



AAC Publications

Many First Ascents Near Barbeau Peak

Canada, Nunavut, Ellesmere Island, British Empire Range

Brian Friedrich traversing the previously unclimbed east ridge of Griper (2,417m). Photo by Eric Gilbertson

BARBEAU PEAK (2,616m) is the highest mountain in the far northern Canadian territory of Nunavut, rising just 550 miles from the North Pole. It is deep in the British Empire Range of Ellesmere Island, where existing topographic maps are unreliable, navigation-quality satellite images are virtually nonexistent, and compass needles point southwest (toward the magnetic north pole).

Our Canadian and American team of Brian and Laura Friedrich, Serge Massad, Len Vanderstar, and myself hoped to ascend Barbeau Peak and some unclimbed peaks nearby during a two-week expedition. On June 17 we flew in a ski-mounted Twin Otter plane from Resolute, Nunavut, to the ice cap just south of Barbeau, landing in the early afternoon. [Editor's note: Barbeau Peak was first climbed in June 1967 during a military expedition to the area. The north ridge was climbed in 1982 during the peak's second ascent (AAJ 1983). A 1996 expedition (AAJ 1997) made the first ascent of Mt. Woodmont, the only other significant peak known to have been climbed in the area east of Barbeau, where this 2017 expedition spent most of its time.]

We roped up and pulled sleds for several hours to a sheltered campsite just east of Barbeau. A prominent summit (Peak 2,258m) very close to camp was unclimbed, so after dinner Brian, Laura, Serge, and I climbed up snow and then hard ice to reach the summit.

We all returned to camp around 11 p.m., but Brian and I decided to hit one more mountain that evening, a peak on the east ridge extending from Griper (2,417m, see AAJ 1983 for information on the naming and first ascents of various peaks in this area). The rest of the crew stayed in camp and got ready for bed, while we roped up and started climbing under the midnight sun. After navigating around some crevasses, we soon crested the narrow summit overlooking camp. The ridge continued and it was hard to resist climbing higher. Over the next few hours, we ascended the previously unclimbed east ridge to the summit of Griper. It was a knife-edge snow ridge with terrific exposure of 500m or so on both sides, with amazing rock gendarmes sticking up intermittently along the way, requiring some exposed rock scrambling.

I led the way down to the Barbeau-Griper col, then up the north ridge of Barbeau Peak, reaching the summit at 3 a.m. The sun was still high in the sky, and it was hard to tell it was the middle of the night. To descend, we dropped to the north, then traversed around the west side of Griper, passed through a col, and staggered back into camp at 6 a.m. on June 18.

I got a few hours of sleep, but by 10 a.m. the rest of the team was itching to get moving. We roped back up for another ascent of Barbeau, and everyone reached the summit that afternoon via the north ridge (a second ascent for me and Brian). Len became the first Canadian to reach the high points of all 13 provinces and territories of Canada, ending a tough, decade-long endeavor.

On June 19, Brian and I set out to attempt more unclimbed peaks near camp. We started with the huge pyramidal summit to the northeast, Peak 2,359m. After crossing a flat basin, we climbed the steep, icy knife-edge southwest ridge to the summit, making a short detour to construct a cairn at a rock outcrop. I led the way down, carefully downclimbing the sharp east ridge until it leveled out. We descended steeply to the Henrietta Nesmith Glacier, and on the way I punched through a few

crevasses but quickly rolled out with no problems.

First ascents near Barbeau Peak. See the map caption below for a key to the most significant peaks climbed.

Eventually we reached a far-off ridge leading to the summit of unclimbed Peak 2,016m and started following the ridge back to the west, toward camp, to make a big loop. Several kilometers of fun, snowy knife-edges followed, with occasional rock bands to scramble over. We passed over many minor peaks along the ridge before climbing steeply up to Peak 2,254m, which was flanked by a huge rock cliff and a hanging glacier, uncharacteristically steep for the British Empire Range.

After a few more hours we reached our last summit of the day, Peak 2,246m. Brian tried descending what looked like snow, only to slip on what was actually dust-covered ice. We were roped together, and I instantly dove into self-arrest position on a snowbank, but Brian caught his fall in time so my maneuver was unnecessary. Luckily, we'd brought a few ice screws and carefully belayed each other across the ice for about 50m to return to snow. From here the hiking was easy, and we arrived in camp, exhausted, at 2:30 a.m.

Over the next ten days or so, we headed south down the Adams Glacier, pulling sleds and climbing one more prominent unclimbed peak along the way (Peak 1,893m). We exited the glacier above Atka Lake and trekked back to Tanquary Fjord for our flight out on June 30.

– Eric Gilbertson, USA

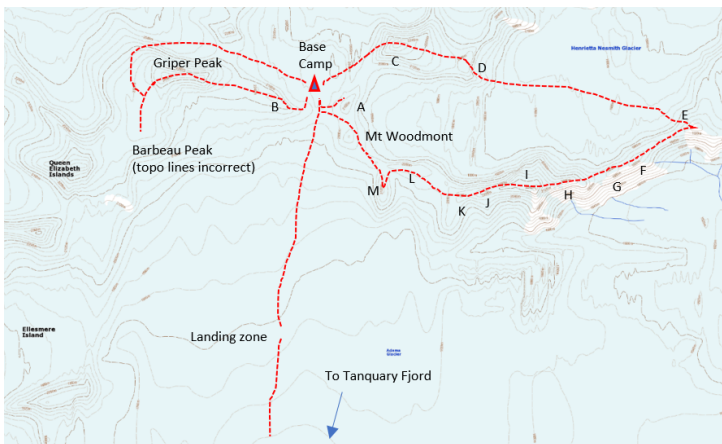
Images



Brian Friedrich traversing the previously unclimbed east ridge of Griper (2,417m).



Eric Gilbertson downclimbing the west face of Peak 2,246m.



Map of first ascents near Barbeau Peak. The letters refer to previously unclimbed peaks, including A) Peak 2,258m, B) Peak 2,417m (continued to Griper Peak along the previously unclimbed east ridge), C) Peak 2,359m, E) Peak 2,016m, I) Peak 2,254m, M) Peak 2,246m, and N) Peak 1,893m.



Eric Gilbertson on the summit of Peak 1,893m, looking south toward Tanquary Fjord in the distance, with the Adams Glacier below. The party's exit route followed the glacier to the left side of the picture.



Peak 1,893m as seen from camp. The party climbed the skyline ridge on the left.



Brian Friedrich traversing the ridge southwest of Peak 2,016m. View looks northeast, with the Henrietta Nesmith Glacier below and Lake Hazen in the distance.



Eric Gilbertson heading southwest along the ridge back to camp. Peak 2,254m is the highest peak along the ridge to the left of Gilbertson; Barbeau Peak is just above and to the right of him; and Peak 2,359m is the second from the right edge of the frame.



Eric Gilbertson ascending the southwest ridge of Peak 2,359m. Barbeau Peak is the highest one in the background, with Griper Peak just to the right of it and Peak 2,417m in front of Barbeau. Base camp is in the flat basin below.



Leaving camp toward Peak 2,359m.



Exploring Ellesmere Island.

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