



## AAC Publications

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### Great Cross Pillar, Deconstructing Jenga

Canada, Baffin Island, Sam Ford Fjord

**In early May, Cheyne Lempe and I traveled to the Sam Ford Fjord of Baffin Island and established a new route on Great Cross Pillar: Deconstructing Jenga (900m, 5.9+ A3+).**

Three days of travel, one canceled flight, two tent bivies in town, plus a five-hour snowmobile ride left us alone and exposed on the sea ice of Sam Ford Fjord. We spent our first day and a half preparing camp and hiking our gear to the base of the Great Cross Pillar, at the northeast corner of Sam Ford Fjord and the Walker Arm. We began climbing capsule-style on May 9.

The wind blew steadily down the fjord from the east, and rarely changed directions or stopped for the entire trip. When it did, the sun *almost* felt warm. We climbed with the motto of the Polish big-wall experts Marek Raganowicz and Marcin Tomaszewski: *Climb every day*. Our second and third days on the route were in a proper Arctic blizzard, with temps below -20°F. As soon as we began climbing, we were awed by the absolute lack of perspective—what we thought might be 30m became 60m.

Our route began up Great Cross' right-side slab to reach the base of its right pillar (365m of climbing). We established our first camp here on a large talus ledge. From that point, we began climbing 30m left of camp, up the obvious cleft between the nose of the wall and its right pillar. Our friends Ben Ditto and Sean Villanueva had attempted this line to about one-third height in an all-free effort in summer 2014, but were turned back due to poor rock (AAJ 2015).

We encountered myriad rock types and qualities in the massive, steep, right-leaning corner and chimney system. While heel-toeing up difficult offwidth cracks in double boots and Arctic battle gear, Cheyne and I were thankful for our Yosemite roots. This first half of the main wall also contained incredible choss. We found occasional towers of stacked rocks in the bottoms of the chimneys that required delicate deconstructing, like a game of Jenga. After 275m of climbing on the headwall we reached the Nighttime Nibbler Bivy. And after another 155m of climbing above that camp we exited the decomposing corner system to the right, via a sporty A3+ traverse. Now on a large, golden face right of the corner system, we climbed tiny cracks and shallow corners through immaculate rock, reminiscent of Reticent Wall on El Capitan.

On May 19, after a frigid 36-hour blizzard, we ascended 200m of fixed lines, climbed another 60m pitch, and then decided to push through the night hours to the summit of the route. The 24-hour daylight made the event surreal. Two short, snowy pitches and two difficult aid pitches through crackless, bulletproof rock brought us to the summit. We descended our route by two-bolt anchors we had installed on the way up. After 24 hours of sleeping and eating on the portaledge, we packed up our camp and descended to the talus ledge, then to the sea ice for a rest day. After two days on the ice, Levi Palituq picked us up on his snowmobile.

– David Allfrey, USA

## Images



Great Cross Pillar, showing Deconstructing Jenga (900m, 5.9+ A3+).



David Allfrey and Cheyne Lempe atop Great Cross Pillar. Behind the two, from left to right, are the Beak, Turret, Broad Peak, Polar Sun Spire, and Beluga Spire (mostly hidden).



Cheyne Lempe readies himself for a cold lead on the 13th pitch, with over 200m of climbing to go.



David Allfrey on the 10th pitch. Polar Sun Spire at back right.

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