



AAC Publications

Oqatssut Wall, Fram, Winter First Ascent

Greenland, West Greenland, Uummannaq Region

Pawel Haldas and I quickly learned that the temperature in West Greenland varies enormously in winter, and speed is often key to success when one's access is dependent on sea ice. Our original goals lay on the walls of Storen, Uummannaq, and Agpat islands, but our local guide advised against them, warning that we could be stranded by melting ice. Instead, we set off on snowmobiles into the depths of the fjords, toward longer-lasting ice and walls that had been seen by local hunters.

We settled on a 6km-long cliff, locally known as Oqatssut Wall (70°42'13.82"N, 51°13'48.07"W), on the south coast of Qaqugdlugssuit peninsula, northeast of Storen. The right edge of the face, dropping directly into the fjord, was named Goliath Buttress by an American-Belgian team that climbed two routes there in 2014 (AAJ 2015).

On February 9, we pitched tents on the surface of the fjord, attaching them to the ice with screws. For cooking, we used ice from a nearby floe, as both the snow and fjord surface were salty. The following day, we packed our gear and headed for the southwest face, roughly 750m to the left of the 2014 routes. It took 14 days to climb to the top.

During the initial days the weather was sunny, but we experienced temperatures down to -40°C. On the lower wall, the climbing was not technically difficult yet proved very demanding due to loose rock. Sedimentary and metamorphic rocks prevail in this area, but the black bands of rock cutting completely across the face at two distinct points proved to be poor granite, with a high risk of spontaneous rockfall. Because of the brittle rock, we placed 12mm bolts at each belay for rappelling and hauling.

Seven hours of daylight meant we were unable to complete more than one or two pitches each day, either using aid or free climbing up to M5. Climbing at night was out of the question due to the cold. Every day we were on the verge of frostbite to toes and hands. A moment's carelessness would have ended our expedition. Despite the cold and wind, the weather was fine and we made the most of each day. One of us would lead the whole day, wearing light clothes, while the other belayed in a down jacket and trousers. We fixed ropes progressively up about half of the route and slept at our fjord camp.

On the 18th, we hauled all our gear and the portaledge to the top of pitch nine, where there was a good snow shelf. We deliberately had not bivouacked lower for fear of damaging the ledge with falling debris.

After passing the second black rock band, Pawel took the lead on a demanding A3 pitch, while I stood beneath booming flakes, feeling like a condemned man at the guillotine. Bat-hook moves led to safer formations, and after a couple of hours, Pawel finished the pitch. I was proud of him: We now had the chance of reaching the top the next day—the last chance before a predicted spell of warming and 110 kph winds.

February 19 was windless and warmer than usual. I quickly led two long pitches of easy aid to the top of the wall, where we untied and walked up to the summit. One of the ice floes trapped in the frozen fjord reminded us of the ship Fram (the three-masted vessel that was used by Norwegian polar

explorers Amundsen and Nansen), which may once have sailed below this wall. We named our new line Fram (700m of climbing, 17 pitches, M5 A3 C1).

We descended to the last bivouac and prepared for the next day's rappels—time was not on our side. Fortunately, we were able to reach our tents on the fjord by mid-day, finding them already sitting on melting pulp. We were collected by snowmobile and driven to Uummannaq. An hour after our arrival, the ice cracked and the route we had traveled from the wall closed. Two days later, much of the fjord had melted out.

This is likely the first big wall climbed in winter in Greenland.

—Marcin Tomaszewski, Poland

Images



The line of Fram (700m of climbing) on the Oqatssut Wall, Qaqugdlugssuit Peninsula.



Oqatssut Wall on the south side of the Qaqugdlugssuit Peninsula. Fram (700m of climbing) is marked. The right edge of this wall, falling into the sea, is the Goliath Buttress, climbed by two east-facing routes in 2014.



Marcin Tomaszewski during the first ascent of Fram, Oqatssut Wall.



Marcin Tomaszewski on the lower half of Fram, Oqatssut Wall.



Tents on the ice of the frozen Uummannaq Fjord ice as seen from Oqatssut Wall.



Oqatssut Wall from the approach up a snow-covered scree slope above Uummannaq Fjord. The new route, Fram, starts toward the right edge of the picture.



Pawel Haldas about to launch into a wide flake crack on Oqatssut Wall.

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