



AAC Publications

Mt. Northumbria, Two New Routes

Canada, Nunavut, Baffin Island, Auyuittuq National Park

Looking down pitch eight of PangTen (424m, 5.10) with the 1,250-meter west face of Mt. Thor in the background. Photo: Darin Berdinka

Having both turned 50, Owen Lunz and I felt like we could no longer procrastinate, so we committed to a long-discussed trip to Baffin Island to climb Mt. Asgard (2,015m) and whatever else we could.

In April, our outfitter, Peter Kilabuk, snowmobiled 157,300 carefully packed calories from Pangnirtung into the Weasel Valley, along with a substantial chunk of our climbing and camping gear, and stashed it under a boulder below Mt. Northumbria (1,633m). Despite Peter's admonishments not to arrive before the second week of July due to the possibility of ice in the fjord, we flew into Pangnirtung on July 3.

After a heavy winter followed by a cool spring, the head of Pangnirtung Fjord was still visibly covered in ice and the mountains were draped in snow. As access to the Weasel Valley is normally done by boat, we set up in the free camping on the edge of town to wait and see what would happen. A fortunate and singular warm, windy day followed, and 48 hours after arriving, we were dropped off near the head of the now iceless fjord.

Mt. Asgard and the approach up the Weasel Valley are located in Auyuittuq National Park, which translates as "the land that never melts." Despite significant glacial recession over the last 50 years, the park lived up to its name in 2024. Upon reaching our cache, we found the river still frozen over, the glaciers covered in an isothermal snowpack that delivered the post-holing nightmares of legend, and the mountains themselves showing lots of snow and limited dry rock. During the next two weeks, those conditions changed incrementally as the days cycled between cold and clear or cold, windy, and wet.

We focused on lower, less committing objectives and were fortunate to establish two excellent routes in that time. Below Northumbria, the west side of the valley is formed by a long, brown slab, about a 40-minute walk upstream of the Thor Emergency Shelter. An obvious line of attractive splitters and corners leads up the tallest part of the slab. We climbed this route on July 13 during a brief weather break and found generally excellent, moderate climbing over ten pitches; we named it Pang Ten (424m climbing distance, 5.10).

From the route's top, we scrambled west across slabs and talus for about an hour to reach the base of the east buttress of the east tower of Northumbria. This was another obvious and attractive feature, with long crack and corner systems.

Having scoped the line, we returned to Northumbria on July 15 by hiking up the walk-off descent from Pang Ten. We climbed the east buttress in nine long pitches of consistent 5.8/5.9 difficulty. It was one of those rare climbs where a majority of the pitches would be classic and popular single-pitch routes. We descended the route in eight clean rappels off solid anchors: Say Hello to Heaven (394m, 5.9).

Later in the trip, after climbing Asgard and other peaks, we returned to Pang Ten to add rappel anchors. Weather prevented us from linking these two routes in a day, but this would make an obvious and attractive objective.

—Darin Berdinka, USA

Images



Looking down pitch eight of PangTen (424m, 5.10) with the 1,250-meter west face of Mt. Thor in the background.



Following pitch three on Say Hello to Heaven (394m climbing distance, 5.9) on the east buttress of the east tower of Mt. Northumbria.



The route line of Say Hello to Heaven (394m climbing distance, 5.9) on the east buttress of the east tower of Mt. Northumbria.



The line of PangTen (424m climbing distance, 5.10), below Mt. Northumbria on the west side of Weasel Valley.

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