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La Hune Headwall, Solo First Ascent

Canada, Newfoundland, La Hune Bay

I huddled over my gear on the slippery boat ramp of Francois Harbor on the southwest coast of Newfoundland, contents strewn about like a bomb had gone off. I wedged and crammed 200 pounds of climbing equipment and supplies for two weeks into my 18' sea kayak until all available space was exhausted, and then pushed off into a southeast swell buried heavy with fog.

Later that day in the summer of 2016, I rounded Cape La Hune—a remote projection of high land sticking into the North Atlantic that was used for years as a navigational landmark for fishermen and sailors—and paddled north, deep into the heart of La Hune Bay. This bountiful fjord, with its abandoned “ghost” settlements, sandy and rocky beaches, 1,000' sea cliffs, and granite “tolls” (solitary rock knobs or domes, remnants of a higher landscape that has eroded away) evokes a sense of cryptic beauty and desolation.

I set my camp in Deadman Cove, just five feet above the high-tide mark on a beautiful mossy hummock. After a few days of exploration, I made two multi-pitch ascents, including an easy 300' crack right behind the camp and a 400' 5.9 I called Blue Door, a mile and a half across the bay on the east face of a prominent toll.

Eventually I set my sights on the west-facing La Hune Headwall, the biggest feature in the bay. The somewhat slabby wall surges up from the sea, a giant groundswell of stone—1,000' high and over a mile and half wide, capped by overhangs and split by waterfalls, cracks, and big corner systems. My attempt, however, was short-lived. After three pitches, the cracks on my line ran out and the weather soured. I watched from above as my kayak became a battering ram against the rocky shore—time to go! After 12 days out, I retreated to Francois, vowing to return.

In the summer of 2017, I returned to Deadman Cove. This time my boat and contents were shuttled over in a 20' skiff owned by George Fudge, a native of Francois. I spent some time exploring and climbing in the mouth of neighboring Aviron Bay with its spectacular sea cliffs—steep, bold, overhanging, and wildly exposed to the open ocean. At one point, while I was eyeing some walls, a large, curious shark passed under my kayak.

Then I returned to the La Hune Headwall. After a wet spell, I loaded up and paddled quietly over to the headwall on a windless morning. Securing my craft under an overhang to protect it from rockfall, I lowered myself into the sea so I could unload, then quickly changed clothes and started up.

I climbed the west face several hundred feet left of my previous outing. The initial pitches were loose, sandy slabs with spotty vegetation. Once above the choss, I climbed crack systems on good rock to a delightful prominent corner system, which I followed to the top of the formation. Climbing solo and without my Soloist, I moved slowly, tediously slacking my clove-hitch self-belay. As a waterfall thundered to my left, I placed a bolt and piton for descent and rappelled back to my kayak.

Several days later, I returned overland from Deadman Cove. After a 4km bushwack across the tablelands, I eventually slid down into a 55° wet and mossy slope (not recommended), rappelled in, and completed a 160' direct finish to my route that went at 5.9. Doryman Pass By (900', III 5.9 with the direct finish) was named after reflections atop the La Hune Headwall. From here you can look up the

fiord straight out to sea and gaze across the abandoned ghost settlement of La Hune Harbor—I thought of all the dorymen who came and went, died, drowned, or just passed by.

After 20 days of magnificent adventure, I headed home. As far as I know, the only other climbers to explore and climb in La Hune Bay were Eli Simon and Peter Fasoldt in 2008.

– Randy Baker, Maine

Images



Looking down Doryman Pass By (900', 5.9) from the route's direct finish. The route follows the smaller of the two dihedrals just below the ropes and continues straight down through cracks and corners to the ocean.



Nearing the top of Doryman Pass By (900', 5.9).



The route line for Doryman Pass By (900', 5.9).



Topping out on Blue Door (400', 5.9), atop the La Hune Harbor Tolt. The La Hune Headwall is at left in the background, and Deadman Cove is the obvious cove in the center left of the photo.

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