



AAC Publications

Khor Ash-Sham Climbs

Oman, Musandam Peninsula

Various perspectives on the second pitch of Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b) on the southeast face of Jebel Shamm. Photo by Marius Rølland | @unrealmarius

From our campsite at the edge of the Khor Ash-Sham (Ash-Sham Fjord), on yet another deserted white-sand beach, we watched the sun sink low over the Strait of Hormuz. A single thought occupied our minds, and Aniek was the first to put it to words: “I don't want to leave tomorrow.” Aniek Lith (Netherlands), Marius Rølland (Norway), and I had just spent eight glorious days kayaking with dolphins, wading shin-deep through bioluminescent algae, climbing multi-pitch routes on virgin limestone, and giggling the nights away under a shimmering, star-filled sky. After the magic of the previous week, I wondered how anyone could ever leave.

The Musandam Peninsula is an Omani exclave that extends into the Strait of Hormuz from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), making up the northernmost point of the Arabian Peninsula. This mountainous region is called the “Norway of Arabia,” thanks the numerous fjords that gouge deeply into the landmass. It was the largest of these fjords, the 10-mile-long Khor Ash-Sham, that we explored for eight days in late January 2023. We were tipped off to the peninsula’s climbing potential by Mark Synnott’s 2013 AAJ report. Plus, the January before, we three had gotten a fair dose of suffering (including frostbite) during a first polar-night ascent of a Norwegian wall, and so we had decided to go someplace warmer this winter. Climbers most often access the Musandam Peninsula via motorboat charter, but Aniek’s desire to rely solely on kayaks made leaving from the port town of Khasab and exploring nearby Khor Ash-Sham the logical choice for us.

Climbers have been visiting the Musandam for upwards of 20 years, with regular DWS trips made by both Oman- and UAE-based climbers. While some longer routes have been established, the potential for new multi-pitch lines remains substantial. Just in Khor Ash-Sham alone, there were 15 miles of steep rock walls with no recorded ascents—until our visit.

During our time in the fjord, our team established two routes. The first, Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b), begins on the climber’s right of a prominent pillar and climbs around 12 pitches to a large cleft in the center of the southeast face of Jebel Shamm. Aniek and I climbed the route onsight and ground-up, leaving no fixed protection. Marius was kind enough to scramble up the south ridge and then graciously guide us down a walk-off route that would have been impossible to find in the dark. A few coves farther west, our second route, Taste the Paste (360m, III 6a+), climbs the centerline of the obvious prow feature on the southeast face of Qarn Shamm. Again, the climbing was done ground-up and onsight, and as we managed to find a lengthy and complex walk-off, no fixed protection was left in place. Major kudos go to Marius, as this was his first ever multi-pitch climb!

New-routing in the Musandam has its share of difficulties. Both routes we established proved to be longer, steeper, and more difficult than estimated from the ground. Sense of scale proved difficult to grasp in the new environment, and while the rock generally provided ample cracks for gear placements, the limestone was often poor, requiring care and a light touch to climb safely. In the Khor Ash-Sham, the potential for DWS is quite low. For the adventurous, roped climbing opportunities abound, most notably on the long walls that make up the southeast faces of Qarn and Jebel Shamm, and the walls near the village of Sibi. (Please note, though, that official policy forbids travelers from entering the villages along the fjord.)

On our last morning, we paddled away from our peaceful oasis and back toward civilization. A handful of hours later, we were in the bustling world of downtown Dubai, where a very different type of adventure awaited us.

– **Alan Goldbetter, Finland**

Images



Aniek Lith (front) and Alan Goldbetter paddle into the Khor Ash-Sham, towing their pack-raft trailer, filled with water and gear for a week's adventure.



A view of the Khor Ash-Sham from high on Jebel Shamm.



Aniek Lith leads the final, and crux, pitch of Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b) as the sun sets.



Aniek Lith topping out the final, and crux, pitch of the new route Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b) as Marius Rølland greets her with a high five.



Alan Goldbetter following the final pitch of the new route Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b).



Alan Goldbetter gets in some rest-day DWS on the southern side of Khor Ash-Sham.



Aniek Lith on the sharp end on Taste the Paste (360m, III 6a+).



Various perspectives on Alan Goldbetter climbing while Aniek Lith belays from the top of pitch two on Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b).



The team: Aniek Lith, Marius Rølland, and Alan Goldbetter (L to R), having just arrived at the first evening's camp by the Khor Asha Sham.



A rough route line of Good from Far, Far from Good (400m, IV 6b) on the southeast face of Jebel Shamm.



A rough route line of Taste the Paste (360m, III 6a+) on the southeast face of Qarn Shamm, with Aniek Lith (left) and Alan Goldbetter on the approach.

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