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## Extreme Climber Cheyne Lempe Chronicles Climb for Mountain Hardwear Short Film

Climbing Baffin Island's Sam Ford Fjord started out as a personal quest for Cheyne Lempe, and as a result his sponsor Mountain Hardwear wound up with a danger-laced 14-minute film.

In May 2014, the Aurora, Colo., native and his friend Dave Allfrey traveled to northeastern Canada to what is the world's fifth largest island. Setting off from the Inuit-populated town of Clyde River in the Arctic, the pair took a six-hour snowmobile ride on the frozen ocean to reach the fjord's 3,000-foot wall. Knowing "the potential of getting stuck up there for an entire week, unable to climb due to a bad storm coming in was a real possibility," the climbers carried all of their fuel and food. As it turned out, there was only one white-out blizzard that inhibited them from climbing one day until the afternoon and they managed to be protected from the winds throughout.

That was not the case when they were getting acclimated to the altitude. Lempe said of the blustery 35-mile-an-hour-plus conditions: "It was hard to sleep sometimes at night at base camp because the tent was shaking so much."

Their first route up the bare-faced wall took 12 days, which was slightly quicker than expected. But the second ascent was problematic. Despite feeling "pretty mentally exhausted" from the first go-round, Lempe said he was spurred on for the second. "My friend was like, 'Alright, we gotta go for it.'"



Leading the ascent, Lempe accidentally dislodged a loose rock, which hit his climbing partner on the back. "Right when it happened, I thought that maybe I just killed him. We had no idea what was broken. We were 1,000 feet up the wall on this big ledge," Lempe said. "Going into EMT mode, I was checking out his spine and making sure everything was OK. At that point, it was super, super painful for Dave but we knew there was no search and rescue out there. We knew we needed to get down to the ice as soon as possible to hopefully get picked up. Base camp is basically the frozen ocean."

The fact that Allfrey could walk a little bit, didn't need to be carried and hadn't lost any sensation in his body was "really, really good," said Lempe, whose full-time job is in search and rescue at Yosemite National Park. Not so good was the situation that ensued at base camp. "It took three days to get hold of the guy to come pick us up. On the ice at base camp, there is a threat of polar bears. So that was kind of scary to have that looming over us. We kind of wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible," Lempe said.

Using a Sony A7 he bought on eBay before the trip, Lempe shot the trek, including the accident. Before that life-threatening point, he said he had already been questioning, "What are we doing out here?" And then the accident happened and I was like, 'Why don't I just throw this camera off this cliff?' That was intense for sure."

Now 25, Lempe started climbing at the age of 16. "I took this class in high school called Adventure Ed, where you learn how to tie knots and there was this little indoor climbing wall." After listening to his teacher describe big wall climbing, sleeping on the wall and showing images of climbers in Yosemite National Park, Lempe said he knew that was what he wanted to do. "For the last four years, I've been living and sleeping in Yosemite. I just fell in love with that type of climbing."

Surprisingly, his teenage years weren't excessively athletic. "I was really into playing music. I was in this metal band called Of The Wolves. I think you can still find it on Myspace or something," Lempe said. "I played soccer growing up, snowboarded and was always skateboarding with my friends. But once I found climbing I was just so hooked."

Before he tackled what he described as the holy grail of big wall climbing, Lempe climbed Yosemite's 7,569-foot El Capitan 20 times. Depending on the route, that can take anywhere from less than five hours to five days. Most people take three to five days for the route that took him less than five hours. Regarding his swiftness, Lempe said, "If you just spend a lot of time climbing in Yosemite, if you really love it, if you're determined to do it, if you're willing to put in the time that it takes then it's possible to climb in a day the things it takes people multiple days."

The Baffin Island trip was almost entirely self-funded, but Mountain Hardwear was able to help out a little. "My partner Dave and I were maxing out our credit cards to be able to go. Mountain Hardwear wasn't able to commit anything for the film beforehand. It was basically just me shooting for myself because I love it."

After the fact, the California-based company said it was interested in helping Lempe tell the story and is using some of the imagery for marketing. "Obviously [before], they were like, 'OK, be careful.' But it was basically a personal project," Lempe said. "I made a little bit of money to edit the film and for them to license the footage. They give me gear and helped me pay for some of the music licensing. Their logo is at the beginning of the film and they posted it. At this point for me as a growing filmmaker, I just like working really, really hard because I love it. Hopefully, I'll be able to fund more trips in the future this way."

Brand manager Kari Rice said, "Cheyne did a beautiful job of opening up and sharing himself in that story and, as a result, it will resonate with people on many different levels. You rarely hear athletes at his level open up about their vulnerability. These types of relatable stories have a lot of value to us and to our fans."

All set to shoot a new climb with documentary filmmakers and adventurer Jimmy Chin, Lempe is less sure about his next climbing goal. "I have no idea what it is going to be which is good. That way I'll be inspired," he said.