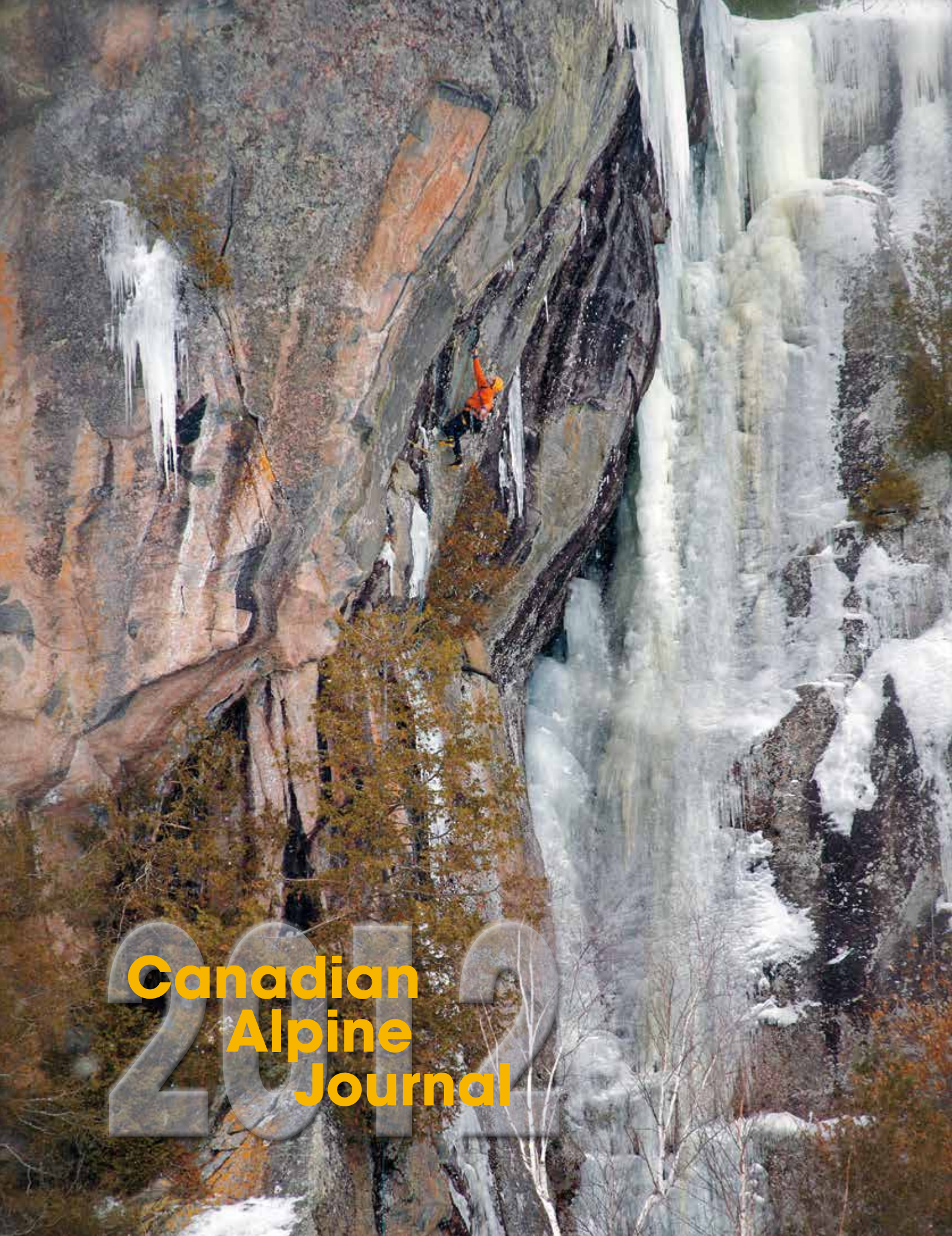

Canadian Alpine Journal

2012

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The Canadian Alpine Journal

Volume 95, 2012

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The Cultural Ranges

Jamie Chong returning to camp on the south face of Mount Dione while working on Dehydrated on Dalwhinnie, Tantalus Range, Coast Mountains (page 80).
Photo: Conny Amelunxen

Cover: Nathan Kutcher on his new mixed route Metamorphosis at Diamond Lake in Southern Ontario (page 24).
Photo: Martin Suchma

Patrons page: Tim Emmett approaching Spray On Top in the Helmcken Falls cave in Wells Grey Provincial Park, B.C. (page 44).
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Photo: Sonnie Trotter

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Editorial

Young Guns

Sean Isaac

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE a new generation of climbers champing at the bit, challenging the status quo. In many ways, this changing of the guard drives the cycle of alpinism. Mentoring is an important part of that; however, more often than not, it is brazen youth charging forward, blazing their own path. And in this way, history repeats itself.

In the late '70s and '80s, young Squamish locals were pushing technical difficulty in big-wall aid climbing on home turf, in the promised land of Yosemite and in the alpine. In the Rockies, The Wild Boys, a bold crew of Calgarians from the late '80s and early '90s, reinvented climbing on Yamnuska and other looming limestone walls of the Bow Valley. At the turn of the 21st century, the Rockies saw the House of Youth push mixed-climbing standards at the crags and on big faces.

Young gun Jason Kruk enjoying some fine reading material.
Photo: Tony Richardson

The next generation hails from the West Coast. Leading the charge are *CAJ* regulars Jason Kruk and Will Stanhope. They are prime examples of today's climber: bred in the gym, introduced to the mountains at a young age and pushing the limits in their early 20s. With mentors like Jon Walsh, Paul McSorely and Chris Geisler, their mountain sense has been fine-tuned under some of the best tutelage possible. In 2002, when Jason and Will were a mere 14 and 15, respectively, they swapped leads up the Grand Wall on the Chief. This was obviously a glimpse of things to come. A 5.11 trad multi-pitch in a climber's early teens can only point towards bigger and bolder.

In Jason's opening feature (page 6), the prophecy unfolds. He returns to Cerro Torre to make the coveted first "fair means" ascent of the historically notorious Southeast Ridge (also known as the Compressor Route) with American young gun Hayden Kennedy. On the descent, they took their fair-means maxim one step further and removed most of Cesare Maestri's bolts, thus essentially erasing the original Compressor Route. Many applauded their effort, others were appalled. Bottom line: they re-wrote alpine history based on their skills, commitment and ethics.

The *CAJ* is not only about the young and the cutting-edge. It stands equally for exploration, regardless of technical difficulty. I am always impressed by the balance of stories that are submitted each year—from the aforementioned standard-setting ascents to the truly exploratory missions. David Jones, Bruce Fairley, John Baldwin and others are out there charting the blank spaces and returning with yarns of remote, untouched terrain. In a way, the mentorship process not only occurs in the mountains via direct interaction but also indirectly with this journal by way of stories passed on through its pages.

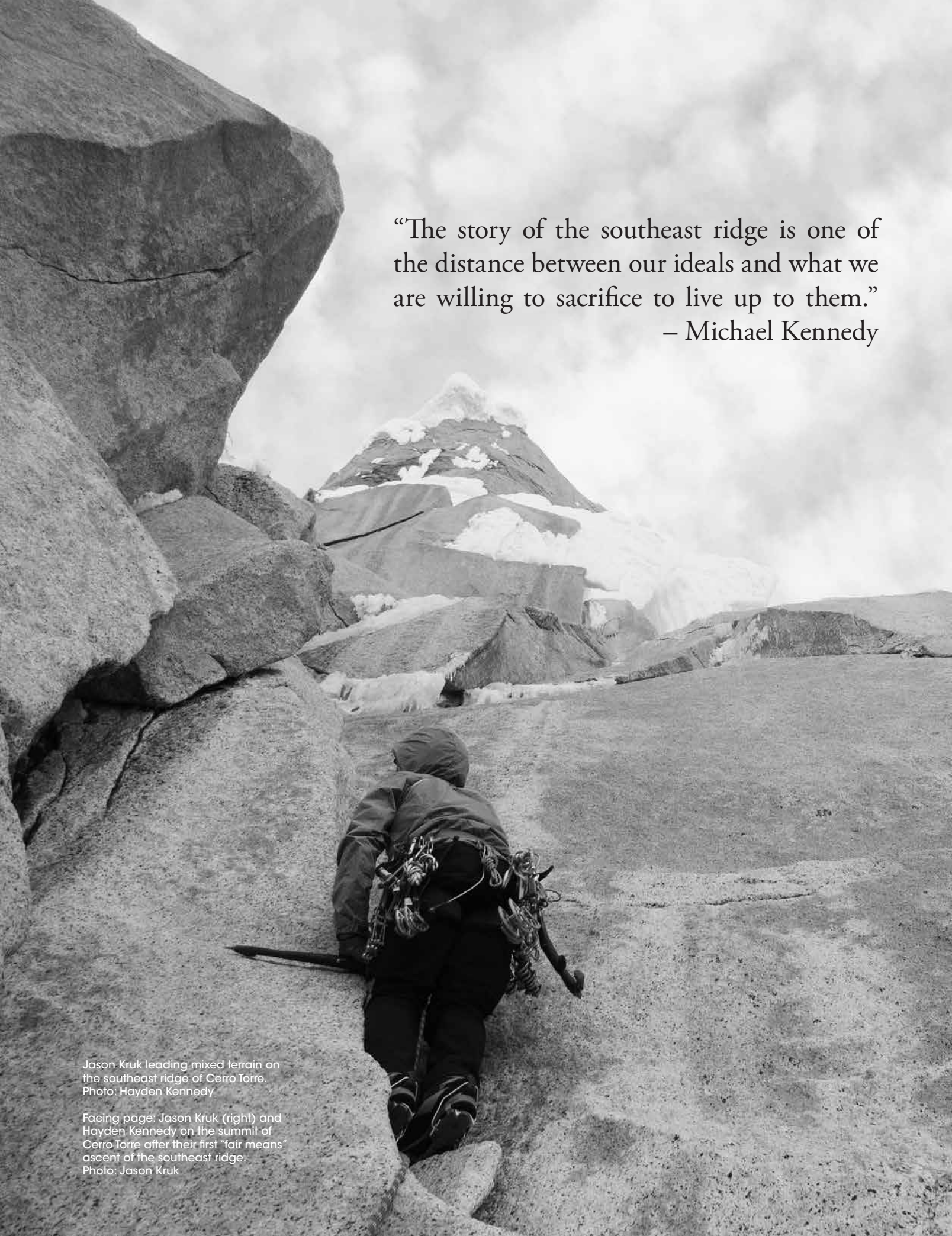
The young guns of today will eventually evolve into the mentors of tomorrow, and the next generation of keen upstarts will be eagerly stepping on their predecessors' boot heels. Jason admitted in an e-mail to me: "Even I feel old as the next generation is progressing at an alarming rate!"

I look around my sons' elementary school at the skills many of these kids already have. Mountaineering, ice climbing and ski touring before the age of 10 can only mean one thing—the young guns are starting out younger. It's exciting to wonder what an early introduction to alpine sports may lead to by the time these youngsters are teenagers.

CERRO TORRE REDUX

Jason Kruk

I agreed to meet Hayden Kennedy in El Chalten, Argentina, in early December 2011. We had hoped to climb together amongst the magnificent alpine spires of the Cerro Torre range of southern Patagonia. In the month leading up to our trip, Hayden and I hadn't talked much. He was in Turkey sport climbing and preoccupied with a Norwegian woman there. I was in Mexico flying paragliders. Despite seven seasons of cumulative experience in the range and a lengthy wish list, we hadn't talked about any specific objectives other than wanting to climb on the Torres and to do so in our favourite style: fast, light and as free as can be ● ● ● ●



"The story of the southeast ridge is one of the distance between our ideals and what we are willing to sacrifice to live up to them."
– Michael Kennedy

Jason Kruk leading mixed terrain on the southeast ridge of Cerro Torre. Photo: Hayden Kennedy

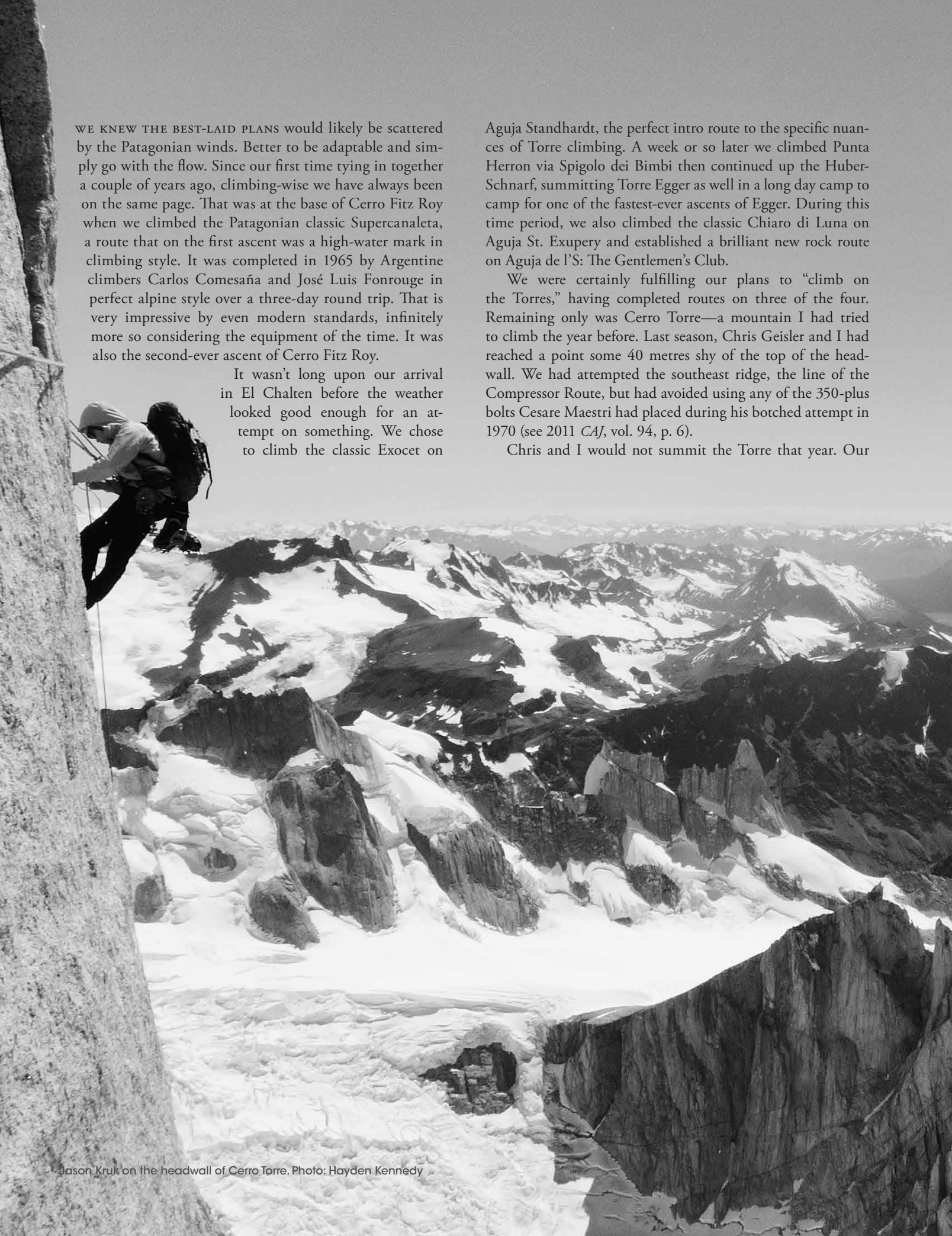
Facing page: Jason Kruk (right) and Hayden Kennedy on the summit of Cerro Torre after their first "fair means" ascent of the southeast ridge. Photo: Jason Kruk

WE KNEW THE BEST-LAID PLANS would likely be scattered by the Patagonian winds. Better to be adaptable and simply go with the flow. Since our first time tying in together a couple of years ago, climbing-wise we have always been on the same page. That was at the base of Cerro Fitz Roy when we climbed the Patagonian classic Supercanaleta, a route that on the first ascent was a high-water mark in climbing style. It was completed in 1965 by Argentine climbers Carlos Comesaña and José Luis Fonrouge in perfect alpine style over a three-day round trip. That is very impressive by even modern standards, infinitely more so considering the equipment of the time. It was also the second-ever ascent of Cerro Fitz Roy.

It wasn't long upon our arrival in El Chalten before the weather looked good enough for an attempt on something. We chose to climb the classic Exocet on Aguja Standhardt, the perfect intro route to the specific nuances of Torre climbing. A week or so later we climbed Punta Herron via Spigolo dei Bimbi then continued up the Huber-Schnarf, summitting Torre Egger as well in a long day camp to camp for one of the fastest-ever ascents of Egger. During this time period, we also climbed the classic Chiaro di Luna on Aguja St. Exupery and established a brilliant new rock route on Aguja de l'S: The Gentlemen's Club.

We were certainly fulfilling our plans to "climb on the Torres," having completed routes on three of the four. Remaining only was Cerro Torre—a mountain I had tried to climb the year before. Last season, Chris Geisler and I had reached a point some 40 metres shy of the top of the headwall. We had attempted the southeast ridge, the line of the Compressor Route, but had avoided using any of the 350-plus bolts Cesare Maestri had placed during his botched attempt in 1970 (see 2011 *CAJ*, vol. 94, p. 6).

Chris and I would not summit the Torre that year. Our



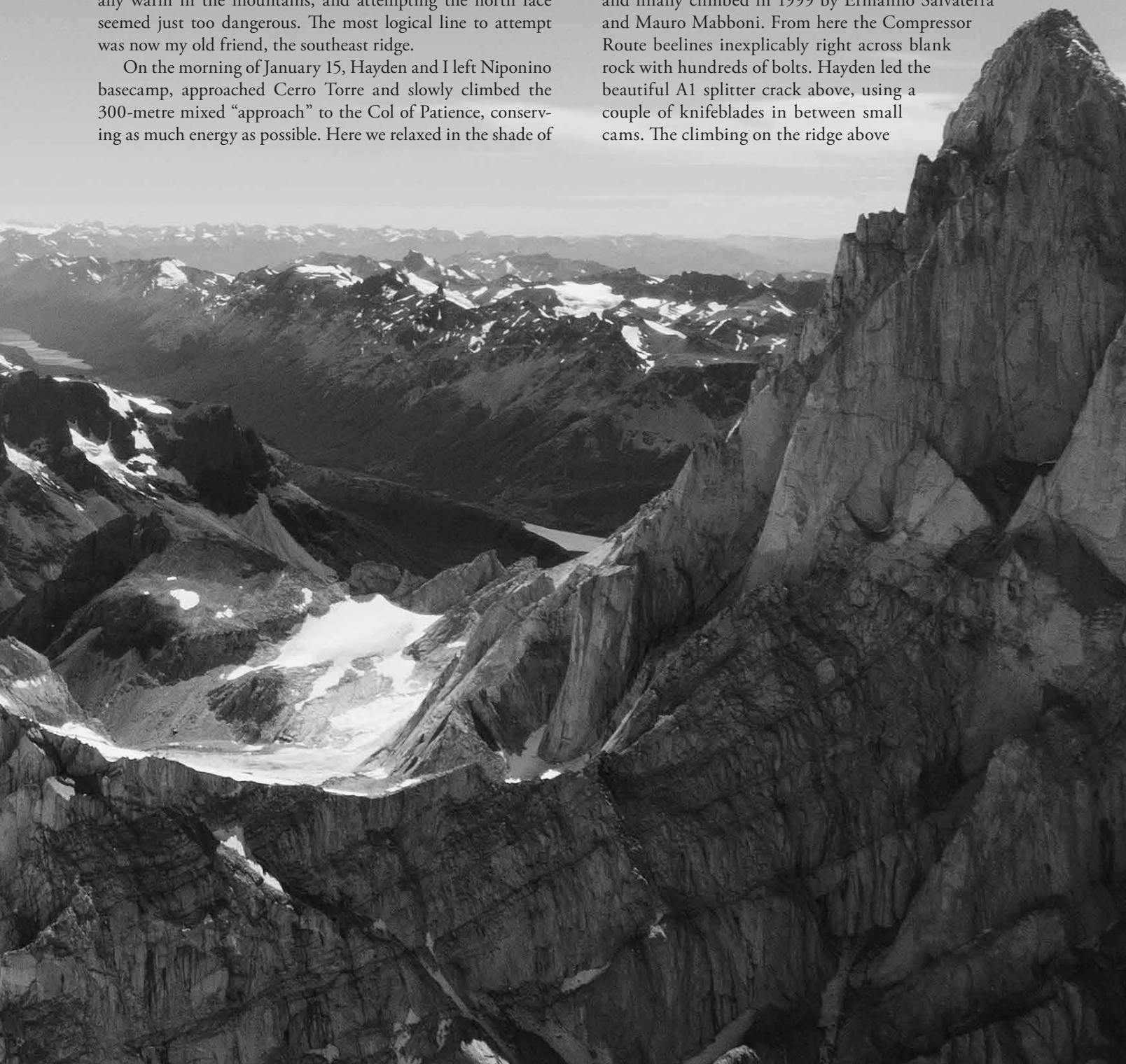
Jason Kruk on the headwall of Cerro Torre. Photo: Hayden Kennedy

attempt was soured by the reawakening of the Cerro Torre debate. Magazines love controversy and they all wanted to know my opinion. The hype became too much—recycled garbage. Eventually I was tired of it all; the idea of comparing myself to someone else sickened me. Neither was my plan to promote my ascent nor defame David Lama.

Hayden and I would focus our energy on another line on Cerro Torre this season—the north face. This wild face is full of adventure and unknown. Feeling über-fit and stoked to the max, we knew we had a shot if the weather continued to cooperate. However, the month of January was uncharacteristically warm in the mountains, and attempting the north face seemed just too dangerous. The most logical line to attempt was now my old friend, the southeast ridge.

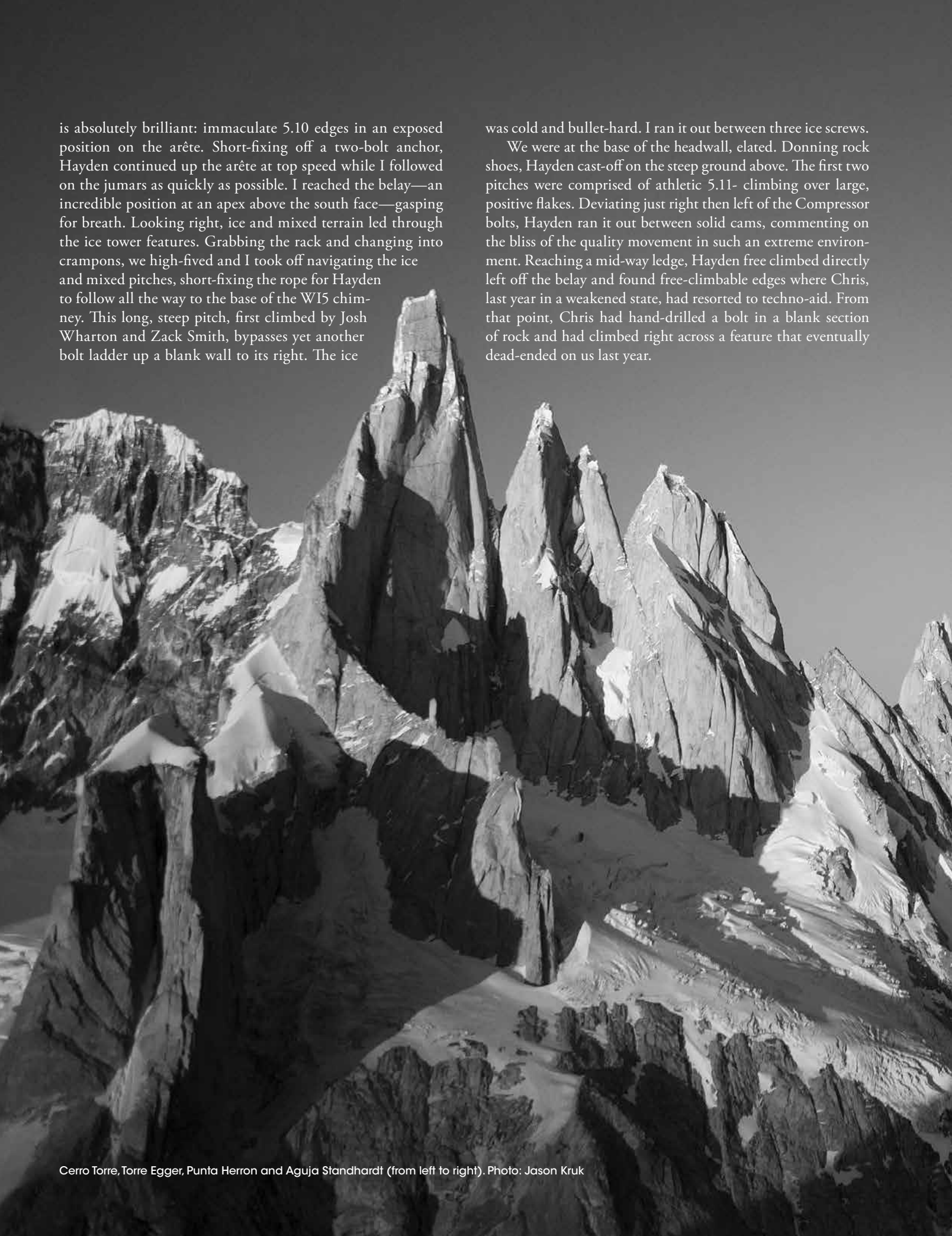
On the morning of January 15, Hayden and I left Niponino basecamp, approached Cerro Torre and slowly climbed the 300-metre mixed "approach" to the Col of Patience, conserving as much energy as possible. Here we relaxed in the shade of our tent, and drank and ate as much as possible. With binoculars, we spied discontinuous features splitting the very left of the headwall that would possibly connect the line Geisler and I had attempted with the summit.

We slept through our 11 p.m. alarm, waking at 2 a.m. Coffee pounded, psyche elevated, we were climbing by 2:45 a.m. Joyous splitter climbing comprises the majority of the lower southeast ridge. We hooted and hollered into the night as we made very quick time in the dark. We reached the Salvaterra-Mabboni variation just before first light. The integral ridgeline above was attempted as early as 1968 and finally climbed in 1999 by Ermanno Salvaterra and Mauro Mabboni. From here the Compressor Route beelines inexplicably right across blank rock with hundreds of bolts. Hayden led the beautiful A1 splitter crack above, using a couple of knifeblades in between small cams. The climbing on the ridge above



is absolutely brilliant: immaculate 5.10 edges in an exposed position on the arête. Short-fixing off a two-bolt anchor, Hayden continued up the arête at top speed while I followed on the jumars as quickly as possible. I reached the belay—an incredible position at an apex above the south face—gasping for breath. Looking right, ice and mixed terrain led through the ice tower features. Grabbing the rack and changing into crampons, we high-fived and I took off navigating the ice and mixed pitches, short-fixing the rope for Hayden to follow all the way to the base of the WI5 chimney. This long, steep pitch, first climbed by Josh Wharton and Zack Smith, bypasses yet another bolt ladder up a blank wall to its right. The ice was cold and bullet-hard. I ran it out between three ice screws.

We were at the base of the headwall, elated. Donning rock shoes, Hayden cast-off on the steep ground above. The first two pitches were comprised of athletic 5.11- climbing over large, positive flakes. Deviating just right then left of the Compressor bolts, Hayden ran it out between solid cams, commenting on the bliss of the quality movement in such an extreme environment. Reaching a mid-way ledge, Hayden free climbed directly left off the belay and found free-climbable edges where Chris, last year in a weakened state, had resorted to techno-aid. From that point, Chris had hand-drilled a bolt in a blank section of rock and had climbed right across a feature that eventually dead-ended on us last year.



Cerro Torre, Torre Egger, Punta Herron and Aguja Standhardt (from left to right). Photo: Jason Kruk

Hayden reached the bolt and lowered to the level of my belay. Running back and forth across the headwall pendulum-style, he stuck an edge at the apex of this king swing. More edges led down to a small perch on the immediate left edge of the headwall. Cleaning the pitch and lowering out off the bolt, I joined Hayden at his belay stance. The exposure was otherworldly.

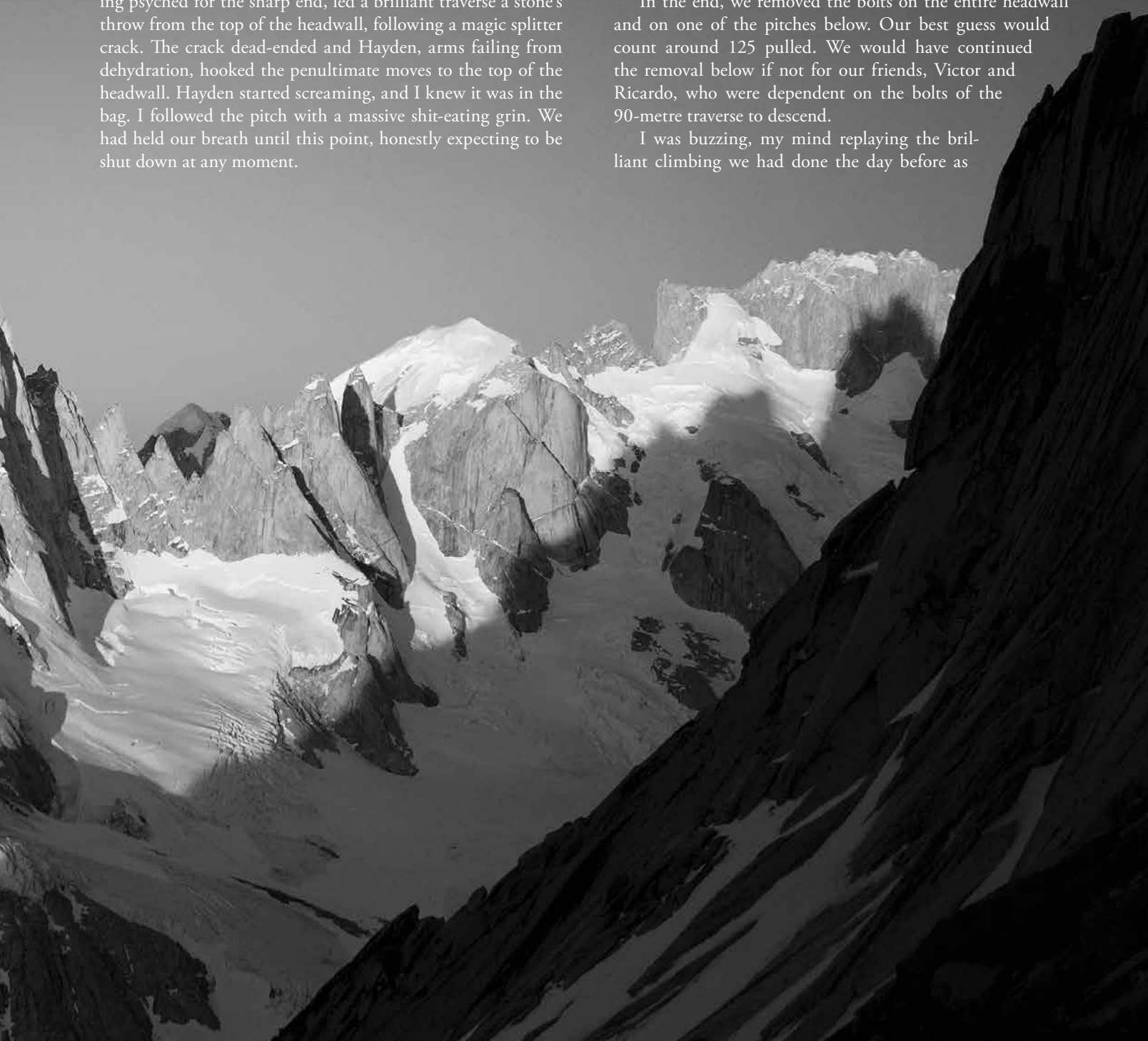
Above, discontinuous cracks, edges and ice blobs provided passage up perfect red-patina granite. Hayden expertly navigated the complex terrain with a mixture of free and ice climbing. The only aid was in the name of alpine efficiency: stopping to stand in a sling to chop a couple of cam placements out of iced-up cracks. After another belay, Hayden, still feeling psyched for the sharp end, led a brilliant traverse a stone's throw from the top of the headwall, following a magic splitter crack. The crack dead-ended and Hayden, arms failing from dehydration, hooked the penultimate moves to the top of the headwall. Hayden started screaming, and I knew it was in the bag. I followed the pitch with a massive shit-eating grin. We had held our breath until this point, honestly expecting to be shut down at any moment.

We dropped our gear on the summit snowfield and ran up the final mushroom to the summit. We had just done the first fair-means ascent of the Southeast Ridge of Cerro Torre—and in only 13 hours at that.

Ever since the word got out of Maestri's work 40 years ago, climbers have been talking about the removal of the bolts. Hayden and I had just climbed the natural line, without the bolts, in half a day. We were feeling pretty good, surprisingly not too fatigued. We had plenty of daylight and a blue sky on the horizon. We had the security of a tent and extra food pitched on the shoulder 900 metres below. We had an opportunity to remove the bolts unlike anyone else previously. If opportunity presents itself, you must seize it.

In the end, we removed the bolts on the entire headwall and on one of the pitches below. Our best guess would count around 125 pulled. We would have continued the removal below if not for our friends, Victor and Ricardo, who were dependent on the bolts of the 90-metre traverse to descend.

I was buzzing, my mind replaying the brilliant climbing we had done the day before as



we made our descent from the foot of the mountain to our tent in Niponino camp. Upon arrival, we were greeted with big hugs and congratulations from friends. About 20 minutes had passed before they shared with us the devastating news: our friend Carlyle was severely injured and alone high on Aguja St. Exupery. An audacious rescue attempt was already being launched. The rain and wind battered our tent that night, and it was hard to think positive thoughts. Our highest of highs were turned instantly to the very lowest of lows. Despite a valiant and dangerous rescue attempt, she would not survive.

Hayden and I spent a couple of days in camp reflecting on all that had happened. This powerfully magic valley was a fitting place to collect our thoughts. By the time we had returned to town, word had leaked both amongst the townspeople and to the very farthest reaches of the Internet. We were being simultaneously praised and reproached for our climb and descent.

I could never figure out why the bolting of Cerro Torre would be so universally condemned, yet even those pointing fingers at Maestri would happily line up at the base to climb the Compressor Route. Humanity is cursed by its own mediocrity. I guess we just weren't willing to lose an easy way to the top.

The bolts were the result of a botched attempt at climbing the southeast ridge in 1970, an attempt that Lucien Devies would call "a sad date in the history of alpinism" in the *Revue du Club Alpin Francais* published in April 1971. "Péché contre l'esprit," translated to mean sin against the spirit, Devies would write. In 1972, *Mountain* magazine ran the cover story, Cerro Torre: A Mountain Desecrated. But the debate never stopped.

Cerro Torre would remain at the forefront of climbing controversy 40 years later. Hayden and I suddenly found ourselves amidst a veritable climbing-ethics crisis.

Hayden Kennedy on the headwall of Cerro Torre. Photo: Jason Kruk

Words from Hayden's father, Michael Kennedy, reaffirmed what I was beginning to learn on my own: "Remember one thing: all this noise is someone else's story, not yours. People will try to pigeonhole you with their words, but you aren't defined by what others think, only by what you know and by who you are, in your heart and mind. […] Don't think about how your life or climbs will look to anyone else. Make choices based on your values, your analysis, your intuition and your dreams."

It was really hard when people hated us; and it didn't really help when others called us heroes. All the Cerro Torre postulation was simply others' right to freedom of speech. It's good to care, but in the end, it's been done.

The summit of Cerro Torre now takes back its rightful place amongst the most difficult places on earth to reach. The routes on Cerro Torre are difficult enough that most of today's climbers are not yet compelled to find ways to challenge themselves beyond simply reaching the top. But it has much left to reveal. There continue to be just two independent lines to its summit. Perhaps without Maestri's bolts the next generation of climbers will go in search of unclimbed terrain. On Cerro Torre, these futuristic routes lurk, waiting for the bold to disbelieve the impossible.

Summary

Exocet (5.10- WI5 M3, 500m), Aguja Standhardt (2730m). Hayden Kennedy, Jason Kruk, Dec. 13, 2011.

Chiaro di Luna (5.11-, 750m), Aguja St. Exupery (2558m). Hayden Kennedy, Jason Kruk, Dec. 15, 2011.

Spigolo dei Bimbi (5.11- MI5, 350m), Punta Herron (2750m). Hayden Kennedy, Jason Kruk, Dec. 23, 2011.

Huber-Schnarf (5.11- MI3, 200m), Torre Egger (2850m). Hayden Kennedy, Jason Kruk, Dec. 23, 2011.

The Gentlemen's Club (5.11+, 900m), Aguja de l'S (2335m). FA: Hayden Kennedy, Jason Kruk, Dec. 25-26, 2011.

First "fair means" ascent of the southeast ridge (Kennedy-Kruk Variation, 5.11+ A2 WI5, 1200m), Cerro Torre (3128m). FA: Hayden Kennedy, Jason Kruk, Jan. 15-17, 2012.

About the Author

Jason Kruk, 24, is a resident of Squamish, B.C. He began climbing as a boy in his local North Vancouver gym. It was at that gym, at age 10, he first saw a photo of Cerro Torre. In his author byline for a feature article in the 2008 *CAJ*, he wrote that he didn't really like alpine climbing. He now takes that back and considers it the most fun.

Hayden Kennedy on the headwall of Cerro Torre. Photo: Jason Kruk

In the Words of Others

"In the end, Jason and Hayden accelerated by a few years a process that has already largely been initiated. Convinced by the founding principles of alpinism, living them passionately and acting by idealism, they are now confronted with people whom they thought would have been more clairvoyant. They lost part of their illusion in the midst of it. They are momentarily the victims of this case. However, there is no doubt that in a few years from now, their action will be considered ahead of their time."

– Arnaud Petit, France, IFMGA Mountain Guide, professional climber

"I'm completely against the bolt chopping on the Maestri. A route which dates back to 1970, when El Chalten didn't even exist and Patagonia wasn't as accessible as it is today, established with methods which I didn't share neither at the time nor today, certainly deserves respect for its historic value."

– Mario Conte, Italy, first ascent of Cerro Torre via the Ragni Route

"Maestri was free to put the bolts in 1970, Jason and Hayden were free to take the bolts out. Cesare demonstrated that Cerro Torre was possible with the compressor; Jason and Hayden demonstrated that it was possible without. They have all my respect for having liberated the Compressor Route from the grips of conquest alpinism, a style that we should finally get over with."

– Reinhold Messner, Italy, legendary alpinist, Himalayan mountaineer

"Thank God there are a few young climbers like Hayden Kennedy and Jason Kruk who exemplify the best qualities of alpinism. The magnificent southeast ridge of Cerro Torre has been unshackled and can now be an inspiration to future alpinists who have the courage to climb rather than merely summit by any possible means."

– Yvon Chouinard, USA, second ascent of Fitz Roy, Founder/CEO of Patagonia

"To those without talent, who might not murder the impossible themselves but would gladly climb up the back of the corpse slain by someone else, that ladder is a symbol of hope. For this reason alone—that their hope is bound to a reduction of standards and manipulation of the natural challenge—the ladder should be removed."

– Mark Twight, USA, leading alpinist of the 80s and 90s

"I feel that Hayden and Jason have done a great service to the global community of Patagonian alpinists, and it saddens me to see them receive so much criticism for what I consider an altruistic act. Many of the people who agree with the bolt removal are staying quiet simply to stay out of drama, but I see it as my obligation to speak out in support of them."

– Colin Haley, USA, new route on Cerro Torre

"None of us has an inalienable right to summit anything. If you aren't capable of climbing a peak after a man-made path has been removed, nothing has been stolen from you."

– Kelly Cordes, USA, senior editor of *AAJ*, new route on Cerro Torre

"I can only hope it inspires others to better themselves and better consider the means to the end which they seek. Thank you Jason Kruk and Hayden Kennedy."

– Vince Anderson, USA, IFMGA Mountain Guide, new route on Nanga Parbat

"I just want to congratulate these excellent young climbers, they will go down in history as the heroes of Cerro Torre for this epoch and they will applaud future climbers who do routes faster and with less equipment and freer yet. For they embody the best spirit of human endeavor. Applause all around!"

– Douglas Tompkins, USA, prominent Patagonia conservationist, second ascent of Fitz Roy, founder of The North Face

Single Push

Raphael Slawinski

A full moon over Mount Hunter from 14,000 Camp on Denali. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Every spring, robins, ducks and geese, driven by an evolutionary imperative, fly north to mate, nest and breed. Alpinists might not be subject to the same reproductive urge. All the same, as days get longer and ice climbs in their home mountain ranges once again become waterfalls, they too feel the pull of the vast boreal tundra, and of the great white peaks rising above it. I seem to go up north every other year or so: I have made trips to the Alaska Range in 2005, 2007, 2010 and again this year. What is it about the place that keeps drawing me back? Is it the huge faces of perfect granite laced with ice, rising above immense glaciers? Is it the 24-hour daylight that throws off your internal clock and lets you—if you are masochistically inclined—climb for as long as your body and mind will let you? Is it the thin, cold air high on Denali that forces you to tread a fine line, too cold to stop and rest, too exhausted to warm up through movement? I expect it is probably all of these, and something else besides, that I cannot quite put my finger on. But I intend to keep going back to try to find out.

The West Buttress

JOSHUA LAVIGNE AND I PLANNED to spend most of June on Denali, taking advantage of the warmer temperatures that spring brings to the upper reaches of the mountain—while also escaping the monsoon that usually deluges the Bow Valley at this time of the year. We had researched several different routes to give ourselves a choice of objectives to suit psych, weather and conditions. It is good to have specific goals in mind to keep one from wasting time and energy. But it is also important to be flexible and to allow the mountain, rather than plans made in one's living room months beforehand, determine what to climb. What we were clear on was the style in which we would climb. With its 24-hour daylight, the Alaska Range is uniquely suited to single-push climbing. Over the years people like Mugs Stump, Steve House, Marko Prezelj and many others have shown that any route in the range, no matter how big, can be done with a daypack, a stove and a willingness to push one's body and mind beyond preconceived limits.

At 6,194 metres, Denali is small compared to, say, the mountains of the Karakoram, where 6,000-metre peaks are a dime a dozen. But its location just south of the Arctic Circle, due to the flattening of the atmosphere at the poles, means that the air on its summit is quite a bit thinner than it would be at more moderate latitudes. How much thinner? A casual comparison of the air pressure in Alaska and Pakistan indicates that, owing to its northerly latitude, the summit of Denali feels up to 500 metres higher.

Now all of this is a roundabout way of saying that, before launching on single-push missions, one has to acclimatize. Fortunately the normal route on Denali, the popular West Buttress, is perfect for this purpose. Over a number of trips to Alaska and Pakistan (along the way nicely illustrating the saying that good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment), I have developed some acclimatization strategies that work well. One strategy is to follow the well-known advice of going high but sleeping low. From painful experience, camping high while not acclimatized absolutely sucks. Another strategy is less obvious but just as important, and it is not to screw around while acclimatizing. I remind myself that for the first bit of a trip, the aim is to acclimatize, not to climb anything interesting; that will come later. Interesting climbing is usually slow and tiring, and as such is not conducive to getting high as efficiently as possible. I wasted a lot of time on my trips to Pakistan trying to make acclimatization interesting before I learned this particular lesson. What all of this means on Denali is taking two or three days getting up to 14,000 Camp on the West Buttress, setting up a comfortable camp, and then going on daytrips higher up, first to 17,000 feet then to the summit. If all goes well, within a week or so of landing on the glacier one should be ready to "get off The Butt and go climbing," as Scott Backes once memorably put it.

We left Calgary on the morning on June 4, and by late afternoon arrived in quaint Talkeetna, the jump-off point for most trips to the Alaska Range. This small Alaskan town has a lot of climbing tradition, from the historic Fairview Inn that saw the likes of Dougal Haston and Doug Scott pass through its doors, to the sobering sight of the climbers' cemetery with its grave markers made of rusted ice tools. That evening we caught up with some friends over what would be our last beers for a while. The following morning we received our Clean Mountain Can, that Denali climber's essential (though seriously now, the rangers have done an amazing job of ensuring the mountain does stay clean). After waiting a few hours for the weather to clear, we piled into one of TAT's Beavers and headed for the hills.

Under a ceiling of low cloud we followed the frozen river of the Kahiltna Glacier upstream. The giant bulk of Mount Foraker loomed to our left, and then we were banking sharply right and coming in to land below the north face of Mount Hunter. The usual choreographed pandemonium greeted us on the landing strip: the dazed new arrivals dragging their duffels up the hill, while others, eager to be off the mountain, dragged theirs down.

The following morning we were away early to take advantage of the cold for easier travel. The skies had cleared overnight, and while we skied along in the blue shadows on the valley bottom, the summits glowed yellow in the morning sun. The sun did eventually catch us at the bottom of Ski Hill,

Raphael Slawinski traversing from the top of the Japanese Couloir to the start of the Knife-Edge ridge on the Cassin Ridge. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

where the West Buttress route, after a long stretch of almost horizontal glacier travel, begins its circuitous ascent. For some perverse reason we were determined to make it all the way to 11,000 Camp, so we sweated our way uphill with our heavily loaded sleds as our ball and chain.

We spent an unexpected two days at 11,000 Camp while I recovered from a nasty cold, before moving up to 14,000 feet. Situated in a sheltered basin nearly two-vertical kilometres below the summit of Denali, 14,000 Camp would be our home for the next two weeks. We gratefully parked our sleds and set up camp, designer kitchen and all, knowing that from here on we would not have to carry anything bigger than daypacks.

After a day's rest we hiked up to 17,000 Camp to breathe some thin air. From 14,000 feet the normal route climbs a 40-degree headwall, adorned with fat fixed ropes, before turning right and following the easy but spectacular crest of the West Buttress. During the daily rush the fixed ropes can be a surreal experience, with traffic jams and flaring tempers worthy of Calgary or Chicago. Just as on a divided freeway, here too there are designated up and down lines. Most people climbing Denali box themselves into fixed ways of doing things: they carry huge loads, they cache them, they go back down and bring up more stuff, they jumar up what would be a black diamond ski run back home. It does not occur to them to experience the joy of unencumbered movement for a change—to ditch the big back, to simply walk up beside the fixed lines, to bypass the entire circus. I hope they are having fun, though I am not sure how much fun walking crushed under a monstrous pack—all the while staring at the heels of the person in front of you—can be.

But the West Buttress experience is not all about grumpy peak baggers. One of the great joys of travelling Denali's normal route is meeting wonderful people who make the whole adventure so much more than just climbing. And let's face it, on an expedition most of the time is spent not climbing but hanging out in camp. Martin Boiteau and Yan Mongrain from Montreal had a program similar to ours—acclimatize then climb. We spent many happy days at 14,000 Camp, sitting around the kitchen table, drinking tea, eating pancakes and shooting the shit. Our trip was made better by their friendship.

After another day's rest we hiked up to the summit. My cold had turned into a sinus infection (many thanks to our 14,000 Camp neighbour and fellow Calgary alpinist, Dr. Jasmin Fauteux, for salvaging our trip with his antibiotics), and for the first couple of hours out of camp I felt like crap. My heart was pounding, I was pouring sweat and I moved at half the pace I should have. But strangely, the higher we went the stronger I felt, and in the end I was able to push my burning lungs and aching legs up the final ridge to the top. A week and a day had passed since we landed on the glacier, and we could finally go climbing.

Cassin Ridge

OUR ACCLIMATIZATION COMPLETE, we hung out at 14,000 Camp and rested. A storm blew through, dropping enough snow to set off numerous sloughs from steeper terrain and to build up windslabs on lower-angled slopes. While we were not thrilled with that particular turn of events, the storm did provide a perfect excuse for guilt-free eating, reading and sleeping. When we could stand festering in camp no longer, we stepped into our skis and skinned up to the crest of the West Rib. It felt good to stretch our legs, plus we wanted to check out the West Rib Cut-Off descent into the Northeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier, rather melodramatically dubbed the Valley of Death. We had originally planned to attempt the Denali Diamond on the southwest face, but between a forecast that could not quite commit to more than one clear day, and me having just started a course of antibiotics, we decided to do something easier instead. The ultra-classic Cassin Ridge it would be.

Joshua Lavigne at the top of the Second Rock Band on the Cassin Ridge.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski

The first ascent of the Cassin Ridge was made in 1961 by an Italian team led by, predictably, Riccardo Cassin. While early ascents of the route were made in siege style, with fixed ropes, stocked camps and large teams, gradually alpine style became the norm (including on the first winter ascent of the route in 1982). The first hint at an even purer form of ascent came in 1976, when Charlie Porter soloed the route in a 36-hour push (from the top of the Japanese Couloir). But it was Mugs Stump in 1991 that truly blew away preconceptions about how

one could go about climbing the Cassin (and ultimately just about any route in the Alaska Range). Starting from 14,000 Camp, he descended the lower West Rib into the Northeast Fork, blitzed the route in 15 hours and returned to camp 27.5 hours after setting out. This was the style we would aspire to: treating the route as a day climb, carrying little more than the clothes on our backs, and keeping constant movement until we were done.

We were up early. Hunter and Foraker still lay silent and blue under a clear sky. It was cold, below -20 C, and we were glad to warm up with the 400-metre uphill to the crest of the West Rib. From there we descended the 1972 Ramp: hiking down snow, facing in on 45-degree glacier ice, front-pointing down over bergschrunds. We had brought an eight-millimetre rope and tied in for some crevassed stretches (and we were glad we did when Josh, who was out in front, stepped into a couple of slots). A quick jaunt below the seracs of the southwest face brought us to the base of the Japanese Couloir less than three hours after leaving camp.

We downed some bars and gels, grabbed a swig from the water bottle, and crossed the 'schrund below the couloir. Strangely enough, we were not alone in what is usually a lonely place. Taking advantage of the favourable forecast, two other teams had set out from 14,000 Camp the evening before. One of these, Jasmin Fauteux and Paul Taylor, were in fact just finishing the couloir. In deference to the steady stream of small ice chunks rattling down the gully, we tied in and moved together with the occasional screw or cam between us. We said hello to our friends at Cassin Ledge and continued, past the rock crux and onto the Knife-Edge Ridge leading to the Hanging Glacier.

A broad scoop at the base of the glacier made for an excellent food and drink stop. Then, unroping, we were off again. The slog up the glacier went quickly and soon we were scrambling through the First Rock Band. Snow gullies, rock steps, ice chutes, at first it was all quite entertaining, but as the rock band went on, we grew impatient. The mists swirling around us had thickened into clouds, and we found ourselves climbing through a snowy murk. Eventually we exited the First Rock Band and slogged up an ill-defined snow ridge toward the next one. Fortunately the Second Rock Band did not drag on like the first one, and before long we were emerging from the clouds at its top.

We traversed out onto the upper slopes of Big Bertha, the hanging glacier dominating the south face, to bypass the Third Rock Band. When we returned to the ridge crest above it, we were in for an unpleasant surprise. Up to this point we had been following in the tracks of the other party on the Cassin that day. Unfortunately Colin Haley and Nils Nielsen, having broken trail all the way to above the Third Rock Band, had finally had enough. With the summit still some thousand metres higher, they traversed off across the endless avalanche slopes of the southwest face all the way to the West Rib. We had gotten off easy thus far, but from here on we would have to work.

And get worked we did. The sun swung lower in the sky before eventually disappearing behind the West Rib. It grew colder. The air grew noticeably thinner. Lower down we had been able to move at something resembling a pace we would keep back home in the Rockies, but now we slowed to the point that we were taking one, and then two breaths per step. As a result, even wearing all our layers, this slow movement was barely enough to keep us warm. Stopping to rest was not an option. I evolved a system whereby I would take a step, take a breath while I wiggled my toes three times, take another step…. Every time I tried to cheat my hurting body and rush a few steps, I would end up slumped over my ice tools, coughing my lungs out. The summit ridge was not far above now, but it seemed to take an eternity before we left the crappy snow of the final gully behind and reached firm névé.

WE CRESTED THE RIDGE just where the normal West Buttress route comes up from the other side. One moment we were on our own on the southwest face, the next we stood on a well-trodden trail with wands every few metres. The summit was a bit higher still, but I did not think I would find anything there I had not already found on the ridge. We plunge-stepped down Pig Hill, across the Football Field, up the cruel rise on its far side and down again. The last thousand metres to the ridge had taken their toll on us, and even walking downhill

Raphael Slawinski approaching up the Peters Glacier towards Common Knowledge on the two-kilometre-tall Washburn Face. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

we had to stop and rest occasionally. For the second time since we had woken up, the sun painted the summit of Foraker red as we headed down the ridge below 17,000 Camp toward the top of the fixed lines. Reaching our tent back at 14,000 Camp, we dropped our packs, pulled off our boots and crawled into our sleeping bags. We did not emerge again until many hours later, long after the sun had turned the inside of the tent into a brightly lit sauna.

One of the sure signs a climb is becoming a trade route is that people start keeping track of the times achieved on it. Just think of the Nose or the 1938 Route on the Eiger. But while chances are that successive speed records on the Nose were set under similar conditions, sunny granite being what it is, things are not nearly as clear-cut on the Eiger—or the Cassin.

On the Cassin we followed in Colin and Nils' tracks to above the Third Rock Band, saving time and energy. What if we could have stayed in their tracks all the way to the top, and as a result beaten the current record of 14:40 from bergschrund to summit ridge? Would that have made us the strongest alpinists around? I hardly think so. So does establishing a valid speed record require that one breaks one's own trail? And how much fresh snow should there be on the route to ensure typical conditions? Reproducible laboratory conditions are pretty hard to achieve in the alpine, and as a result, alpine speed records should be taken with a grain of salt.

Do not get me wrong. I am not against reporting times on alpine routes. I find hearing about fast times inspiring (if also a bit discouraging at times). Putting in a respectable time on a big alpine route requires exceptional fitness, skill and a willingness to stick one's neck out just that little bit further (all that in addition to good conditions). And knowing that, 20 years after Mugs Stump's standard-setting ascent of the Cassin, today's alpinists have improved on his time by a mere two per cent makes us realize just how far ahead of his time he was.

Joshua Lavigne halfway up Common Knowledge on the Washburn Face.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Common Knowledge

MORE REST DAYS FOLLOWED. More bad weather, too, although not as bad as forecasted. Had our trip ended right then and there, we would not have been unhappy. However, we would not have been completely satisfied either. The Cassin gave us a great day out on a beautiful big-mountain route, it pushed us physically as few ascents ever had, but it did not push us as climbers. Now I love days like the one on the Cassin, when I get to run up miles of easy ground. But once in a while I also need to get on routes where my reality is reduced to the circle of vertical ice and rock within reach of my tools and crampons, routes that keep me oscillating between desperation and elation, all within the span of a single move.

We thought about having a go at the Denali Diamond, which, after all, had been our original objective. The lower, technical part of the route looked great; however, slogging up the upper Cassin for a second time did not appeal. Between that and simply wanting to see another aspect of the mountain, our thoughts turned to the Washburn Face. What face, you say? The Washburn Face—or more precisely the northwest face of the West Buttress—suffers the indignity of being walked past and generally ignored by more people than just about any comparable feature on Denali. Each day of high season numerous parties drag their sleds up Motorcycle Hill yet spare hardly a glance for the imposing wall rising in front of them out of the depths of the Peters Glacier. But myself, being an aficionado of all things obscure, I looked at it every time I walked up to 14,000 Camp. This year I had an especially hard time tearing my eyes away from it, as a narrow but continuous ribbon of ice cascaded down a steep rock buttress on the left side of the wall.

I knew exactly what this line was, too. Not a new route, unfortunately, but something almost as good—a rarely (if ever) repeated testpiece. Ben Gilmore, Kevin Mahoney and Bruce Miller established it a decade earlier and called it Common Knowledge, as other teams at that time had also been vying for it. On the lower half of the route they reported climbing pitch after pitch of water ice with a WI6 crux thrown in for good measure. A couple of things were certain: as an ice climber, I found the line absolutely irresistible; and having climbed ice with Kevin, I knew to take his ratings seriously. We had found our objective.

Big alpine routes are funny. They are about overcoming imagined difficulties as much as real ones. I find I both desire

and dread them. I rarely sleep well the night before doing one. My mind and heart race along spurred on by excitement and fear. The night before Common Knowledge was no exception. Strangely, what concerned me the most was not the climb itself but the descent to its base. Somehow, we had to find our way down to the Peters Glacier, a vertical mile below our tent at 14,000 feet where I tossed and turned in my sleeping bag. Descriptions of the descent were annoyingly vague, though one did helpfully refer to a "slope [that] felt like imminent death […] above a line of gnarly seracs." In spite of it all, eventually I managed to drift off to sleep.

The alarm went off at 4 a.m. I tried to get dressed as much as possible inside the warm confines of the sleeping bag, but once I had my inner boots and big parka on, there was nothing for it but to venture outside. Just as when we had set out for the Cassin a few days earlier, it was a cold, cloudless morning. But unlike that day, which had been beautifully still, a stiff breeze blew through camp. The previous couple of days had been unusually blustery, with snow streamers blowing from the ridges. We hoped climbing lower on the mountain would shelter us from the worst of the wind. Shouldering light packs we headed down, around Windy Corner and down Squirrel Hill. At the top of Motorcycle Hill we left the beaten West Buttress trail and began cutting down fresh snow on the lee side.

"How's that slope?" I pleaded, hoping to open the door to retreat.

Josh would have none of it. "A bit of a windslab right here, but it gets better lower down."

Early in my climbing career I read an interview with George Lowe, one of my climbing heroes. At the end of it he was asked if he had any words of advice for aspiring alpinists. His answer stayed with me: "Try to separate your fears and hopes from a rational evaluation of what you should do." And so on this bright, cloudless morning I forced my butterflies down and continued descending—downclimbing below some seracs, rappelling over others and finally reaching the Peters Glacier.

Once in the isolated basin of the Peters Glacier, the simplest way back to the comforts of our camp lay up the route. As soon as our bridges were burnt and we were committed, my butterflies flew off and I started having fun. The altimeter read well below 3,000 metres. After a couple of weeks spent between 4,000 and 6,000 metres, the air felt rich and thick. It was like being back in the Rockies, and we were able to push our pace to the base of the wall as we threaded the needle between the runout of the giant serac spilling between the Washburn Face and the Fathers and Sons Wall on the left, and the debris of the serac bands below the crest of Motorcycle Hill on the right.

We crossed an easy 'schrund and headed up the couloir above. A 10-centimetre layer of hard snow covered black ice; in other words, perfect conditions. Between the good névé and the thick air, we fairly sprinted up the gully. We broke out the rope for a harder-than-it-looked step, where my feet sheared through the chandeliers as spindrift poured over my head, then put it away again and soloed on. We could now see the crux pitch, a beautiful column of water ice where the couloir reared up to vertical. A two-screw anchor, some food and drink, the rope, and then it was time to dance to a slower beat.

Ice climbing is a strange game. A friend of mine likes to poke fun at it, saying the moves even on a WI6 are trivial. And he is right: pulling up from one placement to another even on a difficult ice pitch certainly is trivial. But ice does not come with pre-placed tools one can just grab and go. One of the hardest parts of hard, traditional ice climbing is getting good (or at least decent) tool placements—and protection. Once you have finally managed an OK stick in a mess of fragile chandeliers, and spent minutes fiddling a small wire behind a suspect flake off to the side because the ice is too aerated to take screws, pulling up is indeed easy.

The pitch had looked straightforward from below, but upon closer inspection it turned out to be anything but. I got in a couple of decent screws on the low-angled shield at the start, but higher up they twisted uselessly into air behind the sun-baked shell. For a while I could stem between the cascade and the rock beside it, thus avoiding putting my full weight on tools driven into snow- and air-filled ice. But then the stems ran out, and I was forced to move around to the front of the pillar—and to fully load my tools. *I'm not sure I can climb this*, flashed through my mind as my picks bounced uselessly off

Raphael Slawinski on the sun-rotted crux ice of Common Knowledge on the Washburn Face.
Photo: Joshua Lavigne

the rock beneath a detached skin of ice. I forced the thought down and committed to the marginal placements. At long last a tool thunked into solid ice. I ran out the rest of the pitch on placements, each one of which I could have belayed off. Our 70-metre rope came tight just as I reached lower-angled ice.

We continued on 60-degree ice interrupted by vertical steps. By now the sun had swung around the mountain and beat down on us, and some rocks crashed down from sidewalls running with meltwater. Fortunately the mists that had been swirling around us condensed into clouds, and we found ourselves enveloped in a cool, grey murk. The couloir eventually ended on a snowy ridge. We waded up it and stopped at the first flattish spot. It was 7 p.m., and we had been going for over 12 hours on less than two litres each. It was time for a brew.

We were near the top of the cloud layer and every once in a while we would be afforded a view of the Fathers and Sons Wall to the north, and of the lower-angled upper slopes of our own Washburn Face above. We took our time, making litre after litre of water, eating and changing into dry socks. After more than an hour, re-energized, we left our small perch and headed up. A mixed band had us rope up one last time, and then we were on easy ground—and in deep snow. The southeast winds of the previous couple of days had scoured the mountain and loaded its northwest aspects, which was unfortunately where we happened to be. There was nothing for it but to resort to the tried-and-true Rockies wallowing technique: carve a trench with your knee, step up into it, repeat. And repeat. And repeat.

An icefield glowing in the rays of the midnight sun provided welcome relief from the soul-destroying trail-breaking, but then it was back to snow. It felt spooky being in the middle of a lee-loaded snowfield suspended a vertical mile above the Peters Glacier, so when the opportunity arose, we detoured onto some rocks. After altogether too many hours we reached the crest of the West Buttress. A cold wind whipped across the ridge, threatening to freeze our very eyeballs. Slowly, exhaustedly, we traversed to the top of the fixed lines and stumbled down to 14,000 Camp. We were now satisfied and could finally go home.

After a day's rest—when getting up to make a cup of tea required a major effort—we packed up our home for the past two weeks and headed down. Ever the optimist, I confidently predicted it would take us no more than three hours back to the airstrip; in the end it took us twice that long. The lower Kahiltna Glacier was a mess. Its surface had melted down to a three-year-old layer of volcanic ash, and as a result it was pitted with metre-deep suncups. After our sleds had overturned for the 10th time, we even stopped swearing. Minefields of barely bridged crevasses had us guide the sleds on a short leash to avoid being pulled into a hole by them. At least the rain held off until we had reached the airstrip, but then the skies opened up and it poured. We spent the day sleeping, eating and hanging out with the rangers. Just when it looked like we would have to crawl back into our wet sleeping bags for another night on the glacier, a couple of TAT Otters swooped in under low-lying clouds. Carving deep tracks into the mushy landing strip, they roared with effort on takeoff. But take off they did, whisking us back to green grass and hot showers. The adventure was over.

Raphael Slawinski (left) and Joshua Lavigne on the Football Field at the top of the Cassin Ridge. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

Summary

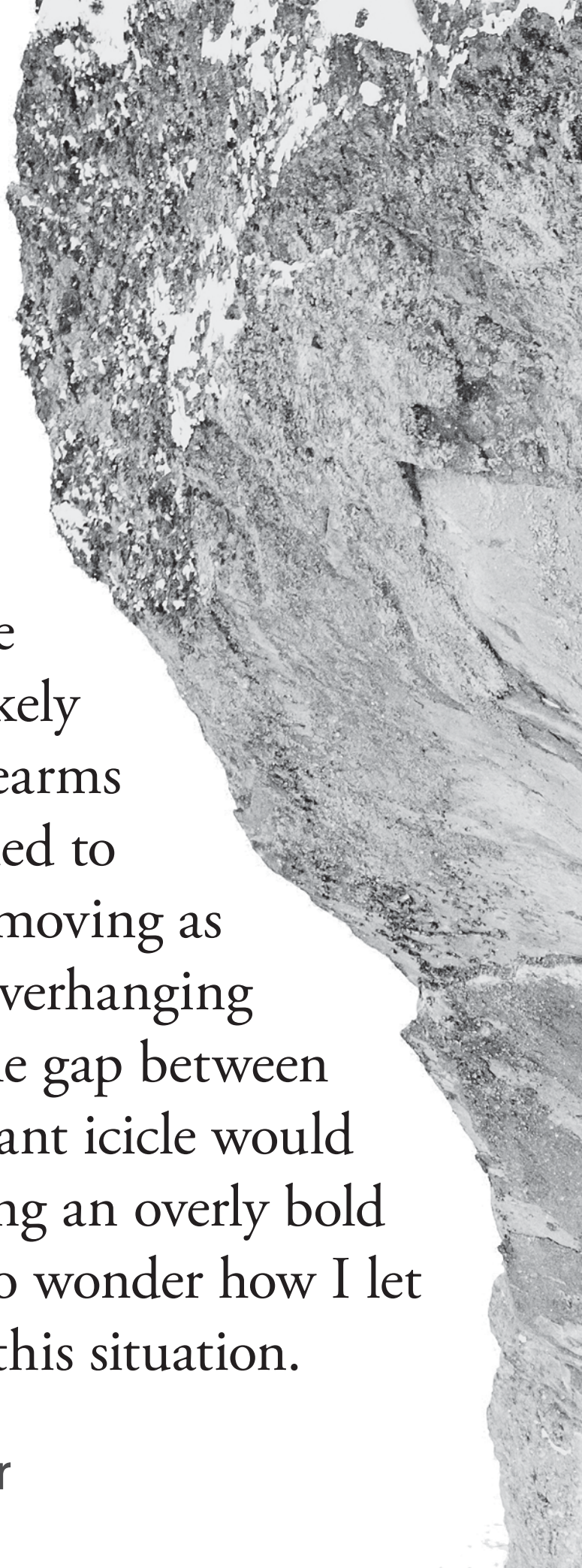
Single-push ascent of the Cassin Ridge (WI3 M4, 2300m) in 16.5 hours from the bergschrund to the summit ridge (no summit) and 23.5 hours round trip from 14,000 Camp, Denali, Alaska Range. Joshua Lavigne, Raphael Slawinski, June 18, 2011.

Single-push ascent of Common Knowledge (WI6 M4, 2000m) in 25 hours round trip from 14,000 Camp, Denali, Alaska Range. Joshua Lavigne, Raphael Slawinski, June 22, 2011.

About the Author

A professor of physics at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Raphael Slawinski is an aspiring gym climber. However, like most addicts, he has yet to face up to his addiction—in this case, to tight shoes, chalk and plastic. And so he still feels obligated to talk (and sometimes even walk) like an alpinist. But do not be fooled. The whole time he was cooped up at 14,000 Camp on Denali, he obsessed about his dwindling contact strength.

METAMORPHOSIS



Improbable-
looking moves
ahead, less
than inspiring
gear below, I
contemplated
the huge airtime
I would most likely
soon clock. Forearms
ballooning, I tried to
keep the blood moving as
I hung off the overhanging
wall, wishing the gap between
me and the distant icicle would
shrink. Not being an overly bold
climber, I had to wonder how I let
myself get into this situation.

Nathan Kutcher

Nathan Kutcher on his redpoint of Metamorphosis at Diamond Lake in Southern Ontario. Photo: Martin Suchma

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO FIND inspiring winter routes to climb when living in Ontario. An exception to this unfortunate reality is the ominous overhanging wall left of Where Egos Dare at Diamond Lake. The line has inspired almost everyone who has laid their eyes on it. It is clearly visible high above the lake and has large daggers of ice dangling from the lip of the steep cliff, beckoning for someone to climb it. Below the ice, a 130-degree overhanging headwall guards against would-be suitors. A right-leaning ice-choked crack splits the smooth headwall, promising passage to the tantalizing ice above. Below is a thin, steep dribble of difficult ice, intermixed with insecure drytooling, which by itself is enough to make most climbers move on to less intimidating sections of the cliff. Local lore tells of a team of aid climbers who had tried climbing the headwall but were turned back just short of the top. Their old pitons were left in the crack to rot after a battle that couldn't be won.

I had my eye on this line and attempted it several times over the past five years. This route had been looked at for decades and even saw a few winter attempts before I first saw it in the winter of 2007-08. On that trip I didn't have the rock gear with me to even think about trying it. The ice was thin and I was still very green when it came to sketchy mixed climbing. Even so, later on that winter I returned with appropriate rock gear, stubby ice screws and a few bolts, but looking at it I could see that the route was in no condition to attempt. The thin ice was even thinner than before, and water had started running behind it. I knew I could bolt it into submission and climb it, but such a line deserved better than that. It would have to wait until the next year.

The route was a great opportunity to be a learning curve—a growing process, if you will—for my climbing. To get the most out of it I wanted to approach it from the ground up with minimal use of the rope. At the start of winter 2008-09, I climbed as many hard ice and traditionally protected mixed routes as I could find to prepare myself for the project. But upon returning to Diamond Lake, I was hugely disappointed to see that after I had been there the year before someone had started bolting their way up the wall. Since they had been there so late in the season most of the bolts were buried under enough ice to easily take screws. I made the decision that their bolts were unnecessary and I would not use them, if for no other reason than to prove a point. Protected by ice screws and removable rock gear, Rebecca Lewis and I climbed past their high point on the lower ice and up to the base of the headwall.

Nathan Kutcher on his winning climb at the Ouray Ice Festival competition in Ouray, Colorado. Photos: William L. Snyder

Where a previously attempted aid route had likely traversed into the base of the headwall, I found an old piton anchor. I was only halfway up the cliff at that point and what I had climbed already felt like a route in itself. I replaced the old piton anchor with a modern bolt anchor and called the lower section Where Posers Dare. With the day finished and the ice conditions rapidly deteriorating for the season, further progress would have to wait another year.

With more experience under my belt, I was hopeful that I would finally climb the project in the winter of 2009-10. Upon returning then, the lower ice was much thinner than the year before. Rather than risk climbing the thin and difficult-to-protect ice, or clip the adjacent ladder of bolts, I climbed a crack system that starts further left. The crack diagonals up and

right, joining the line at a huge flake system before climbing to the midpoint anchor to make Handicap Accessible. From there I could continue upward on the original line. Climbing past the previous year's high point I finally reached the spot in the headwall where the angle of the rock really kicks back. As I moved into the steep terrain I was able to place a few pieces of gear into the discontinuous crack. After climbing well above my last protection point, I was finally able to drape a sling over a hollow flake before reaching up for a tendril of ice that dripped out from a small roof at the bottom of the continuous crack above. I tried to swing lightly but the icicle broke off. Stretching far up over my head to reach the remaining ice, I managed to drive an ice screw straight up into what remained of the small dagger. After contemplating how tired I was, how far below me the last good piece of gear was, and how far up the next opportunity for solid gear might be, I drilled a bolt and lowered off. I returned a few more times that year, but as the lower ice became more difficult to climb, I was never able to push my high point any further without hanging all over the rope, so I opted to just lower off.

A very dry fall in 2010-11 meant that the groundwater necessary to form the route was not present; and without the ice, I may as well have come to climb it in summer. I reluctantly made the decision to abandon efforts for that year and focus my attention on different projects.

EVERY YEAR I PLAN to start training early, but rock climbing seems to always take priority right up until it's ice season and I'm left scrambling to get back into shape for mixed climbing. This year, with some pushing from Rebecca, I decided to apply to compete in the Ouray Ice Festival. Even if I was not accepted to compete, this was a great way to finally take training seriously and get into wicked shape for the ice season, and then hopefully finish my project.

After a month of anticipation I was thrilled with an invitation to compete at Ouray. With almost my entire mixed-climbing career developed in Southern Ontario, being invited was a victory in itself. Arriving in Ouray, I felt I was climbing well. My time spent training over the previous month and a half had been very productive. Reading the quartzite was different than the limestone and granite that I climb in Ontario, but the highly technical style is similar to many of the difficult routes I have established and it seemed to suit me.

On the day of the competition my initial nervousness was quickly put at ease once I started climbing the comp route. Immersed in searching out the next move to make upward progress, I had no expectations. My main goal was to climb as well as I could. I did not want to make the mistake of rushing between the sequences and slipping off. The technical lower portion of the route went by smoothly. At the horizontal ice bridge, I elected to quickly power my way across rather than spend time getting tangled up in unnecessary figure 4s. Once established on the headwall of the opposite side of the narrow canyon, I felt at home yarding between the small holds. With the clock ticking I fought the urge to climb too quickly. Soon enough I was swinging into the ice and became the first to top out on the route. However, being only the fifth competitor so far, there were still many highly accomplished mixed athletes

to go, with a likely possibility of them topping out more quickly. Enjoying my temporary spot in first place, I watched as the route spit off competitor after competitor. In the end only one other person topped out, but not as fast, bringing me to an unexpected victory.

WITH OURAY IN THE PAST, the project was next on my agenda. I saw some photos of the lower ice, which encouraged me, but it still appeared very thin. The weather was miserably cold, but since Rebecca and I had been out there in similar conditions in the past we made the five-hour drive north for the weekend. On Saturday we didn't even get on the route. Without the usual cold-weather acclimatization of the years before, we both struggled to not freeze while just climbing the warm-up route. On Sunday we got a late start but I managed to climb the thin ice of the lower section. By the time I had reached the midpoint anchor, I was already exhausted and daylight was already fading. I lowered off, and we made plans to be back the next weekend if the weather looked better.

Another late start and slippery roads on the drive up were not a great way to start the weekend. We quickly did a couple of warm-up routes then headed over to see what had happened to the thin ice on the project. The thinnest parts were already showing signs of sublimating away but it still looked doable. After making it past the poorly protected climbing down low, the upper smear was still in good shape and easily took 13-centimetre screws. The drytool section, however, was a little sketchy since a large part of the face was covered in verglass, and a light dusting of snow obscured most of the remaining holds. Reaching to the lower dagger that guards the first anchor, I hooked into my old pick holes. The ice creaked and groaned as I weighted my tools. Stuffing away doubt in the back of my mind, I committed to the skinny pencil.

For the first time after reaching the midpoint anchor I was still full of hope. Launching into the headwall, the small patches of ice were dried out and crumbling. Fortunately, there were adequate rock holds underneath the ice to allow passage. Upon reaching the middle dagger, I was pleased to find clear and solid ice, but less happy about having to climb around the obstacle. Hoping it would make a good foothold once higher, I did my best not to knock it off. I clipped the bolt marking my previous high point and let out a sigh of relief knowing that even if I couldn't get anything into the ice-filled crack above and fell from near the top, I at least wouldn't hit the ground—

even though it would still be a 20-metre-plus fall.

Climbing around the curtain-like dagger was one of the more technically difficult sections. With my arm locked off and reaching as high as I could, I twisted my body around the icicle like a serpent. At the same time, I tapped at the fragile surface producing small divots that I could then hook. Above the dagger was the narrow, ice-choked crack. The bolt felt far away as I carefully swung at the ice inside the fissure. After about five metres of delicate climbing, the ice inside the crack opened up to form a small, shallow pod that took a marginal cam. A metre above was a fixed piton left from the long-ago aid-climbing adventure. The thought-to-be reasonable-looking fixed pin I had spied from below turned out to be an underdriven, rusted-out piece of crap. I was pleasantly surprised that

the eye didn't break when I clipped the rope in. But any port in the storm was welcome.

As my forearms filled with lactic acid, I continued to carefully work my way up the steep headwall—the marginal piton getting farther and farther below me, the bolt seeming miles away. Finally nearing the top I found another pod that would take a cam, but the two pieces of the appropriate size were already placed far below, so I tried to work in the next size up. Finally the lobes of the cam slipped into the grainy crack just far enough to grab, encouraging me to continue upward. I was within what seemed like spitting distance from the dagger spilling over the top of the cliff when the ice inside the crack ran out. It was replaced by a thick coating of dry moss that just scraped off. No matter how hard I tried, a placement couldn't be found—too flared to torque my picks, too dirty to try and jam my fingers. After assessing the situation, I decided my only viable option was to lunge for what looked like a small ledge far over my head. As I swung up for the unknown hold, I hoped it wasn't too sloping. If the tool didn't catch I wouldn't be able to recover and maintain control of my falling body. Fortunately, the pick bit into a thin layer of ice that offered a secure hold. Looking over the ledge I was happy to find a couple of more fixed pins that looked like they might actually hold a fall. I happily clipped both. Reaching across to the final dagger and getting a solid stick never felt so good—but it still wasn't over. I was carrying a ferocious pump and could barely swing my tools. With the rope growing heavy, I made a few more tenuous moves on brittle ice and was finally on top.

After so many failed attempts and hours in the car, I was on the verge of abandoning this project. I had started to forget what this route meant to me. In Ontario, it's rare to find a route so forbidding yet so inviting. Early on, it provided a place to practice the idea of accepting the dangers and risks of ice climbing, putting fear aside and fully concentrating on what I needed to do to climb the route. It wasn't until letting go of my expectations and accepting that I did not need to complete the route that I found what I needed to reach the top. I hope that Metamorphosis was a teacher to those who attempted it before me and will be to those who follow.

Summary

Metamorphosis (M10R, 35m), Diamond Lake, Southern Ontario. FA: Nathan Kutcher, January 21, 2012.

About the Author

Nathan Kutcher (35) has over 18 years experience making mountains out of mole hills. Growing up in the flat lands of Minnesota, he did his best to avoid winter, but soon after moving to St. Catherines, Ontario, he learned that mixed climbing is the most fun you can have in long-johns. Now a Canadian citizen, his ice climbing career has been almost exclusively developed in Southern Ontario where he has established some of the area's best sport and trad mixed lines.

The Shining

Tommy Caldwell

Tommy Caldwell on pitch 12 (5.12b) of The Shining. Photo: Sonnie Trotter

Tommy Caldwell working the moves on pitch 11 (5.13c) on The Shining. Photo: Sonnie Trotter

There's no way that's going to hold, I thought to myself, *or will it*? Maybe if I keep most of the weight on my feet and my hands it will hold. "Just suck it up," I muttered to myself. I started to step into my aider. The small flake I was hooking groaned in protest. More weight. *Crack!* A small chunk of the flake broke off. I clipped the hook back to my harness and looked down six metres to the bolt below me—and the hammer drill hanging from it. I had already tried downclimbing but couldn't reverse the delicate moves. What if I just jump? A 12-metre whipper past a hanging drill didn't sound too appealing either. Through squinted eyes, I peered up past a sea of tiny ripples and water-formed needles. Is there an edge up there somewhere I could hook on? It was impossible to tell. I placed the hook back on the broken edge and began to weight it.

The familiar queasy feeling in my stomach said all right, this is exciting. The line between a healthy sense of adventure and stupidity is about as straight as the skyline of the Himalaya. I like to think my risk is calculated. I tell my wife, Becca, I want to look into her beautiful blue-green eyes as an old cruster. I mean even older and crustier than I am now. She says I am a justifier. She is probably right. But like a habit I can't kick, I crave the excitement of big climbs. And on Mount Louis, the excitement had started early that morning.

As the dawn sky lightened that morning, Sonnie Trotter and I scrambled up a long gully of loose rubble. "Rock!" Sonnie shouted. I looked to my right as a baseball-sized chunk of rock went whizzing by. "More rocks!" A few pebbles bounced off my helmet. The diamond face loomed above and was strikingly similar in shape and size to The Diamond on Long's Peak—the fabled mountain that sits just above my childhood home of Estes Park, Colorado. The only difference was that this diamond on Louis looked as blank as a brick wall. A few hours and some 5.5 scrambling brought us to a large ledge at the base of the wall. I approached and placed my hand flat on the wall, peering straight up its vertical face. It looked big but covered in micro edges and small water grooves.

"This is what I have been waiting for," I said in an overly dramatic and somewhat sarcastic voice. Internally, my excitement was peaking. I had dreamed of finding a big limestone wall and bolting it ground up—venturing up immense blankness searching for elusive hook placements, no crack systems to follow. The idea sounded great dreaming at home, but the reality of being up here was downright intimidating.

"I think we should just bolt straight up the middle," Sonnie suggested.

Wow! While I was wavering, Sonnie was getting ready to hit this thing straight on. "I guess I'll go see what's up there." I made an attempt to hide my hesitation.

I CLIMBED 10 METRES up a relative weakness, found a micro cam placement in a crumbly crack, tentatively weighting the cam, hauled up the drill and placed our first bolt. I then hung the drill on the newly installed bolt and tried to free climb above. For 30 minutes I crimped sharp, tiny holds. The climbing was doable, but I couldn't sack up and run it out

Sonnie Trotter aid climbing and bolting pitch 11 of The Shining. Photo: Tommy Caldwell

Tommy Caldwell belaying in the Aloha chair on The Shining. Photo: Sonnie Trotter

far enough to find a suitable place for a hook. I decided to drill a few shallow one-quarter-inch bat hook holes, aid up five metres and place another bolt. I drilled a few bolts this way, and then finally summoning up some courage, I decided to ditch the drill and try to free climb again. This time I made it six metres to a small in-cut flake. I slowly weighted it, holding my breath, calming my nerves. As I put my full weight on the hook I closed my eyes tightly, expecting to hear a pop signifying the beginning of what would be a long sail down the wall. It held. I quickly hauled up the drill, placed another bolt, clipped in and took a breath for the first time in what felt like several minutes.

The higher we got, the braver I got. When the rock was really blank I would resort to drilling bat-hook holes, but when intuition told I would find a hook placement, I free climbed. On a few occasions, however, I got caught out in the cold and found myself far above the last bolt in a blank canvas of limestone. In these instances, I would search for the biggest hold available to grip, use my free hand and teeth to haul up the drill, and fire in a bolt before I pumped out.

By the time I finished the pitch, we knew we had found something amazing. The sun was going down, so we decided to retreat for the day. The next day we woke at 5 a.m. to rain pattering on our van's roof, so went back to bed. By 9 a.m., we couldn't hold off any longer—our excitement getting the best of us.

"Maybe we should buy an umbrella," Sonnie suggested. "I heard Steve House sometimes brings an umbrella." I knew the wall was steep enough that the rock would stay relatively dry, but the biggest ledge was barely wider than the rungs on my campus board.

"What about the hour-long hanging belays... in the rain?" I asked. I could see a light bulb go off in Sonnie's head.

"We can sling a lawn chair!" This was starting to sound like a lot of fun.

Fifteen hours later we found ourselves one pitch above the previous day's high point. While Sonnie bolted, I leaned back comfortably in our Aloha lawn chair. Rain showers came and I pulled out Becca's black-and-white polka-dot umbrella that I had snatched from the van. The drops turned to snowflakes, but Sonnie kept on bolting. Clouds engulfed us then dissipated. Rainbows came and went. The exposure was immense since we were on the highest point of rock as far as I could see. By the time Sonnie finished the pitch it was snowing hard. I slipped climbing shoes on my frozen feet and top-roped the pitch. This was the hardest climbing we had encountered, but despite the fact that it was snowing and

I was climbing in a big down jacket with a Gore-tex shell over it, I managed to do all the moves. "I guess it can't be that hard," I said.

We continued bolting and climbing through the night. The wind howled and snow fell as we rapped through the night. Despite 20 hours of continuous movement, we were energized by the intensity of our situation. By the time we got back to the road the sun was coming up. I quietly got in the van and slipped my dirty, smelly body in bed next to Becca. "How was it, Love?" She asked without opening her eyes. "Really amazing," I replied, "and climbing with Sonnie is awesome. I would do any trip in the world with that guy."

The next day, Becca and I headed into the Selkirks for some heli-climbing with Ruedi Beglinger. Despite the dreaminess of our helicopter-assisted alpine rock climbing, I couldn't get the Diamond Face out of my head, so two weeks later we were back on Louis. Watching the sun peek over the horizon from the base of the wall, we witnessed the summit light up like a candle while the rest of the Bow Valley rested in darkness. Just two days earlier we had a bit of a reality check on our first redpoint attempt. The climbing proved harder than we anticipated, forcing us to come up short.

This was out last chance. Our trip was coming to an end. Both Sonnie and I had to be in Salt Lake City in a few days for the Outdoor Retailer trade show. We knew what we had to do. An excited flutter in my stomach started to overwhelm the tired queasiness I felt from waking up at 1 a.m. For a few minutes we sat on the ledge taking it all in. The beauty of this place calmed me. I thought about when I was a competition climber. I would get nervous causing my movement to be forced and tense. But here, in the mountains, for some reason everything was different. My mind was clear and relaxed. It's one of the reasons I love the mountains so much.

As I started climbing, the alpenglow made the rock look soft. The cool morning breeze dried my fingertips and the rock felt crisp, almost tacky. I sent the first pitch without incident. Sonnie followed, took a few minutes to rest at the belay then led pitch two. His climbing style is impressive to watch—determined and decisive, never a hesitation. *This is it*, I thought to myself. As I pulled the laces tight on my climbing shoes for the crux pitch, I noticed how acutely aware I was of my breathing. I noticed every detail of my surroundings. The smells, the wind, the texture of the rock were all crystal clear. I thought about

The Diamond Face on the upper east face of Mount Louis in the Canadian Rockies. Photo: Sonnie Trotter

Tommy Caldwell freeing the crux pitch (5.13c) of The Shining on the day of the successful redpoint ascent. Brandon Pullan is belaying so that Sonnie could take photos and lead half the pitches. Photo: Sonnie Trotter

how so much of my life is spent in a relative fog. Why are these moments of serene focus so rare and fleeting? What would it be like if we could live out every action in our lives in this state? I guess that's what draws many of us to climbing. It provides us these moments to remember—to strive for. And motivates us to be present in all aspects of our lives.

I pressed my feet to the undulating ripples while simultaneously crimping the micro edges. The moves that had taken all my strength a few days before seemed to float by. When I reached the end of the crux pitch, I let out a scream. Sonnie followed with much determination. When he made it to the anchor, we knew we had done it. The remaining pitches flowed organically, delivering us to the top. Just as we crested the summit ridge, a helicopter appeared and buzzed around us for a few minutes as if to offer congratulations.

WEEKS LATER I AM BACK HOME in Estes Park, Colorado. I reminisce about the architectural beauty of the crenulated spire and the aesthetics of the line—the sun-exposed diamond of weathered limestone. I remember Sonnie's laughter at the absurd sight of me reclining in our Aloha chair, tucked under the umbrella. The high we felt from the success has already faded, but the memories of a good time in the mountains with a great friend will stick with me in some way or another for the rest of my life.

Summary

The Shining (5.13c, 600m, 15 pitches), the Diamond Face on the east face of Mt. Louis, Canadian Rockies. FA: Tommy Caldwell, Sonnie Trotter, August 3, 2011.

About the Author

Tommy Caldwell is no slouch on the rocks. Born and raised in Estes Park, Colorado, Tommy divides his time by climbing, scouting new climbs and training for climbing. He has freed more routes on El Capitan in Yosemite than any other human being—including free climbing two in a single day.

An Odd Essay

This isn't a story about climbing Mount Waddington. Truth be told, last summer Jason Kruk and I didn't actually climb Mount Waddington despite our best efforts. But that doesn't matter. This is a story about how we got there in the first place and what happened on the way home.

Tony Richardson

FOR ME, THIS JOURNEY STARTED 20 years ago when I first went to Waddington. I was 12. That summer I spent a couple of weeks on the Tiedemann Glacier with my father helping clean up the set of the movie K2 that had been shot there the winter before. On that trip I met Ryan Foster, whose family lives at the end of the road down the West Branch valley, the closest place to Waddington that you can get to by car. Mosley Creek runs through the Foster's ranch, meandering its way from Bluff Lake towards Twist Lake, heading south and picking up speed and volume from the Scimitar and Tiedemann Glaciers before feeding into the Homathko River on route to Bute Inlet. By chance, Ryan and I ended up going to Cariboo College together in Kamloops where we became best friends and shared a lot of amazing adventures. We always talked about trying "the Wadd", maybe hiking in, since it was right in his backyard. We even went so far as to scout the Mosely just below Twist Lake. But it never happened for us. Ry had kids, and I went back to school in Vancouver to study design and ended up landing a job at Arc'teryx. Life goes on.

Then last winter Jason Kruk and I started talking about a trip to Waddington while we were travelling together in Morocco. At first it was a simple plan: fly in, climb, go home. But every time we talked it seemed like something was missing, so we would elaborate: maybe something on the south side, what about walking in, how about rafting in. It all seemed a little crazy, especially given the area's history and unpredictable access at the best of times. The only things we knew for sure was that we had to leave sometime at the end of July or early August and that we were stoked.

July rolled around and we still didn't have any real plans. Jason landed a job working on a movie up Bute Inlet and was kind of out of touch until the beginning of August. The weather wasn't that great anyways. I would get the occasional e-mail from him that said he was having a great time and could see Waddington on clear days. He was working with a bunch of other guides, including Paul Bernstein, the Huckleberry Finn of the Coast Mountains, who has spent as much time as anyone flying around the area.

Midway through his contract, Jason came back to Squamish for a couple of days and we met up to figure out a plan. Bernstein had made an interesting suggestion: why not raft in and out? Leave from the Foster's ranch at the north end, walk up the Scimitar Glacier, over Fury Gap to the south face of Waddington then down the Waddington Glacier to the Scar camp and float the Homathko to Bute. This was the craziest plan yet! I was skeptical at first, but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. All we would need were some tiny rafts and some good weather. No problem.

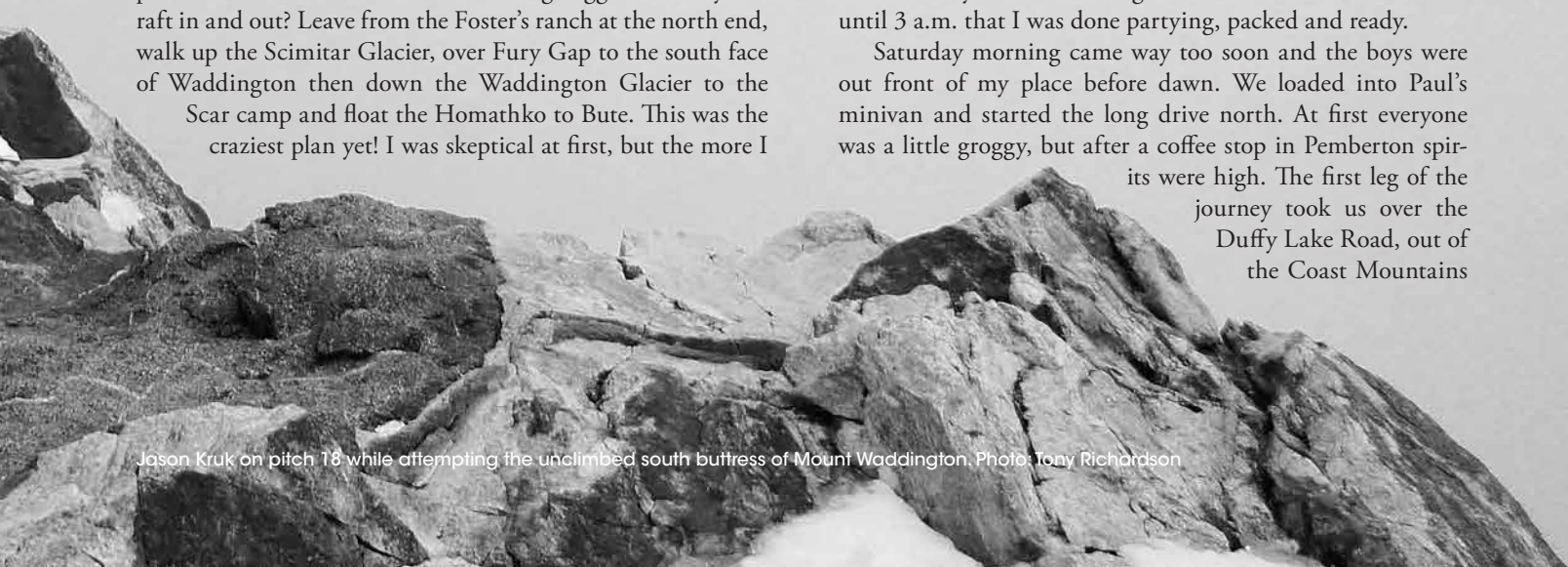
As luck would have it, I knew just the guy for the rafts. My friend and mentor at Arc'teryx, Mike Blenkarn, is about as avid a fly fisherman as any human can be. For years Mike had been telling me about this amazing little inflatable raft, called an Alpacka, he uses to access remote fishing spots. It's like the Canadian Tire raft you use to float down the Penticton canal, but on steroids. He had two. He was gracious enough to lend us one since the other was already out on loan.

It was now almost the end of August, Jason wasn't home yet, the weather was still a little sketchy and we didn't know exactly how we were going to pull this off. To complicate things, Jason and I were trying to coordinate our trip with our friends Paul McSorley and Andrew Boyd. They had also been planning a trip to the area via more conventional means—fly in, fly out. Anyone who has thought about visiting the area has probably talked to Mike King of White Saddle Air Services at Bluff Lake. Mike is the go-to guy for flying into the range. The Pantheon Range and Waddington Group is his backyard. To get to Bluff you drive to Williams Lake then take Highway 20 west towards Bella Coola until you get to the "town" of Tatla Lake. There, you head south for 30 minutes until you pull in to the King's place at the south end of the lake.

But by now it was the last week of August and our window was closing. The weather was still unsettled, yet like a herd of cats, Paul, Andrew, Jason and I committed to taking the drive out to Bluff that coming Saturday, "just to see." As luck would have it, I spoke with Ryan and he mentioned that he and his family would be there visiting his folks. He kindly offered to shuttle Jason and I from Bluff Lake down the road to Twist Lake and could even give us a lift across Twist Lake in one of their boats. We just needed another raft!

Before our weekend departure, I had work projects to finish but was consumed with making some critical gear for our mission. With a bunch of help from folks around the office, I whipped up two new backpacks, some hand paddles, a sack for inflating the boats, and patched up a few crucial items. Friday rolled around and Mike's other Alpacka raft miraculously showed up at noon. We were set. For some reason a party started in my house before I got home from work, so it wasn't until 3 a.m. that I was done partying, packed and ready.

Saturday morning came way too soon and the boys were out front of my place before dawn. We loaded into Paul's minivan and started the long drive north. At first everyone was a little groggy, but after a coffee stop in Pemberton spirits were high. The first leg of the journey took us over the Duffy Lake Road, out of the Coast Mountains



Jason Kruk on pitch 18 while attempting the unclimbed south buttress of Mount Waddington. Photo: Tony Richardson

The attempted and still unclimbed south buttress (prominent sun-shade line) on the the south face of Mount Waddington. Photo: Tony Richardson

and onto the Chilcotin Plateau toward Williams Lake, the last major centre. Before leaving Squamish, Jason and I had only gotten as far as packing a few key supplies and an undetermined number of dehydrated meals. We headed into Save-On-Foods and pumped a quick lap. In record time we bought what felt like the right amount of food for a two-week walk, the most important item being two pounds of butter.

With only a few pee stops to break up the sweeping Chilcotin landscape, we made good time to the turn-off at Tatla Lake. Just before leaving cell range, I called the Fosters to let Ryan know that we would be pulling into the King's place in about an hour, so that he would have time to make the drive up the valley to meet us. We pulled into White Saddle just after dark and talked to Mike. The weather wasn't looking too promising.

The wind was whipping down the lake and a few drops of rain were spiting down when Ry pulled in to pick up Jason and me. We tossed our gear from the van into the truck and said *adieu* to Paul and Andrew, unsure when we would be seeing them next. It was a short hour's drive down the Foster's "driveway", past Middle Lake to the ranch. It was great to have Ryan on the journey, even if for only a short part.

We woke up the next morning and enjoyed a hearty breakfast with the Foster clan. Walt and Carol are gracious hosts and amazing people. I had the chance to catch up with Ryan and Fern, and their two girls, Maia and Sierra Rose. After breakfast we launched the flat-bottomed river boat into the Mosley, loaded our bags from the truck, waved so long to Walt, Carol and the girls, and set off into an oncoming storm.

The creek was fairly wide at that point and oxbowed its way the couple of kilometres from the ranch to Twist Lake. The lake was white-capped by the south wind pushing the storm up the valley from the coast; we slammed our way across the lake. There would have been no hope for us to have made the crossing in our rafts. Ryan and Fern deposited us in a sheltered slough. Hugs all around before they headed back to their family. This was the end of the road, so to speak.

Jason and I stood deep in the Coast Mountains, wondering how we had made it this far. And this was just the beginning! Without much else to say, we shouldered our packs and started the march. Having extensively Google-earthed the section of river we needed to descend to reach Scimitar Creek, I was fairly confident the rapid we were portaging was the only real whitewater we would encounter. You can believe everything you see on the Internet, right? We walked for a couple of kilometres, getting a nice sampler of the coastal bush to come, until we found a spot where we could put in.

This would be the first time for either of us to actually try the loaded rafts with the hand paddles I had just finished two days before. Some other firsts at this point included: inflating the boats with my freshly minted pump bag, wrapping our Thermarests around our torsos to act as floatation devices under our jackets, and loading the boats with our kit. To our pleasant surprise, everything worked. We were afloat!

For me this was a great moment of realization—it was the perfect union of what I do for work and what I love to do. To trust your life to things that you have made with you own hands is a special thing and it's what keeps me in the office those late nights when everyone else has gone home.

As predicted, the water was fairly gentle. We drifted along with the current, occasionally needing to paddle to stay in the main current, but mostly sitting back and marvelling at the rawness of where we found ourselves. We were deep, and only going deeper. After a few hours of drifting, with the odd snack

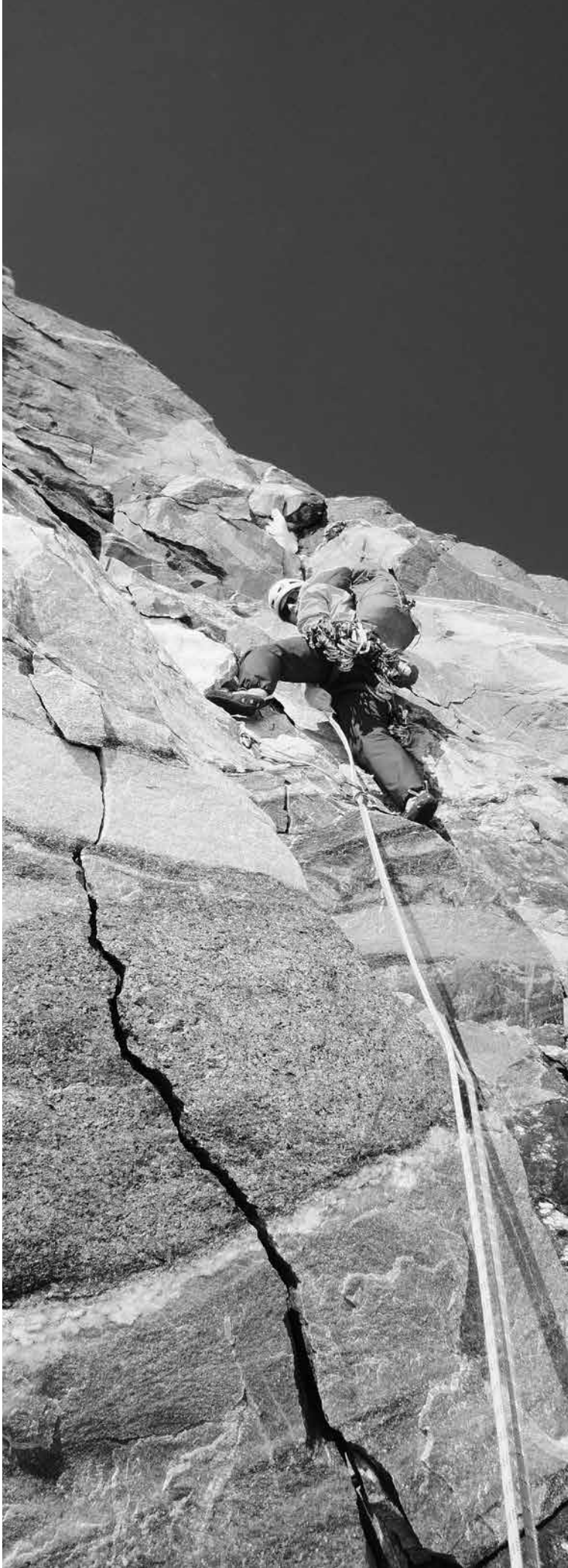
stop, we started to suspect we were getting close to our take-out. This was good, because as we headed south another storm down valley was headed north. Without being totally certain of where we were, we decided to take out as the rain began to slash down.

A quick snack break, pack up the rafts, and we headed into the bush up the Scimitar Valley. At first it was fairly easy going on a nice open alluvial plain. As we got farther up the drainage, however, the side slopes steepened and the brush grew denser. The rain did not let up, and having started out a little damp from the river, we were now both soaked. Strangely, we were both out of drinking water, and despite being in a rain forest, we hadn't seen a trickle in hours. We pushed on in the dark. I was starting to get nervous. "What do you think, Jason? Should we go down by the river to find a flat spot? What about water?" I asked.

"I don't know," was his only response.

Just as we were losing hope in finding a good spot for the night, Jason stopped behind me. Low and behold, I had walked right past a cave beneath some boulders, with dry wood inside and a trickle of water running through the bottom. Jason set about building a fire while I set the tent up on the least-boggy piece of side hill I could find. Dinner and snacks and once again our spirits lifted. This is a pattern that would repeat itself many times throughout the trip. I would get nervous, anxious even, about things, details, like what the best route to take would be, checking the map, where should we plan on making it to for the night. Jason, in his dry, unconcerned way, would always respond the same way: "I don't know." It would make me mad. What the fuck, Jason?! What are you thinking about? We're in the middle of fucking nowhere, and you don't have an opinion about this stuff? Eventually, I figured it out.

The next morning it was raining less hard. We made another fire, ate some breakfast and set off—mostly dried out. The terrain started to get really ugly by then. I felt like there were three main elements: slide alder, lichen-covered talus and bog. Any one of these on its own was fairly tolerable. It was when you found them in combination that travel became difficult. On those special passages where—by some strange miracle of nature—all three elements were found together, things really slowed down. After many hours, and one particularly challenging section, we stopped and I prepared the snacks while Jason checked his iPhone for our progress. "That was a hard-fought kilometre and a half," was all he had to say. We pushed on. It turns out bushwhacking is a skill, like climbing, and you get better at it with mileage and practice. You figure out how to read the bog, how to balance on the slick rocks and which alders will bear your weight. By day's end we had fought our way through the jungle and were glad to camp in the open on the sand flats at the toe of the Scimitar Glacier. As we made camp, my shins felt like a thousand stick-wielding midgets had beaten them to a beautiful purple hue.



Jason Kruk on pitch five while attempting the unclimbed south buttress of Mount Waddington. Photo: Tony Richardson

Jason Kruk on pitch 21 while attempting the unclimbed south buttress of Mount Waddington. Photo: Tony Richardson

The following day was an endless slog up the Scimitar. We walked all day, first on the broken moraine, and then across blue ice to the last rocky outcropping just below Fury Gap. The Olympian scale of the terrain started to reveal itself. Our perspective of the ridges and couloirs towering up around us would seem to stay unaltered for hours. We decided to have a short day and not push into the crevasse field and serac-threatened ground to come.

Early the next day we navigated our way through the tricky terrain. Following a quick snack stop, we punched it over Fury Gap and started down the other side to the flats of the Franklin Glacier. To the west, a line of clear blue sky stretched from one horizon to the other as we rounded the final buttress that separated the Franklin from the Dais. There, we caught the first glimpse of our objective—the northwest summit of Waddington, a pillar rising to the sky.

Another hour of mellow slogging and we set camp in the flats below the south face. After dinner, we sat back with some treats and watched as the sun slid off the face, revealing in stark contrast the buttress we hoped to climb. Anyone who has been to this side of Waddington, or has even seen a picture, will know immediately the line I am referring to. To our knowledge it had been attempted once before, but no one had been willing to give us any more beta then that. It remained a mystery for us to discover.

THE NEXT DAY WE RESTED, snacked and organized our gear for the attack. Again, we could hardly believe where we had gotten ourselves. The world seemed to be in order, everything had a place and a purpose and a meaning, simplified in a way only the mountains—the deep, remote, unpopulated mountains—can offer. We planned an alpine start and went to bed.

In the morning we both slept through our alarms and woke late. It was already light out! We scarfed some breakfast and coffee, grabbed our packs and headed out. As we left camp we saw the first and only wildlife of the entire trip—a massive raven had appeared. It circled our tent and eventually landed for a closer look as we walked away.

An hour of easy crusty snow walking and a few hundred metres of steeper slopes took us to the base of the technical ground. Jason led a couple of nice mixed pitches before we changed into our rock shoes and spent the rest of the day climbing beautiful marbled granite at fairly moderate grades. Finally, as the sun approached the horizon, we hit some wet overhanging sections. Jason did some interesting drytooling to overcome the crux and reach a small ledge as night fell. I joined him. We had a snack and strategized our next move. We hadn't really brought any bivy gear except for a space blanket, but the weather remained nice, so we decided to just hunker down.

Sometime during the night the wind picked up, clouds rolled in and the space blanket was torn to shreds. Despite the difficult conditions, I found that when I turned my iPod on and blocked out the rushing of the wind I didn't feel as cold.

Dawn. We were both frozen. After a cup of coffee, I led a couple of easy pitches to gain a snowfield at the top of the buttress. We swapped back to our boots and crampons, and Jason led out. He found his way into the most amazing corner, walled on both sides by rime-encrusted marled granite, that led to a corniced ridge. At first it seemed that the rime was too rotten to hold body weight, but Jason discovered that by following the very edge of the cornice's fin, the snow would support him. He charged ahead, chopping the occasional notch to flip the rope over for so-called protection. Eventually the rope came tight and I followed.

In order for me to unhook the rope from the other side of the cornice, I had to stand as high as I could on the formation and lean completely over. Every time I did this I found myself looking down the thousand-odd metres of face below, painfully aware that the part I was standing on was not actually supported by anything. When I joined Jason at the next belay the clouds had started to lift and the sun began to shine. It was fantastic except that the snow we were on was becoming softer—fast! Jason led one more pitch that took us to the top of a massive cleft, which leads to the couloir that splits the northwest summit of Waddington from the main summit. We were perhaps a couple of pitches from the plateau of the Angel Glacier and an easy route to the summit.

We might have made it; I don't know. We bailed. It felt like the right thing to do, not just because we didn't want to die, but because it had stopped being about climbing a new route and more about accepting things as they are.

EIGHT OR NINE FULL-LENGTH RAPS took us to the snow slopes of the upper couloir. We downclimbed next to a massive ditch that frequently flushed dump-truck loads of slush and rock from the surrounding walls. We made haste to get down to the relative safety of the upper Dias. Snack time. We started our descent back to camp as the sun was dropping towards the horizon. It had turned out to be a nice day. The snow had gone isothermal, so we spent a couple of more hours balls-deep post-holing back to camp, arriving just before dark. As is often the case, the way home was the hardest part.

At camp we discovered that the raven, that joker, had decided to take a closer look at our tent, shredding two huge holes in the side and distributing our stash of tea bags and coffee around our site. Exhausted from the long couple of days, we salvaged as much as we could, had a snack and went to bed.

Day six we slept in and recuperated for the morning. By lunchtime we were packed. Using our rafts as sleds we set off, thankful that the snow was firmer than the day before. We headed south and east, through Jester Pass and down to the Ice Valley Glacier. Every time we stopped for snacks, we would stare back up at the face we had just been on. The enormity of the mountain was hard to comprehend. Even having just been there the day before, it was hard to distinguish our high point, hidden somewhere in the foreshortened ridge leading from the top of the distinct buttress to the summit. We had been so close; why did we come down? What if we had not slept in the first day? Or what if we climbed faster? I turned by back on the mountain and concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other.

We slogged on towards Mystery Col. The snow had again softened during the day but now the wind was picking up and clouds were blowing in. This was my low point of the trip. Soaked and frozen, we reached the col, set up our tent (still ripped open from the raven), crawled in and went to sleep. We didn't even have enough energy for a bedtime snack. That night it rained hard. I startled awake several times with nightmares that our rafts were filling with rain and were pulling us down the glacier towards a bus-eating crevasse.

We awoke to a whiteout. By the time we were packed, the clouds had started to lift but it was still hard to distinguish

Jason Kruk dragging his inflatable raft down the Waddington Glacier. Photo: Tony Richardson

important details—like crevasses—as we started our final long descent down the Waddington Glacier towards the ocean. We had hardly gone a few steps before my raft slowly gained speed and drifted past me, coming tight on the lines a couple of metres in front. Without saying a word, I pulled it in and jumped on. I looked back and Jason was doing the same. We rode the rafts down the glacier and out of the clouds for a kilometre or two, whooping like rednecks, until the glacier flattened out and we were forced to walk. We pulled this off five or six more times, making good ground, usually accompanied with a snack. As we descended the glacier it became more broken and we had to do some tricky route-finding, weaving our way through crevasse fields, at times holding the lines of our loaded rafts short while their ass-ends hung deep over an icy abyss. Eventually, we found our way to the south side of the glacier where it had receded from the bare rock and provided us with a perfect ramp to transition back to dry land. By nightfall we had set camp and built a fire on a knoll atop the ridge that split the Waddington Glacier from the Scar Creek drainage. It was nice to be off the snow.

OUR LAST DAY OF WALKING started with a tromp through some sub-alpine lakes and marshes as we made our way towards the 1,500-metre slope that would drop us straight down to Scar Creek and hopefully onto an old logging road. As we started the decent, we followed the path of least resistance through the woods and found ourselves on a distinct game trail down a rocky spine. After only a couple of hours of downhill pounding, we made it to Scar Creek and the old road. We stopped for a short break, taking off our boots, soaking our smashed toes in the icy water of the creek, and relaxing with—yes, you guessed correctly—a snack before continuing down the ever-improving road.

By early evening we came to the spooky abandoned logging outpost known as Scar Camp. Wandering through was surreal after being in the wilderness for the past week. The place was littered with old vehicles lurking in the bushes and garages with trucks left exactly like the day they closed the camp down—hood open, wrench now fused to bolt. We didn't linger and instead made our way directly to the shores of the mighty Homathko. There were still hours of daylight, so we decided to see how much of the 50 or 60 kilometres of river between us and Bute Inlet we could cover before dark. A quick bite and we were on our boats, again.

Despite being a huge glacial-fed river full of logs, the Homathko was remarkably mellow at first. We shot along and gained a casual 15 kilometres in a couple of hours. Based on this speed, we were confident that we could make it to salt water the next day. Our final night out was spent on a sand bar in the middle of the river. We built a roaring fire and looked back upstream at where we had come. In only two days, we had made it from icy alpine madness to coastal paradise. Not bad. We filled our bellies with food, topped it off with dessert and had sweet dreams.

Our final day was casual. We slept in, built a fire, drank, ate the rest of our food, lounged in the sun drying our gear to a crisp, and, of course, snacked. I couldn't imagine a beach at Club Med being more luxurious. It was noon before we

Jason Kruk floating down the lower Homathko River. Photo: Tony Richardson

had regained control of the yard sale and were ready for the last push. Donning our rafting gear, we loaded the boats and slipped off the sandbar into the current.

The Homathko whips along quickly, and with all those logs it's pretty heads-up. You have to keep in the main current, picking your line when it gets braided, staying off the back on the long curves. Towards the end, in the final curves as we approached Chuck's place, there were some sections to relax. As my raft did lazy pirouettes, I had the most amazing panoramic display: river, forest, mountains. The most glorious part was looking back up over the ground we had just covered in the past few days from near the summit of Waddington, over Mystery Pass, down the Waddington Glacier, along the steep slopes of Scar Creek, and finally into this massive river. All was laid out, like a detailed train set where perspective is skewed, so close yet so far away. It wasn't even two weeks since we left Squamish, but it felt like we had travelled to a different world.

WE PULLED INTO CHUCK'S PLACE late in the afternoon. Chuck and Sharon see all sorts of people coming and going into the area, but they had never heard of anyone doing a trip the way we had. They were kind enough to put us up, feed us and call the air service that we had arranged to transition us back to reality. Chuck said he hadn't spent more than an hour in town (Campbell River, which is a couple of hours away by boat) in the past year. He wasn't too bothered that we didn't feel like talking much and just let us get organized and relax.

The next morning the weather was decent. Chuck called and the pilot replied that he would be there in about an hour. During that time the weather really started to shift and close in. By the time we heard the plane, it had started to sprinkle. We hopped in Chuck's old truck and headed for the airstrip a couple of kilometres down the road. The pilot was pacing back and forth with what might have been his fourth smoke since he landed. No time for long goodbyes. We hastily loaded our gear in the back of the little plane, said thanks and so long to Chuck, and took off with just a few drops of rain coming down.

The flight home was the cherry on top of our trip's cake. Forced by the weather we followed Bute Inlet down to the Sunshine Coast, seeing all the picturesque little coves and islands. It was beautiful seeing the world from a different perspective. We wrapped our way back around to Howe Sound and before we knew it we were looking over at the Chief and could pick out our houses. We were home! Jason's girlfriend, Elise, picked us up at the airport, and we were sitting on the deck drinking a beer and eating a burger 10 minutes later. Except for my sore toes and stinky clothes it could have been any other Friday afternoon in Squamish, which I suppose it was.

It's hard after a trip like that to not to get a little bit *cosmique* about it all. But I'll refrain. What is certain is that I feel blessed. Blessed for where I'm from, who I know and consider my friends, and the opportunities that I have.

Summary

An attempt on the unclimbed south buttress (5.10+ A1 M4, ca. 20 pitches to high point) of Northwest Peak of Mt. Waddington, Coast Mountains, B.C. Jason Kruk, Tony Richardson, September 1-2, 2011.

About the Author

Tony Richardson isn't a climber. He's an artist. From time to time he is inspired to climb. He enjoys long walks and cold nights out. Calling Squamish home and working as an outdoor equipment designer, he is currently living in France for six months.

Tony Richardson on the approach up the Scimitar Valley.
Photo: Jason Kruk

SPRAY ON TOP

Tim Emmett
Klemen Premrl

Tim Emmett (leading) and Klemen Premrl on Wolverine. Photo: Chris Christie

Tim's take

I first met Will Gadd in 1999 at the ice climbing World Cup. He was flying through the air headfirst before crashing onto the bar with such force that the bar split in half. Fortunately, Will was unhurt, but it was wild and memorable party. Eleven years later, in 2010, I was due to go on a climbing adventure with Will somewhere in Canada. Will told me I was about to embark on his latest project—the Helmcken Falls cave.

Looking at the images on Google Earth, I could tell the back wall of the cave was incredibly steep, and I wondered what I had gotten myself into. Walking into the cave for the first time was like walking onto a set in a science fiction movie—it was unbelievable! The scale is difficult to grasp until someone walks into the frame, and then you realize how big it really is. It is immense! In addition to this was the thunderous sound of the 150-metre waterfall overhead, which happens to be the fourth highest in Canada.

Needless to say, I felt hugely intimidated. This was the biggest and steepest cave I had ever stood beneath. How were we going to climb up that? Will started drilling the first bolt. "There's the first one, all we have to do now is keeping doing that and put a few more in!" Will's excitement was effervescent.

Over the next few days we cleaned hanging ice daggers, and then climbed a 30-metre pitch with about 10 bolts. It was wilder, steeper and more fun than anything I had climbed before with ice axes. And that was just the beginning!

Throughout the summer of 2010 Will and I were fired up to get back into the cave, so the training began. At the start of January 2011 we received the first picture from the folks at Helmcken Falls Lodge. The cave looked insane with way more ice than the year before. Perhaps it would be possible to make our way out across the lower roof onto easier ground above. There was only one way to find out.

Josh and Bret Lowell wanted to make a film and decided to join Will, his trusty amigo EJ Plimley and me.

Will had the genius idea of bringing a metal detector into the cave to find the bolts. It was hilarious but also brilliant to watch him climb the first pitch scanning for bolts hidden under the ice. It worked perfectly and a few hours later the 2010 pitch was ready to climb again.

I loved being back in the cave, questing across the surreal frozen sculpture. We made progress through the increasing steepness with three short but totally horizontal pitches. I think we were all shocked that we had actually made it through the lower roof. It was utter madness—and now we had to try and climb it!

Will and I took turns to climb each of the pitches while the other belayed from the ground. This worked well with our 80-metre rope, and after several days of effort Will and I had led all the pitches. I had to go back to the UK, but Will and EJ managed to add another easier pitch to the top of the ice. This high point was less than halfway to the top of the cave, with the headwall still looming above.

After battling with the falls for the last two years, I knew that this year I had to be in the best shape of my life to even consider climbing to the top. As autumn set in and nights grew longer, the biggest question on my mind was would there would be enough ice on the existing route to be able to climb it.

Fortunately, the friendly team at Helmcken Falls Lodge sent us another picture in January 2012. The cave looked like a hanging garden of frozen roots suspended from the roof. There was even more ice than last year.

A week later, with temperatures consistently around -25 C, another image was e-mailed. It was unbelievable! The ice cone had grown nearly 30 metres. The magnitude of the place is so hard to grasp. It is colossal.

Returning to Helmcken Falls this year turned into the wildest adventure of my life. I had this burning desire to see if it was possible to get to the top, but I also knew it would involve a serious amount of work. Ground-up bolting while getting covered by freezing spray is about as far from warm, sunny sport climbing as you can get. Fortunately, I had the Slovenian hard man, Klemen Premrl, with me this year, who, like Will Gadd, is good at getting things done.

When Klem and I arrived at Helmcken Falls Lodge there was a full team already there. Will Mayo, Chris Geisler, Will Gadd, John Freeman and Sarah Hueniken were present, and more were coming.

Tim Emmett combining the first two pitches of Spray On in 2011. In 2012 this entire pitch was covered by the ice floor of the cave. Photo: Christian Pondella

Klem's take

Helmcken Falls cave is the wildest place I have been for ice climbing. You can see pictures, watch movies, listen to stories—you can even go and see it from the viewpoint—but until you walk into it, you know nothing! You do not have the smallest idea how big and outrageous it is. It is way beyond imaginable.

As we came in this year, there were two routes on the main wall: the original Spray On and a project. Since there was so much more ice on the ground, the first pitch of Spray On was underground and we basically stepped off the ground onto the second pitch. I was happy to be there with Tim because he already has a history with the area. His confidence added to my feeling of safety.

We prepared both routes over the next couple of days, using the infamous metal detector and crashing down big icicles. With the bolts found and the looming daggers grounded, the place became friendlier. For starters, Tim and I did the first free ascent of the project, which we named Wolverine. The next day, on my first go, I managed to link pitches two, three and four of Spray On. I was quite happy with myself. Those two routes were by far the hardest and steepest ice climbing that I had ever done.

Considering there was lots of ice on the ground, prepared routes and a climbing partner like Tim, it felt a lot like sport climbing (but don't fool yourself, in a place like this there is no such thing as sport climbing).

If you look at the cave from the viewpoint at the rim, you would notice that chains of Spray On and Wolverine are not that high at all. There is still a huge amount of overhang climbing to be done to gain the top of the cave, hence, the logical ending. Pushing the route to the top of the cave became our next goal.

The nature of the game changed as we ventured into new ground. There were no bolts in front of us beckoning us upwards. We became explorers inspecting the wall from different perspectives, trying to piece the line together. It was not an easy task trying to find the easiest way to the top. From the high point of Spray On, we bolted leftwards to reach a small cave under a big ice dagger. We dubbed this new section Space Invaders Traverse, and it is one of the best moderate ice/mixed pitches in the world. The next pitch climbs steep rock with a tricky move to the hanging ice dagger itself.

And then there was the Lip Trip pitch: super steep, super exposed and definitely not super easy. It felt so out there. The idea was to climb through the lip of the cave to reach the final upper headwall. I worked on the pitch for a whole day and ended up a mere two metres from easier ground, unable to find any hooks for my tools. I spent more than an hour at that particular spot, searching for the correct sequence, but was still unable to figure out where the route needed to go. It was getting late, so I discussed the situation with Tim via our little two-way radios, and we agreed to call it a day. Rappelling down on frozen ropes over terrain that is beyond steep is an epic story in itself.

I already postponed my flight back home to Slovenia, but we were running out of time again—and running out of bolts. I was ready to surrender, but luckily I was climbing with Tim, which meant giving up was not an option.

We managed to round up some extra bolts. Still, with limited time and bolts we could not afford to make a mistake. Since there was no obvious line in the headwall, we could very easily end up bolting a line that dead-ends. That would mean the end of our attempt for this year, and we really did not want that to happen. We opted to rap from the top to find and bolt the last pitches.

Tim needed to descend three times before he found a climbable route. By that time it was getting late, but that didn't faze Tim. He just turned his headlamp on, grabbed the drill and slid down the ropes again for a night session of drilling.

With Tim's effort the last pitch was prepped, so the next day it was my turn to connect our ground-up high point with the bottom of what Tim had just bolted. Compared to the lower portion of the route, the headwall is relatively easy climbing but still overhanging. Another whole day of swinging around and hanging on the rope, I was able to link the missing section of the route together. Now we just had to send the whole rig in one go. Easier said than done.

Tim Emmett on the Big Dagger pitch (pitch four) of Spray On Top.
Photo: Klemen Premrl

Tim continues

After 14 days of working in the cave, we realized that this wildly steep line might actually go. Both of us were tired and needed a day off, but there wasn't time. We only had one day left before Klem had to fly back to Slovenia. We had added an extra 180 metres of climbing to what Will and I had done the year before. Every pitch was overhanging. It was a massive job. All we had to do now was climb it, bottom to top in one push, and not fall off.

The morning of the ascent was electric; we were so fired up. I set off up the first pitch but found it desperate and nearly fell off. We both knew there wasn't time to make mistakes since there was a lot of climbing still to go. The next few pitches went well, and then it was Klem's big lead, the Lip Trip pitch. I hadn't been on this pitch yet; it looked insane and totally out there. It was really close to the pounding waterfall and directly over the giant abyss that the falls plunge into. We both knew if we dropped a tool it would disappear forever (we brought a spare in case that actually happened). Also, it would be impossible to retreat from the lip as the ropes weren't long enough to get down, and even if they were long enough, we would rappel straight into the cauldron below.

By far, the highlight of the day was belaying off a single bolt halfway across the Lip Trip pitch, watching Klem do the crux moves. While hanging off this sole bolt in the maddest situation I've ever been in, I was trying to remember the sequence so that I might have a chance of climbing it on second. I felt totally out there, only being able to communicate with Klem via radios turned to full volume, drowned by the thundering roar of the falls. Even though it was relatively safe, I was definitely shitting myself. I had to have a few words with myself to calm down. My focus sharpened when I finally was able to follow the pitch. The series of long moves between tiny pockets was like nothing I had ever experienced. I felt like I was climbing on the underside of the moon. Bullet-hard featureless rock with slots the size of my little finger nails destroyed my arms. I was glad that Klem had managed to lead it clean, so I didn't feel too bad taking a rest.

The last two pitches that we bolted on rappel were very Scottish with snow- and ice-covered rock, and having to dig out placements as we went. At a grade of Scottish VII, it was significantly easier than what we had been climbing. It was a relief to be on easier ground.

Topping out was a dream come true—all the hard work had paid off. We heard voices in the bush as the other guys had walked in to join the celebrations with a bottle of Fireball and a few beers.

There are now eight climbs that have been completed in the Helmcken Falls cave, with scope for many more. I think that Spray On Top will be climbed in better style and likely considered easier than how we found it. Regardless, I'm quite sure that anyone who climbs the route will be surprised by the magnificent surrounding, exposure and scale.

Acknowledgements

A big thank you to Will Gadd for discovering the potential of this area, and the team at Helmcken Falls Lodge for their excellent hospitality. Also, a shout out to my sponsors: Mountain Hardwear, Black Diamond, Scarpa, Sterling and Yamgo TV.

Summary

Spray On Top (WI10 M9+, 200-230m, 8 pitches), Helmcken Falls, Wells Grey Provincial Park, B.C. FA: Tim Emmett, Klemen Premrl, February 6, 2012.

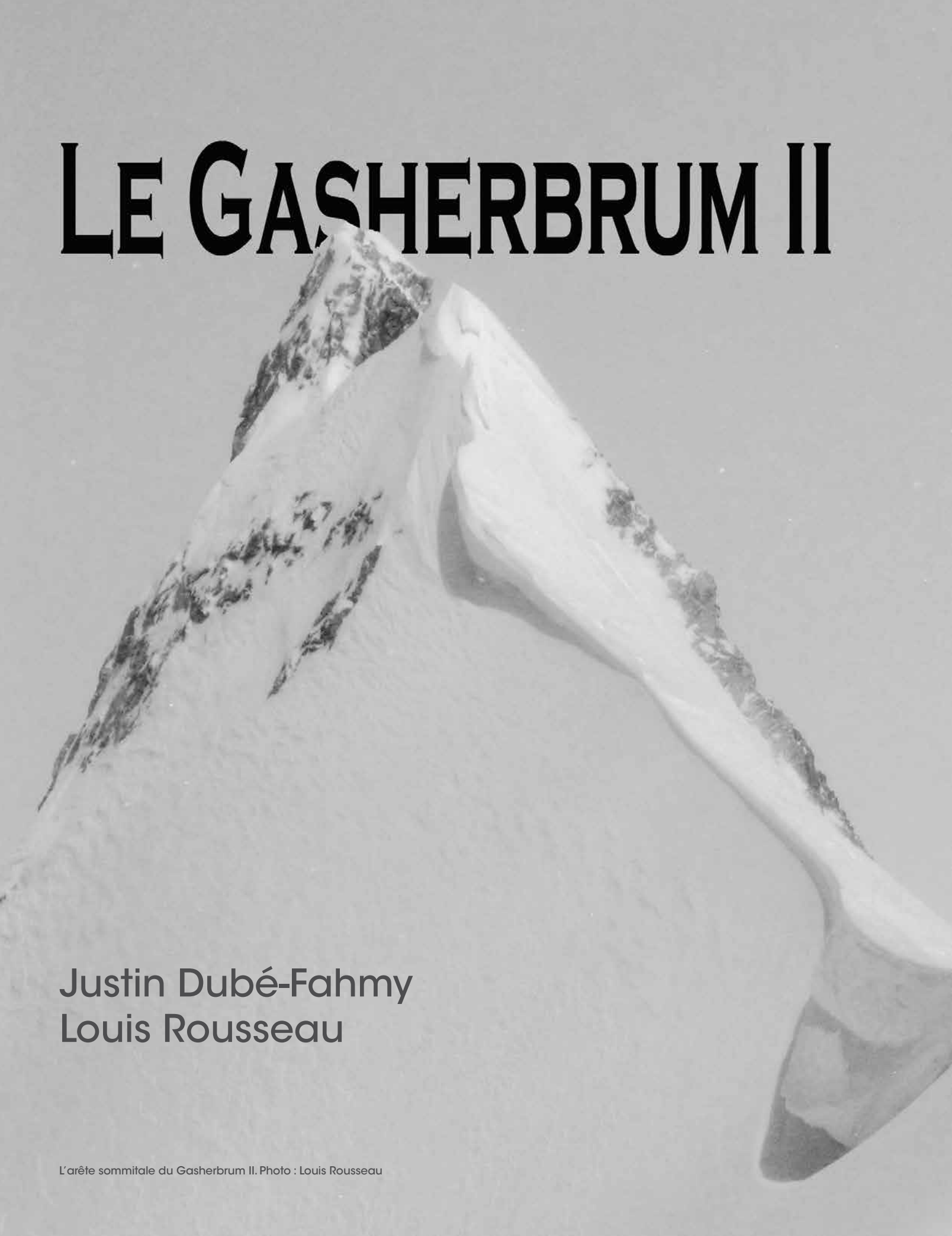
About the Authors

Tim Emmett is a professional climber from the UK but living in Squamish, B.C. part-time with his Canadian wife. Known as a pioneer for deep-water soloing and para-alpinism, Tim BASE jumped the Helmcken Falls cave in 2011, and is currently preparing for an expedition to Pakistan to climb and jump the Nameless Tower.

Klemen Premrl is not a professional climber. Hailing from Trzic, Slovenia, he began climbing at the age of 12. His *real* job as a project manager for an architect agency, along with three children, keep him busy, but he still manages to compete in the ice climbing World Cup and travel the globe to climb difficult ice and mixed routes.

Klemen Premrl on the Lip Trip pitch (pitch five) of Spray On Top. Photo: Tim Emmett

Le Gasherbrum II



Justin Dubé-Fahmy
Louis Rousseau

L'arête sommitale du Gasherbrum II. Photo : Louis Rousseau

« Justin au camp de base.
Justin au camp de base. Over. »

« … » (Silence radio.)

« Justin au camp de base.
C'est une urgence. Over. »

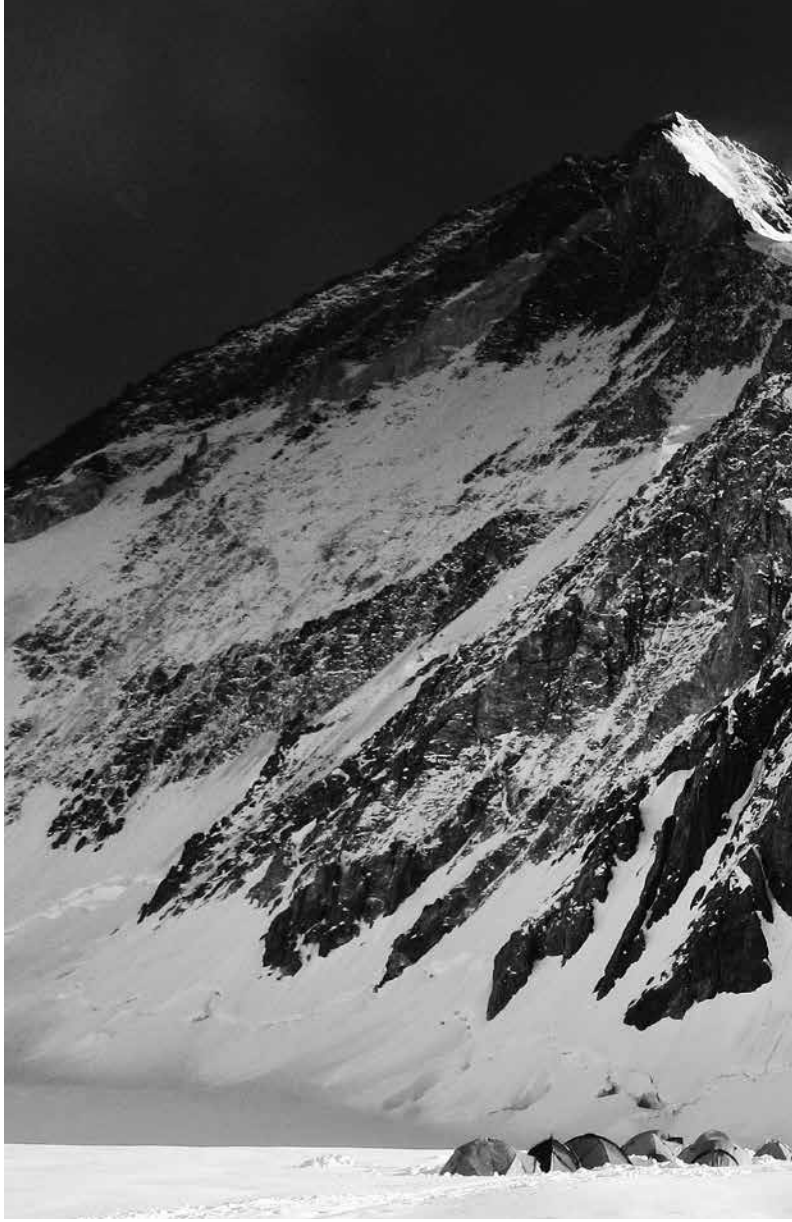
« … » (Silence radio.)

« Justin au camp de base. Je répète.
C'est une urgence. Over. »

« … » (Silence radio.)

« À tous les membres sur les
Gasherbrum I et II, répondez ;
c'est une urgence. Over. »

« … » (Silence radio.)



je sais que la mauvaise réception radio entre le camp de base et le GII est due aux montagnes Gasherbrum V et VI, qui sont situées entre ces deux points. J'espère tout de même que le silence radio vient du fait qu'il est encore tôt le matin et que les radios des autres alpinistes sont éteintes.

Un peu plus tôt, nous étions trois à nous réveiller lentement dans notre tente à 7 000 mètres d'altitude sur le GII, fatigués de notre tentative du sommet le jour précédent. Je me suis assis et j'ai regardé autour de moi. Sylvain se réveillait lentement et Andrew semblait encore endormi. Je me disais qu'il fallait commencer à bouger et partir le réchaud pour faire bouillir de l'eau. Un petit déjeuner, et on descendrait rapidement jusqu'au camp de base pour se reposer.

Une fois que le chocolat chaud était prêt, j'ai donné une première tasse à Sylvain et j'ai dit : « Réveille-toi, Andrew ! Ton chocolat chaud est prêt. »

Andrew a murmuré : « Ouais… OK. »

Tout en sirotant notre choco, Sylvain et moi avons commencé à préparer nos sacs à dos. Après quelques petites tapes sur le sac de couchage d'Andrew, nous avons insisté un peu plus pour qu'il se lève.

« D'accord… d'accord », a-t-il dit.

Je lui ai demandé comment avait été sa nuit, et il m'a répondu : « OK. ». De temps en temps, entre les quintes de toux d'Andrew durant la nuit, je pouvais l'entendre gémir. Des petits bruits de fatigue. Non, des petits bruits d'épuisement… Mais en y pensant bien, tout le monde était épuisé.

La journée précédente avait été difficile. Nous nous étions levés à 1 heure du matin au camp 3, à 7 000 mètres, pour une tentative vers le sommet. Avec quinze autres grimpeurs, Sylvain et moi avions poussé jusqu'au dernier bout avant la crête sommitale dans un blizzard. Sans que nous le sachions, Andrew était loin derrière, le long de la traversée avant le col.

Au milieu des tourbillons de neige, je regardais cinq membres du groupe poursuivre leur montée. Les autres rebroussaient chemin, tandis que Sylvain me regardait avec des questions en tête : Que faisons-nous maintenant ? Continuer, ou retourner au camp 3 ? À chaque deux pas que nous faisions dans cette neige granuleuse jusqu'à la taille, nous reculions d'un pas. Nous avons décidé qu'il nous restait encore le temps de faire une autre tentative. Sylvain semblait aussi déçu que moi, et nous sommes descendus à contrecœur en suivant le reste du groupe. Nous étions à 150 mètres du sommet, qui s'élève à 8 035 mètres.

Dans la tente, mon regard s'est dirigé vers Andrew. J'avais le sentiment qu'il souffrait d'un léger mal de l'altitude, mais je n'en étais pas certain. À chaque fois que je lui demandais comment il se sentait, il me répondait toujours qu'il allait bien. Il était seulement à court de souffle, mais en somme, il se sentait bien. En effet, tout le monde est à court de souffle à 7 000 mètres d'altitude. Malgré cela, j'ai décidé de garder un œil sur lui. Il prenait une gorgée de son chocolat chaud, cherchait dans son sac à dos, prenait une autre gorgée, rangeait du matériel, mettait ses gants, prenait une autre gorgée…

Je me disais : « Tout va bien. »

Puis je l'ai vu essayer de mettre quelque chose dans une pochette le long de la tente. Il a raté l'ouverture de peu. Puis il a essayé de nouveau et il a raté de nouveau. Ressayé. Raté. Cela s'est répété trois ou quatre fois avant qu'il ne réussisse cette simple tâche. C'est à ce moment-là qu'une alarme a sonné dans ma tête, mais je l'ai ignorée.

J'ai ouvert la porte de la tente et regardé à l'extérieur. Super ! Le soleil se levait. Pas de vent. Wow. Quel contraste avec la journée précédente ! J'ai vu que d'autres membres de l'équipe s'affairaient à mettre leurs crampons et décidé de faire de même, laissant du coup plus de place à Sylvain et à Andrew pour se préparer. Une fois les crampons bien en place, j'ai regardé autour de moi et salué mes autres coéquipiers. Soudainement, l'appel de Sylvain a interrompu ma conversation. « Justin ! Viens, s'il te plaît. Andrew ne se sent pas bien et j'ai besoin d'aide pour lui mettre son pantalon. »

Alarmé cette fois-ci, je me suis précipité dans la tente. Andrew était assis et son torse basculait dans toutes les directions, comme s'il était ivre. Devant lui, Sylvain essayait de l'habiller.

Merde.

J'ai fouillé dans mon sac pour trouver les médicaments que Louis nous avait donnés en cas d'œdème pulmonaire

Le camp 1, avec Gasherbrum I en arrière plan. Photo : Louis Rousseau

ou cérébral. Louis nous avait recommandé d'administrer un comprimé toutes les cinq ou six heures. Vu ses toux la nuit précedente, je me demandais si Andrew était en train de faire un œdème pulmonaire. Par contre, sa condition actuelle ressemblait plus à un œdème cérébral. J'ai donc décidé de lui donner un comprimé pour l'œdème cérébral. Il était encore semi-conscient et a pu avaler la pilule et l'eau que je lui ai offertes.

Voyant la situation dans laquelle Sylvain et moi nous retrouvions, je savais bien que nous n'allions pas réussir à descendre Andrew tout seuls. Je suis vite ressorti de la tente et j'ai crié qu'Andrew était dans un état critique et que tout le monde devait arrêter de charger leur sac et de défaire leur tente. Il était trop risqué d'effectuer un sauvetage à ces altitudes chargé d'un sac à dos. « Nous allons avoir besoin de l'aide de tout le monde pour descendre Andrew le plus rapidement possible. Il n'est pas vrai que nous allons laisser mourir un de nos équipiers sur cette montagne ! »

J'ai été très ferme, car j'avais déjà été témoin d'un incident similaire lors de l'expédition hivernale russo-polonaise de 2003 au K2. Il n'y avait pas de temps à perdre, et l'état d'Andrew n'allait pas s'améliorer. À ma surprise, tous les grimpeurs ont immédiatement arrêté leur besogne et se sont rassemblés pour nous aider. L'un d'eux m'a suggéré de donner à Andrew les deux types de médicaments (cérébral et pulmonaire). J'ai résisté à la tentation ; je ne savais pas si le mélange des deux médicaments pourrait engendrer des complications.

Lorsque je suis entré de nouveau à l'intérieur de la tente, j'ai constaté que Sylvain peinait à mettre la doudoune et le cuissard à Andrew et que la condition de ce dernier s'était détériorée. Il avait un regard flou et distant, sa tête vacillait et il avait l'air complètement saoul. J'y ai repensé : Louis ne m'avait jamais mentionné de donner DEUX comprimés en même temps. Que faire ? Que faire ? Louis saurait.

J'essaie la radio de nouveau : « Justin au camp de base. Justin au camp de base. C'est une urgence. S'il vous plaît répondre. Over. »

« ... » (Silence.)

Santiago, membre d'une autre équipe, s'approche de moi. Il est prêt à descendre. Il mentionne qu'il a un téléphone satellite. Super ! Nous pourrons joindre Gerfried Goeschl, notre chef d'équipe, qui est au camp de base. Nous avons seulement besoin du numéro, que malheureusement personne n'a au camp 3. Santiago propose donc de descendre rapidement jusqu'au camp

1 et de chercher de l'aide plus bas. Je sais que nous avons des bouteilles d'oxygène à ce camp, environ 1 200 mètres plus bas ; il faut des gens pour monter les bouteilles pendant que nous descendons Andrew.

Je retourne dans la tente. Sylvain est inquiet à propos de l'état dégénératif de son ami. Je regarde de nouveau les pilules. Je vais lui en donner une autre. Je dis à Andrew d'ouvrir sa bouche, mais il ne réagit pas à ma demande. Je prends donc sa tête avec mes deux mains, je glisse mes doigts entre ses dents serrées et je lui ouvre la bouche de force. Je mets le comprimé profondément sur sa langue et lui donne un peu d'eau en lui disant : « Tout va bien aller, Andrew. Tout est OK. On va s'en sortir. »

Par chance, Andrew réussit à avaler un peu, malgré l'eau qui déborde de sa bouche. Je vérifie s'il a bien pris la pilule et j'ai soudainement une idée. Si je lui raconte les histoires de sa famille qu'il a partagées quelques jours auparavant, peut-être qu'il prendra conscience de son état et sortira, ne serait-ce que légèrement, de sa torpeur ?

Je commence à lui parler de sa famille, de sa femme et de ses enfants, mais son regard reste vide et vitreux. Je suis complètement attristé. Il faut le descendre tout de suite.

Entre-temps, Sylvain et d'autres équipiers commencent à préparer un traîneau de sauvetage avec le matériel que nous avons à portée de main. Ils placent Andrew dans un sac de couchage, puis l'enroulent et l'attachent comme dans un cocon avec un matelas de sol. Une corde est fixée au cuissard d'Andrew. Nous sommes sept avec les Autrichiens Tony, Otto, Karl et Hubert, ainsi qu'Abbas, le porteur d'altitude pakistanais de Karl. Nous commençons à tirer Andrew vers le bas jusqu'à la première corde fixe.

Une fois rendu à l'ancrage, je place un appareil de rappel à la corde fixe et y passe la corde d'Andrew. Je le descends lentement dans cette longue face crevassée de la montagne. Sylvain reste proche de son ami, lui parlant tout en le guidant par les pieds avec Tony et Karl. Otto, Hubert et Abbas restent avec moi pour me seconder.

Nous initions donc ce long processus qui consiste à sécuriser, descendre et guider Andrew vers le bas de la montagne. Nous répétons coup sur coup chaque étape. De temps en temps, j'essaie la radio : « Justin au camp de base. Justin au camp de base. Over. »

« ... » (Silence.)

Nous avons commencé à 6 heures du matin et je sais que nous allons avoir une longue journée.

Louis, au camp de base (5 100 m)

Je paresse, bien au chaud, dans mon sac de couchage ce matin, encore fatigué des efforts lors de la tentative du sommet du Gasherbrum I (8 080 m) les jours précédents. Je suis l'unique membre de l'équipe n'ayant pas atteint le sommet. Mais je suis fier de ce que j'ai accompli. J'ai fixé en grande partie la section la plus technique de la montagne : le couloir japonais. Pour nous, l'unique plan de la journée est de se reposer. Nous attendons le retour des autres membres venant du GII pour célébrer ensemble. Cinq personnes ont réussi le sommet du GII le 14 juillet, une journée après ceux qui ont fait le sommet du GI.

Je suis en train d'enfiler mes bottillons en duvet lorsque j'entends des gens s'activer à l'extérieur de ma tente. J'essaie de distinguer les voix, mais je n'arrive pas à comprendre ce qu'ils se disent, puisqu'ils parlent en allemand. Par contre, il est clair qu'il y a de l'urgence dans leur ton.

Au moment où je sors de la tente, Gerfried, le chef de l'expédition, me regarde d'un air qui veut tout dire. Je comprends tout de suite l'ampleur de la situation.

Gerfried : « C'est un des Québécois. »

Louis : « Non ! Non ! Non ! » J'imagine les pires scénarios.

Gerfried : « Nous n'avons pas encore les détails de la situation, mais nous pensons qu'il est en train de faire un œdème cérébral. »

Louis : « Qui a relayé l'information ? »

Gerfried : « Santiago, de l'autre équipe. Il est rapidement descendu du camp 3 pour nous joindre par téléphone satellite. Il est présentement au camp 1. »

Une rencontre d'urgence est rapidement organisée dans la grande tente. Puisque je parle français, anglais et espagnol, nous décidons que j'irai plus haut sur la moraine, là où on peut avoir une meilleure réception radio avec l'équipe sur la montagne. Nous avons besoin d'avoir plus de détails avant de pouvoir organiser le sauvetage.

Je m'habille, mets mes bottes et regarde le ciel. Parfait, le temps sera de notre côté. Je commence rapidement mon ascension. Je connais bien ce chemin que j'ai fait 20 fois auparavant. Un sentier mène directement à la face sud du GI. Gerfried, Alex et moi avons tenté d'ouvrir une voie dans un des couloirs de la face sud l'hiver dernier (2011). Je sais exactement où je dois être pour avoir un bon contact avec mes amis sur le GII.

Après 30 minutes de marche, j'essaie de contacter Justin. Je sais qu'il a une radio avec lui.

Justin, quelque part entre les camps 3 et 2

Andrew est toujours inconscient. L'équipe travaille fort à le descendre le plus rapidement possible. Pendant qu'Andrew gît au bout de la corde dans la pente enneigée et que Tony refixe sa corde à l'ancrage à côté d'eux, j'entends de l'interférence radio.

Louis : « Louis à Justin. Louis à Justin. Over. »

Justin : « Yes !!! »

Louis : « Justin ! Peux-tu m'entendre ? »

Justin : « Oui ! Je t'entends. »

Louis : « Peux-tu me donner les détails de la condition d'Andrew et les détails de votre situation. Over. »

Calmement et lentement, je réponds aux demandes de Louis. L'état d'Andrew. Combien nous sommes à le descendre. Comment s'effectue notre progression. Où nous sommes et le moral de l'équipe. Je suis soulagé de savoir que nous ne sommes plus seuls dans cette épreuve.

Louis, sur la moraine non loin du camp de base

Calmement et sans apparence de détresse, Justin m'explique l'état d'Andrew, ses symptômes et la progression du groupe sur la montagne. Je lui dis que je le rappellerai, car je dois relayer les détails au médecin de l'expédition, Stefan Zechmann, qui

est au camp de base. Je veux faire valider les conseils que je vais relayer à Justin ; il faut que cela soit bien fait, du premier coup.

Louis : « Louis à Justin. Tu dois immédiatement lui donner 8 mg de dexamethasone, et puis 4 mg toutes les six heures. Over. »

Justin : « Oui. Bien reçu ! Je lui ai déjà donné 8 mg il y a trois heures de ça. Est-ce que je dois lui donner une autre dose ? »

Louis : « OK. Donne-lui 4 mg maintenant, puis 4 mg toutes les six heures. Gardez-le bien au chaud. Quand il pourra, il devra beaucoup boire et manger un peu si possible. »

Justin, à mi-chemin entre les camps 3 et 2

Il y a quelque chose que nous ne faisons pas correctement, dont je ne me rendrai compte que plusieurs jours plus tard. En général, la pente entre les camps 2 et 3 ne semble pas si raide. Ce sont plutôt les crevasses et le risque d'avalanche qui présentent les plus grands dangers. Pendant le sauvetage, nous nous affairons autour d'Andrew sans nécessairement nous attacher à la corde fixe. Nous tenons le traîneau ou la corde et glissons sur les talons tout en guidant Andrew, qui est toujours inconscient. Nous sommes tous concentrés sur sa descente et mettons de côté des notions de sécurité pour être plus rapides. Pourtant, la pente est quand même assez abrupte pour nous emporter, ce que nous constaterons lors de notre asension huit jours plus tard. Cela me donnera un frisson de m'imaginer ce qui aurait pu nous arriver pendant le sauvetage.

J'espère que nous allons bientôt être rejoints par une équipe ascendante avec de l'oxygène. Même si Andrew est toujours inconscient, nous l'encourageons : « Andrew, tout ira bien. Nous allons te descendre. »

Le temps file à toute allure quand on se préoccupe de la vie de quelqu'un d'autre. Toute la journée est dédiée à répéter des mouvements de base : vérifier Andrew, arranger le cocon, serrer la corde, monter son capuchon plus haut afin que la neige n'entre pas dans son col, fixer sa corde, le descendre rapidement, tirer.

Andrew se plaint qu'il y a de la neige qui entre dans son manteau ! « Bonne nouvelle ! », dis-je. C'est signe que les médicaments commencent à faire effet ! Il est semi-conscient et capable de répondre à certaines questions, mais sa condition ne lui permet pas de se mettre debout et de descendre de son propre gré. Nous n'avons pas le temps d'effectuer tous les ajustements nécessaires pour son confort ; l'important est de le descendre le plus rapidement possible. Par ses cris, nous comprenons que cette aventure n'est pas des plus agréables.

Louis, sur la moraine non loin du camp de base

J'attends pendant deux heures, regardant plus haut vers le GII, m'imaginant l'équipe en train de descendre Andrew. Des pensées noires m'envahissent continuellement. Je crains qu'une corde fixe ne cède sous le poids de l'équipe en difficulté.

À chaque conversation radio avec le camp de base, je les avise que je vais bientôt partir pour le camp 1 afin de remplacer les sauveteurs épuisés quand ils arrivent au pied de la montagne. Ils doivent préparer une petite équipe de deux sauveteurs avec médicaments, oxygène, nourriture et gaz, qui montera avec moi.

Au camp de base, Gerfried est en communication via téléphone satellite avec le camp 1. Il organise une équipe qui partira de ce camp avec une bouteille d'oxygène pour rejoindre rapidement l'équipe de sauvetage. Deux porteurs d'altitude se portent bénévoles pour la tâche : Nisar Hussain et son frère Kazim. Ils font également partie des alpinistes qui ont tenté le sommet le jour précédent. Ils ont dormi au camp 2 et viennent tout juste d'arriver au camp 1. Ils se préparent maintenant à remonter.

Justin, proche du camp 2

Je sais que la descente vers le camp 1 sera encore plus difficile en bas du camp 2, mais nous sommes tellement concentrés sur le moment présent que nous n'envisagerons cette étape qu'au moment venu. Malgré le passage des crevasses dans des pentes de 45 degrés, et quelques traversées qui nous ralentissent, nous réussissons à descendre suffisamment rapidement. Nous arrivons à un endroit très incliné juste au-dessus du camp 2. Nous devons descendre Andrew de 10 mètres pour ensuite le tirer par-dessus une arête verticale, de l'autre côté de laquelle se trouve une petite plateforme. Sylvain le descend donc, tandis que Tony et moi le guidons à bout de bras. Nous sommes tous les trois suspendus dans le vide. C'est stressant.

Peu de temps après notre arrivée sur la plateforme, Pascal, un alpiniste français qui campe plus bas, vient nous aider. J'accueille sa présence à bras ouverts. Dix minutes plus tard, toute l'équipe se retrouve au camp 2, où l'Allemand Norbert et le Hollandais Elio, membres de notre équipe, nous attendent. Ils ont quitté le camp 3 tôt ce matin, quelques minutes à peine avant la détérioration de la santé d'Andrew. Lorsque Santiago les a rattrapés, ils ont décidé d'attendre au camp 2 pour nous aider.

Andrew répond maintenant à nos demandes, mais sa condition est toujours critique. Sylvain l'aide à sortir de son sac de couchage détrempé et le place dans une tente déjà montée par une autre expédition. Andrew boit autant de liquide chaud que possible. Il est l'heure pour lui de prendre un nouveau comprimé de dexamethasone. Pendant ce temps, Pascal et moi discutons de la stratégie à suivre pour descendre Andrew le long de la partie la plus abrupte de la montagne. Tout le monde est prêt à continuer le sauvetage, mais nous n'avons besoin que de quelques participants pour cette étape. Tony, Otto, Karl, Hubert et Abbas nous quittent et je les remercie.

Nous espérons qu'Andrew parviendra à grimper les 20 mètres qui séparent le camp 2 de l'arête verticale. De là, Pascal va descendre sur la corde avec Andrew, tandis que Sylvain et moi allons nous relayer pour les descendre. Elio et Norbert vont nous seconder. Tout est en place. Je regarde au loin et j'aperçois des nuages couvrant le glacier beaucoup plus bas. Le temps file. On y va !

Louis, sur la moraine non loin du camp de base

Le temps se détériore. Des nuages se sont rapidement installés très bas sur les montagnes environnantes et il commence à

neiger. De gros flocons forment un voile entre le GII et moi. Je ne vois plus rien, et c'est à ce moment que je perds contact avec Justin. C'est maintenant à mon tour d'effectuer des appels radio et de n'obtenir que de l'interférence.

Vingt minutes passent. De la neige, de l'interférence et des inquiétudes.

Il est temps de monter au camp 1.

« Louis à Justin. Louis à Justin. Over… »

« … » Silence.

Louis : « Justin, je ne sais pas si tu m'entends mais je monte. Je monte tout de suite. »

Je cours jusqu'au camp de base et c'est là que je découvre, à bout de souffle, que personne n'est prêt à monter au camp 1 avec moi ! Je n'arrive pas à le croire. Peut-être qu'ils pensent que tout est sous contrôle puisque le sauvetage avance vers le camp 2. Je crie au groupe de bouger. Lorsque je constate leur surprise et leur inaction, je décide d'y aller seul avec mon matériel, ainsi qu'une bouteille d'oxygène, un masque et une bouteille de Coca-Cola.

Pendant que je prépare mes affaires, Alex Txikon sort de sa tente, réveillé par mes cris. Il fait son sac et rallie Ali Naqi, un cuisinier pakistanais qui a travaillé pour nous lors de notre expédition au K2 en 2007. Je leur dis que je vais les attendre plus haut sur le glacier, avant les crevasses.

Plus tard le même jour, je suis assis et j'attends mes deux coéquipiers au début des grandes crevasses. Je peux voir, quelque 200 mètres plus bas, les petites tentes du camp de base. Plus haut, les deux sommets des Gasherbrum sont cachés par les nuages. Quelque part dans ce désert de roche et de glace se trouve un ami mourant. Je déteste attendre ; cela me donne le temps de m'inquiéter.

Lorsqu'Alex et Ali Naqi arrivent, il nous reste moins de quatre heures de marche avant d'arriver au camp 1. Je peux visualiser le chemin : une section très crevassée, une longue section droite, une petite vallée exposée aux avalanches du Gasherbrum VI, et puis un sentier interminable, zigzagant entre d'énormes crevasses larges comme des maisons. Rien de difficile, mais le temps n'aide pas. Étrangement, la température sur le glacier est autour de 20° Celsius. Nous nous enfonçons jusqu'aux genoux dans une neige mouillée. Cela nous ralentit, et même vêtus d'un T-shirt, nous suffoquons sous le poids de nos sacs à dos. Chaque pas est épuisant.

En m'approchant du camp 1, à la sortie de la section très crevassée, je remarque de petits points noirs entre le camp 2 et le pied de la montagne. Ils sont dans la partie la plus aérienne de l'arête. « C'est eux ! » Mais ce n'est pas le temps de s'exciter. Je sais dans quel état se trouvent Andrew et les autres. J'essaie la radio de nouveau. « Louis à Justin. Louis à Justin. Over. »

« ... » (Silence.)

Justin, dans la section raide en-dessous du camp 2

J'entends Louis à la radio. Norbert est juste au-dessus de moi ; je descends Andrew, tandis que Pascal et Sylvain le guident le long de l'arête. Mes mains tiennent la corde et je ne peux pas répondre.

Louis comprend que je peux quand même l'entendre. Il en profite pour m'informer de leur position tout en me donnant de bons mots d'encouragement. « Justin, nous sommes bientôt arrivés au camp 1 pour vous relayer. Tout va bien. Justin, tu fais de grandes et incroyables choses là-haut en ce moment. Vous faites cela comme des chefs ! Tenez bon ! Ne lâchez pas ! »

Ces derniers mots me vont droit au cœur. Nous sommes sur l'arête, épuisés, et nous commençons à sentir le froid. Pendant toute la journée, nous avons effectué ces mouvements presque machinalement, sans penser que nous faisions un grand sauvetage ou que nous nous mettions dans des positions dangereuses. Nous n'avons pensé qu'à sauver notre ami. Et au moment précis où j'entends Louis me dire : « Tu fais de grandes et incroyables choses là-haut », je réalise ce que nous sommes en train de vivre et d'accomplir. Pour moi, c'est un moment très personnel et émotionnel.

Notre progression ralentit considérablement. Nous sommes tous limités à cette mince corde verticale. Il est difficile de se dépasser les uns les autres, et nous sommes restreints dans nos mouvements pour guider Andrew. Nous commençons à être de plus en plus espacés. Le soleil baisse à l'horizon et nous sommes tous très fatigués. Chaque étape prend plus de temps.

Les derniers 10 mètres jusqu'au sommet du Gasherbrum II. Photo : Louis Rousseau

Louis, sur le glacier entre le camp de base et le camp 1
Le soleil rejoint l'horizon au moment où nous arrivons au camp 1. Enfin.

« Louis à Justin. Je suis au camp 1. Je peux vous voir d'ici. Alex et moi allons vous rencontrer au pied de la montagne. »

Santiago, celui qui nous a contacté au camp de base tôt ce matin, est toujours au camp 1. Il nous attend avec de l'eau. Ce sont de petits détails comme ça qui aident énormément. Il aurait pu redescendre lui aussi, mais a choisi de nous appuyer.

Justin, à mi-chemin entre les camps 2 et 1
Nous sommes maintenant dans la section la plus raide et dans les pires conditions. Cette face de la montagne a été exposée au soleil toute la journée, et nous essayons de bien placer nos crampons dans cette fine couche de neige granuleuse, cherchant du mordant dans la glace en-dessous. Je peux entendre l'eau ruisseler sous la glace et cela m'inquiète. Pascal et Elio sont beaucoup plus bas. Sylvain est plus haut, en train de descendre Andrew, tandis que Norbert et moi sommes ancrés à un relais quelque part au milieu. Je suis prêt à prendre la corde d'Andrew quand le bout arrivera dans l'appareil de Sylvain. Nous sommes au milieu des nuages et il commence à faire nuit.

La corde d'Andrew arrête soudainement son glissement vers le bas. Norbert et moi passons un bon moment à attendre que la corde reprenne son mouvement. Je demande à Pascal si tout va bien, mais j'entends mal sa réponse. Je crie plus haut à Sylvain, lui demandant s'il a toujours de la corde.

Sylvain : « Non ! Je suis au bout de la corde ! »

Merde. J'essaie de passer la corde d'Andrew dans mon descendeur, mais ce n'est pas possible. La ligne est trop tendue. Je crie à Pascal de me donner du mou. À ce moment, Elio, avec ses deux crampons bien ancrés dans la glace molle, porte tout le poids d'Andrew pour nous donner un peu de corde. Pascal me hurle quelque chose que je n'arrive pas à comprendre, mais je sens qu'il y a urgence. À peine un mètre au-dessus de moi, Norbert fait soudainement un nœud de prusik entre la ligne d'Andrew et l'ancrage. De mon côté, tendu et fatigué, je passe rapidement la corde d'Andrew dans mon descendeur, que je fixe à l'ancrage, puis je crie à Pascal et Elio que tout est OK. La corde redevient tendue et se met à glisser dans mon appareil. Quoi ??? Impossible ! Je tiens la corde !

Mon sang se glace.

Je crie vite à Norbert de tenir la corde. J'ai passé la corde d'Andrew à l'envers dans mon descendeur… Puis je crie à

Pascal : « Stop ! Stop ! Andrew n'est pas assuré ! »

Dans l'énervement, j'ai inversé mon appareil. Il n'y a pas assez de friction dans le descendeur pour arrêter la corde. À mon grand soulagement, le nœud de prusik de Norbert se tend et retient la ligne. Nous sommes tous tellement épuisés.

Louis, au camp 1 (5 800 m)

Alex et moi commençons à coordonner les gens au camp 1. L'empressement à cette altitude nous essouffle rapidement. Nous acceptons l'aide de tous et partageons les tâches entre le plus de gens possible. Je demande à Santiago s'il peut préparer une tente médicale pour rendre Andrew le plus confortable possible, avec des matelas et sacs de couchage supplémentaires. Ali Naqi, notre ami pakistanais, commence à faire fondre de la neige pour l'eau et la nourriture. Nous devons préparer le camp pour l'arrivée d'Andrew.

Justin, dans la section la plus raide de la descente

Le bout de la corde arrive dans mon appareil. Sylvain et Norbert descendent. Je me retrouve tout seul en haut, suspendu dans le vide. Pascal et Elio travaille fort pour descendre Andrew le long de cette dernière section.

Je rejoins l'équipe au « balcon », un petit plateau 150 mètres au-dessus du glacier. Pascal y est campé, ce qui nous permet de redonner du liquide chaud à Andrew. Nisar et Kazim sont là pour nous accueillir, et ils ont de l'oxygène !

J'appelle Louis tout de suite pour lui dire où nous sommes et pour connaître les détails concernant l'oxygène qu'il faut donner à Andrew. Nous plaçons le masque sur son visage et constatons que le régulateur est défectueux ! Nous sommes tous déçus.

Nous n'avons pas de temps à perdre. En regardant vers le glacier, je vois Kilian Volken et Willy Imstepf, deux guides suisses qui font partie de notre équipe, grimper vers nous ! Nous sommes réellement épuisés, et je suis content de voir de nouveaux alpinistes qui vont pouvoir diriger Andrew dans les quatre dernières longueurs. Nous n'avons plus droit à l'erreur.

Louis, au camp 1 (5 800 m)

Quand j'entends que le régulateur est défectueux, je m'inquiète pour Andrew. Est-ce que sa condition va empirer ? Alex et moi quittons le camp 1 pour la rimaye. Nous voulons être là, prêts pour accueillir Andrew. J'aperçois Kilian et Willy, qui ont également attendu au camp 1 et suivi la trace des deux Pakistanais pour assister l'équipe de sauveteurs plus haut. Ce sont maintenant eux qui descendent Andrew.

La nuit tombe rapidement. En arrivant à la rimaye, je remarque une forme noire descendre lentement et maladroitement. C'est Andrew au bout de la corde, glissant les derniers mètres sur ses fesses. J'arrive juste au bon moment pour l'attraper et éviter qu'il continue sa course vers la rimaye. Je le place tout de suite contre moi pour le protéger de la neige et de la glace délogées par le groupe qui descend au-dessus de nous.

Justin, trois longueurs de corde au-dessus de la rimaye

Il fait complètement noir. Je peux voir les lampes frontales des gens qui sont plus bas. Louis et Alex attendent au pied de la montagne pour attraper Andrew. Quel soulagement. C'est à ce moment que je me sens vidé de toute énergie. Je suis content de voir Andrew sur le glacier. Je termine mes derniers rappels dans la noirceur et le silence avant de rejoindre le groupe juste en-dessous de la rimaye.

Louis

Pendant qu'Alex, Kilian, Willy et moi mettons Andrew dans un traîneau fabriqué avec du matériel trouvé au camp 1, le reste du groupe s'attroupe autour de nous. Je peux enfin donner de l'oxygène à Andrew. Le dernier arrivé est Justin. Il poursuit sa marche vers le camp 1 pour s'assurer que tout soit prêt à l'arrivée d'Andrew.

Nous nous plaçons tous en position autour du traîneau, comme des chiens husky, prêts à bondir au craquement du fouet. Alex nous rallie : « OK! C'est maintenant le temps d'être fort ! Nous allons tirer sur cent mètres ! Vous êtes prêts ? »

Nous sommes tous épuisés, mais prêts comme jamais.

Alex, avec un cri puissant : « PRÊT ! … VENGA VENGA VENGA !!! »

Nous tirons comme des déchaînés. La neige est profonde et nous nous arrêtons toutes les minutes ! C'est trop difficile à cette altitude. Même à sept, c'est à la limite du possible. Le traîneau est plus large que le sentier et creuse la neige. Nous avons à peine commencé et notre rythme cardiaque est à son maximum ! Entre chaque effort, nous prenons une pause de 20 secondes. À bout de souffle, j'ajuste le masque à oxygène, la bouteille et le traîneau. Et à chaque pause, Alex se penche au-dessus d'Andrew pour l'encourager : « Andrew, tu dois maintenant être FORT ! Ça doit venir de l'intérieur… de là. », tout en pointant vers le cœur d'Andrew.

Alex : « OK ! UN AUTRE 100 MÈTRES ! PRÊTS !… VENGA VENGA VENGA !!! »

En arrivant au camp 1, nous plaçons Andrew tout de suite dans la tente qui a été préparée et réchauffée par Santiago. Je prends la saturation en oxygène d'Andrew, et le pourcentage est terriblement bas. Il commence à manger lentement de la soupe préparée par Ali Naqi, pendant qu'on essaie de lui donner autant d'oxygène que possible entre les gorgées. Une fois que l'état d'Andrew est stabilisé, chacun s'installe dans une tente pour rapidement s'endormir. Tout est silencieux, excepté le petit son venant du masque à oxygène d'Andrew : « Kshhh… kshhh… kshhh… ». Le plus beau son que je puisse entendre en ce moment est sa respiration lente et profonde.

Pendant toute la nuit, je garde un œil attentif sur Andrew. Je me réveille toutes les heures pour vérifier le positionnement du masque et noter la saturation en oxygène. Je lui donne 4 mg de dexamethasone toutes les six heures. Le plus difficile est de le voir dans un état semi-comateux. Par moments, il semble perdu, sans savoir où il est.

Le lendemain, nous nous encordons en groupe de trois pour descendre le glacier. Andrew est maintenant capable de marcher seul mais toujours avec l'apport d'oxygène. Bien plus tard dans la journée, après avoir passé la section de crevasses,

Louis Rousseau (à gauche) et Alex Txikon sur le sommet du Gasherbrum II. Photo : Louis Rousseau

nous sommes accueillis par Gerfried, Hans et Tamayo. Ils ont apporté des biscuits et des bouteilles de Coca-Cola, un luxe à cette altitude. Nous faisons une pause, réalisant ce que nous avons accompli, souriant et nous félicitant tous et chacun. Le soleil sort et nous réchauffe pendant le reste du chemin, qui est plutôt paisible. Nous sommes enfin accueillis avec des cris de joie au camp de base.

La condition d'Andrew s'améliore pendant les 24 heures suivantes mais, malgré tout, se détériore de nouveau le surlendemain. Il semble exténué. L'altitude du camp de base, à 5 100 mètres, n'est pas un bon environnement pour sa récupération. Il prend la bonne décision de descendre jusqu'à Skardu, accompagné par son ami Sylvain.

LOUIS, JUSTIN ET PLUSIEURS MEMBRES de l'équipe se sont reposés au camp de base pour ensuite retourner sur le Gasherbrum II et atteindre le sommet le 22 juillet 2011.

Louis et Justin aimeraient remercier, au nom d'Andrew, tous ceux qui ont participé au sauvetage.

Il est faux de croire que sur ces hautes cimes, la règle du chacun pour soi a priorité sur la solidarité et l'entraide. Certains choisissent de ne rien faire parce qu'ils sont trop fatigués ou qu'ils ont peur de compromettre leur expédition. Mais plusieurs sont prêts à participer, à mettre de côté leurs objectifs personnels. Quand beaucoup de personnes peuvent contribuer un peu, cela forme un tout. Nous étions chanceux d'avoir autant de participants dans ce sauvetage. Nous ne voulons pas nous imaginer le résultat si nous n'avions été que deux ou trois personnes dans cette histoire.…

À propos des auteurs

Justin habite à Montréal, Québec, où il travaille comme concepteur industriel. Outre l'alpinisme en haute montagne, ses passe-temps incluent la voile et son fils. Le Gasherbrum II fut son premier sommet de 8 000 mètres, mais il aimerait retourner au Pakistan pour y tenter un autre.

Louis vit à Montréal, où il travaille dans le domaine de la prévention des maladies infectieuses pour un département régional de la santé publique. Il a gravi le Broad Peak en 2007 et a ouvert une nouvelle voie en style alpin sur le Nanga Parbat en 2009. Il a aussi tenté le K2 trois fois et le Gasherbrum deux fois, dont une fois en hiver.


sachi

The Cultural Ranges

Lofty Science

David Mazzucchi

MOUNTAINS ARE IN MY BLOOD. I'm attracted to their peaceful beauty and humbling ferocity. They test my skills, patience, tenacity, tact and wisdom. Their rugged and unspoiled nature enchants and draws me in. I long to return after periods of absence, as exploring these truly special places has become part of my identity and my soul.

Scientists are drawn to the mountains for many of the same reasons as alpinists; mountains are extreme environments that are often pristine and free from human development. To an alpinist these traits supply fuel for the adventure and offer an escape from the modern world; to a scientist these places provide baseline perspectives for studying natural systems.

I was lucky. Living in the Rockies my father introduced me to the mountains. I thank him for teaching me to appreciate nature and for fostering my curiosity about it. My youth was spent skiing fast and climbing hard, but my life's focus was drastically changed after answering a seemingly bizarre query by a professor near the end of a geology class: "If anyone likes to cross-country ski and is interested in doing volunteer field work this weekend, please come see me after class."

That weekend I helped my professor and his graduate students sample sediment from Crowfoot Lake along the Icefields Parkway. It was hard work, and partway through the first day, while stopping to tighten my laced boots, I recall asking myself, *why on earth would anybody put this much sweat into collecting lake mud*?

I finished the weekend exhausted but grinning with a similar sense of accomplishment to having just climbed a peak. When the same graduate students asked if I would help them sample a lake in the Mission Mountains of Montana a few weeks later, I replied with one word: "Absolutely!"

As life would have it, I now somehow have a doctorate in Earth System Science, specializing in mountain landscapes and lake mud. One might ask why the study of mountains is important to science.

To begin with, the mere existence of mountains attests to the incredible forces involved when continents collide and volcanoes erupt. Erosion produces spectacular mountain scenery and also perpetuates the rock cycle, which leads to the uplift of rocks from ever-greater depths below the surface. This process explains why rocks that contain marine shells are often found on mountaintops. Rocks exhumed from depths of up to 100 kilometres or more are found in mountain belts around the world. Thus, mountains provide geologists with a fascinating glimpse into processes that span vast depths and timescales, imparting insights on the evolution of the continents, atmosphere, climate and even life itself.

Next, tall mountain ranges interrupt the flow of the atmosphere, forcing air upwards to form clouds and ultimately precipitation. Precipitation either saturates the often-fractured mountain slopes or covers them with snow, creating storage much like a water tower. The summer's flow of many prairie rivers and associated agriculture depend greatly on how much winter precipitation accumulates at higher elevations. Accumulated snow that persists for more than a few years contributes to glaciers that form either barriers or highways to alpinists navigating the mountains. Prehistoric people who died on these glacial highways have taught us much about their lost ways of life through their frozen remains, clothing and tools.

Vertical changes in precipitation and air temperature have a profound influence on climate and vegetation. The term "alpine" itself is defined not by the elevation or ruggedness of the landscape but by the mere inability of trees to grow there. Steep ecological gradients result in rapid ecosystem changes over short distances and create tremendous biodiversity within a small area. These isolated island-like ecosystems provide scientists, like me, with a great impetus to study high-elevation lake mud to try to understand how these ecosystems develop and change through time.

Lakes are bodies of water that often fill in with sediment to become swamps, bogs, fens or even grassy meadows. Layers of sediment accumulated over thousands of years preserve evidence of changes in the chemistry and biology of the lake itself. These layers also contain clues to the history of the surrounding landscape such as changes in vegetation, erosion, deposition and other disturbances including forest fires, storms and insects. High-elevation lake sediments, soils and landscape features together tell a composite story of how the natural landscape evolved, without interference from the plough or human settlement.

Analysing layers of sediment from a mountain lake is like exploring a mysterious new place. As a climber, skier and mountain lover from an early age, the scientific unknown is yet another draw into the alpine. Studying mountains ultimately leads to more scientific questions, much like sitting on a summit and discovering a route on another peak from one's newfound vantage point. To research, to look into the past, to speculate about the future, to explore and to stand in awe of these special places—this is why mountains are in my blood.

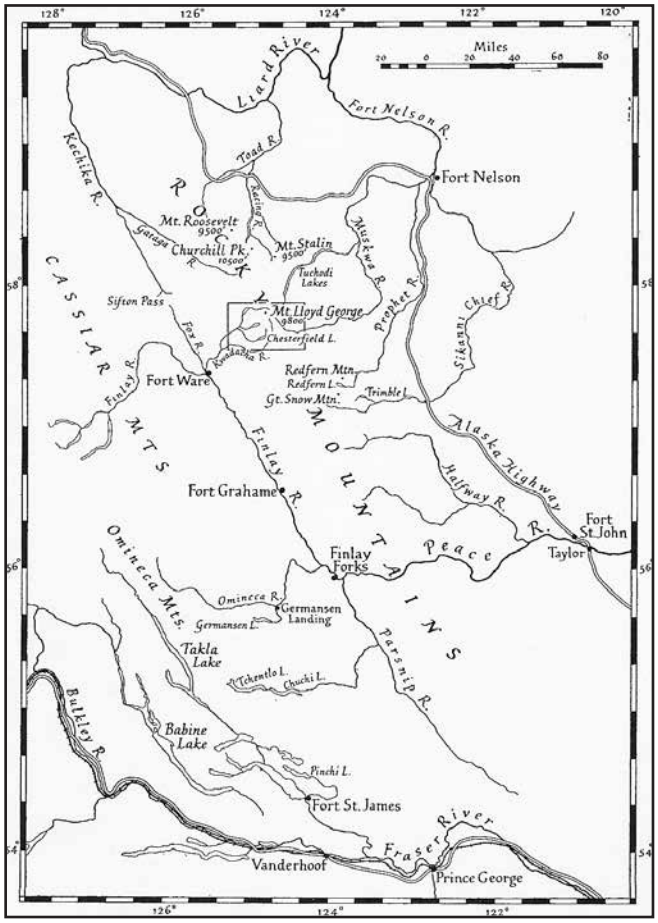
The 1947 Lloyd George Expedition

Maurice Legris

IT WAS WHILE RECENTLY rummaging through a pile of books that I came across an old autograph book. The kind that was popular in the '40s and '50s with school kids not only in the hope of getting the autographs of famous people but also for immortalizing the signatures (and hilarious send-offs) of one's school friends at end-of-year parties. But this little blue book was of more than just casual interest, because in it were inscribed the signatures of the members of a mountaineering expedition who set out to explore a region of northeast British Columbia that was almost unknown at the time and is not much better known today—the Lloyd George range.

This 1947 expedition was sponsored by the great English climber Frank Smythe, who had participated in three Everest expeditions in the 1930s. It included also Nona, his wife, who was to act as both cook and camp manager; Noel Odell, a geologist at Cambridge University and one of the giants of Himalayan climbing in the 20th century; Major Rex Gibson, of Edmonton, who would later serve two terms as president of the ACC; Henry S. Hall Jr., a well-known member of the American Alpine Club who had done pioneer work in the Rockies and the Coast Mountains; and two young climbers, David Wessel of Bozeman, Montana, and John H. Ross, president of the Harvard Mountaineering Club.

Map from page 162 of F.S. Smythe's article, "An Expedition to the Lloyd George Mountains, North-East British Columbia," in *The Geographical Journal* (vol. 111, No. 4/6, April-June, 1948).



It was Rex Gibson who organized the expedition, from Edmonton, and, as a 16-year-old helper, I had the nerve to ask him (this was the 1940s, remember), after he had introduced me to Frank Smythe, if he could request that the other climbers sign my little book. They all graciously agreed. Thus perhaps a few words about this expedition to a little-known area of the Rockies might interest some enterprising contemporary climbers.

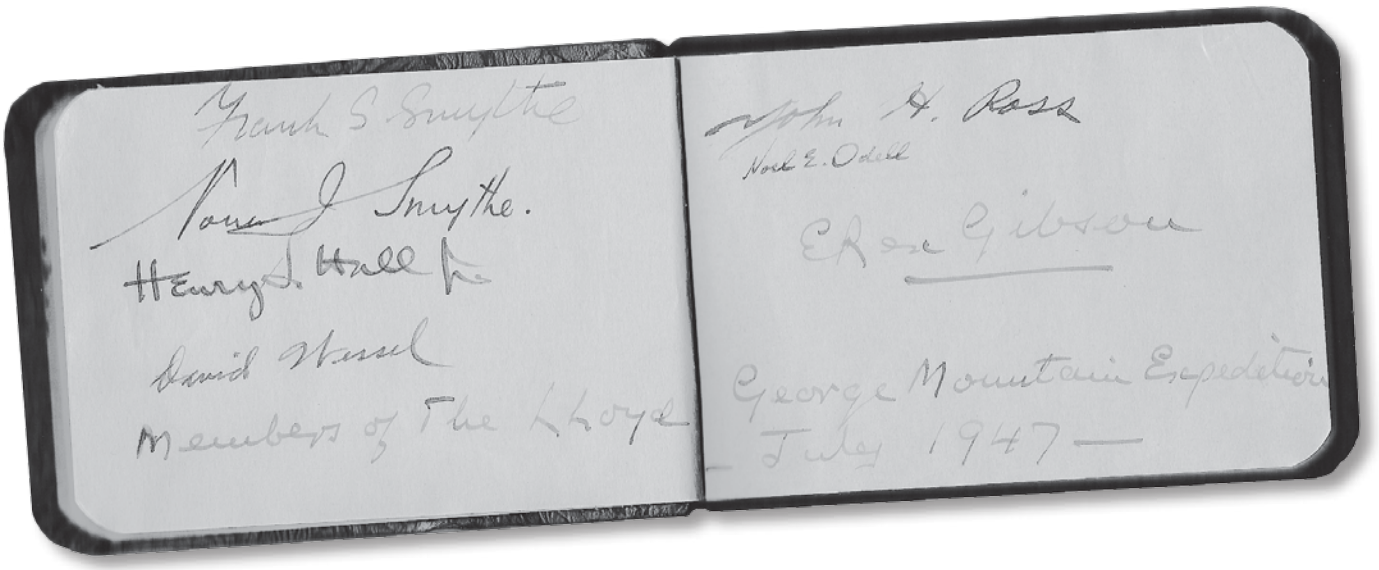
The Lloyd George Mountains lie approximately 150 kilometres west of the Alaska Highway and 160 kilometres southwest of Fort Nelson. A recent pamphlet from the Kwadacha Wilderness Park, of which the Lloyd George range is a part, warns that the journey into the area, whether for backpackers or horse riders, is long and difficult with many treacherous river crossings. The journey is for experienced wilderness backpackers only, who should allow 12 to 14 days for the trip.

But the Smythe party took the unusual step (for those days) of flying in, using an all-metal Junkers floatplane. They landed on the principal body of water in the area, Haworth Lake, on July 2, 1947. As Smythe later wrote in his *Climbs in the Canadian Rockies* (1950), the objects of the expedition were to climb the major peaks of the Lloyd George range, make a geological survey, draw "as accurate a map as possible," and "make a collection of the local flora and silva."

As Odell, the geologist, described the range in an article for the British Geographical Journal (1948), "The dominating physiographic feature, from which rise the culminating peaks at c.3000m, all of which were ascended, is the George Lloyd Icefield, and its main neve (altitude 2500 m) covers some 130 sq. km; but with dependent glaciers its total extent must be about 260 sq.km. These outlet glaciers descend often by steep ice-falls to deep valleys lying at 1200 m, and they show evidence of slow recession from former terminal moraines not more than 1 km distant." [editor's note: grammatical and name errors are replicated as per the original publication.]

Despite constant clouds of voracious mosquitoes, an aggressive grizzly bear, severe lightning storms and the rainiest summer in the Canadian Rockies since 1907, the climbing objectives of the expedition were all achieved: the Lloyd George Icefield was crossed and explored, and the principal peaks were climbed—Mount Glendower (2,928 metres), Mount Lloyd George (2,938 metres), Mount Criccieth (2,434 metres) and several other peaks. The climbing was at times fairly arduous, involving long days and the cutting by ice axe of thousands of steps.

In addition, a detailed map was drawn (included in Smythe's *Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*), more than 200 specimens of



flora were collected and Odell was able to complete his geological survey.

The expedition members were also most impressed by the extraordinary beauty of the area. Smythe, an internationally renowned photographer and author of more than 25 books about climbing in the Himalayas, the Alps and the Canadian Rockies, makes this rather surprising statement: "Of all the lakes I have seen none has more colour than Haworth Lake and none in a finer setting of mountain and forest. Six miles long and over a mile broad, it stretches between the mountains, and at the far end is joined by another and much smaller lake, which empties the waters of both over a high waterfall into the Warneford Valley." Smythe was well aware of the beauty of Lake Louise.

Perhaps I should donate my little autograph book to the club.

Striated

Theressa Bagnall

Shoulder laid bare
Under the stars
Lines traced on a windblown face
A parenthesis in time

The glacier's embrace
A fickle lover
Advance, retreat
Meltwater lost in the till

Memories mark
What once was
Now withdrawn
Remnant of a geological era

A Time to Reflect

David Williams

FOR THE FIRST TIME in almost 30 years, I have not taken off into the mountains for at least one extended two- to six-week period. I was able to wobble around on my skis for most of last year's ski season. However, knee surgery in March 2011 followed by left ankle-fusion surgery in November 2011 has left me confined to sea level since May 2011. As I lie in bed for two weeks recuperating from the fusion surgery, I cannot help myself from reading and thinking and dreaming of mountain scenery, the smell of the cold fall air lying in the shadow of a fallen snag. My primary goal of the past decades has been to wander the innumerable rambling ridges and vast rolling icefields of the Coast Mountains of B.C. and the massive expanses of the St. Elias. Part of me mentally pieces together the next great traverse. Another tries to grapple with the potential reality that carrying monstrous packs will no longer be possible and that the aesthetic quality of a self-supported trip has been lost to me forever.

Each day during my two weeks of bed rest, the kids run up the stairs to greet me after another great and exciting day at school. They bound onto the bed with lots to tell, and I sit back and listen to their tales of the day in a manner I might normally not have had time for, quizzing them on the details of their day. I feel I live vicariously through them.

Weeks pass. Crutching everywhere is tough. Muscle accumulates on my upper torso and arms while vanishing on my left calf. People spend their lives on crutches and anyone on crutches now has my utmost respect. You can make yourself a cup of tea, but due to your inability to use your hands for anything other than supporting yourself, once made you are not going anywhere. You stand and drink next to the kettle rather than relaxing in some cozy corner with your book.

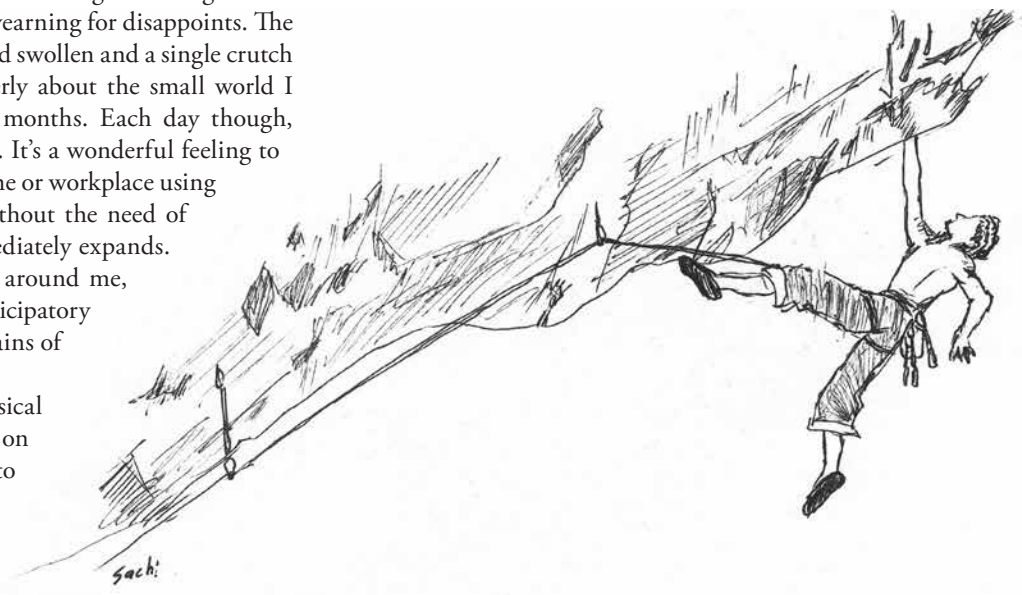
After six weeks I am allowed to bear weight wearing a walker boot. The moment I have been yearning for disappoints. The ankle is immediately tired, sore and swollen and a single crutch is needed to make my way gingerly about the small world I have inhabited for the past two months. Each day though, there is a noticeable improvement. It's a wonderful feeling to wander freely outside near my home or workplace using only the walker boot for aid. Without the need of a crutch, the physical world immediately expands. I can again look up at the space around me, even taking a momentary and anticipatory glance at the North Shore Mountains of Vancouver.

Swimming becomes my physical outlet. I have never been keen on having to pay money in order to exercise, and swimming indoors in a chemical pool and being bumped by others is one of my least favourite activities. Swimming initially for 20 minutes then 30, and finally up to an hour, I have come to appreciate the inherent beauty of a ray of sunlight striking the surface of the water or dancing on the bottom of the pool. The play of light on bubbles and shapes of shadowy movement, these I might never have noticed without being physically restricted as I am.

Another month passes and it's off with the walker boot and back to a single crutch. Focusing on every step and placement of the crutch, my physical world once again shrinks around me. But as with the previous month, the world slowly expands and with the help of intensive physiotherapy, my world grows daily—first on a stationary bike then to cycling outside. Slow and reserved to start, but soon I am going as hard as I can. To be outdoors and out of breath with all my body, after two and a half months, is delightful. Now I am at the point of taking tentative and scary steps out on my skis. I certainly do not look or feel pretty on my first outing to the Diamond Head Chalet, but the four-hour trip goes as well as I can expect with no major problems.

I yearn to see big mountain scenery, to touch wilderness, to push my body to my limits, to breathe painfully cold air, to get a fix to an addiction. But I have come to appreciate the pleasant pace of playing with and listening to my kids, or sitting on the bed reading or watching a DVD with my spouse when nothing is pending, no time constraint, with nothing more expected from me than to recover.

I still have a way to go, and I am perhaps unlikely to move through the mountains with the confidence and the self-assurance of the younger man that I once was. But my goal, my dream to piece together another great traverse, appears to be a reasonable possibility.



Time Machines and Spaceships

Gordon McArthur

THIS PAST WINTER I TIME TRAVELLED around the globe to compete on the world stage for ice climbing with two and a half other Canadians, Ian Holmes, Jen Olson (who joined us in France) and Kendra Stritch (the "half"—she's American but lives in Canada). We spent nearly two months travelling throughout Asia and Europe while battling some of the top ice climbers on this very earth.

Now, to start off with, time travel is no easy task. And once in the middle of it, you lose all sense of orientation and inevitably become discombobulated. On any given day your sense of time is a train wreck. From one time zone to the next, leaving no room for acclimatizing, we were all constantly fighting to either stay awake or go to sleep. One minute we had a grasp on time and the next we were into the future, and then the past. Time travel, as we found out, was not for the faint of heart. It only brings a sense of comfort whilst on the time machines themselves (planes) when handed fresh pillows and blankets.

Travelling around the world (competing aside) has to be one of the most intense, fun, stressful, exciting, humbling, terrifying and most definitely amazing experiences one can endure. Everything from the different cultures, food, languages, hospitality from country to country, chaos of driving in a foreign place and, as mentioned, dealing with different time zones. Pack all this into a whirlwind of 40-plus days and you have nothing less than simply incredible. And then add to that the opportunity of a lifetime to compete with the elite of the elite, testing your mental and physical ability to its absolute limit. Two axes, you and your drive to go up. Intense—flat out intense.

Competing at the World Cup of ice climbing is like nothing I've ever experienced. The style of climbing movement required is essentially non-existent in North America, and the terrain on which such movement is performed was as foreign as one could comprehend. Imagine being blindfolded then taking the blindfold off and suddenly there's a spaceship in front of you, at which point you're told to climb the spaceship. Yes, exactly, crazy in all its form.

The structures that we were to compete on were futuristic, for lack of a better word. Staring high into the sky, attempting to comprehend what we were to scale, I could only think of the famous quote from *The Wizard of Oz*: "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." These venues were out of this world, and with each structure, with each competition, despite the craziness of the climbing style, there was still this subtle invitation within us to summon the will and climb as hard as we ever had before.

HAVING SPENT MONTHS and months training, preparing for the world's hardest ice competitions—the time, blood, sweat and tears—it was evident that such commitment was needed when facing such adversaries. But more so, despite loyal dedication, when the dust had settled, it was evident that it was going to take more. More training, more focus, more commitment to digging deeper. Put simply, trying harder.

The Europeans and the Russians, along with a couple of sturdy South Koreans, proved worthy, performing at a level that seemed unthinkable. It was clear their training was on the right track, thus the results they produced throughout the entire tour. Although disheartening at first, as we all paid close attention, it was understood what it would take to rise to the occasion. Move faster, pull harder and kick higher. Train more efficiently to the style that is required. Focus on speed with bigger movement. Check, check and check.

The end result of travelling around the globe and competing for Canada was an exhilarating and humbling experience, to say the least. The competitive state, physically and mentally, that was required was certainly at a level that can only be acquired by further commitment to the specific nature. Yes, indeed, the top competitors were strong with lots of experience and possible advantages to how they train and the facilities they have access to, but we have the advantage of being Canadian, and Canadians are known for taking the impossible and making it the inevitable. Canadians have desire. It is the essence of our soul, the secret of our existence. Absolutely nothing of human greatness is ever accomplished without it. Desire fuels our ability to turn dreams into reality. We're all going back in 2013, but this time we're going back with something more.

Ice World Cup spaceship in South Korea. Photo: Gordon McArthur

The Moose River Route 1911-2011

Maureen Hoole

WE WERE SETTLING for the night in our one-kilogram two-man tent when something big pounded by. "I didn't shake the tent that time," was my comment to Roger. Peering out into the evening light, I could see a large dark form over the edge of the fly, about 10 metres to the extreme right. Moose. A pair of bull moose. One of them had nicked the unfamiliar tent-line.

Back inside the tent, just a little excited, I quietly exclaimed to Roger: "And whose idea was this to set up next to a moose lick? If we are still alive in the morning, Albert is sure going to get an earful!"

Roger and I had wanted to hike the Moose River Route since a visit to Berg Lake in 2005. At a 2009 Kinney-Phillips reunion in Mount Robson Provincial Park, the topic of one of the guest speakers, geologist Chas Yonge, was Arctomys Cave. Arctomys Cave was discovered by my grandfather, Reverend George Kinney, in 1911. Chas later suggested it might be an idea to try and organize a group of cavers to visit Arctomys Cave in 2011. Would we be interested? The Arctomys Cave lies above the Moose River Route. We were very interested!

The approximate date for a rendezvous was set for the September Labour Day weekend and each group determined their own itinerary. It remained an informal, loose plan.

AS THE GRAND TRUNK Pacific Railway advanced west through the prairies towards the continental divide, A.O. Wheeler of the Alpine Club of Canada organized an expedition in 1911 to the Jasper National Park and Maligne Lake areas in Alberta, and the bordering Mount Robson region in British Columbia, inviting the Smithsonian Institute to participate. The combined expedition would carry out extensive topographic and biological surveys, among other contracts and projects.

The party left Edmonton July 1, 1911, on a Grand Trunk Pacific train, and then, travelling from Lac Brule with pack horses, they arrived at Moose City on the confluence of the Moose and Fraser Rivers via railway construction wagon roads. The participants were Wheeler, Reverend Kinney as topographical assistant, Byron Harmon as the ACC official photographer, Conrad Kain as the ACC guide, Donald "Curly" Phillips as the ACC outfitter, Fred Stephens, Jas Shand-Harvey (second packer) and Casey Jones (cook), in addition to the Smithsonian group (leader Ned Hollister, Assistant Curator in the Division of Mammals, U.S. National Museum (UNSM); Joseph Harvey Riley, Aid in the Division of Birds, USNM; and big-game specimen hunters Harry H. Blagden and Charles D. Walcott Jr.).

Caching some of their supplies, the outfit moved out July 13, 1911, up the Moose River to complete a circuit of Mount Robson.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2011. Albert hadn't done the Berg Lake Trail before, so this fine day he and Roger hiked up while I flew in by helicopter with our full packs. By mid-afternoon I had shifted packs and set camp at the Robson Pass campsite. The men arrived about 6:30 p.m., hungry and satisfyingly tired. We spent two glorious days at the pass doing day hikes.

August 10, 1911. Wheeler and Kinney measured and marked the toe of the Robson Glacier. After completing their survey of Robson Pass they headed back with Harmon and Conrad to their main camp further south, just above the impressive Emperor Falls.

With Blagden and Walcott, they would eventually make their way down to Kinney Lake on the Grand Fork River.

The weather changed when we left Robson Pass Monday morning down the North Boundary Trail (NBT). The heavy morning fog turned into a steady drizzle that lasted until late afternoon.

Roger would lead most of the trip, setting a good pace. Our destination was Calumet Horse Camp (12 kilometres) at the top end of the Calumet valley flats, below Moose Pass.

We left the NBT at 2 p.m. and stepping into the Moose River Route we soon found a welcomed bright 2008 log bridge over the infamous Yates' Torrent, the Smoky tributary dashing down from Coleman Glacier. The damp but colourful trail over the wooded ridge led us down into the Calumet Creek valley, formerly known to the natives as Pipestone. Wheeler changed the name to Calumet to prevent confusion with the Pipestone above Laggan [Lake Louise].

Here we encountered our first bogs and creek-crossings. Inexperienced in judging the currents, we kept hiking to the right. We searched up another milky tributary for a safe fjord or bridge and were turned back by heavy brush and a more turbulent stream.

Rather than dither and just eyeball the tributary, it occurred to one of us that we should actually measure the cold, wet, swift, intimidating depths with an all-purpose hiking pole. The pole measurement indicated the water was below my knees. The decision to plunge in with hiking boots on was an easy one. We were already wet.

This tributary is separated from Calumet Creek by a forested finger of land jutting west into the valley. We crossed about halfway up where there is also a discreet, natural-looking clearing through the forest leading to the north side.

Unknown to us, we had crossed the most challenging of the many fjords we would encounter during the next week. All would be below the knee and most would be only ankle- or calf-deep.

The clouds started to lift a little as we rested and snacked and Albert emptied his boots. We then picked up the horse trail out on the flats of the main Calumet system.

Suddenly we were at the camp: a small but lovely site where the forest starts to crowd the creek. It was 6:30 p.m. We had been on the trail for almost 8.5 hours. We were not in a hurry. I was 61, Roger 65 and Albert 78 years young.

Tuesday's weather improved and we day-tripped up to Moose Pass for the afternoon.

This was legendary territory—the old "Moose Pass Branch of the Smoky". So plentiful was the flora and fauna in this area that in 1911 the naturalists Hollister and Riley decided to remain and continue collecting from their camp up near Moose Pass for 11 days. Curly shifted the surveyors and hunters on to the camp above the falls at the bottom end of the upper Grand Fork Valley.

According to Wheeler and Hollister, the main camp (also known as "Camp on Calumet Creek" and "Smudge Fire Camp") was just below the timberline on the Alberta side of the pass, at about 6,175 feet (barometer reading), about a mile west of the glacier from which the Moose Pass Branch of the Smoky, or Calumet Creek, flows.

They were all in the very best of spirits at this camp. Except perhaps for Kinney, who was forced to stay lower on the mountains while nursing a sore knee.

As Roger, Albert and I emerged from the forest in the vicinity of that memorable camp, the late-season wildflowers gradually became more numerous and lush as we approached the summit of the pass. There was an abundance of aster and valerian, senecio, lupine seed-heads, tow-heads, orange agoseris, and false hellebore in this last flush of flower. Many were knee-height in the meadows surrounding the pass. In their late-season splendor, they covered the narrow trail, making it all but invisible.

The peaks of the headwaters of Calumet Creek are fascinating in their variety of form and colour, especially with intermittent sun and cloud. Calumet Peak and those to the east and south were a wonderful mix of pastels: grey, pink and bone—a striking backdrop to the bright green alp-lands.

We noticed a lone backpacker quickly moving up the pass from the Calumet valley. Having missed our camp, she was very surprised to find these three grey-hairs leisurely exploring the pass with light packs and she wondered where we had come from. After a brief, courteous chat she strode down the flowered meadows of the Moose River valley.

The next morning at Calumet Horse Camp there was fresh snow on the peaks. With our full packs, we headed up to Moose Pass again. It was another great day.

Although the plan was to avoid staying at Slide Lake (eight kilometres) because of all the "prime bear habitat" warnings (and all the heaved ground and churned flowers in the upper meadows), at our speed it worked out best to camp there, rather than try to squeeze in another 5.5 kilometres of unknown territory before nightfall. It was also a lovely site, with pointed, slanted, subalpine slabs marching up the northeast side of the narrow valley. No bear-pole though—just a worn nylon rope that almost touched the ground. We rigged it as high as we

Albert Hestler at Moose Pass. Photo: Maureen Hoole

could, taking into account the claw/slash marks on one of the other trees in the "kitchen" area.

It was in the forest below Slide Lake that we were discovered by a happy, energetic, young golden retriever named Shiloh (meaning peaceful and tranquil). His companions soon appeared with packhorses and a chainsaw. Brian Wallace was a former Jasper Park warden. He and Eileen had been in to Mount Upright and were now heading up to meet friends at Adolphus Lake, cutting out windfalls that impeded their horses. A pack-train on the Moose—neat!

From Slide Lake, we had two damp days of trekking down the Moose Valley, what with the weather and the multitude of fjords. Steppe Creek Horse Camp (5.5 kilometres) was another good camp. It was a rough haul through to Trio Camp (12.3 kilometres) as at times we crossed higher, over last winter's avalanche path, and through willow-laden slopes. However, the damp made for an exceptional mushroom display in the woods—it really was a mycologist's paradise.

Long before reaching Trio, brule' appeared on the slopes across the valley, and in patches on our side of the river. We hadn't seen much, if any, of the taller fireweed in bloom since we arrived at Robson Pass—too short, too wet a season—but the red colour of its autumn foliage swathed the mountain slopes and provided wonderful contrast with the black timbers of the brule'. We would find it in bloom farther down the valley.

Trio camp was unimpressive except for the nice bear-pole. We arrived here super tired and wet and it was cold.

The Moose River is so beautiful from Steppe Creek down. As it meanders through the shingle flats, between erect, dark spruce forest and willow and sedge-covered banks, even on a dull day the colour of the river is lovely: a variable jade-green or blue.

September 3 was clear and sunny. We passed near the spot where Conrad was detailed to build a raft. "Little Laussadet" (The Colonel) rose up on the other side of the Moose. Wheeler, with the transit on his back, was forced off the tilting logs into the water, out of his depth, in the swift stream near the opposite bank. It was the third incident in four weeks (all occurring on Sundays) that he narrowly escaped losing his life, and the thought rather unsettled him. Later though, after the wonders of Robson Pass and Emperor Falls, he would note that the grand sights of the mountains were worth the risk.

Mid-afternoon we reached an invitingly bright, level clearing in the brule', close to the river (seven kilometres). Albert decided this was where he was going to pitch his tent. Even when we realized it was a moose lick, he would not budge with threats of the approaching "rut season". Albert is not one to complain, and our previous day had been toilsome. We about-faced, and took advantage of the rays and breeze to wash and dry things out.

September 4 was another fabulous day. While Roger and I started up one of the many moose trails that radiated from the lick, Albert wisely hung around camp. The blueberries were awesome. Somewhere above us was the Arctomys Cave, which Grampa discovered July 21, 1911.

Albert Hestler after fording Steppe Creek. Photo: Maureen Hoole

Where were the cavers? I was almost certain they had not arrived.

We were up about 549 metres (1,800 feet) above the river. Guided by a topo map, we had just turned right, crossing a small limestone ridge. Roger spotted an animal in the trees beyond a little meadow. Wolf, I thought. But no, it was a young husky—very leery of us. Another came out into the meadow to greet us. The cavers were here! I was elated. Just how lucky can you be considering a loosely timed rendezvous, a beautiful afternoon, five days out on an unfamiliar route, on a special mission?

Their rope led down into a 2.5-metre long, heather-rimmed narrow crevasse. Not having the equipment, we only went in about 12 metres. Leaving a note for the cavers tucked under a water-bottle at the entrance, Roger and I continued up the Arctomys valley to check out the lake. An hour and a half later we arrived back at the cave, about 10 minutes after they had surfaced. Their thoroughly soaked gear was spread out in the heat of the sun.

Chantelle and Kevin Abma, Nate Debock and Kyle VanCamp, sticking to their turn-around time, had reached a depth just beyond Webster's Pit, about one-third the length of the cave (-523, +13). All are members of the Edmonton branch of the Alberta Speleological Society, ages 22 to 27.

It had been suggested at one point to place a commemorative plaque during this visit, and the group was sorry it had not worked out. It was a really generous idea, but in thinking about it, as I wrote to Chantelle later, I liked the simplicity of

the single plaque that is mounted on the side of the low limestone ridge just across the narrow flower-filled meadow from the entrance. The plaque is in memory of Rick Blak, who lost his life within the Arctomys Cave on October 19, 1991. I think my grandfather would have agreed.

Horse rider Brian Wallace, whom we had met south of Slide Lake, was part of that large rescue team.

Visiting the cave was the highlight of our memorable trek. We are so appreciative of the tremendous effort made by Nate, Kyle, Chantelle and Kevin and their dogs Aven and Summit—a long drive and hike for just a few hours below.

We were visited again that evening by a pair of bull moose. And again early the next morning. Albert had missed them every single time. There was no way Roger and I could have alerted him without spooking or stirring up the moose. Fortunately for us, they were very polite. We passed lots of different animal tracks on the trail, but the moose were the only large mammals we saw on the trip.

Realizing we would be spending one more day than planned on the trail, I boldly bummed some extra grub from the cavers. They gladly donated assorted treats to augment our bits and pieces. They would be out to the highway much quicker than we three grey-hairs.

The next morning we crossed the ridge over to Resplendent Creek. It was the worst mess of windfalls we had experienced and we lost the trail. But we managed to hit the creek between the horse camp and a flagged crossing just downstream from it.

Part way down the south side of Resplendent, Shiloh and his companions came up from behind. After a short chat they filed down the trail—the horses were antsy and knew they were heading home.

After 11 days out, we too were tired of mud, of pony postholes, of hills, and of brule', no matter how beautiful it was.

Curly, after dropping off the Robson Pass party at the main camp above the Emperor Falls, took the horses back down the Moose, and then down the Fraser Valley, meeting Wheeler and company at Kinney Lake on Saturday, August 19, 1911. With a few more side trips and survey stations along the way, they reached Hollister and Riley's new camp a mile east of Moose City on August 25. The "Circuit" was complete.

They had been on the go since July 1 and had yet to survey Maligne Lake. This they would finish Monday, September 18. Wheeler had earlier received word that his wife, Clara, was very ill. He formally gave Kinney charge of the party moving on to Laggan, and then he and the hunters joined Hollister and Riley at Swift's before catching the train to Edmonton.

Kinney, Curly, Harmon and Conrad would carry out the remaining obligations of the ACC in providing, for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, an assessment of the possibility of a pony trail between their transcontinental rail-line in the north (Fitzhugh/Jasper) and the mainline of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company to the south (Laggan/Lake Louise).

Our last night was spent beside the Moose River again, near the lovely Eddy-By-The-Spit (13 kilometres). The good weather would stay with us to the end (six kilometres). We could hear the trains long before we crossed the last low ridge.

It wasn't always a picnic, but it had been wonderful.

Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition

Fred Roots

MEMBERS OF THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA may be interested in, and some older members will certainly recall, the Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition (YACE) of 1967. This was the largest co-ordinated climbing and general mountain experience venture undertaken by the club, and was the high point, literally, of the national celebrations of the Centennial of the Confederation of Canada. The activity, popularly known as YACE at the time, was carried out by the ACC with the active collaboration of the Territorial Government of Yukon, the American Alpine Club (AAC), the Arctic Institute of North America (AINA), and the federal Department of Mines and Technical Surveys.

In August 2011 there was an opportunity to re-visit the sites of YACE activities, to observe changes that have taken place in the past 44 years, to look for evidence of all that happened at that time, and to consider the on-going activities in the Icefield Ranges, that wonderful and most spectacular mountain region in Canada.

The occasion was a meeting held at the Kluane Lake Research Station (KLRS), a facility of the AINA, held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the station in 1961, and to review more than a half century of scientific investigation of the area and support that KLRS has provided (and continues to provide) to scientists, surveyors and mountaineers. KLRS was a key centre for the planning and operation of YACE, and YACE is an important part of its history.

Background to YACE

YACE has a complex background, which is well summarized in the book *Expedition Yukon* mentioned below. Very briefly, in early 1963 the undersigned informally proposed that the Centennial of Canadian Confederation be marked by a series of first ascents in the highest mountain range of Canada, and that because 1967 was also the centennial of the purchase of Alaska by the United States, that the Canadian and American alpine clubs collaborate to mark the anniversaries. I discussed these ideas with my friend and fellow scientist Walter Wood, who at the time had just finished a term as president of the AAC. He was immediately enthusiastic. (At the time, I happened to be a life member of both the ACC and AAC, and we were both on the Board of Governors of the AINA.) In September 1963 I wrote to Roger Neave, president of the ACC, proposing that an expeditionary-type camp be organized in the Icefield Ranges to mark the anniversary, and that the AAC be invited to participate. At the same time, Walter Wood wrote to the AAC proposing that the American club cooperate with the ACC to mark its anniversary. Both clubs appointed small committees to examine the ideas, and AINA, which through the KLRS and several research projects in the area would be involved, was kept in the picture.

Quite independently, in 1965, Craig Hughes, David Judd and Monty Alford in the Yukon Territorial Government also came up with a proposal that Yukon Territory celebrate the Centennial by climbing a series of peaks in the Yukon named after the provinces of Canada, and by the ascent of a mountain on the Yukon/Alaska border to mark the coincident anniversary. The two groups met and came together at a conference called by the Canadian Centennial Commission in June 1965. There followed, as some of the older members of the club may recall, many problems and uncertainties and delays in promised funding, but eventually a coherent and organized plan evolved, and in January 1966 a proposal was made to the Centennial Commission for:

> a Sporting and Mountain Exploration Activity among the Highest Mountains of Canada, the Icefield Ranges of the Saint Elias Mountains, in celebration of the Centennial of Canada in 1967, presented by the Yukon Territorial Government and the Alpine Club of Canada, with the active cooperation of the governments of each province and of the Northwest Territories, other amateur Canadian mountaineering organizations, the Arctic Institute of North America, the Canadian Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, and the American Alpine Club.

The proposal was, finally, successful! Although there were many problems and nail-biting setbacks still to come, thanks to the organizing ability of David Fisher of the ACC and the dedication of Ken De La Barre of AINA and an army of volunteers, YACE became a reality.

The mid-section of the Steele Glacier from the YACE camp. The now rubble-strewn surface is 100 metres lower than it was in 1966.
Photo: Fred Roots

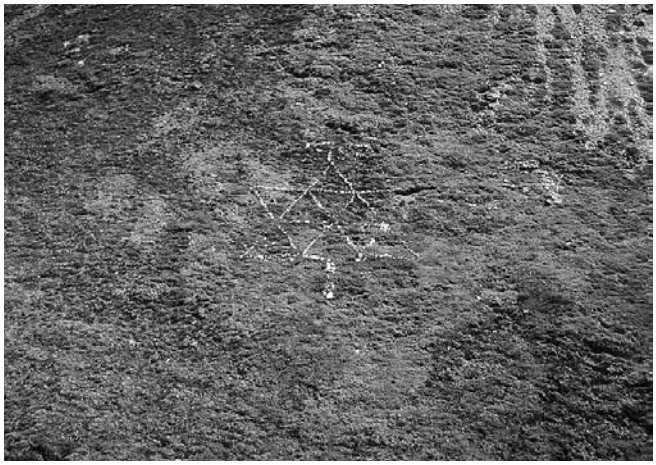
YACE activities and results

YACE comprised three main components:

1) A joint Canadian/American team, with members selected by the alpine clubs of each country, was to climb the highest unclimbed summit on the Canada/U.S. boundary; which is now officially named Good Neighbour Peak.
2) A mountain range with 13 major unclimbed summits was named the Centennial Range, with the peaks from east to west named formally after each of the provinces and territories in geographical sequence, except for the highest, in the middle, located between Mt. Quebec and Mt. Ontario, which was named Centennial Peak; and 13 teams, each representing a province or territory, were set in place to attempt to climb them.
3) Two, two-week General Mountaineering Camps of the ACC, each accommodating up to 100 recreational mountaineers and mountain-nature lovers, were held on the grassy alp on the southeast side of Steele Glacier.

When it was all over, a good time had been had by all. Good Neighbour Peak and nine of the summits of the Centennial Range had received first ascents, with another "probable". First ascents were also made on 13 mountains in the Steele Glacier area. The *big* mountains, Mount Steele (5,059 metres), Mount Wood (4,829 metres) and Mount Walsh (4,493 metres), had been re-climbed several times. A new 1:125,000 contour map of the Centennial Range and the central Icefield Ranges, showing the routes of early exploration, had been drawn and published by the federal Department of Mines and Technical Surveys (MTS M.C.R.7). Reports on some technical aspects of the event and the area appeared in the scientific literature. A 45-page authoritative *History of Mountaineering in the Saint Elias Mountains*, written by Walter Wood, had been produced by the ACC. Finally, the venture was rounded off with the expedition book titled *Expedition Yukon* (edited by Marnie Fisher, 200 pages, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons (Canada) Ltd., 1968, ISBN 0-176-305040-3).

One of the most dramatic aspects of the YACE experience was that between the 1966 reconnaissance of the area for the proposed general camp in the Steele Glacier valley and the establishment of the first camp in mid-July 1967, the Steele Glacier, which for the previous century had been a smooth winding river of ice with parallel stripes of gravel medial moraine, began to surge. Within a few months the main body of the glacier, 36 kilometres long and about two and a half kilometres wide opposite the camp, increased its speed from about five metres per year to several metres per day, 50 to 100 times its normal velocity. The upstream part of the main glacier lowered rapidly, perhaps as much as 100 metres in a few months; but the mid-section, opposite the YACE camp, which had been more or less level with the lower part of the vegetated alp, thickened and rose above its lateral moraine as the shattered blocks tumbled rapidly downstream. (See the photo in *Expedition Yukon*, pages 146-47.) Participants at the camps had a ringside seat beside one of the most spectacular of all



The YACE crest outlined in stones on the slopes of Mount Gordon above the meadow camp. Photo: Fred Roots

landscape phenomena, a surging big glacier—but it meant that what was expected to be a pleasant hike across the glacier to reach and climb the mountains on the other side was out of the question. Helicopter shuttle was necessary.

Within about a year after YACE, as reported by those who had seen it from the air, the surge had spent itself and stopped. Mother Nature had celebrated the Centennial!

Observations 44 years later

ON OUR VISIT TO THE AREA IN 2011, we were anxious to see any changes in the Centennial Range over the past 44 years, and in particular, what had happened in the Steele Glacier valley. I had last carefully studied the Centennial Range in the spring of 1966, when the mountains were selected to bear the names of the provinces and territories, and the range itself was given its name. At that time the ridges and glaciers were deep in winter snow. In summer of 2011, there was certainly a lot more bare rock at higher elevations and the tongues of smaller glaciers had shrunk away from some of their moraines. Comparing what can be seen this year with many of the summer pictures in *Expedition Yukon*, it seemed to me that many of the climbs would be more difficult today than they were then, with much softer snow on steep slopes and bare ridges and ribs of very friable rock. Perhaps a "50th anniversary of YACE" campaign is in order to polish off the still unclimbed summits—Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Newfoundland—and to make sure that the highest point of Centennial Peak has really been reached—and with perhaps a try at the northern companion of Newfoundland, nicknamed Labrador.

In the Steele Glacier valley, the picture is different today. In August, we approached it by helicopter from the upper end. Mount Steele itself maintains its pure-white pyramid, although the upper part of the mountain was obscured in cloud during our visit, and we knew that there had been a massive shedding of cliff glaciers and snow slopes from its northwest face a few years ago. However, Steele Glacier itself was in a sorry state. The main body appeared to be nearly stagnant from about the foot of the northeast ridge of Mount Steele, and its upper

surface had dropped, much more than had been seen during YACE. On the valley walls one could see signs of where the glacier had been recently; it was hard to believe that until a few decades ago the whole head of the valley had been so full of ice. The surface of this upper part of the glacier is now long ridges of dirt-covered ice, stagnant, not much distorted, with subparallel medial moraines of quite different contrasting colours reflecting the different lithologies of the mountainsides further upstream.

The picture changes where the Hodgson Glacier, the main tributary from the north, enters the valley. Hodgson Glacier itself has not noticeably surged. When the main body of the Steele Glacier surged and dropped to a new low level, the Hodgson at first accelerated in its lower portion, running over and across part of the Steele, and building a new lateral/medial moraine on top of the older ice. Today, 40 years later, the Hodgson Glacier appears to be the most active of the upper glaciers; it enters the glacier-filled Steele valley at grade, and is building a new high moraine ridge that apparently blocks half of the old stagnant Steele Glacier.

However, within a few kilometres of its junction with the Steele, the ice that came down the Hodgson is engulfed in the chaos of the main Steele surge, and loses its pattern and identity. Pools of water on the mostly gravel-covered surface of the tottering blocks of ice are very few or absent, suggesting that after 40 years the fractures still go right through the glacier, and that the glacier has not yet sealed itself together or to its bed.

The site of the YACE General Mountaineering Camp itself has little changed. The large sloping green alpine meadow, four kilometres long and up to a kilometre wide and ranging from 1,700 to 1,900 metres altitude, carries a remarkably diverse flora of dwarf willows, dwarf birches, grasses, sedges and herbs. (See Appendix C of *Expedition Yukon* for a list and some notes of the 171 different species of plants collected in the vicinity of the camp.) This big alp is where Walter Wood's packhorses grazed during his epic exploration of the Icefield Ranges in 1935. The horses had travelled up the smooth highway of ice, which was the Steele Glacier at that time. On the recent visit, I had the impression, purely subjective, that the sedges, willows, dwarf birches and saxifrages were replacing the grasses. Changes in the plant successions in this area are being carefully studied by researchers from KLRS.

Topographically, the YACE site has little changed. The glacier-facing side of the alp is on a lateral moraine, formed from an earlier advance, and until 1966 was nearly at the same level as the surface of the glacier so that places could be found where horses could pass readily from the ice to the meadow. During the 1966-67 surge, the ice level first rose higher than the camp meadow, and then dropped more than 100 metres, leaving a growing cliff of unconsolidated material at the edge of the alp. The cliff is still there, very unstable and dangerous, and even during our brief visit a couple of boulders went crashing down to the rubble below.

At the south (upstream) end of the meadow, near the junction with an old lateral moraine of Foster Glacier, there is a huge isolated boulder of buff-pink granite, which served as a landmark for returning climbers and helicopter pilots, and was a favourite exercise ground for rock gymnastics during the camp. It is unchanged and the meadow behind it is still invitingly green.

More than any other individual, Walter Wood was a key person in the scientific investigations in the Icefield Ranges, and a pioneer in its mountaineering exploration. He is the founder of the KLRS. He contributed immensely to YACE as planner, historian and participant. After he died in 1993, a group of his friends and admirers mounted a brass plaque to his memory on the big boulder at the upper end of the Steele Glacier meadow. The plaque reads:

WALTER ABBOTT
WOOD
Explorer, Scientist,
Alpinist and Friend
(1907 - 1993)
This plaque commemorates the
life and contributions of
an outstanding man.

Although this plaque was erected on the site of the YACE camp 27 years after YACE, there will be many who took part in YACE and in the alpine clubs of both countries who remember Walter with gratitude and will be pleased to know that his plaque, and his boulder, are still there.

There is no visible evidence of the YACE camp itself in the meadow, except that perhaps some lines of sedges and vetches in the lower part may be remains of drainage ditches dug around tents during the wet days of the first camp (*Expedition Yukon*, page 112). But on the upper slopes of the alp, about two kilometres east of where the tents were pitched, and just where the thick vegetation peters out into strings of scree, there is, still today, a large design of the YACE crest. The 11 triangles are outlined in light-coloured rock, quite undisturbed. The display is nearly 400 metres across, and is clearly visible from the air and from across the valley. Built by enthusiastic scree-hoppers and stone-carriers during wet weather when climbing was impossible, this crest has remained conspicuous for 44 years, a testimony that YACE was an outstanding event indeed.

The memorial plaque on the big boulder at the south end of the YACE meadow camp. Photo: Fred Roots

"Mount Odell, Canadian Rockies" watercolour painting by Roy Millar (2011).

The West Coast

The Flight Deck

Damien Kelly

AFTER JIM RETURNED from climbing Mount Bute in August 2010, he was inspired by the idea of returning and bringing his friends Wayne and Tom to climb and BASE jump off the top. He asked if I wanted to come and join the trip. Seemed kind of crazy, but I knew I would have great time. I committed.

FAST-FORWARD TO A YEAR later and I find myself on the summit of Mount Bute. There are eight of us rappelling down the fixed lines that will take us to the base of the clean, sheer west face. It is still dark as I wait for my turn to go down. I think about the day ahead and what it will hold. We want to free climb the face while getting filmed for the National Geographic special, "The Man Who Can Fly". Some of this will be familiar to me—the climbing—and some will not—the filming. I'll have to wait and see what it's like.

Facing page: Wayne Crill on pitch nine of The Flight Deck. Photo: Jim Martinello

After the quiet descent down the lines, I am soon at the base of the wall 600 metres lower. The camera crew of Brian Smith, Mikey Scheafer, Pablo Durana and Matt Maddaloni dangle above us like spiders. They will jumar the lines and pull them up as they go while we will climb independently of them as four: Dean, Jim, Wayne and I. Looks like a long way to go to get back to the top, but we have a strong team and the mood is exciting.

Jim takes off for the first block. It is good from the get-go. He motors up a few pitches in a corner that ends in a wide crack. There he trends left across a run-out 5.10 slab. The rock is so perfect. We have only a clean rack—no bolts or pins. It feels so liberating.

Dean then takes the next block, which includes the crux. I am focused on belaying as Dean leaves a ledge 20 metres above me and moves onto a steep slab. With no protection he climbs deliberately up the rock. If he falls, I am going to have to feed out lots of rope so that he would pass the ledge and not break his legs. Dean lets out a shout as he gains safety. With this pitch in the bag, I feel we now have a good chance to make an all-free ascent.

I follow then take the lead. It is quite cool to have my friends hang around

Dean Potter on the crux (pitch 14) of The Flight Deck. Photo: Jim Martinello

filming me as I climb my pitches. I'm amazed at how quick and efficient they are, never slowing us down or interfering with the flow of the climb. I do, however, ask Mikey to clean a few holds for me as I am coming up a steep thin crack. He does a fine job and I make it through the section free. I giggle as they take the piss out of me. Ah, life as a reality television character! Heckling aside, I get to lead what I consider my best crack ever during my block—a 60-metre 5.9 hand crack that splits the white granite.

Wayne brings us to the final headwall. We are about four pitches from the top and the wall is now becoming vertical with bits tipped beyond vertical. Jim starts up, but halfway up the pitch he pulls his shoulder out of its socket. He manages to build an anchor, allowing Dean and I to move up and take over to the top. During this time the camera crew vanishes to the top and a helicopter takes over in their stead with a Cineflex camera mounted on the nose. The sun fades, the sky turns golden, and the film crew gets their money shots.

Dean leads a wet off-camber corner that we know will be the last crux to a free ascent. He sends and I follow free. We race the setting sun to the top and finish the route just after dark. Once we are all up, we head over to our summit basecamp for a great dinner of Ramen and beer.

The next day Dean BASE jumps off a ramp we dub the "Flight Deck" for a mind-blowing ride down the valley. His spirit and poise will always move me. Wayne opts not to jump, which shows equal character.

I WOULD LIKE TO POINT out a few facts. We all took a helicopter to the top and used the summit as our basecamp. We fixed roped down the entire cliff and worked out the route before we free climbed it as a group. We placed no bolts fixing the route or climbing the route. We placed a few pitons for the fixed lines. The fixed lines and anchors were all removed the day after the climb. We installed a 12-metre aluminium platform 60 metres below the summit for the BASE jump. All the bolts used to install the platform, along with the platform itself, were removed at the end of the trip. Dean jumped from the platform three times. We pulled off our mission in a four-day weather window that made for an intense experience.

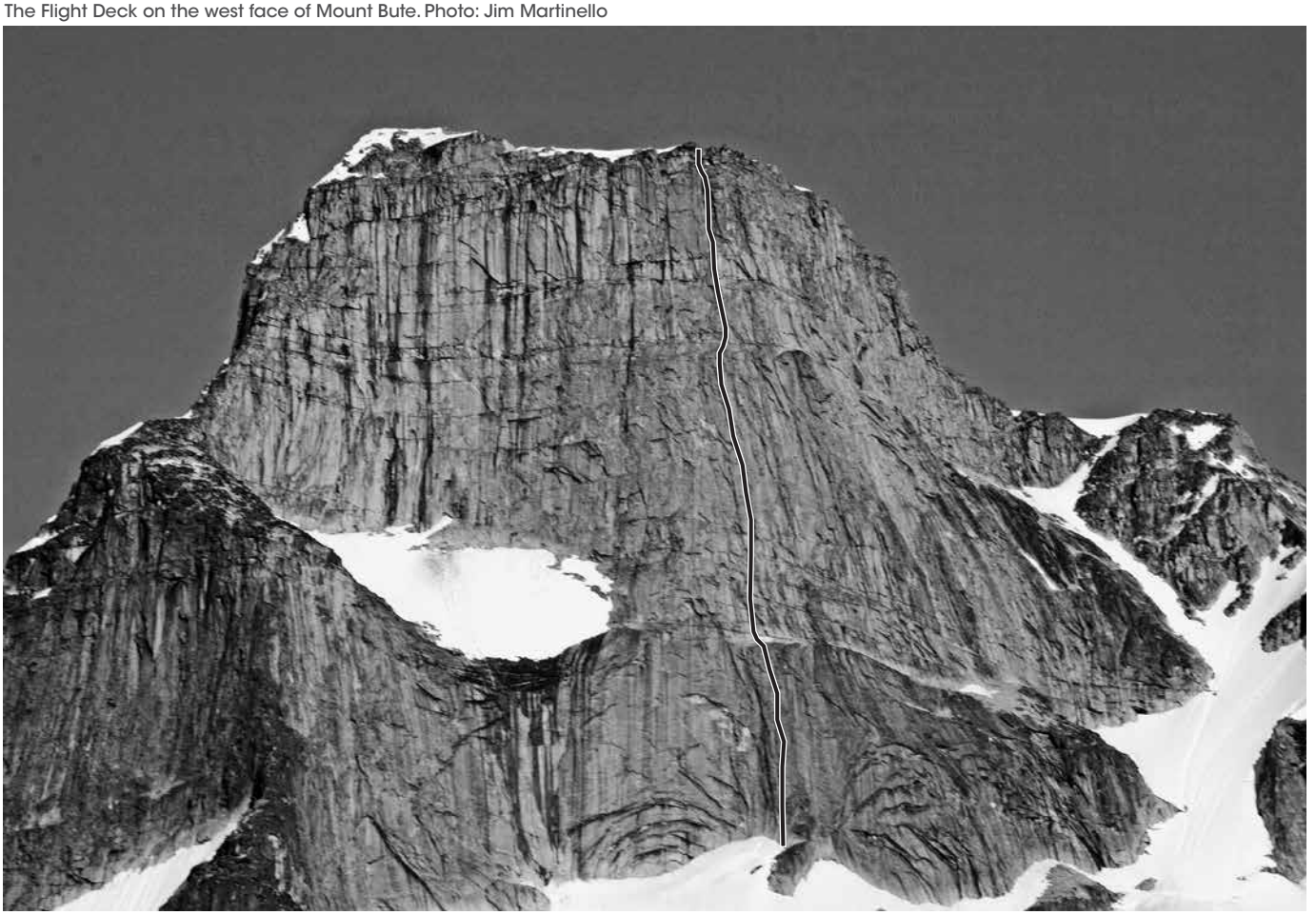
Acknowledgements

National Geographic, Arcteryx, MEC, Metolius, 5.10, Mad Rock, Petzl and *Mountain Life* magazine supported the trip (as did our wives, kids and dogs).

Summary

The Fight Deck (5.11+, 12 pitches, 600m), west face, Mt. Bute, Coast Mountains. FA: Wayne Crill, Damien Kelly, Jim Martinello, Dean Potter, September 2, 2011.

The Flight Deck on the west face of Mount Bute. Photo: Jim Martinello



Spacewalk

Alex Boileau

THE MOSQUITO PASS trail ascends 1,200 metres from the Bella Coola valley to the alpine. The trail was historically used as a trapline. It also provides relatively good alpine access for hunters and climbers. Frank Cook, a local climbing legend, explored many of the spires and peaks in the area where helicopters were scarce and a tough-as-nails approach was the standard. Jia Condon, Grant McCartney, Steve Hodgson and I decided to explore the area in the same vein as past mountaineers and find a few undiscovered lines if the weather held up. The trailhead is 5.2 kilometres down the East Nusatsum Forest Service Road; a cairn and pullout mark the spot.

Most of the trail is through old-growth cedar, hemlock and Douglas fir, with the occasional section of blowdown. It took us a good grind of three hours to get to Mosquito Pass (1,290 metres). There is a band of slide alder and a small creek near the top of Mosquito Pass. Once we reached the alpine, we walked along a great bench to our campsite at 1,600 metres where a couple of beautiful tarns and alpine shrubbery provided good shelter with no mozzies. Our objective was a route on the northeast ridge of Space Point Peak (2,523 metres). Space Point Peak was previously climbed in 1954 by Long, Skinner and Wilson via the 4th-class southwest ridge.

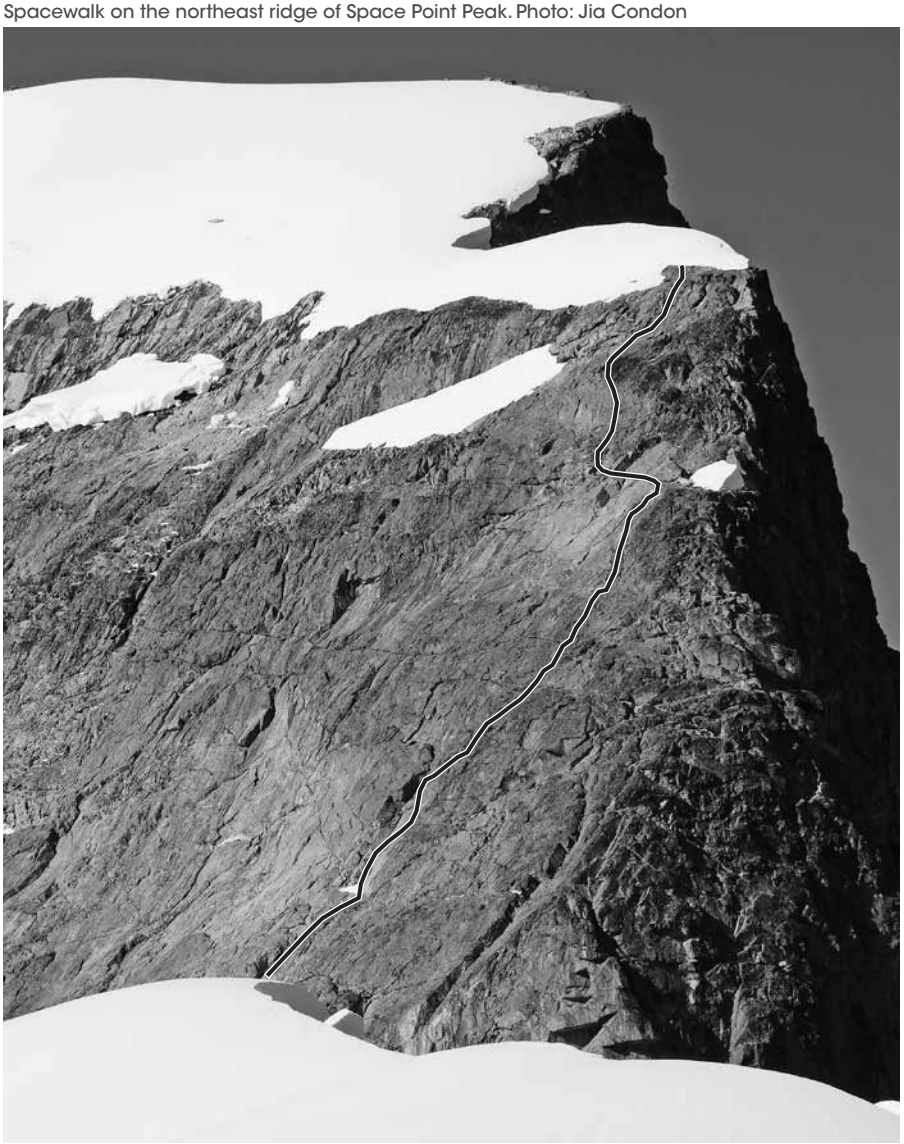
We roped up for the glacier and ascended a moderate section of snow to a bergschrund-crossing to gain the northeast ridge. Spectacular views across to Mad Dog Peak and Phantom Spire beckoned for a future reconnaissance. Four pitches of low 5th class, including a 5.8 traverse, led to the final snow pitch to the summit. The rock quality was good and there was adequate protection when needed. We had brought snow pickets all the way up on our climb, which we finally got to place despite Jia's dislike for heavy metal. We did see a rappel sling left of where we climbed, and we were wondering if anyone had come down from the summit on a traverse from west to east. We had a short break on the summit to soak in the views of the Monarch Icefield, the Bella Coola Valley and Nusatsum Divide. We had these vulpine ear-to-ear grins knowing we were so lucky to share this experience as a party of four.

We downclimbed the northwest ridge a few hundred metres until we were forced to make several rappels on loose rock (one of which narrowly missed Grant and me). But once the ridge below was reached, we were rewarded with a gentle hike back to camp. Space Point Peak is a worthy moderate alpine climb. The whole experience felt like a spacewalk—including the hike down in the dark to get home. There is so much to discover in the Bella Coola valley and Central Coast Mountains.

Summary

Spacewalk (IV AI2 5.8), northeast ridge of Space Point Peak, Coast Mountains. FA: Alex Boileau, Jia Condon, Steve Hodgson, Grant McCartney, August 31, 2011.

Spacewalk on the northeast ridge of Space Point Peak. Photo: Jia Condon



Dehydrated on Dalwhinnie

Conny Amelunxen

JAMIE AND I WERE reminiscing about a line we had done on the west face of Mount Dione about 10 years ago. We laughed about the ridiculous amount of extra gear we carried, the amazing bivi midway up the wall and the miserable one on the summit. We talked about how featured and interesting the rock was in places. So was born the idea of going back. We had done the last route on a whim, because the guidebook seemed to be missing a line on that section of the wall. This one would also be an adventure, but maybe we could leave something that others would be more likely to enjoy.

Late August, after finally getting all our gear in position, we set up camp on the shoulder below the final scramble up Mount Dione's normal Southeast Face route. It was a relief that we were there and that everything had fallen in place. Until two days before and after dozens of e-mails and phone calls, we didn't know if the trip was going to happen. We needed a third person!

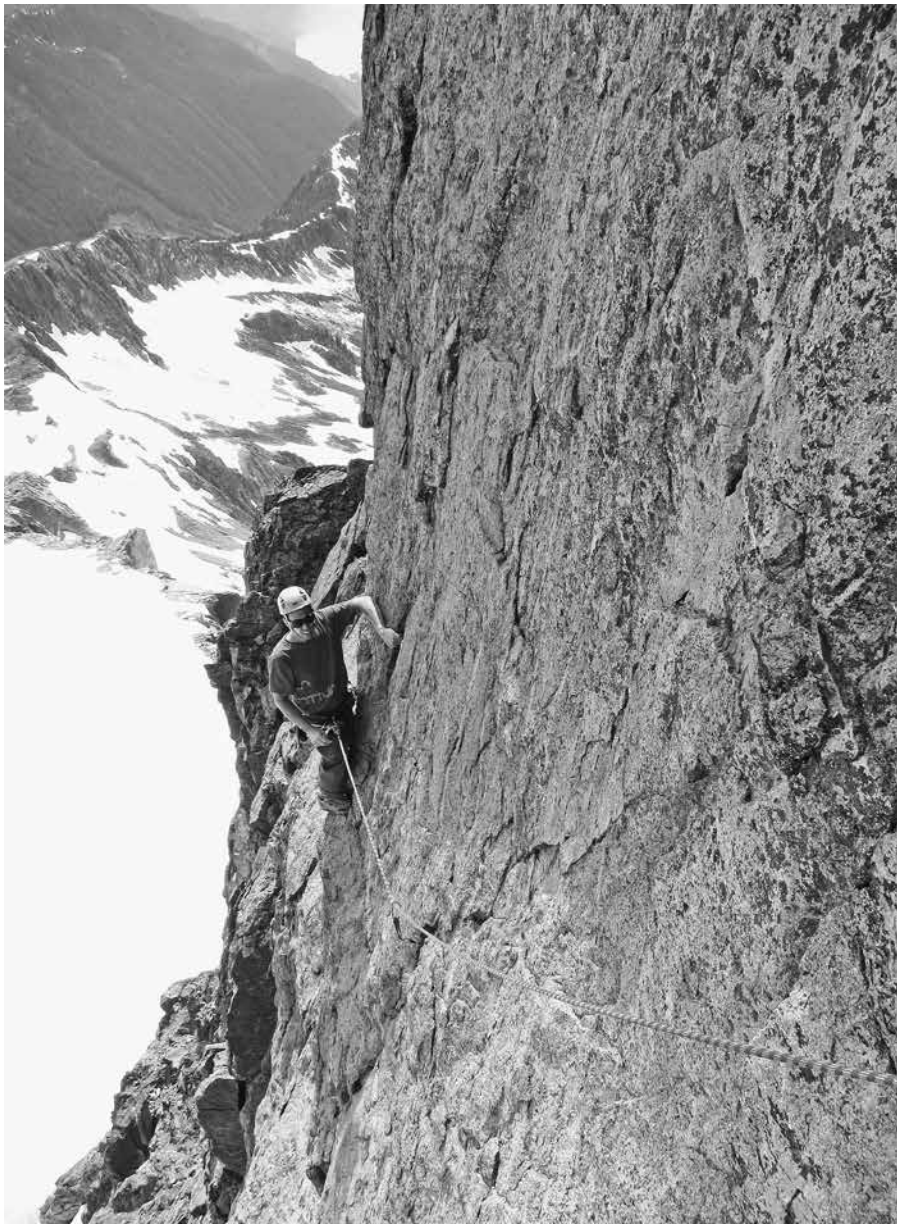
I had only two concerns going into the Tantalus Range. The first was that Jamie didn't have mountain boots, only a pair of approach shoes with smooth sticky soles. The second was that the only person we could find as a third was a guy named Marshal German, who I had never heard of and Jamie only vaguely knew. To top things off, Marshal had never been in the alpine before. On the bright side, he was crazy enough to come out to try something like this last minute.

At 9 a.m. the next morning we set out and quickly reached the south shoulder just below the summit. It was a strange feeling to approach an alpine climb from the top down. After getting our bearings and finding some good stone we quickly threw in a couple of bolts and cleared the area of any loose rock. All of us slightly intimidated, Marshal was the first to drop over the edge. I lowered him exactly half a rope-length down. My worries about his climbing ability quickly faded as he ran up the vertical to slightly overhanging wall and said, "Maybe 5.9, but kind of loose!" I lowered him again and he tried another line. "A bit harder, also about 5.9, but much better rock." I asked him to do it once more, but this time to mark where the bolts should go. And thus began our alpine rap-bolting mission.

The second-to-last pitch on the headwall is one the nicest of the route. After Marshal had climbed it a couple of times and, with chalk, marked where the bolts should go, I rapped down fine-tuning the bolt locations and drilling the holes. Jamie came in last throwing in the bolts as I top-roped Marshal on the next pitch below (our third for the day). In one day we bolted four 30- to 35-metre pitches on the headwall of the south face of Dione.

We left ropes fixed on the pitches we had just bolted and stashed most of

Jamie Chong on pitch eight on Dehydrated on Dalwhinnie. Photo: Conny Amelunxen



our gear at our low point. From there, we 5th-classed up a broken ramp back to camp avoiding the easier snow on the early season regular route below, because, as stated before, Jamie didn't have mountain boots.

After a warm night on the ridge, we descended to the glacier along the standard route enhancing some of the rappel stations on the way. We were hoping to scramble up the Southwest Spur to get to our gear, but once we were at the bottom we realized that the bergschrund in the couloir completely blocked our passage. With a few slings and a single four-inch cam we climbed four pitches to where we had left the rest of our gear. This took us almost four hours due to the rather thin nature of our rack. The midday heat was relentless on the south face and we were parched.

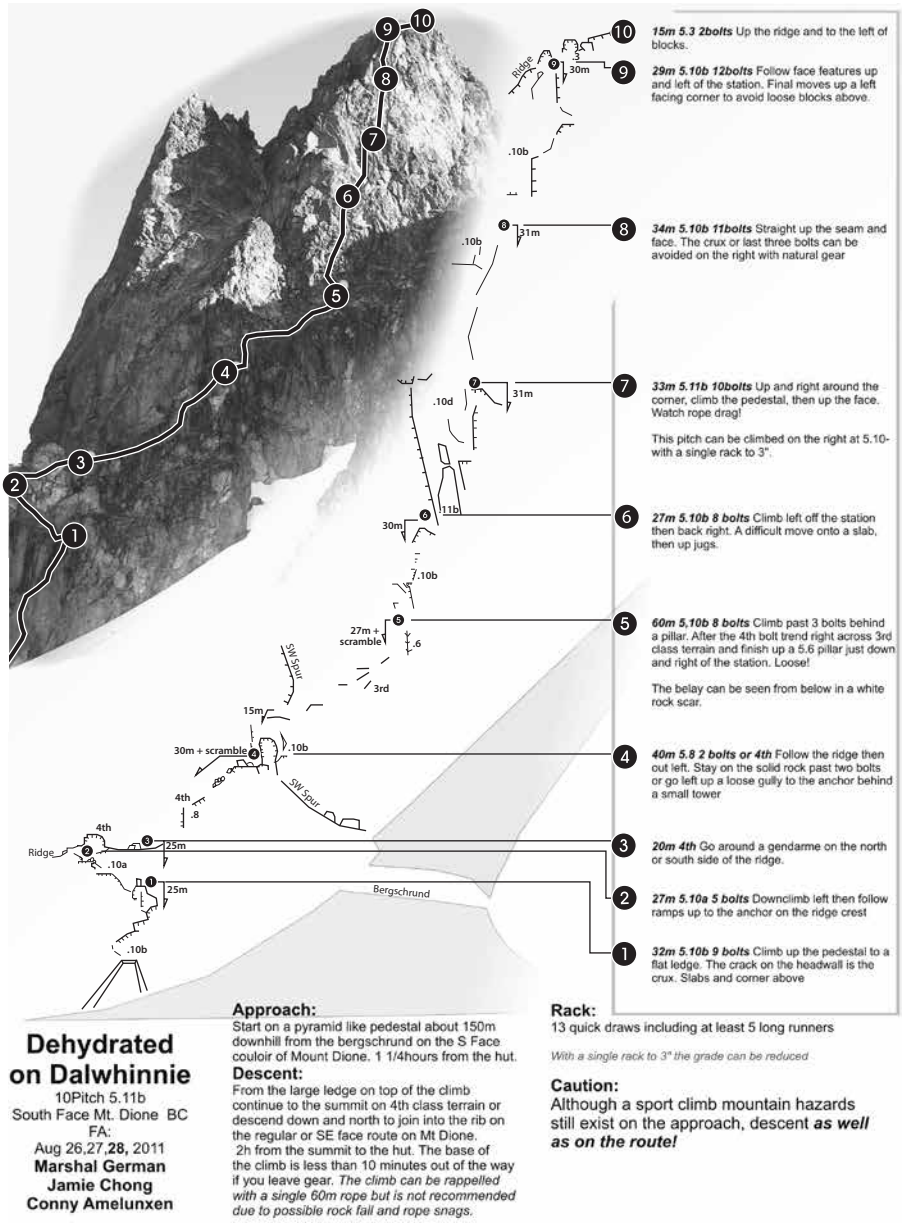
Running out of time we cowered from the sun behind a pinnacle six pitches down from the top trying to figure out how we could finish, or should I say start, the climb and still get out the next day. We discussed, if not argued, for at least an hour and finally decided we would finish the route here, rappel down with the gear and call the route a variation to the Southwest Spur. I insisted that if we rappelled, I was going to bolt on the way down. So over the next three hours we rappelled down the four pitches we had just climbed and threw in another 20-odd bolts.

Reaching the bottom, we were committed. At 5:30 p.m. we started up the climb. Jamie and I swapped leads the entire way because Marshal had led or top-roped all the pitches already. It was not long before we understood what 5.9 meant to Marshal, who followed happily in mountain boots and carrying a 15-kilogram pack with all our glacier gear. We topped out at 10:30 p.m. and got to camp just before midnight.

The next day the clouds came in to give us a break from the sun. We dragged our gear as far as we could down the glacier, and then did multiple loads through the fog to the Dione-Serratus Col. The weather didn't cooperate with our flight plans that night, but the Haberl Hut is about the best place for a forced bivy. It was too bad though that due to dehydration the night before, we had finished all our Dalwhinnie.

Dehydrated on Dalwhinnie is 10 pitches long with six 5.10 pitches and a mid-5.11 pitch. The route is sport bolted with about 90 bolts, but can be a little run-out in the 3rd- and 4th-class sections. The only ethical rule we tried to follow was not to bolt (too many) cracks. Most pitches can be climbed a little easier by bringing a light rack and following crack variations. Several other stunning lines can be climbed using the route as an approach. The route can be rappelled, but I wouldn't if I had a choice since the normal route on the southeast face is much faster and safer to descend.

And as for my concerns at the start of the trip, well, Jamie's shoes worked great with crampons, and Marshal is a monster on the rock and was totally at home moving over snow or broken ground.



Summary

Dehydrated on Dalwhinnie (5.11b, 10 pitches), south face of Mt. Dione, Tantalus Range, Coast Mountains. FA: Conny Amelunxen, Jamie Chong, Marshal German, August 27, 2011. Note: 13 quick draws with five longer runners can be supplemented with a single rack for the easier 5.10c crack variations.

Thirty Years on Ice

John Baldwin

WE FOLLOWED the footprints up the Tchaikazan River valley for several days. They belonged to a large grizzly and dwarfed those of my ski boots. The bear had sunk deep into the spring snow on the wide gravel flats beside the river. We crossed his tracks many times on our way up the valley, staring at the steep rocky peaks that rise up to 1,400 metres above the river.

Our trip had started at Taseko Lakes, after placing two food caches, a long drive, a broken brake line and a late spring snowstorm. After a boat ride across the Taseko River, it had taken us two days of intermittent snow patches to follow a mining road into the Tchaikazan Valley. We spent two nights at a rustic guide outfitters cabin halfway up the valley and did a side trip to a 2,700-metre peak above Spectrum Pass. At treeline, we got the classic panoramic view of the entire Tchaikazan Valley, and from the summit we could see the distant Chilko Lake through wisps of cloud.

The curve of the main valley led us past the spectacular north face of Moose Mountain, and at some point we passed the spot where I had landed in a ski plane in May 1980 to begin a ski traverse of the Lillooet Icefield to Meager Creek (*CAJ* 1981, vol. 64, p. 66-67). At that time there had been a few ski traverses in the Coast Mountains, but no one had really thought of something like a three-week trip across one of the large icefields, so we had no idea what to expect. In 1980, we were a group of early 20-year-olds embarking on the ski adventure of a lifetime. Now 30 years later our large group of Linda Bily, Brain Hall, Coby Hall, Katy Chambers, Anne-Marie Baribeau, Mark Grist, Francis St. Pierre, Gord Bose and myself were planning to repeat the trip. A lot happens in 30 years, and an icefield gives a good perspective for that length of time. I had done a spring trip almost every year since 1980 and for me it was an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate 30 years of skiing on the big icefields of the Coast Mountains.

Graham Underhill skiing the Stanley Glacier in 1980 with Lillooet Mountain (centre) and Mount Tisiphone (right) in the background. Photo: John Baldwin

At the head of the valley, where the river disappeared under the snout of the glacier, we skied up onto the ice. The glacier has receded more than a kilometre in the last 30 years. From a camp at the head of the glacier, we split into two groups, with one party scrambling up the south ridge of Mount Monmouth and the other skiing up Corner Peak for a fabulous run on corn snow. After picking up an airdrop on the Chapman Glacier, we made the steep drop onto the Edmond Glacier, climbed past some spectacular seracs to the col east of Mount Sovereign and descended to a camp above the lower Frank Smith Glacier. We sat in the sun on a tiny patch of heather that had melted out of the deep spring snowpack. We had seen more bear tracks at the head of the valley, and it was great to be deep in the wilderness. According to my map we had camped in exactly the same spot in 1980, but I only had recollections of poorer weather.

The next morning we skied up the Frank Smith Glacier with our crazy carpet toboggans dragging behind. In 1980, we had used narrow telemark skis with aluminum edges. They were really just glorified cross-country skis, which we used with leather boots and wax for grip. I remember stopping halfway up the glacier and using white gas to try and remove the klister wax from our skis so that we could continue climbing higher into the fresh snow. We had climbed through a whiteout to the crest of the icefield at 2,600 metres and set up camp as quickly as we could before our single-leather boots had started to freeze.

Now with warm plastic boots we set up camp in the sunshine before skiing up Mount Mills for a fabulous view of the flat expanse of ice that forms the headwaters of the Bridge and Stanley Smith Glaciers. This is something I will

never tire of—the shimmering silence of an icefield. But even the powerful mass of the icefield is like looking at a river. The patterns and shapes of the ice looked basically the same as they had in 1980, but the actual ice had moved five to 10 kilometres down the big glaciers that radiate out from the centre of the icefield.

Looking at my map here made me feel old. Routes from my previous trips were marked on the map. According to my map, we had also climbed Mount Mills in 1980, but it had been one of six peaks that we had climbed in a single day. I guess we are doing well for our age, but we definitely don't have the energy we did in our early 20s.

Day 10 saw us heading south over Mount Frank Smith. We skied up the 2,900-metre summit immediately southwest of Stanley Peak only to be surprised by a group of seven snowmobilers on top. We chatted for a while. They were all friendly guys from Pemberton and Whistler, mostly skiers, but what a contrast. We were 10 days into the wilderness; they were just out for a day trip. In 1980, it was guaranteed you wouldn't see anyone in a place like this. Only a few climbing parties had ever been to the Lillooet Icefield, and we had most likely been the only ski party in the entire Coast Mountains between Pemberton and Bella Coola.

We had a great run southwest from Stanley Peak, and camped at the crest of the Ring Glacier. We dug a comfortable kitchen and reveled in the evening light. Brian and Coby posed for some father-and-son photos, and Brian used the sat phone to call home and find out that his second grandchild had just been born.

The next morning we made some side trips. The climbing types headed west to use their ice axes while the skiers went for the corn on the south-facing slopes on Mount Alecto. When planning this trip, one of the things I had hoped for most was to be able to ski these slopes in good conditions. In 30 years of exploring all those icefields, few places stand out as offering a more stunning position for a spring ski run. The south slopes of Mount Alecto lie perched 1,000 metres above the trench of the Lillooet Glacier with a backdrop of the 1,500-metre north faces of Lillooet Mountain and Mount Tisiphone rising above the four-way junction of the Lillooet, Ring and Bishop Glaciers. The weather was absolutely perfect. After a straightforward ascent of the summit we were ready for our run just as the corn started to soften in the midday sun. With six of us carving great arcs in the silken snow, we leapfrogged down the mountainside with huge icefalls in the background.

Back at camp we picked up our packs and enjoyed the last of the corn snow, coasting down the Ring Glacier. At the bottom I was surprised to see that the surface of the Ring Glacier had dropped 100 metres and receded to the point where it no longer connected to the Bishop Glacier. Climate change wasn't even on the radar in 1980. We picked up our second airdrop at the toe of the long east ridge of Mount Tisiphone. Perched above the sercas, this was a beautiful spot to camp. We continued up the Lillooet Glacier in the morning. Lower down we could make out an old set of ski tracks that we later found out were made by a young couple on their honeymoon. While we had pioneered the route in 1980, it was now done annually. It was neat to see people out on the icefields connecting with these wild and spectacular places.

From a camp on the plateau at 2,650 metres, we skied up Mount Dalgleish. The ascent from the north side is easy as the snowfield butts right up to the peak. The surprise comes when you get to the summit and look down 2,800 metres to the Toba River, which lies in a deep trench winding out to the ocean. Peering down the valley I could make out dozens of familiar peaks near the head of Toba Inlet. I had spent years in that country with John Clarke, and it brought back great memories. In 1980, none of us knew anything more than the major drainages and a few of the higher summits, but now almost every direction I looked were familiar peaks. What had once been only bumps on the horizon were now firmly etched in my soul. It wasn't just the accomplishments that were there; it was also the whole kaleidoscope of sights and sounds and

John Baldwin skiing off Mount Alecto in 1989 with Mount Tisiphone behind.
Photo: John Clarke

feelings of weeks and years spent in the wilderness.

Seeing all these peaks was like looking back in time. A lot happens in three decades. Our original group of 20-year-olds was now in its 50s. We had gone on with our lives. One of our group members was a math professor, three were mountain guides, another had been a computer specialist and was now retired, and I had written three editions of a ski guide. There were also kids who were born and grew up, and parents and siblings who died. Good times and tough times.

The next morning, we downclimbed a short, steep snow gully to get off the plateau and onto the long snowy ridge that connects to the Manatee Range. This is a fabulous ski route that follows the crest of the ridge for eight kilometres. The ridge drops 1,500 metres to deep valleys on either side, and there are fabulous views in all directions, including the huge icefalls pouring off Mount Dalgleish and the Manatee Range. Pioneering the traverse in 1980, we were pinned down by bad weather and agonized about whether to travel the ridge, wait out the storm or take a low route. The group dynamics of making that decision were as challenging as the route-finding was for our energetic group of young skiers. Now older and mostly wiser, these sorts of issues had been replaced with other sorts of life's challenges. Anne-Marie's partner, Hannes, had died in a crevasse fall the previous year just 20 kilometres to the west of where we were. Understandably, Anne-Marie was still grieving, and travelling on a glacier had been a struggle for her. We had supported her as best we could, but as we got closer and closer to where Hannes had died it just became too overwhelming and she decided to fly out. We called a helicopter with the satellite phone, and an hour later Anne-Marie was gone with that ringing silence that comes after a helicopter comes then goes. Several days later Brian developed strong chest pains and was feeling extremely out of breath. Brian and Coby also made that hard choice to leave. After the trip, it was clear that both Brian and Anne-Marie had made the right decisions but it is always hard at the time. In 1980 there had been no sat phones.

The pilot who came in to pick up Anne-Marie had said a big storm was moving in, so we made a long push to travel the full length of the ridge and move to a camp at treeline in the Manatee Range. After two weeks on the go, we were all beat, and several days of rain and wet snow provided a welcomed rest. We listened to grouse, ptarmigan and a beautiful bird song we never did identify. Behind camp a family of marmots emerged from hibernation and peered out of their hole at their strange visitors.

Finally, it cleared, and we headed off in two groups climbing Wahoo Tower and skiing up the west summit of Dugong Mountain. The upper slopes offered our last powder skiing of the winter. Not bad for May 19!

Bad weather returned and this forced us to abandon our planned high route out past Capricorn Mountain. Instead, we skied out to old logging roads on Meager Creek, crossing the thigh-deep muddy water in the afternoon. Rain, mist, bird songs and the smells of cottonwood and fir welcomed us to the valley. On our last day, we soaked in the hot springs before walking out to the Lillooet River.

Coby Hall skiing off Mount Alecto in 2010 with Lillooet Mountain (left) and Mount Tisiphone (right) in the background. Photo: John Baldwin

West Coast Ice

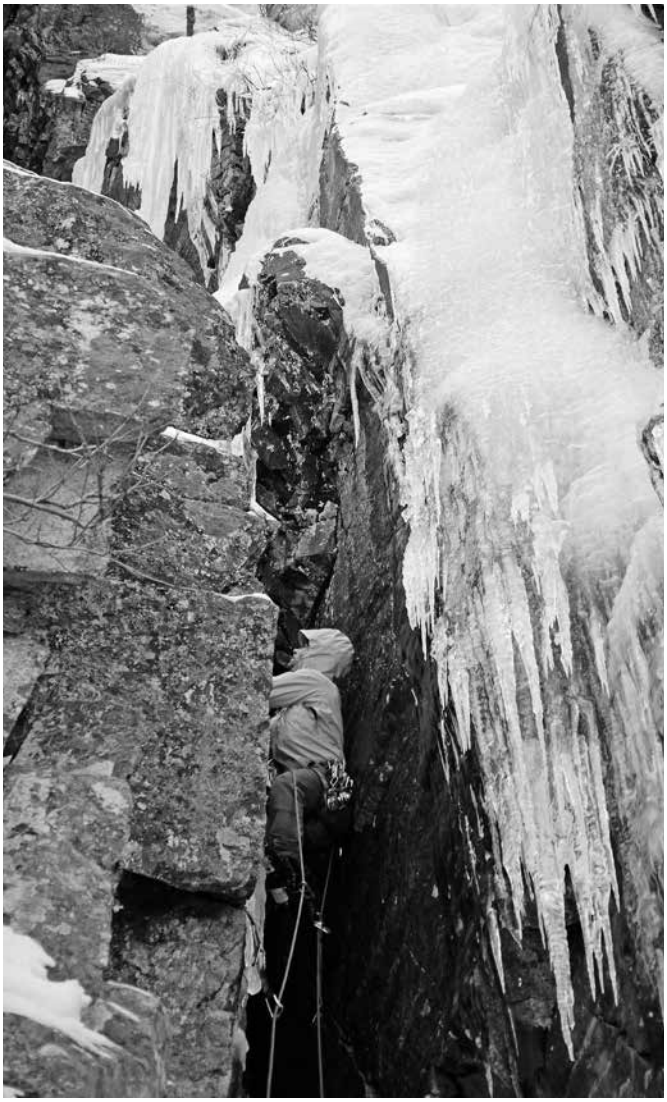
Jia Condon

LIFE IS AS BUSY as ever but the fire for the mountains still burns. So with that, at the end of December 2011, Paul McSorley and I ventured into North Joffre Creek to have a look-see. The approach was as good as I have ever experienced it. The logging road was in fine shape, and with the help of a snow machine the first five kilometres passed quickly. An hour-and-a-half ski tour from where we parked the sleds delivered us at the base of the Aldergrove Wall. Please be advised, there is huge avalanche risk in this area that requires good stability with low hazard rating.

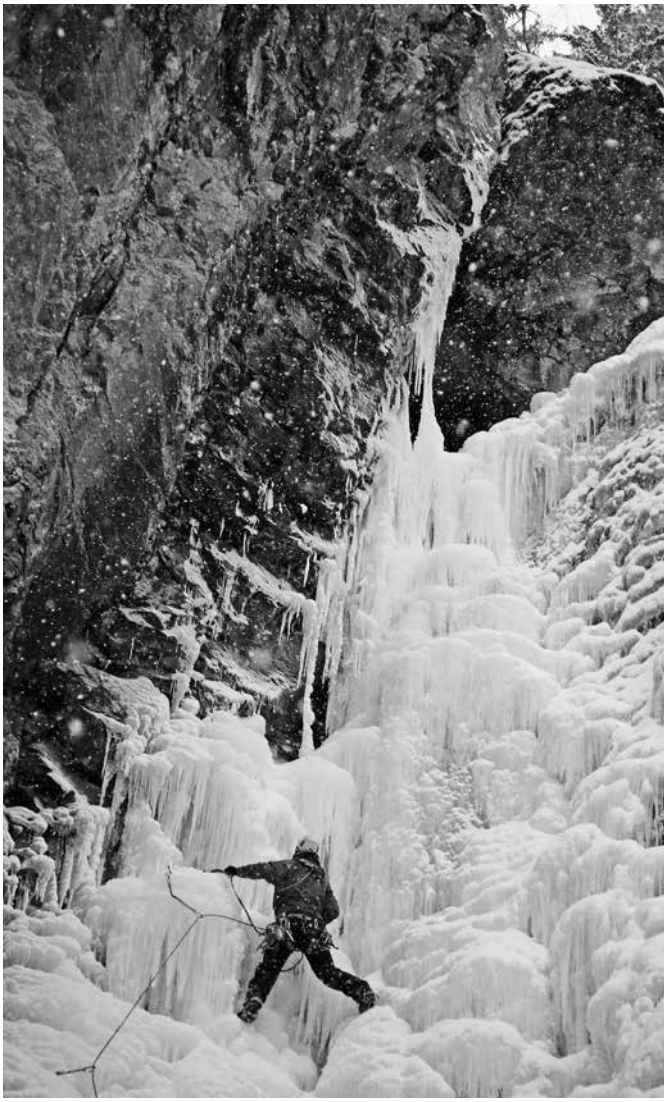
We were happy to find plenty of ice and many options to choose from. We decided on an unclimbed route that Don Serl labelled "R" in his guidebook (*West Coast Ice*, page 82). We found it to be a fun two-pitch route with thin ice up to WI4 that we named Roadside Redneckery. Chris Geisler and I then returned to this valley a couple of weeks later in early January to find another new WI4 route, again done in two pitches (the line right of route "U" in *West Coast Ice*, page 82). This one we called Chamber Maid. Both routes are in very deep clefts offering unique, fun climbing.

Some good fortune in February allowed me a day off in the midst of a busy heli-ski guiding schedule to make the first ascent of Assanany Falls in Bella Coola. I quite enjoyed the five-minute approach. With a posse of Bella Coola locals (Grant McCartney, Alex Boileau and Steve Hodgson), we found a mini version of the Canadian Rockies classic Professor Falls with five tiers of ice up to WI4+.

Paul McSorely on pitch one of Roadside Redneckery in North Joffre.
Photo: Jia Condon



Alex Boileau on pitch four of Assanany Falls in Bella Coola.
Photo: Jia Condon



Filberg

John Waters

THE LOCAL GUIDEBOOK, *Island Alpine* (2003), lists five peaks over 2,000 metres on Vancouver Island with no winter ascents. I wasn't too surprised considering the long approaches, huge annual snowfall, poor weather and tricky route-finding. I set myself a goal to try and climb the remaining peaks in winter. In January 2009, my twin brother, Mike, Curtis Lyon and I climbed Mount Cobb (2,030 metres) over three days. Our North Gully route was pretty straightforward with snow up to 60 degrees and some easy mixed terrain near the summit. A few months later in March, Curtis, Louis Monjo and I made the long approach to Victoria Peak (2,163 metres). With Louis and Curtis on the snowmobile, I was pulled 40 kilometres on skis just to reach the start of the long hike to the base of the climb. On the second day, we climbed the Sceptre (5.9 summer rock route) in 14 hours camp to camp. We climbed a little WI3 ice then sketchy pitches of sn'ice and mixed ground to reach the small snowy summit. Seven raps and lots of downclimbing got us back to camp just before dark. The next day was the long snowmobile drag out, complete with breaking a strut and almost running out of gas—all in all, a standard winter climbing adventure on Vancouver Island.

Now fast-forward to February 2011. Sarah Hauser, David Deluco and I attempted the north ridge and face of Mount Filberg (2,035 metres). In deep snow (with snowshoes) from Lady Falls (at an elevation of only 250 metres) we struggled up steep bushy forest for almost eight hours to reach our camp at 1,600 metres along the ridge in deteriorating weather. The next day Sarah opted out, and in whiteout blizzard conditions David and I slogged down 200 metres to the small lake two kilometres northwest of the summit before we could head back up into a gully feature on the northwest aspect. A steep band of rock and ice 200 metres below the summit blocked our way. With heavy snowfall and visibility down to only a few metres, we couldn't find a weakness up the wall. We had to turn back. Following my GPS track we made it back to camp, packed up and hiked out another five hours down to the car. Sarah and David returned in the summer of 2011 to scope out a different route, but were shut down with steep rock and not enough time.

In March 2012, the weather and team lined up, and with an avalanche bulletin of moderate hazard we went for it. The team was Sarah, David, Lawrence Floucault and me. Parking my old GMC Safari on the side of Highway 28, we started up the steep forested northwest ridge of Filberg. The snow conditions this time were much faster, and in only six hours we made it to our camp at 1,600 metres. Clouds were rolling in, and by the time we got to the familiar camp, we could not see the mountain. It started to snow lightly. I was concerned that poor weather could end our trip just like last winter. Worrying about it wasn't going to help, so we got busy digging our shelters and melting snow.

The northwest face of Mount Filberg. Photo: John Waters

Suddenly flames were blasting out the side of my stove onto the fuel bottle. A quick shovelful of snow snuffed out the problem, but my 20-plus-year-old MSR stove wasn't going to work. Luckily, Sarah had the other stove going, and with my extra fuel bottle we were set. Dave and I were shut down the previous year and agreed to push it, unless the weather was really bad. We went to sleep early, and after a restless night, I woke around 5 a.m. We were all excited to see the weather had almost cleared. During a quick breakfast, we found a straightforward-looking line across the northwest face and easy snow slope down to the lake. As long as the weather stayed reasonably settled, we would find our way through the difficult sections.

By 6 a.m. we were hiking across the small lake and up into the wide northwest-facing gully with snowshoes. At the top of the gully we found a weakness over the 50-metre snow-covered rock band. With crampons on, we were ready for the first real obstacle. Our climbing gear was very minimal as we did not expect to need it. We packed a 20-metre piece of eight-millimetre rope, a couple of pitons and a few 'biners. Sarah was the only one who even brought a harness. We were definitely going old school. I went out first up the steep rock slope covered with 15 centimetres of loose snow. It was insecure but not too difficult. Dave followed quickly behind, hollering back encouragement to Sarah and Lawrence. The winds were very strong as I pulled over the small cornice at the top of the rock band. Next we had to traverse south a few hundred metres across a snowfield to the next obstacle—a very steep wind lip of snow. When Sarah reached us she had maxed out her comfort zone. The next section looked too steep, and she was worried about descending what we had just climbed. We did not discuss the options too much, and we left Sarah tucked behind a rock at 1,850 metres.

The next steep snow section proved to be the technical crux. The slope steepened as we approached; we were getting concerned it might not go. We continued on, and with a couple of false starts found a line between some ice bulges. I was stopped at a short vertical section of snow only a few metres high, but a fall here would be bad. With one technical tool and my general mountaineering axe, I was able to hack away at the lip until I could get a decent plunge in the funky snow. A few precarious moves and I was able to hump my way over the lip onto a moderate snow slope. We would make the summit, as long as this lee slope didn't load up with too much loose snow and slough us over the cliffs below. Dave and Lawrence grovelled over the lip. We traversed up and right across the slope in strong winds, estimated at 50 to 70 kilometres per hour. We had to yell at each other to communicate, and a wind gust would knock you over if you weren't braced for it. Another half hour of slogging over easier rock and snow got us to the summit of Mount Filberg. A tall green radio tower marks the top. We huddled behind the tower to avoid some of the wind and had a quick bite to eat. The celebrations were tempered because we were all a little concerned about getting down. It was time to get out of there.

We made quick progress down to the snow lip, which was hard to find in the blowing maelstrom. With our rope I belayed Lawrence then Dave as they downclimbed the short steep section. I downclimbed with the rope tied around my waist and Dave giving me a psychological belay 10 metres below. Reunited with Sarah, I set up anchors so she could rappel the steep rock band, then Dave, Lawrence and I downclimbed this last technical section. I was relieved to be off the difficult terrain. With our snowshoes on, we hiked down the gully, across the small lake and back to camp. We cracked our single can of beer to celebrate as we packed up before beginning the long, knee-jarring trudge down. Slipping and sliding we made good time down to the van.

With Filberg in the bag, another 2,000-metre first winter ascent is complete, but I still have a few more to go. The remaining 2,000-metre peaks are more involved with much longer approaches. Hopefully, I will have stories for next year's journal.

Summary

First winter ascent of Mt. Filberg (2035m) via the Northwest Gully, Strathcona Park, Vancouver Island Ranges, Insular Mountains. FWA: David Deluco, Lawrence Floucault, John Waters, March 8, 2012. Note: Sarah Hauser climbed to 1,850 metres.

David Deluco, Lawrence Floucault and Sarah Hauser on the first winter ascent of Mount Filberg. Photo: John Waters

Arrowsmith's West Ridge Direct

Francis Bruhwiler

AFTER BAILING FROM an alpine wall off Highway 4 due to seepage, I tossed the idea to John Kristian about trying a *direttissima* to the West Ridge route on Mount Arrowsmith. Having come to Vancouver Island from the mainland for a few days of climbing, he quickly accepted, and soon we were hiking out of our damp camp back to our vehicles. We drove two hours to Arrowsmith, getting stuck behind a grader that was towing a logging truck and doing about five kilometres per hour up the steep switchbacks to the parking area.

Mount Arrowsmith is the busiest alpine peak on Vancouver Island, and in all my years of climbing there I never came across any indication through guidebooks, the Internet or conversations that the West Ridge had been climbed directly. The regular West Ridge cuts out right twice to avoid 5th-class rock bands. A few years back I was successful in climbing the first rock band in boots but could not commit to climbing the second steep obstacle. This time we were armed with rock shoes.

We made quick time following the regular route to the first rock band, which we climbed in two long pitches. The first pitch consisted of face climbing to a left-trending ramp then a short steep step to a small tree belay (crux). An alternate line here would go up the ramp from the ground offering easier-looking climbing. The second pitch (many options here) was at a lower angle, and we decided to go right then trend left to another tree belay. Some minor scrambling got us back to the regular West Ridge.

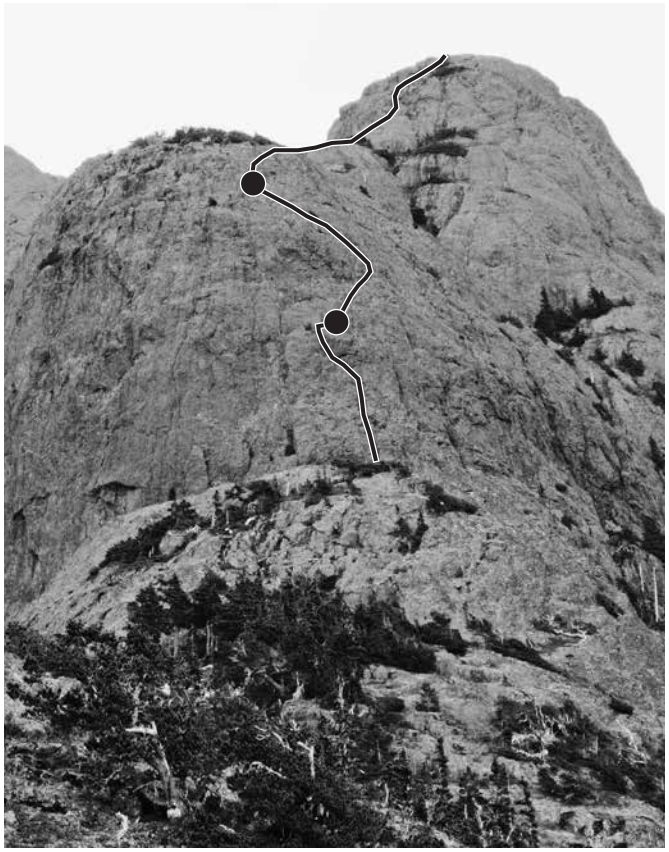
From the top of Brugger's Gully we climbed the second rock band in two long pitches as well—one long pitch straight up to below a small roof where a good belay was found in a corner, and for the second pitch, bypassing the roof to the left then climbing the low-angled face to the right of Newman-Foraker Gully. From the top of the west ridge a little 3rd-class scrambling put us on the summit. Overall, the climbing was fun but the route had its fair share of loose sections and was run out.

I think it is safe to say that this could be the first recorded ascent of the direct line, but with Arrowsmith's rich mountaineering history, there will always be the chance the line was climbed in the past.

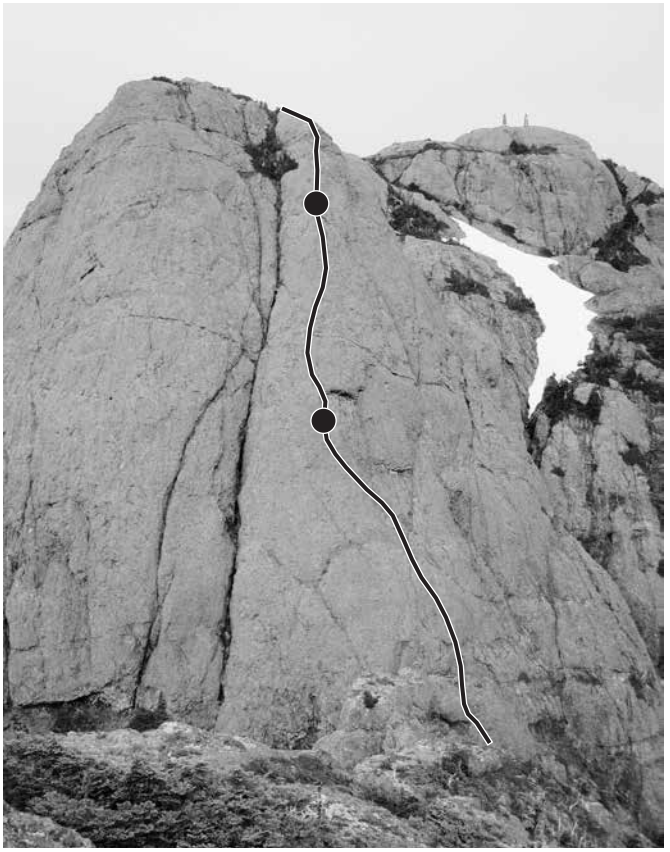
Summary

West Ridge Direct (5.6R), Mount Arrowsmith (1817m), Vancouver Island Ranges, Insular Mountains. FA: Francis Bruhwiler, John Kristian, August 3, 2011.

The West Ridge Direct through the first rock band.
Photo: Francis Bruhwiler



The West Ridge Direct through the second rock band.
Photo: Francis Bruhwiler



Beached Az

Justin Barnes

PROMISES OF NEW ROUTE potential, solid granite, a spectacular position and alpine adventure tipped the scales for me to visit Mount Slesse for the first time with Jeremy Frimer and Kat Siepmann. Our objective wasn't the classic Northeast Buttress, but instead to explore a new route to the north that gains Crossover Pass. After a few hours of walking on the mostly established trail, we set up camp on the bivy boulder, and over dinner spied our route through binoculars.

By most accounts our climb was decidedly straightforward. Without knowing exactly where our route should lead, we chose our way based on what appeared to be the best quality rock, where the cracks opened enough to fit in gear and where we would find the most fun. The alpine granite was clean—mostly—however, when the cracks weren't flaring, they would only accept gear once the leader dug out the dirt and alpine flora.

One particular corner system demanded a variety of climbing techniques, but more so, a lightness similar to walking across a wet, rotting log over a river. My lead up this dihedral had me moving laterally to find a path that wouldn't shower rock fall onto my partners. I placed a stopper while standing on a small ledge, climbed a few metres higher and reached for a jug. It fractured in my hand and I nearly fell in an inopportune position. My first instinct was to hang onto the rock so that it wouldn't cascade down the corner; my second was to jump down to the small ledge below me. Incredulously, I tossed the rock into a different gully and continued until the rope drag was too great to climb through.

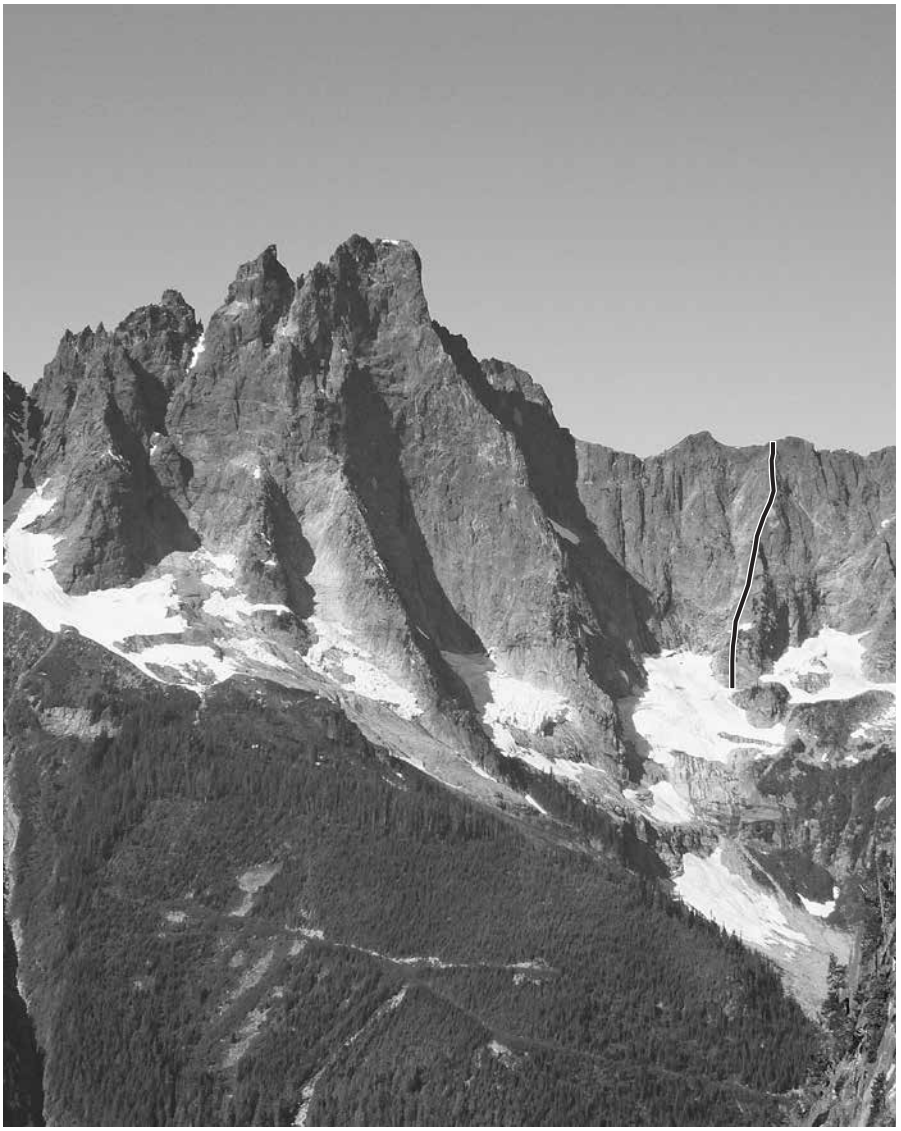
So it was for the remainder of our climb. We summitted with perfect timing—about an hour of daylight left to traverse the ridge to the rappel back to the talus and a north-facing snowfield. We made it back to our bivy and considered staying the night and walking out the next morning. Two things motivated us to return to Squamish that night: the incessant mosquitoes and the fact that Kat had to work the next day. We ate the rest of our food on the boulder, packed up camp and made our way in the dark across the slippery alpine heather back down to treeline, and eventually, back to Kat's truck.

It wasn't until a few days later that we decided on a name for our route. We named it Beached Az after the popular New Zealand YouTube cartoon. Beached Az captured our collective fatigue after watching both sunrise and sunset on route. "Heaps beached," as they would say in Kiwi. We also learned that Kat had confused the dates she was to be on the set of a film production. We could have stayed overnight on the boulder bivy instead of descending to the valley by headlamp after all!

Summary

Beached Az (5.9, 500m), east face of Parkes Peak, Cascade Mountains. FA: Justin Barnes, Jeremy Frimer, Katherine Siepmann, September 2011.

Beached Az on the east face of Parkes Peak with Mount Slesse to the left. Photo: Jacqui Hudson



The Interior

Étoile Filante

David Lussier

THE SOUTH FACE of Mount Asgard in the Valhallas has attracted climbers for almost 40 years. The first route up this sheer wall—Centre Route (IV 5.8)—was climbed by Valhalla pioneers Peter Koedt, Peter Rowat and Greg Shannon in 1973. Peter Koedt returned to Asgard a few years later, in 1975, to climb the Left Side route (IV 5.8) with James Hamelin and Jara Popelkova. These two traditional routes follow the most dominant features on the face and continue to challenge climbers to this day. They offer varied climbing—cracks, flakes and chickenheads—with interesting route-finding and sustained difficulty. Up until now these were the only established routes on the south face.

The vision of a new route on this face has been shared by many a climber over the years. During various trips into Mulvey Basin, I had always been interested by the complexity of the upper right side of the wall. It wasn't until July 2010 that Cam Shute and I ventured into Mulvey with the intention of exploring that potential. Due to the disconnected nature of the crack systems, some blank-looking sections and the steepness of the wall, we decided to bring some bolts and a battery-powered hammer drill. This exploratory trip, culminating with a high point somewhere halfway up the steep upper right wall, revealed the potential for a great line on featured but compact rock. We were already planning our return.

Our vision evolved before we returned in July 2011. With a greater knowledge about the nature of the rock and the various options for lines, we decided to bring the drill again. We considered bolting an interesting-looking blank arête to help straighten the lower part of the route and using bolts for adequate protection on the upper compact wall. If the route turned out to be good quality, we also contemplated bolting the belays to facilitate rappelling. All of this would, of course, be done bottom up while bolting on lead. We were very excited about possibly finishing the route.

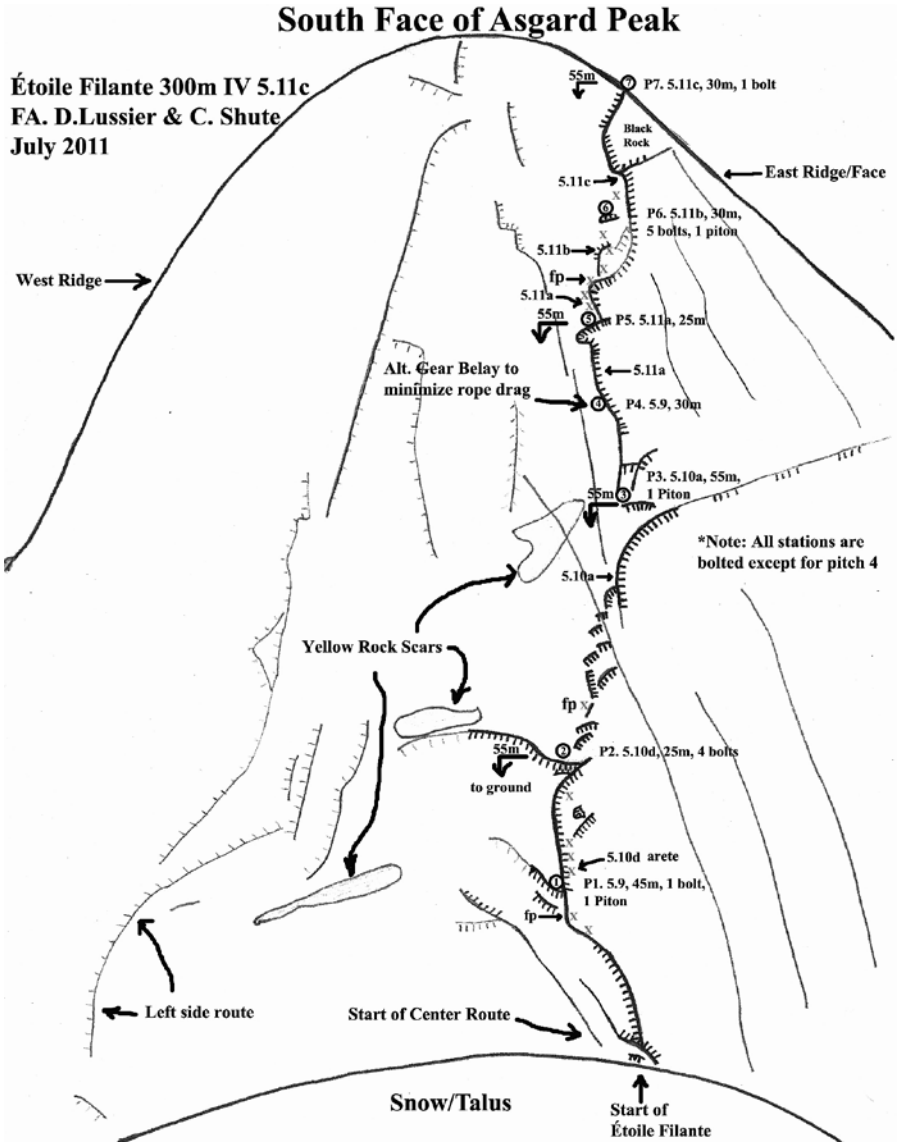
The end result was greater than anticipated. Commitment to the line and a bit of luck allowed us to complete a new modern mixed (bolts/trad) route up the beautiful right side of the south face. A lot of the visioning and actual route-location decisions came together beautifully over the four days Cam and I spent working on the wall. The climbing on the arête lower down (pitch two) was challenging but high quality and provided a more direct line. The intricacies of the steep upper wall revealed themselves after a few days of committed route-finding on the sharp end. In some ways the route exposed itself, and we basically connected the dots. Completing it was very satisfying but piecing the puzzle together was the best part. We really hope that others get to enjoy this quality modern alpine rock route.

Étoile Filante is French for shooting star. The name choice is a tribute to Valhalla pioneer Peter Koedt, who sadly passed away in the fall of 2010. The inspiration for the name comes from the song Étoile Filante by Les Cowboys Fringants. The song's beautiful lyrics

Étoile Filante on the south face of Mount Asgard in the Valhalla Range. Photo: David Lussier

Facing page: David Lussier on pitch two during the first ascent of Étoile Filante. Photo: Cam Shute

compare each human's life existence, turmoil, successes and absurdity to the passage of a shooting star. We feel Peter was a creative force amongst the Valhalla peaks. We will remember his passage and contribution as a brilliant shooting star.



Summary

Étoile Filante (IV 5.11c, 300m), south face of Mount Asgard, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: David Lussier, Cam Shute, July 23, 2011.

The route starts about 15 metres right of the first pitch on the original Centre Route. It begins near the base of a leftward-trending slanting crack/ramp about two-thirds of the way right across the south face.

P1: 5.9, 45m. Scramble up to a small overhang providing access to a left-trending ramp/crack system. Follow this past one bolt and one fixed piton to the base of a large V-shaped slot and a two-bolt anchor.

P2: 5.10d, 25m. Climb the vertical arête defining the right edge of the V-slot (crux) to a featured slab and easier ground passing four bolts to a two-bolt belay in an open dish.

P3: 5.10a, 55m. Climb up and trend right passing a fixed piton and a few loose blocks towards an obvious left-facing corner about 30 metres from the belay. Climb the corner (5.10a) and continue up and right along a ramp system to where it is possible to easily move back left to a good ledge with a two-bolt belay. This is a wandering pitch with potential for rope drag.

P4: 5.9, 30m. Work up a right hand crack above the belay for a few metres then move left across a ledge for a few metres. A vertical crack leads to a long left-leaning corner capped by a roof. Climb this beautiful corner to a small sloping stance and belay on good gear.

P5: 5.11a, 25m. Continue along the steepening corner toward the roof passing an insecure layback section (5.11a). Look for a few key protection placements (#1 and #2 Camalot) in odd triangular crack pockets on the right wall just before the crux layback. Continue more easily towards the intimidating roof, working out the left side of it before traversing back right along a wildly exposed sloping ledge to a two-bolt belay. Note: It is possible to combine pitch four and five but the rope drag and gear management can be limiting factors.

P6: 5.11b, 30m. A thin layback seam leads up and left past two bolts; move right over a steep flake passing by a fixed piton. Beware of a precarious-looking (yet avoidable) flake above the piton. A steepening right-trending arch passes two more bolts (5.11b) before moving back left (another bolt) then skirting around the left side of an overhang on wild chickenheads to a small stance with a two-bolt belay.

P7: 5.11c, 30m. A few exposed slabby moves to the right past one bolt leads to a thin arching crack capped by a small roof. Exiting the roof through the left side on good gear provides the crux of the whole route. Continue straight up with some insecure laybacking along a left-facing corner. The angle of the wall eventually eases and a right-facing corner provides access to the east ridge and a two-bolt belay. From the top of pitch seven scramble 30 metres of 3rd class along the east ridge to the summit.

Gear: Single set of cams from #0 to #3 Camalot with doubles from #1 to #2, single set of nuts, double 60-metre ropes.

Descent: The route can be descended in four long 60-metre rappels. It is also possible to descend via the regular east slope descent (3rd class).

Starbird Range

Kirk Mauthner

FROM OUR CAMP at 2,655 metres in a small south-facing cirque with a remnant pocket glacier in it, flanked by Donnard Peak, Sally Serena Peak and Koala Peak, Joanne Mauthner and I put up a new route on the southeast face of Koala Peak. The open-book corner goes essentially up the centre of the broad southeast face, a clean, steep wall that is visible from the Columbia Valley as you look west up the Horsethief Creek drainage at the Starbird Range. This six-pitch route has a three-metre-by-three-metre roof at about the halfway mark, and the overall grade is 5.8 with a move or two of 5.9. It's a very clean, enjoyable granite crack climb, and its quality we felt was as good, albeit shorter, as similar grade routes on the west face of Snowpatch Spire in the Bugaboos—Surfs Up, for example. As such, we dubbed the route Koala-ty. The descent goes down the west aspect of the southwest ridge by downclimbing, finishing with a total of five 30-metre rappels down a gully system, which is described as "Route 3 Access" in the 1976 Kruszyna route and guidebook.

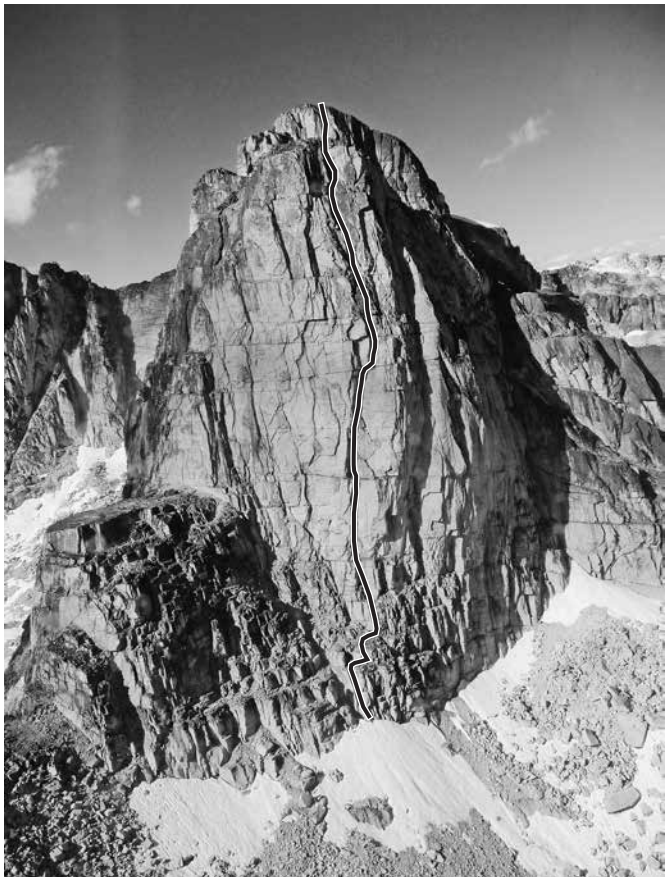
The next day we put up another probable new route, this time on the west face of Mount Sally Serena. The route is essentially the most direct line to the summit up the west face, which places it just near the huge corner between Sally Serena and the connecting face to Donnard Peak. Similar in length and grade as Koala-ty, Something About Sally is not as clean, and has more black lichen and stepped benches on it, but the climbing improves the higher up you get. We descended by downclimbing the south-facing slab wall of the large gully that separates Sally Serena from Koala Peak, and again finishing with rappels (two at 30 metres each) to a large ledge system, from which we could glissade down into the cirque. Overall, this area offers very fine unexplored moderate objectives on sections of good quality granite.

Summary

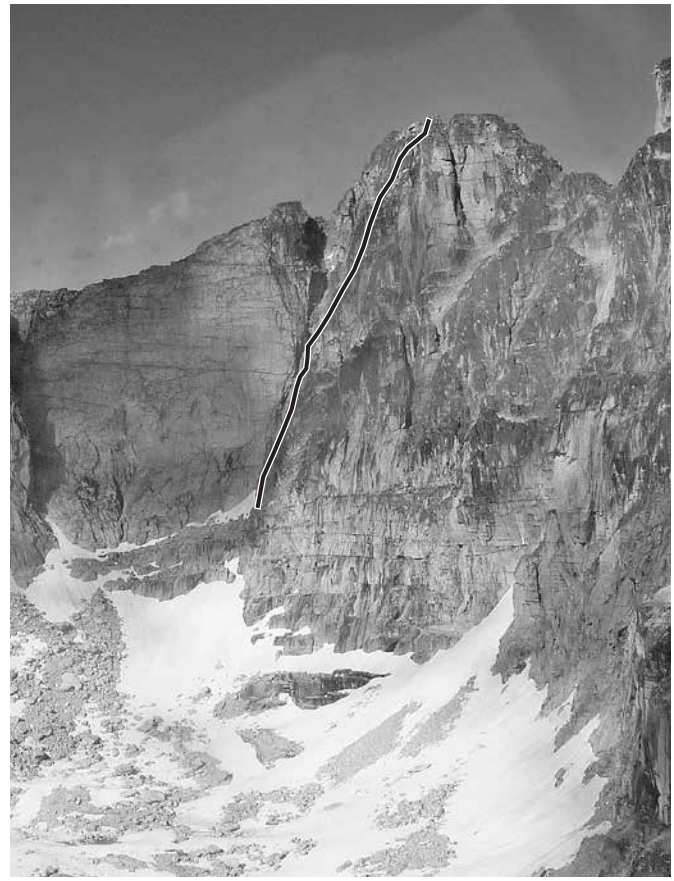
Koala-ty (5.9, 6 pitches), southeast face of Koala Peak (2940m), Starbird Range, Purcell Mountains. FA: Joanne Mauthner, Kirk Mauthner, August 21, 2011.

Something About Sally (5.9, 8 pitches), west face of Mount Sally Serena (3030m), Starbird Range, Purcell Mountains. FA: Joanne Mauthner, Kirk Mauthner, August 22, 2011.

Koala-ty on the southeast face of Koala Peak.
Photo: Kirk Mauthner



Something About Sally on the west face of Mount Sally Serena.
Photo: Kirk Mauthner



The Minotaur

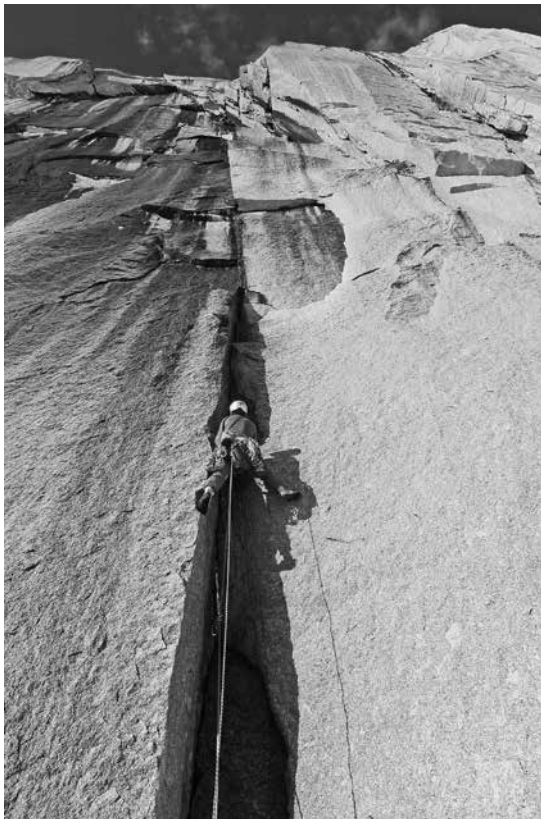
Colin Moorhead

JONNY RED HAD A PLAN. Whereas I wanted to test my mettle on the North Howser, JR was convinced that a spectacular new free climb lurked on the east face of Snowpatch. With two classy new routes to his credit on this wall, I was sure his estimation was accurate and I ceded to his program.

Amongst the pile of gear needed for this kind of venture, I had two special items. The first was my chalk bag, which mixed in with the regular white powder were the ashes of a dearly departed friend. Theresa Calow had stocked up my chalk bag a couple of days before with some of Andrew Langsford's ashes while we enjoyed an amazing day on the west face of Snowpatch. We climbed like he would have wanted us to, and we felt his spirit with us the whole day. The second item was a very used pair of La Sportiva rock shoes taken from Andrew's gear stash at his and Theresa's home in Golden, British Columbia. A hasty replacement for my recently blown out shoes, these ones were hanging on by a thread. They looked like Andrew had used them on many good adventures. While lacing them up at the bottom of the wall, I noted the fit was perfect and I knew that they would last for one more climb.

Utilizing the first four pitches of JR and Jon Simm's 2009 Labyrinth route to gain access to the upper two-thirds of the face, we were able to diverge into a line that roughly follows the old aid line of Les Bruixes Es Pentinen. The rest of the day was spent cleaning and establishing two new pitches. Counting on having two more days to finish the last 300 metres and establish a badass free route, I was alarmed when JR pulled the old "I have to be home sooner." If our three-day establish-a-500-metre-free-route plan seemed ambitious, two days seemed ludicrous. I was enthusiastically protesting Jonny's about-face when he just fixed me with his unblinking, reptilian stare and said: "We go down now, have a big dinner, and then tomorrow we dig deep and send." You can't argue with Jonny, so I submitted to his wild plan.

We were jugging our fixed lines at sunrise the next morning. Quickly re-climbing our two new pitches brought us to the overhang that provides a barrier across most of the east face. After a little cleaning and frigging, I was able to lower down to a large stance, pull the rope, and fire. The climbing was reminiscent in quality and style to the best pitches at my home crag of Nightmare Rock in Squamish. On the next pitch, JR hand-drilled the only new bolt on the climb to protect a devious traverse that bypassed a second un-freeable (for us) wet roof crack. Several pitches required this type of time-consuming tactics: pounding pins, excavating cracks, aiding then lowering down to re-climb hastily prepped pitches free. We did manage several first-try onsights of stout 5.11 crack pitches that would make seasoned trad climbers proud. Initially what seemed to be route-finding errors turned out to be elegant passages through steep terrain. Letting the mountain draw us into its folds rather than forcing our preconceived line, we were granted methodical upward progress by the alpine higher power.



Colin Moorhead on pitch one of The Minotaur.
Photo: Jon Walsh

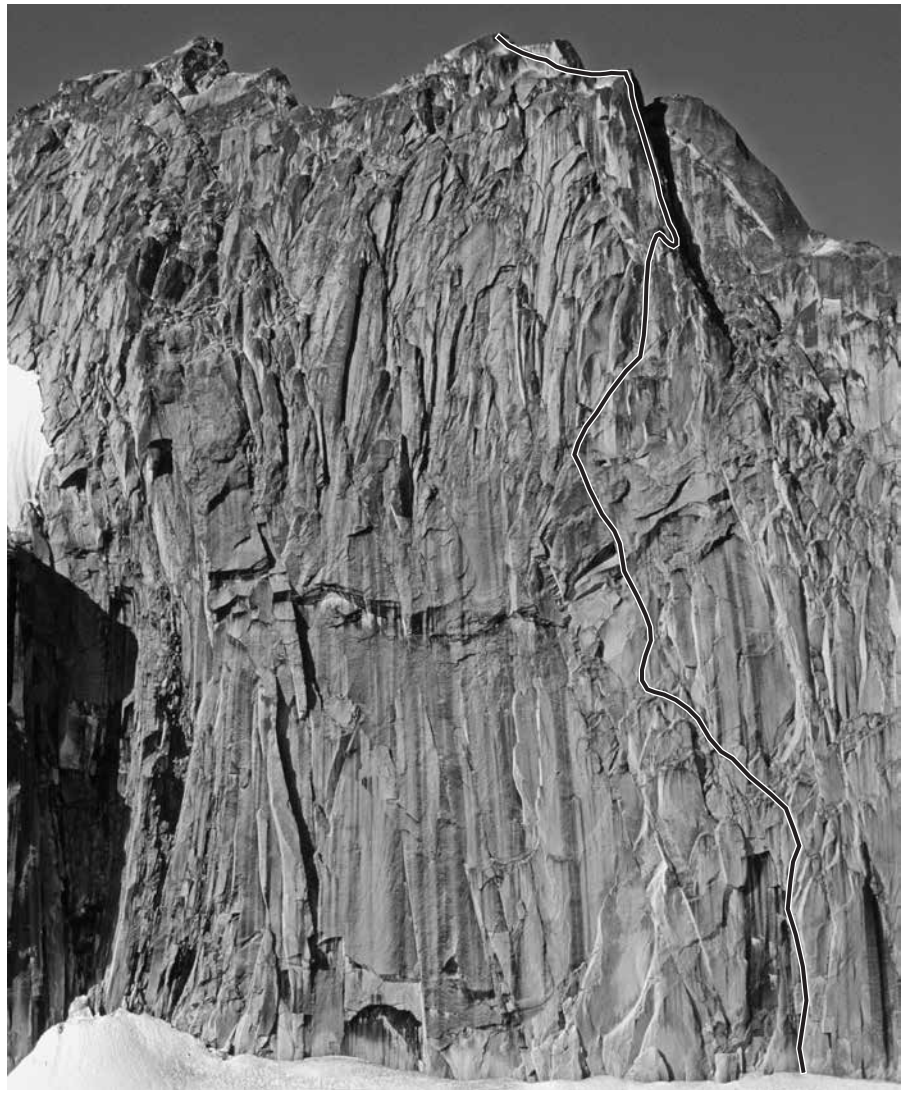
It was 6:45 p.m. and I felt really out there. Retreat from this high on the route was almost unthinkable. Our large rack might have been enough to get us down, but this was uncertain with so many leaning, traversing, and/or overhanging sections and acres of blank granite. Rapping the wall would take all our combined skill. Atop a large tower feature (Bruixes Tower) with about 100 metres of cliff above us, the original Les Bruixes Es Pentinen route pendulummed right. Jonny had previously climbed this final passage with another wild Canadian alpinist who, coincidently, also goes by the unassuming title of Jonny. These final pitches of their amazing Labyrinth route featured two pitches of 5.11 stemming and a final off-width that JR didn't seem to want to talk about. Our other option was to keep forcing the proud, direct line up the final phallic cylinder of granite above. Looking at JR, his preference was obvious. With dilated pupils and a fixed stare, flames almost licked from his nostrils when he exhaled. He wanted the intensity of the unknown outcome and the uncompromising line. As a professional alpinist and unchallenged hard man, JR is used to uncertainty and discomfort and is willing to roll the dice. As a fair-weather rock climber and occasional adventure *rock-pinist*, I just wanted to get up the damn thing and maybe not spoil our otherwise up-to-now free ascent. Jonny respected

my decision without showing any disagreement. I downclimbed a full pitch, which in addition to taking us away from the summit also added another pitch of 5.11 climbing. The pragmatic pendulum adopted by the first ascentionists was thus avoided by my personal quest for the all-free wall route. We were in full "rock robot" mode now, numb to run-outs and fall potential, cruising the intense stemming corners with little grunting or fanfare.

I arrived at the base of the final offwidth pitch with the last rays of twilight providing enough light to size it up. Indeed it was the real deal: a five-inch monster tracing an uncompromising line up a clean corner. Laybacking the wide crack by headlamp made me feel hardcore and competent. Slipping and narrowly avoiding a leg-breaking ledge fall made me feel reckless and foolish. Adrenaline allowed me to hang on, slot a knee and squirm to the top, all the while thinking about the # 5 Camalot sitting back at camp. At the top, I shut down and let JR lead me across the summit ridge and down the rappels of Sendero Norte.

At the base of the route, Jonny was far more coherent than me. This kind of venture is practically a weekend occurrence for him, whereas for me it was the culmination of all my climbing experience. He was throwing out names for our route. What can be a long and awkward process with an unsatisfactory outcome was cut short when he suggested The Minotaur. It really fit in with the Labyrinth theme, so I immediately agreed. From my vague recollection of Greek mythology, the Minotaur is a strong and proud mutant beast with striking auburn fur. The Minotaur feels mastery and ease within the complex and dangerous corridors of the labyrinth. Jonny didn't know it at the time but he was naming the route after himself.

The Minotaur is a 16-pitch line utilizing the first four pitches of the original Labyrinth route before striking out into new and/or previously un-freed terrain, roughly following the 1997 aid route Les Bruixes Es Pentinen for nine previously un-freed pitches, five of which were completely new ground. It then continues up the final three pitches of Les Bruixes, which were previously freed during the first ascent of the Labyrinth. An obvious and aesthetic direct finish (and possible direct start as well) awaits completion and will elevate this route to proud and independent. We used every quasi-acceptable trick in the book to pull off a two-day free first ascent of this line, including fixed ropes, pre-placed gear and placing fixed gear from aid. We still made the effort to lower back down and pinkpoint through these aid sections from no-hands stances. Ground up alpine free climbing with short time frames and weather windows often seems to require some compromises from stringent valley bottom redpoint ethics. Repeat ascentionists will be able to enjoy a clean route with some fixed protection and improve on our style.



The Minotaur on the east face of Snowpatch Spire in the Bugaboos. Photo: Jon Walsh

The east face of Snowpatch Spire is providing a new golden age. With abundant continuous crack systems, it will provide new spectacular free climbs for years to come. These new free climbs are absorbing and overwriting the previous adventures of the old wall routes, sometimes utilizing sections of three different old-school routes. In the shift to this new paradigm we should take care not to lose the history of previous bold first ascents.

Summary

The Minotaur (V 5.12a, 16 pitches), east face of Snowpatch Spire, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Colin Moorhead, Jon Walsh, August 27-28, 2011.

Entering Another Dimension

Shawn Tasker

I NEVER DREAMED of climbing into the unknown of new ground. For years I found myself intimidated by the thought of so many uncontrolled variables. Since that time I have found new lines more and more exciting. My confidence in my ability had increased to the point that I found myself approaching the mountains intent on a new route with my partner JT. It was a beautiful day with the heavy load of all that was needed to attempt a ground-up assault on the bastion that is Gimli, a monolith in the mysterious and isolated Valhalla Range.

JT, as always, was keen. We weighed some options and finally decided on a line he (and likely others) had spotted. To the right of Space Buttress on the west face are a number of disconnected crack systems. Could they be linked? We were about to find out. JT roped up first and set out fiddling in some gear and eventually traversing to the first prominent crack and establishing a belay at the base. I followed psyched to get moving past the first of a few hanging belays. The crack climbed well enough and then ended with a slightly overhanging flake that required some under-clinging.

We found ourselves in a corner with a short chimney, moving left and again unsure of what lurked above.

JT on lead: "Where is the .75 Camalot?"

"Here in the belay," I replied.

Some cursing, a few more moves, more cursing, more fiddling with gear. JT was at the lip of a slightly overhanging section and shouted down "I think this one is good," as he began to reach for the rope to clip. A moment and a popped foot later, he was falling, accompanied by the sound of failing protection. The first cam above my anchor held but JT ended up below me. My hand ripped open, his knee battered and bruised, we got off lucky.

On the ledge we contemplated whether or not to carry on in light of his recent plummet. The piece of protection above us was still waiting to be clipped. JT decided to give it another try, this time with the .75 Camalot. He made the clip and pulled over the lip.

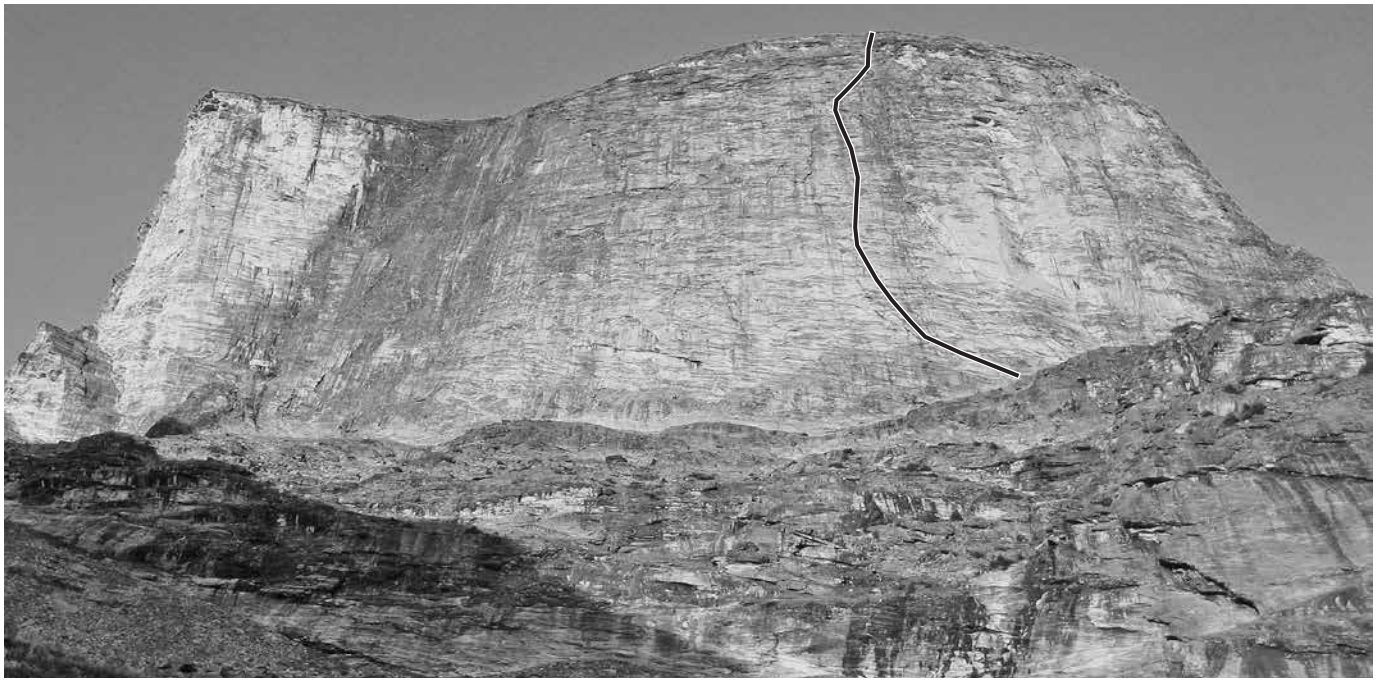
The next pitch ended in another steep flake, but rather then attempting the thin edge, I opted for a more direct route. I placed a cam with one lobe barely catching in the shallow groove that was my chosen line. "Don't think just go," was my maxim. A moment later, I was falling, and then abruptly found myself staring at that cam, that lobe. It held. With wits gathered, I concluded that the only thing to do was try again, this time a little more left. I pulled then pushed, and then found a jug on the top of the flake. The crux was overcome.

A few similar but less eventful cracks later we saw the top of the large corner where the climb Lusting After Women exits. A quick but tricky traverse and we were sure that we would be able to finish. The challenges had been met and we found ourselves on top, all of our pins and bolts safely stowed for another completely clean climb on Gimli.

Summary

Another Dimension (5.10d), west face of Mt. Gimli, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: JT Croston, Shawn Tasker, July 30, 2011.

Another Dimension on the southwest face of Mount Gimli. Photo: Shawn Tasker



Start left of the large blocky left-facing arête left of Lusting After Women. Follow the hiking trail from the "beach" toward the Gimli-Nislehiem col. Just before the trail descends steeply below the west face, scramble up a series of ledges to establish a belay at the base of pitch one.

P1: 5.9, 40m. Scramble up obvious ledge features for about 20 metres from the large left-facing corner system. Climb up for 10 metres then traverse up and left for 30 metres following below a small roof and steeper ground to belay at the base of a left-facing corner system. The traverse has gear where needed but could be run-out if placements are missed.

P2: 5.10a, 30m. Follow the corner system to a small roof, which is surmounted to a small belay ledge at the base of a large flake chimney (alcove). You will know you're on route when you see the wall to the left is blank with no holds.

P3: 5.10c, 35m. Climb through and left of the large flake chimney on some moderately steep face climbing to and through a small roof, then right to a horn and above to the next left facing corner.

P4: 5.10d, 30m. Follow the corner system trending to a small roof, either laying back the flake to the end of the roof or pulling over the roof (crux) to a small belay ledge.

P5: 5.10b, 30m. Climb out slightly right to an obvious left-facing corner with large flakes (if possible, keep gear in the corner to avoid rope drag). Continue through this corner, weaving in and out of the large flakes, following the easier ground to the hanging belay near to the top of the corner.

P6: 5.10a, 20m. Climbing slightly right then left under a roof up into a corner to a series of ledges. Climb a little higher to a sloped ledge traversing right to an obvious belay ledge 10 metres left from the large left-facing corner system.

P7: 5.8, 50m. Traverse into the large corner system making for the large notch near the top (joins pitch eight of Lusting After Women at the notch). Move up and through the notch in the roof and right to a large, flat belay.

P8: 4th class, 20m. Scramble up easy ledge systems to a large ledge.

Notes on the Hermit Range

Bruce Fairley

THE HERMIT RANGE is the lovely group of peaks that form the north wall of the Rogers Pass area. On August 3, 2011, Brian Cruikshank and I ascended the Swiss Glacier headwall above Hermit Meadows and descended to the Swiss Peak-Shaughnessy col. After dropping our loads we scrambled up the north ridge of Mount Shaughnessy in a little under 1.5 hours from the bivouac. The next day we climbed the south ridge of Hennessey in a couple of hours. Both were new routes. The rock on Hennessey was superb quartzite, and the climbing was more solid and pleasant than on Shaughnessy. None of the rock gear we packed was needed on either route, however. Both were gained by a loose gully that leads up to the north ridge of Shaughnessy. Exiting the gully is the crux of the Shaughnessy climb. For Hennessey, to exit the gully, we were easily able to pass below a large white pillar at the head of the gully and descend northwards to the col. Climbing either peak via the Swiss Glacier headwall makes for a pretty full day of vertical—over 2,000 metres—but avoids the bush approaches other parties have used. Views of the "cirque of the unskiables"—the north faces of Hermit Mountain, Swiss Peak and Mount Rogers—take your breath away. The Jeff Lowe route on the north face of Swiss looked barely climbable and hazardous.

I was pleased to see from Shaughnessy that the North Ridge of Rogers appeared as an elegant and graceful line. Dave Jones, Bill Durtler and I made the first ascent a couple of years ago. Having puzzled for several years over the conundrum of how to get down to the base of it, I eventually concluded the best way over was to just downclimb the entire ridge then climb back up, which is what we did! One low 5th-class step near the bottom was the only difficulty.

Mount Sifton lies to the southwest of Mount Rogers, and is likely only second to Mount Tupper in terms of visitation from parties based at Hermit Meadows. The only unclimbed aspect was the short northwest face, which Jeff and Joan Dolinsky and I climbed in July 2010 via snow and 3rd-class rock.

On Grizzly Mountain in 2006, next along the range, Jay MacArthur and I climbed the easy north face. We approached through the Sifton-Grizzly col, and the only real difficulty was an awkward step exiting off the rock onto straightforward snow. Our line went pretty much directly to the summit.

While climbing Catamount Peak in 2008, I had the opportunity to pass by the toe of the southwest ridge of Ursus Major Mountain, a route attributed to the topographic survey under A.O. Wheeler. It seemed to me very unlikely indeed that Wheeler had climbed this portion of ridge given that some stiff 5th-class climbing on poor rock looks to be necessary. The answer would seem to be in Wheeler's volume *The Selkirk Mountains: A Guide for Mountain Pilgrims*, where he describes the route as being obvious from Balu Pass. Wheeler does not indicate that one descends from Balu Pass to gain the route. He also describes the south face of Ursus Major as housing a glacier on its south aspect (the glacier is no longer there), which is, however, not mentioned in his route description. It would seem that he would have referred to the need to ascend the glacier to gain the southwest ridge. He says that the route is obvious from Balu Pass, but in fact most of the route is not visible from this aspect. Wheeler also does not recognize Balu Peak as a

separate summit in his guidebook, nor does he refer to ascending a couloir or the flank of the southwest ridge. I would conclude that his route was over Balu Peak and thence to the summit via the connecting ridge.

In any event, in mid July of 2009 I passed through Balu Pass and bivouacked on the slopes below the south ridge of Balu Peak. The next day I utilized an obvious couloir to gain the southwest ridge, which led quickly to the summit via nice blocky stone. This route seems very likely to have been climbed from Cougar Valley in the Glacier House days. Two short rappels (I had only a 40-metre rope) were needed to descend the east ridge, and I would think it has been a long time since one could have ascended the east aspect on snow. It looked like climbing up to 5.8 might be involved now. I then descended a little bit to attain Balu Peak via easy step kicking in snow up its fine little north face.

Southwest of Ursus Major is the shunned summit of Catamount Peak. The northeast glacier route was certainly not feasible when I made my climb in July 2008 and likely is not feasible now at any time except possibly in winter. I simply went up the east ridge from the col between it and Ursus Minor. The final portion of the ridge to the summit is very narrow indeed—a gangway with just enough room for one climber. The best way off or onto Catamount is to ascend right to the very southwestern toe of the southwest ridge of Ursus Major Mountain, where one can squeeze through a little gap then downclimb easily to the col.

I also went down to have a peek at the unclimbed north ridge of Catamount on this trip. It seemed more of a fin than a ridge and was beyond my soloing abilities. All of these climbs can be easily soloed by a competent mountaineer, but given the longer approaches they are unlikely ever to see much traffic. They do, however, take one onto some of the less-traveled aspects of the range and are fun to climb if one is looking for just a scramble in an out-of-the-way spot.

Summary

North Ridge (3rd class) of Mt. Shaughnessy (2750m), Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Brian Cruikshank, Bruce Fairley, August 3, 2011.

South Ridge (3rd class) of Mt. Hennessey (2824m), Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Brian Cruikshank, Bruce Fairley, August 4, 2011.

North Ridge (5.2) of Mt. Rogers (3169m), Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Bill Durtler, Bruce Fairley, David Jones, July 7, 2007.

Northwest Face (3rd class) of Mt. Sifton (2922m) Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Jeffrey Dolinsky, Joan Dolinsky, Bruce Fairley, July 2010.

North Face (3rd class) of Grizzly Mountain (2757m), Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Bruce Fairley, Jay McArthur, July 2006.

The north ridge of Mount Rogers (far right skyline). Photo: Bruce Fairley

Spicy Red Beans and Rice

Jon Walsh

IN MIDSUMMER 2011, Joshua Lavigne and I left Applebee campground in the early hours with intentions of exploring some new terrain on the west face of the North Howser Tower. Darkness faded as we crested the Pigeon Howser col and dropped into East Creek. As usual, the commitment of the west face started to kick in when we made the rappels to its base; although no surprise as this was something we had done a combined nine times before. Adventure was the goal, so with no topo, but enough food and fuel to last 36 hours, things were looking good.

We started up Shooting Gallery, but after two and a half pitches we veered left around the arête into new ground. Some nice pitches up to 5.11a ensued and soon the impressive upper headwall came into full view. By far the most appealing-looking line from our vantage point was the right-facing corner known as Warrior, and a little traversing soon had us below it. From our new position, a series of splitter cracks and small corner features to its right looked even better. What we were sizing up turned out to be Spicy Red Beans and Rice, although at the time we thought it laid further right.

After one 5.10 pitch on Warrior to get us off the ledge, we moved right into what we thought was virgin ground. I weaved the rope through a 5.11+ knifeblade pitch, and then fixed the ropes back to the big bivi ledge halfway up the face. After a quick dinner we both fell asleep before the sun had even set. With only one tarp and one light Thermarest as team bivi gear, it wasn't the best sleep. We warmed up by ascending our lines the next morning and Josh proceeded to fire what was the best pitch of the route—a lengthy straight-in 5.11 finger crack (the original topo called it the "sweetest finger crack ever"). I think we were slightly to the right on the next pitch and found a 5.11+ variation to the more direct 5.12-. Another wild pitch of the same grade followed after that, as well as a few 5.10s. The quality remained exceptional.

Joshua Lavigne re-joining Warrior at the 5.10 off-width pitch after climbing Spicy Red Beans and Rice. Photo: Jon Walsh

Eventually we climbed back onto Warrior for a few more pitches. The crux came on Josh's lead on the last pitch before exiting the face onto the much easier upper ridge. As the lichen-encrusted corner became too desperate, he punched it out onto the face and found the key to the free ascent at 5.12-. A little simul-climbing later, we tagged the summit, rapped the east face and stumbled back to camp with just enough daylight left—exhausted but stoked to have on-sighted every pitch of such an amazing route.

Our research over the next few days revealed that we had basically followed the route Spicy Red Beans and Rice up the headwall, established in 1997 by Eric Greene and the late Cameron Tague. We likely did some minor variations to the right on the fourth and fifth pitches above the halfway ledge, as well as on the last pitch before the easy terrain. We also climbed the lower face via a different line, although we were on Spicy Red Beans throughout its business section.

We'd highly recommend this route and both thought it was probably of better quality than its celebrated neighbour All Along the Watchtower, mainly because it has much more variety, receives more sun, is more sustained in the 5.11 range, and doesn't have such a difficult and sandbagged crux.

Summary

Spicy Red Beans and Rice (5.12-, 900m), west face of North Howser Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FFA (and probable 2nd ascent): Joshua Lavigne, Jon Walsh, August 7-8, 2011.

Losing Lately Gamblers

Jon Simms

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! My alarm shrieked at 1:30 a.m. I slowly opened my eyes to see Mike staring open-eyed at me. Minutes later he told me he hadn't slept a wink. Not a good way to start the day and attempt to pump a lap on the North Howser in a push. We got up and bumped into Braz, who was only just going to bed after a session on some new variation on the east face of Snowpatch. We had a quiet chat and he assured Mike that he hadn't sleep at all the night before either. We had been up enjoying the good times of a bottle of 16-year-old Lagavulin with JR Walsh the previous night. The difference was that Mike and I had a late warm-up cragging session on the southeast walls of Eastpost while Braz and JR were up at the crack-of-Christ new-routing.

This time we are taking the crack-of-Christ role. I had put the rack, gear and food together the previous evening at around 5 p.m. Mike lay in the baking hot tent of the August alpine sun. He didn't look so good the day before when he picked me up in G-town. He also informed me that he had hurled earlier that day. I was convinced it was just butterflies in his stomach from attempting a grade-six commitment climb. So a bit of downtime was probably a good idea. I had convinced him earlier that day that to take a lap on the Flaming Hack arête was a good idea. Forgetting the actual grade of the climb in comparison to what it is graded in the book, I suppose I sandbagged Mike on the first pitch.

So, back to the morning with Braz. He wished us well and we were off. We hiked by the light of the full moon. A beautiful evening/morning it was. Up and over the BS col we went. After a brief chat with a couple of ladies who had just had an epic on the northeast ridge of Bugaboo, we crossed the Vowell and down into East Creek. My pack felt good and light—we packed minimal gear for our adventure to come.

The granite of the Minaret radiated the moon's reflection—a very special sight. We continued by a few Yankee tents at East Creek and onto the Becky-Chouinard approach. Gaining some elevation, descending and re-ascending is the norm for the approach to the start of the rappels into the North Howser basin.

Mike was quiet all morning. I wasn't sure if our adventure would even continue past the start of the raps. "I'll have to admit to you, I had a couple of light-headed bouts on the way up," Mike said. I understood, given the all-nighter he had just pulled.

"Honestly, man, are you up for this?" I asked. I wasn't really worried for the first part of our journey, or maybe I was just ignoring his body gestures. Now, at the start of the committing raps, it was kind of put out there that we either do or don't. Once again Mike thought about it and gave his decision, which was to go for it. If it wasn't for the man's in-depth list of alpine ticks in the Canadian Rockies, I would have doubted him. But knowing Mike, I had complete confidence in his decision.

Down the raps we went, grabbing some water along the way. We landed on the North Howser snowfield. A quick crampon scurry across the snow, and to the base of All Along the Watchtower we arrived.

Mike geared up to start the first three pitches and we simu-led our way to pitch four. There, sucker pins and splitter white granite take you right into nowhere. We eventually figured out that a contrived move right off that belay is the correct way to go.

For the record, just before the climb I had replaced the ink cartridge in my home printer. For some reason it hadn't taken to the new cartridge and the printed version of our precious Watchtower topo was unreadable in places (as we later found out).

Thankfully the description was readable and we were on our way to the "good bivy ledges." As I tried to correct our previous off-route error, I heard a faint voice: "I need help."

I thought, Huh? What, Mike? Was I hearing things? We both looked at each other, slightly confused. Upon looking down, there was a small figure in the boulders below the snow. "No way, there's someone down there!"

"I need help!" she called again.

"What's up?" we yelled back.

"My friend has hurt his knee! Can you come down to help us?" she called back. Mike and I both looked at each other wondering what to do.

"Another rescue in the Bugs. Two in three years," I said. We chatted about what to do and whether or not to go down and help out. Mike thought he knew her. I yelled back down, "Is he stable?"

"Yes," she said. A few minutes passed and I still didn't want to start descending. Mike and I talked times and distance.

I wondered why the woman hadn't gone for help herself. "Maybe she doesn't know the escape way back to the Vowell," I said to Mike. Mike thought we should go down. I convinced him otherwise, that it wouldn't take much longer to go up and over and call a rescue from Applebee, where I have a radio in the tent. The other option was descending and walking around to where they were, taking slightly less time, give or take six hours. You feel quite helpless when your radio is back at the tent. "We'll call you a helicopter when we get to Applebee." I yell back down. "We aren't coming down!" I read the woman's body language and it didn't agree with my decision.

We continued to the 5.10 bits. A nice wide corner presented itself. "The meat and potatoes pitch," I yelled down to Mike. We were both climbing with packs, and I was careful not to squeeze my pack (my Platypus) into the chimney too hard. I think Mike might have mashed the potatoes in his pack in this corner. That marked the start of our gear

malfunctions, which I explain later. The next few pitches cruised by uneventfully with easy climbing to the bivy ledges below the five-pitch crux section.

Mike continued the lead up and out left to an obvious dihedral system. After a pitch and a half we realized we were off route again (we later found out that some Australians followed this variation and it ended up working for them). We again descended back to the start of the original crux section. At this point, All Along the Watchtower follows the main corner system, a deep chimney with some rubble that gradually steepens and turns splitter. With rack in hand, I launched up this gorgeous hand crack. Running the rope 55 metres to a nice stance, Mike followed. At this point in the day (about 5 p.m.) the winds started to pick up, as did a build-up of threatening cloud. I continued up another 40 metres on pitch two of our variation, which continued as hands, gradually tapering down to finger size and even smaller to tight fingers and some corner palm work. The face splitter gradually ended and turned into a thin corner with an amazing assortment of crystals for the feet. This pitch ate some time with the final moves ending in some technical side-pull traverse sequence on thin gear that probably went at mid 5.11. This stance was another miracle stance in a sea of steeps. More difficult climbing looked to be ahead with the corner tapering down to crimps, small cams and RPs.

The build-up of the approaching storm continued. Distant summits were being engulfed by cloud and the biting westerly winds continued. An electrical storm has a different look than a traditional low-pressure storm. At an upper elevation viewpoint, you can see through the storm. Distant mountains appear translucent. Wisps of cloud seem to extend downward like that of phantom ghosts passing by.

The start of our pitch three looked improbable. But like Squamish's most prolific first ascentionist, Colin Moorhead, says, "You have to try." So, I tried. Off the belay stance I placed a good small C3 cam followed by a good RP in a flake. Moves continued back left to the original corner system. Crimps and strenuous stemming led me into a small but in-your-face roof. Right hand crimping a friable ear, left-hand palm under-clinging. I managed to stuff another green C3 at about waist level into the slam-shut corner. Left foot pasted, right foot up to not much. Then, snap! "Whoa!" I yelled at Mike, whipping five metres, pulling the RP up and out, green C3 holding. Snapping the ear off, we both watched it hurdle the 20-something pitches below us. Adrenalized and eye level with Mike, I laughed at our situation. I got him lower me back to the stance and tried again.

"What?" Mike looks at me and asks like I'm out of my mind. "We've got to go," he yelled over the wind.

> Rumbles and flashes became more frequent in the near distance. Hail started and clouds swirled around us. We could feel the energy in the air.

Again, though I reference Colin, I said, "You got to send!" So I made one more attempt, climbing through the moves to the high point, putting the RP back in on the way past. This time, the right hand crimping the flat edge that once was the friable ear. *Sweet*, I thought, *a better hold*. Left-hand palm under-cling. Left foot pasted, right foot up to not much. Bearing down on the right hand I bumped my left foot up to belly-button level and reached up with the left finger to a tight one-finger lock and pulled. *I'm through*, I thought. I stemmed my right foot out to a nice pink crystal and re-established the left foot. "Yeeha!" I yelled, partially imitating my good friend JR, just as he had done in other memorable situations. Like he says, there are only three real sports in the world: race car drivin', rowdy ridin' and mountaineerin'. There's nothing like pulling a sick roof pitch on good gear. Anyways, "Yeeha!" I yell. I took in the situation: 5.12 moves on our variation on the North Howser, fully committed with a serious situation encroaching us. Doesn't it feel good to be alive? JR's words echo in my mind.

The pitch continues at solid +5.11. More thin cams and small nuts. The corner system keeps going. "Improbable," I kept saying to myself. The variation just kept sharing the love. Miracle pink-crystal feet and conglomerated pebbles littered the slam-shut corner walls. It was as if someone had construction-glued these pebbles into the wall. At 20 metres the pitch had another roof section. This pitch goes from left-facing corner work and transitions into a right-facing roof corner. I had a feeling lower down this is where the fun would abruptly end. So up, up, up I go. Still very sustained. Placing some more small gear, I pulled into the bottom of the roof.

Completely tired from the day and pulling hard at elevation, I thought to myself, this feels like the hardest thing I've ever had to do. The full day, the sustained climbing, the storm approaching, the distance we had come and the distance we needed to travel to get back to Applebee, emphasis on sustained. Pitch two and three of our variation that far was some of the most sustained climbing I've done in the Bugs. It's comparable to Divine Intervention with some 5.12 -. (By the way, Divine Intervention is a great route close to home and an excellent way to train for some of the sustained climbing the Howsers have to offer.)

Getting a nice red Camalot in the roof, I was still skeptical that it would go. Slam-shut above was how it looked. But once again, the North Howser goddess provided us with passage. Looking hip level and to the right, I saw a series of down-sloping pebbles glued into blank steep granite. Not the most confidence-inspiring pebbles because of their down-sloping nature. I reached around up and to the right, finding a reach-y side-pull for the right hand. I committed to the foot sequence and stepped through. "Sick!" I yelled to the air. It took a few more moments to climb the remaining

seven metres of the pitch. Then, a belay below a big overhanging roof at a not-so-good stance.

Mike climbed through fast, the weather becoming ever so serious and the wind that much more harsh. We were wishing for 4th-class terrain to put long underwear on. We had to yell at each other at this stance because of the wind. Racking fast, I kept going up the final few moves of the corner and grabbed a granite tufa! A granite friggin' tufa! Who would of thought? A series of jammed granite tufas lined the inside of the roof. Slightly detached, I was guessing, and hollow-sounding. This section of our variation needed time for the send, which we did not have. Gripped and feeling rushed, I didn't even bother. This roof section looked in the mid 5.12 range. Tufas led to a strenuous right-hand traverse protected by very good gear. I slid in a 3.5 Camelot and got Mike to take me. He lowered me slightly and I swung over right to the exit 5.11 pitch of the traditional Watchtower route, feeling quite relieved we were back on the regular route. I climbed up a fair distance beside and above the 3.5 cam to prevent rope drag. Feeling the need to go in a hurry, I started firing in pieces and pulling like a French sport climber in the Alps of Chamonix, then walking up cams with me and free climbing for a full 60 metres. This pitch would have been an absolute pleasure to lead on a nice day. I built a belay underneath yet another roof. Mike seconded, lowered out off my 3.5 cam and hauled ass to my belay. Tired and adrenalized I needed a rest. Mike grabbed the rack and led off up and right into easier ground. He quickly had a belay and I soon seconded.

Rumbles and flashes became more frequent in the near distance. Hail started and clouds swirled around us. We could feel the energy in the air. I climbed past Mike up 5.8 ground, trying to find a gendarme or pinnacle to get behind. A chimney or something would have been ideal, anything to offer a bit of shelter from the wind. Finding exactly that, I spotted a deep chimney with room for the both of us. I built a quick belay and put Mike on. As he climbed I started to ditch all the hardware on my harness in a pile beside the belay, knowing this was going to be our home for a few hours. Mike arrived and did the same. We were moving with urgency and soon were both wedged in the chimney, sitting on the ropes and packs. Mike was in front, me behind giving him a good old man-spoon.

We didn't bring any sort of bivy gear since we planned to do the route in a day. We had gambled with the weather forecast and realized we were about to lose. Not a wise choice given the situation. I kicked myself for gambling with the forecast.

They were calling for 35 per cent chance of showers that day, with not even a bivy tarp to hide under. We pulled our headlamps out and I clicked mine on. Mike's, on the other hand, wasn't so good. The wire going into the light had ripped out. I assumed it happened lower down in the squeeze section of the 5.10 meat-and-potatoes pitch. The realization of this gear malfunction was instantly clear—we were pinned there for the night, whether we liked it or not.

> I felt like this was the best birthday present I had ever gotten. Just to get off this thing alive.

And then the show started. The arrival of the electrical storm. The hail increased, wind continued. And yes, the arcing began. The saying "the calm before the storm" came true. The wind dropped, hail decreased. "Man, I think it's letting up," I said sarcastically. Then all of a sudden, bang! Holy pooper! The bolt of lightning hit about 25 metres away with no warning. There was a blinding flash and a piercing sound.

"Ow, my lips!" Mike said. The near strike had somehow reached his lips. "Well, that's a first." We were both half laughing and half concerned for our safety.

We huddled for hours, occasionally switching on the one remaining headlamp to see what was happening out there. The hail continued. We were thankful it hadn't yet turned to rain. The nest of rope and our half-wet packs were the only thing keeping us from getting soaked. As the night progressed, the hail turned to snow. It snowed constantly from about 8 p.m. onwards.

Being the good guy that Mike is (he's the one who always has the heavier pack and gives you his food at times in need), he was quite adamant about being the one in the front part of our man-spoon, his legs partially exposed to the wet snow. My position was quite comfortable. Aside from the wet rock pressed against my shoulders, I wasn't suffering too badly. As time passed, the temperature dropped a few degrees an hour.

Closer to midnight we both started to really shiver. We could only fend it off for so long. At first we kept our shivers to ourselves, but eventually we both inched closer into the pocket of warmth. After all, embracing another man is something not practiced very often in conventional society. I moved closer, like a high school first date: dark and silent. I just wanted Mike's warmth. Naturally, our man-spoon changed positions. Men in need, indeed. We shuffled sideways so we were both lying on our side. Chest to chest, man on man, we embraced.

Back on track here, the night hours continued. I flicked the light on at about 3 a.m. and we were covered in 10 centimetres of wet, cold, miserable snow. The chock stone that was wedged above us in the chimney started to release a slow drip that gradually increased in speed. We were sick of this shit. But we were helpless in the dark with only the one headlamp. We talked about the leader climbing with the light and the second climbing blind in the snow up the remainder of the 5.7 terrain. This didn't seem possible, so we waited until a half hour before dawn. I then led out at about 4:30 a.m. since I had the headlamp that worked. It was blowing snow from all directions. With crampons on I started up, plugging gear in and French-freeing. Still, it wasn't very fun. I got dead-ended once, returned down to the chimney and tried another corner. After

my first attempt up I was thinking, *shit, if this doesn't work, we're screwed and we're going to have to rappel the route*. It didn't seem like a very fun option given we would be volunteering ourselves to a face running with cold water. Ummm, no thanks. I tried the other option, and happy fuckin' birthday, it started to work. Oh ya, I forgot to mention it was officially my 32nd birthday. Not a place I'd expect to end up on that special day of the year. I climbed the rope length and found another chimney to hide in from the elements. Mike started in the dark, but it soon became light. He climbed up, grabbed the rack and continued French-freeing on gear. We were both fully bundled up with everything we owned for protection from the elements. The storm raged on. It didn't take long to be completely soaked to the bone. We eventually hit the summit ridge. The blowing snow started to blast upwards. It felt like my eyeballs were getting sandblasted. We had no goggles, and sunglasses were pretty much useless.

On the ridge I hit the wall and my crampons sucked—another gear error to account for. I had grabbed some old aluminum crampons from my basement in a hurry, and they weren't really ideal with the running shoes I was wearing. I had absolutely no confidence with my set-up. So Mike had to lead. And lead he did! His was an amazing effort to witness. He led through marginal gear, sideways run-outs, drifting snow and piping winds. He was right where he was meant to be in this world: comfortable and solid in a very hostile environment. That was a lead I will never forget. I thought, *if he doesn't send this leg of our journey, we were in real trouble*. Maybe we had stepped out too far?

Mike plowed through the convoluted summit ridge. It seemed like endless pitches of traversing ice, rock and snow-filled cracks. I sketched my way seconding across the ice. We passed a few words at the stances. Mike said, "There's going to be a lot of sad people out there if we don't get off this mountain." I agreed, and thought of the birthday date I was supposed to have down at Applebee campground with my girlfriend.

It was 2 p.m. the second day when we finally got to the summit. We would have bailed earlier down the north ridge of the South Howser, but hearing the stories of what's down there wasn't that inspiring. So we chose to find our friend Josh Lavigne's rap line down the east face onto the Vowell Glacier. His info was that it was four easy rappels to the glacier below.

On the summit we were engulfed in complete cloud. It still snowed and the accumulation in the past 20 hours since the previous night was about 20 centimetres. We both couldn't agree on the same gully to go down. So we waited and debated, trying to convince each other which was the correct gully to start rappelling down. There was no sign of any previous parties having rapped down anywhere. I had the great idea of getting Mike to take a look at his watch compass to see which way was north. But, right, the watch was burnt from the lightning. We ate a bit of our remaining food and continued to wait. Eventually the weather started to break just enough to see the orb of the sun for a brief few minutes. Within that small glance we figured out our bearings. We could also hear raging water thousands of feet below, which we concluded was East Creek. Another clue I gathered was from JR. At some point, he had mentioned that there was quite a substantial cornice off the summit. That was the cornice I was looking at a week before from the Crescent Glacier. I found where the cornice was, which had recently calved off down the east face, meaning there was only one gully to descend down. I got Mike to lower me into what I thought was the correct way to get off the mountain. I cut small slab avalanches off as Mike lowered me. We talked about the avalanche hazard. The temperatures were warm, just enough to make things more spicy. But we didn't really have any other options. Just as I was about to give up and let him know it wasn't the right way, I saw the first anchor!

Man, was I ever happy. I felt like this was the best birthday present I had ever gotten. Just to get off this thing alive. I hooped and hollered! I clipped into the anchor and Mike followed. We spent a good majority of our time cleaning the snow out of the gully. Small avalanches rocketed down off my feet as I rappelled. I swung in both directions cleaning all the hanging slabs of snow off the rock slabs. It wasn't as bad being in there as I originally thought. Halfway down the rappels, we heard a loud crack and thundering snow. I looked up, waiting to get nailed by something….It never came. It happened to be the next gully over that had fully cleaned out. "Thank God," I said. The last rap off the face and over the ice 'schrund was exciting. An airy position in a hostile place. We built one more snow anchor to rap, and cut the avalanches off the 45-degree slopes that led down to gentler terrain. Cold, soaking and tired we were both happy to be down.

The route back to the Bugaboo/Snowpatch col wasn't so straight forward. It was completely white again and the storm raged on. In places, we post-holed in snow up to our knees. Exhausted, we arrived at Applebee. My concerned, loving girlfriend Sarah greeted us with a birthday cake and a plethora of gifts and booze. I was exhausted but happy and appreciative of her thoughtfulness.

The first thing I did was call the local CMH lodge and let them know about the climbers in distress. The climbers were quickly rescued by helicopter by the local SAR team, and they even beat Mike and I down to the parking lot that night. We later heard they had found a cache of sleeping bags under some boulders to keep warm in the Howser basin.

We talked about our friend Andrew Langsford who recently died from cancer. His girlfriend, Theresa Calow, was supposed to give us some of his ashes to scatter on the summit, but we didn't get a chance to see her before we started our climb. We talked about Andrew throughout the climb. He was going to kick our asses and make it feel like the hardest thing we ever had to finish. And it was true….This story is dedicated to our good friend Andrew. Thanks for kicking our asses. We miss you, bro.

And to Carlyle Norman, RIP. You are deeply missed.

The Rockies

Man Yoga

Jon Walsh

LAST NOVEMBER, my good friend Jonny "the Simmulator" Simms and I completed the first ascent of Man Yoga, a high-quality five-pitch route at my favourite Rockies mixed climbing venue, the Stanley Headwall. Its makeup is typical to many others in the range: mostly drytooling on rock with some patches of thin ice lower down; an overhanging crux three-quarters of the way up; and a full pitch of vertical ice that flows from a cave just below the rim to finish. However, a monstrous arch approximately 80-metres wide and 60-metres high at its peak with a seven-metre horizontal roof running its entire length guarded the access. There's no doubt that this was reason enough that Man Yoga had been left unclimbed, or even unattempted.

The wall was an enticing 200-metre-high canvas of dark limestone with a beautiful-looking ice pitch at the top. Silver splatters streaked its belly to the lip of the arch, and it was easily seen from the donkey trail across the valley that services classics such as Nemesis, Suffer Machine and a dozen other worthy routes. I stared at it every time I had ever walked back there, and certainly hundreds, if not thousands, of other ice and mixed climbers had too. Naturally, I was enthused when Chris Brazeau suggested checking it out back in 2009.

When I tie in with Chris, magic seems to happen and as a result, some of the biggest highlights in my climbing life have been with him. A new route on the north face of Mount Alberta and a speed record on Torre Egger route are a couple of memories that stand out. Sure enough, the magic continued one cool January morning as we unloaded hefty packs of gear below the route. The arch rose above us like a gigantic entryway, and a ribbon of verglass stretched down from the apex, tempting us to stick our necks out. As inviting as it was to go direct, we agreed that a weakness through the roof looked dubious, and we'd be better off to find a way around it. A 45-degree hanging snow slope took us leftwards for half a rope length to the base of some splitter dihedrals where I won the roshambo for first lead.

The first pitch was a steep corner that ate picks and cams like it was starving for them. Thin-crack torquing at first, a small roof then a gradual widening to hand jams, some final roof moves through a slot, and a comfy belay ledge all made for a sweet pitch. The technical footwork and excellent pro had made it immensely enjoyable and rewarding. Looking up from there, it appeared we were onto something.

Chris soon arrived at the belay with a big grin on his face. Re-racked, he set out on the face above. He danced his way calmly through intermittent cracks and face holds, occasionally getting small pieces of gear before veering into a rightward traverse below an overlap. The climbing was brilliant, not quite as steep but much more cryptic, and more challenging to protect. When a seven-metre sideways run-out from his last piece occurred in terrain he wouldn't dare reverse, a micro Pecker was pounded into a shallow seam and the self-drive drill was hauled into service. By the time a bolt was placed, Chris was frazzled. Hand-drilling from a poor stance with an ice tool had taken its toll, and the delicate face climbing ahead offered no opportunities for protection. He lowered back to the belay. After I cleaned the pitch on second and attempted to pass his high point, I could see how close we were to the next belay stance. And I had a good view of the next pitch too. It looked like it would go, but we just needed a couple of more bolts to get there. Onsighting into the unknown on snowed-up terrain is tedious, time-consuming work and we were out of time after just two pitches.

It wasn't long afterwards that a skiing accident left Chris with a dislocated shoulder; he has hardly climbed with tools and crampons since. Although he seems to have healed well, his passion for skiing has trumped any other wintry pursuits.

When the following winter came along, the Simmulator said, "I need a good world-class man-yoga session. What about that line you and Braz started last year? We should go finish it." He was right, and Brazeau was happy to tag out. Man yoga was a term Simms had coined while establishing Drama Queen, another independent line located a few routes down the wall that we had authored together in 2005. "This is like man yoga," he had blurted on the naturally protected third pitch while grovelling up a run-out snow-choked flaring chimney that was steering him towards some overhanging car-sized ice blobs. "Chicks just wouldn't do this." He laughed and continued his battle, cracking relationship jokes with each body length of upward progress. Ever since, we've referred to any complex traditional climbing that involves the key elements of ice gear, engagement, virgin terrain, and physical and mental pump, as man yoga.

Facing page: Jon Simms on pitch three of Man Yoga. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

From late October to mid December 2010, we returned five times. I finished Chris's second pitch, which took a couple of more bolts initially and then three more were added on rappel. Every time we returned, we re-climbed it all from the ground up. We were committed on building a world-class route that people would want to repeat and be engaged on but not terrified. We never considered fixed ropes, since that wouldn't be nearly as much fun as climbing, which of course is always the main goal. Our good friends Tony Richardson and Troy Jungen joined us on separate outings and laughter remained a constant. Simms aced the traditionally protected third pitch, and I took on the fourth, which wound up being all fixed with a mix of pitons and bolts. While entering the crux roof band with a bolt at my feet and none placed above yet, I looked over at the belayers about 30 metres away (I was more sideways from them than up), only to see a lit Roman candle pointing in my direction. Moments later, I was locked off and ducking fireballs while laughter bellowed from the belay. I finished the pitch, and again added an extra couple of bolts on the way down. A lack of stances and gear on lead had made it impossible to add sufficient protection.

Between busy lives and work schedules, we weren't able to get back until the next season. The night before it was finally about to happen, Simms bailed on me, but fortunately Jason Kruk was available. Jason, a man-yoga guru, was stoked as he had heard about our project and was chomping at the bit to give it a go. The day went smoothly and we managed to make it up the exquisite ice on the last pitch for the first time—but not without a fall at the route's crux.

About a week later, Simms and I went back for the full send. We hauled the drill one last time to install belay stations at the final cave and for the direct rappel line. We also hauled and fixed 180 metres of static line for our friend Joshua Lavigne to use a couple of days later when we planned on returning for a photo/video lap with him. With all the equipment, our packs that day were easily the heaviest we've ever carried to the Headwall. This time all went well—no falls. We managed a clean ascent on shooting day despite the fresh snowfall making for full-value conditions. Even though it was my ninth time on the route, it was still a blast, and I look forward to going back again someday with different ice conditions.

We named the route Man Yoga with some light-hearted humour. Silliness is underrated. It's a style of climbing we like to practice as often as possible, and as Kruk pointed out, "It's a way of life." The experience as a whole was extremely satisfying as we felt like we put the route up in good style. Style is a crucial part of the process. How you get there is more important than where you get to. We were fortunate the features on our line all connected. Starting a project like this can be risky as you might invest a lot of time, money and energy and get dead-ended. Fortunately, we were never confronted with forcing a route up a blank wall with a bolt ladder or a series of drilled holes, like other folks have resorted to in nearby areas. That wouldn't have been man yoga. At the end of the day, it's all just climbing. Have fun and respect. Namaste.

Man Yoga on the Stanley Headwall. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Summary

Man Yoga (M8 WI5, 250m), Stanley Headwall, Canadian Rockies. FA: Jon Simms, Jon Walsh, November 2011.

Tsunami

Raphael Slawinski

SERACS ARE FUNNY. Not funny in a hilarious kind of way, but rather odd. On the one hand they are dangerous and unpredictable, and most people wisely avoid them altogether. But as alpine features par excellence (it could be argued that climbing becomes alpinism when a glacier enters the picture), they are also perversely attractive. I first noticed the ice strip to the right of Riptide a few years ago when Robert Rogoz, Eamonn Walsh and I dodged falling snow mushrooms up the latter route. Usually when I see a compelling line I file it away in a recess of my brain for future reference. However, in this case the scrappy mixed ground below the strip and the serac above it put it in the nice-looking-but-unreasonable category, and I thought no more about it. But I was reminded of it a year later, as Jon Walsh and I skied up the sunlit moraines below the Snowbird Glacier, bound for Rocket Man. From across the valley the strip looked more compelling than ever, and I found myself starting down the slippery path of rationalizing the risk involved in attempting the line. And so it was that a few weeks later, as Josh Lavigne and I cast about for a suitable May Day objective, I suggested we have a look at it.

I PULLED OVER AN ICE BULGE and came face to face with the serac capping the ice strip. It was not really nasty as far as such things went, and I felt better about our decision to spend several hours under it. All the same, it leaned past vertical like a frozen breaking wave. Fortunately a stream of water ice poured out of a crack in the serac wall, and allowed a merely vertical passage out of the shadowed world below into the sunshine playing on the windblown snow just above. I was also glad I was spared carving placements out of the hard glacier ice; getting sticks in the cold water ice was hard enough. As the angle of the ice kicked back I picked up my pace, hooking cracks in the surface of the glacier and running for the top. The top? I mean the figurative top, not the literal one. The literal top of the mountain was hundreds of snow-choked metres above, but a flat glacial bench would do. From where we stood, if we really wanted to, we could go left and walk down a snow couloir, or go right and downclimb the Snowbird Glacier. Of course we did neither but instead drilled the first of many Abalakovs and slid down the ropes. Still, it was the principle that mattered. On the way down we were reminded that a climb is not over until one is back at the car, as we battled a stuck rope while thick spindrift washed over us. May had come to the Rockies.

Summary

Tsunami (M5 WI5+, 300m, 6 pitches), Mt. Patterson, Icefields Parkway. FA: Joshua Lavigne, Raphael Slawinski, May 1, 2011.

Raphael Slawinski on pitch three of Tsunami. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

Tsunami on the north face of Mount Patterson. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Cragging on Cline

Eamonn Walsh

FROM THE DAVID THOMPSON Highway we contemplated the upper reaches of Mount Cline through binoculars. We could see that there was a coating of fresh snow up high. Standing there on the side of the highway, in cotton shirts on a cold blustery evening with only a one-day weather window ahead, we found it hard to not change our plan and simply stay low in the valleys to enjoy some warm, low-commitment rock climbing.

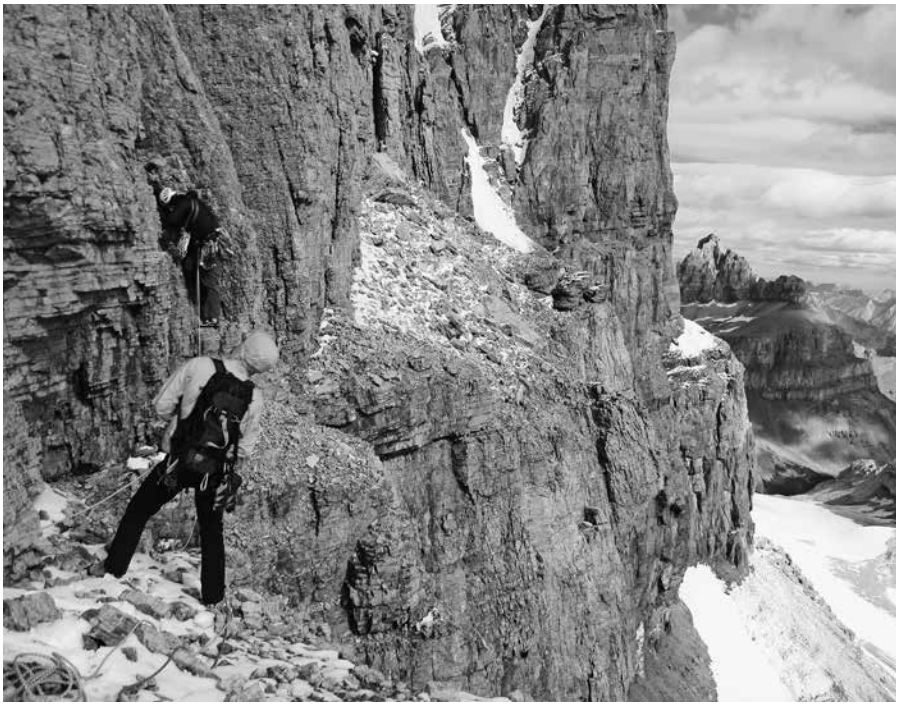
Thankfully, Steve, J and I are all of a similar mindset. Bivying under the open sky with cheese smokies, a campfire, tobacco and Scotch to keep us warm is preferable to a day of cragging or some other such fast-food type of climbing, even if the end result is hiking for hours upon hours and accomplishing nothing more than visiting a new area.

Being an after-work mission, it was already late in the evening when we finally started hiking. We did not hike far since J had a strategic bivy for the night. This is J's backyard, and with multiple guided ascents under his belt it's possible he knows Mount Cline better than anyone. Holeczi and I were getting a cushy first visit to this not-so-well-known 3,353-metre peak.

The next day, we were hiking by 5 a.m. After some light bushwhacking, we emerged into the open upper drainage below Cline and soon could see the southern escarpment, which happened to look outstanding. Our choice of route was easy to agree on—the striking and stepped south ridge. It looked to be the driest and it joined into the last two pitches of the East Face route that J had climbed in September 2006, so we knew the upper wall would go.

We arrived at the base by 8:30 a.m. at an altitude of about 2,900 metres. It was quite cold with the blasting wind and we garnered no warmth from the rising sun. We traversed west out of the sun along the base until we agreed on the best feature for breaching the first barrier. J started the first block of leads. It must have sucked leading that first pitch, having to pimp down on icy holds and funk in some tricky gear. This

Steve Holeczi and J Mills approaching the prominent South Buttress of Mount Cline. Photo: Eamonn Walsh



Steve Holeczi (leading) and J Mills on pitch four of the South Buttress. Photo: Eamonn Walsh

pitch and one up higher had the only bad rock that I can remember (technically, about 5.9, but it felt much harder in those conditions). J's next pitch was easier (5.7) and in the sun. Holeczi took over. Climbing with a grace that belies his bulk, he took a line that moved over to the east side for three pitches with difficulties of 5.8.

Then it was my turn. I traversed hard right looking for an easy way onto the crest but only found deep snow and icy features, so I returned to the belay and then checked out left. I found a nice corner with a small, fun roof and good gear (5.7). This pitch brought us to the crest, so the next lead was directly on the prow (5.8). After these two pitches, we were on a long, flat ridge that butted up against the upper headwall of Mount Cline, a feature that runs west to east and that all routes from this aspect will ultimately have to deal with.

J took over again since he assumed it was only one more pitch until we joined his 2006 East Face route. I was glad because it looked hard. It was while we were moving the belay closer to the base of the headwall that I noticed the sun had not been out for awhile. Looking around I could see hazy sky to the west and east, and the odd snowflake. It was time to worry. We were at a point where we could easily go down, but so far it had been such an amazing line and we were only a couple of pitches from the top where J could easily find his way down. Without bringing up the elephant in the room, I watched as J charged upwards.

J climbed the crack-corner feature quickly and confidently. By the time he had a belay set up, the scenery around us was shrouded in low-hanging cloud and the snowflakes were becoming more numerous. Following the pitch, I wrenched and pulled my way on gear to speed up the process. Holeczi followed clean, the climbing a solid 5.10. It was on the next pitch (5.9) that our line joined in with the East Face route. This pitch gained a large ledge, the left end of which is the key to the summit scree field. J took us up this final exposed, wet pitch topping out at 4:30 p.m. A full-on summer snowstorm swirled around us as we plodded the final 100 metres to the top in a whiteout.

After a brief summit visit, we started down the classic Southwest Face and at around 3,000 metres, the snow turned to rain. We reached our bivy at 7:45 p.m., cooked up some Ichiban, finished our Scotch and then continued our soggy march out. Needless to say, we were very happy that we did not go cragging.

Summary

South Buttress (5.10, 400m), Mt. Cline, Canadian Rockies. FA: Steve Holeczi, J Mills, Eamonn Walsh, August 17, 2011.

J Mills leading the crux pitch (pitch seven) of the South Buttress. Photo: Eamonn Walsh

The Myth of the Lost Camera

Brandon Pullan

HE HAD HEARD of the route after one fateful morning at the Rocky Mountain Bagel Company coffee shop, the kind of morning that traps anyone who walks in the doors, trapped by the lethargic energy and verbal stoke. I mentioned the route to him while downing coffee number four. With that much caffeine in the blood stream, the climbing chitter-chatter usually reaches level 10 of BS: pantomiming the almost-sent 14a and screeching about the wild scary only-climbed-twice north face of some far-off mountain. By the end of coffee number four, everyone is either comatose or heading out to scale either the nearest wall of the library or scary face. Cian chose the latter. With thoughts of TV-sized blocks tumbling downwards in the background of my mind, the prospect of nabbing an oft spoken-about third ascent of such a trophy route was at the forefront, driving me back further and further towards the Robertson Glacier. But, before I continue I must embark on the historical tale of this route.

Take One

1988. ANDY GENEREUAX and Jeff Marshal, two of the Rockies finest rock climbers at the time, explored Mount Robertson for a potential route up the seemingly fine-looking west face. An obvious gully with solid-enough-looking rock meandered up the face that dropped below the western summit of the two peaks. They choose this line because of its free climbable appearance and perhaps the solid nature of the stone. After bivying at the base they scampered up to the summit (route description coming in Take Three) and proceeded to freak out due to looming doom clouds rolling in from the west. As the rain and hail poured, they panicked to get off the summit before electricity found the nearest point between land and air—likely a pair of helmets.

With a self-drive bolt kit, they found a zone where a safe rappel might be possible. They pounded in a quick bolt (one) and headed down into the gully, the east gully of the two. From here they pounded in another bolt (one) and rappelled. From the base of a gully feature they put another bolt in (one) and rappelled 55 metres down into a flat, barren wall with no ledge to be seen. From a hanging rappel, they fired in another anchor, one bolt, but this time backed it up with a dodgy angle pounded downward into an expando flake. From here they headed down into another gully that provided safety from the pounding weather, and another bivy. In the morning they realized Jeff left the camera on the summit rappel bolt, far from their current position. They continued to the ground and left for home. Drawing a topo and noting that their camera remained clipped to the top anchor, the myth of the lost camera began.

Take Two

2006. EIGHTEEN YEARS passed before another party headed up to repeat the climb, and again it was two of the finest local climbers, Raphael Slawinski and Eammon Walsh. The pair established a bivy site that remains today: stacked blocks in a semi-circle near the scree cone that leads to the base of the west face. They climbed the route to the summit but were unable to find the original rappel bolts. So, in haste to descend, they rappelled the route. What once took three days now took two. Raphael drew his own topo, posted it on his website and noted that they never found the descent, and therefore could not settle the missing camera myth.

Take Three

2011. CIAN AND I are also two local climbers—one being a rope gun and the other being, well, me. We exit the car at 5 a.m., and it takes three hours for us to reach the base of the route. After a few minutes of gathering thoughts and pounding food into our faces, we stash the down jackets and muckle up the scree cone.

I head off over 60 metres of limestone and pound in the necessary pitons. Off Cian goes past the icy chimney and out onto the face. Off I go up onto a face and into a chimney. The climbing is fine 5.8. I cannot believe no one has been back up there, wink, wink, nudge, nudge. Off he goes up into the grotto. He is fast. I follow the 5.10 climbing. A foot-hold blows and I bash my knee. I curse. I curse everything. I scream and tell Cian what I think of him. No pro, bad rock, throbbing knee, I head left into a possible variation that ends up being a splitter 5.9 seam. Up I go. Now he heads up the 5.11 crux pitch— stacked egg shells and dusty cracks. He does a fine job, of course. I second. He always makes it look easy. I pump and pull, pull and pump until I reach him. I'm worked with an achy knee.

In fine style, he grabs the rack and tackles the upper bedding plane—a splitter crack for 60 metres. Wow, every move is 5.10 hard, every move harder then the last, no rest, no ledge. Cian does well; I sweat it out and join him. One of the finest traditional pitches I have climbed. I am off up the next 5.10 pitch, easier then the last but still steep and dusty, Dusty! I chill the nerves and pull a small roof into a grovelly loose chimney, stemming up to a hanging belay. Cian joins and is off into the void. He takes a long time, rocks bigger than my head whiz by out of the gaping hole, the rope sending them southward. It must be the longest squeeze chimney in the Rockies, guaranteed. Rocks continually pepper me while seconding. The walls are falling apart. It's a bad place. Cian heroically heads off again on steep climbing: 5.5 on Raph's topo, 5.9 on Andy's, 5.8R on ours.

I limp to the top and we agree that the rockfall was the worst we had ever seen. Rappelling the route was not an

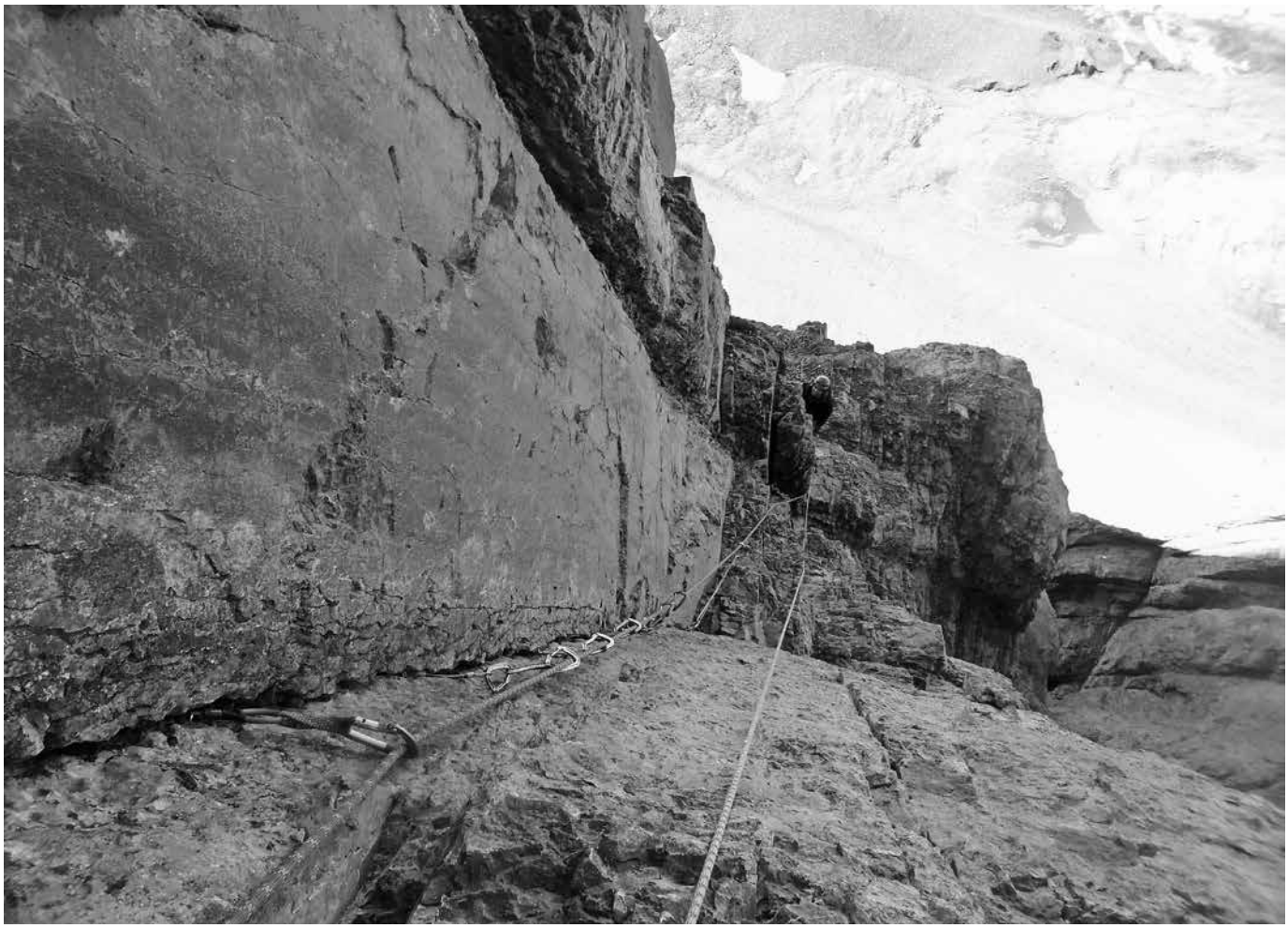
option. We were happy to be on top but orange hues silhouetting Assiniboine meant it was time to go down. Looking for any sign of Jeff and Andy's descent, we traversed the top of the west summit and began heading down toward what appeared to be a col. Raph mentioned he could not find the original rappel, so if he couldn't, how could we? As I mention to Cian to keep his eyes peeled, a single bolt appears with rotted time-bleached webbing. We replaced the sling but found no back-up for the bolt. "Do NOT use these bolts! They were placed in a hurry!" I recall reading from the original topo. *Tuck that notion away and use the damn bolt*, I thought. The next bolt was not on the topo. Andy forgot about one rappel and so we were left looking, dazed in the dusk. I unclip and straddle a broken pillar as Cian scouts into the east gully, and alas, finds a bolt. Almost headlamp time, the next rappel is down through a squeeze. The cold air from the glacier rips up our pant legs. Assiniboine is nearly gone in the distance, absorbed by darkness. I spot a bolt and my clenched stomach eases. Another lone bolt with faded webbing, but this one is accompanied by an old piton. A 23-year-old anchor used once. I clip in and hang freely, feet dangling. The one thing that encourages confidence in all of this chaos is the knowledge that the bolt was placed by Andy Genereux—and if there is one thing that Andy can do, it's place a bolt. Our shadows dwindle as we pull the ropes, both of us hanging on a self-drive and a useless piton. I hold my breath and think light thoughts, very light thoughts.

Cian takes off down the gully. From there we don our headlamps but miss the next anchor, so Cian quickly builds one. After I pull the ropes, he hurries off again but misses the next one as well. I find it on my way down, so Cian climbs back up through a waterfall and joins me on a large chockstone. The muddy two-piton belay will do but our rope seems to be stuck. We yank for 20 minutes and finally it comes down. One last rap, and then down onto the snow cone and scree that leads to our packs. We only have to suck it up for three more hours to the car and then our day is done. Once on the ground, I recall how there was no sign of any camera or camera strap along the way, and so, almost a quarter of a century later, the myth of the missing camera is settled. A pack rat must have pictures of Andy and Jeff pinned up in its cave.

Summary

Third ascent of the West Face (5.11a) of Mt. Robertson, British Military Group. Cian Brinker, Brandon Pullan, July 20, 2011.

Cian Brinker belaying on a splitter 5.9 crack variation on pitch five of the West Face route on Mount Robertson. Photo: Brandon Pullan



Fairview's Northeast Rib

Glenn Reisenhofer and Marc Schaller

AS MY FAMILY AND I soaked in the rooftop hot tub of Deer Lodge, my mind began to wander amongst the peaks of Lake Louise. Whyte, Popes, Unnamed, Collier, Victoria and Lefroy presented themselves in their finest fall glory. The larches had reached their prime and the snow had not yet arrived. I imagined Donnie Gardner and Charlie Locke continuing their 22-peak traverse after first crossing the summits of the Valley of the Ten Peaks. As my body sank further into the hot tub, my gaze shifted towards the closest peak. My daughter, sensing an unguarded moment, splashed bromine-laced water into my face.

After the brief water fight my attention drifted back towards Fairview Mountain. The aspect above the lake contained a number of high-quality bolted sport climbs. Maybe there's another area, or better yet, a line that sneaks up towards the summit. Squinting through the swirling mist, a line started to emerge. "Look at that great rib of quartzite," I enthusiastically stated. My family ignored me, splashed me again and continued their soak—their eyes glazing over at my constant mountain enthusiasm.

The Northeast Rib of Mount Fairview. Photo: Glenn Reisenhofer

The climb unfolded in my mind's eye. A trail led up towards Saddleback. The path cut through an avalanche slope. Hike up the avalanche slope to the base of the rib. Climb some nice quartzite to reach the very large balcony at the top of the rib. End with some easy boulder-hopping towards the summit where a trail would take you back down to Saddleback. Accessibility jutted out as easily as the hot water that pushed into my back.

Two weeks later I was back with my good buddy Liam Kavanagh. Unfortunately, several centimetres of white stuff coated the rib. The first pitch was straightforward and blocky. The second pitch passed some trees and greenery on the right side. Beyond, the rib morphed into a beautiful crack-ridden face. Cold fingers and slippery lichen-covered rock prevented us from getting past the third pitch. With plenty of time we rapped down and ran for the sun.

Winter covered the rib with a thick mantle of snow and Fairview continued to creep into my mind. I dreamt of quartzite. The long winter continued. I told friends. Photos were shown. I dreamt of summer. Summer is busy for me with most of my time occupied by work. When could I get back there? The rib was certainly out of my sight but not out of mind.

During one of these obsessive moments my friend Marc Schaller became interested in the route. Marc has a fine nose for sorting out an upward path and is always keen on great adventures. We lined up a date in late July for our excursion.

THE EARLY MORNING arrives with a piton being driven into my dreams. A baby angle is sliding into a crack. As the hammering continues, I realize that the noise is coming from Marc's hand as he pounds on the window to get me out of bed. I figure the best way to start the day is to sleep in and since I'm too

groggy to focus, Marc will continue the story:

THE ADVENTURE WAS seeded by a story of a previous attempt climbing wonderful Lake Louise quartzite with proud positions and a short approach. I was in. Our day started predawn in Calgary, and the drive was filled with coffee, talk of the upcoming summer, our families and the mountains. Our approach is definitely short and soon we see the targeted buttress. Quartzite often leaves me guessing. Besides the solidity and marvellous crack systems, there are also boiler-plate slabs with little in the way for gear or holds. The first couple of pitches go without a hitch as we weave our way up clean low-angle blocks and faces. We hoot and cheer for the fun of it. Soon enough the angle rears up, and Glenn's pitch takes him up a clean face with a couple of laser-cut cracks. Bomber! His semi-hanging belay is set by a slight groove/crack with nothing but clean, bold quartzite beside and above him. As I approach, I see that things will soon get interesting and I steady myself on the already acute climbing.

After a quick transition I finally get the chance to lean back and take in the challenge of the next 30 metres. Straight above the belay has very few options and nothing for pro but both left and right have a suggestion of a route. Glenn recalls his previous year's October attempt ending at this pitch after cold fingers from snowy rock and lack of bomber pro. Choosing the right-hand option, I establish myself into a wide stem that gives access to the required gear to continue. Further right leads to a shallow corner topped by a small roof, both revealing signs of cracks just big enough for our small nuts and pins. The moment I leave my stemming stance, I enter ground that puts my weight on my arms, and any remaining footholds are shallow and covered in moss or dirt. With my nut tool acting as a spade, I progress up the shallow corner to an OK nut and finally to a position below the roof that gives access to a horizontal crack shouting out for a Lost Arrow to be hammered home. The pin goes in, I clip the rope and finally I can look up higher to see a ledge system above the roof and passage to easier ground.

With the confidence of the new gear, I smear my feet high, move the hands through some cracks and finally gain the ledge where I'm greeted by a 15-centimetre covering of moss on every surface. Not knowing what is solid to hold my weight, I kick steps—á *la* snow climbing—up through the moss garden and run the rope out to a cave devoid of thick vegetation to arrange a multi-piece anchor in rapidly deteriorating rock. Glenn climbs up, gives a couple hoots and it looks like we're done with the technical crux. Now just a few hundred feet of steep but very featured rock continues up the buttress to the skyline. We swap pitches up the rib observing some extreme variances in rock quality from teetering multi-ton, rope-chopping boulders to perfectly fissured bulletproof-hard quartz.

Our top-out happens before we realize and soon we're sitting on the mountain's upper talus slopes, partially bummed that there's no more climbing and yet psyched to have just climbed a full-value line. We chill for a while in the sun, and then crunch our way up to the summit and the stellar views of the glaciated peaks around Lake Louise. A wonderful day in the mountains!

Summary

Northeast Rib (5.9, 8 pitches), Fairview Mountain. FA: Glenn Reisenhofer, Marc Schaller, July 31, 2011.

Marc Schaller on the third pitch (crux) of Mount Fairview's Northeast Rib.
Photo: Glenn Reisenhofer

Pussycat

Raphael Slawinski

ONE OF THE COOL THINGS about playing in your home mountain range is going back to familiar places and seeing them in a new light. Like, say, tiptoeing up delicate mixed ground and thin ice right next to the massive Weeping Pillar. Contrived? You could say so. Fun? You bet!

2008. EAMONN WALSH and I took a few days off and went on a little road trip up the Icefields Parkway. Our friend Dana Ruddy was away, but that did not stop us from crashing in his basement in Jasper. From there, on the first day we climbed No Use In Crying, an unlikely four-pitch line well left of the Upper Weeping Wall. On the second day we took care of some unfinished business on the left margin of Curtain Call, calling the result Cyber Pasty Memorial in honour of a perennially untanned friend who had recently given up ice climbing. On the third day we headed back to the Upper Weeping Wall to try a line to the right of Weeping Pillar that we had spotted two days earlier. The first pitch went up an intimidating crack with the occasional ice smear—more Alaskan than Rockies. I was in the moment, torquing and tapping away, when from the belay Eamonn drew my attention to the increasingly large chunks of snow and ice flying overhead from the sun-baked walls above. We ran away and headed home just as the Parkway was being closed for avalanche control.

2011. "I ASKED my landlady about her pussycat last night. Did I say something wrong?" the ever-polite Swiss asked anxiously.

"No, not really. But just be sure to keep the 'cat' in there," replied me, the adopted Canadian. And so it went as we sped north along the snow-covered Parkway. We did not feel like freezing in the shade, and so headed to the Upper Weeping Wall. Even in deep, dark December that fine wall basks in the sun. The objective? The crack to the right of Weeping Pillar, and then whatever looked good to the top of the wall.

The crack was just as good as I remembered, even though the ice was not very user-friendly. Once or twice I found myself wishing I had brought some big cams. But I was glad to have a rock hammer as I rooted around for a solid belay in a maze of snow-covered rock. We exited the second pitch on a thin veneer and slogged up and right across the big snow ledge running across the Upper Wall.

The ice strip enticingly marked "Unclimbed" in the guidebook (though who knows for sure) petered out a few metres above the snow. The Swiss put on a fine performance, bouldering the unprotected start above a crash pad of deep powder then gently tapping away at the ominously booming sheet of detached ice, with screws that were more Christmas decoration than protection. Fittingly, we topped out just as the last bit of daylight faded in the west.

Pierre Darbellay and Bertrand Martenet approaching Pussycat on the Upper Weeping Wall. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Summary

Pussycat (M7 WI5R, 180m), Upper Weeping Wall, Icefields Parkway. FA: Pierre Darbellay, Bertrand Martenet, Raphael Slawinski, December 4, 2011.

The route parallels Weeping Pillar on its right side with interesting mixed and thin ice climbing. Climb the obvious crack 15m right of the fat ice for two pitches with a belay on a narrow snow ledge on the right (no fixed gear). Slog up and right across the snow ledge to the base of the upper ice strip. Climb the strip on improving ice for two pitches to a tree on the right. Gear: cams to #4 Camalot with doubles of #1 and #2, half a set of nuts, a few pins and screws (including stubbies).

Facing page: Raphael Slawinski on pitch one of Pussycat on the Upper Weeping Wall. Photo: Pierre Darbellay

New Ski Traverses

Mark Klassen

THE WINTER OF 2011 in the Rockies saw one of the deepest snowpacks in memory. Having skied here for nearly 30 years, I recognized opportunity when I saw it and knew that I needed to jump on some long-term projects. Stable conditions and good weather in late April and May led to completing these potentially new trips.

North Rockies High Line

LUCKILY, BEFORE THE season even started I had arranged a spring traverse from Jasper to the Clemenceau Icefield. With the excellent coverage we were seeing elsewhere in the range, I figured that the high-line variation I had been eyeing for some time would be in good nick. From April 18 to 26, six of us skied this variation of the original North Rockies Traverse, first skied in 1967 as part of the Great Divide Traverse. It avoids most of the bush that previous parties have had to deal with.

Of the 15-plus long ski traverses that I have completed, this one was possibly my favourite. It goes below treeline only three times, crosses 13 cols and passes, and is very scenic. Combine that with never quite knowing what lay around the next corner, good weather, stable snow conditions and a fun group, and we had all the ingredients for a great trip. This tour finished the Great Divide Traverse for Eric, Felix and I, although it took us four different trips spread out over seven years to do so!

We started where many parties have before, going up Portal Creek near Marmot Basin ski area in Jasper. However, partway up the creek we made our first deviation off the regular route by crossing the east ridge of Maccarib Peak then going over the Maccarib-Oldhorn col. This avoids the long, flat route over Maccarib Pass and cuts several kilometres off the trip to the Wates-Gibson Hut.

After a night at the hut we made our way south past the toe of the Fraser Glacier and down to the headwaters of Simon Creek. Here we left the normal North Rockies route for good and turned west into the valley between Blackrock and Elephas peaks, camping at treeline.

The next morning we climbed steeply over the col to the north of Blackrock Peak and dropped down to treeline above the Fraser River. Unfortunately, on one of our descents Glenn took a tumble and hurt his knee. After some discussion, the sat phone came out and 1.5 hours later Glenn was on his way to Golden with Don McTighe of Alpine Helicopters.

After this mishap we made our way to Beacon Lake and set up camp late in the day on the glacier above it.

Day four was a big one. First we traversed a col above the Beacon Glacier and dropped into the Middle Whirlpool River through open forest. Then we climbed out of the valley and went over a pass east of Mallard Peak before descending into the main Whirlpool River, again through easy, open forest. From there it was a long, flat hike up the river through meadows and over historic Athabasca Pass to find our food cache just on the west side of the pass (thanks to Mica Heliskiing for placing the cache).

We took it easy the next day and did a short ascent onto the Kane Glacier to set us up for crossing the Hooker Icefield. We expected this next section to be one of the cruxes of the trip due to: a) some uncertainty as to how easy it would be to cross the col to get onto the icefield, and b) the descent we had picked down the south side of Mount Hooker had never been done as far as we knew.

In the end it all went swimmingly and the crossing of the Hooker was perhaps the best day of ski touring I've ever had. It had a little bit of everything: stellar weather, boot hiking, great views from a high icefield and an 1,800-metre descent to finish off.

We woke at 4 a.m. and were moving out of our glacier camp by 6:30 a.m. with a temperature of -11 C and not a cloud in the sky. A fast trip up the glacier led to what we called SYP col. Shit Your Pants col involved 100 metres of boot hiking up through bottomless snow that lay over crumbly rock and then a long, exposed traverse along a ledge above a cliff. This got us to the col at 2,800 metres. An easy drop onto the icefield below led to a glide down to the icefield and then a long, flat walk in the heat of the day around Mount Hooker.

From the Kane Glacier we had been following a route other parties have used in the past, but just past Mount Hooker we left it again. From the lowest point between Hooker and Mount Serenity we made a fantastic descent to the southwest. First down a glacier in an impressive basin with icefalls all around, and then down moraines and finally through open, mature forest to a hanging valley. From there we traversed down valley below avalanche paths and above a canyon before making a final descent through thicker forest to the Wood River at 1,000 metres. An easy wade across the river led to a camp on a gravel bar and a campfire to dry out beside.

The next ascent contained the only character-building bush of the trip. Directly across from our descent of the previous day we worked up a drainage to where it steepened and then cut left up a steep cutbank into thick forest. Bush saw in hand, we battled through this for about 150 vertical metres before it opened up. From there we followed a rib to treeline. Hugging the trimline of the forest below a huge basin, we made camp 1,000 metres above the Wood and at the last of the trees.

Another early wake-up started the final day. A ramp through moraines led to the glacier beside an impressive icefall. We ascended the glacier through a broken section and then to the last unknown col of the trip. It was easily gained on the north side and had a short but steep

Erica Roles above Beacon Lake on the North Rockies High Line. Photo: Mark Klassen

descent to the main Clemenceau Icefield on the south. From here we glided past the impressive peaks of the Clemenceau as they shed the clouds they had worn since the morning. A last ascent to the Tusk Glacier brought us to more gliding down that to the Cummins Glacier. A short jaunt across the Cummins, a call-out on the sat phone, and Alpine Helicopters was whisking us off to Golden by late afternoon.

The Lake Louise Traverse

I've been looking at a high-level ski traverse through the Lake Louise group for a couple of years, waiting for when time off and the right conditions coincided. The late spring of 2011 and a willing partner in Conrad Janzen combined to make that happen. I don't know of anyone who has done this exact route on skis before, although there are rumours that a similar trip was taken on a guide exam back in the Stone Age.

A wake-up at 3 a.m. in Banff led to a start at 5 a.m. from the Lake O'Hara parking lot. We followed the classic ski tour around Narao Shoulder and up the glacier to the col at the base of the east ridge of Popes Peak, arriving there at 8:30 a.m. From that point, it was new terrain for a good part of the day for both of us.

A steep ski down the couloir to the south over avalanche debris led us to the Plain of Six Glaciers. Then we trotted up under the high ramparts of Mount Victoria and Mount Lefroy with seracs from the Upper Lefroy Glacier spitting ice down regularly. Luckily the glacier is wide, and we could avoid the icefall zone easily.

From there our goal was the Mitre col, the notch at the base of the east buttress of The Mitre. Steep slopes led us to the col by 11:30 a.m. Some cornices threaten this route, but if you move fast, exposure time is short. The col on the west side of The Mitre, beneath Lefroy, looks like it would work too.

There is another steep south-facing couloir that leads to Paradise Valley from The Mitre. It was midday and the crust was just holding in; a little while longer and it may not have carried our weight anymore. At this point, the south-facing cliffs on the high peaks were really starting to go off and large wet-snow avalanches and cornice collapses were occurring almost non-stop. This would continue to the evening, but we were able to stay away from these

Conrad Janzen committing to the Popes Peak col couloir on the Lake Louise Traverse. Photo: Mark Klassen

features. The more moderate terrain we were on for the rest of the day had reasonably stable snow.

From Paradise Valley we climbed to Wasatch Pass and skied down to the Valley of the Ten Peaks. We coasted down through larches to the moraines and followed the creek below to Moraine Lake. By now it was about 4 p.m. and we knew we would be finishing late, so Conrad made a quick phone call to Coralee from the payphone at Moraine Lake Lodge (which was still closed for the season). "Honey, we're going to be a bit late...."

Then we made the long slog up Consolation Valley. Things were cooling off nicely though, in our favour. Consolation Pass, at the end of the valley, is not as straightforward as the map suggests. It's steep at the top and carries some huge cornices. Thankfully, the cornices are smaller at either end of the col and we managed to bypass them on the right quite easily after boot-packing up the last section.

Our original plan called for an exit out one of the cols leading into Chickadee Valley. However, it was 8 p.m., it would be dark in an hour and a half and yes, we were tired. So we chose to take the fast route out via Boom Lake. (The Chickadee Valley exit would be an excellent finish to this trip.)

The upper basin was crusting up and this made for a fast cruise to treeline where conditions turned to nice corn snow in the trees. Ankle-deep slush on Boom Lake slowed things down a bit, and the flat trail out of Boom Valley seemed slightly interminable.

We got to the road at 10:30 p.m., 17.5 hours after our start. It took a bit of time before we could convince a vehicle to stop for us and take us to our shuttled vehicle at the Chickadee Valley parking lot. Standing in the middle of the road and waving our arms seemed to help. By midnight we were at Aardvarks in Banff eating pizza with the drunks.

Summary

North Rockies High Line Traverse, Jasper to Clemenceau (105km, 7500m of elevation gain). Felix Belczyk, Glenn Dorey (first three days), Phillipe Gauthier, Eric Harvie, Mark Klassen (guide), Erica Roles (guide), David Storwick, April 18-16, 2011.

Lake Louise Traverse, Trans-Canada Highway to 93 South Highway (40km, 3000m elevation gain). Conrad Janzen, Mark Klassen, May 21, 2011.

2011 Tsar-Somervell GMC

Zac Robinson

THE 2011 General Mountaineering Camp (GMC) was held in a new location—a special thing for the 106th consecutive GMC. A new location in either the Rocky or Columbia Mountains is a rarity for the longest-running mountaineering camp of its kind. And what a place it was. Just above treeline and just below the west face of Mount Somervell, the camp was perched on a high meadow, sheltered and comfortable, and buttressed by sublime views of the Shackleton group to the north and of Mount Tsar rising high in the south. To the west, the world seemingly dropped away to the deeply etched valley that held the mighty Shackleton Glacier, the headwaters of the Kinbasket River. Remote. Seldom visited. Perfect ingredients for the GMC.

If only the weather was as good as the site…. Hearty folks, those GMCers. A late spring with heavy snow required no small effort from Brad Harrison's exceptional set-up crew, who, in full-on winter conditions, assembled our *city of tents in the clouds*. Participants in Week One travelled with snowshoes and avalanche transceivers—a first for the GMC—and winter didn't really release its grip until Week Three. Whatever challenges, however, participants and staff still managed to do what they always do during the six-week camp: climb, explore, and enjoy the company of new and old friends in a spectacular backcountry setting. By mid-season, regular ascents were being made of Mount Tsar, which, rising to an elevation of 3,424 metres, was the prized treat of the camp.

Louise, Wally and Andrew peaks also held special appeal. Each was named to commemorate the memory of dear friends of the camp who are no longer with us. Toasts to the life and times of Louise Guy (1918-2010), Wally Joyce (1915-2010) and Andrew Langsford (1970-2010) were a regular feature around the dining tables under the canvas last summer. And from the summits, more than one heartfelt yodel bounced down through the valley in their honour.

Management-wise, 2011 was a transition year for the GMC. It was the first summer in decades that long-time camp outfitter Brad Harrison didn't orchestrate the show. Harrison stepped down from his position after 25 years of dedicated service. Harrison's resolve had brought the camp back from near obscurity in the 1980s and rebuilt it to the marquee event of today. Those familiar with Brad missed his presence, his usual frenetic pace, the whirlwind of energy that kept the camp humming, bad jokes and all.

The more things change…. A highlight of the summer was the evening when Paul Geddes and guide Matt Mueller strolled back into camp. The two had suspected that Mount Odell, a stunning black fin of rock just south of Mount Tsar, might actually be unclimbed, so off they went in the early hours of the morning, giddy with anticipation. They successfully climbed the peak's northwest ridge. Nearly the entire camp went out to greet them upon their return. Excitement filled the air. The cheering crowd did all but hoist the sheepishly grinning pair up onto their shoulders. Dinner was kept warm and waiting for Paul and Matt, but those assembled were nevertheless treated to a full account of the day. It was hard to tell who was more proud—Paul and Matt or everyone else! As it turned out, theirs was the second ascent of Mount Odell, but it mattered little. The scene was perfect—probably not unlike the GMCs of a hundred years ago when so many locations were new and mountaineering in the Rockies was young. Hip-hip-hurrah.

Despite the weather (and, er, that pesky road washout in Week Three), the 2011 Tsar-Somervell GMC was a great success. Thanks to all who made it possible, including Alison Dakin, Dan Verral, Don McTighe, Dave Dornian and the GMC Committee, Richard Guy, as well as the ACC office staff. The guides, leaders, managers and cooks all worked extremely hard to provide everyone who attended with a wonderful backcountry experience. We hope to see you at the 2012 Sir Sandford GMC. It's a new location, too.

2011 GMC Ascents

Mountain	Route	Parties	Participants
Mount Somervell (3105m)	West Face variation	1	2
Mount Odell (3146m)	Northwest Ridge	1	2
Little Odell (GR427695)	Via the Tsar-Odell Glacier	10	86
Mount Tsar (3424m)	West Spur/North Ridge	5	32
Wally Peak (GR431817)	Southeast slopes	11	113
Louise Peak (GR442708)	East Ridge	12	120
Andrew Peak (GR454807)	Southeast slopes	7	43
Mount Ellis (2954m)	Ellis-Somervell col	16	136
Consolation Peak (GR443695)	West slopes	1	3
Tsarzina (GR444734)	West Spur	4	30

The Mentor

Brandon Pullan

FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE morning, the day after Halloween, was a bad time to tell a local alpine legend that I would be at his front door and ready for a two-day mission. The night before, I had attended a notorious annual local Halloween party, and, for one reason or another, had forgotten that a Kenny bash often goes until 5 a.m. As luck would have it this year the party ended at 4:30 a.m., which gave me ample time to sober up and drive to Sharon Wood's house where I was to meet Jim Elzinga. Goes without saying that when I knocked on the door at 5:05 a.m., Jim was ready, set and stoked with a few coffees in him.

"Hey, man! You ready! This is going to be awesome!" Jim said exuberantly as he swung the door open.

I was seeing double, and the essence of cheap wine was stuck to my palate. I reeked of skunky weed and was wearing someone else's shoes. To say the least, I had surprised myself that I even made it to Sharon's house. Jim was none the wiser as I sported a stoked grin and put on my best sober chat. We loaded up Jim's truck and I took right to the heated seats. With Jim in the captain's chair I focused very hard on getting three hours of sleep before we arrived at our destination.

Jim and I had plodded and post-holed for four hours into a beautiful alpine cirque. By 2:30 p.m. we had the tent set up and food on the go. We nestled into our tent, a tight one-and-a-half-man accommodation. Jim is six-foot-six, so the tent was tight. However, in my hung-over state of mind, I was simply content to be horizontal.

Jim is one of the most accomplished climbers I have met. Though few know of his extensive list of fine sends, he is among the best Canadian alpinists and mountaineers, full of tricks of the trade. One such trick was that where the tent meets the ground Jim had gotten a friend to sew on large flaps that you could put stones on. This prevented any wind from getting under the tent—a seemingly obvious feature that tent manufacturers leave out.

Snow had begun to fall and with it my ability to formulate sentences. So, while in the tent, Jim started to tell stories. He has a lot of stories, but most are best left in the tent. Woven throughout his yarns were lessons, rare bits of information between the lines: simple things like keeping a lighter tied around your neck in the tent since it is always the first thing that goes missing.

As Jim went on, filling the clean crisp alpine air with words of climbing in Peru, Nepal, the Yukon and so on, I faded in and out of dreamland. I had read about Jim a number of times in Sean Dougherty's *Selected*

Jim Elzinga is the mentor during a winter attempt on Fumbles on EEOR, Mount Rundle. Photo: Brandon Pullan

Alpine Climbs, in Chic Scott's *Pushing the Limits*, and in a variety of *CAJ* articles. Jim's account of his and John Lauchlan's winter ascent of the Ramp Route on Kitchener's north face is hands down one of the most bad-ass Canadian alpine ascents, but nothing I had read about Jim gave me the real insight into his mastery in the mountains. So as he talked, I listened.

The next morning came quick. The valley bottom was green, but up in the alpine where our tent hung tight against the winds of the Rockies, it was full-on winter. Our plan A was therefore nixed off our list, but the plan B we had spotted the day before seemed the perfect consolation. We left the tent and approached upwards. An hour and a half later we stood beneath a virgin piece of waterfall ice. The line itself, although aesthetic and stunning, was by no means cutting edge; it was just a fine-looking piece of ice. Jim had not stopped smiling all morning. This was his first new route in more than a decade—a man with new routes on a number of continents. Jim was an integral part of the 1986 expedition to Mount Everest that saw Dwayne Congdon and Sharon Wood stand on the summit. He had also organized dozens of successful international expeditions, climbed the Southeat Buttress of Logan for more than 15 days with Lauchlan and the Burgess twins, and made the first ascent of Slipstream. Despite this vast resume, he was as happy as ever while we roped up beneath this 100-metre drip of moderate ice. On a side note, Jim has become known as Uncle Clint to us young folk due to his resemblance to Clint Eastwood and his natural cowboy ways with his denim suit and old-school sensibilities in the mountains.

As I headed up the climb Jim shouted out encouragements and before I knew it I was halfway up my first ice route of the season. The initial metres are always a bit shaky as the transition from summer rock-climbing mode to ice mode takes a move or two, but as I stood beneath the upper pillar it all came flooding back. The fresh snow from the night was lightly pouring down the surface as I heeded upwards. The ice was brittle and

The Mentor on Cirrus Mountain. Photo: Brandon Pullan

fat for early season; we were in a high, cold spot. I finished the ice onto a steep snow slope with nowhere for an anchor, so as I climbed up Jim began his swinging. After 30 metres of me post-holing and Jim sending, I came to a blocky roof where I quickly smashed in three baby angles up into a crack that would become our rappel station.

"Was that only 60 metres to here?" Jim looked confused.

"Nope, about a hundred. We climbed together for half of that," I said, awaiting a lesson in simul-climbing.

"Awesome! So you want to be a climber, do ya, kid?" he replied intensely.

"What do you think of that anchor?" I laughed back.

"You're rapping first!"

As we hung out and laughed about our first climb together Jim looked over and said, "You got it, kid! That was perfect!"

We got back to a snow-covered tent and packed for home. The day had been a success. We talked about possible names and in the end Jim said it was up to me.

It was about a month before the trip that Jim and I were sitting in the Georgetown Inn having a few pints and a burger when Carlyle Norman joined us for a bevy. It was her first time meeting Jim. We drank, joked and had a great night. A short time after, Carlyle mentioned with a big smile that Jim is a great Mentor.

Summary

The Mentor (WI4+, 100m), Cirrus Mountain, Icefields Parkway. FA: Jim Elzinga, Brandon Pullan, November 2, 2011.

Mount Joyce

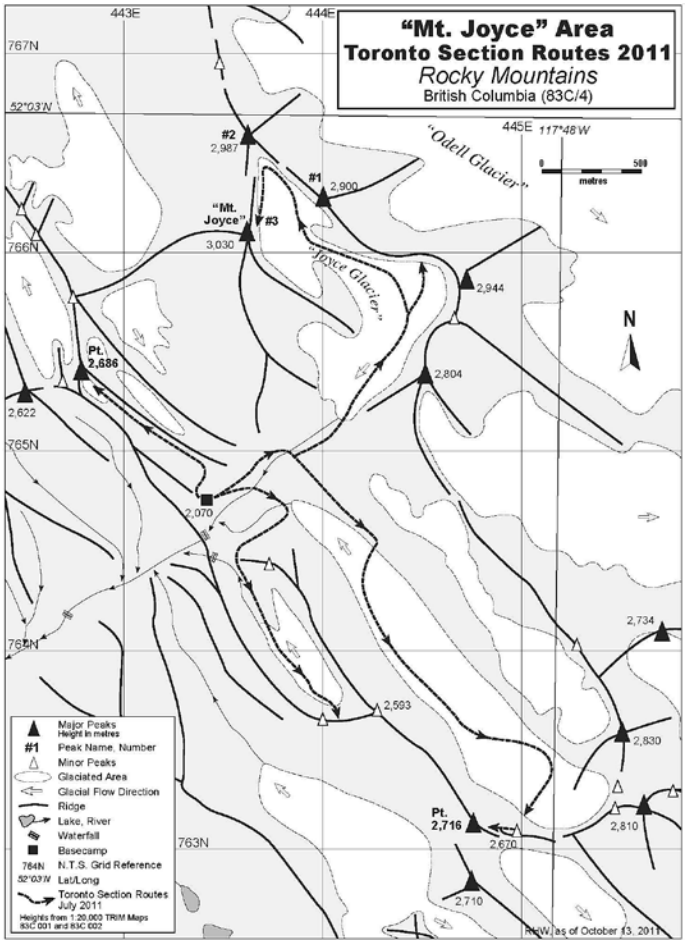
Paul Geddes

WALLACE R. JOYCE passed away on December 9, 2010, at the age of 95. The Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) has since published several articles on Wally (see the *CAJ* 2011, the spring 2011 *Gazette* and the spring 2011 Toronto Section newsletter). Wally had been one of our climbing companions, and this past summer we planned to summit an unclimbed peak and name it in Wally's honour.

David Jones and Roger Wallis are two well-known ACC members who track unclimbed Canadian peaks. They knew that in the area south of the 2011 Tsar-Somervell ACC General Mountaineering Camp (GMC), there were still a number of unclimbed peaks. Roger produced a detailed map of this area of the Rocky Mountains, which showed several climbing objectives that included an unclimbed peak over 3,000 metres. This area (map 83 C/4) is difficult to penetrate. While logging roads can get you part of the way, access by helicopter is necessary.

During his long climbing career with the ACC, Wally had visited the Clemenceau area twice. In 2000, at the age of 85, Wally had camped at the Tsar-Somervell col with his Toronto Section buddies. That year he also made his last of several trips to the Adamants. I have no doubt that Wally would have gazed upon these remote summits on one or more of these climbing trips.

After months of planning, on July 23, 2011, a group of five ACC Toronto Section members waited patiently for the helicopter to finish all of its runs to the GMC campsite. We only needed a six-minute heli-hop across the Kinbasket River to drop us off at the head of the first major tributary passed en route to the GMC site. We were excited to land at "Joyce Camp" (2,070 metres, GR433645). It was a beautiful setting: a gravel expanse; above, a steep headwall of tumbling waterfalls. The glaciers had covered this site less than 75 years ago. Their retreat is so recent that there is very little vegetation and, as a result, no wildlife in the area.



THE NEXT MORNING we organized our gear and ascended our first unclimbed peak in the area. Peak 2,686 metres was a short distance from our camp. We climbed the southeast ridge to a steep and narrow snow gully leading to the summit blocks. It felt good to have all five of us on a summit together. From here we looked across at the imposing west ridge of our proposed objective and its snowy summits. We were excited to be in such an impressive cirque of unclimbed peaks. We were certain that this unclimbed prize was destined to become "Mount Joyce". Before descending from the summit we looked far up the Kinbasket valley and saw the meadows of the GMC, its tents just tucked out of our line of sight. Wally had attended more than 40 ACC camps during his 55-year climbing career.

Our priority for the following day was a reconnaissance of Mount Joyce. From base camp we had a clear view of the initial approach: ascend a polished rock headwall below the snout of the "Joyce Glacier" and attain the snow-covered glacier above. Thoughtful route-finding allowed us to accomplish this in good style. Willa, Bill and I followed the side edge of avalanche debris, which had recently triggered off the slopes of our intended route. The avalanche had laid bare the underlying rock slabs below its crown. This was the largest summer avalanche that any of us had ever seen. It was powerful enough to travel more than a kilometre down the glacier, leaving in its path car-sized blocks of ice. We reconnoitred the proposed route up Joyce, until we obtained views into the huge snow and ice cirque forming the southeast face of the mountain below one of its sub-peaks. With the knowledge that we would have a good chance of making it to the upper snow ridge on our route, it was time to play on something else. For the rest of the afternoon we challenged ourselves with some sketchy climbing to attain the col between Mount Joyce and its

impressive unclimbed neighbour, Peak 2,944 metres. After taking in the views of Tsar Mountain and Mount Alberta to the north we focused our attention on downclimbing back to the glacier. We returned to camp, and over dinner plans were made to get everyone to the summit the following day.

July 26 produced miserable climbing weather but we were committed to summitting Mount Joyce as this was the main focus of our expedition. With the weather against us, Willa volunteered to be the day's basecamp manager. Bill and I gave Roger and Don a head start up the glacier. We caught up with them at the halfway point to the summit. We all took a short break huddled in the mouth of a small crevasse. Bill and I moved ahead to establish a route. Cold, rainy weather and post-holing made the climbing difficult.

I became concerned about the snow stability as I led up the steepening snow face between the avalanche release zone—with its 10-metre-deep crown—and a 150-metre-high sloping glacial ice serac. Not only was the snow isothermal and sitting on glacial ice, but there had already been a massive slide on this very slope. I was sinking up to my thighs attempting to make a platform with every footstep. I knew Don and Roger would have an equally tough time following through this section.

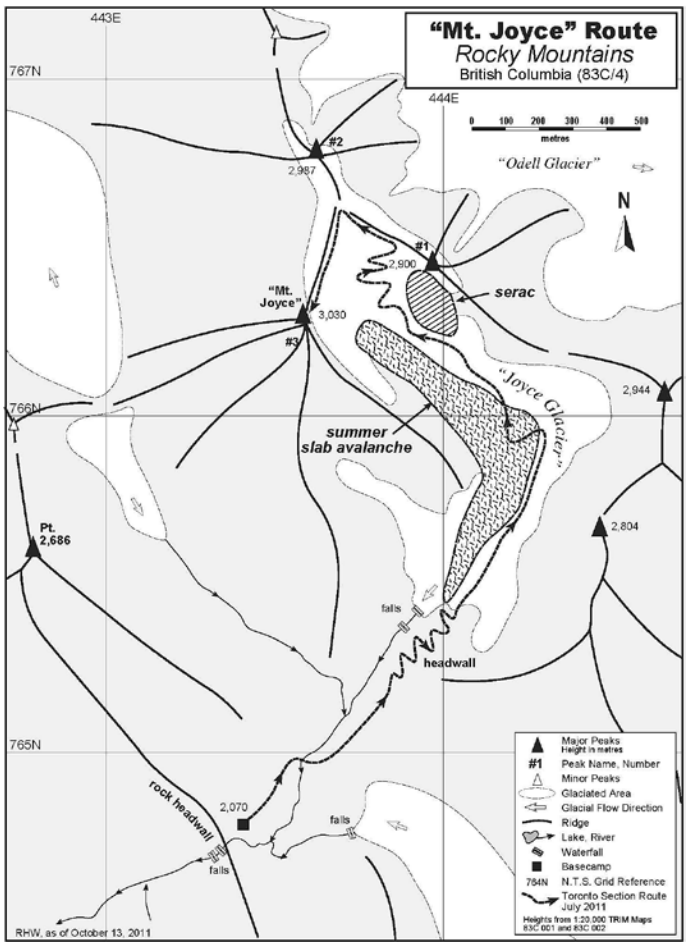
Bill and I pushed on to the ridge leaving the steep snow face behind us, but we were now fully engulfed in clouds. There were no views and no reference points visible to us along the north ridge as it curved up to the left. We knew we were passing close to the second sub-peak. Though it was only about 200 metres away, we only sensed the faintest hint of it in the swirling cloud and snow. To our right was a cornice with a 400-metre drop-off straight down to the Odell Glacier, and to our left, a steep snow slope that disappeared down the east face. We left some wands along our route to mark several of the cornice fractures. There was no doubt where our steps were though, as we had been on a breakable crust along the entire ridge.

Finally, just before 1 p.m., rock became visible through the clag beyond the snow ridge—the summit! An extremely narrow *au cheval* snow arête lay ahead. Bill and I booted across it and scrambled onto the summit, very pleased with our success. We raised the others on the radio and shared the good news. For a very brief moment there was a break in the clouds and we could peer down to basecamp 1,000 metres below, where Willa had been following our progress with periodic radio calls. The blowing snow quickly returned. Bill and I explored the precipitous summit, a small limestone rock outcropping at an elevation of 3,030 metres (GR 436661). Many mountains are hosts to Bill's mega summit cairns, and here we built a substantial monument topped with a Canadian flag as a memorial to Wally. Roger and Don arrived at the start of the exposed snow arête, their haggard faces peering at us through the cloud and blowing snow. We offered all the help we could: "Careful, don't fall here. It's a slippery slope, ha-ha!"

The four of us spent an hour huddled on the summit together. Reverend Norm Greene, a Toronto Section member who had climbed with Wally in years past, had written a memorial service for Wally. Roger read it to us, and we had a moment of silence. We placed a record of the ascent with a copy of an article on Wally and the hand-written service in a waterproof container in the cairn. This mountain, a symbol of one of the central joys of Wally's life, will remind us of him.

Scattering some of his ashes to the mountain winds was our last tribute for Wally. Roger carefully retrieved from his pack the felt bag that Wally's family had delivered before we left Toronto. It contained a small vial, which he handed to me. A quick step onto the summit, a burst of wind, an arc of ashes across the sky, dispersed to the mountains in an emotional moment.

We sat a while longer on the summit. We were isolated from our surroundings by the clouds—white, grey and black were the shades of the day. There were just the four of us around Wally's cairn with the Canadian flag blowing in the wind. We knew it was a place that Wally would very much appreciate. On a clear day, the views from the top of Mount Joyce would encompass Mount Sir Sandford in the south, Mount Alberta in the north and hundreds of summits in between. A glaciated peak climbed for the first time in Wally's honour—how fitting for a man who accomplished so much in his lifetime!



It was time to go as we had a long and hazardous descent ahead of us. It started with the crux moves across the exposed snow arête. I led, unroped, followed by Roger and Don, and then Bill who took up the rear guard. All went well as we slowly descended our up-track, post-holing even deeper than on our way up. Briefly, we could make out the two sub-peaks of Mount Joyce but nothing beyond that. Down the steep snow face we wallowed, waist-deep in the unstable snow. Some wet snow avalanches had already crossed our up-track. I was relieved when everyone was off that slope.

We continued homeward, spread out along the glacier but keeping an eye on each other. Torrential rain greeted us just as we reached the rock headwall. We regrouped, as a little more care was required downclimbing the smooth, wet rock. One more bit of route-finding across a snow bridge over the rushing creek above camp saved us the risk of tired bodies struggling to hop across wet rocks. We knew we were home when we saw Willa walking towards us. Of course she had hot soup and snacks waiting for us in the kitchen tent.

It continued to rain overnight, but when we looked up to the summit of Mount Joyce in the morning there were traces of new snow on the upper buttresses of the mountain. We took a rest day since the weather was intermittent rain showers. Bill spent the day constructing a basecamp cairn so large that it will be clearly seen by any future parties visiting the area.

We got in one more climbing day on Friday and accomplished another first ascent, Peak 2,716 metres. Unfortunately, Don was feeling ill and had to turn back soon after starting up the glacier. The summit had an interesting rock fin engulfed in swirling clouds that gave us some exposed 4th-class climbing. Again, weather issues hampered us all day, but we enjoyed being out on the glaciers.

We broke camp on Saturday feeling satisfied with our accomplishments. Mount Joyce awaits a second ascent.

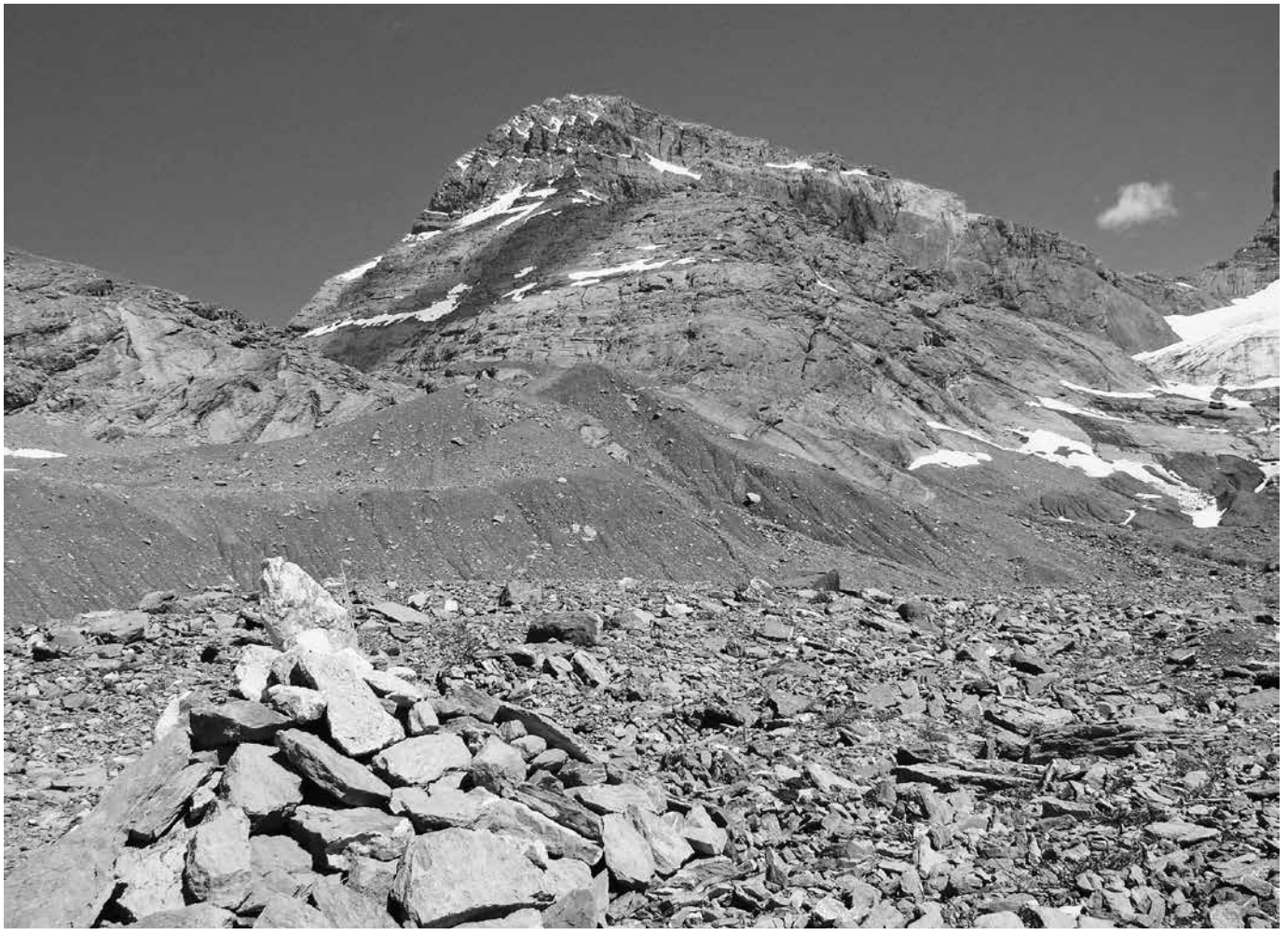
Summary

Southeast ridge of Peak 2,686 metres (GR 428654), Clemenceau Icefield Group. FA: Don Chaisson, Paul Geddes, Willa Geddes, Bill McKenzie, Roger Wallis, July 24, 2011.

Southeast face/north ridge (PD, 4th class) of Mount Joyce (3,030 metres, GR 436661), Clemenceau Icefield Group. FA: Don Chaisson, Paul Geddes, Bill McKenzie, Roger Wallis, July 26, 2011.

Peak 2,716 metres (GR 447633), Clemenceau Icefield Group. FA: Paul Geddes, Willa Geddes, Bill McKenzie, Roger Wallis, July 29, 2011.

Mount Joyce in the Clemenceau Icefield Group. Photo: Paul Geddes



Obscure Rockies

David P. Jones

The southwest face of Mount Hurd. Photo: David P. Jones

MOUNT HURD IS A seldom-climbed peak that is overshadowed by nearby Mounts Vaux, Chancellor and the Goodsirs. The Topographical Survey named the peak after Major M.F. Hurd, an assistant to Major Rogers in laying out the location of the railway. An ascent of the southwest flanks offers an early season training climb since this aspect becomes snow-free relatively early.

Starting from the picnic site on the Trans-Canada Highway, I bushwhacked up the north bank of Finn Creek. Small timber was blown down and stacked criss-cross several layers deep, making for slow progress. The windfall was sufficiently serious that I thought about turning back on several occasions, but finally gained timberline after two hours of strenuous effort. I headed up steep shale-y slopes to the base of the southwest face, which is cleft by several steep, narrow gullies. Having not paid much attention to Cromwell's account of the first ascent, I mistakenly assumed that he had climbed an easy gully on this face. I scrambled up a series of small cliff bands into what I thought was the largest and probably easiest gully. The gully became progressively steeper and narrower and before long I found it necessary to negotiate small overhangs on less than perfect rock.

After 1.5 hours of steady progress, the gully spit me out onto the crest of the west ridge. Even this ridge was not straightforward since I had to negotiate several false summits before I could look into the large, open south-facing bowl, which was obviously the Cromwell route. Short sections of steep scrambling along with sloppy isothermal snow gave access to the western-most and apparently highest summit, and a small register. Plunge-stepping down the south bowl led quickly to easy scree and back to timberline. Descending about half a kilometre north of Finn Creek, the bushwhacking was much more manageable with little in the way of windfall. I popped out of the bush onto the highway to find a 13-kilometre long string of traffic backed up from an accident near Field. While the bushwhack approach was challenging, and the rock on Hurd may not have been stellar, the magnificent views of the Goodsirs and President Range certainly provided a much more pleasurable experience than sitting in traffic for hours.

"UNNAMED 2847" (GR335797) is a peak in the Italian Group of the Southern Rockies, located 1.6 kilometres south of Mount Minton. The southwest and northeast faces of this peak are steep, and rived with gullies, of which the sides are festooned with pinnacles and gargoyles, offering few prospects for a practical route.

Gord Bose, Jeff Nazarchuk, Lyle Rotter and I drove up White River and Maiyuk Creek until we were due west of the peak, and then hiked easily through the old forest burn to gain the west-facing basin between Mount Minton and the objective. We hiked up the basin on snow and scree then angled up over broken rock steps to reach a false summit on the northwest ridge. From the false summit we climbed a series of steep, exposed rock steps to gain the true summit, where we built a cairn to hold a register. The rock on the steps was generally firm while the rock on the intervening treads was more fractured and loose. We downclimbed the route since all other options for descent were much more difficult.

Summary

Southwest Face (PD+ 5.0), Mt. Hurd (2993m), Ottertail Range. FA: David P. Jones, July 4, 2011.

First ascent of "Unnamed 2847" peak via the northwest ridge (PD+, 5.0), Italian Group, Canadian Rockies. FA: Gord Bose, David P. Jones, Jeff Nazarchuk, Lyle Rotter, July 18, 2011.

An Ultimately Unworthy Route

Glenn Reisenhofer and Marc Schaller

THE MOISTURE-LADEN storm clouds race past the limestone ribs of Mount Kidd. "Maybe we shouldn't go up there today," Marc suggests. With groggy, early morning eyes, I easily agree. My body likes the idea of a warm vehicle with wind protection. Being much more of a morning person than me, Marc develops plan B: "Hey, we should go try that route on Baldy." After pouring myself another cup of coffee, my mind shifts through the various tiers of cobwebs. Layers upon layers of routes, mountains and people blend, some webs thicker than others. Baldy? Isn't that the name of the peak where I spent a large part of my youth climbing on the lower cliffs called Barrier Bluffs?

"Yes, Marc, let's go back and check it out."

As the car zips along, my head careens towards the side window for a brief view of the split buttress that lies at the base of the crag. "Screaming monkey vomit" still echoes back through the fabric of time as Larry's animated voice states the name of his new line at Barrier Bluffs. That was many years ago now, longer than I care to admit. Yet, I still can't drive past Barrier without thinking of my old friend Larry Ostrander.

As Marc and I head up the lightly wooded slope towards our objective my mind floats back to the days of Barrier and the crowd I once knew well. Prior to 1984, only a few locals had checked out the crag, but the heat turned up when David Dancer, Larry Ostrander and Kelly Toby arrived. A significant number of one- to four-pitch traditional-style climbs were put up during the 1985-87 period. A disagreement over rap bolting split the trio up and resulted in Dancer and Ostrander investigating the better-quality rock at the south end of the cliff. Larry took to the new area with a passion and became the major force in the development of Barrier Bluffs. Over the course of the next few years, a large number of excellent climbs appeared with such colourful names as She's Lost Control, Ideal for Living, Shadow Play, Koyaanisqatsi, 2+2=5, Tempted to Exist, Hollow Men and Iron in the Soul.

While hanging on an old nine-millimetre rope, Larry would slave away hand-drilling protection bolts for a first ascent. Those short star-nosed 5/16-inch expansion bolts were a combination of both drill and bolt. A continual, seemingly endless pounding resulted. Twenty minutes was a common time, sometimes shorter, sometimes longer, depending on the density of the rock. Occasionally, a second bolt was needed to complete the hole since the first bolt's drilling teeth were all sheared off. My regular climbing partner, Neil Winder, and I would patiently wait for a chance at a second ascent. Rarely did we have to wait long because Larry's drive would ensure a constant supply of fresh new routes.

As the trees were left behind, Marc and I crested the top of the crag. The terrain opened and our first view of the route appeared. The walking was easy at this stage, and I continued to think of Larry. I could see him as if he was standing next to me. He would often face you with his head slightly tilted to one side. He had longish hair on one side while the opposite side was closely shaved to his scalp, perhaps resulting in an unbalance of weight. On his powerful physique he chose to wear simple navy blue nylon shorts and a white tank top. This was such a regular occurrence that all of his colleagues once dressed like him for a day of work.

Larry was a keen advocator of bouldering and found indoor climbing structures suitable. Ahead of his time, he had a climbing wall made of various-diameter cut-off branches under the stairwell of his home. The very first time Neil and I met Larry was at Crater Rock, a small quartzite boulder sunk in a depression on the prairies. Larry was terribly powerful with a determined crystal-breaking focus. He wore full-shank mountaineering boots. Neil and I joked that his mother must wheel out trays of food to keep that lad satisfied. In later years, he dug beneath the steepest part of the boulder and created problems that were 15 moves long—an amazing feat for small-town rock.

In my mind, the idea of the hard-man was born from Larry and not some comic character with a black diamond engraved on his forehead. He was the one who espoused the hard-man philosophy to us young eager types. While doing so, he taught us how to drink black coffee. My adrenal glands have never been the same since. With early '80s punk riffs constantly going through our heads, I'm surprised we survived that era. As I peered over the lip of the huge roof on Static Fanatic, Larry, with pursed lips, was shaking his head wildly about, plugged into some imaginary hardcore tune. The sound that one makes when strumming quickly on an air guitar helped to drift me over the crux and up to the belay.

MARC AND I REACHED the base of the route after a surprisingly casual approach. The weather was holding. Ahead, a ramp cleaved the face and allowed access to the upper ridge. I wondered if Larry had his eye on this exact line, too. As often as he went to Barrier to climb, his eyes fell on this small north face, dreaming of a thin smear of ice that would sneak through to the upper reaches of the mountain. Marc, too, has this dream, one that would line up snowy bits with ice and rock. He tried to climb the face one winter but was halted by unconsolidated snow. This day was another part of the big journey, so Marc continues the story:

THE IDEA FOR THE NORTH rib came from a desire to see more of this wonderful little mountain that is one of the closest to Calgary. Actually, the idea was to look at Baldy as if it was the only mountain around, and to open my adventure mind to what is available within a relatively small area. I had climbed the traditional

west ridge and also the circuit of the southwest ridge to the south summit, west summit and north summit and down the west ridge. This second route is such a wonderful piece of scrambling that offers so much for its relatively short length, including a short approach, knife-edge ridge climbing, some excellent rock, a tour of all three summits, and especially a skywalk that gives views to both mountains and prairies.

WHILE CLIMBING THESE two routes (five to six times in two years), I was afforded stunning views of the many rock formations between the north and west summits that looked like they would yield a couple of shorter multi-pitch rock climbs as an alternative to the scramble climbs already investigated. With all this in mind, I couldn't ignore the rocky and gully-strewn north face of the peak since it is the side that faces everyone as they approach the mountain and it stands as the entranceway to Kananaskis Country. I would stop on the drive and mentally map out a route that would make its way through the bottom cliff band and link up with a singular ridge of rock that leads directly to the summit. Because of its aspect, the idea of a winter climb with ice in the gully and a snowy upper ridge was very appealing. Yet every time I drove past the face in winter, the gully looked blank of ice and filled only with powdered snow. So, the logic was to be there in spring when the melt-freeze cycle would drip a lovely vein of ice in the steepest rock gully, and the snow would be re-frozen and set for good step-kicking. Sadly, our trip up to the face in May yielded only bottomless faceted snow and still no ice in the gully. An end to our first attempt.

Finally, the day came open in July for a second attempt. As Glenn and I approached the face, we saw nothing but dry rock and clouds flying past the summit that indicated storm-pressured winds up high. Since this was plan B, it was either try or have coffee back in town. We chose to go up. After a brief rain shower passed quickly overhead, we were rewarded with lots of sun and only brief spells of wind. Seemingly, the aspect of the mountain was shielding us from the true brute force of the Chinook wind that day.

The approach hike turned to scrambling, and once past a minor rock band (which, on the earlier attempt, had seemed steep and scary with three feet of snow) we were cruising to the base of what would be the first pitch. From a belay tucked away in a corner, a cam then an iffy nut and finally a well-placed piton helped me past the lip of a small overlap and to a view of the ground above. Glenn followed then continued up on scree to a nice corner. Finally, this pitch gave way to the easier ground above.

The ground above looked easy but was terribly loose. We packed the ropes away and made our way up from what below looked like a stellar rib of alpine rock. Sadly, this passage, a casualty of foreshortening, was actually a pronounced scree ridge with a few short steps. Near the top, our attention was arrested by the ripping sounds of the once-forgotten wind. It sounded like it was tearing the ridge apart. Both Glenn and I dreaded the onslaught we knew we would endure on the decent. The wind turned out to be as brutal as we thought. My lower perspective was advantageous over Glenn's eagle-like wingspan, as over and over I saw my tall friend crouch and duck the wind's powerful blows. Later, researching the day's weather, Glenn discovered that the local winds had peaked at more than 154 kilometres per hour—a true force of nature.

It was either our eager enthusiasm or the gusty gale pushing at our back that we reached the car roughly five hours after leaving it; a time that we both agreed had allowed us to relax and enjoy a good effort on a fine but ultimately unworthy route. Yet this passage adds to the overall portrait of Mount Baldy, regardless of quality or numbers. However, each time I pass her proud northern face in winter, I'll keep looking and hoping for a sliver of ice to tie it all together.

An Ultimately Unworthy Route on north face of Mount Baldy. Photo: Glenn Reisenhofer

Summary

An Ultimately Unworthy Route (5.6), north rib of Mount Baldy, Kananaskis Country. FA: Glenn Reisenhofer, Marc Schaller, July 8, 2011.

The East

Short is Sweet

Nathan Kutcher

SOUTHERN ONTARIO climbers are accustomed to a short ice season, but winter 2011-12 was almost the winter that never was. The chossy limestone cliffs never fully froze and the granite cliffs of the Canadian Shield weren't subjected to the usual deep freeze that fights off the sun's strengthening rays. Fortunately the conditions were favourable long enough for a small number of new routes to go up. Despite lack of quantity, the new lines climbed this past season were mostly high quality and will likely leave an imprint on the growing Ontario mixed scene for years to come.

Early season came and went quickly. With temps well above freezing late into December, the minds and bodies of climbers were on faraway ice flows. The arrival of more consistently cold weather in January finally gave the local winter climbing scene the kick that it needed. Usually Diamond Lake is always a busy spot. With the heavy traffic and an already high number of routes, it was amazing that in one weekend three new routes went up. Andriy Kolos started it off with Every Day is Training, Every Day is Real (M5, 25m). This line must have been walked past many times without notice by most. As I walked along the lake towards my project, Andriy was making a beeline from his warm-up to his soon-to-be new route. It is found far right of Guardian Angel, just right of A Turn for the Douche. After surmounting the initial rock ledge off the lake, it follows the line of least resistance up to a left-trending crack that leads to thin ice followed by thick brush at the top.

Meanwhile, I was doing battle with a long-term project of mine just left of Where Egos Dare. Metamorphosis (M10R, 35m) is a line that has been looked at for many years and has been attempted by few. While most Diamond Lake routes form from snowmelt and tend to get better as the season goes on, Metamorphosis is mostly formed by seepage from a crack that quickly locks up, stopping any further formation. The thin ice slab leading up to the steep headwall tends to dry out and deteriorate quickly, making a short window for reasonable conditions. Splitting the headwall is a narrow ice-choked crack that leads to just short of the cliff top where a dagger can be reached for the top-out. One of the few lines of its kind in Ontario, Metamorphosis it is a landmark route.

With some help from Garry Reiss, Rebecca Lewis and I established Dark Angel (WI4 M5, 20m). This well-protected route can be found on the bare patch of rock on the right end of Guardian Angel. It starts with very technical moves before climbing onto much more secure holds through a small iced-up bulge. After pulling the bulge, steep ice leads to the top. Due to its excellent protection and easy accessibility it will likely be the first sport-mixed lead for many novice mixed climbers.

It felt like you could count on a single hand the number of days that winter visited the far south of Ontario this year. Fortunately, I happened to be at the Grotto on one of the days when the cliff had solidified enough that I could complete a previously equipped route from the end of last season. Stoic Control (M9, 20m) climbs out the centre of the cave between Peripheral Visionary and Highway Robbery to the dagger at the lip. The juggy holds at the start quickly diminished and I found myself climbing across the horizontal roof, making long moves on small holds with engaging clips in between. At the lip, a small ice smear helps in reaching the big dagger that hangs over the centre of the cave, thus leading to the top of the cliff.

Sherborne Lake had been in the back of my mind for new-route potential since two years prior when I made a visit to establish The Quickening. The well-featured cliff had lots of potential but only a few visits, mainly by people going there to repeat Highlander. Several lines had caught my eye, the first of which to be ticked off was Flatlander (WI4+/5-, 25m). It starts left of Highlander and climbs straight up to the big pillar and meets where Highlander traverses just before the ice tunnel. From the stance, it continues up and left into steep ice to a set of anchors in the huge roof above. Beyond the anchors are two mixed lines still waiting for someone to make time to climb them.

Raven Lake still has much potential for new mixed routes, especially at the moderate end of the spectrum. Just right of This Ain't Muskoka and set between two large slabs of ice is Meltdown (M4+, 35m)—a not-so-obvious but fantastic well-protected trad mixed route that is easy to overlook. From the ground the bits of ice are easy to dismiss. The slab of ice at the start climbs up to a thin discontinuous-looking crack on the face, and the next ice smears seem too far away with blank sections in between. Once on the route the mud- and ice-filled crack draws you upward past

Nathan Kutcher on the first ascent of Flatlander at Sherborne Lake.
Photo: Martin Suchma

secure hooks and bomber nut and cam placements. At mid-height the crack runs out and a few face moves, now protected by a bolt, access the remainder of the crack and thin ice above. After gaining a ledge the ice fattens up and leads to the top of the cliff.

Once again it was no surprise that Danylo Darewych was able to sniff out more new ice routes this past winter than possibly anyone else in Southern Ontario. Among his more noteworthy finds were Rock, Paper, Pick (WI3, 19m) and Love and Hate (WI4-, 15m). His haul also included yet another high-quality entry-level mixed climbing gem: Join the Revolution? (WI3 5.4, 25m). The route climbs a thin ice sheet that spills out from under a large roof then ducks out to the right on bare rock. It continues up around a corner to more rock, turf and thin ice climbing to get to the top. While making the traverse Danylo dropped a tool and was forced to climb the remainder of the route old-school style, using one tool and his hands to get through the upper section of the route.

After a second visit this year to Sherborne, I had left with a project on the go and a few more in mind and I was keen to make a third trip before winter came to an abrupt end. A 3:30 a.m. wake-up call had Rebecca and me making the four-hour-plus drive and hour-long hike back to the Highlander Cliff for one more day of mixed-climbing fun. After repeating Flatlander for our warm-up, I turned my attention to Lowlander (WI5 M6, 30m). A diagonal fissure leads from the steep ice at the start of Flatlander across the bulging cliff face to the hanging dagger in the middle of the steep wall. With my feet skating around while trying to smear crampons on the blank rock between small intermittent footholds, hand and fist jams in the crack led me out towards the hanging ice. Nearing the halfway point of the traverse the crack pinches down and gives way to drytooling and limited options for gear. After the insecure traverse, reaching the dagger was a relief and a dilemma. From a distance, the ice offered safe, easy passage to the top, but upon reaching the ice I could see that the pillar had detached an undeterminable distance up the cliff. After kicking myself for not bringing smaller gear, I dumped my two remaining pieces of rock gear into marginal placements and swung onto the outside of the pillar. As I climbed the rotting ice to the top I knew that this short season was pretty much over.

After Rebecca seconded Lowlander we set our sights on the line we had started equipping a few weeks prior. Redemption and Retribution (M8, 30m) shares the start with Sins of the Father and climbs up to the first ledge of that route. Instead of continuing up the low-angled ramp, Redemption and Retribution steps off the ledge onto the main cliff face and into a shallow dihedral. The sometimes hard-to-see holds lead up to a small roof where the route moves out of the dihedral and onto the face. In better times, a thin dribble of ice makes the transition out of the dihedral more secure, but the highly featured rock means climbing past this section is possible even without the ice. Once established above the roof, a more respectable piece of ice leads to a ledge and the first set of anchors. Beyond the first anchor is a steep bulge where powerful reaches between small holds and difficult footholds climbs past two more bolts. After clipping the last bolt another smear of thin ice can be reached and provides passage onto the ledge above.

Over the past few years, McCauley Lake has reliably produced new routes. A lack of early season snowmelt nearly halted any new route exploration this season, but Andriy and Pascal Simard made good use of the last weekend of reasonable winter conditions to climb Overwhelmed (M5+, 20m). Above the first beaver pond, this route climbs a corner system to a horizontal crack before making a jog left then working back right into the corner that continues up to the top.

Southern Ontario may never be a destination area for travelling ice climbers, but it is shaping up to be a great training area for the growing number of winter climbers who want to hone their skills for faraway objectives. This season has also shown that even though many of the most visible lines have been climbed at the more popular cliffs, there are great routes to be picked off that aren't always obvious.

Summary

Metamorphosis (M10R, 35m), Diamond Lake. FA: Nathan Kutcher, January 21, 2012.

Dark Angel (WI4 M5, 20m), Diamond Lake. FA: Nathan Kutcher, Rebecca Lewis, January 22, 2012.

Every Day is Training, Every Day is Real (M5, 25m), Diamond Lake. FA: Andriy Kolos, January 22, 2012.

Stoic Control (M9, 20m), The Grotto. FA: Nathan Kutcher, January 29, 2012.

Flatlander (WI4+/5, 25m), Sherborne Lake. FA: Nathan Kutcher, Rebecca Lewis, Martin Suchma, February 4, 2012.

Rock, Paper, Pick (WI3, 19m), Bark Lake. FA: Danylo Darewych, Janet Trost, February 4, 2012.

Join the Revolution? (WI3, 5.4, 25m), Bark Lake. FA: Dave Brown, Danylo Darewych, Janet Trost, February 5, 2012.

Love and Hate (WI4-, 15m), Bark Lake. FA: Dave Brown, Danylo Darewych, Janet Trost, February 5, 2012.

Meltdown (M4+, 35m), Raven Lake. FA: Nathan Kutcher, Rebecca Lewis, Martin Suchma, February 5, 2012.

Lowlander (WI5 M6, 30m), Sherborne Lake. FA: Nathan Kutcher, Rebecca Lewis, February 25, 2012.

Redemption and Retribution (M5/M8, 30m), Sherborne Lake FA: Nathan Kutcher, Rebecca Lewis, February 25, 2012.

Overwhelmed (M5+, 20m), McCauley Lake. FA: Andriy Kolos, Pascal Simard, February 26, 2012.

Escalade hivernale dans le parc national des Grands-Jardins

Jean-Pierre Ouellet

PARMI LE PAYSAGE ondulant d'épinettes se trouve un groupe isolé d'anciens sommets arrondis mais bien fourchus, connu dans la région comme un îlot de Grand Nord québecois : le parc national des Grands-Jardins. Terrain de jeu silencieux pour une pratique pas très flamboyante, mais tout de même intéressante : grimper en libre les lignes naturelles en hiver. Dans cette activité largement inspirée de l'escalade hivernale écossaise, la longueur des parcours (180 à 250 m) demeure toutefois modeste.

La plus belle face de ce jardin d'escalade, soit celle du mont Gros-Bras, a connu quelques ascensions hivernales à partir du milieu des années 80. Jusqu'à maintenant, la plupart des lignes cotées 5.10 ou moins ont été grimpées dans un style exigeant, leur ascension rendue complexe par le rocher souvent plâtré de neige. Des lignes ouvertes pendant la dernière décennie, telles que Campanule (M6+, 200 m) et Harmonie intérieure (M6+, 180 m), n'ont rien à envier aux voies mixtes traditionnelles les plus difficiles de l'est du continent.

En décembre 2011, une nouvelle section qui traverse au-dessus des toits de Simulateur cardiaque (5.11+), sur la face nord, a été complétée par Yannick Girard et Jean-Pierre Ouellet : Métal hurlant (M6+, 250 m). La première longueur (M6+) avait déjà été grimpée à quelques reprises, entre autres pour accéder au système de dièdres d'une autre voie grimpée en 2009. La deuxième longueur consiste à traverser au-dessus du grand toit de Stimulateur cardiaque pour atteindre la partie supérieure de cette nouvelle voie. Puisque les protections étaient plutôt espacées et médiocres, cette traversée s'averra être le passage clé « mental ». Elle est aussi engageante pour le second de cordée que pour le premier. Le reste de la voie est bien plus facile, mais les conditions de tourbillons de neige, ainsi que de neige recouvrant le rocher, ont rendu la grimpe « intéressante ». Cette ouverture a coïncidé avec le « retour aux sources » de JP Ouellet, qui n'avait pas grimpé en mixte depuis 2007. À la fin de la saison, Yannick et JP, accompagnés par Damien Côté, ont réussi la deuxième ascension de la voie Daedalus (M7+, 300 m) sur Cannon Cliff, au New Hampshire.

Le 23 février 2012, Mathieu Leblanc et Philippe Eynaudi ont ouvert une nouvelle voie impressionnante sur le mont Gros-Bras : Pin ton piton mon loup (M6 A0, 250 m), une directissime dans la face nord. Toutes les ascensions hivernales précédentes de cette face avaient évité cette ligne directe par des systèmes moins difficiles. La ligne était évidente ; nous l'avons tous vue, mais « fallait avoir le courage ». Rappelons que Philippe est décédé trois semaines plus tard sur la Pomme d'Or.

Yannick Girard dans la deuxième longueur de Métal hurlant, lors de la première ascension.
Photo : Jean-Pierre Ouellet

Foreign

The Prophet

Sonnie Trotter

THE PROPHET IS ONE of the greatest rock climbing experiences I have ever had. It also ascends some of the best and worst rock I have ever dared to climb. Established in October 2010 by British talents Leo Houlding and Jason Pickles, The Prophet follows a weak line of steep ramps, roofs and fractured seams on the right side of El Cap. It is 14 pitches in length, but due to its overhanging and difficult nature it requires a very committed team to ascend—or so it seems to me. The pitches go at 5.12- R, 5.12- R, 5.11+ R, 5.13- R, 5.13- R, 5.13- R, 5.12- R, 5.13- R, 5.13+ R, 5.11 R, 5.13+ R, 5.12- R, 5.13- R and 5.10- R. Sustained and runout!

The lower pitches are by far the most dangerous and involved. Extremely fractured rock plus questionable gear plus long distance between protection equals horrible fall potential. In contrast, the upper half is quite a bit harder technically speaking, but much safer because of its steeper angle and higher quality stone. This allows for better gear and bigger, cleaner (albeit frightening) falls.

My partner was world-class stone monkey and stand-up comedian Will Stanhope. We arrived on October 3, 2012, direct from Squamish and we wasted no time getting on the route. Within hours of dropping into the Big Ditch, we were standing on top of the route by way of the east ledges, eager to dig our fingers into some compact California granite.

Rappelling in, the stunning 5.13d crux pitch seemed unfathomably hard at first, but we kept at it, mostly because it was just that good. It was fun to fall off and keep trying; moreover, I can't imagine a better place to hang with a good buddy. Yosemite Valley is simply extraordinary.

Like any trip, we had highs and lows on the climb. Coincidently, these both often occurred immediately after one another, and often during our ground-up attempts. It took us five tries to break through the lower pitches, climbing on-sight into the unknown. Each time we'd get just a little bit farther along, which was extremely rewarding. But then we'd encounter some sickeningly committing sequence over even more sickening gear and we'd back down and retreat—tail tucked and all.

It wasn't easy, the feeling of failure, but I would justify it like this: I figured there was very little point in any unwarranted heroics. An injury would often be the best-case scenario and that would only send us home for the season; where as to retreat to recompose would mean trying again in only a day or two, and hopefully fresh with a greater understanding of the climb and increased confidence. It wasn't just about balls for us, it was also about smarts (what little we have), and I think we handled each situation with just the right amount of both.

Like I mentioned above, however, the highs were just being up there with a rope, a rack and the shirts on our backs, a truly liberating process. It's the sort of climbing I love the most, not knowing exactly where to go next. Lost then found. Scared then fearless, and then scared again—but with a perpetually progressing attitude.

By the end of October, storms were becoming more frequent and we often escaped the valley for some more diverse scenery, returning when skies cleared again. This pattern occurred until our very last three days in mid-November. The weather looked depressingly skeptical the day before, and since the route is located directly under a waterfall we made a tough decision to pack it in for the season and ready ourselves for a second attempt the following year. But then miraculously overnight the skies cleared and we realized we had to rally one last time. We mustered all our strength and motivation for one last hooray!

Humping loads to the base with enough food, water and beer for a three-day push was very hard work, especially stacked on top of so many days of previous efforts. It was definitely worth it once we finally broke through our high point and free-climbed to the top of pitch seven. With our portable camp high on the wall and legs hanging over the edge, a few sips of cheap whiskey were a very fine thing indeed. We slept pretty well that first night despite a constant dripping from the Devil's Brow.

The following morning we sent pitches eight, nine and 10, and set up our second camp. Exhausted from the steep and run-out scrambling, we crashed hard into our bags for the second night. It was my birthday, and Will's would be tomorrow. We could not have planned for this but it was a fun little perk. In addition, tomorrow would also be our hardest day.

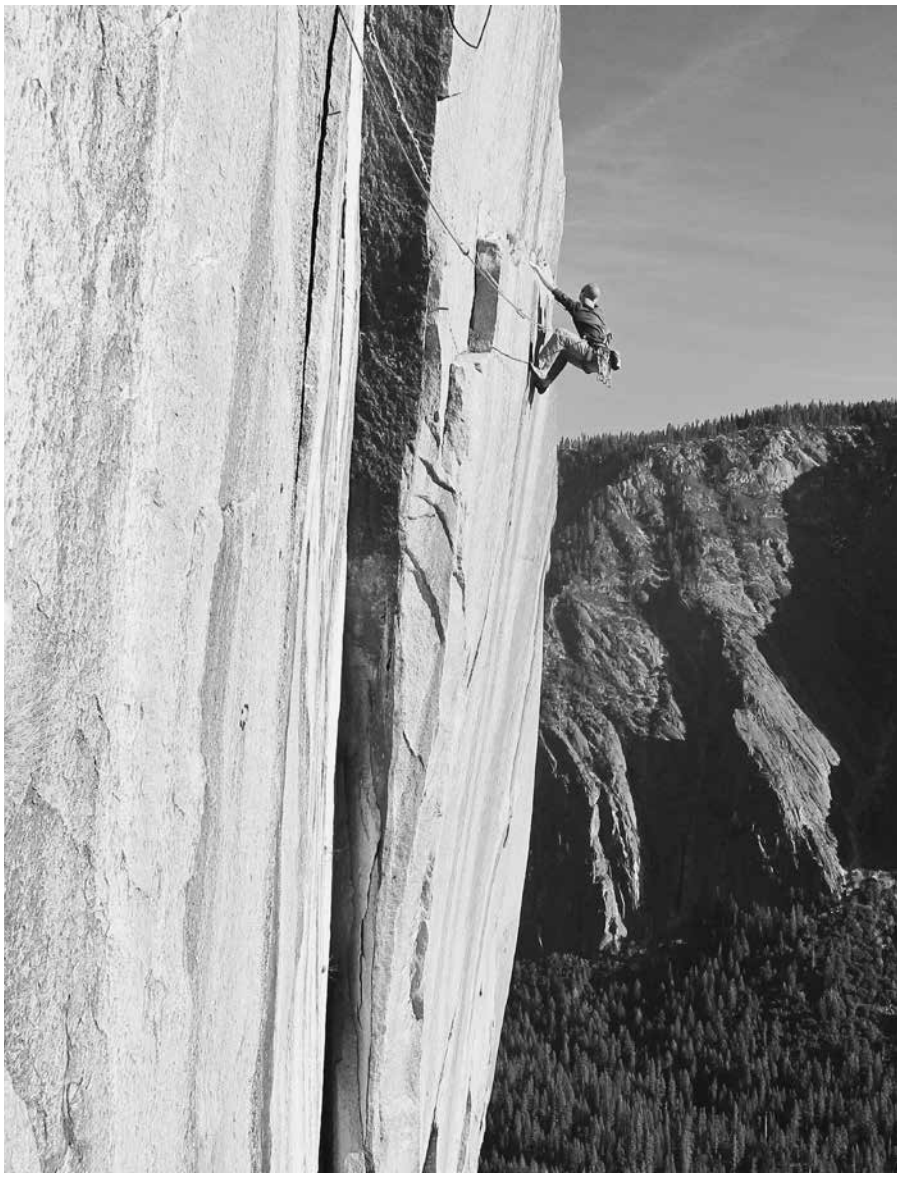
The sun burns hot on the Captain. Some argue that it's the number one factor that makes free-climbing difficult up there; and so it proved to be for us as well. What once felt like 5.13d suddenly felt like 5.14d in the blazing white heat. We were forced to wait until evening

Sonnie Trotter on pitch nine (5.13c R) of The Prophet on El Capitan. Photo: Ben Moon

when temperatures would cool off, but our window would be very short and our limited time remaining even more pressing.

I luckily managed to lead the pitch on my first try, second attempt of the day, just as the sun was dipping below the horizon. It took everything I had, literally. The last 16 years of climbing had led up to that point. Every combination of moves I had ever completed, every piece of gear I had ever placed and fallen on, every run-out I've ever risked, lap I have run, bolt I have clipped and every comp entered or day guided, it all added up to get me through one of the toughest pitches of my life. While Will climbed up to meet me, he looked, of course, tight on his feet, strong in his hands, relaxed, calm yet determined. However, just past his personal high point on the pitch, his foot slipped just enough from a micro sliver of granite that he could not recompose himself and he slumped onto the rope. It was a heartbreaker for us both, no doubt. But Will is never one to feel sorry for himself; he picked himself up and carried onto the anchor with a pure shit-eating grin. "Nice moves, Trot!" he congratulated. As disappointed as Will may or may not have been, he just loves being up there, the higher and wilder the better, his spirit unbreakable.

Will Stanhope on pitch 10 (The Devil's Dyno, 5.13c R) of The Prophet on El Capitan. Photo: Sonnie Trotter



My luck continued and I managed to send the last three pitches in the dark without falling. Will executed flawlessly as well, and we captured a fine, albeit exhausting, photo from the summit by headlamp.

The next day Stanhope tried again to free that one elusive crux pitch, but again the sun was too intense and our bodies too tired. Thus we began the tiring work of hauling our camp to the top, squinting in the mid-day heat, our lips craving beer like raging alcoholics. We stumbled down the east ledges with heavy pigs on our backs and met our friend Ben Moon after the long rappels. Like a true brother, Ben delivered a six pack of cold suds. For the rest of the day we fell into a state of blissful exhaustion. The real (deeper) fatigue wouldn't set in for another 24 hours for me, and would last nearly two weeks.

El Cap is one glorious son of a bitch: so much good-quality rock, so much amazing exposure, and so much work. I'm certain its climbing will leave, or has left, an impression on anyone who has tried it, done it or dares to try it. Even the simple sight of it ignites our imagination. Think about it, where else in the world can you get in your car, drive from your home anywhere in North America, sleep in the warm comfort of your van or RV, and then in the morning walk mere minutes to the base of a sheer granite wall towering 900 metres into the sky? It's absolutely an incredible gift, and it's for these reasons that the Captain will forever remain just that.

For me, The Prophet was a deeply rooted climbing experience, one that taught me a lot about myself and created a lot of laughs. I'm honoured I got to share that with my talented and committed friend Willy. Thanks to Leo Houlding and Jason Pickles for bringing this climb to life for all to enjoy. And thank you to the Alpine Club of Canada for believing in the pursuit of mountain adventures in Canada and around the world.

Summary

Second ascent of The Prophet (VI 5.13d R, 14 pitches), El Capitan, Yosemite Valley, California. Will Stanhope, Sonnie Trotter, November 14-16, 2011.

Jenga Spur

William Meinen

WHEN I INITIALLY READ the news reports that the former head of the Islamic militant group al-Qaeda had been found and killed by the United States military on May 2, 2011, I felt a small knot develop in my stomach. Osama bin Laden had been successfully evading detection from the US military for nearly a decade since the attacks of 9/11, and then it finally happened. A small group of US Navy Seals raided his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, killed Osama bin Laden and buried his body at sea.

I had just agreed to join two Americans on an expedition to Pakistan's Karakoram Range to attempt a difficult new route on the southwest pillar of K7. My permits and travel visa were being processed, and my non-refundable plane ticket to Islamabad had already been purchased. If we drove the Karakoram Highway to Skardu, we would end up driving right past Osama bin Laden's house.

"Why on earth would you ever want to go there?"

"You know you'll probably be kidnapped and held for ransom, never to be seen again?"

"I hope you have good life insurance."

These were among the reactions I received when I told friends and family that I would still be embarking on this expedition regardless of the political situation. This decision proved to reward me with one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. From the moment I set foot in Pakistan until the moment I left, I was treated with incredible generosity, warmth and sincerity by everyone I met. I could not believe how hypocritical we had become in the western world. How was it that the collective people of this country had been tarred with the same brush as the leader of a religious extremist group? Unfortunately, it is a question that doesn't come with a straightforward answer. The more people I met along the way from Islamabad to our basecamp, the more I fell in love with my new surroundings.

Jenga Spur on the northwest ridge of Fida Brakk. Photo: William Meinen

Once our team was established at K7 basecamp, we were generally plagued with bad weather. After several weeks passed, we finally received an encouraging forecast. Not a big enough weather window to try our primary objective on the southwest pillar of K7, but big enough try something. We decided to attempt an unclimbed pillar across the valley. It looked to be the type of route that would go in a day with some snow climbing up a couloir and moderate rock climbing to a virgin summit. It turned out to be a full-on 48-hour epic with plenty of loose rock and difficulties reaching 5.12. My partners Pat Goodman and Matt McCormick charged their way up the spur, never willing to give up, as I did my best to keep up with them. After summitting, we rappelled down in a rainstorm and nearly got hit by a large rockfall while kicking steps back down the couloir in the dark.

As the trip was nearing its end and I was on the long return flight to North America, I knew that one day I would be back for another adventure in the breathtaking Karakoram Range.

Acknowledgements

This expedition was made possible with generous support from Mountain Hardwear, the Copp-Dash Inspire Award, and the Gore Shipton-Tilman Grant.

Summary

Jenga Spur (V+ 5.11+R A0, 1050m), northwest ridge of Fida Brakk (ca.5300m), Charakusa Valley, Karakoram Range, Pakistan. FA: Pat Goodman, Matt McCormick, William Meinen, July 6-7, 2011.

A Fitz Roy Birthday

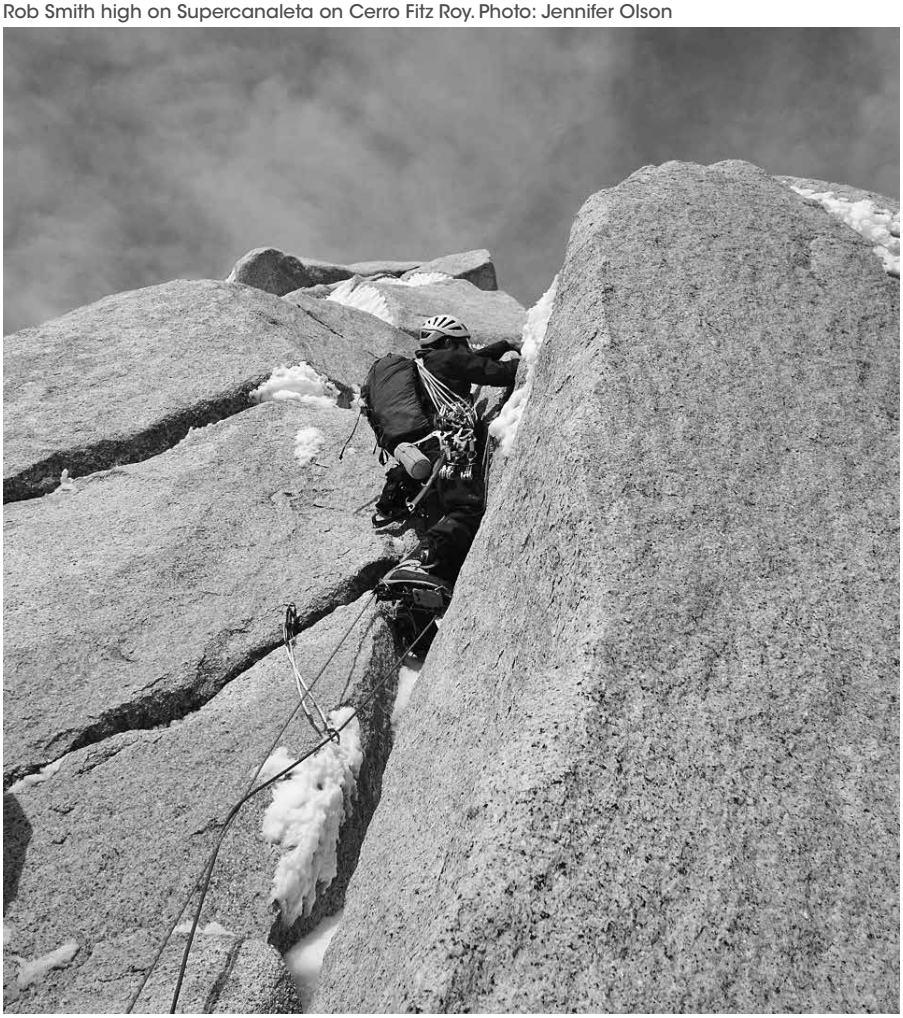
Jennifer Olson

A STATEMENT OF FACT: You can leave Canmore, Alberta, and be on the summit of Cerro Fitz Roy in Patagonia in 72 hours. I know this to be true because I did it. This means you could conceivably work in an office in downtown Calgary, take a week off, climb Fitz Roy, and be back riding your desk the next week. For this to happen though, the stars need to align. In terms of climbing Fitz Roy in an extended long weekend, celestial alignment means good weather (not a common occurrence in Patagonia), no delayed flights or lost baggage (even less of a common occurrence with today's airlines), survival of the gruelling approach hike, and then finally climbing 1,600 metres of some of the world's best alpine granite.

The opportunity to climb in Patagonia presented itself to me last year. I was hired by Mammut to guide three young Lithuanians up Fitz Roy as part of the company's 150th birthday celebration. In addition, I would be there for my 40th birthday. In preparation for guiding down there and to take advantage of my paid-for flight, I met up with Rob Smith to get to know the area prior to my work gig.

I flew down with a total of three huge bags; luckily two of them had wheels. It is invaluable to have a travelling companion (i.e. Rob) so that when you need to run to the bathroom, you do not have to take your luggage with you. Also, I was extremely lucky because somehow I screwed up booking my flight from Buenos Aires to El Calafate. Basically, I wasn't booked on the flight. I had made the reservation but didn't confirm it. I was very fortunate to be able to still fly that day on a different flight. We got a shuttle from El Calafate to El Chalten that evening, putting us at our small apartment just before midnight. As we approached El Chalten, the mountains gradually came into view, presenting us with a gift—a birthday gift, so to speak.

Rob Smith high on Supercanaleta on Cerro Fitz Roy. Photo: Jennifer Olson



When we awoke to blue skies over Fitz Roy, we knew we had to start walking towards our climb immediately. After buying a few groceries and repacking, we met up with some friends, Joel and Jens, to share a taxi and the first several hours of the approach. The hike up Rio Electrico is a lovely trail through an emerald forest. You break out of the trees at Piedra del Fraile and start gaining elevation in earnest through scree fields and snow patches up to Piedras Negras. Joel and Jens stayed at Piedras Negras with many other keen climbers while we continued over Paso Cuadrado then across another glacier toward the base of the Supercanaleta route on Fitz Roy.

We arrived to the base of the massive couloir at 10 p.m., about seven hours after leaving the trailhead. There were several teams bivying, waiting for their 1 a.m. start time. We slowly realized that we were not going to get much rest with our lightweight approach of carrying only puffy pants and a tarp. We also didn't want to be rubbing elbows and jostling for position in the bottom of the couloir for the first few hours of the climb. Instead, we came up with the ingenious plan of *borrowing* some other climber's tent for a few hours. When everyone left the bivy at 1 a.m., we crawled into a tent and enjoyed about five hours of cozy sleep. I suspect this was critical to the success and enjoyment of the rest of the climb. We started climbing around 7 a.m. and had the

route to ourselves. Luckily, we did not have any overhead hazard from climbers above, and we quickly caught up to one of the slower parties that we were able to pass.

Aside from the exhaustion of travel, the greatest challenge on Fitz Roy was the route-finding, both on the upper ridge and on the descent of the Franco-Argentine route. I kept berating myself for not having done more homework on both routes. Still uncertain that beta would have helped, it was nonetheless a bit maddening not knowing exactly where to go at times and trying to avoid difficult climbing. I had assumed, incorrectly, that the trade routes of Fitz Roy would be straightforward to follow.

Rob and I took turns climbing in blocks, enjoying many excellent moderate rock and mixed pitches. Rob styled one really challenging mixed pitch that was likely off route. I struggled up another one that might have been the actual crux (hard to say), but eventually we found ourselves wandering around on the summit plateau looking for a good place to bivy. We found a fairly sheltered ledge and hunkered down for the night.

We watched the light from headlamps of fellow climbers descend on Cerro Torre as we both fought hard to find comfort and warmth on the rough granite ledge. We each took turns pulling on the tarp trying to catch some continuous Zs, but we were constantly woken by the coldness of the alpine air or sharpness of the rock pushing into our bodies. Eventually, we witnessed one of the most spectacular sunrises I have ever seen. Cerro Torre and its brothers were bathed in deep red light. I turned 40 that morning and could not have asked for a more perfect present. As the sun warmed our bodies, we motivated to pack up and head to the summit. Within 30 minutes we were enjoying the top of Fitz Roy while the people of El Chalten, 2,500 metres below, were brewing their morning java.

It took us approximately 19 hours to get from the summit of Fitz Roy back to El Chalten via Paso Superior. During this time we did about 30 rappels and stumbled down almost 30 kilometres of glacier, moraine and trail. I was so exhausted, barely kept awake by the lure of a decent sleep in a real bed with blankets. We did stop for one or two short naps in the dirt between Rio Blanco and town. We stumbled past a disco party at 3 a.m. in El Chalten but were not tempted by a celebratory beverage. The only thing beckoning us was a long, deep slumber. Round trip from town took us about 60 hours. Add on a couple of days travel to and from Calgary, and you a have a week-long vacation to the summit of Fitz Roy.

AFTER A WEEK of sport climbing and trekking in the area, I met up with the Lithuanians, Gedas, Saule and Arunas. We decided on climbing Aguja Guillaumet as two teams of two, everyone swapping leads. We climbed the Brenner-Moschioni route first, which took us about 16 hours from Piedra del Fraile to the summit and back to Piedras Negras. This was some of the most amazing granite I have ever climbed in the alpine. Perfect fissures and pitch after pitch of golden stone led to an exposed ridge then a small snowfield just before the summit. We had such a fun climb that after a rest day in the scorching heat (unseasonably warm) we did another route on Guillaumet called the Comesana-Fonrouge. This time we went much lighter, thus faster. We decided to forego the summit and its snowfield so that we could travel with just our rock shoes. Again, the climbing was five-star. We then descended all the way to the valley bottom and caught a taxi back to El Chalten. A few weeks later, while I was ice climbing back in the northern hemisphere, these same strong Lithuanians summitted Fitz Roy via the Franco-Argentine route.

I am very grateful to Mammut, the Lithuanians, Rob Smith and the lovely people of Argentina for enabling this spectacular visit to Patagonia. Despite the risk of being weathered out, I will return to enjoy one of the most amazing climbing destinations on earth.

Summary

Supercanaleta (5.10 WI3 M4, 1600m), Cerro Fitz Roy (3405m). Jennifer Olson, Rob Smith, December 1-2, 2011.

Brenner-Moschioni (5.11-, 350m), Aguja Guillaumet (2579 m). Arunas Kamandulis, Jennifer Olson, Gediminas Simutis, Saule Zukauskaite, December 13, 2011.

Comesaña-Fonrouge (5.11-, 350m), Aguja Guillaumet (2579 m). December, 15, 2011.

Jennifer Olson waking up to her 40th birthday after an open bivy near the summit of Cerro Fitz Roy. Photo: Jennifer Olson

Cerro Fitz Roy

Yannick Girard

EN JANVIER 2012, j'arrive à El Chalten, camp de base devenu moderne depuis l'arrivée de l'Internet dans le village, pour l'ascension des plus fameuses tours de la Patagonie. Je découvre un endroit du Far West, où tous les chiens errent en liberté dans une ambiance de chaos agréable.

Cette découverte est rapidement interrompue par la redoutable fenêtre de beau temps qui se présente par surprise 48 heures seulement après notre arrivée. C'est juste assez rapide pour conserver un peu de notre naïveté, nécessaire pour l'attaque de notre projet.

Dans ce tumulte précipité, nous commençons notre aventure que sera l'ascension du pilier Goretta. Cette immense paroi débute par 300 m d'escalade mixte — plutôt sèche cette année, vue la météo anormalement chaude et les faibles précipitations de neige de l'hiver précédent. Échauffement d'escalade en fissure à 900 m d'altitude.

Nous établissons notre bivouac avancé, un abri creusé dans le glacier à Paso Superior. Nous ne sommes pas seuls ; sept autres équipes nous côtoient. L'expression de leurs visages varie d'impressionnée et douteuse à déterminée et sévère. Nous réalisons que deux autres équipes sont ici pour tenter notre objectif — l'une d'entre elles pour la troisième fois. Prenant compte de cette situation, nous nous lèvons au milieu de la nuit pour les devancer, mais à notre surprise, nous sommes les derniers en ligne. Ici, le niveau de motivation dépasse les limites de mon imagination. Les membres d'une des équipes qui nous précèdent s'assoupissent tout simplement, assis contre un rocher, au point de grelotter sur place. Ils mettent bientôt un terme à leur souffrance et partent grimper à 1 heure du matin.

Pendant la première partie de l'ascension, nous dépassons une autre équipe dans une course folle alimentée par l'urgence de ne pas être pris derrière eux plus tard dans les longues fissures. Nous y arrivons grâce à notre petit sac de moins de 40 litres pour deux personnes, dans lequel nous n'avons pas mis de sac de couchage.

Sur le pilier, l'escalade va de bon train, mais nous sommes un peu perplexes pour ce qui est de la suite, étant donnée la lenteur de la dernière équipe encore devant nous. J'ai 14 longueurs de fissures derrière moi et je continue pour les 10 prochaines. C'est pour moi un « single block » sur le pilier.

La nuit finit tout de même par nous rattraper, au moment même où nous nous rendons compte que l'équipe de bons alpinistes néo-zélandais qui nous précède a été ralentie par des fissures complètement bouchées par la glace. Nous ne pouvons pas continuer dans la noirceur, vu ces difficultés inattendues. Une longue nuit nous attend, avec rien de plus qu'une doudoune et une petite vire pour nos quatre fesses, les jambes dans le vide. Engourdis par le froid, nous ne dormons pas.

Le lendemain, nous savons que la suite sera un combat où toutes les règles sont permises et où les solutions doivent être des plus imaginatives. Penduler d'une fissure à l'autre ; traverser des faces avec des protections limites ; casser la glace en grimpant avec un piolet, les chaussons aux pieds. Les plumes de mon manteau de duvet volent autour de moi, à mesure qu'il se déchire contre les parois abrasives.

Quelques longueurs derrière nous, la troisième équipe abandonne, faute de progrès dans les larges fissures de glace. Nous arrivons au sommet du pilier un peu trop tard pour continuer vers le deuxième sommet, celui de la montagne principale du Fitz Roy. La fenêtre de 48 heures est fermée et les vents violents sont déjà de la partie. Nous redescendons péniblement avec notre corde déchirée au point où nous pouvons voir l'âme à deux endroits.

Une seconde fenêtre météo arrive deux jours plus tard, et la tentation de repartir est forte. Sur les traces d'Yvon Chouinard cette fois-ci, nous traversons la montagne du Fitz Roy dans sa face relativement dépourvue de soleil, en courant et grimpant à toute allure. Nos deux visages expriment une force de conviction des plus enragées. Toujours sans sac de couchage et avec encore moins de matériel, nous prenons le pari de réussir avec un effort continu, sans jamais s'arrêter.

Cette face de la montagne par la Californian Route est des plus intrigantes. Les fissures partent dans toutes les directions, offrant parfois des raccourcis avantageux. Un peu égarés dans les dernières tours à traverser, nous perdons un temps précieux et recevons quelques morceaux de glace. Mais le sommet est à portée de vue et nous l'atteignons rapidement.

Toute cette ascension depuis notre campement a pris 18 heures, et la descente est pratiquement aussi longue. Nous nous égarons au départ des rappels avant de retrouver la Franco-Argentine, qui nous est inconnue. Avec deux autres équipes sous la nôtre, nous poursuivons la descente un peu pris à la remorque du rythme très lent qu'elles nous imposent. Trente-deux heures plus tard, de retour à notre campement, nous avons un certain plaisir à filmer notre état de grande fatigue, où la plus simple des tâches devient infiniment longue à exécuter.

Résumé

Californian Route (5.10c, 700 m), Cerro Fitz Roy, Patagonie, Argentine. Yannick Girard, Martin Lajoie, janvier 2012.

Kearney-Knight Route (5.11+, 1 200 m), pilier nord (Goretta), Cerro Fitz Roy (jusqu'au sommet du pilier), Patagonie, Argentine. Yannick Girard, Martin Lajoie, janvier 2012.

Yannick Girard dans la partie supérieure du pilier Goretta, Cerro Fitz Roy.
Photo : Daniel Joll

2012 BMC Winter Meet

Jennifer Olson

I HAVE FANTASIZED about winter climbing in Scotland since I heard about Sean Isaac attending the British Mountaineering Council's International Climbing Meet in 2007. I patiently waited until they hosted another meet then planned my attack of begging and pleading to the ACC to send me to represent Canada. It was pretty much everything I'd hoped for and more, excluding a rather eventful ending that I am still adjusting to.

I flew into Inverness after attending the World Cup Ice Climbing competition in Saas Fee, Switzerland. From an artificial climbing wall in a parking garage high in the Alps to the majestic forests and hills of the wet and windy Scottish highlands, both events hosted a crayon-pack of nationalities and the passionate enthusiasm of obsessed climbers. I met athletes and adventurous spirits from Russia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, France, Korea, Japan, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Finland and, of course, the United Kingdom.

In Scotland we were generously housed at Glenmore Lodge just outside of Aviemore in the Cairngorms. Each day, an international visitor was teamed up with a talented local to go and explore a craggy outcrop. Objectives ranged from enticing chimneys and gulley climbs to stout dihedrals and faces. Some with ice, others with turf, but all were white. We were educated in the ethics of the local folk. Black (i.e. no snow on the rock) meant go to the pub. It is in a climber's best interest to only climb on the rocks when they are covered in ice, rime or some other version of white stuff, regardless of the fact that at times you may need to clean off that very valuable winter coating to find protection or a tool placement. Ironic, but I get it; especially when I found sinker placements in the turf. What a tragedy it would be to climb unfrozen turf thus destroying it for future ascents. Nothing is quite as satisfying as swinging into a sacred piece of frozen flora that makes an otherwise tricky mantel move enjoyable and elegant.

Hours were spent inching our way up the impeccable granite of these *coires* and *bens*. The movement can be balancey, technical and tenuous. Finding protection involves cleaning the cracks while eyeing-up stopper and hex placements, making them solid with a few whacks of your hammer. Cam placements, on the other hand, can be very suspect since the cracks are often lined with verglass.

Most days were windy, and despite being just above freezing temperatures my exposed hands felt like ice blocks in minutes. A couple of times I attempted to change my lowest layer after a two-hour approach only to find the wind and spindrift coincidentally pick up with fury at the moment of nakedness. A futile effort I found. It is better to just keep moving and accept the humidity and dampness of this northern maritime climate until you get back to a hot shower.

I was fortunate not to have to utilize a map and compass during my holiday to Scotland—both of which are necessary equipment for navigating the often whiteout conditions on the barren plateaus. I can only imagine how terrifying it would be to top out on one of the moors in a grey fog and have to try to find your way home without stumbling off the edge of a cliff or walking in the opposite direction for days.

On the last day of the meet, I had the good fortune to climb with another female, named Rocio (nicknamed Theo). It's always a treat to climb with a strong woman, and we had perfect weather to boot. Despite being exhausted, the weather and the company made it easy to get motivated to go out for another climbing day at Coire an Lachain. The crag was busy, so we ended up attempting to climb a route called The Vagrant (Scottish VII, 7).

It just so happened that Justin and Simon of Reeltime Productions, who were filming the entire meet, wanted to film us that day. Justin initially filmed from the ground, while Simon got into position from higher up on the climb by abseiling into the route. Theo led the first pitch in fine style and brought me up to the anchor. I looked up at the second pitch and felt intimidated by the main feature, which was a striking, slightly diagonal hand crack. I wasn't sure how to tackle this crack but willed the grade to be accurate and hoped it would easily unfold.

The first few body lengths were fun as I found reasonable protection. Then I started into the hand crack. There were obvious small fissures and features drawing me up and left of the crack, and if I had no preconceived notions about where to climb, that would have been my inclination. But I thought let's just see how climbing the hand crack goes, and I knew I had a plan B readily available to me. The gear in the main crack feature was tricky since the crack was very parallel-sided and did not accept nuts or hexes easily. I did get a good nut off to the left, and then I placed a small cam in the main crack knowing that I needed to get a better piece of protection in very soon. I tried several times. Finally I moved up to where I thought I would easily slot a nut.

I had my left tool in a small piece of turf or sn'ice on a ledge and my right tool cammed in the hand crack. It held as I tested it. My feet, taking most of my weight, were stemming the feature. As I moved my right foot, my right tool popped. I wobbled, resisting the barn door while hanging on my left tool. I looked at my hand and willed it to grip harder, but I was too relaxed and not ready to load that hand completely, and as a result, I let go. The cam and nut (placed with hammering) in the parallel crack both ripped out. The first thing I impacted was a boulder on a ledge. That is likely how I fractured my spinous

process on T4. Then my feet flipped over my head and I continued to fall a couple of more metres. This action likely caused the compression fracture of T12.

I made a loud involuntary cry at the impact of my fall—pain shot through my body. I experienced much discomfort for the next couple of hours.

Luckily I was carrying Tylenol with codeine because it was only after ingesting three tablets that over the next couple of hours I was finally able to allow Theo to counterbalance rappel with me down 30 metres to the bottom of the cliff. Unfortunately for her, I wasn't in *so* much pain that I couldn't still try to supervise her work.

Jennifer Olson on pitch five of Gargoyle Wall, Ben Nevis. Photo: James Dunn

At the base of the climb, there were a few folks who generously helped me by creating a flat platform for me to lie on. Also, there was a doctor and some very caring climbers.

Eventually, the gigantic yellow bird arrived and lowered out a rescuer. Unfortunately it wasn't Prince William—neither on the line nor flying the bird. But the strong man who carried out the rescue eventually put me in a litter, and attached us to the long-line that then winched us up to the machine in the diminishing daylight.

I was concerned that the rescuers and film crew were all putting themselves at risk by staying at the cliff so late. I was relieved to later learn that no further incidents happened due to my rescue.

At the hospital, I was X-rayed and CT scanned, and then sent "home" un-splinted with the diagnosis of a fractured but stable T12 (it wasn't until I was re-X-rayed in Canada that they caught the fracture of T4). I made it to the final party to share my drama over a glass of wine, and then passed out from the day's excitement.

Now, at three months since the accident, I am climbing, skiing and preparing to guide Mount Columbia and Mount Logan in May. I feel very fortunate not to be a paraplegic.

Attending the BMC International Climber's Meet in Scotland was a highlight of my climbing career. The combination of generous hosts, interesting international guests and high-quality climbing will create fond memories for many years to come. This was my first accident in 20 years of climbing. I hope to go back to Scotland in the future and enjoy many more days of winter cragging—incident-free.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Alpine Club of Canada for the opportunity to fulfill a dream and make this trip possible. Thank you to the BMC and organizers for hosting such a fantastic opportunity for international climbers and for taking good care of me post-accident.

Necronomicon

Jean-Pierre Ouellet

I first heard about The Underworld in the Canyonlands area of Utah a couple of years ago when Rob Pizem did the first free ascent of The Army of Darkness (5.13d). The route looked sick, so I instantly tried to find where it was, but until this past fall, this underground roof-crack world had been kept secret.

After a few years of begging, Rob finally gave in and showed me the ultimate project of the Underworld—Necronomicon. Rob worked on it for a couple of seasons and came close to sending it, but the super-thin hand-to-ringlock-to-finger-bar section always shut down his best tries.

Since last summer I have been kind of secretly training for this roof. I did a lot of roof-crack boulder problems in Vedeawoo and Yosemite, and worked on a roof project at home. But the first time I went down there, I was awestruck. It was the best unclimbed crack I had ever seen—such a proud and unique line definitely makes it the mother of all roof cracks.

After my first two days on the roof, my neck, shoulder, shins and hamstrings were so sore I had to take three days off, but I was confident I could send the horizontal splitter at some point during my trip. The seven-metre finger-bar crux section was not that unfamiliar to me since I had used the finger-bar technique on a few other routes in the past year. For a vertical crack of this size I would normally do ringlocks or thumb-stacks, but these are not very effective in a roof, and they are especially painful. So basically, the finger-bar is like an arm-bar (for off-widths) but with the fingers. It is obviously very insecure but worked quite well for the crux of Necronomicon.

My main crux, however, was finding willing partners to belay my attempts. On my third trip down to The Underworld, when I finally found a partner to go back with me, I was feeling more confident and I almost climbed Necronomicon on my seventh try with pre-placed gear. I finally pinkpointed the route four days and three tries later. Although I was really happy with my performance, I was not totally satisfied with the pinkpoint ascent. I thought that The Book of the Dead deserved a better style. But the idea of cleaning all of the gear after every try was daunting. The day after the pinkpoint send, my friend and well-known photographer Andrew Burr came to shoot the climb. He made me do the crux section eight to 10 times that day. This gave me the confidence that I could do it while placing gear. I returned three days later with my friend Marat and redpointed the route on my second go placing gear.

I want to say a special thanks to Rob for sharing this route with me. I really appreciate it! It means a lot to me. Also, thanks to Marat for the belay duty, and to the Wide Boyz (British climbers Tom Randall and Pete Whittaker) for their encouragement and inspiration.

Summary

Necronomicon (5.13d/14a, 30m), The Underworld, Canyonlands, Utah. FA: Jean-Pierre Ouellet, October 2011.

Jean-Pierre Ouellet on Necronomicon at The Underworld. Photo: Alex Ekins

Three Peaks Nepal

Margaret Imai-Compton

BARRY BLANCHARD'S e-mail popped into my inbox late on Christmas Day 2010. He'd titled it "Three Peaks Nepal in the Fall 2011" and for a nanosecond I thought it was one of his playful pranks, until I read on.

Namaste All!

I hope that this letter finds everyone well and enjoying time in the mountains. I am giddy at the prospect of returning to the Everest region of Nepal. Ours will be my fifth trip into the powerful Solu Khumbu mountainscape and its endearing culture. I am very much looking forward to re-acquainting with these magnificent peaks and sharing past experiences, while gaining new ones, with you all.

We're shooting for three peaks—Gokyo Ri, Lobuche East and Island Peak—and a crossing of the very high Cho La (pass). Both Lobuche and Island Peak will require high camps in tents, which our Sherpa expedition partner will supply and organize in concert with me.

Read the itinerary and tell me what you think.

Happy Trails!

Barry

Trekking and climbing in Nepal with Barry as lead guide had been a much discussed concept between Mark Rosin and me over the years. But here it was, with details on our objectives, logistics and a price tag! Barry had given us the mother of all Christmas gifts—one month in the Solu Khumbu!

Peak Number One

BARRY SCRUTINIZES my stiff and puffy purple fingers on the summit of Gyoko Ri (5,357 metres) and pronounces it to be the real deal.

"Well, Margaret, that's frost nip. Most of your fingers still have some colour, but we've got to warm them up before they go white. Put them in your armpits, and we'll find you some warmer gloves."

Easier said than done, considering I'm wearing three layers of fleece and a down jacket. As I'm unzipping layer after layer, looking for that elusive contact of skin on skin, Harry Prentice gallantly bares his torso and says, "Here, Margaret, stick them in mine. The pits may be stinky but they're warm!"

Harry shared more details when we descended to the teahouse in Gokyo. "When your gloves were removed your hands were swollen, purple-ish in some areas, and on the predominantly raised portions of the swollen tissue there was a whitish waxy-looking colour."

This is not an auspicious omen for the two higher peaks Barry designed in the itinerary, but it's over a week into the expedition so there's no point in turning back.

Peak Number Two

BARRY'S HEADLAMP flickers inside the walls of our tent as I watch him methodically dress and pack for the climb on Lobuche East (6,090 metres). It's 1 a.m. on October 28. It is cold—really cold in our high camp. And I am paralyzed with indecision. Should I make the effort to join the team to climb Lobuche East? Or should I just snuggle deeper into the comfort of my sleeping bag and continue with my reverie?

Steaming Sherpa tea is delivered to our tent, followed by hot soup and a sandwich, but I can't even muster enough energy to sit up and receive the food. *So this is what AMS [Acute Mountain Sickness] feels like,* I think to myself. *It's the real deal.*

No energy, no conviction, no desire to even shrug off the sleeping bag from my shoulders and sit up. Just enough energy to give Barry a squinty glance and mumble, "I'm really not feeling so good now. You go on. I'm just going to sleep. Wish everyone good luck, Barry." I am extremely embarrassed by my lethargy, but my body is unwilling to swing into action.

Barry is kind and generous in his encouragement. "Margaret, you know you can do this. I know you can do this. You climb better than a lot of people on this mountain."

I am grateful for his vote of confidence, but my body refuses to fire up. At this moment my down sleeping bag is my best friend. So I turn off my headlamp, snuggle deeper into my bag and fade into contented half-sleep as I listen to the team congregate near the cook tent. I sense extreme anticipation (and some anxiety) in the voices of my friends as they set off, and I am happy for them, but I am happier for me because I am cozy in the tent. Having AMS is giving me the gift of sleep. I have never slept so much and so long in my adult life as I have on this trip in the Solu Khumbu.

Peak Number Three

THE OFFICIAL KHUMBU trekking map labels our high-camp location as the "Attack Camp of Island Peak", but not all of us are in attack form. By the third week of our expedition, the Khumbu cough has hit some of us quite hard while others are fighting flu symptoms and something Barry calls being "butt sick" (use your imagination).

It's 2 a.m., we're in high camp on the flanks of Island Peak (6,194 metres) and it's cold, really cold (again!). Barry and I are dressing and packing for a climb to the summit, but we are both sick—and in Barry's case, a partial recovery from a high fever earlier in the week. During a pee break around midnight, I hurl a messy mass of mucous, so I am uncertain and indecisive once again. Can I climb this peak when I'm feeling so diminished?

Without any regrets, I slither back into the welcomed comfort of my bag and muffle some sorry words to Barry. "I'm going to pass on this one. Will you take my prayer flags and leave them at the summit for me?"

Barry stuffs the roll of tightly furled rainbow flags into his pack, and he's gone. The prayer flags and the red blessing cords we wear on our necks were sanctified by the Tibetan Buddhist monks at Tengboche Monastery to grant us an auspicious and safe expedition. "It'll be a good day for my friends," I say to myself, and then curl into a tight fetal ball and drift into the comfort of unconsciousness.

Seven hours later Deborah Perret and I are luxuriating in the warmth of the morning sun as we admire the legendary mountains spread out before us—Makalu, Lhotse, Ama Dablam—when she flips around and announces, "Barry's coming down the scree. He's on his way back."

A miniscule yellow dot is, in fact, Barry descending to high camp, and when he arrives exhausted and spent, his first words, between heaving coughs, are "I want a new pair of lungs!"

Happily, our other team members Tim Winn, Jeff Dmytrowich, Mark Rosin, Harry Prentice and Jane Shadbolt return in due time with tired smiles, having successfully navigated the 200-metre headwall and the knife-edge ridge to reach Island Peak's summit at 7:30 a.m.

"We had the opportunity to walk amongst the giants and stand together on the summit and call home to our families via cell phone. It doesn't get better than that," Mark says in his gentle and modest manner.

The resilience of the human spirit is amazing as I reflect on Jane Shadbolt's summit achievements. Early in the trip Jane developed a nasty deep cough that was eventually diagnosed as pneumonia on her return to Australia. And yet, throughout the three weeks, she persisted and successfully summitted all three peaks. Always self-effacing, Jane believes that mountaineering is equal parts mental fortitude and athleticism.

"Climbing with pneumonia in Nepal means nothing other than that I'm too stubborn for my own good. It is an interesting study in how much the mind plays into these things. I really wanted to climb the summits and just told myself to keep putting one foot in front of the other and enjoy it as much as possible, to take in the amazing views and keep telling myself how lucky I am to be here. And that worked!"

For me, Nepal Three Peaks 2011 was classically about the journey and not the summits. It didn't really matter whether I stood at 5,650 metres or above 6,000 metres, so there was no point in pushing myself when I was physically compromised. Instead, having topped out on Chukhung Ri (5,650 metres) while waiting to move up to Island Peak, I happily renamed the trip, "Two Peaks and Two High Camps in Nepal" and was completely content with the privilege of exploring a magical, self-propelled culture. I knew, however, that for others in our team it was important to reach the top, and that internal struggles sometimes overwhelm the ability to control and manage our fears.

Kame Sherpa ascending Island Peak. Photo: Jeff Dmytrowich

Being completely self-propelled in the Solu Khumbu has different consequences for locals than for those of us from developed countries. In the West, there is hardly a day when we are not in some kind of motorized vehicle in the course of our work or play. In the Solu Khumbu, being self-propelled is not a choice; it is a necessity that renders a pretty hard life.

Travel is measured in hours and days, not distance. Everything, and I mean everything, from heavy construction material, food, trekking luggage and farm machinery is carried on the backs of people or animals. So what happens if you are a visitor and for whatever reason being self-propelled is no longer an option? Then you follow the signs in each village that advertise, "Tired of trekking? Hire happy horse. Safe, reliable, cheap."

The one aspect of this expedition that leap-frogs us from primitive to futuristic is the presence of technology in all forms. Porters, Sherpa guides and yak herders all chat on their cell phones as we jostle for space on the trails. Teahouses in even the smallest hamlet use solar panels to power compact fluorescent light bulbs in their tiny rooms, and Internet cafes (at least one in every town) allow us to keep an active connection with home.

At the same time, our expedition team is well outfitted with technology as both Tim and Jeff strap solar panels on their backpacks for recharging cell phones, iPods and camera batteries. We also carry GPS units, satellite phones and a pulse-oximeter with results I dutifully record every evening after dinner. Our cache of electronic hardware is in sharp contrast to the yak-dung-heated dining halls, potato and barley fields tilled by hand, and terraced fields carved out of rocky hillsides.

At the conclusion of the month-long expedition, the team flies back to various points in Canada and Australia, while Barry stays on to attempt a new route on Kusum Kanguru with fellow Canmore climber Tom Schnugg. We receive his trip report two weeks later, written in his signature narrative style.

Summit of Gokyo Peak. Photo: Tim Winn

November 20, 2011

Namaste Y'all,

So I landed in Lukla on November 10, hooked up with Tom and bought food and gas for our climb, then came down with round two of the fever, and I got butt sick. A night of shivering in the North Face Lodge, and a second one in the Hill Top Lodge in Chepplung, one slow and painful hour up-valley from Lukla.

We started up the Thado Kosi River on November 13, a short day followed by an insane jungle climb clinging to bamboo and yak grass to keep from tumbling into the Thado Kosi. It was frosted with verglass that required sand to be chucked onto the boulders for traction on our half dozen crossings. We had two 20-year-old brothers, Pasang and Dawa, from the Thado Kosi village porting for us.

Pasang is one of the most naturally gifted athletes that either Tom or I had ever seen. The Wayne Gretzky of the jungle-porting world. The guy could run through the jungle with 30 kilograms on his back wearing Crocs! Tarzan would have been hard pressed to keep up.

Eight grueling hours saw us to basecamp, which was mud platforms hacked out of a double black diamond ski run. Shara, our sirdar and older cousin to Pasang and Dawa, got us lost in the mist the next day searching for high camp. Not his fault as we couldn't see a damn thing.

We retreated to basecamp and it snowed for 48 hours, then we plum ran out of time and tromped back to Lukla on November 19. The descent down the Thado Kosi was even crazier! Hand rappels on snow-covered bamboo. Neither Tom nor I could keep up with Pasang who had a load, amazing!

Ang Niri at the North Face lodge told me no chance of flying today, so I called Wongchu (owner of Peak Promotion) who called me back 15 minutes later commanding me to get to the airport, and then he changed my return flight to get me home in time for my daughter's birthday. YIPEEEEE!

So, we took all the gear for a jungle walk, got to see the mountain the last morning, spent all of our money and didn't climb a damn thing. How could life be better?

Peace and light,

Barry

Reviews

Freedom Climbers

by Bernadette McDonald, Rocky Mountain Books (2011)

Polish photographer David Seymour (born David Szymin) apparently once remarked that in great photography "…all you need is a little bit of luck, and enough muscle to click the shutter." He was being modest, for clicking the shutter in the way that Seymour and his contemporaries did took considerable strength and vision. There are similarities between the making of a photograph and the writing of history or biography. At their most effective and aesthetic, the photographer and the writer seek not only to collect facts and display them, but they also strive to give shape and meaning to an image or a story in a way that puts them at the very core of the thing being described. Simply *seeing* something is not the same as photographing it; likewise, dry chronology and recitation of facts do not make for good history or biographical writing. To succeed demands real muscle.

It takes the reader only a few pages to realize that *Freedom Climbers*, the latest book by acclaimed Canadian mountain writer Bernadette McDonald, has what it takes. *Freedom Climbers* is the ambitious and sweeping history of post-WWII Polish Himalayan alpinism, one that contains factual information and pulls it together into a great story. That it won both the Grand Prize at the 2011 Banff Mountain Book Festival and the 2011 Boardman-Tasker Prize is in itself sufficient endorsement. A meaningful, must-read book, it follows the key members of a driven tribe of alpinists who occupied the forefront of a renaissance in climbing as they struggled and succeeded in pioneering routes on the world's highest peaks in bold style. A good many of them lost their lives in the process, in the service of their dreams, their ambition, their search for a liberation from the oppression and limitations of their own country—and at times of themselves.

Simultaneously describing and capturing the zeitgeist of those days is not an easy task. As Churchill said: "History with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days." This was McDonald's challenge, the seeds of a complex tale that were first sown through her personal exposure to several of the book's main characters during her years in the world of mountain culture and film/book festivals. One single event also served as principal catalyst: a festival gathering and afterparty in Katowice, Poland. There she listened as the remaining members of that tribe reminisced and told their stories, many of which were unknown in the West. McDonald felt as though she was witness to the end of an era; a golden age had passed.

Any good drama, real or fiction, has a cast of lead and supporting characters. *Freedom Climbers* is no different. McDonald intentionally devotes most of her attention and spotlight to arguably the three most significant Polish climbers: Wanda Rutkiewicz, Jerzy Kukuczka and Voytek Kurtyka. This is not just because they were among the most famous and accomplished, but also because of the contrasts and commonalities they represent, and how their individual stories also serve in telling the broader story of the community as a whole. And so in each life story, and throughout the book, McDonald subtly and effectively layers the themes of suffering, faith, pride and ingenuity that have defined the Polish nation and its people for hundreds of years.

Rutkiewicz, Kukuczka and Kurtyka all describe the freedom they realized upon first discovering climbing. This is not uncommon for all of us, but set against the oppressive government system of the Iron Curtain and the slow recovery from WWII, it must have felt like a revelation. Brilliant expedition organizers like Andrzej Zawada would come to play a critical role in recruiting talent, building national pride and recognition (which kept the state happy), and enabling the dreams of many climbers. Unlike in many Western countries, climbing in Poland was not some counter-culture escape. The state had successfully crushed most aspects of normal self-actualization and often wasn't even providing the basics, so the communal and structured climbing system in Poland became the place of social connection and fulfillment; something quite absent in a lot of other areas of Polish life at that time.

How this plays out with each character in McDonald's book makes for interesting reading and reflection. In Rutkiewicz, we have a life shaped by tragedy in the death of her brother while playing with a grenade in the rubble following WWII, and her father's brutal murder when she was a young woman. A study in contrasts, McDonald shows the duality of Rutkiewicz's simultaneous desire for love and acceptance, and in the same moment, desire to compete with and alienate many who tried to get close. She is a person who seems lost in life, everywhere except the fleeting moments on the heights. Her story is in some ways the loneliest, a national hero who was one of the best female alpinists in history, a dreamer whose search finally ended with her death on Kangchenjunga in 1992.

Kukuzcka's determination and hard work were legendary in a culture where such qualities were already in abundance. He applied these traditional values to the problems at hand, whether negotiating contracts for chimney painting as a means of income for club expeditions, dealing with the setbacks of the deaths of partners, or pushing past altitude illness and severe cold. One of the most impressive Himalayan climbers the world has ever known, Kukuzcka was the second man to climb

all 14 eight-thousand-metre peaks, most by difficult new routes and several in winter. McDonald shows that if Rutkiewicz's faith was that of independence and acceptance, where many didn't know what to expect of her, Kukuzcka's was a faith of dogged determination and adaptability. When adaptability didn't work, all-out suffering often did. Sadly, the continuous exposure to hard, high climbing caught up with him when a rope broke high on the south face of Lhotse in 1989.

Kurtyka would follow a different path than others. Elite, intuitive and artistic, he would come to define his freedom not just by slipping past the Iron Curtain to pursue his climbs, but by the style and aesthetic qualities of the experiences he had. One of the principle architects of the Himalayan alpine-style movement, his bold ascents included the east face of Dhaulagiri, Shining Wall on Gasherbrum IV, Broad Peak traverse, the east face of Trango Tower and many others. He's also known for the chances he didn't take, his cautionary sixth sense. The style and attitude of these climbs, including the specific nature of their partnerships (often with iconoclastic Western climbers such as Alex MacIntyre) defined the alpinist's art in their purity of line and rejection of large bureaucratic expeditions. McDonald shows how Kurtyka saw that the desire to climb at all costs contained a trap that could constrain. Ever the intellectual, he took freedom to another level, and is still alive today.

Freedom Climbers is a magnificent book. As Henri Cartier-Bresson did when he "craved to seize the whole essence" in a single picture, Bernadette McDonald has managed likewise to trip the writer's shutter at the decisive moment when fact and art intersect, thus giving events their "proper expression" as the master photographer would say. And ultimately as we witness the lightning that was the golden age of Polish Himalayan alpinism, we see a little bit of ourselves, our own motivations and the freedom we all seek in the mountains.

—Jon Popowich

Ecology & Wonder in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site

by Robert W. Sandford, Athabasca University Press (2010)

Every once in a while a book comes along that quickly proves its value by going beyond the simple act of sharing information, and through its quality and depth not only helps us understand who we are, but how we fit in this place we call home.

Ben Gadd did that with his *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, as did Bart Robinson and Brian Patton with their *Trail Guide to the Canadian Rockies*, and more recently Graeme Pole and his *Canadian Rockies Explorer*. These books are essential reading as they provide the information and, more importantly, the experience and understanding that would otherwise take a lifetime to accumulate. Their life's work allow the rest of us to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Canadian Rockies, and through that, to become more connected to this region, to this place so many of us profess to love.

With the publication of Robert W. Sandford's *Ecology & Wonder in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site*, this short but extremely important list of books has just grown by one.

Sandford wrote in the opening pages of this book that *Ecology & Wonder* was 40 years in the making. He began his connection to the Rockies in 1970 when he was hired as a park naturalist by Parks Canada, at which time he was bluntly informed that he was not their first choice. Thankfully, he ignored that comment and went on to write, edit or publish more than 20 books on nature, history and culture of the Rocky Mountain region, and chair the United Nations International Year of Mountains (2002), the United Nations International Year of Fresh Water (2003), and the Wonder of Water Initiative (2004) in Canada. He is currently chair of the Canadian Partnership Initiative of the United Nations International Water for Life Decade.

Ecology & Wonder, as a result, is the culmination of all those activities and experiences that represent a lifetime spent helping others understand and appreciate the mountains. Sandford is passionate about the West, the Rockies and protected landscapes, along with the numerous facets that fall under those that can only be generalized as human and natural history, and he includes the myriad of facets that make the Rocky Mountain national parks unique and worthy of world heritage site status.

The narrative is a passionate, detailed response but not overwhelming. Instead, many of the different aspects, such as landscape art and photography, are covered in a single chapter with quick hits on the different elements that fall under that topic. Even the chapter about Banff National Park, which is now celebrating its 125th anniversary, is only 28 pages long over a 352-page book, thus providing a good example of the remarkable range of Sandford's topics.

Through that, he gives us just enough information to either ignite or re-kindle an interest in this region and its intriguing and numerous facets. What Sandford has done, through his passion and commitment to the ecological and human history of the Canadian Rockies World Heritage Site, is help us to understand that we cannot protect what we don't understand. But thankfully, through the work and passion of others, such as Sandford, we can build a deeper, more profound connection to the Canadian Rockies World Heritage Site and be better able to love this place and work to ensure it remains worthy of its globally significant title.

—Rob Alexander

Summits & Icefields 1: Alpine Ski Tours in the Canadian Rockies

by Chic Scott & Mark Klassen, Rocky Mountain Books (2011)

Back in 1995, I wrote a review of the first edition of *Summits & Icefields* for the *CAJ*. In the review, I expressed excitement about the imminent release of that guidebook. Sixteen years later, I found myself just as excited about the imminent release of the third edition of *Summits & Icefields*.

A lot has changed between the first and third editions. The key change is the book has been split into two volumes. Volume 1 covers the Canadian Rockies and Volume 2, which will be released later this year, covers the Columbia Mountains. There are also a lot of changes between the second and third editions. Key is the addition of Mark Klassen to the impressive writing team. Mark offers a lot of experience and local knowledge to the formidable base of knowledge that Chic brings to the series. The third edition has nearly twice as many tours as the second edition and brings full-colour pictures and maps into play. Witnessing the number of ski tracks out there on the tours that are new to this edition, it appears that this book has already made its way into a lot of people's hands!

The new guide has more details than ever about hazards, maps, accommodation and anything else that you need to know to enjoy the area. Tours in British Columbia described in the guide also include information on maps based on B.C. TRIM data, which are much more useful than the National Topographic Series maps. Each tour description includes the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES) rating for terrain complexity, which ties the tours nicely to the rated avalanche hazard. Also covered are the backcountry lodges in the area; both private and ACC facilities.

The variety of tours included is broad. There are short trips for yo-yo turns, all the way to multi-day and multi-week traverses. Accuracy of descriptions for the tours that I have done is very good; Chic is known for his meticulous research.

Looking at the credits of the photographers who contributed images to the guidebook is like reading a who's who of the local backcountry community. Over the years, Chic has gotten to know and has befriended a lot of the local community. This shows in the quality of photos and in beta received from others. A tome like this is really a community effort, as well as a lot of hard work, research and digging on the parts of the authors.

Chic Scott and Mark Klassen have created a worthy guidebook, one that should be in the possession of every skier who plans to backcountry ski in the Canadian Rockies. It is highly recommended.

—Rod Plasman

Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory, and the Conquest of Everest

by Wade Davis, Alfred A. Knopf (2011)

As george mallory and Andrew Irvine left their tents at 23,000 feet, their short, chalk-white breath puffed into the frigid air of the Himalaya. At such an altitude, they likely shuffled to stay warm and began their steady upward plod. Departing from more than just their frost-riddled tents, into the silence walked two of Britain's most darling of alpinists. Away from the myriad tragedies that shaped their generation, the two chilled men climbed away from the circumstances that had placed them on that foreign slope on June 8, 1924, and waged war on what would be their last wind-scoured slope. In a regal silence, looking towards the shrouded white ghost summit of the world, the pursuit of hills would forever etch itself onto the spirit of a nation and the bodies of a few cold men.

In *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory, and the Conquest of Everest*, Wade Davis explores, in no less than epic-style, the constituent factors of the Mallory expeditions in the 1920s to summit Mount Everest. With a literary, historical and journalistic athleticism rare to certain contemporary standards of mountain writing, Davis, as anthropologist-adventurer, crafts such a wholly complete and engaging reference on the 1920s-era Everest expeditions and the Mallory legacy to render others on the topic painfully deficient at worst, myopic speculation at best. The fitness of literary techniques and depth of research with which Davis weaves *Into the Silence* challenges both modern mountain writers and alpinists alike to rise, as the Mallory-era generation did, and consider their place in the words and mountains of history.

With an artful and steady gait, Davis moves between visceral images, sobering facts and frank assessments, always resistant to speculation so familiar in discussions regarding Mallory. Be it in descriptions of battle or ascent, laments regarding British Imperialism in India, Tibet and abroad, or in the inclusion of intimate journal entries and letters, or the influence of both modern and historical commercial interests and controversies (including the recovery of Mallory's body in 1999), *Into the Silence* is in fact, very vocal and leaves little unrevealed, little unsaid.

In a work that took nearly a decade to complete, Davis places a mountain of fact and images at the boots of his readers and begs them to climb/read on to their own conclusions regarding The Great War, George Mallory and the conquests of a battered generation. Tongue in cheek, as Mallory may have had that cold morning in June, *Into the Silence* is sure to breed a quietness in anyone privileged enough to tread lightly upon the majestic hills.

—Josh Smith

Ruthie's Trails: A Lifetime of Adventure

by Ruth Oltmann, Mount Fable Press (2011)

In 1964, ruth (Ruthie) Oltmann—long-time ACC member, active volunteer, popular camp cook, Mountain Culture Committee member—came west, like so many before her, in search of adventure, or as she says "to follow her star."

Oltmann landed in Calgary in 1967 after travelling across the country, discovering what would become her destiny when she had her first experience with The Canadian Youth Hostel Association and her first overnight backpacking trip.

Through her work at hostels and the University of Calgary field station, the Kananaskis Country information centres, along with her hiking groups and her writing, which includes her books *My Valley the Kananaskis*, *Lizzie Rummel: Baroness of the Canadian Rockies* and the first trail guide to the Kananaskis region, Oltmann was able to share her love for the mountains with numerous people, helping them to find their own joy in this mountain landscape.

And now with the release of her newest book, *Ruthie's Trails: A Lifetime of Adventure*, Oltmann is able to share the joy she has found in the mountains, her many adventures and even her occasional misadventure.

Ruthie's Trails is a lighthearted, yet passionate reminder that life in the Rockies can be highly enjoyable and filled with adventure. And when the daily grind is especially grinding, *Ruthie's Trails* and its perpetually young-at-heart and ever-smiling author is there to remind us to make the most of life and that the Rocky Mountains truly is one of the special places in the world—even if winter can settle in and hang out for 10 months of the year.

In fact, the last line from one of Oltmann's trip descriptions where she describes her time out as a "supermarvellous week" can be used to sum up her life in general as well as Oltmann's time in the Rockies. And during that time, Oltmann has travelled roughly 85 to 90 per cent of the trails in the four mountain national parks and Kananaskis Country.

"It has been a rewarding life and I am grateful to God for his guidance and care, and in looking back I consider myself rich. Not in money, but in experiences, and in the amazing, spectacular places I've seen, and the wonderful people I've met and known. It has all been a tremendous gift. Never in my wildest dreams would this skinny kid from Ottawa have imagined this life of great adventure," Oltmann wrote.

—Rob Alexander

All That Glitters: A Climber's Journey Through Addiction and Depression

by Margo Talbot, Sono Nis Press (2011)

Local "glitter girl" and well-known climber Margo Talbot had to cover more ground than most of us to reach that first hold that would mark her entry into the climbing world. In her autobiography *All That Glitters*, Margo describes how her severely dysfunctional family background gave way to a series of equally disruptive personal relationships, and Margo lurched from one addiction to another as she tried to dampen her anger and pain.

There's no mention of vertical terrain in the book until Margo moves to Jasper. Early on her first morning there, on what was supposed to be a stopover, Margo walked outside to discover "looming towers of limestone" in every direction. Her response: "It was unlike any landscape I had ever seen. I felt safe and protected in the midst of these stone fortresses, and I had a feeling I can only describe as falling in love." That's around page 50. Margo would have been about 20 years old and she had just finished her second year at university. But she would not tie in for that monumental first climb for another eight years or so, some 50 pages farther into the book.

Margo climbs ice. Even on her first climb, she felt at ease with the tools and the methodical processes of belaying her partner, and then swinging her picks and thunk-thunking her way up the wide blue strip of waterfall ice. "It came naturally to me because I had done carpentry work and was familiar with how to swing a hammer," she writes. "I loved the inherent aggression of piercing my tool into the ice."

Margo was soon ticking off an impressive list of ice routes, including some of the hardest lines in the area. Incredibly strong and determined, she rearranged her life around climbing, co-organising the Canmore Ice Climbing Festival, and guiding for Chicks with Picks in the United States.

But the real strength of Margo's story is that she does not present climbing as her salvation. The demons she has had since childhood still boil inside her. In calm but powerful prose, Margo describes her ongoing war with emotions she did not understand, and the affects of those emotions on her day-to-day life as well as on her climbing. "I felt like a ghost, as though I couldn't quite figure out how to inhabit my body, or my life," she writes. Margo's account of her decision to address these emotions and of the long, difficult journey she then faced demonstrates the steady commitment she seems to bring to every project.

But while Margo might be a tough cookie—and she sure sounds like one—she also demonstrates an endearing playfulness. She and New Zealander Karen McNeill called themselves the Glitter Girls after their hallmark partying in outrageous outfits.

Not many writers talk as extensively about the challenges they faced before they tied in that first time, and fewer still talk about what they did with the emotions they found in the suitcases they lugged up the route with them. Margo does it with style. *All That Glitters* is a fun and rewarding read, and it will appeal to climbers and ground-dwellers alike.

— Nic Learmonth

Remembrances

Peter Koedt
1944-2010

Peter was born in Denmark where his parents worked in the Danish resistance movement during WWII. He was brought up in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and was the first guide hired by the Jackson Hole Mountain Guides in 1968. He was on the first ski descent of Mount Moran and the first ski traverse of the Teton Range, and pioneered rock climbs in the Jackson Hole area. Decades later, in the '90s and 2000s, he and I did two week-long ski traverses of the Tetons and the Wind River Range.

In about 1969 he moved to Whistler, B.C. and lived in a log cabin on the site of today's Nita Lake Lodge. He was a beautiful skier and a strong climber, and was known as "Peter blocks" because of the wooden blocks he fixed to his skis to cant his boots correctly.

My partner Nona first met Peter on Whistler Mountain when climbing to the peak after-hours, many years before the chair was built. Nona remembers it being a rather hairy experience coming down Whistler Bowl in deep powder with huge amounts of snow sloughing off, but no avalanche.

In the spring of 1972, Peter and Nona (pregnant), Colin Dearing and I went up to Wedgemount cabin and made what may have been the first ski descent of Wedge Mountain's 1,500-metre south face. This earned a derisive comment from Dick Culbert in the *CAJ*: "Some yahoos skied the south face of Wedge."

Our daughter, Lena, was almost born in Peter's cabin on January 1, 1973, as that evening, when it began to snow and we hurriedly left, the road was closed 30 minutes later.

When the first helicopter-skiing operation started in Whistler, Peter was their ski guide. One day he landed his party on the summit of Wedge Mountain, but the helicopter broke down. After taking his party down the south face of Wedge he faced the task of getting this group of skiers, with no experience of backcountry skiing and no randonée bindings, down bushy Wedge Creek to the highway. He got everyone out alive but Peter said it was a hard day and night.

In the summer of 1973, Peter and our family (Nona and our infant girls, Ruby and Lena, and the Coupes with their first child, Ian) and Greg Shannan spent two weeks in the Valhallas based at the tiny KMC cabin in Mulvey Basin. At that time the Mulvey Creek trail was in good shape, apart from the headwall.

On the first good day, we went in different directions to explore, and Peter came back with a glowing description of a wonderful ridge on Gimli. Next day, Peter, Greg and I went over to try the ridge. Peter led the first pitch, and I think we started up the second but the weather broke, so we rappelled off as it began to rain.

Peter returned in September with John Hamlin to finish the climb, which now appears to be one of the most well-known climbs in North America—the South Ridge of Mount Gimli.

Peter and I also did the first route on Mount Asgard's south face and a route up a corner on Gladsheim, both in the Valhallas. We also explored the big slabs in lower Mulvey Creek, but before we got started on the huge wall above them the weather broke. The cover of the 1974 *CAJ* shows these slabs with Peter in the foreground.

Later, Peter moved back to Jackson Hole, building log cabins for many years, and then lived in Durango, Colorado, for several years until he contracted colon cancer. Most years, in springtime, he would go on a multi-week solo desert walk-about. In his last year he was nursed by his mother, Inger, in Jackson Hole.

Peter took his mother climbing for the first time when she was 65 and took her on backcountry trips every year until he died in 2010. His mother is still very much alive, now in her late 90s and still lives in Jackson Hole. Peter also leaves behind his sister, Bonnie Kreps.

Perhaps the best memorial for Peter Koedt comes from today's climbers David Lussier and Cam Shute, who named a new route on the South Face of Mount Asgard, Étoile Filante as a tribute to him (see page 91).

—Peter Rowat

Brad Schmucker
1966-2012

In february 2012, the Okanagan Section of the ACC was saddened with the sudden loss of Brad Schmucker after a brief battle with cancer at age 45. Brad was a longtime and very active member of the Okanagan Section and served for many years on the executive, mainly representing the section at national functions. Although born in Ontario, at a young age Brad moved west with his family, settling in the Interior of British Columbia. It was there that Brad discovered that his athletic abilities were suited for recreation in the mountains. Brad graduated from Thompson Rivers University in 1986 with a Diploma in Computer-Aided Drafting, but was really more interested in living in the mountains.

He spent several years skiing while living in both Whistler and Fernie. It was at this time that Brad discovered backcountry skiing, and he left the ski-resort life behind for a more intimate backcountry experience. He pursued many activities in the mountains, including rock and ice climbing, cross-country skiing, mountain biking and water skiing on the Okanagan lakes. His true passion, however, was backcountry skiing. Although often away from his home in Kelowna due to his job as a construction superintendent, Brad was always keen for a backcountry ski trip, especially the annual Okanagan Section hut-based ski week.

Brad's tall stature belied an acrobatic ability on his skis, which at a very old-school length, seemed to weigh more than most people carried on their backs. Somehow he would manage to keep from getting clipped while loading a Bell 407 when headed to Fairy Meadow. I seem to recall he was always guaranteed a front seat in the chopper because those legs wouldn't fit in the back.

On these trips, Brad and his meal partner would always spare no expense or time when it came their turn for preparing supper. I remember a fine turkey dinner with all the fixings on several occasions, and I was paired with Brad when we presented two barons of beef for the 20 lucky souls on a Fairy Meadow ski trip. It was at Fairy Meadow that we discovered that Brad was a dedicated and unpredictable referee of the evening *bones* match and his good-humoured wrath would descend onto anyone foolish enough to question his judgments as to what the dice were reading when perched on one of the grooves in the table.

Brad was the quintessential ski partner, always ready to take a turn breaking trail. He was equally at home on a sun-splashed powder run or through the cliffs and steep trees. At well over six and a half feet tall, whether going up or coming down, when you found waist-deep powder with Brad, you knew you were in for an epic adventure. His sense of humour was deep, constant and immutable. He contained the essence of what mountain people wanted to share, high in the alpine, often times in the sun, in deep silence with a beer—a good beer.

—Ron Berlie

Philippe Eynaudi
1983-2012

On march 10, 2012, our friend Philippe Eynaudi fell to his death while climbing the mythical ice route La Pomme d'Or in Québec. It was meant to be his last ice climb of the season after an impressive winter of climbing in Gaspésie, Côte-Nord, Saguenay, New Hampshire and around Québec City, where he had been living for the past few years doing rope-access work.

I knew him for less than a year but we quickly became very close friends. We shared the same job, the same climbing ethic and dreams, the same lust for life. The last time we climbed together was a few days before the accident. I just returned from a climbing trip in South America and wanted to climb a new line that I spotted the year before on Mont Gros-Bras in Parc des Grands-Jardins, Charlevoix, Québec. He was the perfect partner for the project—always positive, even when breaking a trail in waist-deep snow; always smiling and joking, even after 10 hours of climbing tough thin ice and loose rock.

We named the new route SDF; Chapitre 33 because we were both homeless at the time (SDF means *sans domicile fixe*, or no fixed address, while *Chapitre 33* is a reference to Kris Krisofferson's song, "The Pilgrim, Chapter 33"), but I changed it at his girlfriend's request. She wanted something more personal to remember Phil's last accomplishments in climbing. So the route is called Pin ton piton mon Loup. The piton was the first that Phil had ever placed, and the last.

Life is not long or short, it is neither full nor empty. Phil's life was filled with adventure, passion and love. He did what he wanted to do until the end. May he rest in peace.

—Mathieu LeBlanc

Norman Purssell
1919–2012

Norman pursell—norm to those who knew him well—died in Vancouver on Saturday, April 28, 2012. He was 92 years of age. Norman was a life member of the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC), having taken out his membership in 1953. He had experienced his first mountain adventures in the Snowdon Mountains of North Wales in 1940. His interesting life story includes much more than his mountaineering accomplishments. He was born in the suburbs of London, England. During WWII he was trained as a Royal Air Force pilot and by the end of the war attained the rank of Flight Lieutenant. A three-month training stint in air navigation on Prince Edward Island would connect with one of his major climbing accomplishments many years later in 1967.

Having visited Canada during his wartime training, he was keen to start married life in Canada. In February 1948, he and his new bride sailed into Halifax harbour aboard a troop carrier, along with many other newly married couples. Norm and Win were soon on the train to Vancouver where he started his career in engineering. Within a couple of years, their home in West Vancouver was under construction.

As a couple they enjoyed summer train trips to the mountains, with destinations like Glacier National Park being a favourite. The family soon grew with Roy's birth in 1954 and twins Eileen and Tanis in 1959. Climbing and hiking trips continued with their first family camp in Larch Valley in 1962. During that summer trip, Norm took Roy, then age eight, and his six-year-old friend John up Mount Eiffel.

Norm had a lifelong interest in conservation. He was a member the Vancouver Natural History Society (since 1950) and the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists. He volunteered for many roles within these organizations, including being president for both. One of Norm's most active conservation issues was his involvement in the Skagit Commission. He had first visited the Skagit Valley, 150 kilometres east of Vancouver, in May of 1952. Conservationists were eventually successful in having the area turned into a provincial park. During the period of his involvement, Norm was appointed by the B.C. government as one of the Canadian Commissioners representing the conservation community.

He dedicated a lot of his spare time to the Vancouver Section of the ACC, including a two-year stint as chair of the section in 1967-68. In 1985, Norm received the ACC's prestigious Distinguished Service Award. He led many trips and camps over the years. Norm's cheerful demeanour and enjoyment of the outdoors ensured that his trips were fun to be on. He was recognized as a calm leader and always showed sound judgement in the mountains.

With all of his outdoor activities one of his fondest memories was that of the ACC Yukon Alpine Climbing Expedition (YACE) in 1967 to celebrate Canada's centennial. Much has been written about the YACE camp held in the Centennial Range of the St. Elias Mountains. The Governments of Canada and the Yukon were keen to have mountaineering as a part of the country's centennial events. The ACC supplied teams of four climbers to do first ascents of peaks named after the 10 provinces and two territories. Two additional peaks would also be climbed: Centennial and Good Neighbour Peak, which shares the Alaska border. With the 1967 ACC General Mountaineering Camp held in the same area, 250 climbers were in the St. Elias Mountains that summer. When Norm was passed over for a position on the B.C. climbing team he immediately applied for the PEI team and was accepted as that team's leader!

In a 1968 *Canadian Alpine Journal* article on his team's ascent, Norm recounted, "We only had a map with 150-metre contours and a few aerial photographs." The small four-person PEI team was overwhelmed by the vastness of the St. Elias. This was not the Rockies or Coast Mountains that they were used to. Their first attempt started in earnest in the early hours of July 13, 1967, but by 8 p.m. they were back in their camp, unsuccessful but with a better understanding what was needed to succeed. The second attempt on July 16 saw them departing camp by 1:30 a.m. The skies were clear and the views incredible with the sunrise lighting up Mount Logan. Upward progress was slow, and careful climbing throughout the morning was required to first gain the false summit then traverse a long, sharp ridge leading towards the main summit of Mount Prince Edward Island. By this time the weather had deteriorated to whiteout conditions and falling snow. The team pushed on up the final 300 metres of the southwest slopes and reached the 3,738-metre summit at 1:30 p.m. The PEI provincial flag and Canada's centennial flag were both left flying on the summit when the team headed down at 2:20 p.m. The newly fallen soft snow made the descent treacherous, requiring many pitches of belayed climbing. The difficulties of the descent can be summed up by the fact that the team did not arrive back in their camp until 1 a.m. the next day! Norm noted some easier approaches to this mountain and it is therefore unlikely that the first ascent route will be repeated.

Norm lost his beloved Win, after 53 years of marriage, in 2000. Despite this loss, with the encouragement of his close friends and family, he was able to resume his outdoor activities. Norm was still skiing and hiking in his late 80s.

—Paul Geddes

Ray Norman
1946-2011

On saturday, February 26, 2011 longtime Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) member Ray Norman died in an avalanche near Smithers, British Columbia. If a man's worth is measured by his accomplishments and titles, then Ray lived a rich life. He had an esteemed career as an actuary. He cycled across Canada. He was the chair of the Calgary Section of the ACC and was the president of the Bow Valley Cycle Club. He played the roles of brother, husband, father and grandfather with enviable grace, aptitude and panache.

But if a man's worth is measured by the joy he left behind in the world, Ray's life is even more impressive. He revelled in introducing others to the beauty of the mountains. He participated for years in the Rocky Mountain Section Backcountry Skier in Training (BIT) program and set up a similar program for the Calgary Section. He was a tireless volunteer who sincerely believed that the joy of giving to others was a gift to the giver.

Ray led the first ACC trip that I ever attended. He encouraged me to become a leader myself, and he was the organizer of the first ski leader's training weekend that I attended. Packed into a tiny tent with his son Colin at the base of White Pyramid, he dealt with the miserable, wet whiteout in his typical fashion—by laughing his head off. I never saw this amazing man without a smile on his face. The world is a sadder place with his passing.

—Steve Fedyna

Brenda Carol Desnoyers
1959-2011

I first met brenda at a Saskatchewan Section slide show in Regina. She was interested in expanding her mountain activities from downhill skiing to more remote and adventurous places. With very few members in Regina, it's easy for the club to remain "dormant", but under Brenda's enthusiastic insistence, I agreed to put on a crevasse rescue course. Again, with Brenda's encouragement and organization, we had a total of four participants. After having the students "learn the ropes" and having them raise their instructor up five metres, we had a discussion about learning and practicing skills (rope management, crevasse rescue, knots, transceiver practice, etc.) at home so that when those precious days are spent in the mountains, one could more fully enjoy the experience.

Brenda wanted to learn more skills so she could safely share mountain experiences with her friends and family. She was determined to expand her skill base, so she went on couple of GMCs, participated in Saskatchewan Section's Thrasher Weekend, organized a weekly climbing group at the local indoor wall, joyously volunteered at the Regina showing of the Banff Mountain Film Festival, and routinely participated in backcountry ski trips. Just a week before the avalanche accident that claimed her life, Brenda was furthering her education in avalanche training. Wilf Desnoyers, Brenda's father, remembers his daughter as a woman who lived life to the fullest and devoted her time to many circles within the community.

Her enthusiasm, determination and energy will be missed by the ACC, especially by the few members in the Regina area. She was a club member in the truest sense of the word—she wanted to learn more so she could share more.

—Mike Wild

Bryn Carlyle Norman
1982-2012

Death, for bryn carlyle norman, was interwoven into her life. It did not only present itself with the loss of a loved one or the loss of her own life but also from the renewal of life, from the passing of the seasons to the discovery of new friendships. Life and death became the same, even if they manifested in different forms. Death became her friend, her foe and her loyal companion.

When Carlyle was a child, both of her parents died—her mother in a climbing accident, and then her father in a cycling accident. Carlyle would be annoyed that I've written this (for several reasons she didn't like to talk about her parents' deaths), but those deaths are facts of her past, which cannot be overlooked. Her parents' deaths shaped her. But being aware of the tragedy of Carlyle's childhood is not the same as knowing who she was. It's much too simple to suggest that all the smiles and warm embraces, all the exuberance and joyfulness that she shared with us, belied that past. Instead, Carlyle's life told a deeper story, a story about how to free oneself from the shadow of death with courage and grace. She walked forward with her chin high, shoulders back and the resolve to be defined not by her history, but by her actions.

Carlyle's way of living was cultivated over a lifetime; first, by the guidance of her parents, then by the community that adopted her, and then by her own will to live free from her fears. She had a uniquely mindful presence. Whether teaching yoga, climbing an alpine big wall or just having coffee with a friend, Carlyle was always aware of her actions and, as such, anchored them to values she took very seriously: uncompromising morals, a yearning for knowledge, equanimity of the mind and a deep appreciation for adventure. Adventure took a lot from Carlyle, but it also offered her the most direct path to mindfulness.

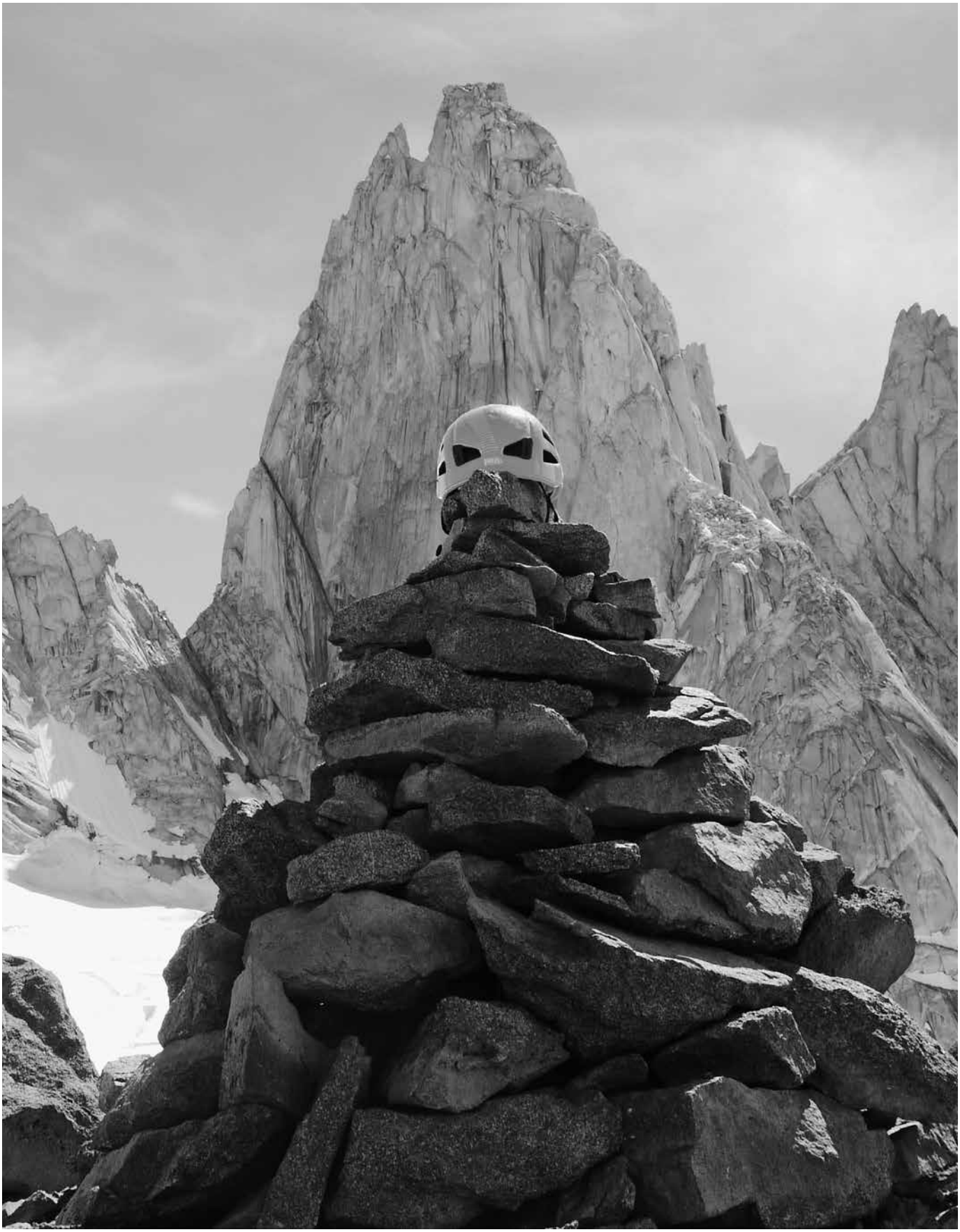
Alpinism as an embodiment of adventure became the perfect match for Carlyle—the intense focus, the physical challenge, the necessity to maintain strong values in the face of adversity and the internal struggle with fear. Carlyle used alpinism to guide her and sometimes force her to confront life's uncertainties. She recognized risk as an inherent part of life and valued the clarity that it brought her, instead of fearing what it could take away. She understood, better than many of us, how the precariousness of a situation could lead to self-discovery. Alpinism became the canvas on which Carlyle painted her fearlessness.

Over the past five years, Carlyle's objectives in the mountains grew in size and commitment. She took on these challenges with discipline and focus, training her mind and body rigorously. As with all her actions she became an observer—even if just for a moment—so that she could recognize her weaknesses and then strengthen them. She also learned to celebrate her successes and failures equally, as each experience gave her knowledge on her path of self-awareness. When Carlyle went to Patagonia in January 2012, she had embarked on a new era in her climbing career. The trip was the culmination of a life of mindfulness and it was the beginning of so many dreams to come true.

—Joshua Lavigne

My Loyal Companion, a short story by Carlyle Norman

I found my way to the city by following the path of the Green Snake River.
I left my belongings and started off into the stormy oblivion.
There were times I believed I would perish but the river delivered me to safety
And upon the embankment of the Green Snake River I was met by an angel of dreams.
And he delivered me to the sleep of one who has lost his orientation.
And what of dreams?
I dreamed of my death.
And looked upon my recently departed vessel with indifference.
And now I have discovered that our dreams change us and I awoke different from when I had gone to sleep.
The dragons have left and what they have un-covered follows me through my waking life.
I learned that death had escaped my dream.
It followed me ever patient, ever watchful.
Always at a distance, my once unbearable fear had taken on form.
It became my loyal friend.
Not predator but *amie* in the vast expanse of the lonely city.
I met wolves that used words like friend and ones that used no words at all.
But my companion's steady comfort gave me courage—the inevitable guarantee—and thus I could discern friend from foe.
Nothing could be lost to fear that I could not get back.
And the walls of concrete gave way to open sky and a full moon.
And now I am free to dream.
And these walls crumble at my will and I laugh and skip through the illusions that surround me.
I am truly free, and with you at my side, the whole world is akin.



Carlyle Norman's memorial cairn with Aguja Saint Exupery behind, Patagonia, Argentina. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

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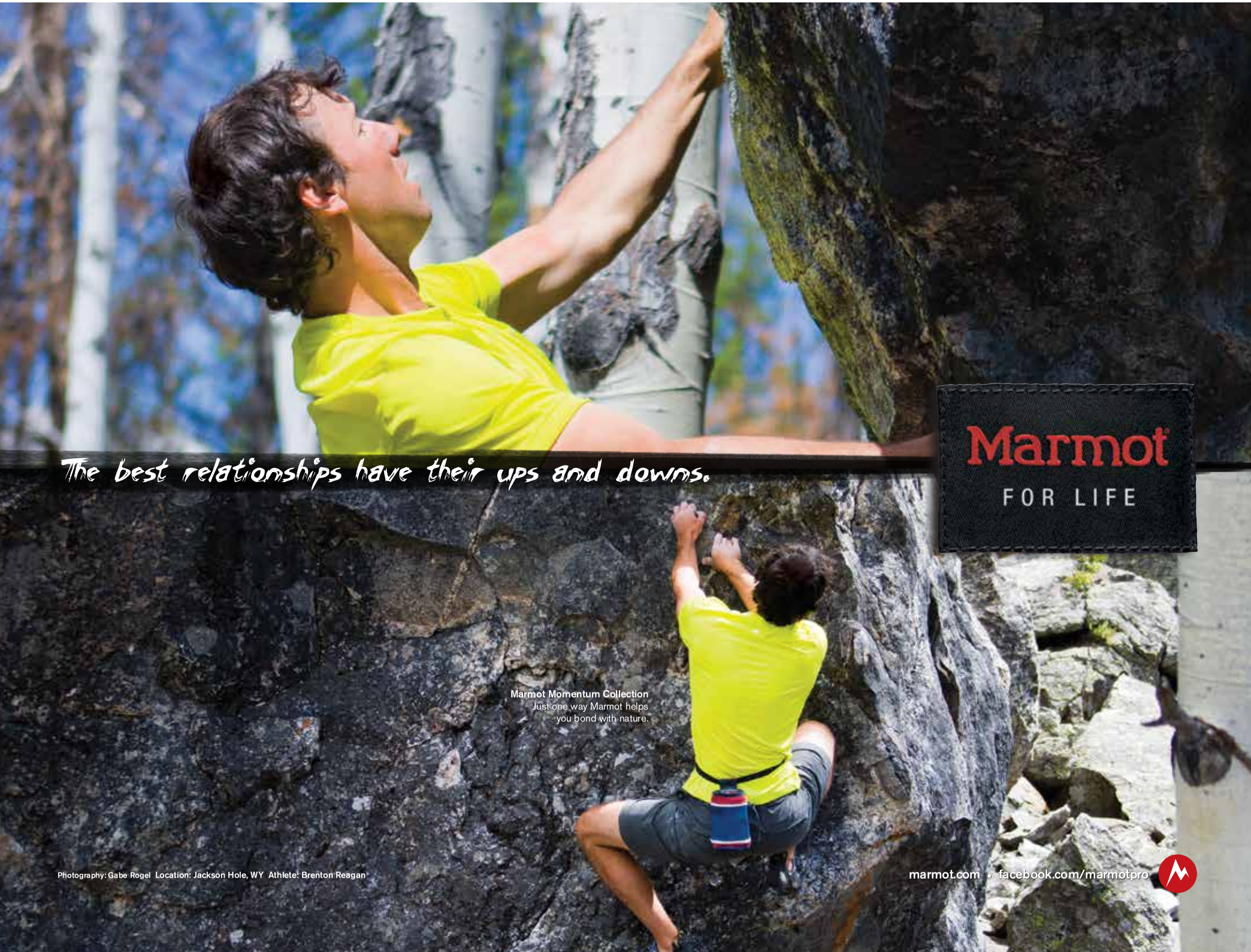
www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/grants/

Photo: Nancy Hansen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