



AAC Publications

Great Sail Peak: Two New Routes

Canada, Nunavut, Baffin Island, Stewart Valley

In the summer of 2016, Joshua Lavigne, Marc-André Leclerc and I spent six weeks in the fjordlands of eastern Baffin Island, establishing two new routes on Great Sail Peak (ca 1,500m). Our journey began on June 21, when we set off from the community of Clyde River by snowmobile, guided by local outfitter Levi Palituq. Two days of travel over the frozen ocean landed us at the entrance to the Stewart Valley, an ancient fjord now blocked by a moraine to form a huge inland lake. We shuttled gear by sled for 10km across frozen Stewart Lake to the base of Great Sail Peak, and nine days after leaving Clyde River we were ready to begin climbing.

Josh, Marc, and I began our first route up the right side of the west-northwest face, where the rock is steepest. (Previous ascents of this face followed a line of ramps and ledge systems farther to the left. The wall was first climbed by an American team in the spring of 1998.) We spent a week establishing the first seven pitches, consisting of faint cracks and technical face climbing. Most pitches were cleaned on aid and then free climbed, with difficulties up to 5.12b.

These pitches led to a sloping talus ledge about the width of a football field where we collected water from melting snow. We traversed leftward under the headwall, past the high camp of a Belgian-Italian team that was working on their first route above us. [This quintet climbed three new routes on Great Sail, including the first free ascent via Coconut Connection (5.12d).]

Above the talus ledge, we first attempted one line, but it was obviously going to require far more aid climbing than we were after. We switched objectives to the leftmost buttress on the wall, a feature we named the Northwest Turret. The upper wall of the Northwest Turret showed apparent weaknesses and obvious free climbing terrain, but the lower wall had a blank slab, which posed the biggest question mark.

We prepared supplies for seven days, deciding to climb ground-up without the use of fixed lines. We set up our portaledge camp above the first crux, a thin and obtuse corner with a boulder problem crux, which we freed at 5.13a. While working on freeing this pitch a storm rolled into the valley. The Arctic cyclone lasted for six days, hammering our hanging camp with violent winds, rain, and snow. During breaks in the storm, Marc-André and I took turns working on the technical aid pitch above, hooking and copperheading our way across the slab in search of a free line. Our supplies were running low, and it soon became debatable whether we could finish the route. But the storm began to break on day six, giving us a very narrow window, given our resources, for a single-push attempt to the summit.

The evening of our push, Marc-André spilled boiling water on his foot and was unable to wear a rock shoe, so Josh and I took turns leading in blocks. The three of us climbed throughout the pale light of an Arctic night, using the fastest style possible to ascend each pitch. The leader would speed climb, using a mix of free, French free, and aid, depending on the terrain. The two seconds ascended the fixed lines, carrying the packs. It rained throughout the climb, and the upper wall was wet and partly iced up. Our bodies were tired from the incessant hanging belays, but we stuck it out and summited about nine hours after our middle-of-the-night start, around 10 a.m.

We spent the next ten hours or so rappelling. We had some difficulty reversing the traverse directly above our portaledge camp, but we made it work by reverse-jugging a line we had fixed over the traverse. We named our route the Northwest Turret (ca 900m, 22 pitches, 5.13a A2).

With a few sunny rest days, we took time to relax and boulder around base camp. The Belgians brought us fresh-caught Arctic char, quite a delicacy compared to our canned tuna.

Our next objective was the west buttress of Great Sail Peak, at the right edge of the main face, which we decided to climb in a single push. We led in blocks, with the seconds climbing with their packs. Intervals of steep climbing were split up by comfortable ledges and ramp systems. The climbing generally followed crack systems but had the occasional blank slab. We reached the summit around 3 a.m. as the golden glow of early morning cast upon the mountain peaks. Tired and worn, we rappelled the face via the Belgian/Italian anchors on Coconut Connection and were back at base camp in a full 24 hours. We named our route the West Buttress (1,100m, 5.12 C1).

It was now early August and the ice on Stewart Lake had broken up, so we resorted to paddling our gear back to the toe of the lake in two small blow-up rafts; each trip averaged four hours due to the strong headwinds. Taking a final look into the Stewart Valley, we hiked our gear over the moraine to Walker Arm, where Levi and a companion picked us up by motor boat two days later.

The 2016 expeditions were the first to the Stewart Valley during the summer season. Beyond Great Sail Peak, the entire valley has unimaginable potential for route development and exploration.

– Brette Harrington, USA

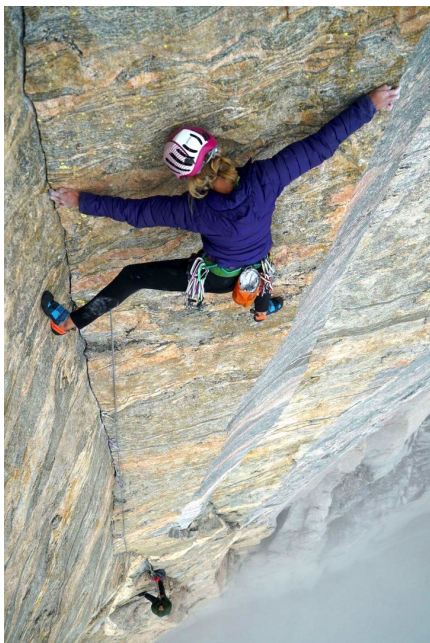
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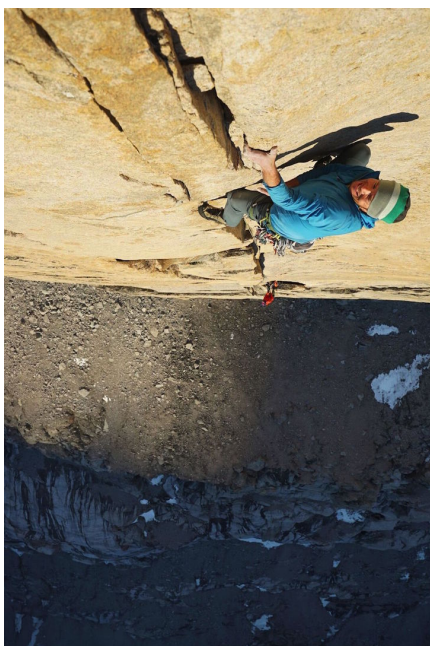
The ca 1,000m west-northwest face of Great Sail Peak, showing approximate lines of (1) Northwest Turret (2016). (2) Mascalzone Latino (2016). (3) Northwest Passage (2106). (4) Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash (1998). (5) Original start (1998). (6) Rubicon (2002). (7) Coconut Connection (2016, first free ascent of the wall, finishing on Rubicon). (8) Canadian-American start (2016). (9) West Butress (2016).



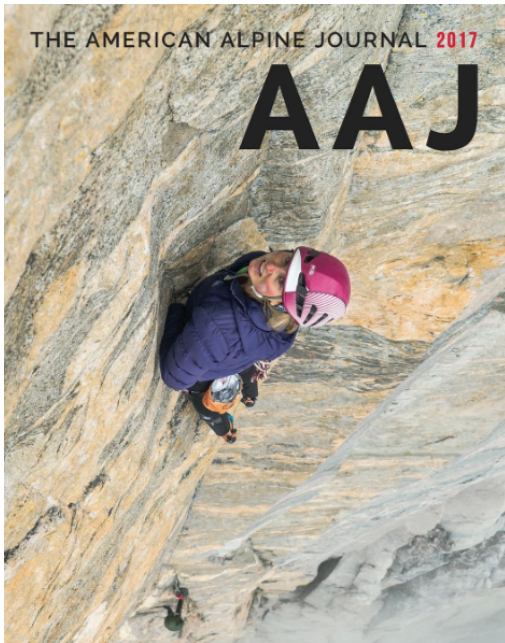
Approaching Great Sail Peak across the frozen lake that fills part of the Stewart Valley



Brette Harrington attempting a 5.13a pitch on the Northwest Turret of Great Sail Peak.



Joshua Lavigne attempting a splitter granite crack on the northwest face of Great Sail Peak.



Brette Harrington on the cover of the 2017 AAJ, shown resting and warming her hands while attempting a 5.13a pitch on the Northwest Turret of Great Sail Peak.

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