



AAC Publications

Mont Gros Bras, North Face, Le Dernier Ronin

Canada, Québec

The day was perfect—except for the date, Friday, March 13. Mathieu “Mat” Leblanc, François “Frank” Bédard, and I had decided to finish a project we’d started last year on the far right side of the north face of Mont Gros Bras. (The 200m wall, located on the eastern edge of Parc National des Grands-Jardins, previously had five winter routes in this right sector.) We hoped to climb a new route in memory of our friend and accomplished climber Yannick Girard. Yannick died not long after he and I made the first winter ascent of Sens Unique on the Acropole des Draveurs (AAJ 2015).

We had already tried five times to climb the second pitch of our project, but there seemed like nothing more to do: It was almost like a mirror, with tiny crimps to place the tip of our picks, one or two micro cracks, and no protection possible. Even the hardman Nick Balan came to lend a hand but with no luck.

This time, our feelings were different, with a sense of conviction and of a last chance. When we arrived, we inspected the north face for other options to finish our route but found nothing. Even in mid-March, it was cold and the snow was firm. At the base of our route, we decided Mat would tackle the first pitch. Frank, the bravest, would have the difficult task of the second. I felt lucky to get the third pitch, which we hadn’t tried yet. We didn’t know who was going to climb the fourth pitch.

Gros Bras in winter inevitably means freezing hands and screaming barfies, plus the first pitch is difficult. It’s all like a violent punch in the teeth. But we were off to a good start: Mat freed the pitch, a diagonal ramp into a beautiful crack. Now it was Frank’s turn. It’s a strange feeling to see your friend head up a climb knowing he has a good chance of falling with many sharp metal spikes attached. When he arrived at the crux, he climbed extremely delicately and slowly. When a hold broke, he took a large, jumbling fall. But after that he went off again in search of micro-crimps, probing with the blades of his ice tools. Eventually, he deciphered the sequence and engaged a long, icy section above.

I found the third pitch to be run-out but much less technical than the first two pitches. I built a belay below a small overhang. Below the fourth pitch we packed into the belay like three frozen sardines. Mat volunteered to continue and headed up through the overhang and some loose blocks. When cracks petered out, he placed the smallest cam available to do a single aid move (C1). Above this, a slabby section crossed two short ice steps before reaching the easy summit slopes.

As we walked together to reach the summit cairn on Mont Gros Bras, there was only a slight dark, orange glow on the horizon. The lights of the small shacks in the bottom of the valley brought back memories of Chamonix. Before the descent, I thought about our friend Yannick, who had guided us all day from above. It was one of the Quebec crags he especially liked to visit with good friends, in search of alpine adventures and the sound of his swinging ice tools. We named the route Le Dernier Ronin (175m, M6 C1), which means the Last Ronin.

– Louis Rousseau, Quebec

Images



The north face of Mont Gros Bras showing the new route Le Dernier Rōnin (175m, M6 C1), which means the Last Ronin.



Mat Leblanc engaging some hard dry tooling in the middle of the first pitch.



Frank Bédard making his way up the second pitch (M6 C1).



Frank Bédard and Mat Leblanc atop the new route Le Dernier Rōnin (175m, M6 C1).



At the summit of Mont Gros Bras.



1. *Le Grand polataouche* (2009)
2. *Métal hurlant* (2011)
3. *Perdus dans l'hiver* (2010)

4. *Pin son piton mon loup* (2012)
5. *La Face Nord* (2002)
6. *Départ de la l'ote des papas* (1996)

Topo et photo Yannick Girard

Other known winter routes on Mont Gros Bras.

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