



AAC Publications

Mt. Asgard, Loki's Mischief

Canada, Nunavut, Baffin Island, Auyuittuq National Park

On June 23, as Waldo Etherington, Leo Houlding, and I flew into Pangnirtung (Pangniqtuuq), pure excitement surged as we gazed upon the magnificent valley we would be exploring for the next month and a half, contrasted by trepidation as we observed the first of many hurdles. The fjord was still frozen, but large leads crossed the ice, preventing travel by boat or snow machine. This meant an additional 20-mile hike just to reach the trailhead. The initial miles proved to be the most challenging, with deep, boggy tundra, difficult river crossings, and heavy packs.

During the arduous approach to Mt. Asgard (2,015m), we crossed the Arctic Circle and retrieved a gear cache dropped by outfitter Peter Kilabuk earlier that winter on a snow machine. After seven challenging days, we reached Summit Lake, which would serve as our base camp.

We spent about a dozen days shuttling gear and waiting out storms, hoping to climb the north side of Asgard. But continuous rainy weather made that impossible. Remaining optimistic, we established a new camp at the northeast toe of Asgard's North Tower.

Right of the classic 1972 route (Braithwaite-Hennek-Nunn-Scott), we eyed a line of striking discontinuous splitters up the center of the east buttress. The line appeared challenging for the first 200m and dried out faster than anything else around. We picked away at it whenever the weather allowed. On pitch two, I quested left through mantels and flakes, hand-drilling our only bolt of the route from a stance and placing beaks for protection. Pitch four proved to be a challenging beak seam that Waldo aided through the rain at A3.

Nearing the bottom of our food supply, we seized a weather window to attempt our route to the top. I top-roped the fourth-pitch seam at 5.13-, then Leo and I alternated leads in blocks, climbing long pitches of mostly 5.11 in a fix-and-follow style, while Waldo, in hero style, juggled with a large backpack of bivy gear. We slept on ledges at the top of pitch nine, as the sun traveled slightly under the northern horizon before rising again.

After 12 new pitches, we connected with the Scott Route and followed it to the summit, free climbing the wet crux offwidth and completing a total of 29 pitches. We called our 500m alternate start to the 1972 route **Loki's Mischief (total of 1,300m, 5.11+ R A3)**. [Several other lines have been completed on the lower east buttress of the North Tower, including Line of Credit (Condon-Easton- Prohaska, 1998) and Whiskey Gonzales (Favresse-Favresse, 2009), both to the right of Loki's Mischief, and the Brazeau-Walsh Route (2009) to the left.]

Experiencing the greatness of Baffin when the weather cooperates, we were hungry for more but out of food and time. The expedition concluded with Loki teasing us one last time, with splitter weather for our walk out.

—Wilson Cutbirth, USA

Images



The first 11 pitches of Loki's Mischief (500m of new climbing, 5.11+ R A3). Prior routes up this buttress are not shown.



The North Tower of Mt. Asgard from the Turner Glacier. The 2023 route climbed the prominent buttress in the center.



View from the summit of Mt. Asgard after completing Loki's Mischief on the northeast side of the North Tower.

Article Details

Author	Wilson Cutbirth
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	170
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions