

Baffin Paddle Climb Expedition 2019

Technical Report



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1.0 Location

Auyuittuq National Park, Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada

2.0 The Team

Bronwyn Hodgins (Expedition Leader - contact bronwyn_hodgins@outlook.com)
Jacob Cook
Thor Stewart
Zack Goldberg-Poch

3.0 Trip Dates

July 1st - August 10th 2019

4.0 Trip Overview

In March we shipped food and equipment to Pangnirtung, Nunavut, where local outfitter Peter Kilabuk (www.kilabukoutfitting.com) took it by snowmobile to Summit Lake - cache permit required in advance, contact the Park Office.

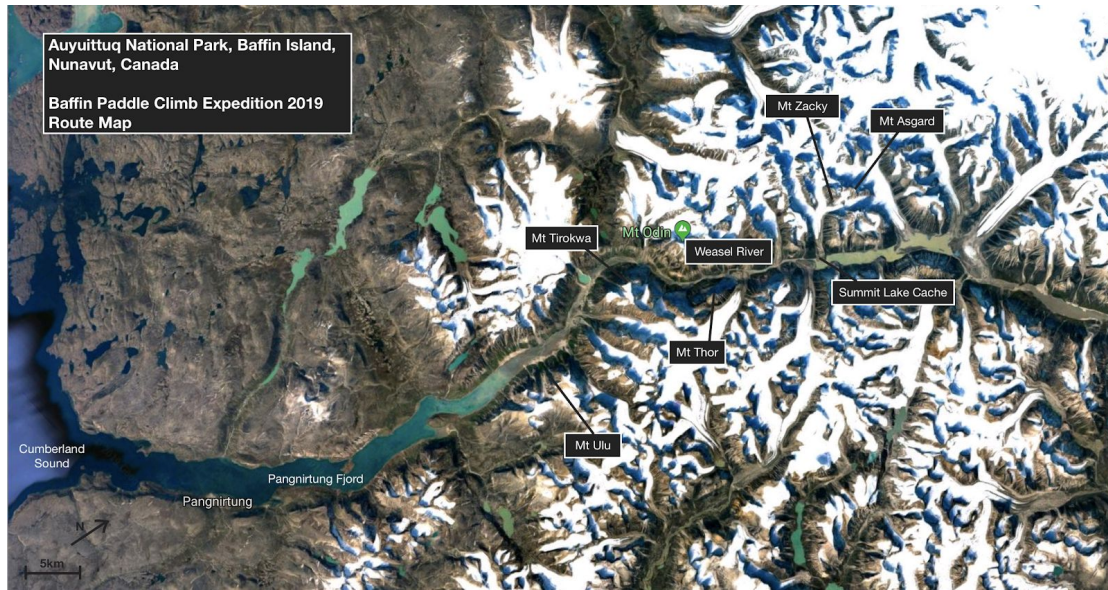
After landing in Pangnirtung we paddled 30km up the Pangnirtung Fjord in packrafts, which we completed in an 8-hour push. We then continued up valley by foot for another 30km (through four days of miserable weather) to our cache at Summit Lake.

We established an advanced base camp at the confluence of the Parade and Caribou Glaciers. From there Bronwyn and Jacob climbed a new route on the South Tower of Mount Asgard, while Thor and Zack made what is likely the second free ascent of *Polar Thievery* on the North Tower. A few days later Jacob and Bronwyn repeated the classic *Scott-Henneck Route* on Asgard's North Tower, adding a 3-pitch harder free variation to avoid the often wet chimney crux. At the same time Thor and Zack made the first ascent of "Mount Zacky," an unclimbed sub-summit of Mt Midgard.

We then hiked around class 5+ rapids at the top of the Weasel and then paddled/portaged the river down to Mount Thor. We all climbed Mt Thor together via the *South Ridge*, succeeding in our major trip goal to "climb Mt Thor with Thor!" After an unsuccessful attempt on Mount Tirokwa due to poor rock, we continued downriver, running up to Class 3 rapids. This made a great change of pace from climbing and saved us about 20km of hiking with insanely heavy loads. We believe we are the first combined paddling and climbing expedition to the area and around the fourth to paddle the river.

From a camp at the river's end, Jacob and Bronwyn made the first ascent of *The Niv Mizzet Line 5.13-* over two days, with a hanging bivy on Grade 7 Pods. This may be the first 5.13 put up in alpine style on Baffin Island. At the same time Thor and Zack made possibly the first recorded ascent of Ulu Peak. We paddled the fjord in 8 hours through the night (for calmer sea) back to Pangnirtung. Before flying home, we took about 20 local kids rock climbing for an afternoon on some cliffs near the town!

4.1 Route Map



The official park map is available at the park office in Pangnirtung upon arrival, and is very useful showing the hikers trail (including the glacial stream crossings) and the location of the emergency shelters. We also ordered 1:50 000 topographical maps from the National Resources Canada website.

4.2 Summary of Ascents

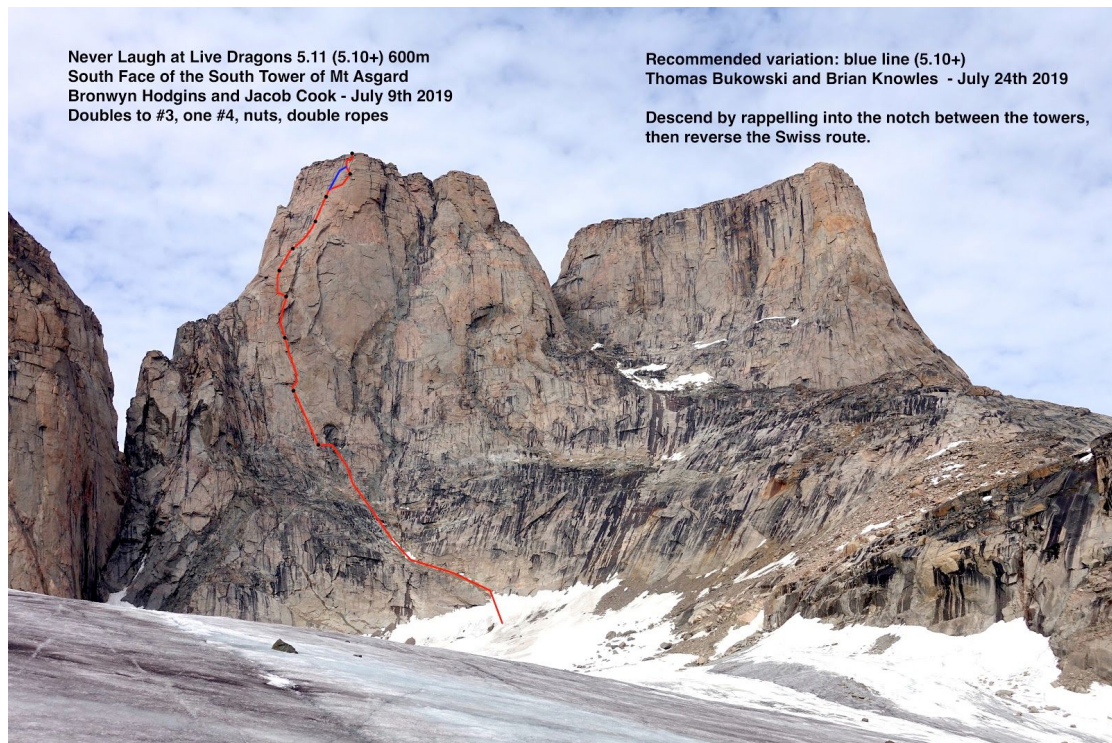
- Bronwyn and Jacob made the first ascent of "Never Laugh at Live Dragons" 5.10+ (E2) 600m on the South Face of the South Tower of Mount Asgard.
- Thor and Zack made an ascent of Polar Thievery 5.11a (E3) 400m on the North Tower of Mount Asgard.
- Jacob and Bronwyn repeated the Scott-Henneck route via a new 3 pitch free variation at the top, 5.11+ (E4) 900m on the North Tower of Mount Asgard.
- Thor and Zack made the first ascent of "Mount Zacky," an unclimbed sub-summit of Mt Midgard via "Beach Vacation" 5.10+ (E3) 600m.
- All four team members made an ascent of Mount Thor via the South Ridge route 5.8 (HVS).
- Over two days Jacob and Bronwyn made the first ascent of "The Niv Mizzet Line" 5.13- (E7) 400m on an unnamed west facing tower adjacent to the North Face of Ulu peak.
- Over two days Thor and Zack made possibly the first recorded ascent of Ulu Peak via their new route "The Beached Whale" 5.10+ (E3) A1 600m.

5.0 Technical Details

5.1 Climbing Mission #1: North and South Towers of Asgard

On the south face of the south tower of Mount Asgard, Bronwyn and Jacob made the first ascent of *Never Laugh at Live Dragons 5.11 600m* in 9 rope-stretcher pitches. The route shared the first pitch and a half with Jon Walsh and Chris Brazeau's 2009 route and the Italian Route from some years before. From there we cut left on some face climbing to get to a perfect 100m splitter hand-crack! Following a major corner system above, we took a detour to avoid a wet icy chimney via a pitch and a half of airy 5.11 face climbing that was probably deserving of an "R" rating. Near the top we found some ancient hardware and think we joined the British 1972 route (Guy Lee, Phil Koch and Row Wood).

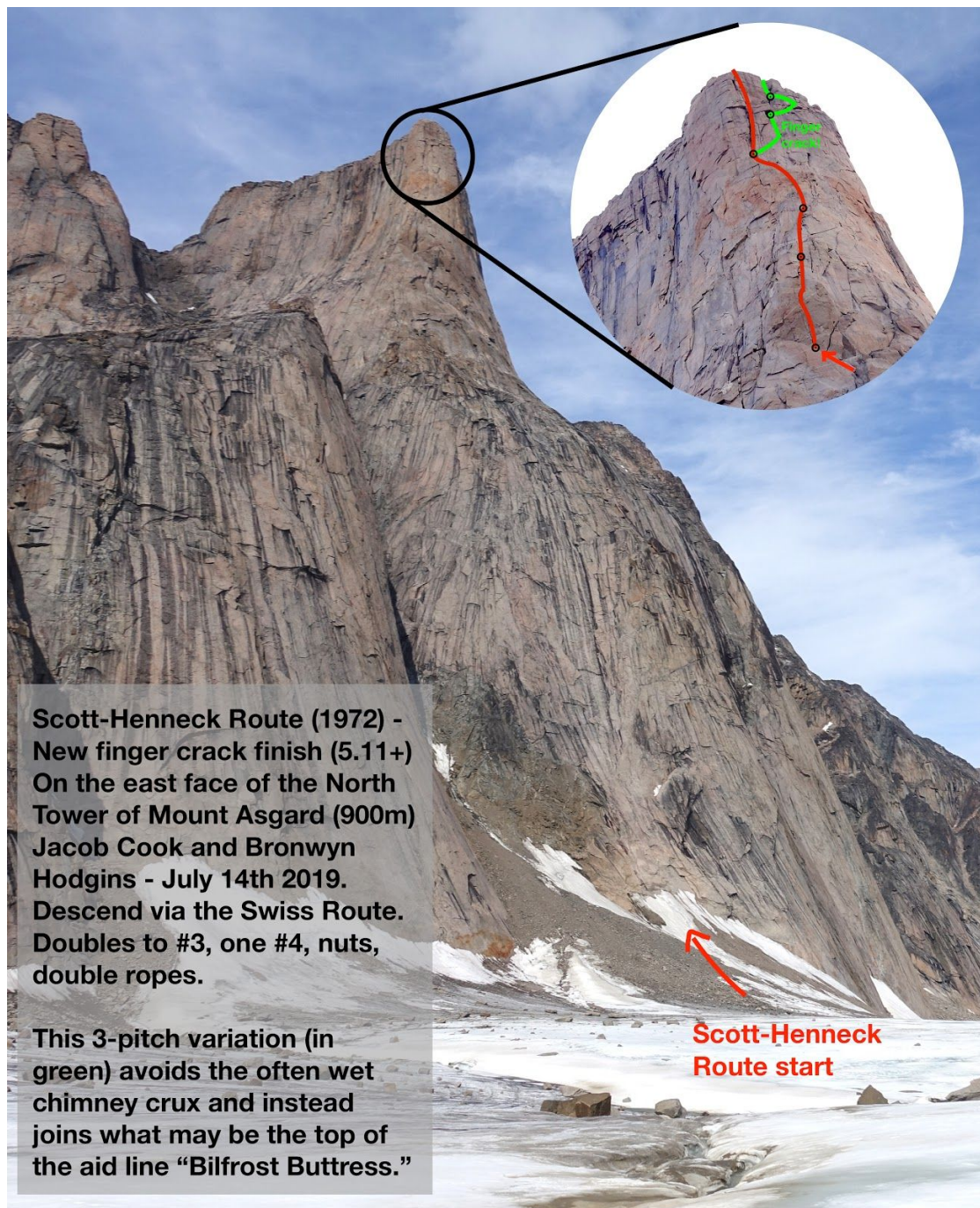
The climb was established in a 20-hour continuous push from a base camp at the confluence of the Caribou and Parade Glaciers. It was repeated a week later by climbers from San Francisco, Thomas Bukowski and Brian Knowles, who we met and to whom gave a hand-drawn topo. They confirmed the quality of the climb and were able to stay in the corner up high, meaning the whole route now goes at 5.10+. It's for certain the easiest free climb on the South Tower of Asgard and follows sustained crack and corner systems nearly the entire way. We would highly recommend it to future visitors to the area (hand-drawn topo in *Appendix*).



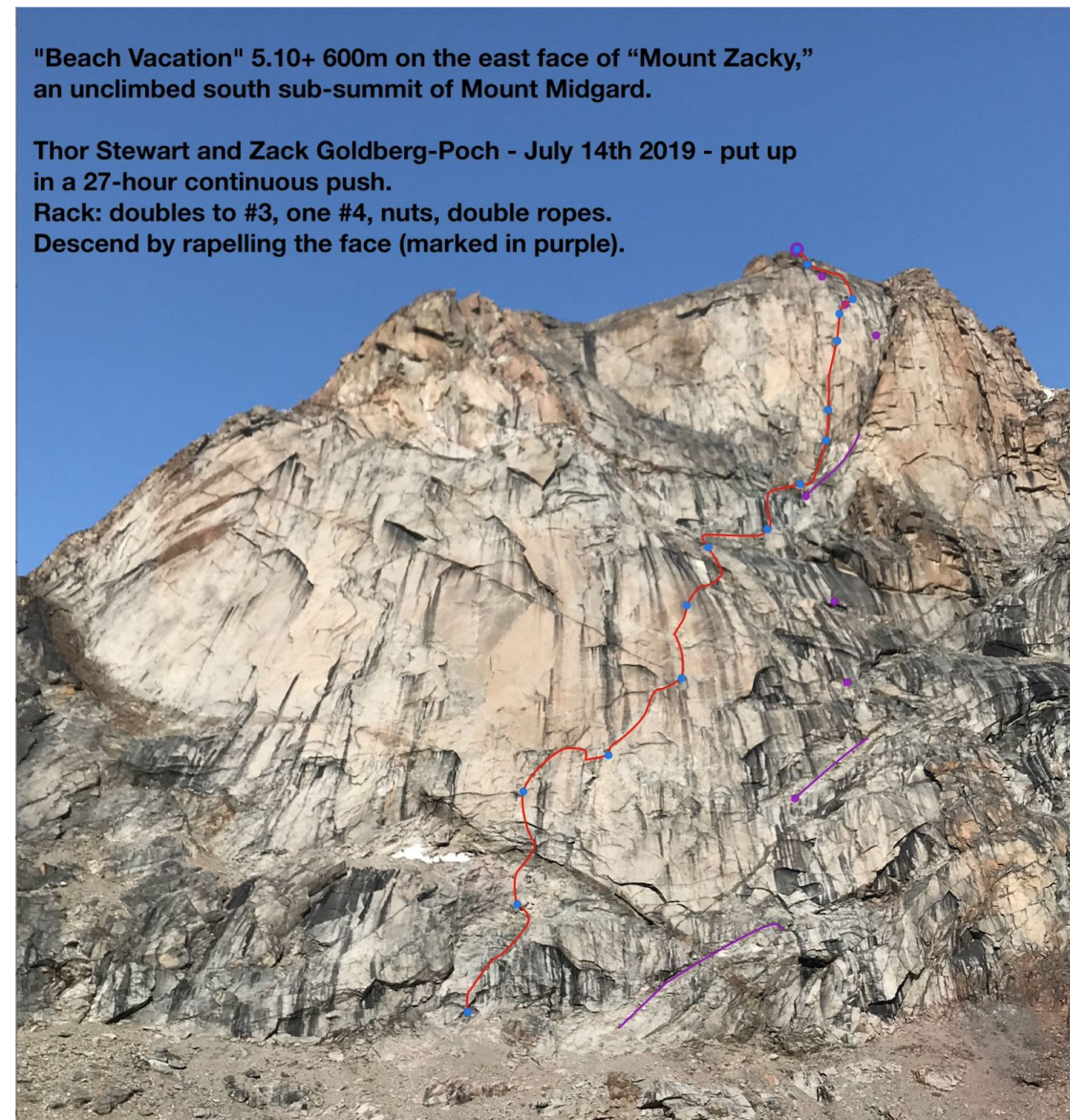
At the same time Zack and Thor made an ascent of *Polar Thievery 5.11- 400m* on the south face of the North Tower of Asgard. This was as far as we know the route's second free ascent and they completed the climb in a 23-hour continuous push. We were whooping at each other back and forth between the two towers as we climbed. A topo can be found in Mark Synott's guide for the area titled *Baffin Island: Climbing, Trekking and Skiing*.

5.2 Climbing Mission #2: Scott-Henneck Route (Asgard) and “Mt Zacky”

A few days later Bronwyn and Jacob repeated the classic *Scott-Henneck Route* on the East Buttress of the North Tower of Asgard, in an 18-hour round trip push. Up high we discovered the famous chimney was running with water; we filled our water bottles from it and started considering other options. Instead, we traversed right and made what we think is the first free ascent of a perfect finger crack, originally part of the aid route *Bilfrost Buttress*. Our 3-pitch free variation to the top of the *Scott-Henneck Route* goes at 5.11+ and features excellent rock, a sweet finger crack and unreal exposure at the top of the North Tower (hand-drawn topo in *Appendix*).



At the same time Thor and Zack made what we believe to be the first ascent of a large peak connected to (and south of) Mount Midgard, to which they gave the tongue in cheek name “Mount Zacky.” They named their route *Beach Vacation* and it featured 15 pitches up to 5.10+. They rappelled the face to descend. The climb was our groups’ longest effort, requiring a 27 hour continuous push camp to camp (hand-drawn topo in *Appendix*).



5.3 Climbing Mission #3: Mount Thor

After some bad weather we descended the Weasel River via a combination of portaging and paddling to establish a base camp under Mount Thor. As a team of four we ferried across the river and made a repeat of the classic *South Ridge Route 5.8*, completing our expedition’s major goal: “climb Mount Thor with Thor!” We descended the north-east side of the peak and experienced some complications returning to the valley owing to the receding of the Forks Beard glacier (a few rappels were required) and a thick fog settling in the valley. The climb took us 21 hours camp to camp.

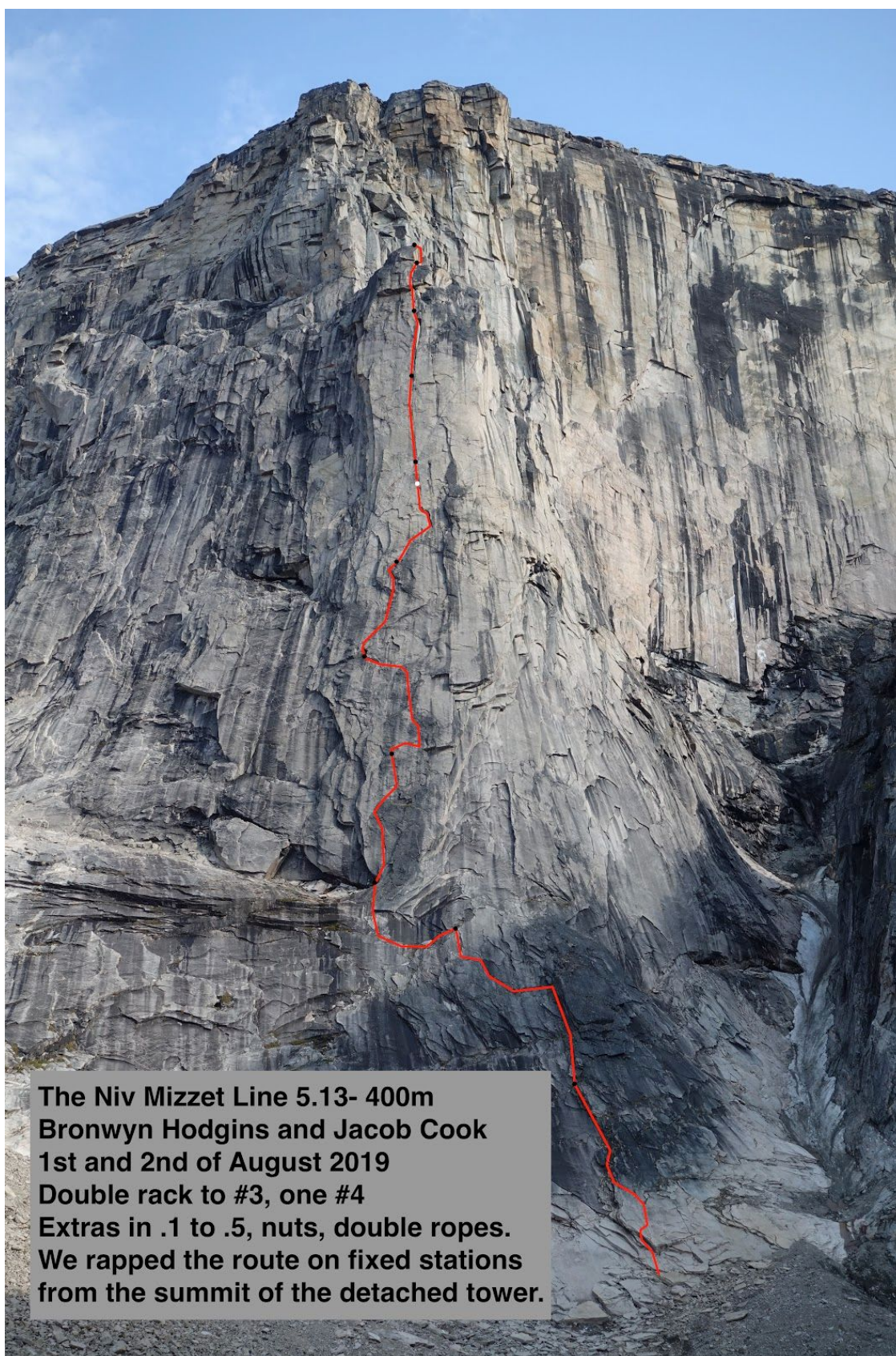
5.4 Climbing Mission #4: Mount Tirokwa (attempt)

After further descending the Weasel River, we made another base camp under Mount Tirokwa. We planned to try the 700m west face big wall style over 3 days as a team of four, following a line that Jon Walsh and Chris Brazeau had attempted in 2009. After 3 pitches of scary loose rock, one dropped camera, one core-shot rope, two dropped shoes and dislodging a block that exploded narrowly missing Zack and Thor at a belay, we decided to bail. We named our 3 pitch base route *How to Epic in 3 pitches or Less*. We believe we may have been further left than Jon and Chris.

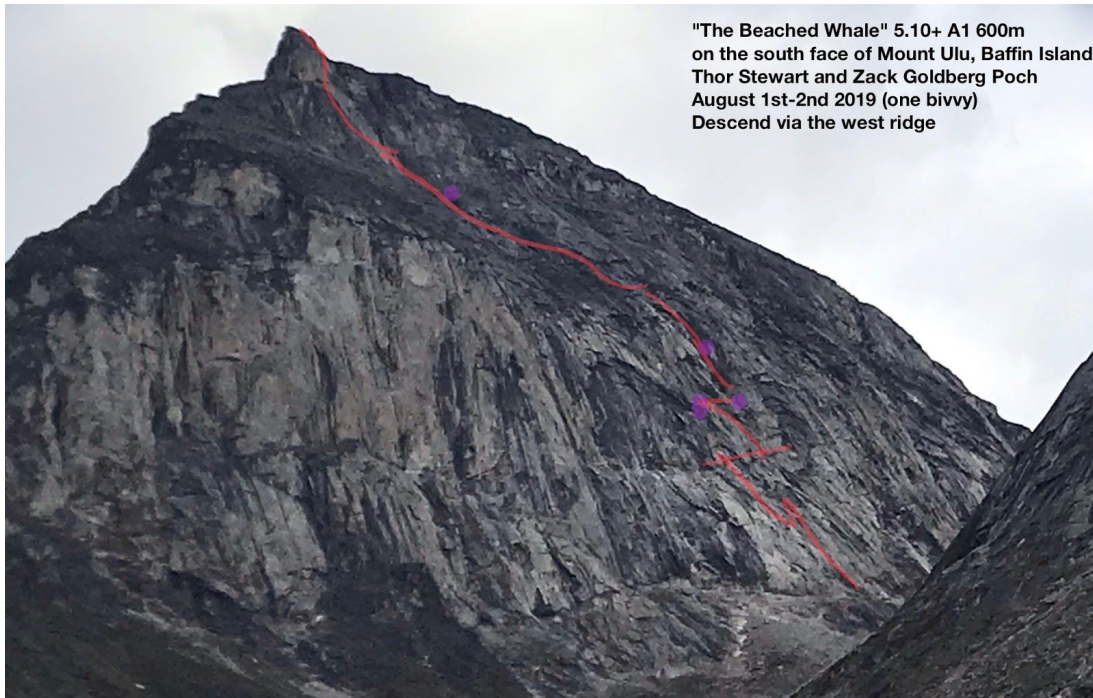
5.5 Climbing Mission #5: Mount Ulu and “Magic Tower”

Our last base camp (after more sweet white-water) was under Mount Ulu at the mouth of the Pangnirtung fjord. Bronwyn and Jacob packed for 2 days and set off to attempt the North Face. However, once we made it up into the cirque below the face, our eyes were drawn to a 400m unnamed tower of golden granite. The upper half of the wall was split by striking splitter, so we changed objectives. We spent the first day climbing 6 pitches up to 5.12- to reach the base of the splitter. On pitch 5, Jacob found himself standing on a scrittly sloping ledge, 15 metres run out above some sub-optimal gear. He tagged the hand drill and spent an intense 20 minutes drilling a bolt from the stance, before clipping it with a locking biner and running it out another 10 metres to a belay. The pitch was maybe 5.11X. We spent the night at a free-hanging bivy on Grade 7 *Pods*, the new 3lb inflatable portaledges.

Day 2 we climbed the splitter, which turned out to be much thinner than expected: two pitches of sustained 5.12 followed by one 5.13- pitch, all on perfect finger and tips crack reminiscent of the Tom Egan Memorial Route in the Bugaboos. Jacob successfully free climbed the entire route after redpointing the crux pitch; Bronwyn followed the route mostly clean except for the crux which she aided through. We named the route “The Niv-Mizzet Line” (5.13- 400m) and the tower “Magic Tower” (which we thought was an unclimbed summit, only to find an old piton at the top!). This may be the first 5.13 on Baffin Island put up in alpine style (hand-drawn topo in *Appendix*).



At the same time Thor and Zack made an ascent of the south face of Mount Ulu, also over 2 days with a bivy on Grade 7 *Pods*. They called their route *The Beached Whale* and experienced difficulties up to 5.10 for around 400m. It's unlikely that this is the first ascent of the mountain, but we have been unable to find any other reported ascents.



5.6 The Pangnirtung Fjord and the Weasel River

From Pangnirtung, we started paddling at low tide (12pm for us) in order to ride the rising tide up the 30km-long fjord. The tidal variation was significant at about 6m. Paddling in two-person *Alpacka Forager* packrafts, we camped one hour after high tide (8pm), roughly 1km shy of the mouth of the Weasel River. The following day we walked along the west shoreline, dragging our loaded packrafts up the river for about 8km. After that, the river steepened and we carried our load the rest of the way to Summit Lake over three days.

After climbing on and around Mount Asgard for a little over a week, we started to descend the valley. From Summit Lake, we ran the very first set of the Weasel, a short and fun Class 2. Then the river plunges suddenly with rapids up to Class 5+ for a few kilometers, before settling into continuous Class 3/4 until Mount Thor. We portaged the majority of this. As far as we know, the upper section of the Weasel has only been paddled once in its entirety, by pro kayaker Eric Boomer in 2014. We put in and ran a 500m section about 1km south of Half Hour Creek. After scouting, Jacob and Bronwyn made it through the run, but Zack and Thor had some difficulties and ended up both swimming part of the set. Given the skill level of the team (Bronwyn is a very experienced whitewater canoeist but the other three are only casual paddlers) and the dangers of frigid water, we opted to portage to Mt Thor after that.

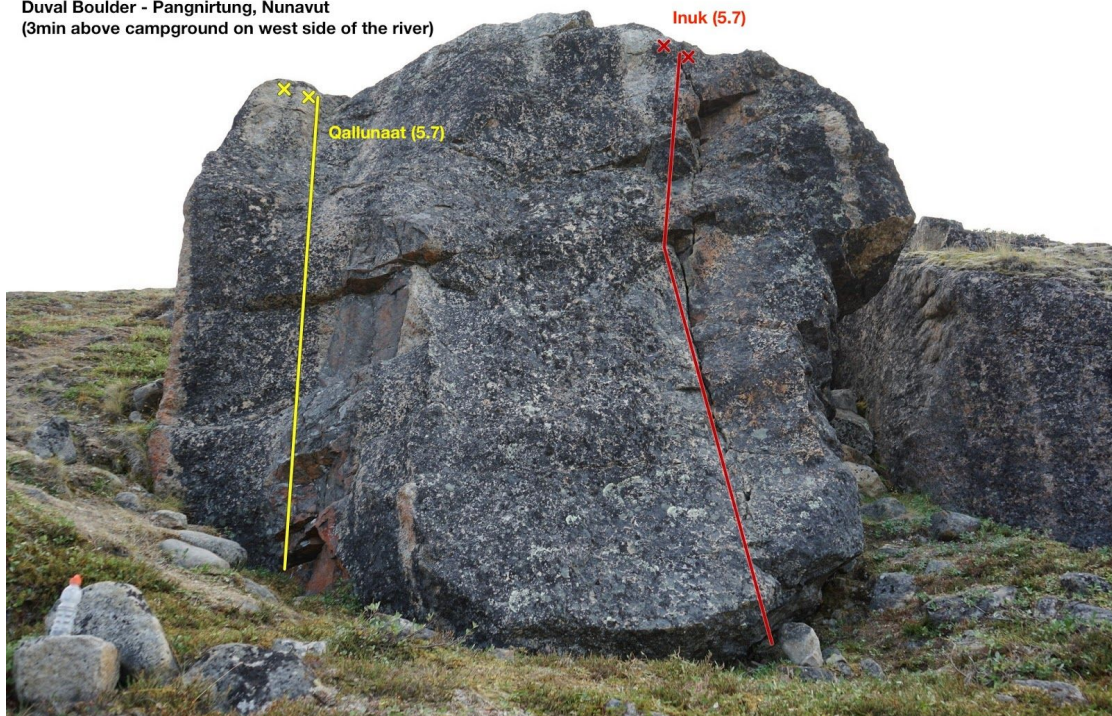
After Mt Thor the river goes through a series of short intense rapids (Class 3-5) separated by longer stretches of wide flat sections. These rapids are caused by moraines spilling into the valley from either side and effectively "pinching" the river. This happens in three significant spots: 2km below Thor Emergency Shelter, just above Windy Lake Shelter and at Crater Lake. At each, we would carry all our gear and food to the bottom of the rapids. We'd then portage the paddling gear partway, and run the lower section of the rapid into the calmer pool below. After Crater Lake it's a fun, fast flowing smooth ride to the river's end.

For our return fjord paddle, high tide was at 8am and 8pm. We opted to start in the evening as the winds were much calmer (and there was still very little darkness). We pushed off at 6pm and were able to ride the current of the Weasel until the tide picked us up. We arrived in Pang at 3am.

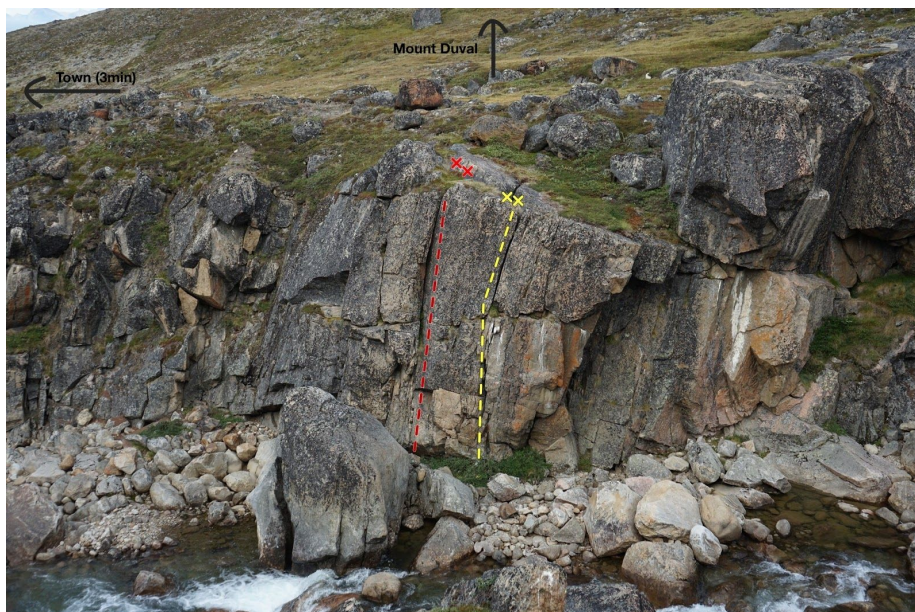
6.0 Community Project

During our final days in Pangnirtung, we wanted to do something with the local community. We put up posters around town and the next day about 20 kids showed up to go rock climbing. They loved it! We left bolted top rope anchors in a boulder above town (see below) and hopefully future climbers to the area can get the kids out again! See *Appendix* for our poster.

Duval Boulder - Pangnirtung, Nunavut
(3min above campground on west side of the river)



The following two routes were already established and are found directly across the river from the Duval Boulder. We learned that these have been used for training purposes. The line on the right was 5.8 and we didn't try the line on the left but it looked about 5.9.



7.0 Trip Expenditure and Valuable Sponsors

The Expedition expenditure came to a total of nearly \$30,000 CAD, with personal air travel and food shipment making up most of the expenses due to the remote location. A complete cost breakdown chart can be found in *Appendix*.

With generous support from our valuable sponsors, we were able to raise over \$25,000 CAD, as well as acquiring some free equipment, food and technical apparel.

We would like to say a huge thank-you to...

- Our main Sponsors: Rab, Grade 7 Equipment, Scarpa UK and Alpacka Raft.
- Additional Trip Sponsors: Grivel, Edelweiss, Mountain House, Katadyn, Honey Stinger, Optimus, Level Six and Il Negozio Nicastro.
- Grants: The Gino Watkins Memorial Fund, The British Mountaineering Council (BMC), The Mount Everest Foundation (MEF), The Mec-Vimff Adventure Fund and The Royal Canadian Geographic Society.

8.0 Media/Outreach

8.1 Written Articles

Articles of our trip have been released on: [UKClimbing](#), [Rock and Ice](#), [Gripped Magazine](#) and the [BMC](#). We are also writing articles for: [The American Alpine Journal](#) and [The Canadian Alpine Journal](#), as well as the [Rab](#) and [Scarpa](#) official websites.

8.2 Presentations

Bronwyn has given two slideshow presentations about our trip: as an inspirational speaker for the *Mountain Mentors* program in Vancouver and at the opening of the *Alpine Club of Canada (ACC)* Squamish Branch. Our team will also be presenting in person at the [Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival \(Vimff\)](#) in February 2020.

8.3 Film

We are working with Canadian filmmaker Heather Mosher to create a 20min film of the expedition, funded by Rab, which we will be submitting to various prestigious mountain film festivals. Our tentative deadline is to be finished by late spring 2020. See *Appendix* for our National Parks Photo/Film permit.

8.4 Social Media Links

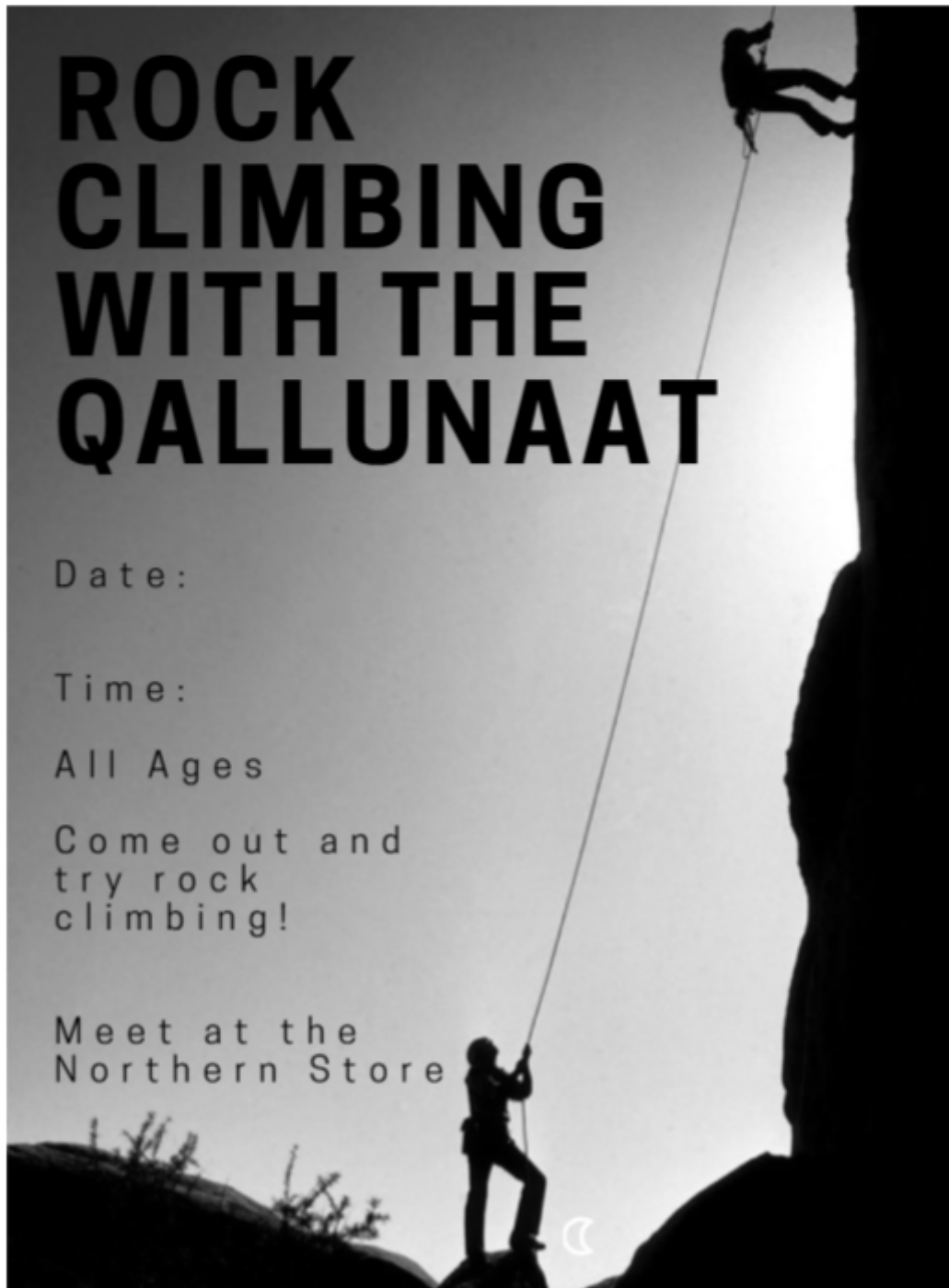
[Expedition Instagram](#)

[Bronwyn Hodgins Instagram](#)

[Jacob Cook Instagram](#)

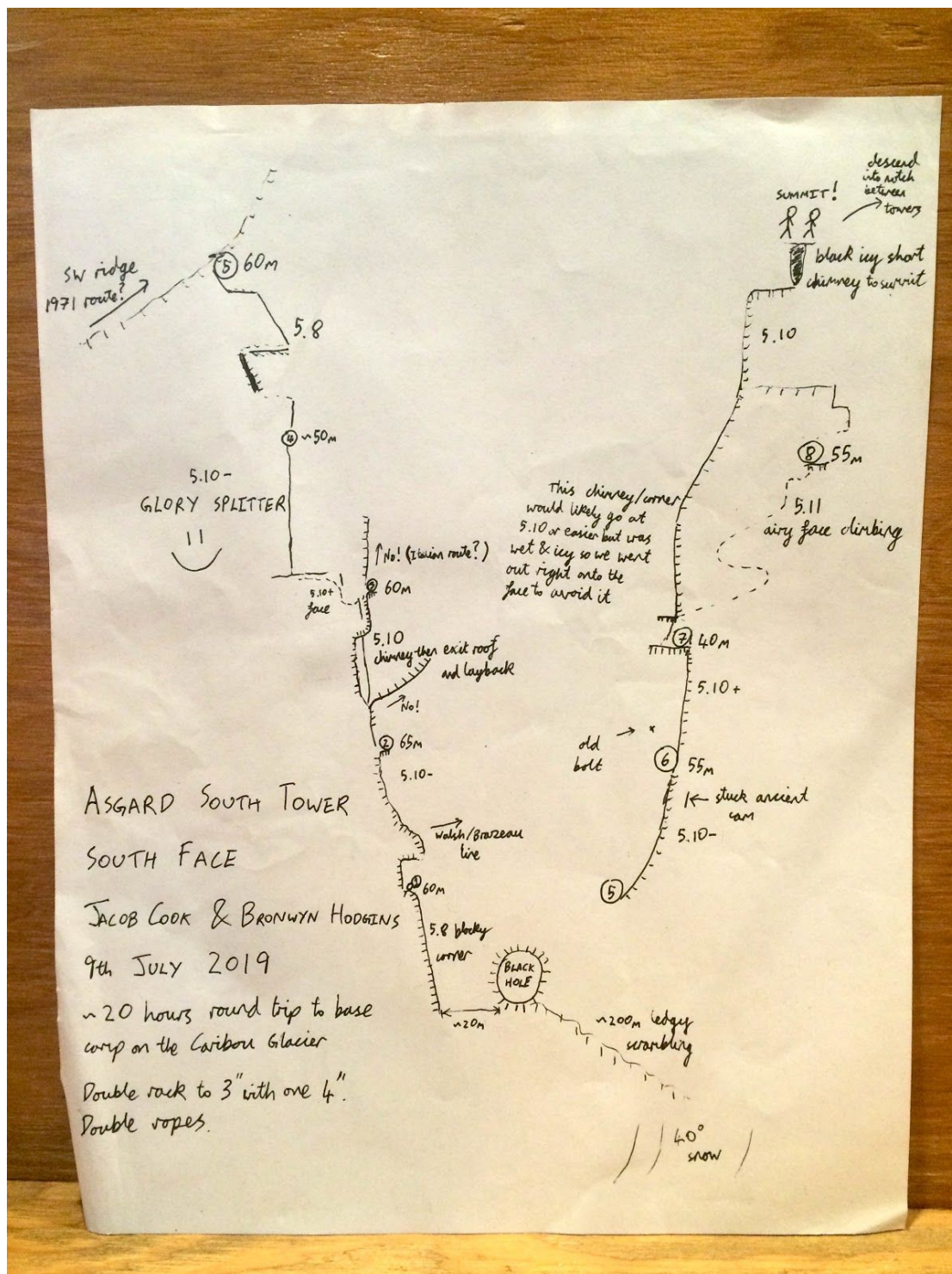
Appendix

Community Climbing Poster

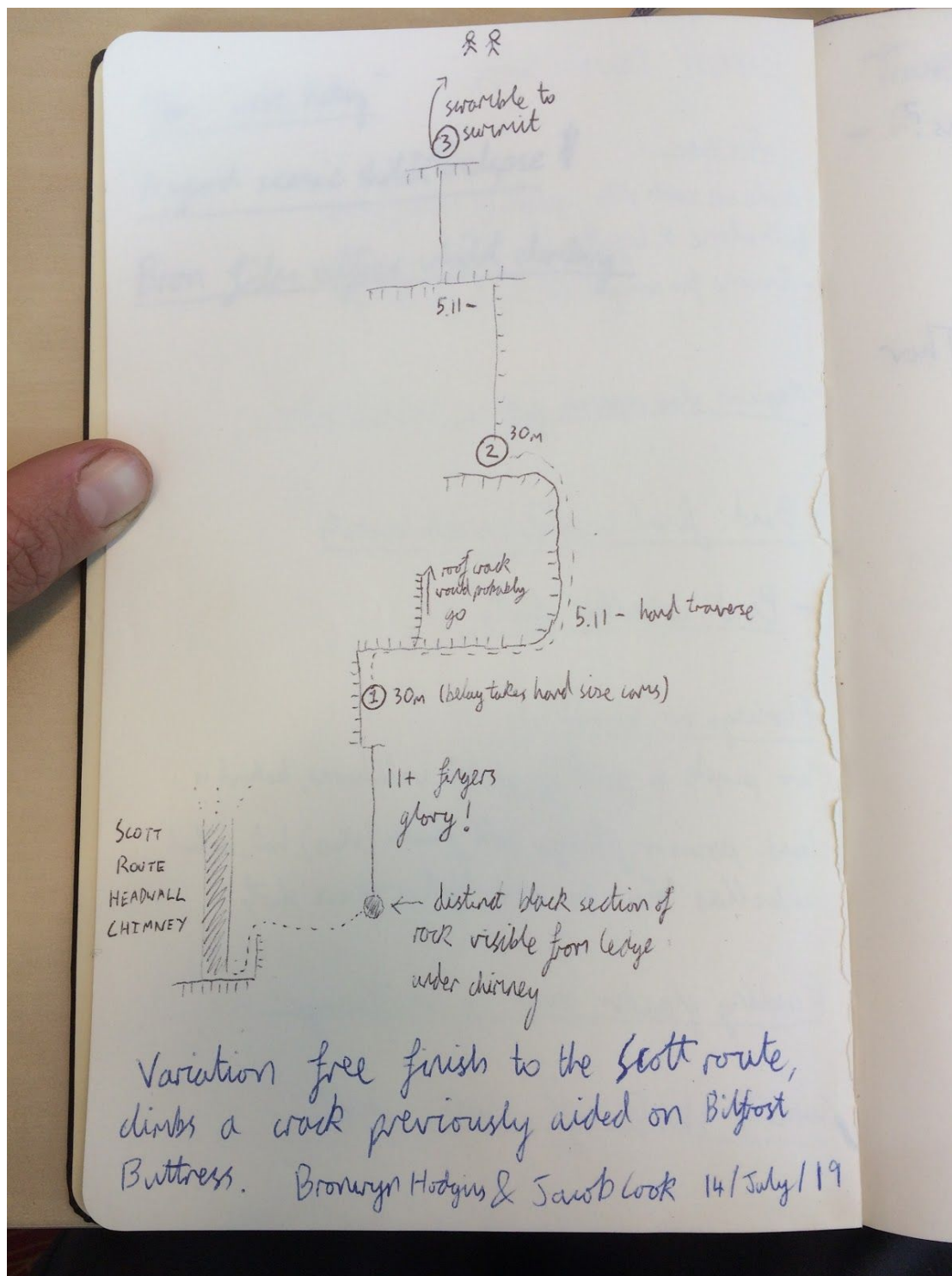


Hand-drawn Climbing Topos

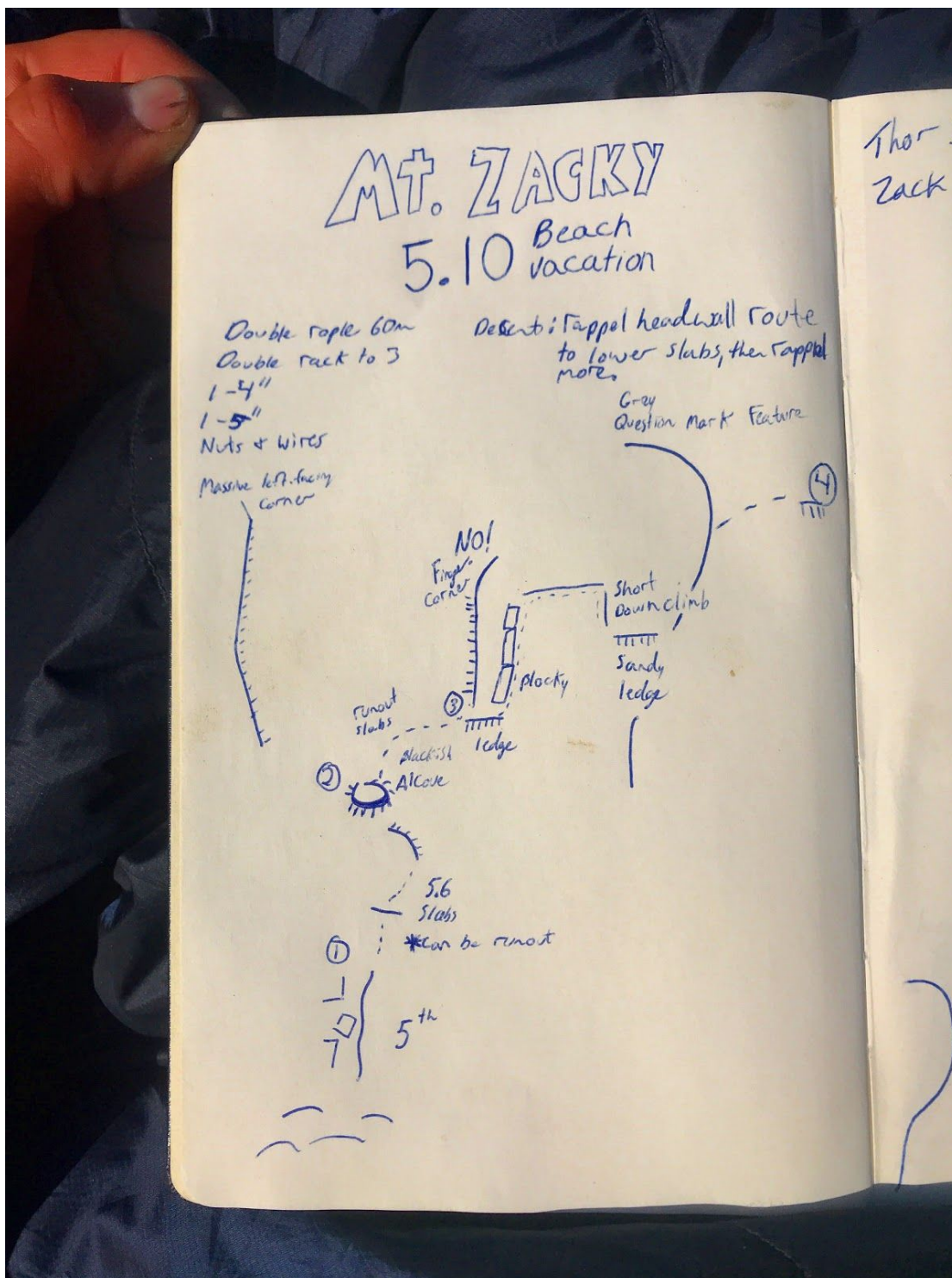
"Never Laugh at Live Dragons" 5.10+ (E2) 600m on the South Face of the South Tower of Mount Asgard (FA Bronwyn Hodgins and Jacob Cook):



New finger crack finish to the Scott-Henneck Route (1972), 5.11+ (E4) 900m on the North Tower of Mount Asgard (Bronwyn Hodgins and Jacob Cook):



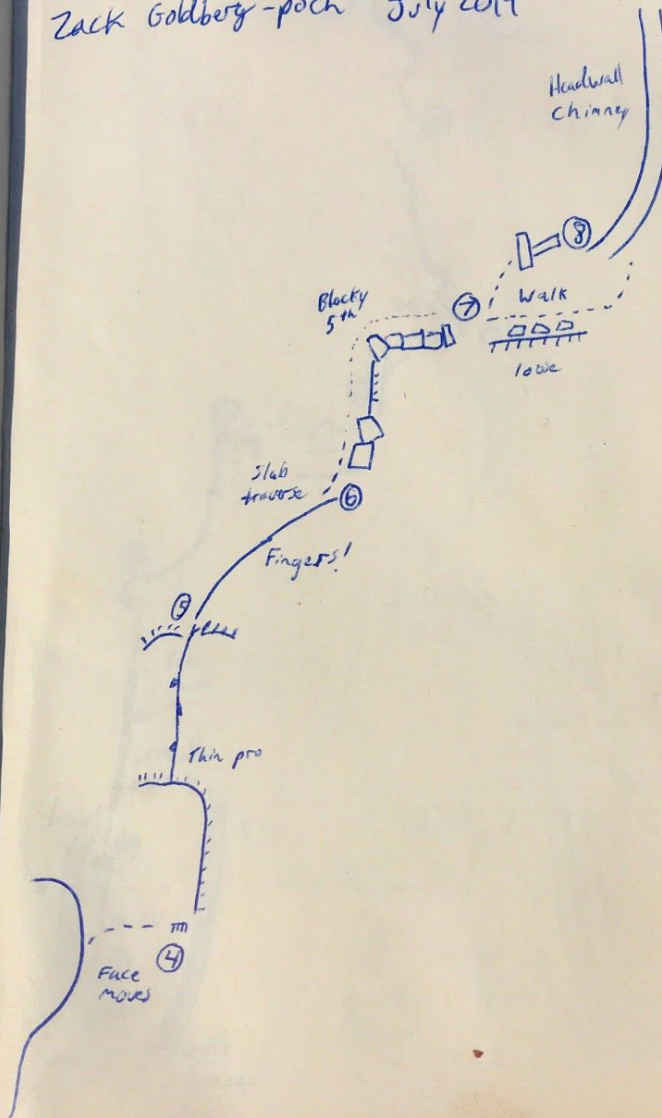
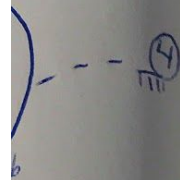
"Beach Vacation" 5.10+ (E3) 600m on "Mount Zacky," a previously unclimbed sub-summit of Mount Midgard (FA Thor Stewart and Zack Goldberg-Poch):

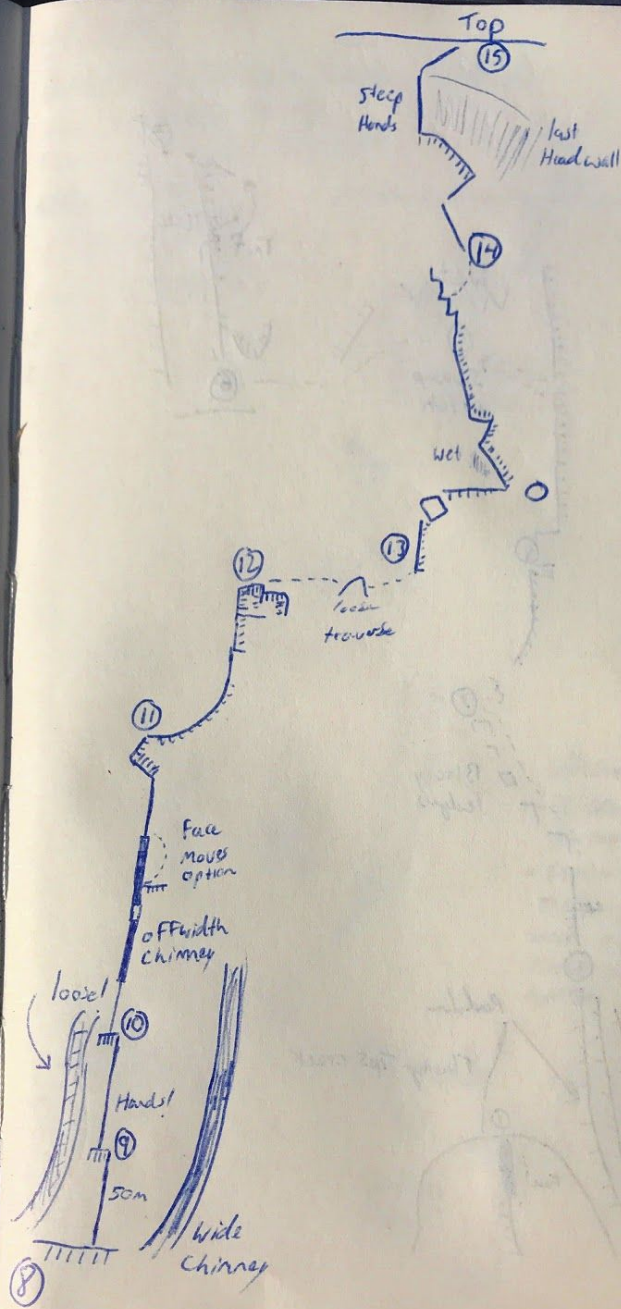


Thor-Stewart Mountain side
Zack Goldberg-poch July 2019

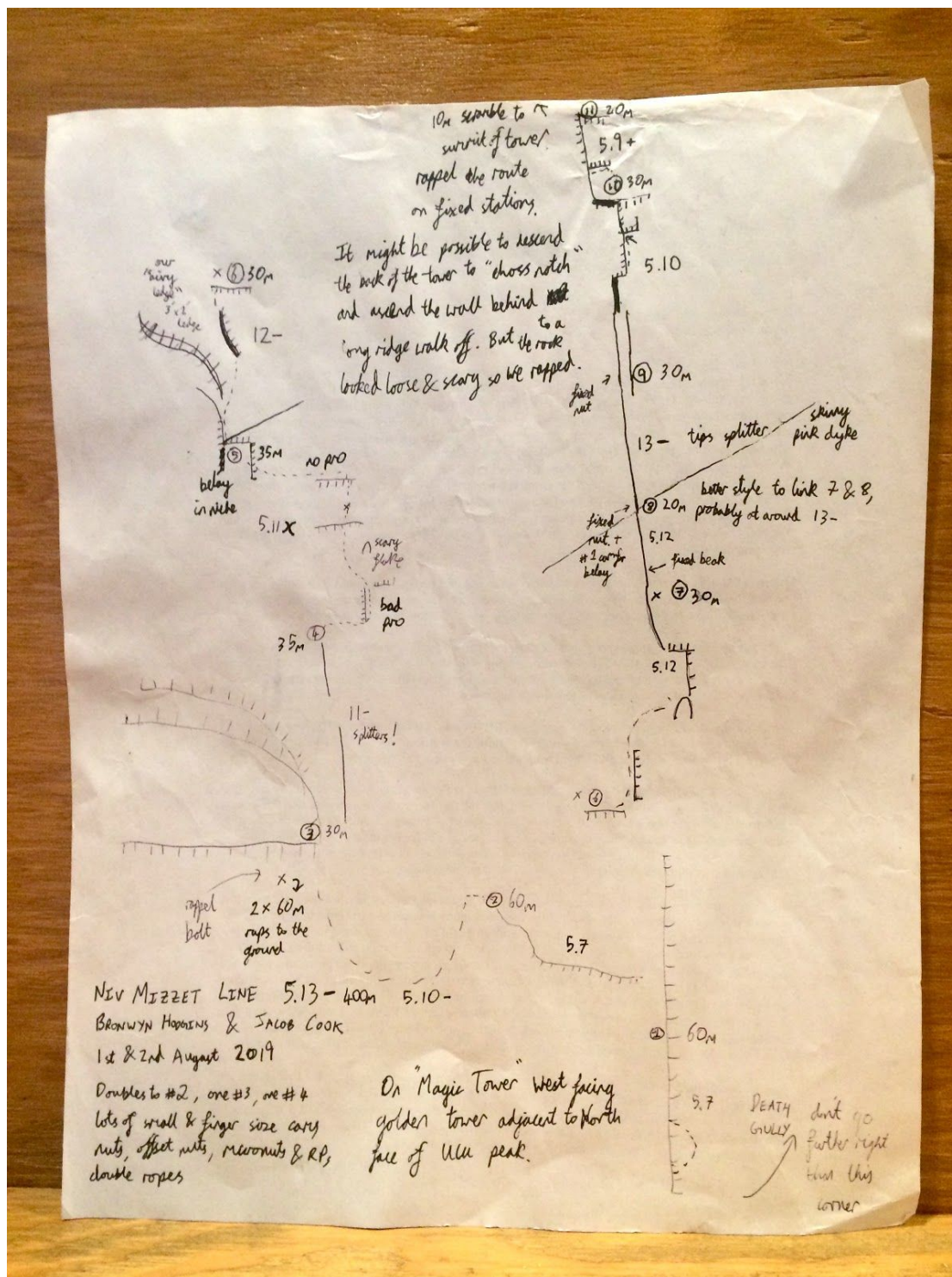
Lowell route
abs, then rappel

mark Feature





"The Niv Mizzet Line" 5.13- (E7) 400m on an unnamed west facing tower adjacent to the north face of Ulu Peak (FA Jacob Cook and Bronwyn Hodgins over two days with a bivvy):



[illegible]

Expedition Expenditure Breakdown Chart

Category	Expense	Cost (CAD)	Notes
Travel	Airfare Ottawa to Pangnirtung return	\$9,963.57	4 x return flights
	Flights to Ottawa	\$4,962.26	from hometowns (Vancouver, San Fransisco, Whitehorse)
	Excess Baggage costs	\$435.25	
	Park permits	\$147.20	includes photo/film permit
Food	Food	\$2,963.28	
	Stove fuel	\$100.00	Whitegas
	Air shipment of food and gear to Pang	\$2,864.21	shipped by First Air Cargo from Ottawa
	food caching in Park	\$900.00	By snowmobile -- Peter Kilabuk
Gear - camping	First aid kits	\$250.00	
	Satellite communication	\$235.28	InReach subscriptions x 2
	Bear spray and bangers	\$300.00	rented from Peter Kilabuk
	Maps	\$67.69	
Gear - climbing	Ropes (x4)	\$0.00	Supplied by Edelweiss
	Climding gear upgrades	\$2,000.00	Upgraded to ultralight (estimate)
Gear - Pack rafting	Pack raft (2 x Alpacka Foragers)	\$2,133.30	Purchased one boat (loaned second boat)
	Paddles	\$255.84	
Gear - Camera equipment	Sony A7	\$1,594.41	camera upgrade (essential for expedition film)
	external SD card back-up device	\$485.89	
	SD cards and batteries	\$198.06	
	external microphone	\$65.08	
Total		\$29,921.32	

Granted funding sources	Items	Amount (CAD)
Rab	Apparel and tents and £8000	\$13,700.00
Grade 7	Pods and climbing backpacks	\$1,000.00
Alpackaraft	One Forager packraft on loan	\$0.00
Scarpa	Climbing and approach shoes	\$0.00
Grivel	Ice axes	\$0.00
Edelweiss	Climbing ropes	\$0.00
Mountain House	50 meals	\$0.00
Stinger	Bars and gels	\$0.00
Katdyn Group	Water Filter	\$0.00
Optimus	Stoves, pot set	\$0.00
Level Six	pro-deal on dry pants	\$0.00
Royal Canadian Geographical Society	A flag	\$0.00
MEC/ VIMFF grant		\$3,000.00
Gino Watkins Memorial Fund	£4000	\$7,070.00
Mount Everest Foundation (MEF)	£825	\$1,342
BMC	£525	\$854.00
Big Phil	Cheese	\$0.00
Total		\$26,966.00
Total personal needed		\$2,955.32

Park Photo/Film Permit



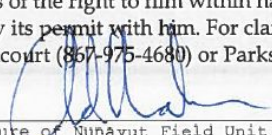
Freelance Photo Permit Nunavut National Parks 2019

Park/Site: Auyuittuq National Park
Name of Project : _____
Photo or Film Photo
Permit No.: ANP-2019-FLPP-02_TStewart

Under the authority of the *Canada National Parks Act*, this Film Permit is granted to:

Name: Thor Stewart
Address: 7 Buttercup Pl.
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5V1
Business: Free lancer

It is the responsibility of the permit holder to comply with the terms and conditions of the Film Permit which has been issued. Failure to comply with these conditions will result in the loss of the right to film within national parks in Nunavut. The permit holder is required to carry its permit with him. For clarification on any matter, contact Marie-Andrée Vaillancourt (867-975-4680) or Parks Canada at (867-975-4673).


Signature of Nunavut Field Unit
Superintendent (or designate)

May 2, '19
Date

Film Permit CONDITIONS

- The permit holder must attend mandatory orientation and polar bear safety training, as well as follow any Parks Canada staff instructions.
- **The application fee of \$147.20 applies. Payable by credit card.** Film permit location fee of \$14 718.00 (490.60 x 30 days) is waived on the condition that all images are provided to Parks Canada for its use by September 30th, 2019. Parks Canada will have full and unconditional rights to these images.
- The permit holder must obey all *Canada National Parks Act* regulations. This includes but is not limited to low impact camping, no disturbance of wildlife, and ensuring personal safety and safety of others.
- **The use of unmanned aerial vehicles or drones is not permitted.**
- In case of emergency, contact the Parks Canada emergency dispatch number (780-852-3100) and not the RCMP. Please note that emergency response can take days.
- The permit holder must not wilfully remove, deface, damage or destroy any prehistoric or historic artifacts or structures in the park.



Parks Canada
Parcs Canada

Canada