The crux, however, was acquiring a permit.

Jakob and I had requested permission in December 2012 with the same idea; however we were denied access in favor of a permit for a Red Bull filming project, which led to the route Into the Light (13 pitches, 5.14a), equipped by the Red Bull team and climbed by Chris Sharma with Stefan Glowacz in March 2013 (see AAJ 2015). At the time we instead opted to climb in the 7th Hole Cave, 2km away, opening three naturally protected lines out of the cave. [Editor’s Note: A film about this trip can be found at <https://vimeo.com/92864834>.] Finally, in 2019, a permit was granted to Jakob.

Guido and Alexander were intent on repeating Into the Light. Aleksandra and I arrived in Muscat at 2 a.m. on December 13. We were exhausted but also excited for the adventure and days of climbing and camping ahead. We had all budgeted a week for the cave, but Jakob met us in Muscat and let us know that we had in fact just two days on our permit, including that day—a relaxed trip now became an urgent mission!

After a very brief nap, we united the team and rallied towards the cave, which in normal conditions takes about three hours to reach. Recent heavy rains, however, had washed out the main track, but thankfully a second route was passable. After seven hours of driving, we stood over the main entrance of the Majlis to rig our static lines down the 165m sheer drop.

With just the two hours of daylight plus the following day available to us, Guido and Alexander rushed to descend and check out Into the Light, perhaps to psych up for a future trip, understanding that a single afternoon and one full day wouldn’t be enough time for a complete ascent. Jakob and I, loathing the idea of 165m free-hanging jumar for a single hour in the cave, opted to scout potential exit options from above and prepare our gear for a one-day attempt.

Early the following morning, we found ourselves at the base of the cave. The excitement and awe of descending into the blackness, hooting and hollering as our eyes slowly adjusted to the grand scale, was slowly overtaken by anxiety.

At first the cave's features looked quite close, but when we began walking up to the base of our intended line, everything seemed to expand, each of us just a tiny dot on the subterranean landscape.

At the base of our line, Jakob stooped down to collect a pebble for our traditional who-goes-first game. "Which hand is it in?" he asked.

Honestly, my desire at that moment was to choose the wrong hand. Jakob is a master on the delicate, loose, and often scary Omani limestone. I suggested rock, paper, scissors as a diversion. Jakob shook his head, then I swallowed and stammered "that one," pointing.

Two hours later, I was still on lead. The initial section of the wall was overhanging, and the stone was really rotten where water had not had the opportunity to work its magic. I went up and downclimbed inside a chimney multiple times, clearing loose blocks, sometimes by choice, too frequently not.

Having Alexander and Guido beneath shouting encouragement, while Jakob hid away from the bombardment, helped push me onward. Alex, bless his patience, tried a direct variant to speed up the process, but twice retreated due to bad rock. My only option, as they saw from below, was a horizontal traverse around a flakey green pillar. When your idol speaks, you move, and so I found myself on a sloping shelf about 20m up and unable to continue because of the rope drag running around the pillar. Standing free, I untied and lowered one of my ropes and begrudgingly hauled up the drill to place the one and only bolt on our route, the sole anchor point for the first belay.

From then on the rock improved drastically, and so did our speed! We followed a series of dry waterfalls, laughing at the fact that we were climbing underground. Jakob and I swapped leads while Alex and Guido followed hot on our heels. After six pitches our Austrian-German-Canadian team emerged, giddy, into the sunshine above. We even found bolts on the last pitch, (which Mohammed, the local minder of the cave, mentioned must be from the filming project), further speeding up our exit into the brilliant afternoon sun. A campfire dream ticked: Out of the Dark (165m, 6 pitches, 6a+).

Our cave alpinism was not finished, though. The next day we drove a few kilometers along the plateau to 7th Hole Cave, where Guido and Alex opened a new route, Tunnel Vision (120m, 4 pitches, 7a), and Aleksandra and Jakob repeated one of our routes from 2012, the Traverse of the Gods (120m, 6a+).

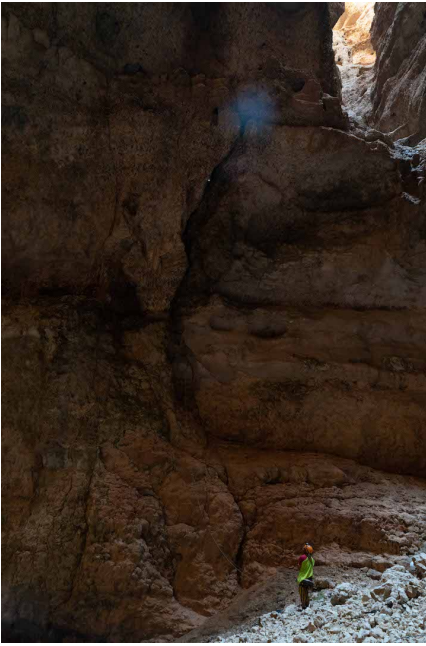
Then, moving our base camp to the beach, we celebrated and rested a day before opening two new routes in alpine style in Wadi Tiwi, just above the village of Mibam. Alex and Guido climbed the Wadi Racer (500m, 6c+), and Jakob, Aleksandra, and I climbed Mibam Roundtrip (450m, 6a+). Guido and Alex were not done, moving to Jebel Kawr to open the sustained and exposed Rihlat Saeida above Al Khumeirah village (400m, 6c+) a few days later, while Jakob and I finished a short variation to a route Jakob had climbed earlier in the year on Hamra Towers of Jebel Fokha: Central Chimney (195m, UIAA VI+).

Even after nearly 10 years living in Oman, I am still impressed with the amount of adventure climbing and new routing to be done. Oman is full of wild landscapes and some of the kindest people I have ever met. I hope to return next year.

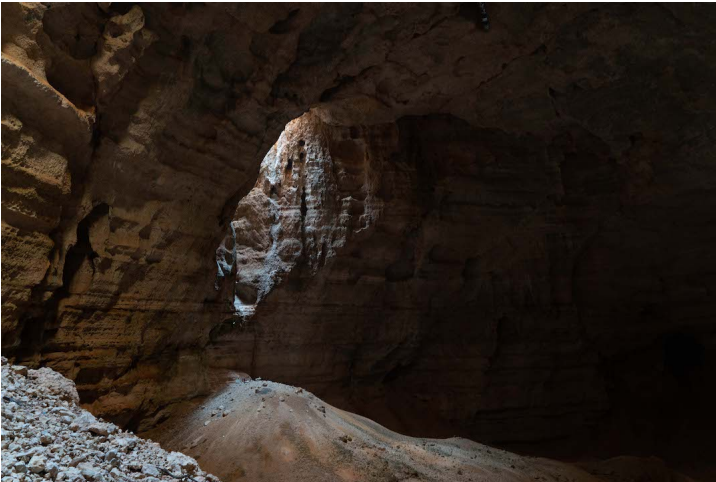
For more information on trad climbing in Oman, see *Climbing in Oman* by Jakob Oberhauser. There is also a vibrant and passionate community developing sport climbing. Guides to those climbs created by Larry Michienzi are available through the Rakkup app.

– Read Macadam, Canada

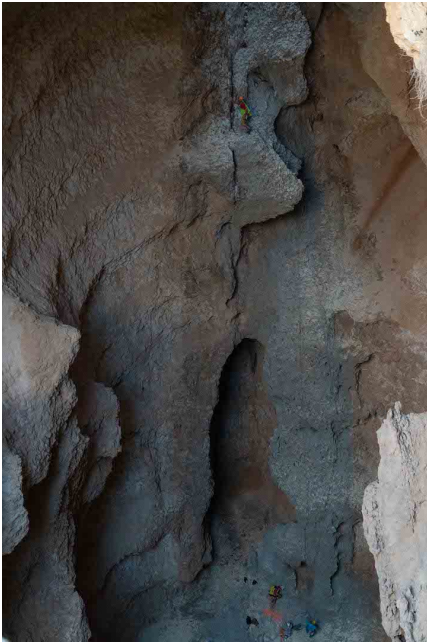
Images



Read Macadam (headlamp visible) leading the first pitch of Out of the Dark (165m, 6a+). The loose and overhanging pitch took him over two hours to lead.



The massive interior of Oman's Majlis al Jinn cave. The headlamps from the team are visible on the second pitch of Out of the Dark (165m, 6a+), below the main opening, with the other team members on the cave floor below.



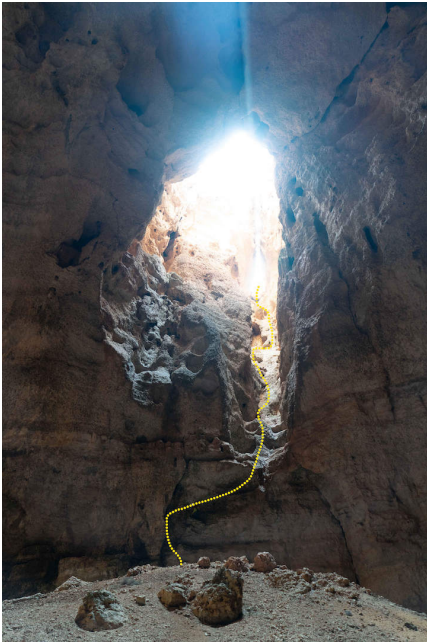
Jakob Oberhauser leading the fifth pitch of Out of the Dark (165m, 6a+) in Oman's Majlis al Jinn cave.



Read Macadam topping out to ground level during the first ascent of Out of the Dark (165m, 6a+) in Oman's Majlis al Jinn cave.



Jakob Oberhauser, Alexander Huber, Guido Unterwerzacher, and Read Macadam at the entrance to Oman's Majlis al Jinn cave after topping out the first ascent of Out of the Dark (165m, 6a+).



The line of Out of the Dark (165m, 6a+) in Oman's Majlis al Jinn cave, viewed from the floor of the cave. Accessing the start of the route requires a 165m free-hanging rappel.



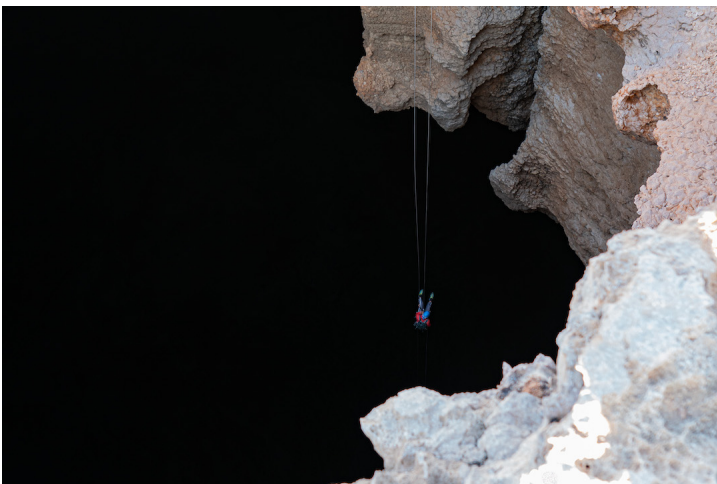
Aleksandra Taistra leading up Traverse of the Gods (6a+) in Oman's 7th Hole Cave. Jakob Oberhauser and Read Macadam made the route's first ascent in 2012.



Jakob Oberhauser (leading) and Aleksandra Taistra about to top out Traverse of the Gods (6a+) in Oman's 7th Hole Cave.



The team goes for a morning swim on the Omani coast after several days of subterranean climbing.



Base camp manager Herwig Kaschka making the massive free-hanging descent into Oman's Majlis Al Jinn cave.



Alexander Huber and Guido Unterwurzacher pondering first-ascent opportunities above the village of Mibam, Oman. The two routes the team completed are shown: The Wadi Racer (500m, 6c+), and Mibam Roundtrip (450m, 6a+).



Jakob Oberhauser climbing the first roped pitch after 100m of free soloing on brilliant water polished rock during the first ascent of Mibam Roundtrip (450m, 6a+), near Mibam, Oman.



Jakob Oberhauser following up pitch three of Central Chimney (195m, UIAA VI+). This route is a variation to a line Oberhauser and Herwig Kaschka climbed earlier in the year called Rotzgnedl (195m, UIAA VI+).

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