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Marek Raganowicz solos two new routes on the Ship's Prow in Baffin Island

Posted on: May 25, 2017

Derek Franz

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[This story has been updated to clarify the details of Raganowicz's original plans. —Ed]

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Though he intended to do some solo climbing, Marek Raganowicz hadn't planned on spending the entire six weeks alone among the polar bears on Baffin Island between mid-March and May, but that's what happened after his partner, Marcin Tomaszewski, had some problems with light frostbite on his toes and had to leave a couple weeks after they arrived at Sam Ford Fjord on March 3. His original hope was to complete a climb with Tomaszewski in March, solo in April, and then rendezvous

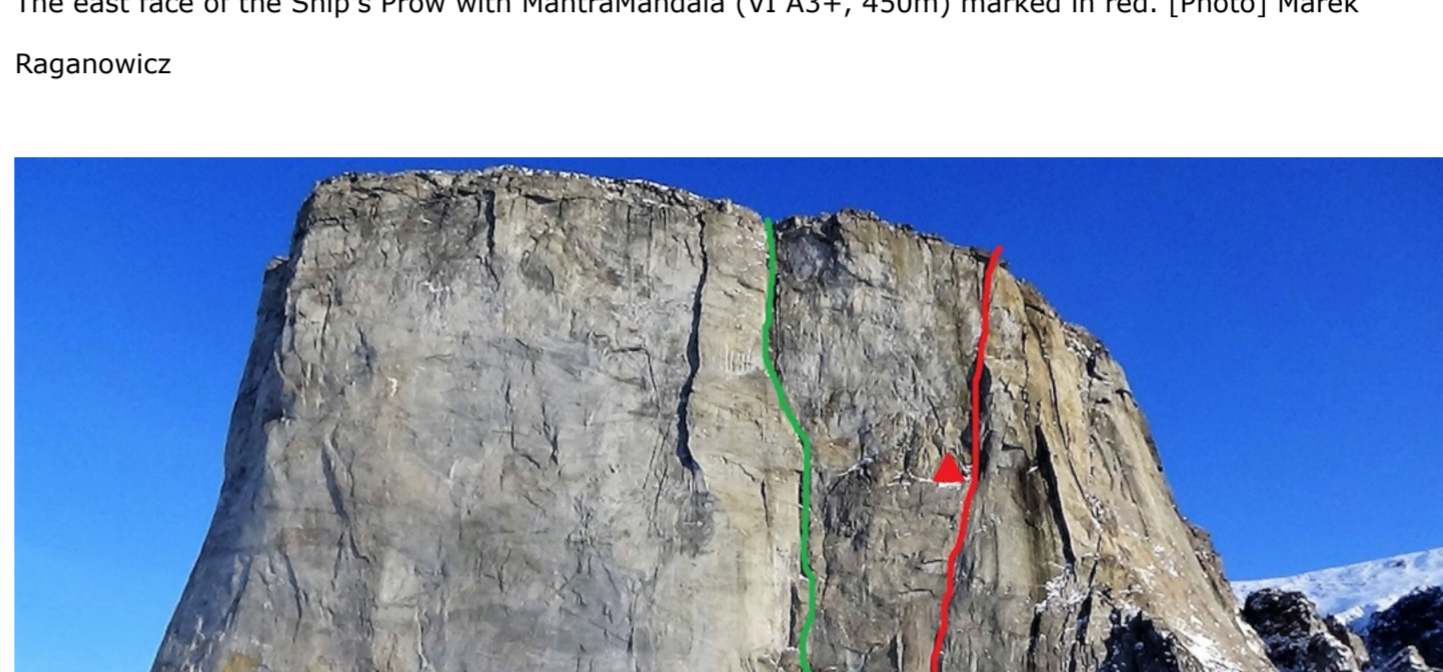
with another friend for a climb in May.

"Extremely cold conditions (felt like -50°C [or -58°F]) and very strong wind forced us to give up," Raganowicz said. "Marcin went back to Poland and I moved farther north to the base of the north face of the Ship's Prow at Scott Island."

Raganowicz ultimately established two new big wall routes—MantraMandala (VI A3+, 450m) on the east face of the Ship's Prow, and Secret of Silence (VI A4, 600m) on the formation's north face—between March 23 and May 1.



The east face of the Ship's Prow with MantraMandala (VI A3+, 450m) marked in red. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz



The north face of the Ship's Prow with Secret of Silence (VI A4, 600m) marked in red. Mike Libeck's 1999 route, Hinayana (VI 5.8 A3+, 600m), is marked in green. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz

He wrote:

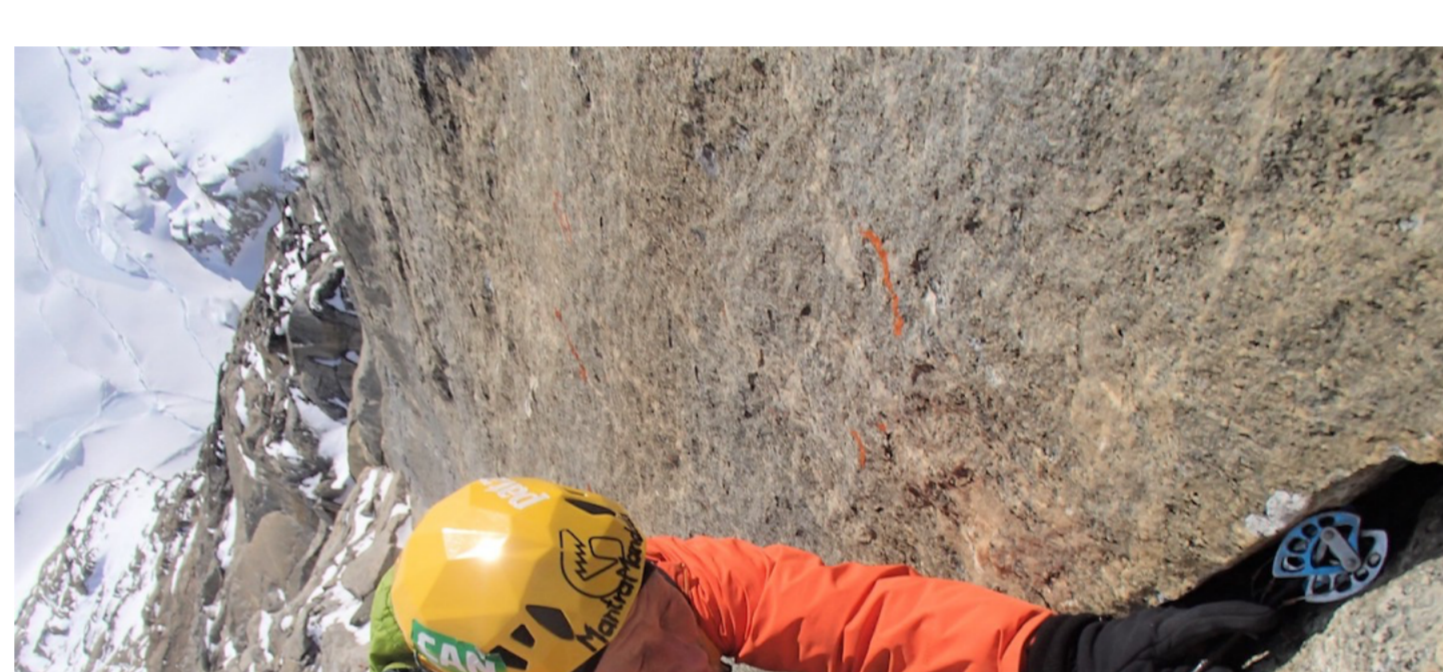
I spent a couple of days fixing my eyes on the walls and faces around me, wondering where it would be possible to lead new lines. I found my perfect route, but it was still too cold for climbing. In the meantime, I found out that coldness on the east side was bearable for a couple of hours when the sun shined. My priority was to climb the north face which is taller (greater) and steeper, but I would have to wait a long time for better conditions, so I decided to pack my gear and start climbing on the east face and not waste anymore time.

My main [goal] was to climb without drilling. I wanted to keep a natural character to my routes.

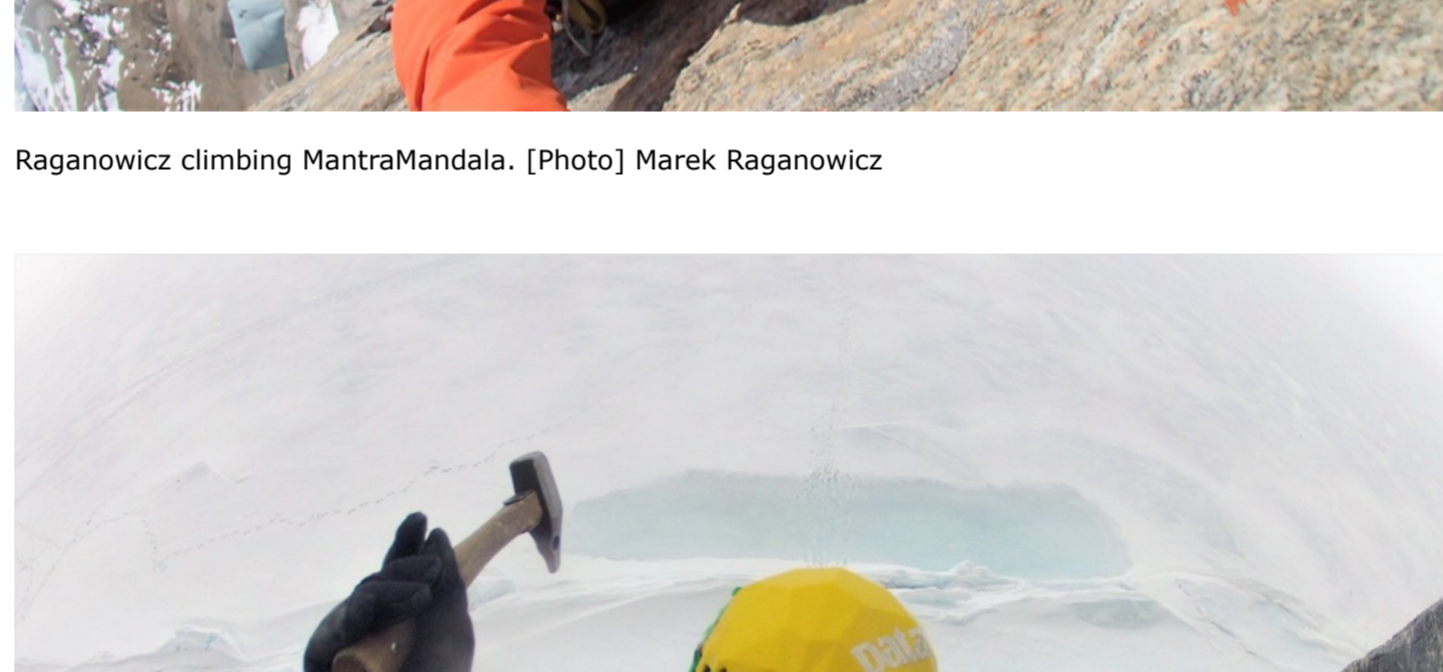
After 17 days on the east face, I put up a new line, which I called MantraMandala (VI A3+), and after one week of resting, I fixed the first pitch on the north face. Unfortunately, the wind picked up, and climbing became more difficult. I topped out on May 1 [after a total of 13 days on the wall], and I called my second route Secret of Silence (VI A4). On the last day, conditions became worse, lots of fresh snow and very strong wind made the descent and carrying bags down quite risky.



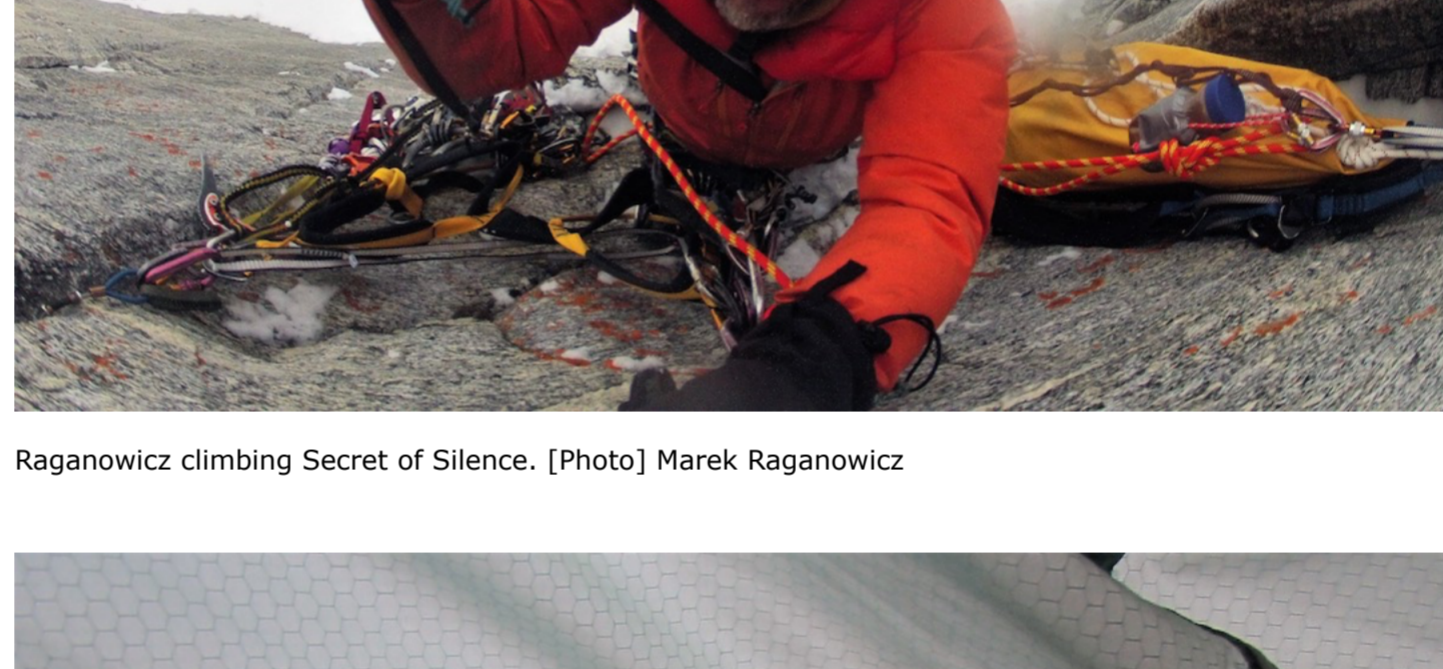
Looking down on a portledge camp on MantraMandala. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz



Raganowicz climbing MantraMandala. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz



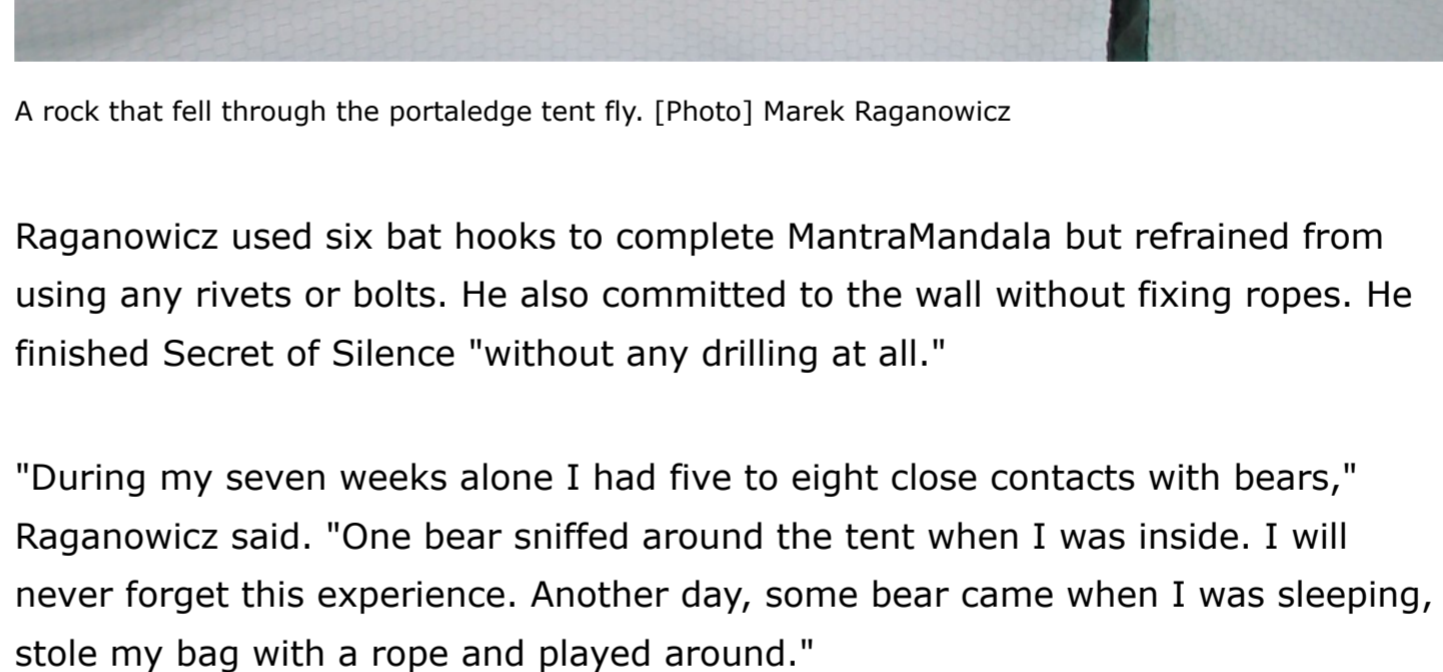
Raganowicz climbing Secret of Silence. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz



A rock that fell through the portledge tent fly. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz

Raganowicz used six bat hooks to complete MantraMandala but refrained from using any rivets or bolts. He also committed to the wall without fixing ropes. He finished Secret of Silence "without any drilling at all."

"During my seven weeks alone I had five to eight close contacts with bears," Raganowicz said. "One bear sniffed around the tent when I was inside. I will never forget this experience. Another day, some bear came when I was sleeping, stole my bag with a rope and played around."



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Base camp. [Photo] Marek Raganowicz

This makes three routes in two trips to the area for him.

"Five years ago I did a first ascent with Marcin of Superbalance (VII A4 M7+, 37 pitches) on Polar Sun Spire, which was our climb of a lifetime," he said.

Regarding the route name of "MantraMandala"—it's the title of a chapter in Raganowicz's book, which he anticipates will be published sometime this year in Poland.

"This is a 100 percent true story from my life in the years between 1983 and 2016," he said.

In January Raganowicz completed a winter ascent on Norway's Troll Wall in impressive style.

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