



## AAC Publications

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### **New Route Plus Ski and Kayak Descents**

Canada, Nunavut, Baffin Island, Kangiqtualuk Uqquqti

Skiing across the quickly melting sea ice, Erik Boomer and Sarah McNair-Landry head toward Stewart Lake. Photo by Erik Boomer.

**The first time I remember hearing about Baffin Island was in 2009 when I met Sarah McNair-Landry on the kite-surfing beach in Hood River, Oregon.** I introduced myself as “from Idaho,” and she replied, “I’m from Baffin Island.” At the time it seemed like an inaccessible Arctic desert, not a place I would eventually call my second home and spend months every year.

Inspired by the wild and huge landscape on the east coast of Baffin Island, Sarah McNair-Landry and I left Clyde River on June 3 and spent 12 days approaching Kangiqtualuk Uqquqti (formerly known as Sam Ford Fjord) with all our toys and supplies to settle in for 70 days. The first day of the 150km approach was windy, and with heavy sleds and kayaks in tow, we were keen to get as far as possible with our kites towing us. Stopping only to eat and drink, we continued for 14 hours, covering 80km.

In the following days, we ski hauled deeper into the fjord. Snow-filled couloirs hung from the mountains on either side. A 3,900’ unnamed peak blanketed by a glacier with a smooth strip of snow all the way down to the ocean caught our eye. We camped at the base and skinned up late at night. From the top, we skied a fun, north-northeast-facing 30–35° degree gully—probably a new line that we named Glacier Gully (35°).

The west-northwest-facing Model T couloir, a classic ski descent, was our next stop. It was hard-packed with a few patches of debris, but stable snow gave me the green light for skiing. After that, we headed deeper into the fjord for a ski/climb of Broad Peak (1,681m), the tallest formation in the area. The glacier provided great snow, good turns, and all smiles.

With warming weather, rain, and soggy feet from skiing through a foot of water on the sea ice at times, we decided it was time to head for dry land. We skied another 20km, then shuttled our gear 15km over moraines and across Stewart Lake. We had asked Brette Harrington for recommendations of moderate new routes to try, and she pointed us to an unnamed peak on the north-northwest shore of the lake (70.75076, -71.46836). Marc-André Leclerc had attempted to free solo the southeast face during their expedition in 2016 and had downclimbed from about halfway up.

Erik Boomer and Sarah McNair-Landry enjoying the spectacular views from their low camp on Romance and the Stone (466m, 5.11a C1). Photo by Erik Boomer.

After climbing five moderate pitches (5.8–5.10), Sarah and I sat on a ledge halfway up, I ate a snack and reset. I was already feeling exhausted and a little overwhelmed. I pulled out our small drone to scout the 600’ feet of rock above us, and as I brought it back to land, Sarah reached out to grab it. Blood sprayed across the rock as the drone propellers repeatedly sliced her pinky finger. Sarah’s finger was a great excuse to back off, but I had already given up on the route. We rappelled down and, with overloaded packs, started the four-hour hike back to our base camp, nestled under Great Sail Peak.

Rain kept us cooped up in our tent as we waited for Sarah’s finger to heal and for a window to try another climb. To pass time, we reviewed our drone footage. We started to spot potential small cracks on the face we’d attempted. With some traverses and pendulums, maybe there was a route after all? We decided to give ourselves more time and attack the route in big-wall style.

Back at the big ledge above the fifth pitch, we established an epic camp. The next day I made an airy traverse, and two hard pitches—a mix of free and aid climbing—followed. The next day we set off with the sun for the summit. Pitch eight was the crux, requiring beaks up a thin, wet seam to a difficult pendulum into another seam. The route eventually eased back into steep, continuous 5.10 crack climbing. On the final pitch (pitch 11), I had two options: a splitter crack up the face or a wet icy chimney. After a micronut blew on the steep splitter, I decided to go for the nasty corner. I grew up wrestling, so there is something comforting about physical offwidths, but by the time I got to the summit, I was wet, cold, and ready to start back down to our ledge. We named the route Romance and the Stone (466m, 5.11a C1).

Erik Boomer kayaks the first descent of an impressive waterfall. Photo by Sarah McNair-Landry.

The final stage of our adventure in Kangiqtualuk was paddling some inland rivers I had spotted on satellite imagery. With difficult access and unknown flows, it was a roll of the dice if the rivers would be quality enough to warrant the long approach. It took six days to navigate the broken sea ice in the fiord and hike upstream with heavy boats to get to the first river. The river was in full flood, with fun big-water rapids and canyons.

The next river was much lower volume, sliding over smooth granite with waterfall after waterfall until it eventually disappeared under a glacier.

The final river was the one I was the most excited about. To get to the source, we skied 35km across a glacier, hauling our kayaks up over a 4,000' divide. What we thought would be an easy route across is not. Deep, slushy snow, crevasses, and meltwater ice canyons slow our progress. The descent off the ice cap is vertical in most places. We scouted and spotted one possible way off that was not overhanging ice, and the perfect height for a rappel. However, after we kayak the river, Sarah and I will need to reverse this route to get back to our base camp. So before we pulled the rope and committed, I fixed the rope and used two Mini Traxions to test the ice for what will be my first ice climb on lead. A pair of sneakers, cheap crampons, two ice axes, and four ice screws seemed to be the bare minimum required to get the job done. We pulled the rope and headed toward the river for some kayaking.

Erik Boomer climbing back up onto the glacier after paddling the first descent of a river. Photo by Sarah McNair-Landry.

All the information from scouting satellite images led us to believe this river would have the best whitewater. However, many rapids were not runnable, and in addition, the weather had turned to thick fog, freezing rain and strong winds. In early August, we ice climbed back onto the glacier and started toward base camp in Kangiqtualuk, planning to meet our friends Mark Synnott and Renan Ozturk, who were sailing the Northwest Passage and had planned to pick us up. As we neared camp, however, Mark sent us an inReach with some bad news: There was too much offshore ice to reach us.

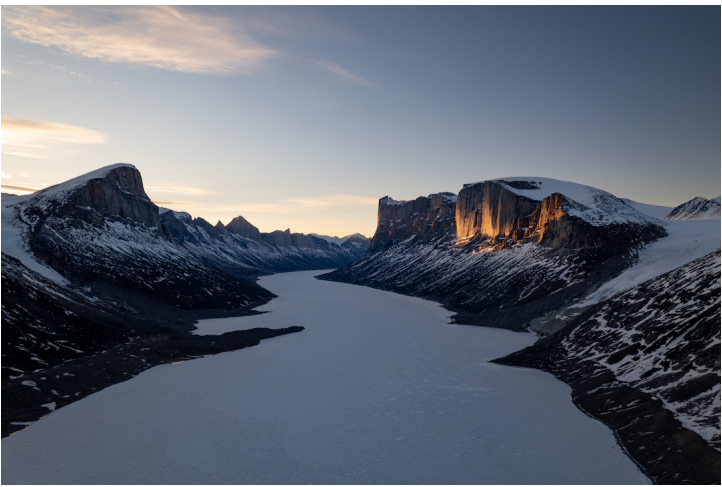
This left Sarah and me with a decision: wait in base camp for the ice to (hopefully) clear enough for a pickup from a friend in Clyde River or start our hike/paddle/portage back to town. We chose the latter, and after seven days, three open-water crossings, two overland portages, and a bonus kayak descent of another river, we made it back to the awesome community of Clyde River, where a maktaaq (whale skin) pizza party with our friends never tasted so good.

— Erik Boomer, Canada

## Images



Erik Boomer bootpacking up the Model T Couloir in Kangiqtualuk Uqquqti (formerly known as Sam Ford Fjord).



The last rays of sun illuminate the cliffs overlooking Stewart Lake.



Erik Boomer climbing back up onto the glacier after paddling the first descent of a river.



Camp on the sea ice in Kangiqtualuk Uqquqi (formerly Sam Ford Fjord).



Skiing across the quickly melting sea ice, Erik Boomer and Sarah McNair-Landry head toward Stewart Lake.



Erik Boomer kayaks the first descent of an impressive waterfall.



Erik Boomer leads the way up the final section of Romance and the Stone (466m, 5.11a C1) .



Sarah McNair-Landry at the top of Glacier Gully (1,188m, 35°), which provided a fun ski back down to the fiord.



Early morning turns down Glacier Gully (1,188m, 35°), above Kangiqtualuk Uqquqti (formerly known as Sam Ford Fjord) . Late in the season, the glaciers provided the best skiing conditions.



Wearing a drysuit and life jacket, Sarah McNair-Landry hauls her kayak across very thin sea ice.



Scouting an unrunnable yet beautiful waterfall.



The team's small camp partway up Romance and the Stone (466m, 5.11a C1).



Erik Boomer and Sarah McNair-Landry enjoying the spectacular views from their low camp on Romance and the Stone (466m, 5.11a C1).

## Article Details

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