



AAC Publications

La Malbaie, Grands-Jardins, and Gaspé: New Routes

Canada, Québec

The Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie saw a lot of action during the 2021 season, encouraged by unusual weather and travel limitations due to a province-wide COVID-19 curfew. The holiday season saw some major downpours, which contributed to the formation of new ice routes. Snow removal from the access road in the last couple of years also has been a game changer, since the former 30km approach on skis is now mostly done by car.

The most notable new line was Klondike (220m, WI6 R), opened in early 2021 by Jean-Philippe Bélanger, Yan Mongrain, and Charles Roberge. Back in 2017, Roberge had seen a tiny streak of ice high on the western side of the Malbaie River and 300m to the right of a route called Pomodoro. The torrential rain of Christmas Eve 2020 persuaded him to revisit the site and see if, maybe, a line had formed. The trio was in luck and launched the season with a smash.

A few weeks later, Bélanger and Roberge returned to the park and opened Tabasco (115m, WI6+) on the extreme left side of the cliff that holds the renowned Pomme d'Or. Despite being on the same face, it's a distinct and hard new route with quite difficult access, very high on the flanks of the mountain. Also in early January, Vincent Demers and Patrick Gagné did the first ascent of C'est Pas la Mer Ciboire (120m, WI5). This route is between Triolet and Hystérie Collective, before the dam, on the west banks of the Malbaie River. A few days later, Carl Darveau and Jean-François Girard added an extension to the line to reach the summit: a 60m WI2+ and a 40m M7-. They have named their addition Inconscient Collectif (100m, WI5+ M7-).

In February, Patrice Beaudet and Sébastien Morin made a prolific trip to the valley, opening three new routes: Le Retour de Papy (90m, WI5), La Goulotte des Tropiques (70m, WI4), and Passion Hivernale (65m, WI4+). The duo also repeated Klondike during that trip.

The Grands-Jardins (located a bit west of the Hautes-Gorge) seemed a bit forsaken in 2021. However, the Gros Bras did see a major new route with the establishment of Baba Yaga (165m, M8 A1) by Jean-François Girard and Louis Rousseau. The ascent took 14 hours and combined delicate traverses, slabs, tiny cracks, overhangs, a chimney, and big loose blocks. The sixth pitch was the hardest (M8 A1) and completed with headlamps.

Also on the Gros Bras, Benoît Dubois and a partner made the second ascent of Folie de Jeunesse (240m, 5.11- M8+) in late March 2021; this summer rock route was opened in 2018 by Pierre-Alexandre Paquet and Jacques Lamontagne. Even though this wasn't officially a first winter ascent, it was a hard repeat in wintry conditions. It took the duo 13 hours to complete the route. Because of the curfew, they had to sleep in their truck on the return to avoid possible mishaps with the authorities.

Out on the Gaspé Peninsula, Girard continued his season by opening Ad Absurdum (105m, WI5+ M6) at Gros Morne with Mathias Arroyo Bégin. The first pitch was on an ice-plastered slab with a vertical icicle at the end, and the second saw the pair climb some questionable rock, which also plagued the rappel.

Despite Québec's walls having been scouted by ice climbers for decades, this season confirmed there

are still nice discoveries to be made, without having to drive for hours by car or snowmobile.

— **Ian Bergeron and Louis Rousseau, Canada**

Images



Charles Roberge leading the first pitch of Klondike (220m, WI6 R) in the Malbaie area.



The north face of Gros Bras in the Grands-Jardins, showing Baba Yaga.



Jean-François Girard leading pitch five of Baba Yaga (165m, M8 A1) on Mt. Gros Bras.



Patrice Beaudet leading up Passion Hivernal (65m, WI4+) in the Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie.

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