



AAC Publications

Milestones 2021

The climbs featured in the American Alpine Journal don't occur in a vacuum—they reflect the broader evolution of climbing styles and performance around the world. The following achievements in 2021 provide additional context for the longer rock and alpine ascents documented in this year's AAJ. —The Editors

FEBRUARY–APRIL

In February, Simon Lorenzi (Belgium) completed the sit start to The Big Island, a famous 8C+ (V16) boulder problem at Fontainebleau, France. Lorenzi called the new start Soudain Seul and tentatively graded it 9A (V17), which might have been only the second problem in the world of this grade, after Nalle Hukkataival's Burden of Dreams (2016) in Finland. However, in late March, French climber Nicolas Pelorson repeated Soudain Seul and said it was 8C+. Pelorson had previously repeated and downgraded another problem given 9A, No Kpote Only, also at Fontainebleau.

Then, on April 2, Daniel Woods (USA) climbed the sit start to Sleepwalker in Black Velvet Canyon (Red Rock, Nevada), originally established by Jimmy Webb in late 2018 and graded V16. Woods' start added half a dozen moves to the problem, and Woods (who repeated Sleepwalker soon after the first ascent and eventually did it more than 15 times) said the extended problem deserved V17.

AUGUST

The COVID-delayed Tokyo Olympics took place in July and August, and for the first time in the modern Olympic Games, climbing was on center stage. The combined event calculated competitors' standings based on their individual rankings in lead climbing, bouldering, and speed. A victory in speed and a fourth-place finish in lead were enough to give Spanish climber Alberto Ginés López the first men's Olympic gold medal. In the women's event, Slovenian Janja Garnbret confirmed her status as the most dominant competition climber of our time (at only age 22), winning the Olympic gold. Garnbret won nine World Cup bouldering competitions in a row from 2018 to 2021.

A revised climbing competition will be part of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, with a combined lead-bouldering event and a separate speed competition. In December 2020, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board recommended that climbing join the "core" Olympic program, meaning it is likely to be included in future Summer Games, starting with Los Angeles in 2028.

In another sign of sport climbing's commercial success, Planet Mountain reported in October that Norwegian climber Magnus Midtbø had surpassed 1 million subscribers to his YouTube channel.

OCTOBER

Laura Rogora (Italy, age 20) repeated Erebor (9b/+ or 5.15b/c) at Arco, Italy, possibly the hardest sport climb done yet by a woman. In 2020, Rogora redpointed a 9b route, becoming the second woman ever to climb the grade.

Two other hard redpoints in October may rewrite sport climbing history. Near Rifle, Colorado, Matty

Hong (USA) made the second ascent of Flex Luthor and said it deserved 9b/5.15b. (Hong climbed his first 9b in Spain in 2018.) Tommy Caldwell had established Flex Luthor way back in 2003 and did not grade the climb, saying only that it was harder than the nearby Kryp-tonite (9a/5.14d). Hong said some holds on Flex Luthor may have broken since Caldwell's ascent, making the route harder, but it seems likely the route was not only the first 5.15a in the United States but also possibly one of the first routes approaching 5.15b anywhere in the world.

In a similar development in England, at the very end of October, Will Bosi (Scotland) made the second ascent of Mutation at Raven Tor, first climbed in 1998 by Steve McClure. (At the time of Bosi's repeat, the climb was two months older than he was!) McClure rated Mutation 9a, but Bosi and other climbers who have ticked 9b and harder routes have said it must be at least 9a+ (5.15a). If the grade eventually is confirmed higher than 9a+, Mutation might have been the hardest sport climb in the world in 1998.

NOVEMBER

Enjoying some time outside in Spain and away from her training walls, Olympic champion Janja Garnbret onsighted Fish Eye (8c/5.14b) in Oliana, giving her the first 8c onsight by a woman. She repeated the feat just a few days later, onsighting American Hustle (8c), also at Oliana—an extraordinary end to a superb year for the young Slovenian climber.

Images



Janja Garnbret during the first 8c (5.14b) onsight by a woman: Fish Eye in Oliana, Spain.

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