



AAC Publications

Mt. Huntington, Heart of Stone

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

In the spring of 2021, my wife, Ines Papert, and I stayed in Alaska for three months, as the beginning of a larger journey down the entire length of the Pan-American Highway. At the beginning of April we headed into the Revelations, where we got totally shut down because of weather and conditions. After a short break in Seward, luck turned in our favor in Denali National Park.

On April 22, after flying through the Ruth Glacier to help us scope the walls, Paul Roderick dropped us below Mt. Huntington's west face, as it seemed to have the most promising conditions from what we were able to see from the plane.

We set up our base camp and quickly went to work on the Colton-Leach (1981) early the following morning. We were relieved to find good conditions and quickly progressed on moderate ice, many times stretching the pitches up to 150m. Being quick paid off, as the snow ramp in the middle of the route was still frozen when we reached it and enabled us to continue at a good pace.

At the end of the ramps we zigzagged through the rocky section and climbed a short section of really cool steep cracks in perfect granite to the snow flank above. Here we found a trail from a party that had climbed the Harvard Route a couple of days prior. We smoothly followed it to the summit ridge and eventually the top. It was really calm and warm at the summit, but we quickly started with the descent as we hadn't brought any bivy gear.

Rappelling the West Face Couloir, I kept looking at the steep wall to the left of us. The rock looked very solid and full of good looking cracks. The idea of climbing this part of the wall seemed very attractive, but at that moment we didn't seriously think of doing it, as we were still preoccupied with getting back to our tent in the last light of the day.

The next day, while relaxing in the warm sun and thinking about what to try next, we got a very promising weather forecast for the next three days from Jack Tackle, who very kindly shared his knowledge with us while we were in Alaska. The forecast for warm temperatures seemed perfect for the steep rock wall that we'd seen on the descent.

We even had climbing shoes with us in base camp, because we hadn't known where we would end up when we flew into the mountains. We relatively quickly decided to try the new route after one more rest day. This time we packed bivy gear, more cams, and the rock shoes. From what we'd seen, we thought we'd climb rock for a few pitches to reach an obvious mixed ramp system. We decided on a late start to use the warmth of the afternoon sun for rock climbing.

Cloudless blue sky accompanied us as we left our camp for the second time at 11 a.m. on April 26. We found perfect conditions on the initial snow slope below the West Face Couloir and arrived smoothly to the steep wall about 300m above the bergschrund, just when the sun hit it. At the place where we started climbing new terrain, we spotted a big heart feature on a blank granite face. It felt almost too sweet for us—a climbing couple—and we both laughed at the belay.

But to our surprise the crack system that seemed the most logical was filled with ice, strangely

almost the same color as the rock because of all the dirt mixed into it—which is why we couldn't see the ice from a distance. The rock shoes stayed in the backpack and we continued in full-on mixed climbing mode.

The climbing was steep and almost every pitch had a kind of a boulder problem crux. Some of them were quite powerful, but luckily had mostly decent protection. At that point there was already water running down the face and the ice became really rotten and slushy.

In the last pitch before reaching a right trending ramp system we had a first little shock when Ines pulled off a loose hold and just barely managed to catch herself. The ramp itself went very quickly for a half rope-length, and then I got stuck for quite some time on one of those boulder cruxes. I underestimated it and started climbing up it with a backpack. After lots of cleaning of useless snow and trying to find decent placements in thin ice, I found myself in a really awkward position where I couldn't take off my pack to hang it on a piece. I started reaching as far as I could toward the first okay looking ice, but I couldn't reach it.

I hammered my lower tool as deep as I could into the ice and grabbed it at the head. With this extra reach I could just barely reach the next bit of ice and I thought I had it the ice disintegrated and my tool ripped.

I was o for a moment, and I still don't know how I managed to catch my lower tool and not actually fall. After some breathing, I tried again and that time I was able to luckily sneak through the section.

The rest of the ramp went really well with some great ice and good hooking in the cracks until the very last pitch before the summit snowfield. This pitch took almost two hours of digging on the side of a huge mushroom and with quite bad and run-out protection—definitely the most serious pitch of the route, especially as it was already dark. In two more rope stretches we reached a perfect bivy spot below a big block. It was already three in the morning and we felt tired, but a full moon came out and we couldn't go to sleep for almost two more hours as the whole scene was so nice.

The next morning we left our bivy site with only one backpack and reached the summit of Huntington at 11 a.m. We sat there for almost an hour and couldn't believe how warm it was. In any direction we looked we could only see wild Alaskan mountains and started wondering where our journey would take us next.

The descent of the West Face Couloir went smoothly because we knew it already and we reached our base camp in the afternoon for an early dinner.

After checking with Jack Tackle and Mark Westman, we figured out that we climbed a new route. After the initial snow slopes, we climbed 20 pitches of new terrain before joining other routes on the summit snowfields. The feature that perfectly marks the start of our route gave the route its name: Heart of Stone (1,050m, M7 90°).

We would like to thank Jack Tackle and Mark Westman for their help and knowledge about Alaska that they shared with us.

— Luka Lindič, Slovenia

Images



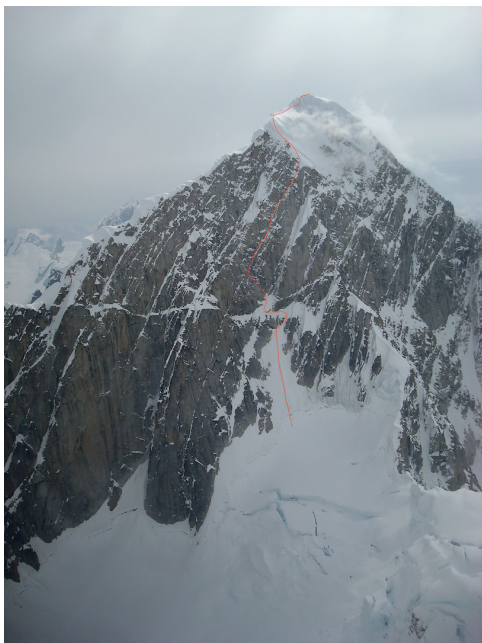
Ines Papert traversing the wild summit ridge of Mt. Huntington during the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°).



Luka Lindič coming up the final plateau to the summit of Mt. Huntington during the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°).



Luka Lindič heading into a steep ice ramp partway up Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°) on the west face of Alaska's Mt. Huntington.



The west face of Mt. Huntington, showing the line of Heart of Stone (1,050m, M7 90°); the route begins on the West Face Couloir. Three days before starting this new route, Luka Lindič and Ines Papert climbed the Colton-Leach Route, which takes the most prominent diagonal line to the left of Heart of Stone.



Ines Papert and Luka Lindič on the summit of Mt. Huntington after making the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1,050m, M7 90°). The route begins near the base of the West Face Couloir and climbs steep rock and ice runnels to rejoin the WFC below the summit ridge.



Ines Papert drytooling up steep rock during the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1,050m, M7 90°) on the west face of Mt. Huntington. The route continues to the visible snow and ice ramp to her right.



The starting point of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°), taken from the base of the West Face Couloir on Mt. Huntington. The heart-shaped rock scar that gives the route its name is visible just above the snowline.



Luka Lindič tackling steep mixed terrain during the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1,050m, M7 90°) on the west face of Mt. Huntington in the central Alaska Range.



Ines Papert tackles the first rappel down from the summit ridge of Mt Huntington after making the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°).



Ines Papert following up a portion of the prominent ramp system that defines the middle portion of

Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°) on the west face of Mt. Huntington in the central Alaska Range.



Luka Lindić heading up one of the route's cruxes—a thin corner with intermittent blobs of deteriorating ice—during the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°) on the west face of Mt. Huntington in the central Alaska Range.



Luka Lindić cruising up the snow slopes below the west face of Mt. Huntington on his way to the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°).



Ines Papert heading up to the bergschrund below the west face of Mt. Huntington during the first ascent of Heart of Stone (1050m, M7 90°).

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