

Anne Arran leads 5.11+ splitter cracks on the 14th pitch of Bloody Mary on Denbor Brakk. *John Arran*

*Denbor Brakk, Bloody Mary, mostly free ascent; Zang Brakk, Welcome to Crackistan.* Seeking free-climbable routes in the rock spire wonderland of the Nangma Valley, we first examined the left side of Shingu Charpa's east face, but when poor weather made free climbing unlikely we turned our attention to lower, steeper walls that would hold less snow. We hoped to warm up and acclimatize with a three-day free-climbing attempt on the slabby left-hand side of Zang Brakk (4,800m), but a stream swollen with glacial runoff proved uncrossable, so we focused our binoculars on the closer Denbor Brakk (4,800m).

After scoping the southwest face we chose to attempt the Czech route Bloody Mary (Jonak-Satava, 2004), which already had free pitches up to UIAA IX- (5.12c). We repeated the 500m climb in a seven-day capsule-style ascent. Of the route's two aid pitches, the first (A1) went on natural gear at E6 6b (5.12c), just left of the original offwidth roof; the other (A2) we freed on top-rope at 5.12d, initially somewhat right of the knifeblade aid line. Although we did not want to add bolts to an existing aid pitch without the consent of the first ascensionists, John feels the addition of two more bolts to the pitch would be in keeping with the nature of the other hard pitches, and would make the climb one of the best, hardest, and most varied free lines in the region.

We then returned to Zang Brakk, looking for a free-climbable line up the southeast pillar. An Austrian team had free-climbed to half-height at 5.12d (now thought to be 5.12c), before running into blind seams. By opting for a variant line and climbing two pitches of E6/7 (5.12d), we onsighted all-free almost to the top of the pillar. However, hampered by five days of unsettled, snowy weather, we ran completely out of food and water, and thus did not have time to free the crux pitch, which we had aided on tiny knifeblades and beaks at A3. John worked the moves on top-rope and said the pitch would likely go free at around E7 6b (5.13b), and might need a bolt or two for protection. We pressed on to the summit on day nine. As nearly all of the 500m route's 17 pitches involve hard crack climbing (including six pitches of 5.12), Welcome to Crackistan must rank as one of the most continuously hard jamming routes on any big wall, and now awaits a completely free ascent.

ANNE and JOHN ARRAN, UK

*Zang Brakk, Czech Start Canadian Pinish.* I was coming to the end of my summer guiding season in the Alps when I applied for the John Lauchlan Award to pursue my dream of exploring new routes in the Karakoram. After Lilla Molnar—a good friend and solid climber—agreed to

join me, we began thinking about an objective. Sean Isaac bestowed his knowledge, and we decided on the Ladyfinger and Hunza Peak.

However, after we arrived and trekked for a long day in the remarkable area of Ultar Meadows, we decided to abandon Ladyfinger and Hunza for safer and quicker approaches in the Hushe Valley. We were fortunate to find a conveniently located and spectacular base camp up the Nangma Valley, above which many talented climbers have left a legacy of hard aid and spicy free climbs. We stumbled upon the unfinished east face of Zang Brakk (4,800m), where a Czech team had abandoned a line earlier this summer. [See note below.] The objective seemed to fit our window of weather, ability, and motivation.

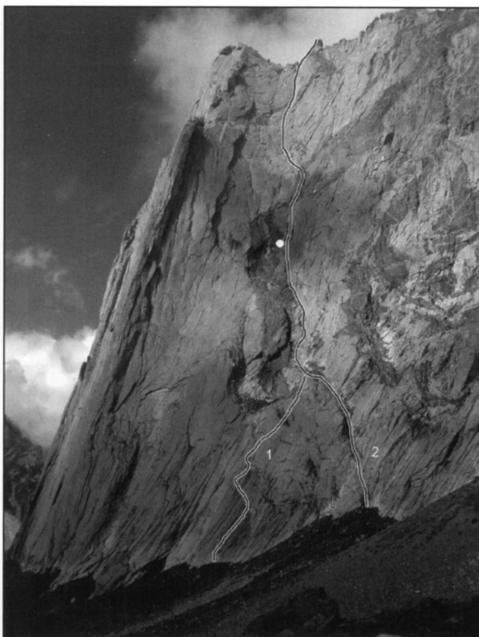
The first day of our ascent, September 19, was blessed with sunshine, and we added two pitches to the Czechs' initial three. Lilla won the day's crux with a tricky A2 butt-crack pitch. After waiting out a couple of bad weather days, which provided rest and a chance to scope the summit ridge and descent route, we charged back up to our

previous high point in deteriorating conditions on September 22. Wearing everything we had, we climbed mostly 5.10 A1 for the next six pitches. Actually, we didn't climb so much as extricate plants and harvest dirt. If extreme gardening were an Olympic sport, we'd be medal contenders. The rock itself was brilliantly clean, slightly featured granite. The cracks have the potential to be just as remarkable, with rigorous cleaning.

As we neared the summit ridge it snowed and got dark. We had to traverse the ridge in rapidly deteriorating conditions, climbing up and rappelling down several times before we were able to put the rope away. From the top we descended slowly, with a bit of backtracking, and arrived at base camp 16 hours after we began.

Lilla coined the name Czech Start Canadian Pinish for our route (500m, TD- 5.10 A2, 11 pitches) because our guide, Imran, was not used to the small appetites of picky white girls and would often ask if we had "pinished our dinner." This route would go free at 5.11-. You could replace the A2 pitch with a 5.10+ offwidth with a steep exit.

JENNIFER OLSON, *Canada*



The east face of Zang Brakk (4,800m), showing the Czech start (1) and Canadian start (2) to the route Czech Start Canadian Pinish (500m, TD- 5.10 A2). The circle marks the Czech high point. The new route Welcome to Crackistan (500m, TD- 5.12d A3) ascends the right side of the prominent pillar on the left. *Jennifer Olson*

*Drifka, completion of southwest ridge to west summit; other ascents and attempts.* The Czech expedition of Ondrej Baszczynski, Martin Klonfar, Ondrej Martinek, Petr Novosad, Martin Simunek, and Jiri Splichal spent most of August in the Nangma Valley. Three climbers repeated