



AAC Publications

Northern Sun Spire: An all-women's sail-and-climb expedition

Greenland, East Greenland, Renland

After a year of preparation, we set sail on June 20 from La Rochelle, France, on the 15m yacht Northabout. We were a team of eight women. Four were sailors: captain Marta Guemes (Spain) and crew Caroline Dehais and Alix Jaekkel (both from France) and Maria Sol Massera (Argentina). Three were climbers: Capucine Cotteaux (France), Nadia Royo (Spain), and me. There was also our photographer, Ramona Waldner (Austria). We had food for three months and gear for an unclimbed rock wall.

Stuck in the Faroe Islands in strong storms, we began to doubt we'd ever make it to Greenland. Then a short weather window allowed us to sail to Iceland, where we were again stuck, this time for a week. Eventually we arrived on the east coast of Greenland and were forced to wait again, around 30km south of our destination, Scoresby Sund, which was blocked by pack ice. At least here I managed to paraglide.

Six weeks after we left France, and after navigating through a labyrinth of ice, we reached Renland, where the sailors deposited the climbers on a beach opposite the Bear Islands. We had only 10 days before we would have to set sail again. Our goal was the unclimbed east face of Northern Sun Spire (1,527m, 71°10'32.10"N, 25°48'37.44"W), a peak climbed in 2019 by a British party via the much easier west face (AAJ 2020).

We shuttled our gear to the wall over two days through a complex series of crevasses. Then another setback: Bad weather forced us to remain in base camp, where a polar bear climbed out of the water just 50m from us. Our screams were enough to frighten him into running away. (We also carried a rifle and had practiced shooting before the expedition.) Two days later, we hiked to the wall and climbed the first two pitches. The granite was good quality.

After another two pitches the next day, the wall became steeper and the climbing more demanding. The maximum difficulties were around 7b+. We switched leads, and while the leader sometimes had to aid, the followers could nearly free every pitch. We fixed 300m of rope and rappelled to the base of the wall to sleep.

A new forecast predicted we had only one and a half days until the next snowstorm, and it seemed nearly impossible to reach the top in so little time. Only a few hours later, we were jumaring our fixed ropes. Above, we encountered some wet and broken rock, making our progress slow. After four more pitches, at the top of pitch 11, we reached the first little ledge where we could spend the night, two of us in portaledge and one on the ledge itself.

Next morning, August 7, we woke to a sea of clouds, which made us wonder if the weather was moving in early. We set off climbing as fast as possible through amazing orange granite, and after six pitches at 6a–6b, reached the upper south ridge. We had climbed the wall despite all the setbacks, doubts, and challenges. However, the approaching weather didn't give us time to scramble to the summit. We quickly began our rappel descent, using slings, nuts, and piton anchors (no bolts were placed on the route). When we reached the ground it started to rain, and later this turned to snow. We named the route Via Sedna (780m of climbing, 16 pitches, 7b+ A0).

It took four weeks of sailing to get back to France. In all, we had traveled 4,000 nautical miles. While the world of sailing and expedition climbing is still male dominated, we enjoyed mastering the challenges of the expedition as an all-female team—a dream team. We want to encourage everybody to follow their dreams, and we hope to inspire other women to take the unknown path, because everything is possible.

— **Caro North, Switzerland**

Images



The Via Sedna expedition team aboard Northabout.



Caro North during the first ascent of Via Sedna, Northern Sun Spire.



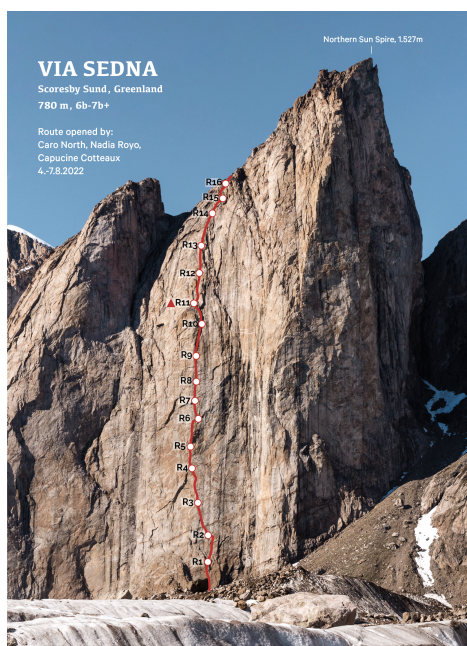
Caro North leading, with Capucine Cotteaux and Nadia Royo on belay, during the first ascent of Via Sedna, Northern Sun Spire.



Capucine Cotteaux during the first ascent of Via Sedna, Northern Sun Spire.



The glacier just north of the drop-off point in Renland with the Bear Islands behind.



Via Sedna on the east face of Northern Sun Spire.

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