



AAC Publications

Atomfjella, Extended Ski Tour and Various Ascents

Norway, Svalbard

The southeast ridge of Chadwickryggen gave 1,100 meters of rock, mixed, and snow climbing. Photo by Ed Luke

In April and May of 2024, Ed Luke and Sasha Doyle (both U.K.) completed a 27-day self-supported journey across central Spitsbergen, in the Svalbard archipelago, establishing three new alpine routes in the seldom-visited Atomfjella mountains. Their trip, spanning more than 300 kilometers of sledge hauling and kiting, proved equal parts punishing and rewarding.

The pair set out from Longyearbyen on April 11 with sleds weighing nearly 100 kilograms each. They had hoped to power their travel predominantly by kite, but days of frustratingly fickle winds in the valleys forced them to laboriously haul their gear up a steeper route onto the Fimbulisen ice cap, where they finally found favorable winds.

Fifteen days after leaving Longyearbyen—a week later than planned—Luke and Doyle established a base camp on the Upper Smutsbreen Glacier (79°05'10"N, 16°51'45"E). Over the next four days, in calm, sunny weather, they established three new routes:

- Southeast ridge of Chadwickryggen (1,638m, 79°05'46"N, 16°45'52"E) on April 26. A long and complex alpine line (1,100m, Scottish IV,5) involving rock slabs, loose chimneys, a tower with a 60-meter abseil, and snow ramps leading to the final crest.
- Slush Puppy (400m, Scottish VII,7), a mixed route on the east side of Westbyfjellet (1,564m, 79°04'03"N, 16°48'33"E), climbed April 28. The crux was exposed slab climbing near the top of the face.
- Midnight Express (750m, PD-), a snow and ice line on Chadwickryggen's southeast face, climbed in the evening of April 29.

With food supplies dwindling and valley snow melting earlier than expected, the team began their return journey in early May. They made a ski ascent of Svalbard's highest peak, Newtontoppen (1,712m), on May 2, then conditions forced them to descend toward the coast, where fresh polar bear tracks kept nerves sharp. After a strenuous push to the sea ice of Billefjorden, on May 7 they were able to board a tourist vessel bound for Longyearbyen. [See AAJ 2008 for reports from two expeditions—a Slovenian team and a German-Swiss party—that climbed many new routes on Chadwickryggen and other peaks in Atomfjella]

—Maarten van Haeren, AAJ, with information from Ed Luke, U.K.

Images



Sasha Doyle flying across Sassendalen with her snowkite and pulks in tow.



Ed Luke waiting for the wind at the edge of the ice cap. A turning point for the pair's progress North toward the Atomfjella mountains.



Arriving at the team's Atomfjella base camp.



The southeast ridge of Chadwickryggen gave 1,100 meters of rock, mixed, and snow climbing.



Sasha Doyle on the southeast ridge of Chadwickryggen.



Fresh bear tracks on the sea ice as the pair headed to the boat pick-up, having not slept and skinned

all night instead to make the rendezvous.

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