

On the edge

The Asgard Project saw Leo Houlding set out to climb one of the toughest mountains on the planet in the remote wilds of the arctic... then jump off the top. This is his story

Easy just isn't in Leo Houlding's vocabulary. The former prodigy is a bona fide climbing legend in a sport where such status doesn't come cheap, but with The Asgard Project he pushed the boundaries further than ever before.

Asgard is a 2015m peak on Baffin Island, in the Canadian Arctic. It's three-days-for-a-rescue-helicopter-if-you're-lucky remote and one of the most technically demanding climbs in the world. Houlding's 'project' was to free-climb it (using just fingers and toes, ropes for safety only), then base-jump off the top. But then things got harder...

Having parachuted onto a crevasse-pocked glacier to reach the base, Leo and the team found they couldn't take their intended route up the west face due to rock falls. So they had to tackle the even more treacherous north west face. Blank, featureless with

the middle 1000ft not just vertical, but overhanging, free-climbing suddenly became impossible. But as you might expect from a man who reckons that "when shit goes according to plan it can be kind of dull", Leo began free-climbing it anyway.

Leo inched up the brutal face, free-climbing 20 hours a day, sleeping roped onto the exposed cliff face. Then a severe frost iced the rock, numbing fingers until even he had to resort to ropes. Staying alive and reaching the top became the only stakes to play for. And they hung in the balance 75m from the summit when a hook gave way and Leo tumbled, shredding his hands. Drawing on freezing, exhausted depths of determination, Houlding fought through the pain to the summit. Barely pausing to consider the achievement, he unclipped his last carabineer, donned the wingsuit and flew.



MAKING TRACKS

Embrace the spirit of Asgard in the Alps with a 'Best of Chamonix' Short Break worth £2000, courtesy of Blacks, Berghaus and Mountain Tracks

You're probably not quite ready to follow in Leo's overhanging toe-holds, but adventure clothing specialists Blacks and Berghaus have teamed up with leading mountain outfit Mountain Tracks to give you (plus a friend) a true taste of the Asgard spirit in the French mountain sports mecca of Chamonix. The prize includes travel from the UK, 2 days private guiding with a UIAGM Mountain Guide, 3 nights accommodation, technical climbing equipment plus spending money. Ready to take on the mountains? Just head to menshealth.co.uk/berghaus to enter.

GEARING UP

You may not quite have Leo's skills or grit, but thanks to Berghaus and Blacks you can get the kit to handle life on the edge

Sanctity Jacket A highly versatile mountain jacket, ultra-light with two-layer GORE-TEX® for tough weather protection and integral snow skirt for ski-mountaineering and ski-touring.

Ignite Hoody Primaloft® insulation for cold-weather climbing, mountaineering and even extreme commuting. This can be used as a mid-layer or on its own in dryer conditions.

Arcle 45 Rucaac Ski carry straps make this ideal year-round, from a day's cragging to lightweight mountaineering, to-hut-to-hut ski tour use.

Pro Mountain Peak hat Fully waterproof GORE-TEX® Pro Shell-insulated to keep you at your peak in extreme cold.

Windstopper Insulated Glove Fully windproof insulated softshell glove with leather palm for grip, suitable for multi-activity use.

Available at Blacks stores and Blacks.co.uk



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