



AAC Publications

Parsons Pond Area, Recent New Routes

Canada, Newfoundland

Ice climbing in western Newfoundland, while not well-documented, has been chronicled in the AAJ, Rock and Ice, and Gripped over the past several years. Tales of huge backcountry ice routes and Newfoundland hospitality are true. Nightmare stories about sinking snowmobiles, sketchy creek crossings, terrible weather, and bizarre overhead hazard from hanging ice formations—they're mostly true too. Most of the media coverage has focused on Gros Morne National Park, but there is extensive climbing both north and south of the national park.

Over the past several winters, a revolving crew of climbers including Chris Beauchamp, Dustin Cormier, Alden Pellett, Silas Rossi, Bayard Russell, Keith Sidle, Michael Wejchert, and me, all from the northeastern U.S., have been using Parsons Pond as a base camp for backcountry climbing in the many fjord-like valleys north of Gros Morne National Park. This crew has established about 20 new ice and mixed climbs up to 300m.

Routes here are approached with a combination of snowmobile and foot travel. Trail-breaking at the beginning of each trip requires significant effort. During our crew's 2023 outing, this process occupied the first four days of the trip. Once packed, though, the old trapline and hunting pathways can offer relatively straightforward snowmobile access for the duration of a trip.

The 2022 and 2023 seasons were particularly fruitful, as we pushed our sleds farther into the backcountry and established multiple routes on previously unclimbed walls.

Pellett, Rossi, Sidle, and I arrived in February 2022 after a big rain event and found excellent ice conditions. At the back of Parsons Inner Pond, along the inlet of Parsons Pond River, on a south-facing wall we've dubbed the Inner Sanctum, our foursome established three routes over two days. Sidle and Rossi climbed Four Horsemen (200m, WI5+), a steep corner feature at the right end of the wall, while Pellett and I climbed Spindrift Highway (220m, WI4+), the obvious right-facing corner. Rossi, Sidle, and I returned later and climbed thin ice features up the left side of the wall (260m, WI5).

At the south-facing Bear's Den (49.978558°, -57.547311°), a small mountain at the edge of Parsons Outer Pond, just above Middle Brook, Rossi, Sidle, and I climbed Beersick (70m, WI6+) and Delirium (70m, WI6 M6). Both of these routes climb past wild ice overhangs and parasols and are among the best in the region.

In 2023, the same foursome returned and found dry conditions, minimal snow, and variable approach conditions. Above Western Brook Gulch, a large ravine at the southwest end of Parsons Outer Pond, we spotted an unclimbed wall, visible from the top of the climb Newfinized. The north-facing Wayback Wall sits above Piss Pot Pond (49.933783°, -57.526478°) in a small alpine cirque. Here, Sidle and Rossi established God's Own Prototype (140m, WI5) and White Rabbit (100m, WI5+). Pellett and I climbed Dead Reckoning (140m, WI5) and Whiskey and Weed (140m, WI5 M5).

Most of the routes are 15km to 20km from the road, yet it is possible to travel in and out each day once trails are packed. However, the apparent ease of a snowmobile approach belies the true difficulties: Crossing frozen tidal ponds past open water, navigating swift and questionably frozen rivers, managing complete whiteouts, and trashing one's snowmobile in thick woods are just a few of

the challenges. The weather is difficult, and there is no possibility of a quick rescue in this remote area. Those seeking the rewards of climbing in this region should fully consider the consequences of their actions before embarking on any backcountry outing.

– **Ryan Stefiuk, USA**

Images



The Inner Sanctum lies at the back of Parsons Inner Pond. From left to right: Haywire (260m, WI5), Spindrift Highway (230m, WI4+), and Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (230m, WI5+).



The Inner Sanctum Wall at the back of Parsons Inner Pond. Haywire (260m, WI5) finishes on the obvious steep ice in center left. Spindrift Highway (230m, WI4+) takes the corner in the center of the photo.



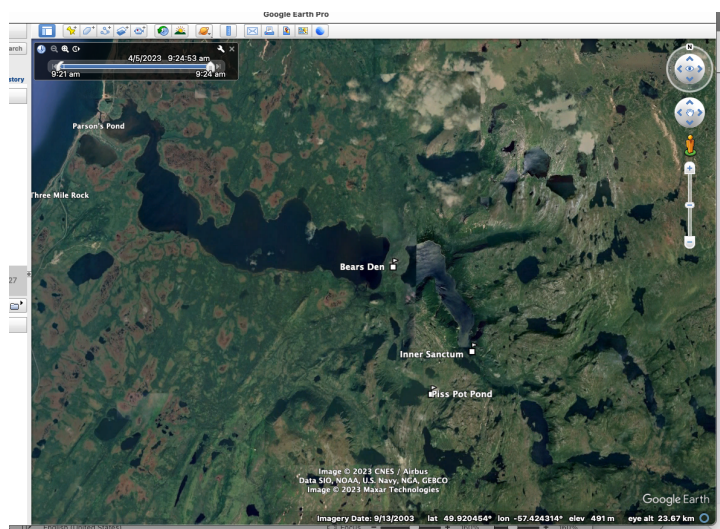
Silas Rossi climbing Delirium (70m, WI6 M6) at the Bear's Den, a small mountain at the edge of Parsons Outer Pond.



The north-facing Wayback Wall sits above a col at the back of Western Brook Gulch. The routes are (1) White Rabbit, (100m, WI5+), (2) Whiskey and Weed (140m, WI5 M5), (3) Dead Reckoning (140m, WI5), and (4) God's Own Prototype (130m, WI5).



Route lines on the Wayback Wall, left to right: White Rabbit, (100m, WI5+), Whiskey and Weed (140m, WI5 M5), Dead Reckoning (140m, WI5), and God's Own Prototype (130m, WI5).



Map showing the locations of Bear's Den, Inner Sanctum, and Piss Pot Pond in the Parsons Pond area.

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