



AAC Publications

Pika Glacier, The Throne, Oxidado Express

Alaska, Alaska Range, Central Alaska Range

On June 27, Nadine Lehner and I flew from Talkeetna to the Pika Glacier, prepared to glacier glamp with copious amounts of fresh comestibles. Paul Roderick of TAT dropped us off about a mile down-glacier from the busy flight-seeing landing zone, and we proceeded to make camp in between the Throne and Royal Tower.

After several days of climbing classic routes, Nadine and I were joined by Pedro Binfa, who had completed a full traverse of the Trolls on a previous trip (see AAJ 2016). Staring at the Throne, the three of us identified a steep but seemingly climbable line up the west face just to the left of a roof covered in bright green lichen. The line joined the northwest ridge about halfway up the formation.

On July 1, we started up. A short section of easy but unprotected face climbing led to a moderate crack system, topped by a very large and comfortable belay ledge (which we dubbed La Playa), a full 70m pitch off the snow. [Editor's Note: The team believes their route begins to the left of Swisser than Swiss Chocolate (10 pitches, 5.11+, see AAJ 2007), and to the right of a series of popular single-pitch cragging cracks.] We found a pin and nut and old cord on the ledge, the last sign of human passage on our route.

The pitch above La Playa was of very high quality, both in rock and movement, but featured large amounts of moss—we named it “Jardin de los Sueños.” A slab protected with small cams in a corner led to a section of 5.10 stemming and underclinging, with a short section of wet offwidth bringing us to the next belay (70m), just left of the large green roof. A third full 70m pitch went left (north), bypassing a 5.9 finger crack on the right to follow an offwidth behind a flake to a series of 5.9 steps. The pitch trended further left at a dirty corner to moderate, well-protected face climbing.

From here, we looked up at the spectacular northwest-facing headwall located about halfway up the northwest ridge. Several short pitches led us to its base. The climbing looked steep and unprotected, with no obvious crack systems to follow. We traversed northeast on moderate terrain, bypassing the headwall. Continuing on the northwest ridge toward the summit, several moderate pitches and one more steep, long pitch (5.10-) took us to the top of the last vertical step on the ridge just as the Alaskan summer sun dipped below the horizon. Several more pitches of easy fifth took us to the west summit, from which we descended The Lost Marsupial (5.8) on the south side back to the glacier, returning to our base camp 20 hours after we began.

We named the route Oxidado Express (1,500', 12 pitches, 5.10). Little Switzerland holds much new route potential — we'll be back!

— Rustam Lalkaka

Images



A foreshortened view of the Throne from base camp to the west. Oxidado Express starts left of the central rock scar and finishes along the left skyline.



The west face of the Throne off the Pika Glacier in the central Alaska Range, showing the line of Oxidado Express (1,500', 12 pitches, 5.10). Pedro Binfa, Rustam Lalkaka and Nadine Lehner climbed this new line at the beginning of July 2022.



Rustam Lalkaka on the easy 5th-class climbing to finish the route Oxidado Express. The Royal Tower is in the background.



Rustam Lalkaka, Nadine Lehner, and Pedro Binfa (L to R) on the summit of The Throne.



The west face of the Throne, showing the line of Oxidado Express, finishing along the northwest ridge.



The sun setting over the Pika Glacier from above the last difficult pitch of climbing on Oxidado Express. Sultana (Mt. Foraker) is visible to the right.



Looking up at the pitch on Oxidado Express that the team dubbed Jardin de los Sueños for the combination of high-quality rock and large amounts of moss.

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