



AAC Publications

Coronation Glacier Area, Four New Routes

Canada, Nunavut, Baffin Island

The ice around me gleamed as I slid into my dry suit and trusty Crocs. I fashioned an improvised harness out of skinny Dyneema and tied in—it hardly seemed like real life as James slowly lowered me down steep ice into cobalt-blue water. I stretched across the moat and grabbed beautiful golden granite. Soon, the three others were sliding across a taut rope and racking up at the base of our fourth new route—likely the fourth climb ever established near the outlet of the Coronation Glacier in southern Auyuittuq National Park.

Shira Biner, Amanda Bischke, James Klemmensen, and I had begun scheming and dreaming of this truly audacious trip six months prior. We were a small crew of Squamish-based climbers, skilled but not the caliber of professional athletes we associated with this kind of trip. Luckily, we had the most essential ingredients: self-belief, a keen eye for managing alpine hazards, and the logistical skills to make our dreams a reality. After months of preparation and a heady mixture of fear and excitement, we arrived in the small village of Qikiqtarjuaq, Nunavut, on July 7.

Our plan was to paddle the 70 or so km south and west to the Coronation Fjord by way of inflatable sea kayaks, then explore the climbing possibilities of the massive Coronation Glacier. Billy Arnaquq, a local outfitter and Inuit Arctic renaissance man, greeted us at the airport. Soon, our first major challenge presented itself. The sea ice surrounding southern Baffin Island showed no sign of breaking up. (In a typical year, the ice breaks up in June.) We had far too much weight to carry across the ice on our backs. After some deliberation, we eventually decided that the best course of action was to enlist the help of Arnaquq and his snow machine. We still felt strongly about doing this expedition as humanly powered as possible, but some things were out of our control.

We compromised by having Billy deliver a large load of equipment and food to an island near the southern extent of the sea ice while we walked with more manageable packs. Under the evening sun, we marched roughly 20 km across the vast ice as seals watched us from their breathing holes all around, slipping into the icy sea before we could get close. By the wee hours of that morning, we had arrived at our gear cache.

The next phase of our trip consisted of waiting and growing increasingly antsy. We dubbed the tiny spot where we were marooned Faffin Island—it accurately described how we felt by day five. Finally, we were able to shuttle massive loads of gear across the thinning ice, pack our boats, and carefully scoot them into the open water. We were off!

The rest of our journey to Coronation Fjord was relatively uneventful. After 50km of paddling, we arrived at the end of the fjord and began another gear shuttle ten kilometers up the valley to our base camp. Finally it was time to climb. Alpine new-routing in such a wild environment is not easy, and successes and failures came in equal measure. On their first attempt, Amanda and Shira learned several critical things about the Coronation Glacier. One was that traveling up the glacier was easy, but traveling laterally involved stream crossing after stream crossing. Second, they discovered that the cleanest-looking walls lacked continuous crack systems.

In time, we managed to complete four routes between rainstorms and rest days. James and I climbed

two long routes: The Salami Exchange Commission (800m, V 5.10) on a prominent buttress on the north side of the Coronation Glacier at approximately 67.149189, -64.998320, and Escape from Azkaban (650m, IV 5.10+), above the north side of the glacier's north arm at about 67.17357, -65.18980. Amanda and Shira teamed up for The Big G (350m, III 5.8), a pretty ridge on the south side of the glacier. All four of us joined forces for our final climb, back up the north arm. A glacial lake guarded a beautiful ridge of golden rock at approximately 67.16720, -65.28386—that's when I got to don the dry suit to set up a Tyrolean traverse. Bathed in pale Arctic sunlight, we completed Raise the Drawbridge (300m, III 5.10-), with breathtaking views over the Penny Ice Cap, a perfect ending for our 20 days by the Coronation Glacier.

After hiking out and paddling 70km back to Qikiqtarjuaq, we departed the village on August 19. Our expedition was supported by a Cutting Edge Grant from the AAC and a Jen Higgins Grant for Young Women from the Alpine Club of Canada (see Jen Higgins Grant trip report [here](#)).

— Noah Besen, USA

Images

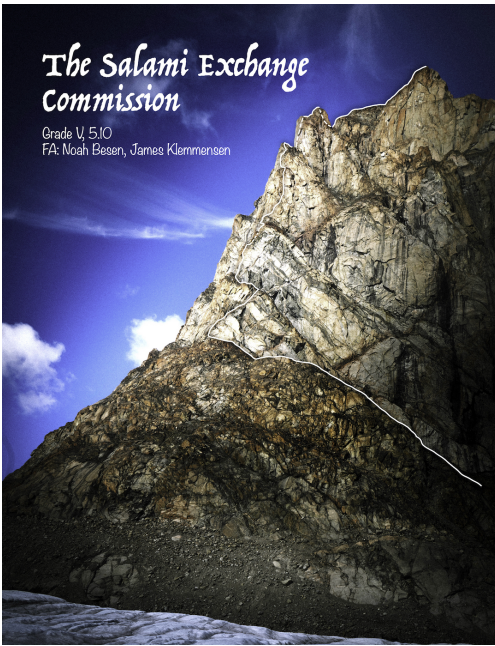


Photo-topo of The Salami Exchange Commission, near the Coronation Glacier.



Noah Besen on The Salami Exchange Commission (800m, V 5.10), above the Coronation Glacier.



Paddling en route to the Coronation Glacier.



Shira Biner climbing on Raise the Drawbridge! on the north side of the north arm of Coronation Glacier.

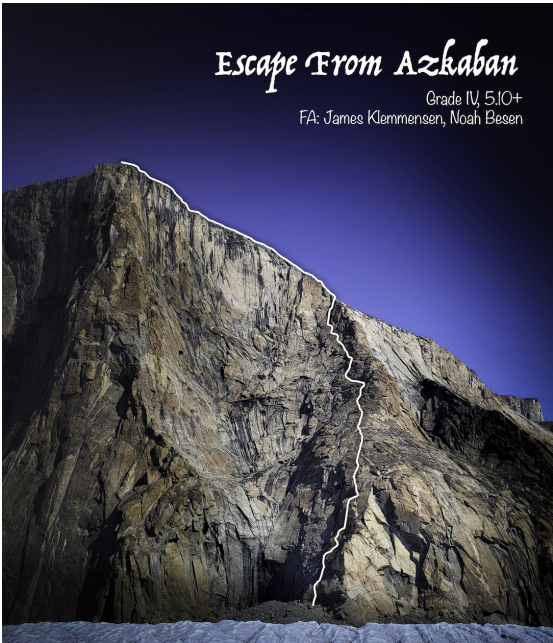
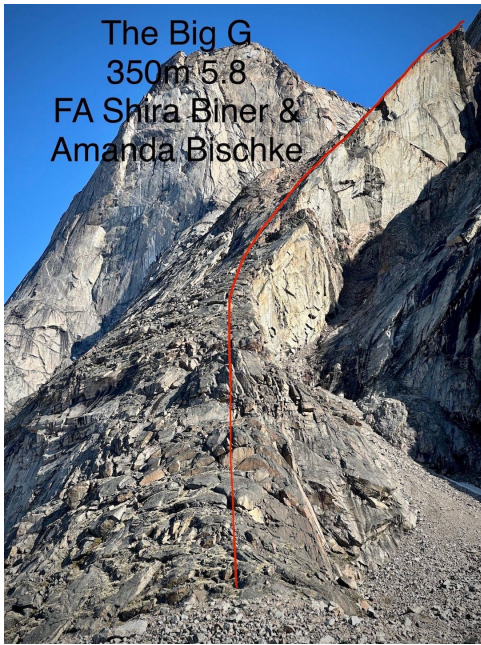
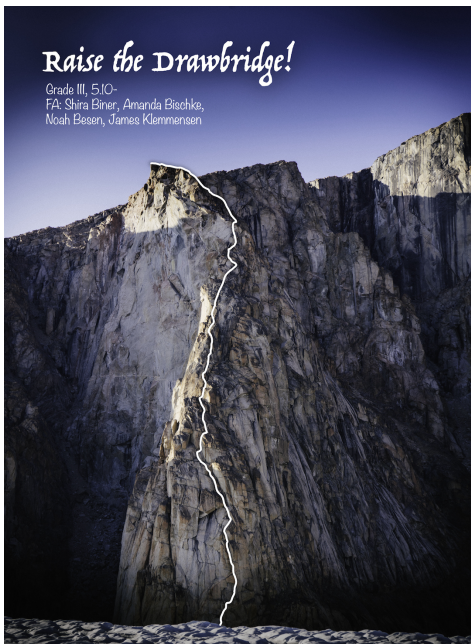


Photo-topo for Escape from Askaban on the north side of the north arm of Coronation Glacier.



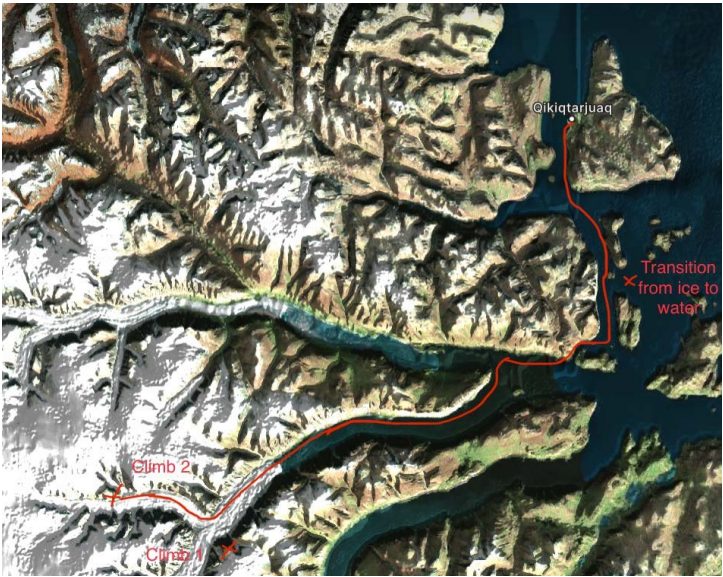
The Big G
350m 5.8
FA Shira Biner &
Amanda Bischke

Photo-topo for The Big G.



Raise the Drawbridge!
Grade III, 5.10-
FA: Shira Biner, Amanda Bischke,
Noah Bassen, James Klemmensen

Photo-topo for Raise the Drawbridge! on the north side of the north arm of Coronation Glacier.



Map of the 2023 team's approach to the Coronation Glacier from Qikiqtarjuaq.

Article Details

Author	Noah Besen
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	171
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions