



AAC Publications

Mt. Fay, East Face, The Sound of Silence

Canada, Alberta, Canadian Rockies, Valley of the Ten Peaks

The route line for Luka Lindič, Ines Papert, and Brette Harrington's The Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) on the east face of Mt. Fay. The original route (1985) finished up and right from the snowfield at two-thirds height. Sans Blitz (2000) climbed the obvious ice to the left. Photo by Jon Walsh

I first stood below the mighty east face of Mt. Fay in early April 2016 with the late Marc-André Leclerc. The night before we intended to climb was warm, and we saw the first avalanche come down the line that Barry Blanchard, Dave Cheesmond, and Carl Tobin climbed in 1984 before we even had our breakfast. Marc and I walked away without touching that wall, but the idea of completing a direct finish to the 1984 line stayed in our heads.

When Ines Papert and I packed for a trip to the Canadian Rockies in late winter, a year after Marc died in Alaska, we definitely had the east face of Mt. Fay in mind. It had been extremely cold in the Rockies for a very long time, which usually doesn't promise anything good on the big faces. But two weeks before flying to Canada, we got a very friendly message from Maarten van Haeren saying that there might be some ice growing on Mt. Fay. The photos he sent shortly afterward confirmed it.

We arrived at the end of March and immediately approached the Valley of the Ten Peaks to check the conditions on various walls. We thought there was still too much unconsolidated snow on Mt. Fay. On our second trip into the valley we tried two north-facing walls and got shut down for the same reason. We decided that we might explore some other areas, and we carried all our equipment out.

After a few days of rest, a good weather window arrived. So did Brette Harrington, Marc's partner before he passed away. Ines and I wanted to climb something with Brette, but we weren't sure if a face like Fay would be a good idea for a first climb together. After a couple hours of catching up, though, we all felt that it was worth a try.

We moved quite fast on the approach to base camp, thanks to a track established by friends during the previous window. In the evening, there was no spindrift coming down, and it was quite cold. But we knew the situation could be different once the sun hit the face in the morning, so we decided to get a very early start.

We were moving again after a few hours of sleep. We quickly reached the left-trending snow ramp at the base of the wall where the 1984 route starts and climbed to the end of the ramp unroped. At this point we entered into a main fall line of avalanches and spindrift, so we tied in and simul-climbed.

We soon reached the first steep section of ice, which we also climbed quickly. Then the rising sun hit the upper headwall and brought spindrift avalanches as expected. Luckily, I was already over the steep ice when it hit us. I built an anchor and belayed Ines and Brette, who arrived at the anchor covered in snow but smiling. The terrain above was less steep and we started simul-climbing again. We were actually gaining speed until Ines slipped. Fortunately, that didn't happen too far from an ice screw, but it reminded us to take care.

At the big snow bowl in the middle of the wall, where the 1984 route traversed out right to finish, we needed to deal with some very deep snow. I climbed a rope length without finding any protection or suitable anchor. Rather than simul-climb, I decided to untie from one rope and toss it down to Ines

and Brette, who tied the ropes together so that I could continue. After a long struggle to find suitable features, I was able to build a belay below a steep step.

A stripe of ice and snow that had looked very promising from the valley turned out to be horrible. After traversing left and right, searching for a route, I spotted a very steep crack system. It looked very hard—especially with our light alpine rack of one set of cams, nuts, and a few pitons— but we agreed to give it a try.

I made it through a roof with a mixture of free climbing and aid, cleaning loose rock and snow on the way. As I built the next belay, I started thinking how incredible it would be to free climb the pitch. I spent a few minutes alone, deciding what to do. Seeing the big headwall above made me want to keep moving, but I knew I would regret not trying to free the pitch. Ines sensed what I was thinking and hollered encouraging words from below. "Fuck it! It's now or never!" I said. They lowered me, I pulled the ropes, and after a short rest I freed the pitch at M8.

Another hard pitch brought us to terrain that was a bit easier, following dihedrals and snow ramps. However, the snow eventually became horrible and scary. After a very long pitch of digging and climbing, we reached a spot that seemed like the only reasonable place to spend the night. We ate a Spartan dinner and went to sleep with the hope of waking up with the warm rays of the morning sun.

The morning was cold and cloudy, and we got moving quickly. Brette led two pitches and then Ines led another two. The terrain got steeper again, the rock very loose, and it was really difficult to find a promising route. We didn't talk much in the next hours. We worked well as a team, everyone did what he or she could. Soon a snowstorm hit us and made everything even more intense.

We finally found ourselves about 30m from the top of the face. The summit was guarded by a final pitch of superb drytooling on overhanging rock. I pulled the last moves, rolled over onto a very windy ridge, and started screaming from happiness. Ines and Brette joined me in the fading light and we screamed together. It was a short but very intense time at the top.

We downclimbed to the big plateau on the other side of the mountain and started navigating toward the Neil Colgan Hut through intense snowfall and fog. We never would have found the hut without a GPS. As relief and fatigue set in, I felt very proud of our climb and our style—and happy that Brette had joined us. During the ascent, I could almost hear Marc talking to me. In the moments when we were totally silent because it was so serious, I could hear him saying, "Hey, dude, thanks for taking Little B on this climb." We named the route the Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) in his memory. Brette told us that Marc had wanted to name a route after the Simon and Garfunkel song, but unfortunately he passed away too soon.

– Luka Lindič, Slovenia

Images



Ines Papert leading a beautiful ice pitch in the morning sun during the first ascent of The Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) on the east face of Mt. Fay in the Valley of Ten Peaks in the Canadian Rockies.



Luka Lindič leading the crux M8 roof pitch during the first ascent of The Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) on the east face of Mt. Fay in the Valley of Ten Peaks. Lindič first aided the roof and then, knowing he'd never be back, decided to go for the redpoint.



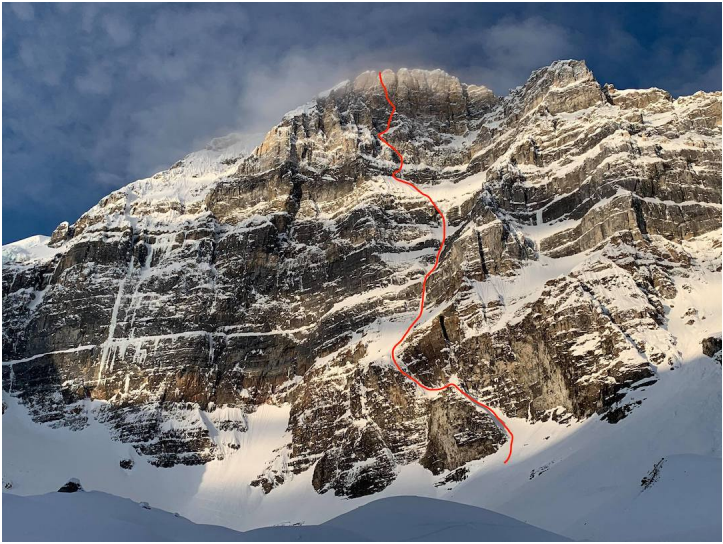
Brette Harrington on the first pitch after the bivy during the first ascent of The Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) on the east face of Mt. Fay.



Luka Lindič climbing the final steep pitch of mixed terrain during the first ascent of The Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) on the east face of Mt. Fay.



From left to right, Brette Harrington, Ines Papert, and Luka Lindič on the summit of Mt. Fay, after the first ascent of The Sound of Silence (1,100m, M8 WI5) on the east face.



The route line for Luka Lindič, Ines Papert, and Brette Harrington's *The Sound of Silence* (1100m, M8 WI5) on the east face of Mt. Fay in the Valley of Ten Peaks. The original route (1985) finished up and right from the snowfield at two-thirds height. Sans Blitz (2000) climbed the obvious ice to the left.

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