



AAC Publications

Klokkinden and Rulten, New Routes

Norway, Nordland, Lofoten

For about the last decade, I've made a yearly pilgrimage to the Arctic north, where each winter I hope to squeeze some climbing into rare days off from ski guiding. The Nordland, more than anywhere else I've climbed, is a hard place for weather, conditions, free time, and the right partner to align, but sometimes they do.

When I met Stian Bruvoll, a strong, young guide and native of Narvik, in 2019, our first day out yielded an excellent new route. Due to the pandemic and other issues, we didn't reconnect until 2023. Instead of my usual attempts to schedule climbing around work, I gave myself the 40th birthday present of a few weeks off from work to climb. Unfortunately, as my departure date for Norway neared, I received a string of disheartening dispatches. Lofoten's typically mercurial weather had taken a turn for the worse, and I postponed my trip as the rain fell, melting—according to Stian—every piece of ice in Lofoten.

I moved my ticket to the first day in the forecast when the temperatures looked to drop below freezing, and by the time I arrived, it was obvious that the the Magic Islands, as Lofoten is known, were working their spells. All of that water turned to ice, and in the weeks that followed, Stian and I were gripped by a veritable feeding frenzy of climbing. Even when our free time elapsed, we were out attempting new routes by headlamp after work. In the end, we established three genuinely high-quality and difficult new lines, all of which required major efforts.

We began by pulling on a thread I had seen years ago during a scouting mission to Lofoten's west islands. A few hours' drive through the morning of March 8 landed us at a dark pullout by the side of the E10 below Fjøsdaalen, some 12km north of Reine. We decided to make our approach on foot instead of skis, a decision we'd regret for the entire three hours it took us to reach the face, and again on our return. The tortured post-holing brought us to the northeastern shoulder of Klokkinden (860m) and its east summit—the spire I had seen previously.

A host of icy veins split the dark facade of the 400m north face, with the two most continuous emanating from a shared approach gully. We decided upon the one going right from the top of the gully to the main summit of Klokkinden.

A few hundred feet of snowy wallowing brought us to a belay below an enormous chockstone, and as I racked up, I realized with a shock that one of the nuts attaching the pick of an ice tool was missing. Not having any spares, I reasoned that the bolt, which was still present, was essentially functional, and all I needed to do was keep it in place. I exhausted half a roll of athletic tape in that effort and, with considerable embarrassment, set off.

A pitch of quintessential Lofoten rock, snow, and turf led up and rightward. At the ramp's end, a finger of ice choked the base of the gully system we had seen from below, looking steep and a little austere, but climbable. Reaching that, however, involved negotiating a blank section of overhanging rock. A weakness to the left seemed the most promising, but proved too steep and dry to yield to my attempts. Instead, I moved right, where, after hanging my pack, I was able to stand as tall as I could and tap a pick into the glaze of ice that barely reached the edge of the overhang. It took several minutes and half-hearted attempts to push aside the consequences of a fall and work up the nerve to pull over the lip. When I did, it involved some of the more desperate campused swinging I've done,

followed by a pumpier than expected section of climbing through the drips above.

Luckily, this granted us entry to the runnel we'd seen from below, which in turn brought us to the summit slopes via a succession of ludicrously good ice pitches, most of which Stian led. Unluckily (though perhaps unsurprisingly), my tape did not hold, and the pick of my tool began shifting disconcertingly. I executed another round of repairs, this time with bailing wire in place of the bolt, and set off on the steep sheet of ice at the apex of the ice hose. What looked like a straightforward lead turned out to be more vertical than expected and at times no more than 10cm thick, the difficulties compounded by my frightfully wonky tool and Stian's frightfully dull screws. Copious swearing, both internal and shouted, found us on top of the pitch after almost a full 70m.

We topped out as sunset lit the islands in a stunning palette of red, black, and white. We descended by traversing until we were able to rappel down the peak's steep but short northeast wall, then downclimbed snow slopes to the shoulder from which we had started. We reached the car after 17 hours on the go, and named our route **Beyond Cod and Eagle (400m, WI5 M8)**. [This is the line shown in the photo above; the arrow shows the start of *Nowhere's Finest*, described below.]

The morning of March 11 again found us driving through the dark toward Klokketinden, aiming for the left of the two lines we'd scoped on the north face. This time we used skis and found the approach considerably less painful.

Upon reaching the face, we set off up the approach gully and were greeted by a firehose of graupel powerful enough to hasten a belay. Stian led out to the left and into a classy mixed corner system, which again offered pitch after pitch of remarkable climbing on mostly moderate ice. That brought us to a shoulder below the east summit, which presented a compact and formidable horn about 150m high. I led into a series of iced corners, and with some considerable hardship, we managed to stitch together a fairly direct line to the summit through continued wind and snow.

We reached the top half plastered in rime and as the light was fading, but were heartened by already knowing the way down. We again rappelled and downclimbed to the shoulder where we'd left our skis, then enjoyed an excellent powder run down past our bootpack. We arrived at the car 16.5 hours after leaving it, and traded leads on the final pitches of driving as we pushed through the storm toward home, making for two 20-plus-hour days in close succession. We called this one *Nowhere's Finest (400m, WI4 M6)*, and again believe it would be a classic anywhere with climbers.

A few days later, we tried and failed to climb a rarely formed ice line on Gandalf, near Henningsvær, retreating soaking wet and quite late at night. A few days after that, we boarded a fisherman's boat to cross the Austnesfjorden from Vestpollen to Rulten. Known as the "Eiger of Lofoten," the northwest face of Rulten is one of the area's most imposing walls. Finding a way across the fjord had always stopped me from trying it, but Stian got the beta on a boat after repeating the classic *Syklotronen* on the face while I was busy working.

We began in the same series of runnels that Marko Prezelj and Bjørn-Eivind Artnun took on their 2009 ascent of *The Bullocks (600m, M6+)*, then continued direct where they branched left. Outlandishly good pitches led up to a gendarme at three-quarters height on the face. Where previous routes had veered right here, we made a rappel from the gendarme into a hidden couloir between it and the headwall, and continued directly.

A few pitches of challenging mixed climbing brought us to an uncomfortable, semi-hanging belay and the route's crux: a terribly overhung, exposed, and rimed slot, which gave way eventually to ice. I was very pleased not to draw the lead, as the meager protection required both creativity to place and a level of faith I would have found hard to muster. Stian dispatched it in great style, and with both of our packs and howling biceps, I barely managed to follow. Were there any gear to pull on, I surely would have. This brought us to easier ground, which we were able to connect to the summit ridge and on to

the top, which we reached once more as an otherworldly sunset enveloped us. As Marko wrote in 2010, "Perhaps the best description would be the single word from Bjørn when I joined him on the summit of Rulten: MAGIC!"

From the top, we descended the western ridge and rappelled Syklotronen, benefiting greatly from Stian's knowing the way. After we skied back to shore, the boatman met us with tea and a banana, and we reached Vestpollen about 20 hours after leaving. We named our route No Sleep till Rulten (600m, WI4+ M7), though I had to explain the Beastie Boys before Stian agreed.

On April 1, I flew home. A few days later, Stian messaged me to say that spring had come and the climbing season was over. I told him that was okay by me, and that I too could be done with alpine climbing for a while. Which reminds me, I need to buy my plane ticket for this year. The islands still have some magic left, I suspect, and I'll take as much as I can get.

– **Chris Wright, USA**

Images



Chris Wright climbing steep ice after surmounting a blank rock bulge on Beyond Cod and Eagle, having hung his pack to lighten his load.



Approaching the north face of Klokketinden. Part of Beyond Cod and Eagle (400m, WI5 M8) is shown. The arrow marks Nowhere's Finest (WI4 M6), hidden to the left. Both routes were climbed in March 2023.



Stian Bruvoll on the lower part of Nowhere's Finest on Klokketinden.



Chris Wright climbing the thin ice and mixed of the upper part of Nowhere's Finest.



Stian Bruvoll on the upper ice hose pitches on Beyond Cod and Eagle.



Chris Wright following the lower mixed corners on Nowhere's Finest.



Below the north face of Klokkinden: Nowhere's Finest follows the left weakness, while Beyond Cod and Eagle follows the right-trending ramp to ice. Both routes were climbed in March 2023.



Known ice and mixed routes on the northwest face of Rulten, including the 2023 route No Sleep till Rulten (600m, WI4+ M7) in yellow.



Stian Bruvoll starting the crux pitch of No Sleep till Rulten, an overhanging, rime-covered slot.

Article Details

Author	Chris Wright
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	225
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions