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Reuben Shelton traverses to the base of the headwall on Mount Loki, Baffin Island. Photo: Dave Nettle

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Cover: Sonnie Trotter on Castles in the Sky, Castle Mountain, Canadian Rockies. Photo: Ben Moon
Back cover: Will Gadd rappelling Overhead Hazard, Helmcken Falls, Cariboo Mountains. Photo: Christian Pondella/© Red Bull Media House

Ian Welsted approaching the unclimbed summit of K6 West. K6 Main (climbed once) and K6 Middle (unclimbed) can be seen poking up behind the snow slope. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

# Karakoram Diaries

High on K6 West, Ian Welsted and I were still sunk in deep cold shade, but the snowy saddle at our backs already sparkled in the sun. The cloudless sky overhead was the dark blue of high places, so very different from the pale lowland sky that we could have been on an alien planet. Kick by deliberate kick, we switchbacked across an icy slope, a string of shallow tracks in a thin crust of snow that unrolled behind us. Every few minutes we would stop to swing blood back into our fingers, and at those times we would lift our heads and look up toward the summit. At last no more obstacles separated us from the highest point. No more seracs, bergschrunds, or knife-edged ridges; nothing but a snow slope that slowly eased in angle. After all the earlier trips to Pakistan where summits had eluded us, after nearly pulling the plug on this trip because of the Nanga Parbat horror, we were finally going to the top of an unclimbed 7,000-metre peak. We were finally taking the walk in the sky I had dreamed about ever since I first saw these mountains.

Raphael Slawinski

Ian Welsted on the approach between K6 West and Kapura. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

2005. OUT OF THE SHAPELESS MASS THAT IS the past, some moments stand out like still photographs. I remember driving through the concrete canyons of Calgary's downtown and deciding that, yes, I would email Steve Swenson to say that I would go with him to Pakistan. Until then I had avoided expeditions to faraway, exotic mountain ranges. I figured I could get a lot more climbing done if I stayed home in the Canadian Rockies. I don't know what made me change my mind, but that July, jetlagged after 24 hours of continuous travel, I found myself blinking in the harsh sunlight as I stepped onto the tarmac of Skardu's airstrip.

My first trip to the Karakoram was an initiation into more than just the mysteries of what, in the opinion of this relatively untravelled climber, is the grandest mountain range on Earth. It was also my first foray into the thickets of Pakistani bureaucracy. First we were denied permission for K13, which lies in the restricted area near the Line of Control that splits the disputed Kashmir. Then our plans were nixed for K6, from which you can glimpse this area. In the end, we settled for playing on the trekking peaks (in Pakistan, mountains below 6,500 metres) of the Charakusa Valley.

My first trip to Asia was unfortunately also an introduction to that continent's microbes. I recall waking up in the middle of the night in a stone guesthouse and making a desperate dash for the squat toilet. The following day, step by slow step, collapsing every few minutes among scrubby grasses, I dragged myself across the first stage of the approach trek. What is normally a two-hour walk took me an excruciating six hours.

All that was forgotten once we arrived in basecamp, a green meadow surrounded by granite spires, icy couloirs and hulking mountains. We acclimatized on the boulder-strewn hills and snowy peaks above basecamp before a good forecast enticed us up the glacier. There, at the head of the valley, stood the symmetric pyramid of unclimbed Hassin Peak (ca. 6,300 metres). The first day, climbing through intermittent flurries, we negotiated steep ice flows, granite grooves and unconsolidated snow flutings to a spectacular bivouac right on the crest of a sharp ridge. As promised by the weatherman, the following morning dawned cloudless. We set off for the summit, which rose a mere 800 metres higher, with light packs. After all, how long could climbing less than a thousand metres of snow and ice take?

As it turned out, it could take much longer than we had expected. By mid-afternoon, we ground to a halt 300 metres below the top. The snow, squeaky in the morning, had turned to mush in the fierce Karakoram sun. Swimming upward through the insubstantial stuff, we gasped at thin air with open mouths. If only we had taken bivy gear, even just a stove, we could have stopped, rested and summitted the following morning. As it was, throats burning from thirst and exertion, we drilled the first of many V-threads in the soft ice and slid down the ropes.

Walking out of the Charakusa Valley 10 days later, I turned around one last time. I thought about the bivouacs in the talus below the spires, the early starts under the arch of the Milky Way, the curtains of chandeliered ice and the verglassed granite corners. It almost didn't matter that the summits themselves had eluded us. After all, the peaks we had attempted were little more than crags next to the true giants, whose distant, corniced summits rose nearly a kilometre higher—giants like the unclimbed K6 West (7,040 metres). Rising across the glacier from basecamp, it overwhelmed the casual admirer with its sheer bulk, and scared away the would-be suitor with shattered icefalls, bands of seracs and snow-plastered rock. I was secretly glad we had been denied the permit for it, and yet I could not keep my eyes and camera off of it. Is it surprising that eventually it would draw me back?

2006. HOWEVER, WHEN LESS THAN A YEAR LATER I stepped off a plane in Islamabad, my T-shirt already sticking to my back in the predawn heat, it was not for K6. Instead, Ben Firth, Eamonn Walsh, Ian Welsted and I were intent on the unclimbed Kunyang Chhish East (ca. 7,400 metres). Sitting above the Hispar glacier at the opposite western end of the Karakoram from the Charakusa Valley, it had attracted us with its two-kilometre-high southwest face, the wilderness of its surroundings and, compared to K6, its relative freedom from bureaucratic obstacles.

Our gastrointestinal troubles started while we were still in Islamabad and never truly stopped. They punctuated the approach trek. They didn't relent during acclimatization, one of the forays above basecamp being cut short when I had to spend a night outside of the tent on all fours, the falling snow coating my back and the vomit on the ground. And they spelt the end of our attempt on Kunyang Chhish East, when after two long days of climbing we started rappelling in perfect weather.

A couple of days before leaving basecamp, Eamonn and I made the first ascent of one of the many nameless 6,000'ers lining the Hispar glacier. We climbed it in a 24-hour push, through rockfall and storm, the way we would've in the Canadian Rockies or Alaska. But once the satisfaction and relief wore off, the frustration returned. Before I started going to Pakistan, I liked to quote Dave Cheesmond: "If you can climb here, you can climb anywhere." I had climbed rock, ice and choss all over the Rockies, but this fact didn't seem to be helping much in the Karakoram.

2009. A FEW YEARS WERE NEEDED TO SOFTEN the edges of my recollections of the Kunyang Chhish trip. The days spent in a sleeping bag while sick and miserable were forgotten. Instead, I remembered crisp mornings, shadowed icefields and range upon range of jagged peaks that stretched to the horizon under a cloudless sky. I wanted to go back.

This time Eamonn Walsh, Ian Welsted and I chose yet another unclimbed bastion of granite and ice—Pumari Chhish East (ca. 6,900 metres), lying one valley north of Kunyang Chhish. Thanks to the cooking by our friend Hajji Ghulam Rasool, we even managed to (largely) avoid the gastrointestinal eruptions that had plagued our previous trip. But success—real success—continued to elude us. True, we did establish, in a 24-hour push, a fine mixed route on an unnamed 6,000'er we called Lunda Sar, or Second-Hand Peak. Then, just days before leaving basecamp, Ian and I made the first ascent of Khani Basa Sar (ca. 6,400 metres) in another single-push effort. The lead fall that I took, when my tools ripped through the snow that capped an overhanging serac, was forgotten in the warm glow of the evening sunlight cast over the Karakoram as we took the last few steps to the summit.

Yet, as satisfying as Lunda Sar and especially Khani Basa Sar had been, they weren't the reason we had travelled halfway around the world—the higher and harder Pumari Chhish East was. Our attempt on it came to naught when, after an exhausting day of climbing, I threw up freeze-dried chili and cheese all over the bivouac ledge. Sir Isaac Newton saw himself as "… only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding […] a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." With far less modesty, I could sum up my three trips to the Karakoram as mere cragging while great peaks rose unclimbed before me. Could I learn from my failures and make the fourth time different?

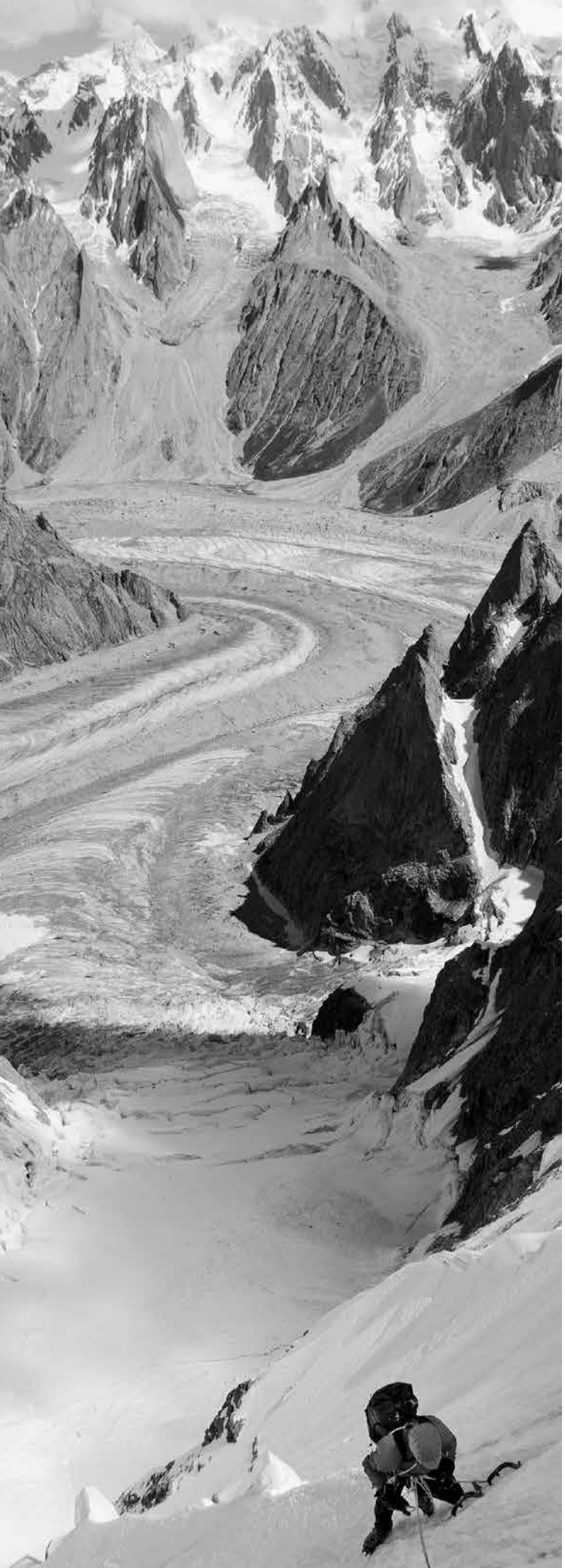
2013. AS I STEPPED OFF THE PLANE in Skardu, I experienced a comfortable feeling of familiarity. The car horns and clouds of exhaust along the main thoroughfare; the quiet, walled-in gardens of the back streets; and Rasool's toothy smile when Ian Welsted and I walked out of the small, neat terminal building. Not much seemed to have changed in Baltistan in the eight years that I had been coming here. But the guard with an AK-47 sitting outside the modest Indus Motel was a surprise, as was the stranger in a *shalwar kameez* who crossed the street toward us when we went out after lunch.

"I'm so glad you've come. I'm sorry about what happened. Pakistanis are not like that. Please enjoy your stay here."

We knew what he was referring to. Indeed, in the past 24 hours, we had thought and talked about little else. Two nights earlier, armed men had stormed the Diamir basecamp at the foot of Nanga Parbat and murdered 10 foreign climbers and a local cook. We had always known that violence simmered just under the surface of everyday life in Pakistan. In 2005, we were given an armed escort when we insisted on driving the Karakoram Highway at night to catch our flight home. After all, bands of Sunni men would sometimes stop buses that passed by and execute Shia passengers. The following year, along the same stretch of road, some men threatened to kill us when we didn't hire their van. Given these experiences and the broader geopolitical canvas, perhaps we should have known that a massacre like the one at Nanga Parbat was inevitable. But a deliberately planned and mercilessly carried out execution of a group of climbers wasn't something we had ever imagined possible. Still, now that the unthinkable had happened, why didn't we get back on a plane to Canada instead of a turboprop bound for Skardu?

In fact, I came within a breath of saying I was going home. But in the end, I realized how much I still wanted to spend the summer in the Karakoram. That remained the visceral motivation for going on with the trip. The cerebral reason was that our objective, K6 West, lay deep inside traditionally peaceful Baltistan. Pakistan isn't a monolithic country. It's a

Ian Welsted climbing out of the glacial cwm between K6 West and Kapura.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski



conglomerate of distinct peoples, dialects and cultures. Baltis, Shia by religion and Tibetan by ethnicity, are very different from the Sunni tribes of the troubled Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in their attitudes toward just that: differences between people. Ali Hussain, the cook who was shot at Nanga Parbat for being different from his murderers, came from the village of Hushe, where we would start our approach trek. I thought we would be quite safe in Baltistan.

The last day of June dawned cool and showery. The Charakusa glacier disappeared out of view up the valley, where grey clouds hid the big peaks at its head. It was a good day for a walk. Umbrella in hand, I skipped along the trail, chatting with porters one moment and enjoying solitude the next. Even better, my engine wasn't smoking, to use Rasool's colourful phrase for diarrhea. After the surreal and yet all-too-real horror of the Nanga Parbat massacre, after all the subsequent hesitation, I was happy to simply be alive and in the mountains.

We started the process of acclimatization the very next day by scrambling up The Flame, a 5,000-metre hill above basecamp. Toward the top, post-holing through isothermal snow, my lungs couldn't keep up with my legs. After spending the previous summer rock climbing in the Canadian Rockies and the Bugaboos, I was rudely reminded what thin air felt like. Our scramble up the Flame set the tone for the next few weeks. Every time we ventured above the grass and gravel flats of basecamp, we went a little higher, while trying to avoid actual climbing as much as possible. With sharp ridges and vertical faces all around, it was a little strange to be seeking out snow slogs. Had we grown lazy? Or had we learned from earlier trips, when we proudly eschewed the easiest routes then failed to acclimatize as a result? At this stage, what mattered most was our red blood cell count. We would find enough steep ice and granite on K6 West.

For our last acclimatization outing, we had planned a traverse of the triple-summitted Farol (ca. 6,300 metres). After two days of deep snow, corniced ridges and steep couloirs, we pitched our little yellow tent in a comfortable wind scoop just below the west peak. The following morning, with the sun lighting up the symmetrical pyramid of Chogolisa to the north, we started weaving between cornices toward the central peak. An hour later we were back, finding the sharp connecting ridge to be more demanding than we neither expected nor wanted. We spread our sleeping pads on the snow and settled in for a day of eating and reading. In 2006, we had thought about spending a night on the summit of the 6,400-metre-high Ice Cake, but headaches made us seek the comforts of basecamp instead. We had learned since then that there's no avoiding the dull rigours of acclimatization—we spent two nights on top of Farol West.

Back in basecamp, we did as much as on Farol West: we ate, read and waited for a favourable forecast. Every few days we would receive SMS updates on our satellite phone from

Ian Welsted on day one of the K6 West ascent.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Mohammad Hanif, an experienced meteorologist with the Pakistani weather office. Each message was couched in precise yet poetic prose: "Harsh weather next three days, be careful," or "Five-day window opening in two days, don't worry." Hanif's latest forecast was for a weeklong spell of good weather to begin in three days. I was glad of the enforced rest. I feared K6 West almost as much as I desired it.

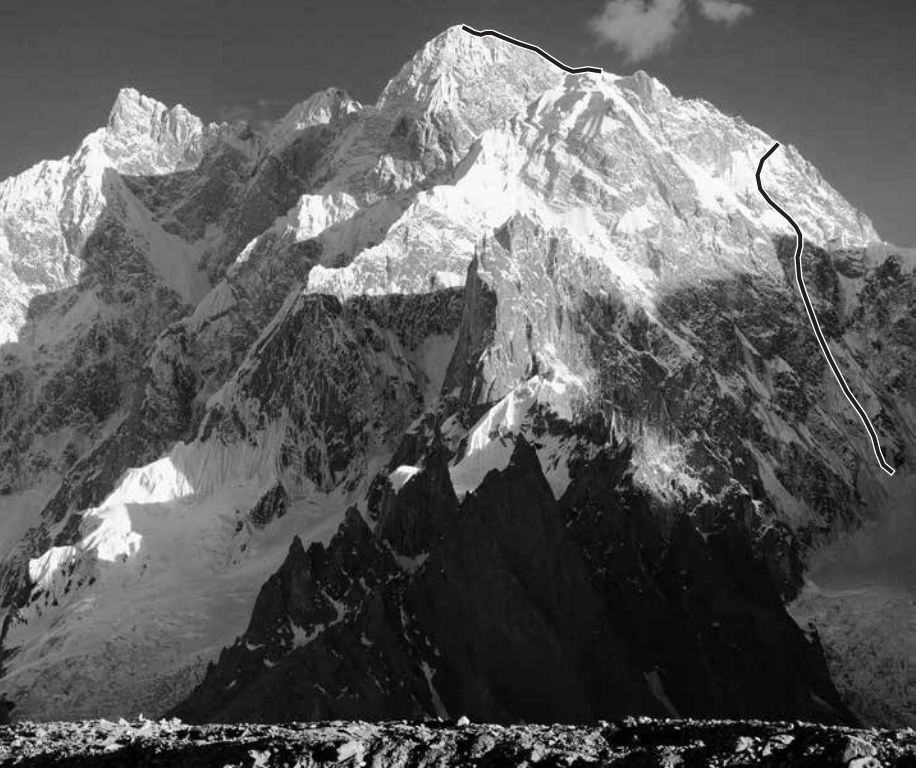
And what I feared the most was the approach. The choice of route had always been clear—an aesthetic line of icefields and ice pitches on the northwest face that appeared safe from the seracs which threatened most of the northern aspects of K6. Unfortunately, the way to it led up a broken icefall and, above it, a narrow valley with huge mountainsides rising on three sides. More than once we had witnessed avalanches sweep across nearly the entire width of the gorge. However, there was no other way. *In sh'allah*, luck would be with us.

JULY 25. WE GOT UP BEFORE DAWN. A visibly moved Rasool made us milk tea and porridge. As we were about to shoulder our 20-kilogram packs, he sprinkled flour on our heads. A traditional Balti farewell: may you come back safely, and grow old and grey. Two hours later we clicked into our crampons at the base of the icefall. I was glad to be done with the anxious anticipation of the past few days, and to focus instead on simple, immediate actions—a burst of frontpointing up an ice wall, an end run around one crevasse, a face-in downclimb into another one. In the hanging valley above the icefall, we crossed a couple of bottomless chasms on car-sized snow blocks that had come off the valley's back wall, which was festooned with mushrooms and cornices. As the mid-afternoon sun turned snow into wet cotton candy, we dropped our packs inside a safe bergschrund and I breathed a sigh of relief. Though a vertical mile of icefields and rock walls rose above where melt water dripped on our tent, the random hazards of the approach were behind us.

JULY 26. SPINDRIFT POURED OFF THE LIP of the 'schrund as I swung over and over at the snow above it. We hadn't wanted to waste a day of the high-pressure spell on the approach, and hoped to take advantage of fresh névé coating the black, rock-pitted ice. Unfortunately, starting as soon as the storm dissipated also meant powder clouds would still be sloughing down the wall. The picks finally bit into something substantial, and I pulled up onto the slope above the crevasse where we had spent the night. A white tilted sheet rose overhead. A few hundred metres higher, a rock wall with vertical ice cascading over it blocked my view of the upper face and the distant summit ridge.

We spent the day climbing seemingly endless 50- to 60-degree icefields interspersed with vertical pitches. These would have been easy enough in the Canadian Rockies; however, at nearly 6,000 metres and with a heavy pack, my forearms and calves quickly filled with lactic acid. Nearing the

Rappelling the overhanging icicles of the crux pitch on the way down. Photo: Raphael Slawinski



The north side of the K6 massif showing the line of ascent. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

top of a pitch, I rushed tool placements and forewent placing screws, intent on reaching lower-angled ice where I could drop my arms and stand flat-footed.

By late afternoon we reached the shelter of an overhanging rock wall. Seen from camp, some snow mushrooms at its base held out the promise of flat ground. Instead, we found ice that swept up to near vertical below the rock. There was nothing for it but to start chopping. A couple of hours later, we had fashioned a long foot ledge. Extended with a nylon tarp that we had anchored to screws and filled with ice chunks, it accepted perhaps two-thirds of the tent. All the same, after a dinner of soup and mashed potatoes—we knew better than to take chances with half-cooked freeze-dried meals—sleep came easily.

JULY 27. AFTER A CLEAR NIGHT, the morning dawned blue and cold. While taking down the tent and gearing up, I had to stop repeatedly to re-warm my fingers. Right above where we had spent the night, a band of shattered granite reared up steeply. The most promising option was a thinly iced, right-leaning gash. In spite of the cold, or perhaps because of it, I was eager to get moving and offered to lead the first few pitches. The continuous line of ice we had followed the previous day ended a few metres above the belay. I balanced delicately up gritty slabs, tapped up a narrow ribbon of hollow ice and, almost out of rope, squirmed into a nearly vertical gully. Instead of the thicker ice I had been hoping for, I found snow over compact rock. Spying some ice splatters on the left wall, I traversed toward them. After much poking around, they yielded enough stubby screws that I could yell "Secure!" down to a frozen Ian.

On the next pitch, a chockstone in the gully proved surprisingly awkward, but once over it I took off running on firm snow and good ice. Above, the bed of the gully swept up to past vertical. Icicles dripped from the overhanging rock. I didn't want to let doubt take root in my mind, and as soon as Ian arrived at the stance, I grabbed the rack and started up. At least the gear was decent, if upside-down screws in snapped-off columns could be called that. Judging them to be solid, I relinquished control and committed to the knee-drops and lock-offs. Swinging desperately at thin ice, I expected to come off at any moment. But a pick draped over a rock fin stayed put and I got my feet back under me. I had gotten what I wanted—hard climbing above 6,000 metres.

I ran out the ropes on the small icefield above. Light and space flooded my senses, which for the past few hours had been constricted by the shadowed gash. I looked up at the line of ice as it continued, still narrow and steep but thicker now. Two pitches higher, I sat awkwardly on a sloping granite shelf, turning my face toward the sun as I belayed Ian out of the depths. We still had a long way to go but the steepest part of the wall was behind us.

Ian led up snowfields interrupted by rocky steps. Moving together, we climbed up and left to avoid a steep buttress. Once past it, the summit ridge came into view. It didn't look far, but between altitude and increasing fatigue, we moved slowly. The thought of flat ground was alluring and I almost suggested continuing into the night. Then I thought better of it. It wouldn't do to climb ourselves into a hole of exhaustion. We were starting to grasp the immense scale of these mountains and the patient effort it took to climb them. Stopping below a boulder in the middle of a steep slope, we chopped another ledge, crawling inside the tent long after dark.

JULY 28. IN THE MORNING, IT TOOK US another few hours to reach a notch in the ridge. For the first time in over two days, we were finally on flat ground. I peered down the south side. "It looks like good corn skiing," I joked, elated to see mellow ground ahead. After soup and mashed potatoes, we left most of the gear behind and headed up an easy snow ridge. However, I hadn't forgotten the miscalculation on Hassin Peak, and we carried the tent, sleeping bags and stove. Yet for a while, as we trudged up the ridge, it seemed we might summit that very afternoon. Soon, though, the broad crest degenerated into a corniced knife-edge of smooth granite. "We could rappel to the glacier below," Ian suggested. Unwilling to commit to rappels that we didn't know we could reverse, I demurred. Disappointed, we strode down sun-warmed snow to the notch where we had first gained the ridge.

While we set up the tent and made more mashed potatoes, we thought—and then talked—about what to do. We still had a couple of gas canisters; the weather still held. We couldn't give up just yet. Maybe we could drop down the south side of the ridge and outflank the offending knife-edge? It would mean losing height and making summit day that much bigger, all at an altitude neither of us had ever experienced before. As the shadow of a rock pinnacle crept closer to the tent, we made up our minds. In the morning we would try for the summit

without bivy gear. Success, seemingly so close a few hours earlier, now seemed like a long shot.

JULY 29. WITH THE SUN STILL BELOW THE horizon, the cold was almost Alaskan. Leaving the tent, we frontpointed down a steep, icy slope to reach a glacial bench. We looked up at a broad glacier, interrupted here and there by crevasses and seracs. Picking a likely line, we started kicking steps toward a summit that stood even higher above us than an hour earlier. However, luck was on our side—the snow was firm and we gained height slowly but steadily, with only occasional wallowing. After a couple of hours we regained the ridge above the knife-edge. In deep shade, at nearly 7,000 metres, we couldn't move fast enough to stay warm. A puffball, a shell jacket and a big parka—we wore every layer we had and still had to stop every few minutes to swing feeling back into our hands and feet.

Slowly, as the angle eased, we emerged into the sun. The summit was a gentle slope on the south side and a huge precipice on the north. Ignoring Ian's protestations at the other end of the rope, I edged as closely as I dared to the highest point, hoping for a view down to the Charakusa glacier and a glimpse of distant basecamp—perhaps if I had been a raven. For a long time we sat in warm sunshine under a dark blue cloudless sky, talking, sipping from our water bottles, and trying to hold onto this moment. Then it was time to go. We wanted to be up the slope below our bivy before the sun softened the snow.

JULY 30. WE PACKED UP EARLY AND HEADED down, hoping to be off the face before the day heated up. One V-thread, then another and another, until we lost count. Later we figured we had made close to 30 rappels. As we had feared, once the sun peered over the summit ridge, rocks started to fly—mostly small ones but also some that were big enough to take our heads off. However, our luck held and without incident we reached the 'schrund where we had left a few days earlier. We stayed there all afternoon, looking longingly at the valley while all around us the mountains fell apart in the heat. Finally, when evening stilled the bombardment, we made a dash for basecamp.

We felt very small as we zigzagged between crevasses on the floor of the hanging valley, with batteries of seracs and snow mushrooms ranged silently on three sides. Fortunately, they stayed silent, and as night fell we took our crampons off at the base of the icefall. We shouldered our packs one last time, switched our headlamps on and took off hopping across the granite rubble that covered the Charkusa glacier. A couple of hours later, scrambling up the sandy far bank of the glacier, we saw lights waiting for us on the edge of the meadow just above. It was Rasool and his helper, Iqbal, come to bring us milk tea and chapattis, and to take our packs. Farhan, our liaison officer, gave an impromptu speech about how we would remember this moment for the rest of our lives. At the time I thought he was being bombastic; now I think he may have been right.

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### Summary

South couloir, Sulu Peak (5950m), Charakusa Valley, Pakistan. Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, July 12, 2013.

South ridge, Farol Peak West (6200m), Charakusa Valley, Pakistan. Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, July 15-18, 2013.

K6 West (7040m), first ascent by northwest face (1600 vertical metres, M6+ WI4+), Charakusa Valley, Pakistan. Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, July 25-30, 2013.

British route (5.10-), Nayser Brakk (5200m), Charakusa Valley, Pakistan. Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, August 4, 2013.

South face (5.10-), Dog's Knob (5400m), Charakusa Valley, Pakistan. Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, August 6, 2013.


### About the Author

On his first visit to the Karakoram in 2005, Raphael Slawinski was stunned to discover a mountain range even more impressive than the Canadian Rockies. Since that first trip to Pakistan, he has returned three times: to try, fail on and sometimes even summit beautiful obscure peaks. Most days, however, he can be found teaching physics at Mount Royal University in Calgary and adventuring in the nearby Rockies, which he still finds plenty impressive.


### Acknowledgements

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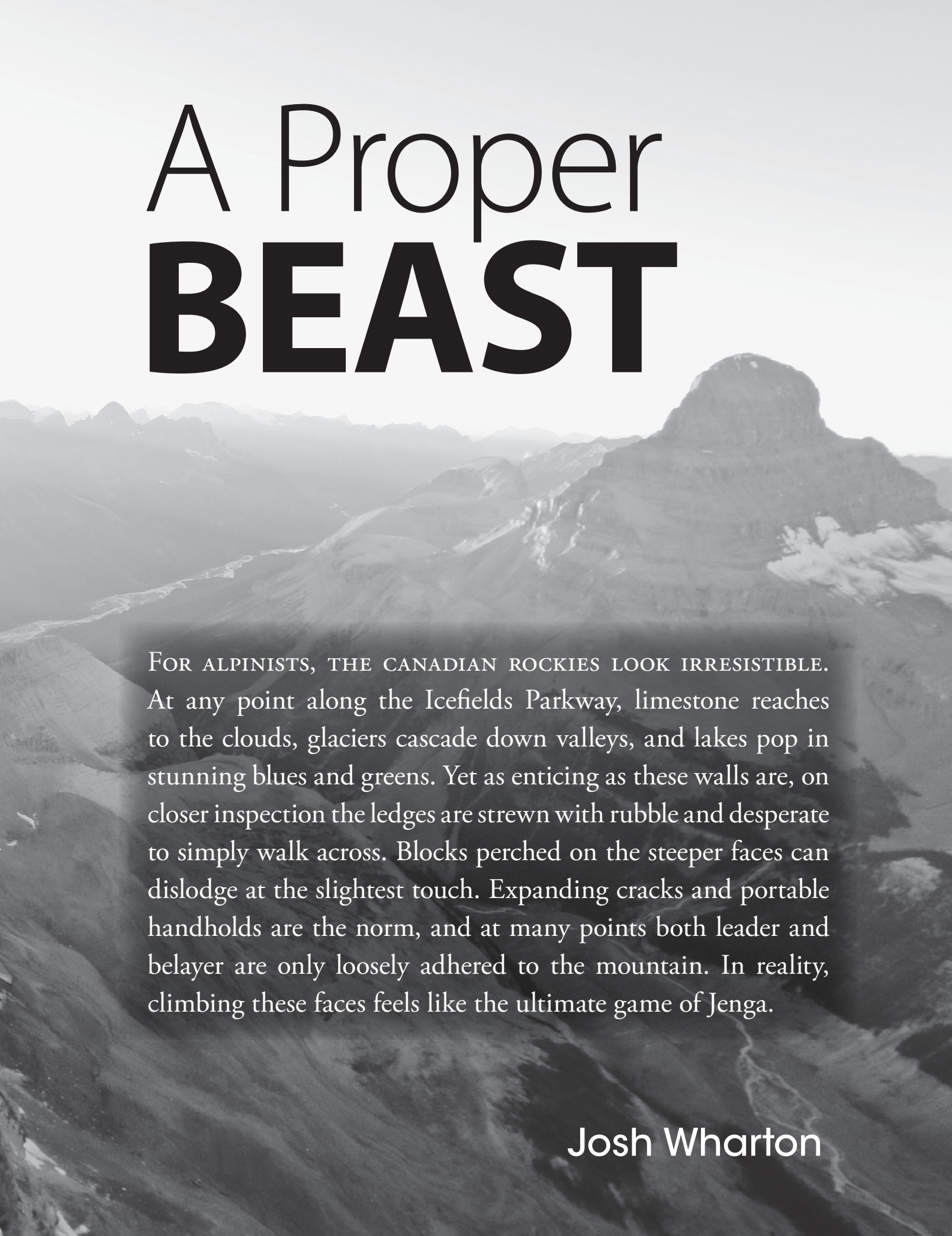
Ian Welsted on the lower-angled upper face on day two. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Josh Wharton arriving at the belay one pitch below the second bivy. Photo: Jon Walsh

# A Proper **BEAST**



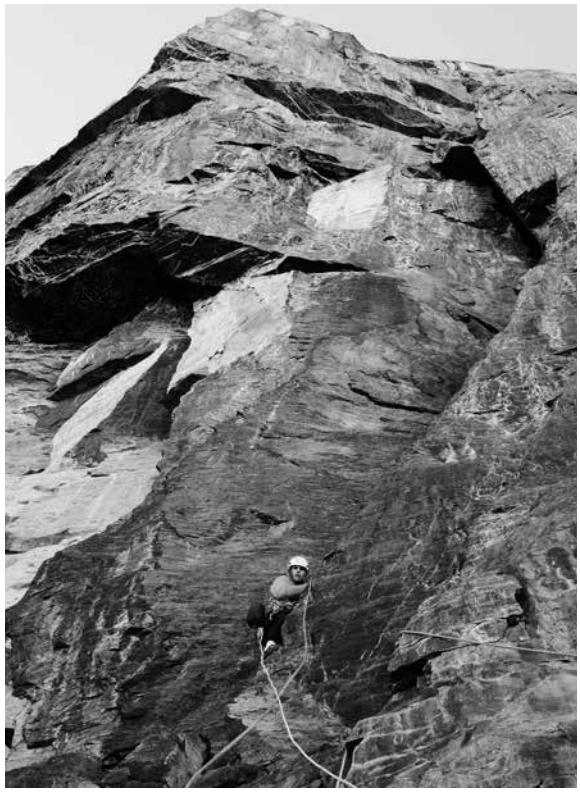
For alpinists, the canadian rockies look irresistible. At any point along the Icefields Parkway, limestone reaches to the clouds, glaciers cascade down valleys, and lakes pop in stunning blues and greens. Yet as enticing as these walls are, on closer inspection the ledges are strewn with rubble and desperate to simply walk across. Blocks perched on the steeper faces can dislodge at the slightest touch. Expanding cracks and portable handholds are the norm, and at many points both leader and belayer are only loosely adhered to the mountain. In reality, climbing these faces feels like the ultimate game of Jenga.

Josh Wharton

AMONG THESE MIGHTY BUT INHOSPITABLE WALLS is the north face of the North Twin. To say that this 1,400-metre pyramidal face (the tallest in the Rockies) is steeper, harder and more committing than the Eiger is an understatement. Steve House, who put up the House-Prezelj on North Twin in 2004 for its third ascent, notes that the difference between the two walls is the difference between a Yosemite 5.9 and Astroman.

Tucked a rugged 13 kilometres away from the Icefields Parkway and well off any commonly used trails, the Twin goes mostly unnoticed. Since 1974, it has had only three ascents, each so epic and fantastical that it is easy to imagine fire-breathing dragons and stone-wielding trolls inhabiting the fearsome wall.

My attraction to the Twin began in 2011 when I attended Barry Blanchard's slideshow of his and Dave Cheesmond's 1985 first ascent of the North Pillar (VI 5.10 A2) on the north face. Barry is a great storyteller and weaves sound effects throughout his grand tales of adventure. He will shock you awake with a deafening "ROAR!" of an avalanche, or an insidious "*shish*" of spindrift. Partway into his show, when he said he thought the North Pillar was "the hardest route I would ever do in my lifetime," my ears perked. I studied his slides even more carefully and agonized when he moved on to the next image too quickly. His slides revealed the usual chossy sections of wall, but also splitter cracks and corners. Perhaps this 5.10 A2 would go free.



Josh Wharton on pitch five of the headwall of the North Pillar. Photo: Jon Walsh

Over the next two years, I made two attempts on North Twin, but was thwarted by poor weather and conditions. On the first trip, horrible isothermic snow conditions had us post-holing on skis along Woolley Creek, only to turn back when the following day dawned foggy and snowy. On my second trip over Woolley Shoulder, a fresh layer of unfrozen snow coated everything, turning the wall dark with unattractive wet streaks. However, both times I made it just far enough along the approach to feel the wall's power—along the nervousness it incites in hopeful suitors. Hundred-foot-tall active serac bands just east of the wall made the area a loud and wild place. When a serac gives way to the pull of gravity, the air it displaces causes a stupendous boom, and it's impossible not to watch the eerily slow cascade of ice and snow down the cliffs below. I realized the huge 1,200-metre-plus elevation loss from Woolley Shoulder into Habel Creek would have made a retreat from the north face an involved and exhausting proposition. My respect for the Twin grew.

During this time, I also learned the recent history of the north face. In 2011, Hayden Kennedy and Jason Kruk scurried off a midway escape ledge in bad weather. Cold and terrified, they reported that they had been soul cleansed. In 2004, Canadian Ian Welsted was hit by rockfall while attempting a one-day ascent of the North Pillar. Retreating from over halfway up the face, Welsted and partner Chris Brazeau got one rope stuck and another chopped by more rockfall. Reduced to making short 25-metre rappels, the duo spent nearly two days getting down and they left their entire rack for anchors. My friend Jon Walsh had a huge rock roll onto his foot in 2011, causing yet another difficult retreat. The North Twin was, as Steve House wrote after his and Marko Prezelj's ordeal, where he dropped a boot shell and had to gimp along with a crampon taped to his foot, a "proper beast".

In September 2013, I was driving home from a month-long climbing trip, basking in the afterglow of glorious alpine rock in the Sierra and Wind Rivers with good friends. An email from Jon Walsh pulled me back into the Twin's vortex.

"Weather and conditions look good. Want to come up for the Twin?" Jon asked.

I had good reason to say no. My wife was four months pregnant with our first child, prime rock-climbing season was starting, my surgically repaired knee was still tender, I was too broke to afford the trip, and I would have to skip one of my slideshow presentations. Excuses, excuses, excuses. Truth was I didn't have a choice. I had been reaching for that face for years.

A week later, I stepped off the plane in Calgary and within the hour Jon and I were packing and sorting gear in his tiny basement apartment. We put together our lightest kit of clothing bivouac gear. We threw in a healthy dose of cams and pins along with proper rock shoes and chalk. We left the jumars behind, both of us intent on getting the most out of the wall. Our only concession was a tiny sleeping bag each, as we had both done too much extreme shivering lately.

The next day, we drove up the Parkway and immediately got our first taste of nature's power while wading across the swollen, frigid and churning braids of the Sunwapta River.

Left: Josh Wharton following the third pitch on a small variation of the North Pillar route. Photo: Jon Walsh

Josh Wharton finding loose holds on pitch nine of the headwall. Photo: Jon Walsh

As we trudged alongside Woolley Creek, we paused often to take photos and video. I have never enjoyed bringing a camera to the mountains, yet it is nearly necessary for those of us who scratch out a living from climbing. Photos and video share the experience, but when something is recorded for others, that experience is reduced, and the edited version becomes permanent.

After six hours of pleasant walking, we reached the comforts of the Lloyd MacKay Hut. This tiny box clings to a rib near Mount Alberta. The hut is breathtaking, with small windows that look out onto the East face of Mount Alberta and offer a glimpse into the upper reaches of the 900-metre north face. It's a comfortable, humble spot to decompress amidst the sea of crumbling giants. In 2011, I left a cache of food and fuel with a note that I would be back in 2012 at the hut to lessen the load on a return trip. Just before I arrived in Canada, I emailed a friend to see if the supplies were still there. He had recently been to the hut and assured me that the provisions were still intact. With light loads and gluttonous bellies, Jon and I arrived at the hut to discover that most of the food was gone.

I only had myself to blame. It had been a year since my note had expired.

Still, the remaining cache had roughly 5,000 calories per person for the route—just enough to give the Twin a solid effort, though barely. "Light and fast just got lighter and faster!" I lightheartedly said to Jon.

Supper at the hut was especially satisfying given the circumstances. I dined on instant mashed potatoes mixed with tuna, while Jon enjoyed a freeze-dried delight. The next day's dinner, wherever it was eaten, would be a packet of onion soup.

By 10 a.m. the following morning, our crampons were scratching on muddy scree as we navigated the dirty bergschrunds of late summer. North Twin was to be my first true Rockies' rock route (Yamabushsi on Yamnuska and single-pitch sport routes at Acephale don't count!). My experiences till then had been limited to the region's mixed and alpine routes. As I would soon find, I wasn't prepared for the wall of choss we were about to climb.

Near the top of the first steep cliff band, after a pitch of wet, loose 5.11 with bad pro, I told Jon, "I'm not psyched, are you?" He was, and my moment of weakness was trumped by his motivation. When I was younger I had imagined myself always blazing the path, but now that I am older I realize that being able to competently follow is just as important of a skill.

The first hard pitch of the day, a short section of Cheesmond A2 that went free at spicy 5.11, was Jon's lead. I followed

wearing the pack, getting a little pumped as I turned the pitch's crux roof. When you climb in a gym or at a sport crag, it's easy to forget what the weight of a pack feels like.

Alpine climbing hasn't progressed much since the 1970s. On big, loose and often wet faces, experience and mental fortitude still count for a lot. When George Lowe and Chris Jones made their remarkable first ascent of North Twin's North Face route in 1974, it was likely the hardest alpine route in the world at the time. Today, lighter gear, higher technical grades and greater access to rescue have barely reduced its standing.

As darkness descended late the first day, I was fishing for gear on 45-degree choss ledges just 30 metres below the Twin's imposing 350-metre headwall. The grey menacing wave of rock above was a complicated tangle of overhangs, corners and dead ends unique to the Canadian Rockies. We had made good progress and were tired. This ledge would be home for the night. With difficulty, I placed a knifeblade and a few RPs and brought up Jon. Together, we dug out our beds, a proposition made easy by the ledge's muddy scree. Once we were dug in, I chopped ice from a small icefield and we began the painstaking process of melting, rehydrating and preparing the next day's water ration. As we dined on onion soup, we crunched on dirt and small rocks melted from the ice. The Twin was literally finding its way inside us.

The morning's first order of business was a 60-metre angling rappel across an icefield to get us back on route. To save cord, we threaded the ropes directly through a V-thread drilled in the ice, just as we had done a hundred times on other routes. This time, however, the wet ice and freezing temperature froze our ropes in place, and I had to re-climb the rappel lines twice before admitting defeat and leaving a piece of cord. Jon looked on patiently while I muttered expletives and tried not to lose myself to frustration.

Jon took the first block on the headwall, a riddle of tricky route-finding. We passed a rappel anchor from his previous attempt, the only sign of prior passage we would see during the entire climb. A few pitches up the headwall, I took over and quickly arrived at an intimidating gaping slot—wet, wide and wild. The old guidebook mentioned a chimney with a "few moves" to gain a roof. Cheesmond was clearly an unreal

Josh Wharton enjoying morning coffee at the second bivy, one pitch below the top of the headwall. Photo: Jon Walsh

Jon Walsh on mixed terrain above the headwall. Photo: Josh Wharton

climber, as this pitch looked like it could have tomes written about it. Alpinism lost a visionary when he, along with Catherine Freer, plunged through a cornice on Mount Logan's Hummingbird Ridge in 1989.

I brought Jon up to the base of the chimney, for no other reason than to delay the inevitable struggle. Despite my initial fears, a #4 Camalot that mostly fit and a few tiny pieces weaseled into a seam took the sting out of the pitch. Although the crack was exhausting, for once I felt reasonably safe burrowed within the Twin on some of the best rock on the entire route. Exiting the chimney, my foot dislodged an enormous flake—welcome back to the reality of the outer face. I nearly fell, but the instantaneous realization that if I fell I would have to re-lead the hard-won terrain below kept me hanging on with everything I had.

A few hours later, after more impressively steep and loose terrain, Jon had taken over the lead and yelled down that he thought he was off route. "Let me check out the next ledge," he said.

Impending darkness had us eager for rest, and I hoped the bivy in the route description would provide respite from the headwall's steepness. The next ledge was worse, however, so Jon brought me up to a lower ledge where we excavated bits of ice from a chimney for melting. The bivy was multi-tiered, strewn with sharp rocks and flakes, and half a metre wide at most. Now I knew why Jon had wanted to check out the possibilities higher up the wall. The ledge did make me chuckle—it's amazing what you will accept when there is no alternative. Jon and I bedded down on the tiny perch, happy not to spend the night in slings.

The next morning we woke to a beautiful sunrise, and enjoyed it with cups of hot coffee. The final pitch of the headwall was just above, and we weren't sure where we should go. I set off on a creaking pillar that was part of a giant tower. Ten metres out from the belay, I was standing on top of the pinnacle's precarious, square summit with no gear between us. Only a small seam in the main wall provided any hope of protection. After some excessive chalking and whining to Jon, I finally aided three metres up the crease. Although I disdain aid—an activity I once heard described as carpentry with consequences—the risk of free climbing the short section high on the headwall with the lack of good gear, an empty stomach and limited retreat options was simply too much. Luckily the aid was over quickly, and I launched out rightwards across slightly overhanging terrain on some of the route's best rock. The climbing was absolutely wild with 20 metres of physical

pulling between flat edges protected with a few psychological pieces of gear. This was apparently Cheesmond 5.10d but felt solid 5.11X.

As I rocked over onto the low-angled terrain that signals the end of the headwall, I finally had a moment to reflect on what we had climbed. I was blown away by Cheesmond and Blanchard's effort nearly three decades earlier. They had spent five nights on the wall, jumared with enormous packs and, at times, led in plastic boots. Few big alpine routes from 30 years ago live up to their legend. The North Pillar does.

There was still more to do. A long alpine ridge felt interminable in our depleted state. Jon led a steep step of M5. When we finally gained the summit ridge of the Twins Tower, I traversed low across ice fields to avoid a section of double-corniced ridgeline. With light boots and tools and only two screws in 150 metres of hard summer ice, I probably made a bad decision, but the climbing went smoothly enough.

The summit plateau was bathed in afternoon sunlight. Big walls and peaks enveloped us. Even though we were strung out, it was hard for us not to be drawn in by their power, and we quizzed each other about peaks, climbs and possibilities for the future.

As darkness fell, we carved uneven beds in a steeply sloped talus field. The night was long, cold and windy. We shivered hard. When the sun finally popped over a ridge, my dirt-filled, crusty eyes made out small cars gliding along the highway far below in the valley. I wanted to be where they were, and now! With growling stomachs, we drank our final cup of instant coffee.

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### Summary

Second ascent of the North Pillar (VII 5.11X, 1500m), north face of North Twin, Canadian Rockies. Jon Walsh, Josh Wharton, September 11-12, 2013.



### About the Author

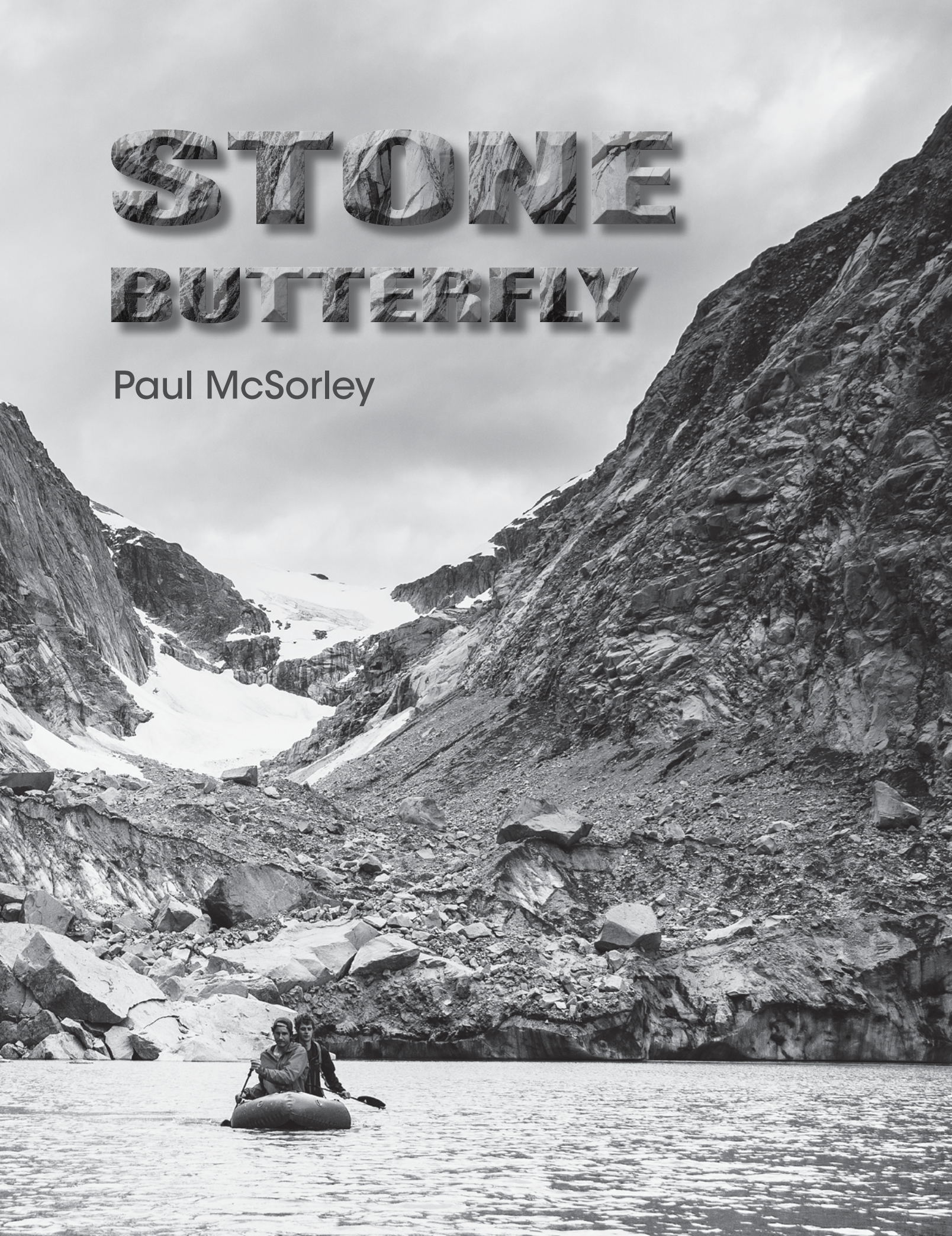
Josh Wharton is a full-time climber and Patagonia ambassador living in Estes Park, Colorado. He has climbed difficult new routes in Patagonia, Alaska and Pakistan.


Josh Wharton on the final few steps of the north ridge of North Twin with Twins Tower and Mount Alberta behind. Photo: Jon Walsh

Will Stanhope and Marc-André Leclerc returning from a recon of Cerro Mariposa. Photo: Matt Van Biene

# STONE BUTTERFLY

Paul McSorley



Marc-André Leclerc and Will Stanhope heading up the Turbio valley on day two of the horseback approach. Photo: Paul McSorley

Will Stanhope on the first Tyrolean across Turbio IV. Photo: Paul McSorley

GOING BACK TO TURBIO VALLEY wasn't something I had considered, until Will Stanhope dropped the idea last summer in Squamish over guides' pops at sundown. We had done a month-long trip there in 2009 with Andrew Querner and had come away with some summits, bruised egos, emaciation, and a deep respect for this untamed corner of the world.

Our team this round would be different. Andrew was off to Liberia, so we reached out to Squamish young-gun Marc-André Leclerc, whose perpetual psyche and mad-mountain knowhow made him a shoe-in. Matt Van Biene from Index, Washington, would also join the squad, packing a quiver of his sharpest lenses.

Rio Turbio drains from the reaches of Lago Puelo on the Argentine-Chilean border in northern Patagonia. At its headwaters, the river forks into multiple valleys, each packed with rugged terrain and the promise of big granite walls. After a 30-kilometre Zodiac ride across the lake and a two-day horse pack led by authentic third-generation *gauchos*, we reached a ramshackle *refugio* in the tight drainage of Turbio IV. From here, the horses could not continue. Tyrolean traverses across canyons and bamboo-infested old-growth jungle lay ahead. The Valdivian Rainforest is a fountain of biodiversity that hosts flesh-eating yellow jackets, 3,000-year-old Alerce trees and, as you might expect, wild boars.

The refugio, built by Oswaldo Rappoport in an unsuccessful bid to popularize the area, would be our basecamp. Located in a lush, sheltered meadow, it provided much needed psychological comfort from the intense valley. Despite being rat infested, Oswaldo's hut sported a wood-burning oven perfect for making pizzas. Pizza, like sex and ice cream, is one of the things that you end up really missing on an expedition. While neither Ben & Jerry's nor our girlfriends awaited us in basecamp, the prospect of a pizza party always boosted morale.

Over seven days we thrashed up and down Precambrian-esque Valleys, shuttling loads 20 kilometres to a tiny hut in the Oreja drainage, built by Swiss climbing pioneer Pedro Luthi. Pedro had inspired and mentored a generation of Argentine climbers, and it was his photograph of Cerro Mariposa on the wall of Refugio Frey in Bariloche that moved us to visit this

Paul McSorley on pitch 13. Photo: Matt Van Biene

fabled corner of the Andes. From Pedro's hut we continued three more hours to treeline and reached the rugged shores of Laguna de la Mariposa. Crossing this iceberg-littered lake would require using inflatable rafts since huge flanking cliffs made walking around the *laguna* impossible.

From the edge of the lake, we finally laid eyes on our objective, Cerro Mariposa. Buttressed by an 800-metre vertical cliff, the mountain is crowned by an icefield that pours over the massive precipice, sloughing off debris with a disconcerting frequency. We were now a hundred kilometres from the nearest village, and without any communications. The feeling of commitment was cranked up like a Spinal Tap track.

Vocalizing excuses is a natural part of this game. It's easy to come up with a reason to bail, but it better to be legit—these kinds of trips don't happen easily. On our first lap across the lake, we faced burly headwinds that resulted in negative progress the second we stopped paddling. Thousand-metre waterfalls and huge decomposing cliffs made crossing this stretch feel like sneaking past a trespassers-will-be-shot sign in West Texas.

Once across the lake, we booted up the moraines and the dry glacier to the foot of the mountain's northeast face, where we finally spotted a safe route up a pillar protruding from the massif. Approaching the wall was like going in for your first kiss—every instinct tells you to abort, but curiosity demands you drop in and see what happens.

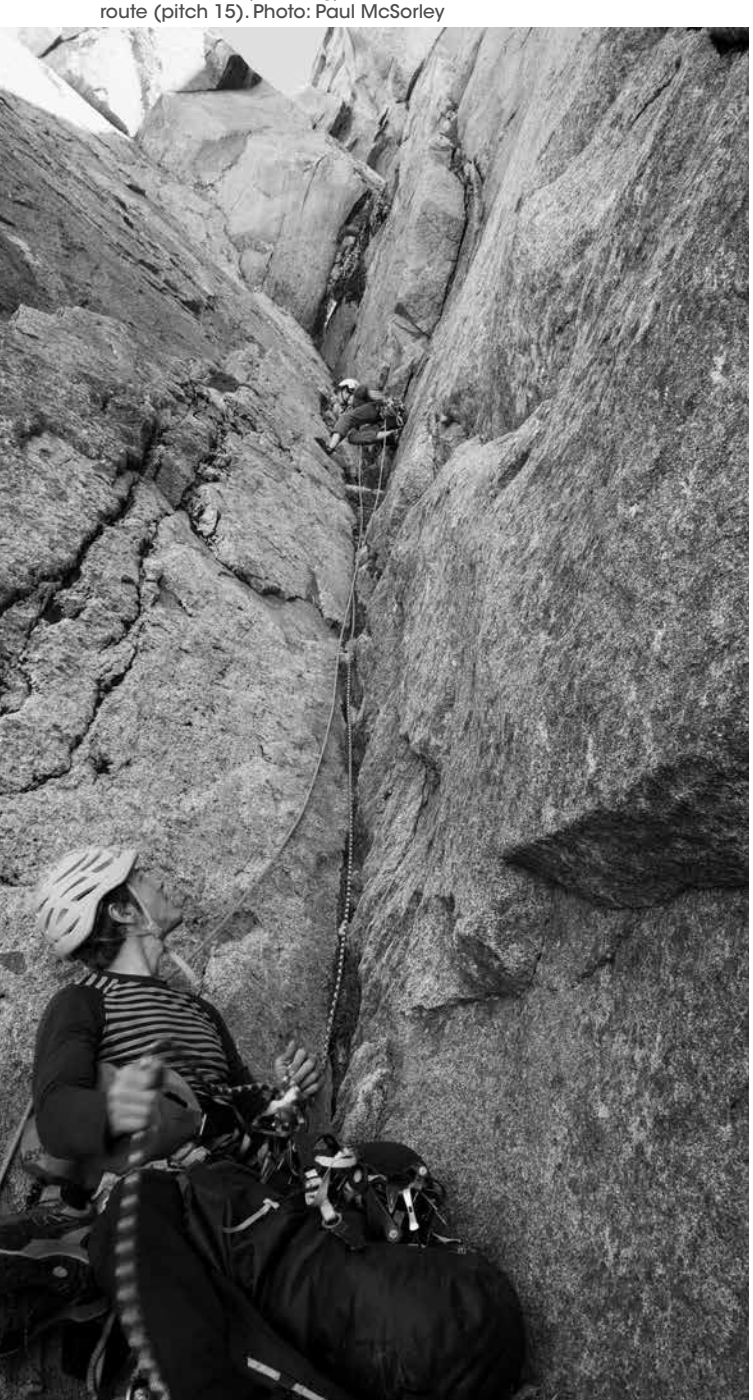
While Will and Matt pumped back to Pedro's to stock us up with more food, Marc and I kicked off the climbing, fixing our three lines for the next day's push. Climbing into the 'schrund was far and away the spookiest part of the mission. Huge, house-size rocks creaked and settled as we snuck carefully over, around and through them. Marc made a daring 5.10+ X-rated lead out of the moat just beside a waterfall, which we crossed on the next pitch to join our intended system.

The following morning the alarm rang at 3 a.m. and we punched up the fixed ropes, red eyed but stoked. Matt was jugging the final line over a big roof when, out of nowhere, his rope sheathed and sent him for a heart-stopping 20-footer. Will sorted out a rescue line and an adrenalized Matt proceeded

Marc-André Leclerc regrouping after the 5.11 slab traverse of pitch five. Photo: Paul McSorley

Marc-André Leclerc, Paul McSorley and Will Stanhope ascending the summit snow slopes. Photo: Matt Van Biene

Matt Van Biene (belaying) and Marc-André Leclerc on the crux of the route (pitch 15). Photo: Paul McSorley



wide-eyed to the anchor. "My mom would be bummed," he mustered as we debriefed the events of this unlikely near miss. After some terse words, we put the incident to bed and continued along a big ledge system to gain a corner that ran uninterrupted for 500 metres.

Continuous, flowy climbing and quality rock brought us to the 18th and final pitch around 6 p.m. Marc was leading but balked 15 metres above the belay. The call came for the pins, hooks and hammer. Delicately negotiating some loose blocks, he linked up a brilliant sequence of climbing to the top of the wall. Psyched as we were to finish the difficulties, the show wasn't over and it was getting late. The condors that rode thermals beside us all afternoon had abandoned the shadowy mountain flanks as night began to fall. An hour of 40- to 50-degree snow plodding and a brief cornice bash brought us to the summit plateau and the virgin *cumbre* of Cerro Mariposa.

With little day remaining, we pointed it over the summit and down to the north in hopes of locating a good bivy site. Finding shelter in a rocky crevice, we shared a brisk night out with only a tarp for cover and ropes to sleep on. It's on nights like these that men end up holding hands….

Morning brought the 11th consecutive day of good weather. It was Matt's birthday so we gifted him our remaining 1,200 milligrams of Ibuprofen, threw some high fives and continued north to reach a glaciated saddle at the head of the Mariposa Valley. Only a half-dozen rappels were needed to gain walk-able ground and make it to our cache at the wall's base by midday.

Reversing the lake and schlepping all our kit down the valley took three more days. Below the refugio, we pumped up our boats for the final time and put in at the confluence of Turbio II, III and IV. A moment of inattention between Will and me led to a raft-swamping incident and the loss of a haul bag to the river gods. Soaked to the ears, we paddled out the final 40 kilometres to the shores of Lago Puelo. With luck on our side, a motor boat was nearby and picked us up for the final hour-long crossing of the lake just as the Patagonian weather turned on for the first time in two weeks. Back at the boat launch, we pinned it to the nearest *kiosco* and purchased some long awaited *litros* of beer. And with a "clink" the mission was complete.

**Summary**

La Vuelta de los Condores (VI 5.11d A2, 800m), northeast face, Cerro de la Mariposa (2076m), Northern Patagonia, Argentina. FA: Marc-André Leclerc, Paul McSorley, Will Stanhope, Matthew Van Biene, January 14-16, 2014.

P1: 5.10+X, 60m. From deep inside the bergschrund, climb up left from a waterfall on highly suspect rock that improves higher up but remains hard to protect.

P2: 5.9, 70m. Climb slabs on the left of the waterfall then cross it after 30 metres to move up right into a short left-facing corner and climb this to a belay on the cracked slab above.

P3: 5.10+, 40m. Pull some overhangs up left to gain a hanging right-facing corner and climb this to belay at an obvious horizontal crack.

P4: 5.9, 40m. Handrail right then up a groove a few body lengths to belay where the wall blanks out.

P5: 5.11, 15m. Climb down seven metres then make a hard slab move right to gain the groove, then up this to belay level with the previous stance.

P6: 5.6 AO, 30m. Lower and tension out right to gain the obvious horizontal system. Belay with some large cams.

P7: 5.6, 20m. Continue easily to the right.

P8: 5.11-, 60m. Traverse a long way right then make a difficult slab step up to gain good ledges. Continue down and right to a good stance.

P9: 5.8, 50m. Move right into the corner at the margin of the watercourse and climb it up to a stance below a steep section.

P10: 5.11, 60m. Crank out the overhangs and follow hanging corners up until the angle eases.

P11: 5.10, 60m. Climb the groove and continue up a steep right-facing corner until a little ledge is reached at a connecting system.

P12: 5.10R, 60m. Go up the corner on good gear then move out right and up engaging face climbing (no pro), gunning for a large cave. Continue past this to belay on the left.

P13: 5.9, 60m. Fun corner-stemming.

P14: 5.8, 60m. Continue easily up the corner.

P15: 5.11+, 60m. Start easily up the corner then turn the impasse on the right up a steep thin wall protected by micro cams and nuts.

P16: 5.10, 50m. Climb the left wall through overlaps to a sheltered belay.

P17: 5.9, 30m. Ascend the left-facing corner (a few hollow bits) and mantel out to belay at flakes on a ledge.

P18: 5.11 A2, 40m. Layback the wide flake and step up above to good gear. Nail and hook around loose blocks (now gone), tacking out to the arête. Head diagonally right on little crimps to the final short corner. Mantel to the ledges that gain the summit snow field. Six hundred metres of 40- to 50-degree snow and ice leads to the summit plateau.

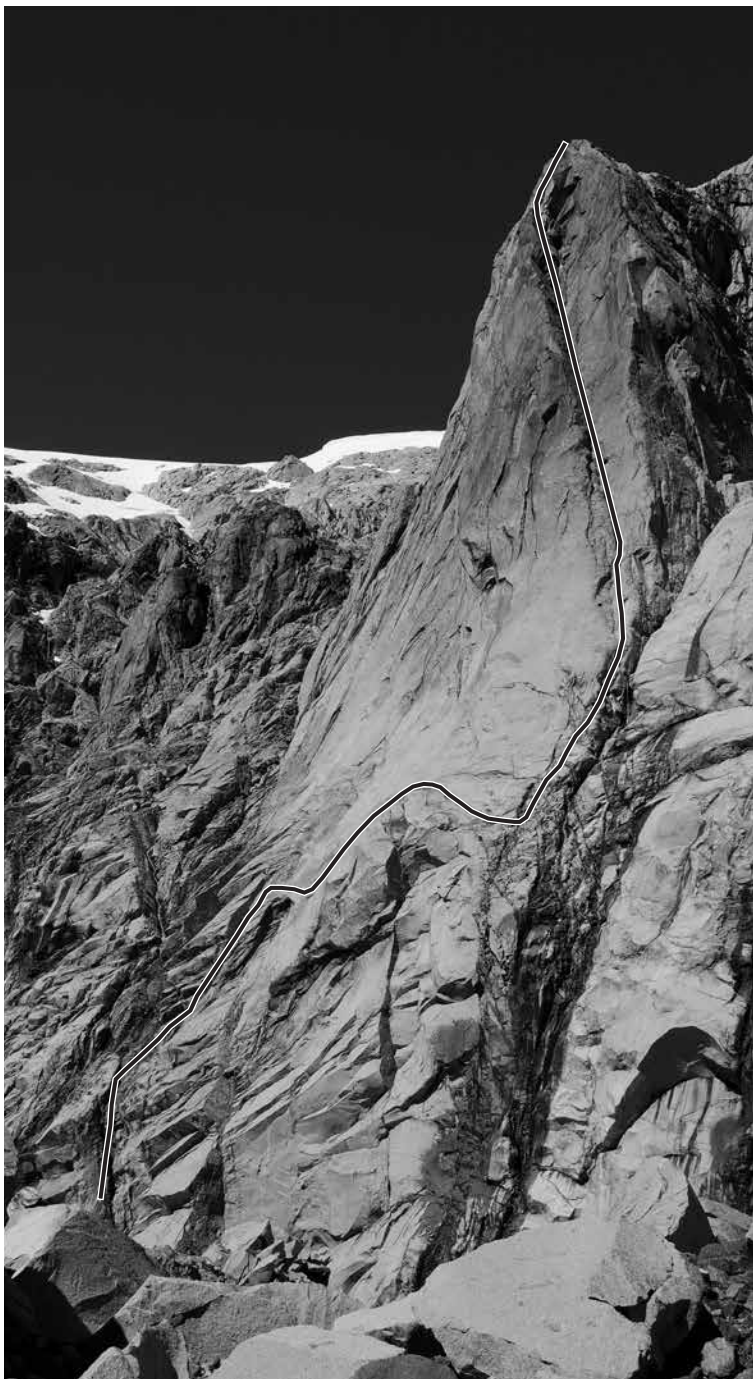
**About the Author**

Paul McSorley has unrepentantly made climbing and exploration his life's focus for more than two decades. Living in the relaxed atmosphere of Squamish, B.C., he works (infrequently) as a climbing guide and mountain safety specialist for TV and film. He spends his days flying paragliders from the Chief, hunting for new routes and scheming for the next far-flung adventure.

**Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Arc'teryx, Feathercraft, Innate and MEC for supporting us on this trip.

La Vuelta de los Condores on the northeast face of Cerro Mariposa. Photo: Matt Van Biene



# Testing Boundaries

Every journey has a beginning, a point where forces come together and encourage us to adventure into the unknown. This adventure—to climb a granite big wall in the Canadian Arctic with my brother, Delano Lavigne—started in 2005 when we travelled to the Northwest Territories to climb the remarkable Lotus Flower Tower. It was Delano's first big wall and our first grand adventure together.

Joshua Lavigne

Delano Lavigne on pitch 10 of the attempt on the northwest face of Mount Turnweather.
Photo: Joshua Lavigne
Left: The Lavigne brothers (Delano, left; Joshua, right) on the summit of Mount Turnweather.
Photo: Joshua Lavigne

ON OUR TRIP TO THE CIRQUE OF THE UNCLIMBABLES, I recognized that we had a bond that went beyond our fraternal contract. Our trust in each other (an innate part of our relationship) emboldened us to live a life of meaning by the discovery of ourselves through adventure. Our partnership has become something that's not defined solely by climbing or kinship, but by an interchangeable student-teacher connection. This is why we continue to encourage each other to seek out adventures, and to seek that adventure together, and how we found ourselves stepping off a plane in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, ready to journey toward the granite walls of Auyuittuq National Park.

We walked across the gravel airstrip, pushed by the Arctic air blowing in from Cumberland Sound, and entered a one-room airport. A young Inuit boy and his father, Rikki, immediately greeted us with wide smiles, eager to get us on our way. After three days of travel we were also eager to start our journey towards the mythical walls. Within two hours of arriving, we happily took our first steps on the tundra. Our steps yielded to the weight of our feet, and our heavy loads sunk deeply into the sand and moss—the surroundings absorbing our presence. We, too, absorbed the sounds, smells and sights of the expansive landscape, acclimating to our new home. Water surrounded us, running off the cliffs of Overlord Peak looming above, trickling under the thick tussocks of moss that blanketed the valley floor and gushed through countless glacial moraines.

We moved up the valley methodically, finding and holding our own pace, eventually turning north away from Weasel Valley and up towards the Turnweather glacier. The path was undefined and fresh with fallen rock, but it awarded us with a reasonably straightforward approach. Over the next four hours, we passed meadows painted pink, white and yellow with wildflowers. Unnamed and unclimbed walls hung above and exposed crevasses ran deep under our feet. With our knees weak from the weight of our packs, we were happy, if not forced, to stop every hour.

Eventually, we arrived at what would be our home for the next two weeks—an unassuming island of rock haphazardly strewn on the glacier. It offered us a place to sit, find shelter and stretch out on the sea of ice, which had inspiring views of the 900-metre east face of Mount Turnweather. Once settled, we walked unencumbered up the glacier to get a better look at our objective, a welcome respite from the labour of the previous days. We studied the walls and made every effort to learn its hidden secrets, those that would permit us passage to its towering summit. But the walls were not in condition, still wet from a cold, rainy spring. The snowy winter and late summer cast a mild doubt over our ability to free climb—the intention of our trip—in such unfavourable conditions. Nevertheless, we returned to our tent ready for a rest day and optimistic that a few days of good weather would dry the stone and brighten our hopes.

On our first days in camp, heavy clouds, thick fog and generally cold temperatures greeted us. Feeling the need to keep the morale high, we explored the nearby glaciers and peaks and completed what were likely two first ascents. The first was a pleasant hike and scramble up a bowl-shaped peak to the northeast of our camp, capped with a hanging glacier and granite summit. The second was the east ridge of Gauntlet Peak (Violett's Ridge, V, 5.8, 400m), an obvious clean granite buttress on the left side of the dark and ominous walls of the enormous east face.

A day of rock climbing up a clean and well-protected classic, even in sub-optimal conditions, gave us the motivation to start up Mount Turnweather. The free climbing was spectacular, with hanging big walls and glaciers that encompassed every angle of the eye, sculpted grey and yellow granite under our hands and feet, and a landscape of solitude punctuated only by our presence. We were really excited to get on the east face of Turnweather.

Another day of rain delayed our start and eventually changed our intended route line. Originally we wanted to free the route Dry Line, established in 1996 by Jia Condon and Rich Prohaska at 5.10 A2, but it continued to appear wet. Instead, we decided to explore the same buttress and follow our intuition. Our first day was spent establishing five new pitches to a prominent ledge below the main wall. It offered solid and clean climbing up to 5.11, so we had high hopes for the upper pitches. The rains continued, but with a positive weather text on the satellite phone we decided to launch.

We awoke to grey skies but relatively stable weather, which seemed sufficient enough for an attempt at establishing a first free ascent on the east buttress. What was unclear, and a little foreboding, was whether or not the conditions would hold for the two days we needed to climb 900 metres of steep and unknown terrain. Equipped with the essentials—food, warm clothes, an emergency tarp, rock gear and a strong motivation to complete a big wall—we started up the face. The day began with climbing our two fixed lines, and we were soon treading through a handful of classic alpine granite pitches: wet, loose and traversing, ranging from 5.8 to 5.10. We weaved around the route Dry Line and traversed left to the top of a pillar. The belay was perched above an overhanging void, the wall cut away at our feet and there was nothing but a blank wall to the right. Here we faced a decision: either rappel and do a large pendulum to the right to an unknown crack; or piece together a precarious and un-protectable traverse to an insignificant seam. Delano opted for the pendulum. I opted for the traverse.

As I stepped off the perch and climbed away from the ledge, I turned back to assess the hazard. I looked down at the fall and then up at Delano. I could see concern in his eyes; he said nothing and steadily held the rope. The weather had started to deteriorate and clouds blew across the horizon. Wind numbed my fingers, pitched the rope back and forth across the wall, and heightened my awareness of the consequences. The outcome remained unclear.

Right: Delano Lavigne high on the headwall of Butter Knife Ridge.
Photo: Joshua Lavigne

The intricacies of the pitch unfolded. Experience, along with a little luck, delivered me to the belay unscathed. Delano followed, pushing himself through the cold and the difficulties, and arrived at the belay without falling. He was elated. After suffering through frozen hands, pumped forearms and nagging fears, he had persevered. The rush of being up high on a Baffin big wall was pumping through his veins. I worked through another pitch of committed 5.12 climbing. My enthusiasm rose in a wave of perfect jams, engaging face climbing and splitter cracks. I stood 60 metres above my brother with feverishness for more. Delano, on the other hand, hung from the belay with a feeling of unease in his gut. He was grappling with an unfamiliar voice, a voice urging him to go down. With a pain in his heart but no hesitation in his voice, he yelled up from below and stated unequivocally, "I want to go down." At first I was confused, but I couldn't ignore his conviction and I trusted his decision. I responded to his voice, to his mountain sense, and before long we were retracing our steps to the base of the wall.

Under clear skies and a setting sun, we moved along the glacier. The mood was unsettled yet reconciled. Unsettled as we waited for a change in the weather that would validate our retreat; reconciled because neither of us held the decision we had made against the other. We settled into our sleeping bags and waited for the rain, but it never came until the next morning when it started to storm in earnest. Wind and rain pounded our tent and snow capped the peaks. Had we continued climbing, we would have been 800 metres up the wall, fighting to stay warm and dry under an emergency tarp. Delano's intuition had saved us from a certain epic. When we were adventuring up the wall into the unknown, I may have been the teacher and Delano the pupil, but the roles were reversed when it came to making the decision to retreat.

Our resolve to climb Turnweather was still strong, but the acute feeling of being on our own, far away from any help, weighed heavy on our minds. We spent a couple of more days in camp—using the last of our supplies—as we waited for the rain to stop, the walls to dry and our psych to realign. Eventually, we decided to make another attempt, but this time via the northeast ridge, a section of the mountain that looked clean and dry. The summit day started poorly, a squall ran through camp, spattering our tent with rain. Consequently, Delano took two sleeping pills as we had decided to delay for a day. We fell back asleep only to wake a few hours later to blue skies, a warm breeze and a desire to go. The sleeping pills started to kick-in just as we left camp and a haze followed Delano as he stumbled behind me.

We traversed under the two-kilometre-long wall, making our way towards the northern flank where a wide, low-angle ice gully cut through the rock. We donned our ice gear and started up but quickly recognized that the rain and warm breeze had loosened the surrounding walls, which had started to release a barrage of rock fall. We abandoned our planned approach and ran for shelter, making our way towards a low-angle rock wall to the left. We simul-climbed several hundred metres, a slight oversight on my part considering that Delano's eyes were still half shut. We traversed the summit and headed down towards the col below the north ridge. Here, Delano took the sharp end. He resolved that it was the only way to shake off the drugs. I followed as we climbed a quintessential ridgeline, framed by the Turnweather glacier to the north and Cumberland Sound and rolling tundra to the south. The main event of the climb presented itself as a steep and intimidating buttress of golden granite that jutted straight up from the ridge. We swapped ends and I led off towards a faint seam up the very edge of the wall; indistinct and discontinuous features connected to make the climbing possible. We were pushed right towards the void of the east face but I held true to my instinct that we would be rewarded with a direct line. Delano, uncertain of my chosen line, kept his feelings to himself and trusted my intuition, continuing to push himself and meet me at each belay with eyes widening and heart pounding. The pitches and summit unfolded in a perfect crescendo of splitter seams, desperate climbing, and a partnership built on a lifetime of encouraging each other to strive for fearlessness in the face of uncertainty.

We could have never imagined the adventure that awaited us on Baffin Island. We arrived with a tentative plan—one defined more by our desire to have an adventure together than by specific objectives. Rather than restrict ourselves to one line or one mountain, we were open to a whole world of possibilities. As a result, we discovered more of ourselves beyond what would be possible individually, and added a new chapter to our partnership, friendship and kinship.

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### Summary

Violett's Ridge (V 5.8, 400m), east ridge, Gauntlet Peak, Auyuittuq National Park, Baffin Island. FA: Delano Lavigne, Joshua Lavigne, July 21, 2013.

Butter Knife Ridge (VI 5.12 AI3, 900m), northeast buttress, Auyuittuq National Park, Mt. Turnweather, Baffin Island: FA: Delano Lavigne, Joshua Lavigne, August 1, 2013.


### About the Author

Joshua Lavigne is an ACMG guide and climber based out of Canmore, Alberta. Having climbed and travelled to some of the world's greatest big walls, Baffin Island has captured his imagination and encouraged fervour for remote fjords framed by granite monoliths.


### Acknowledgements

Thank you to MEC for their support of this expedition.


Right: Delano Lavigne approaching the headwall of Butter Knife Ridge. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

Sonnie Trotter on the last pitch (pitch five) of Castles in the Sky. Photo: Ben Moon

# Castles in the Sky

*"Building castles in the sky" is an old Irish proverb for daydreamers who never take any action.*

Sonnie Trotter

Obviously, this expression is geared towards big planners, the ones who walk around spraying about their colossal ideas, hyping up their visions, but who, at the end of the day, never actually take any concrete steps towards achieving their dreams. But I think dreams are important, and being half Irish myself, I'll admit I've had my share of big ones. Unfortunately not all of them have come true, but I'm not finished yet. There's still a lot of work to be done. However, one dream that I've luckily managed to put behind me (for the time being) was my perpetual desire to create a new line on my favourite Rockies peak—the majestic and unmistakable Castle Mountain.

Castle Mountain as seen from the Trans-Canada Highway. Castles in the Sky climbs the second buttress in from the right on the lower tier.
Photo: Ben Moon

For more than 10 years, I ogled at an outrageous and most prominent buttress of rock perched way up high on the middle tier of the mountain. Located directly south of the classic Eisenhower Tower, the buttress hangs high and shapely over the Bow Valley like a voluptuous woman. Her beautiful profile is visible directly from the Trans-Canada Highway while heading east, and I've always hoped of swinging around up there on hard terrain. I was never absolutely sure if I would do it or not, or even if it was possible, until May 2013 when my friend Eugene and I basically jogged up to the base of the wall one afternoon to have an inspection. The wall was surprisingly featured, and even more awesome than I had imagined.

Unfortunately, ascending this beast on natural gear was impossible, so I took to the cliff from the top down, and like many routes of this nature, the climbing is often the easy part. First, I had to convince a small crew of selfless soldiers to help me hump loads to the top. Many ropes, bits, batteries, bolts and hangers (nearly 100), anchors, hammers, wrenches, prybars and a drill completed the kit list. Even today, my knees swell up just thinking about it. They waited patiently on top for me to rappel down and inspect the route just to see if and where it would go. It was the first of many backbreaking missions that summer, and I had a number of absolutely amazing partners who joined me on this journey. I truly couldn't have done it without them.

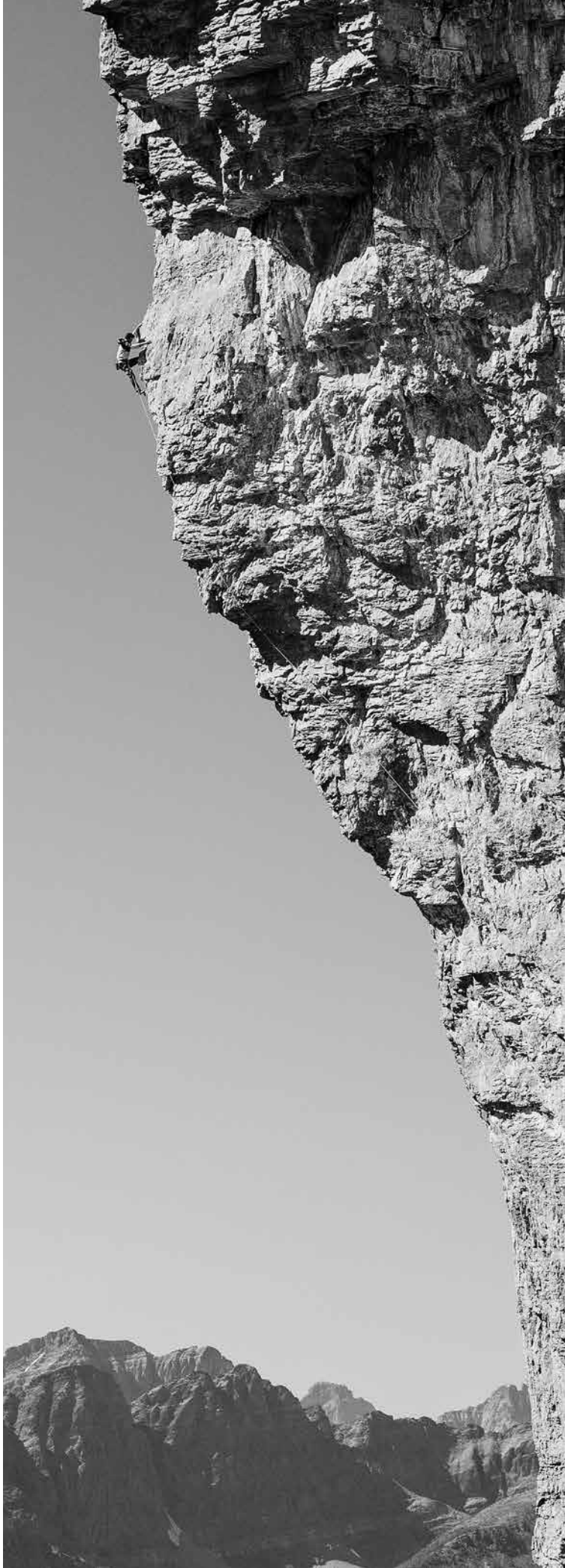
I recall the first time Sam, Eugene and I reached the top of

the route by following the Rockbound Lake trail and breaking left through the trees and up onto the ridge. Our quads hummed with fatigue as we sat in the mid-morning sun eating our lunch and peering down over the surrounding peaks of Castle Junction. Storms rolled through the valley, but luckily never directly hit us. It seemed like they always split into two halves before reaching the mountain and each half went in separate directions—one travelled east and the other to the west. This, of course, was a spectacular sight, but always kept us on our toes for we never knew when it was about to get ugly for us. Over the summer, this happened nearly every single time we went up there. I began to wonder if Castle Junction itself is a bit of a vortex, a blue hole that is partially sheltered from the famous afternoon thunderstorms known to the Rockies, or if we were just lucky.

On the second day, after some precarious route navigation, I eventually (and excitedly) swung under the giant roof to find the amazing prow below my feet. The exposure was nauseating at first, but what really made things difficult was the constant howling winds coming from the west. I realized quickly that if I stayed a couple of feet on the right side of the prow, then I could get some respite from the constant battering of these cold and forceful gusts. I was moving well enough to stay warm, so I continued down, cleaning and bolting. I hoped that the route would continue to reveal itself and not shut me down with a chossy bit, or worse, a completely blank face that would prevent any passage at all from below. I continued sliding down my ropes as the tail ends of them drifted and whipped in the open air below me.

After about five days of extremely hard work, we made it down to the bottom, on relatively solid ground. Besides ruining two perfectly good ropes (pack rats), I also inhaled far too much rock dust from the holes I had drilled, and the wind made it worse by blowing it into my eyes. Our so-called solid ground was actually a large sloped scree ledge that divides the lower tier into two halves, one where we could easily walk off to gain the main trail back down. We didn't know what was above us, and although fully equipped with shiny new bristlers, I had only before visualized doing the moves. I had yet to perform a single sequence with proper rock shoes and a chalk bag. I assumed from touching the holds that it would be nothing harder than 5.13a/b, but over the next three or four visits, my prediction would prove to be wrong again.

Needless to say, the 300-metre wall is impressive in its own right, but the jutting prow on the fourth pitch stands out like a peacock puffing up its chest. When you're actually on the arête, you finally realize how exposed you really are because of how much atmosphere there seems to be sucking you down, and the afternoon crosswinds only affirm your vulnerability. They hit you hard on the left side of your body, making you feel like a flapping flag on top of a skyscraper. At this point, you're approximately 600 metres above the Bow River.



Sonnie Trotter on the crux (pitch three) of Castles in the Sky.
Photo: Ben Moon

I made three arduous visits to the crux pitch before piecing the entire route together, each time with a different belayer. First it was the young Hirsch, also known as Sam Eastman-Zaleski from Ontario, but we bailed from the searing sun and dehydration. Then it was Brandon Pullan, also an Ontario native who fled west many moons ago. Finally, on the day of the send, it was Sam Lambert, the unflappable French Canadian. One thing they each have in common is their irrefutable sense of humour and passion for being in high places.

On the day of the send, Lambert and I actually rappelled the entire route to the main ledge from the top, where we had spent the night. Having had some work to do on the route the day before, we had brought enough gear for an open bivy on the summit. Despite the constant harassment of pack rats throughout the night, we awoke to a renewing sunrise, and I felt relatively strong and fresh. We drank hot coffee and ate stale bagels while packing our bags for the day. Climbing is about a lot of things: one of them is the friends you go out with; another is the exhilarating experience of urinating off a giant cliff at 7 a.m. with the warm summer sun on your face; another yet is spending the night out in the open and falling asleep to the sound of wind meandering through the surrounding trees.

The climbing went well. I felt stronger than ever and the friction was impeccable. The first two pitches are nothing more than a wonderful warm-up, straightforward low-angle 5.10 climbing. Then it kicks back in a hurry. Sam climbed what he could behind me and aided through the more difficult sections. I chose to link together the third and fourth pitches because I wanted to eliminate an optional, precarious and rather arbitrary hanging belay on top of pitch three. This was my personal choice. It doesn't have to be climbed that way, but I wanted to climb it in the best style I could manage, and this mega-pitch created what I believe to be an enduring 5.14a. When you add together the weight of the rope and its inevitable drag, combined with the power-endurance climbing of the lower 5.12+ pitch, *and* the über-technical climbing of the upper 5.13+ fourth pitch, you get 50 non-stop metres of brilliant monster-pump rock climbing. It's a worthy endeavour.

The fifth pitch is a steep and rather tricky 5.12a. The bolts are closely spaced as it trends up and left over a small roof. This bit is very short and ends on another solid and comfortable belay stance. If you wish, you can link this into an easy obvious corner system above (5.10), or pitch it out. Either way, you'll gain another obvious and secure belay stance, probably 20 metres or so higher. The last pitch is again thankfully wild and exposed—climb an easy slab traversing right until you gain a nifty section of 5.11 arête shenanigans. This pitch will lead you to the top of the wall, another bolted anchor and a much-deserved lookout point. After taking in the view, scramble easily to the top of the ledge and walk down the right side of the mountain (Eisenhower Tower descent) to gain the main trail back to the car park.

I have always known that the Canadian Rockies are at least comparable (if not better in some respects) to many of the most well-known mountain ranges in the world. Right here in our own backyard we have an unlimited amount of adventure opportunities, coupled with more than the occasional line of high-quality rock and steep terrain. The possibilities are truly endless if one were so inclined to get out and explore them. Having said that, nothing will exist without first having a wistful dream, and, in my experience anyway, a highly motivated team of industrious and waggish individuals, the kind of people who are rarely employed and will call in sick at the drop of a hat to get outside one more time.

With this route, I wanted to create something spectacular and inspiring, something you would see in pictures and think it was from the Dolomites of Italy, or the Swiss Alps. My goal was to encourage as many people as possible to experience the thrill of playing in this wild place, on this bit of wonderfully steep rock in the heart of the Rockies, but without fear or consequence. I wanted to create a challenging but joyful climbing experience. The climbing is very safe, and rather easy to aid through any section, even if you're not a 5.13+ climber. I do suggest, however, that you are (at least) a very competent 5.12+ climber before attempting this route. To retreat in the event of a storm, fatigue or dehydration, lower back down the wall using steep sport-cleaning tactics. A 60-metre rope will get you back to the scree ledge where it all began.

Many thanks to Eugene Kozhushko and Sam Eastman-Zaleski for their very hard work and companionship, and to Brandon Pullan for the working belays, and finally to Sam Lambert who belayed me on the successful attempt. Thanks to Ben Moon and Page Stephenson for the great pictures and moving imagery. Thanks so much to all of you for helping me make this route a reality—it's no longer my castle in the sky. Two things I have learned about this endeavour is, first, that most dreams will only come true with a brutal amount of hard work and determination, so it's important to love the process as much as the intended outcome, and, second, having good friends with a sense of humour make all the difference in the world.

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**Summary**

Castles in the Sky (5.14a, 5 pitches), south face, Castle Mountain. FA: Sam Eastman-Zaleski, Eugene Kozhushko, Sam Lambert, Brandon Pullan. FFA: Sonnie Trotter, September 2013.

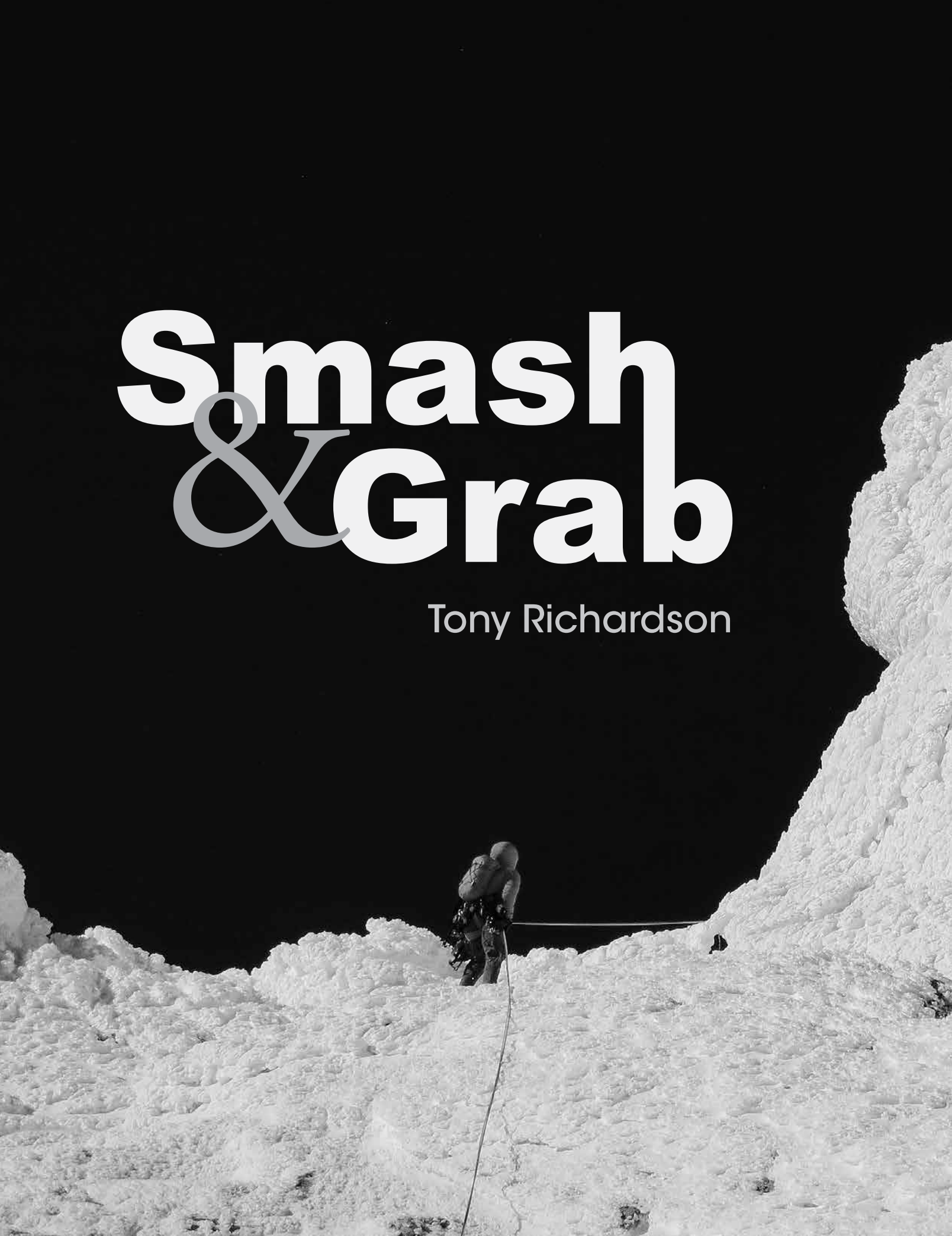
**About the Author**

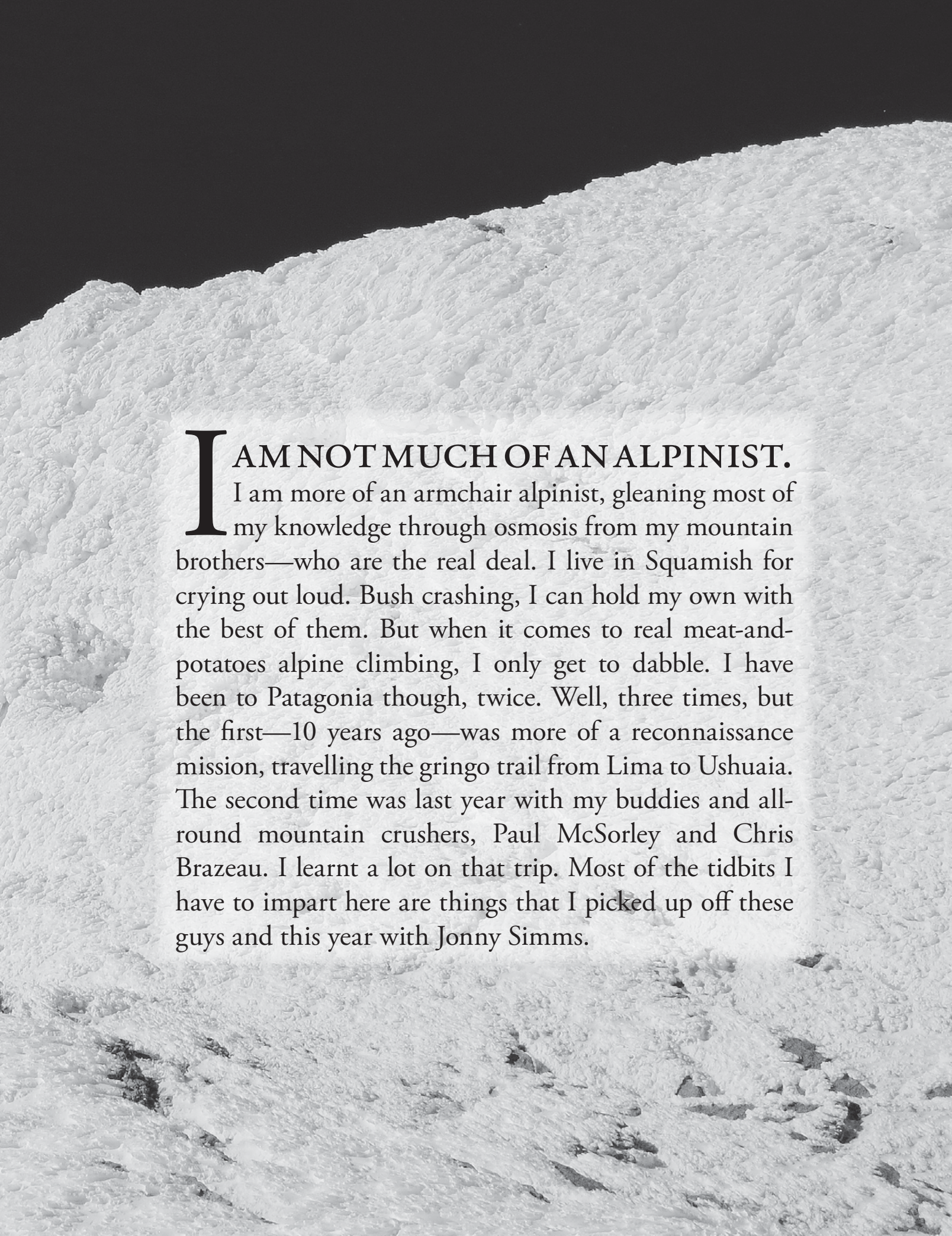
Sonnie Trotter is 34 years old, has been climbing for 19 years and currently lives, works and plays in Canmore, Alberta. He is a Patagonia ambassador, climbing coach, filmmaker, photographer, writer and guide. When not travelling around looking for cool new routes to climb, he hangs around the Bow Valley with his wife, Lydia, and son, Tatum.

Sonnie Trotter and Brandan Pullan at the third-pitch anchor below the crux. On his red point ascent, Sonnie didn't use this anchor, thus combining pitch three (5.12+) and four (5.13+), resulting in a 5.14a grade. Photo: Ben Moon

# Smash & Grab

Tony Richardson





I AM NOT MUCH OF AN ALPINIST. I am more of an armchair alpinist, gleaning most of my knowledge through osmosis from my mountain brothers—who are the real deal. I live in Squamish for crying out loud. Bush crashing, I can hold my own with the best of them. But when it comes to real meat-and-potatoes alpine climbing, I only get to dabble. I have been to Patagonia though, twice. Well, three times, but the first—10 years ago—was more of a reconnaissance mission, travelling the gringo trail from Lima to Ushuaia. The second time was last year with my buddies and all-round mountain crushers, Paul McSorley and Chris Brazeau. I learnt a lot on that trip. Most of the tidbits I have to impart here are things that I picked up off these guys and this year with Jonny Simms.

THIS ARTICLE ISN'T INTENDED as a dis on all the folks who went to Patagonia this past season and didn't get to climb much. By all accounts, the season was pretty shitty. This is especially true when you compare it to the last two or three years, which have been some of the nicest on record, with numerous multi-week weather windows. This year did not see a repeat of last year's congo-line, send-train on the west face of Cerro Torre (I was there, it was awesome) or the cragging on the Goretta Pillar of Fitz. No, this season was a different story, a seemingly endless storm punctuated by the briefest of cracks in the window, followed immediately by "the wall of hate" as the next pearl in the storm-necklace strung around the southern oceans' infinite fetch came rolling in.

Despite this, a lot of impressive things were accomplished. To name a few, there was Tommy Caldwell and Alex Honnold's incredible link-up of the Fitz Roy massif, many new routes on some of the less-frequented peaks of the region, and, one of my favourites, the blitz by the strong Italian duo Simon Gietl and Gerry Fiegl when they went from town to the summit of Fitz and back in a 30-hour push via the Super Canaleta. All of these feats further my argument that the weather in Patagonia is what it is—the only thing you can control is how you deal with it. The common denominator in all of these bids can be summarized as smash and grab.

In the months and weeks leading up to my departure date at the beginning of January from Vancouver, it wasn't the spray about how bad conditions were that gave me doubts; it was the lack of reports. In this day and age of hyper-reportage, a media void is more alarming than the standard stream-of-consciousness tweets, Instagrams and Facebook posts that we have all come to expect.

> Partners in crime: Choose the right partner. I saw plenty of guys wandering around Chalten trying to find someone to tie in with; Argentine Roulette. This is, in fact, the reason I didn't climb the first time I went to Patagonia a decade ago. I figured it would be like Camp 4 south. It's not.

Fortunately for me, I had made plans to go with Jonny Simms. Hanging out with Jonny is kind of like hanging out with a rock star. Not so much because he shreds the guitar and is not afraid to use it, but because of his approach to life. In his own words, "We can go this way over here and take the safe line, or we can go that way where it is world-class." Some people naturally err on the side of caution; Jonny's tendency is to go world-class.

Our planning for this trip was brief. Sometime in September, Simms texted me out of the blue: "Want to go to Patagonia this winter?" I was in the depths of a work binge/burnout cycle, designing climbing harnesses no less, and replied immediately: "Yes". The first thing to do in these situations is to purchase a plane ticket, thereby making those so-easily spoken words a committed agreement. This we also did with the scarcest of communication.

"Dates?"
"Jan 12 to Feb 12?"
"Copy"
"Check"

In the final days before departing, I was stressed. My boss was not speaking to me, and the hundred-year storm had settled in on the East Coast (my flight connected through Toronto). The straw that nearly broke the camel's back came the night before I was to fly out. Jonny sent me a photo of his car 50 feet down an embankment somewhere between Golden and Calgary (he had miraculously escaped unscathed). But by this point it was too late, my flight was leaving in only a few short hours, and I still had to figure out which long johns to pack.

> Be prepared for anything: Bring your rock shoes, bring your #6 cam, but also bring tools, 'poons and screws. Most importantly bring the mindset to use all this shit. It may be tempting to scrimp (what about extra baggage charges, I'm not good at ice climbing, I want to climb rock routes like I saw in the pictures…), but nothing will have you wallowing around El Chalten quicker than wishing you had the gear to get it done.

No matter how you slice it, the trip from Squamish, or almost anywhere for that matter, to El Chalten is a long grind. Cars, busses, ferries and trains, and I hadn't even left Vancouver! For some reason, probably to save $50 all those months ago when I bought the ticket, I had cast myself into purgatory—an 11-hour layover in Toronto. It wasn't until the 11th hour, when Jonny showed up, guitar in hand, smile on his face, that I started to really get into the fact that I was going back to Patagonia.

Two days later, after a couple of long flights, transfers, taxis, busses, hostels and the final march from the bus depot in Chalten, I arrived at my friend Jesus' hostel on the outskirts of town. This is when it would be tempting to just throw your bags down for a few days and catch your breath—don't!

> When you get there, keep going: The best thing you can do when you arrive in El Chalten is to figure out what the weather is doing, and then figure out what you can do, even if it's to hump a load into camp. Last year, after an even more brutal intercontinental commute, this is what Paul, Braz and I did and it really helped to break the seal and get that first hard hike out of the way. This also falls into the "set yourself up for success" category.

When Simms and I arrived on January 15, a crack in the weather in two days was forecast. The first order of business was to fuel up with some *empanadas* and a Quilmes. At the *empanaderia*, we ran into half the climbers in town and got all the beta we needed. Everyone was talking about the hot new route of the season, Super Domo on Domo Blanco. It had been established only a few weeks earlier by the strong team of Mikey Schaefer and the brothers Kauffman. They raved about

it, and given the number of quick repeats and glowing reports, we decided this would be a good warm-up. It didn't disappoint. The following day, we packed our kit and made the long march up the Torre Valley to Niponino (this is actually a contraction of Ni Polacos and Ni Noruegos, as it sits more or less between the traditional camping spots of the Polish and Norwegians, and is not the vaguely racist name I had assumed). It's only about 15 kilometres to get there, but it always feels like a really long way, particularly on the first lap of the trip with a full sack and travel-weary legs. This brings me to my next point.

> Fitness: The best way to prepare for a season in Patagonia is to get fit. I'm talking about straight-up cardio marathon miles. It's a long approach to even the closest objectives, and the climbs are long, and then you have to make the long descent and walk a long way out. At a minimum, you're looking at two to three days round trip. In a season like this one you don't get the luxury of waiting for the weather to break before you start walking, so you have to start at the end of one storm and probably walk out in the start of the next. The last excuse you want to make is that you're too tired.

We arrived in Niponino and set up camp. It was a much different scene than the one I remembered from last year. Then, we had strewn our stuff about and lolled around getting sunburns whilst being serenaded by Sean Vilanueva's penny whistling as the resident fox skipped amongst the boulders near camp. Simms and I found a spot amongst the handful of other tents already there, set up camp and settled in for an early night as the skies mostly cleared. In the morning we set off early, wondering where the other headlamps we could see bobbling up the glacier were headed, and hoping we weren't going to be stuck below another team. As luck had it we made it to the base of our route first, just edging out a couple of German climbers. This was the perfect warm-up for us. We simuled the first pitches of steep snow. I led the next fun mixed step and Jonny took us to the chains up the final bullet-hard pitch of steep ice. We topped out in some classic Patagonian winds carrying a building storm and decided to head home. The Germans passed us at that point, asking, "Vich vay to ze summit?" Then, "Sanks," with a tone that made us wonder is they were offended by our existence, or genuinely happy for the advice.

Previous page: Tony Richardson rappelling from the high point on the ridge of Cerro Pollone. Photo: Jon Simms
This page: Jon Simms racking up and freeing the opening pitch of Tomahawk on Aguja Standardt. Photo: Tony Richardson
Next page: Tony Richardson on pitch four of El Busca Jesus on Cerro Pollone. Photo: Jon Simms

Technically, we didn't go to the summit of Domo Blanco, so, technically, I guess we didn't finish the route. I'll leave that sort of debate to the philosophers. The climbing was fun, and we were back in our tent before it started to rain too hard. The next day we packed up and walked out as things began to get really nasty.

Eat lots of meat: This is what the Argentines do, and they do it well. This is also the best way to recover from the drinking you'll most likely do when you get back to town after a mission and the weather forecast is bad for the next week.

Which brings me to the next point.

Stay hydrated: Quilmes, Palermo, any of these light beers have the most pleasant quality of giving you a good buzz all night while magically rehydrating you and leaving you relatively hangover-free the next morning. If the weather looks really bad and you want to check out the disco, which doesn't open until 1 or 2 a.m., then skull a few Fernet *con* Colas. Don't even think about trying to make that *con* Pepsi though.

We stayed in the same hostel that I had stayed in the year previous. My friend Jesus runs this humble abode. It's his side gig for when he isn't rocking out as the bass player of the local band, Siete Venas. Simms and Jesus got along very well. Jonny's rest days consisted of marathon jam sessions. He would throw down some Bob Marley or a Sublime track and Jesus would match it with something a bit more local or, better yet, one of his own tunes. This was a great way to pass some time while the winds raged outside. I would usually end up getting bored and go for a walk around town and run into one of the other climber-types also out for a wander. Eventually though, even this sweet routine got a bit old. Luckily, a bit of a weather window showed on the meteogram, so we packed our bags for the next lap.

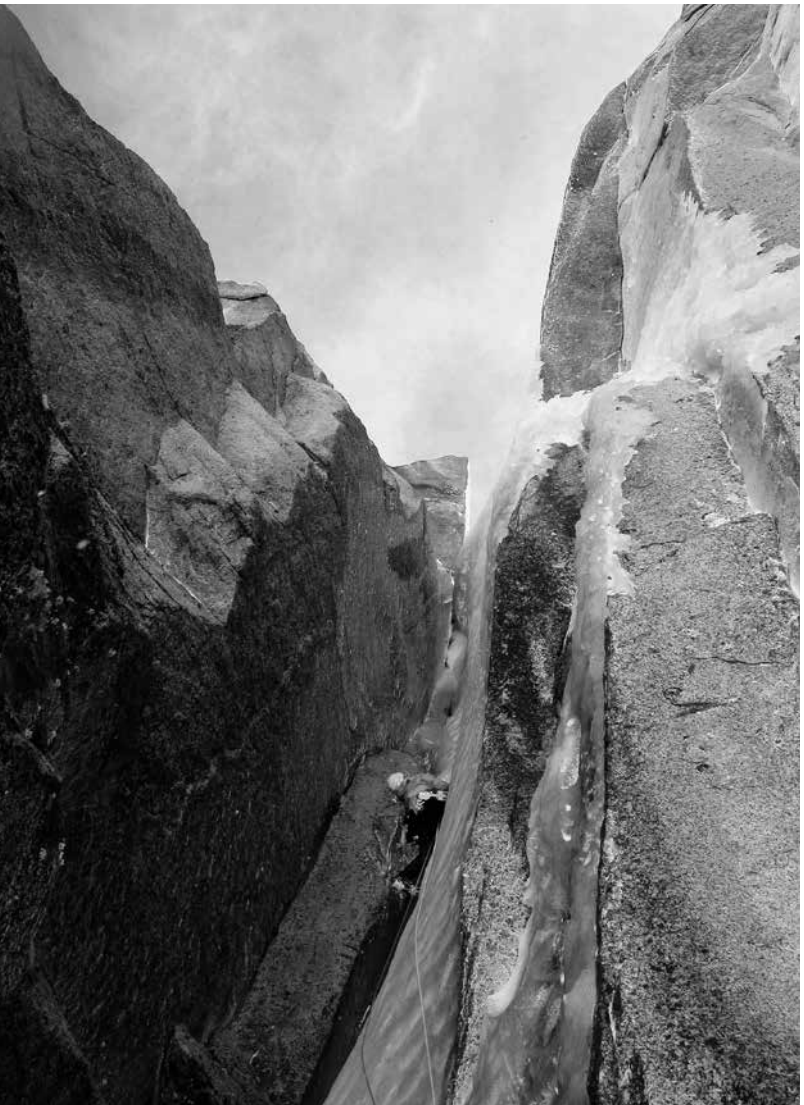
Check the weather, sometimes: The access to current, accurate weather reports in Patagonia is the single greatest game changer of the past decade. You must learn how to read them. Rolando Garabotti—guide, author of the must-have guide book, Patagonia Vertical, and blog PATAclimb.com and all-around nice guy—has provided detailed instructions on how to access and interpret the various meteograms available and is always very generous with beta, climatic and otherwise. You have to take his advice with a grain of salt though, because as he would be the first to admit, he is conservative in his assessment. He is the powder snob of Patagonian climbing, having been there for many, many seasons.

Like all technological aids, the meteogram tends to be abused, and people lose sight of the fact that it's still only a model. Being there only for the month, we found that trying to make the most of every possible opportunity yielded plenty of fun climbing. In fact, we found the meteograms to be surprisingly accurate to the point that if a window was forecasted from midnight to the next evening two days away, this would be the case to within a couple of hours. Knowing this, we could set ourselves up for success, choosing an objective based on the amount of time we had. Smash and grab!

Our next outing was on Pollone, one of the smaller peaks at the back of the Torre massif. We had spied a nice ice line from Niponino that turned out to be a route called Rayuela. It seemed to make more sense to access it from the other side via Electrico Valley. This pleasant hike through the Lenga forest in the valley climbs steeply up for the last few kilometres to the perched campsite Piedra Negra at the foot of Guillamet. We set off early the next morning in a blizzard. By the time we made it to the base, the snow was easing off. Super thin ice on the first couple of pitches made me wonder if the line would go, but Jonny saw the world-class line and attacked.

As he floated delicately up the sea of ephemeral ice, the clouds drifted past his head and the sky began to clear. I took the next pitch. Halfway up, the ice disappeared and I traversed out left on some of the funnest granite-slab mixed climbing I have ever done. This set us off on a new trajectory. We hit some snow slopes and traversed some more and arrived at the base of a sweet goulotte, three pitches long. By the time I arrived at the stance on the convoluted summit ridge of Pollone, Simms was eyeing up the rime mushrooms above us. I kyboshed this, though, when I arrived at the stance and realized it was actually a foot of unconsolidated foam. I wasn't prepared to endure many more hours of sketchy ridge climbing to get to the summit block. Not when we could rap three pitches and walk off the snow slopes to be home for dinner. So, technically we didn't get to the summit of Pallone either. And I guess, technically, our route was a variation of an existing line, putting it in that "variation didn't top out" category. But again, I was stoked, Jonny was stoked. We called it El Busca Jesus.

Avoid crowds: Climbing on Pollone gave us the perfect opportunity to look straight into the Super Couloir on Fitz Roy. If there had been one route that I wanted to climb this season, the Super Can was it. Simms took one look at it and said he wouldn't go. Due to conditions, it had become the trade route, or at least the preferred line of attack, and had as many as five parties on it at one time. Given that it is already a 2,000-metre terrain trap, that there had already been two rescues earlier in the season, and, though we didn't know it at the time, it would take the life of Chad Kellogg a few weeks later, I realized the wisdom in Jonny's words and lost my stoke to try it. Plus, there were plenty of other world-class lines around.



After another few days in town, we needed to sober up again. This time the window was even shorter, a scant 12 hours. We decided to go for a safe bet and climb one of the classic routes on the east face of Guillaumet. When we arrived there, low and behold there were already parties on the two most classic lines of the zone: the Amy-Vidailhet and the Coqueugniot-Guillot. To kill time, Jonny started up the snow cone just left of the Guillot (perhaps the original start to that route) as I simuled up the snow behind him. By the time I had him on belay he was committed to an insecure sn'ice groove. The pitch above this was another Chamonix-style goulotte almost directly below the summit snowfield. A quick jog to the top and we had bagged our first true *cumbre* of the season and another unwitting first ascent. Well, actually, I believe in technical terms, because the line we climbed shares the same start as the original Guillot line, ours is a variation. Either way, we climbed some fun new ground and we got to name it: The Richard Simmons. Again, the forecast didn't lie and the winds went from zero to nuclear in the time it took to coil the ropes.

> Follow your nose: Both of the new lines Jonny and I climbed were accidental. This season was cold and icy. Not so great for the splitters, but super if you are into ice. Everywhere there was a patch of snow draining down steep terrain held potential.

El Chalten is not a sport-climbing destination. As the weather started to really deteriorate, we had to resort to bouldering and cragging to keep the motivation levels high. Don't get me wrong, the bouldering around Chalten is world-class if you are in to that sort of thing, and the sport climbing is definitely better then a kick in the teeth, but world-class? Not so much. It sort of blew me away how many folks had reconciled themselves to accept that sending a sport project in the valley would send them home happy.

We had less than a week left in our trip and the weather wasn't trending any better. We convinced ourselves that maybe in a day the happy colours on the weather animation would be close enough to where we wanted them for us to be halfway up Cerro Standhart via Exocet. So, to put us in position, we decided to approach via the mega classic Tomahawk. To make sure we nailed the timing, we figured it made the most sense to do this in a single push from town.

We did the long walk up the Torre Valley, not burdened by extraneous camping gear, and made it to the base of our route as darkness fell. There was just enough time to see that the first long ice pitch wasn't really there and that we would have to climb the overhanging chimney in mixed style. Unfazed, Simms freed the daunting first pitch on his second go after he fell off the first few moves, sending festive sparks flying—a bonus to climbing at night! With only a single rack, we had to climb short pitches. We each did another exciting lead and arrived at the base of the chimney proper. By this point, it was about 1 a.m. and the spindrift was starting to intensify. Another nice thing about climbing at night is that you're in a bubble of light. The things that usually get me a little stressed— weather, rock and ice fall, exposure—no longer loom above or below. There is only what can be seen in front of you. By now, I was feeling a bit tired. It was my lead and the steepest ice was up next. As a medium-to-good ice climber, this scared me. Before I could say anything, Jonny handed me the rack and I was off. It was around this time that the spindrift began almost incessantly, and Simms shared another nugget from Sergeant Suffer (Jon Walsh): "Just climb through it."

It worked. Rather than stopping and waiting for the snow to let up, I reached over my head and kept swinging my tool until I felt confident that it was stuck, and then I moved up. This pitch was my all-time proudest. After another few pitches, as the sky started to lighten, we reached the snow slopes that lead to the Exocet chimney. Now that our bubbles were burst, and the weather refused to play out the way we had hoped, we decided to take the easy bail line down Scud and call it a day. It was a long walk back to town.

The last few days we had left in town were spent sleeping a lot. On the final evening before Jonny left, we had a big *asado* at the hostel. The guitars got a workout that evening. Jesus and his friend and bandmate San Jua put on a world-class performance, and then we headed for the bar where, in true rock-star fashion, Simms met up with Tomas Huber and talked rock (as in roll—Tomas is the lead singer in a metal band called Plastic Surgery Disaster). Finally, as the sun came up, I started to turn into a pumpkin and had to head for bed. I gave Jonny a hug and said I would get up to see him off in the morning. Of course, I didn't, and he was gone like a thief in the night. World-class, indeed.

Top: Jon Simms on pitch two of El Busca Jesus on Cerro Pollone. Photo: Tony Richardson
Bottom left: Jon Simms on the final pitch (pitch nine) of Super Domo on Domo Blanco. Photo: Tony Richardson
Bottom right: Tony Richardson on pitch two of Richard Simmons on Aguja Guillaumet. Photo: Jon Simms

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### Summary

Super Domo (WI5 M5/6, 500m; to the top of the ice pitches), east face, Domo Blanco, Argentine Patagonia. Jon Simms, Tony Richardson, January 16, 2014.

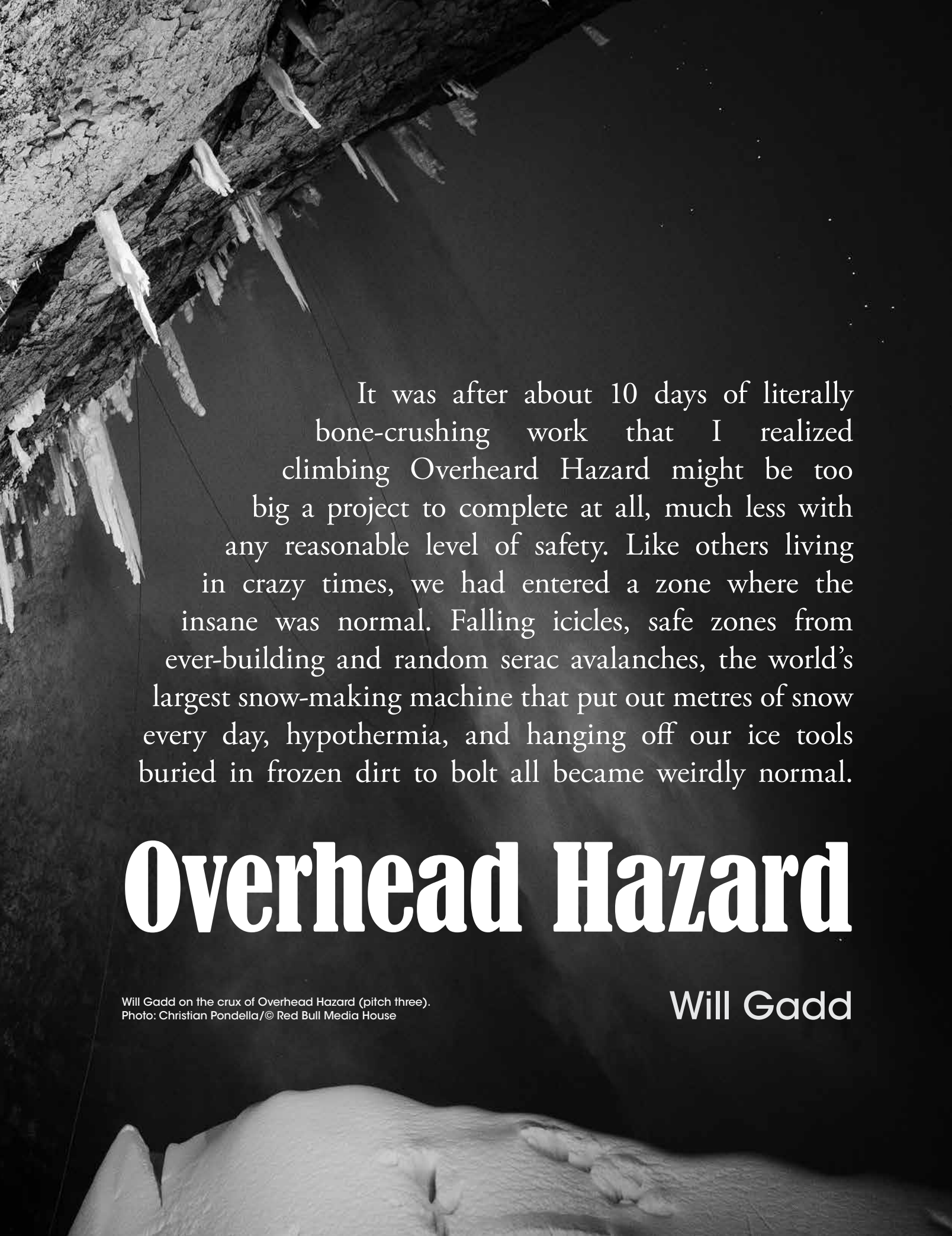
El Busca Jesus (WI4 M5, 200m; to the ridge), south face, Cerro Pollone. FA: Jon Simms, Tony Richardson, January 21, 2014 (to the ridge).

Richard Simmons (AI4, 80m), east face, Aguja Guillaumet. FA: Jon Simms, Tony Richardson, January 30, 2014.

Tomahawk (M7 WI5, 450m; to the base of Exocet), east face, Aguja Standhardt. Jon Simms, Tony Richardson, February 1, 2014.

### About the Author

Tony Richardson refers to himself as a 5.11 climber stuck in a 5.14 climber's body. He works in Vancouver for Arc'teryx and passes the rest of his time in Squamish.



It was after about 10 days of literally bone-crushing work that I realized climbing Overheard Hazard might be too big a project to complete at all, much less with any reasonable level of safety. Like others living in crazy times, we had entered a zone where the insane was normal. Falling icicles, safe zones from ever-building and random serac avalanches, the world's largest snow-making machine that put out metres of snow every day, hypothermia, and hanging off our ice tools buried in frozen dirt to bolt all became weirdly normal.

# Overhead Hazard

Will Gadd on the crux of Overhead Hazard (pitch three).
Photo: Christian Pondella/© Red Bull Media House

Will Gadd

WE HAD EACH ALREADY FROZEN our feet, despite having many years of personal and professional experience climbing in the cold. I had broken my finger and come within a few millimetres of dying in a hypothermic stupor. But, even after all of this, the immediate problem was much worse. The rope I wanted to ascend—had to ascend to finish working on the route—was covered in at least 10 centimetres of stubbornly affixed ice, the kind that's hard to chip off your sidewalk when standing on flat ground. But I was hanging on the rope while wildly smashing it above my head with my ice tool. Somehow this seemed like a reasonable solution, and I'm not sure what bothered me more: the realization that hanging with my full body weight on a thin rope while whacking it with a razor-sharp ice tool was an incredibly stupid idea; or that I simply didn't give a shit anymore. The route had completely destroyed all sense of reason.

I know that some objectives will do this to my mind. They overwhelm the safety circuit breakers of fear and reason—the self-preservation mantras. Just burn it all in a fire of desire to go up. I don't think this process is healthy, but I know it to be effective and all-consuming. Overhead Hazard was the line I always wanted to climb at Helmcken Falls, but it took six visits over the years plus weeks of climbing in the bottom of the 150-metre deep spray cauldron before I felt like I understood the place enough to try the line. Years of the Helmcken Head Jerk—an ever-repeating move where you keep looking up like a startled chicken to make sure you're not standing under a dangerous hanging icicle—developed my situational awareness for the area. Understanding how the spray mist breathed onto the walls as the day and season progressed gave me confidence. Knowledge is always survival, and at Helmcken Falls, we didn't have much knowledge at first.

When Tim Emmett and I first walked into Helmcken six years ago and climbed a single pitch of WI10 that we called Spray On, we knew we had found something amazing. We built on that line the following trip, and it was the most amazing ice climbing I've ever done. When Tim Emmett and Klemen Premel climbed the first spray ice line on the wall that went from bottom to top, they did something that, in my mind, was the best, most amazing, powerful and rad ice line in the world. I was injured that year, but cheered their efforts from afar because I knew what it took to put routes up at Helmcken. It's way, way harder than any normal new routing

I've ever done—and also more rewarding.

There is nothing in climbing I've found that beats the buzz of new routing, and Helmcken is the biggest buzz of all. Maybe high-altitude big-wall free climbing is as painful, dangerous and rewarding, I don't know, but it seems like mentally it might be close. Every autumn, I receive emails from people who want to climb at Helmcken. Out of the hundred-plus people who have said they would for sure come, only a thin fraction ever showed up, and fewer yet have put up lines that go for more than a few bolts. The place is powerful and difficult in a way that no words can describe. It's the only climbing area that I've ever been to where you feel it in your guts. Oh, and you can forget about climbing on ice screws—they pop faster than champagne corks on New Years. And the rock is so bad that bolts sometimes do, too. But it's all worth it.

At 47, I'm not going to get many more years where I can train my body to its peak level, and I knew Overhead Hazard would take everything. All fall, Sarah Hueniken, John Freeman and I trained in Canmore's bouldering gym, The Cave. We also started work on a new drytooling crag on the Icefields Parkway called the Temple of Silence. It overhangs about 30 metres in 60 metres of climbing. It's ridiculous but 30 vertical metres is less than a quarter of Helmcken Falls. We pushed ourselves on circuits in the bouldering gym until our hands bled, and we worked the routes at the Temple, climbing ourselves into shape as we added a few more bolts each trip. At the Temple, the first 15 metres that we bolted seemed really hard. By the time we left for Helmcken, we were running five or six laps on the 30-plus metres of climbing that we had created. I figured Helmcken would require at least six pitches of M11 to M13 climbing, so the Temple was perfect training.

In early December, Sarah and I went to Bozeman to compete in the UIAA North American Championships, and our new training partner, Katie Bono, joined us. Katie was a top cross-country ski racer and knows how to train and improve. Most limitations in climbing are mental, and Katie had no idea what was considered hard or not. She placed third in the speed competition despite never having done any speed climbing before, and she climbed M10 in her first mixed season.

Approaching Overhead Hazard with Helmcken Falls disappearing to the Cauldron of Doom.
Photo: Christian Pondella/© Red Bull Media House

I wanted to compete to see how my fitness stacked up against other people playing the mixed game. The problem with the alpine and ice climbing I do is that I never know how hard it really is since there is no objective measure, only a story and pictures. Egos are easy to feed in this environment and often grow larger than the routes in the pictures. In competition climbing, you either have it or you don't. The three of us sent the finals route out of a field of 50 or more. I screamed with joy on the final jug and knew our training was successful. Sarah also finished in the top three.

After the competition, we climbed all of the much-hyped M13 routes in Bozeman's Bingo Cave in a day—then ran training laps on them. The routes weren't as difficult as the grades listed on the posters being passed out, but the psyche was awesome every day that we climbed there. I watched young Justin Willis try unbelievably hard to send his mixed project, and saw the future in action. The essence of mixed climbing, like sport rock climbing in a way, is to try hard, to push yourself physically beyond your limits. But mixed climbing adds more than just the fear of failing. Mixed requires the ability to overcome the unnatural feel of steel on stone, curtains of ice in space, and savage upside-down spinning falls that you would never take while rock climbing. The accepted evils of grade inflation and chipping (it happens any time ice tools connect with stone) are exterior to the climbing. It's like jazz or '80s punk rock: if you don't get it, you don't, but if you do then it's the best thing going. Sometimes I feel like I have to defend mixed climbing to rock climbers who don't get it, or from the critics who cut at mixed climbing as peg-boarding. But I don't really need to explain; the climbing is so good that it is its own answer, and the mixed crags are now busier in the winter than the sport crags in the summer. Some sort of critical mass of psyche has been passed.

We felt strong after Bozeman, but doubled down on the training to get stronger before Helmcken season started. I figured I would need to climb at a higher standard than ever before for seven or eight pitches straight, in a day, in the cold. We waited and watched the weather, and trained, and waited, and trained. Photos came from the Helmcken Falls Lodge. Bad year. Too warm. Too much water. We waited like jet-setting surfers watching surf reports for the perfect swell to hit a precise spot in the world. And we trained and trained. All over North America mixed climbing was undergoing an explosion.

The drytooling crags around Canmore and in Vail, Colorado, were full of people going at it. The energy wave was strong, and we rode it.

John Freeman and I went on a recon trip first, and both had the obligatory "Holy SHIT!" moment when we saw the cave for the first time despite having been there before. We couldn't help it. Chris Geisler describes Helmcken as the Land of Holy Shit! He's right. In four days we managed to bolt only two pitches of the line I had been dreaming about for years, and we couldn't imagine climbing the second pitch. It overhung 20 metres in 25 metres or so of climbing. The math said that bolting would take another 10 days to finish, but ultimately it took longer, even with two teams bolting and climbing on alternate days. The climbing was savage: solid M11 pitches spiced up with some M12 or M13, but all with beautiful, delicate eyebrows of ice and full-body twister across crazy steep terrain while a freight train of falling water roared past. Even now, a few months later, when I hear the roar of a river or other moving water, my stomach clenches. Helmcken is a three-dimensional chess set where you're the pawn, and a pounding audio track constantly runs.

The complexity of the situation is daunting, and the environment feels more alive than static. It's different in that place every single day. John is a rope-access master, and without him we wouldn't have gotten very far at Helmcken. I rig on films and do some stunt work, but he had the methodical skills to progress in really wild terrain. I rage and flail and use whatever energy I can find to go up. John simply goes up. John would do better on psychological stability tests than me.

In early February, John, Sarah, Katie and I returned, along with a film crew. I like making films, although I have often seen the result and think I'm deranged. Sharing the mountains of madness of great adventures is often more fun than the madness itself. The film should be good since the work the film crew did was heroic.

I could write pages about the experience of putting up the route, and then climbing it free in one push from bottom to top with Sarah, but that success seems small compared to the massive team effort that went into making it happen. Like John taking a huge whipper on lead and blasting Katie through the straps of the portaledge that she was belaying him from, but her still catching his fall—and continuing

Will Gadd on pitch four of Overhead Hazard.
Photo: Christian Pondella/© Red Bull Media House

to calmly belay for hours more. Or the days of -30 C that had us wearing sleeping bags to belay and buying every pack of toe warmers in Clearwater and beyond, yet still freezing our feet. The roar of the falls, and the warmth of the Helmcken Falls Lodge and our friends there. The terror of seeing my rappel device hanging onto the rope only by the notch in an opened carabiner (in all my time climbing, I've only had two instances where I truly felt I almost died, and that was one of them). Of Sarah climbing the M13 pitch in full gecko mode—a state of physical and mental climbing we discovered only this year where you can hang on seemingly forever while being totally upside-down, like a gecko on the ceiling. Gecko mode is illusive: tricky to find, but magic when it happens. Of Katie sending the first pitch with a look in her eye I normally only see in wild animals. Of John figuring out the puzzle that made it all happen. Of the film team hanging in frozen stillness, much colder than our spasmodic motion kept us. Of my broken finger bones grating every time I swung my ice tool on the free ascent, but knowing the prize was worth the pain even as I dry heaved at the belays and shed warm tears on my literally frozen cheeks. Of pulling over the lip less than a metre from where a placid river goes crazy and falls 150 metres away into space below my crampons. But more than anything, I remember three weeks where everyone did more together than we could have ever done individually, did it better, and survived as both a team and friends. Those are the memories I hold closest, even as they warp and mellow with time.

At the end of every climb there are pictures and stories to share in hopes that some sense of the experience is gained by others. I don't want to climb at Helmcken again; I don't want to push my body so hard again; I don't want to see my friends in danger like that again. I do want to watch the film in a warm seat with my friends, and even then, I'm sure I'll shiver when I see myself whacking the rope with an ice tool, or John's headcam shot of the wall flying past during his monster fall. It's done. I know it's the biggest, coolest and all-around wildest route I'll ever climb.

A huge thanks to Sarah Hueniken, John Freeman, Katie Bono, Bryan Smith, Dave Pearson and Pablo Durana. We did it! I dedicate Overhead Hazard to Jeff Lowe, as it is what he and I really wanted when we first started mixed climbing together more than 15 years ago. It's a good one, Jeff!

**Summary**

Overhead Hazard (M13+, 210m, 7 pitches), Helmcken Falls, Wells Gray Provincial Park, Cariboo Mountains. FA: Katie Bono, Will Gadd, Sarah Hueniken, John Freeman. FFA: Will Gadd, February 15, 2014.

P1: M10, 30m. Follow spray ice up the line of least resistance. Belay on the right side of the water ice for warming up, or move around the icicle to another belay if continuing up.

P2: M12+, 20m. Use the left belay at the start, pull the rope through the first pitch and use a large pulley at the anchor to reduce rope drag from the ground. The terrain is super three-dimensional, and the pitch ends on the icicle. You'll need to extend most bolts with long slings to cut drag. An 80-metre rope may get you back to the ground depending on where the ice floor is.

P3: M11, 20m. You can belay from the ground with a 100-metre rope. Steep, positive holds head right then back left to the small belay cave at the top. It is M13+ if combined with pitch two.

P4: M11, 40m. Go right for about five metres then up trending left at the top. The fourth belay is mostly hanging. Enjoy the belly flop onto the ledge; it's more complicated than it looks.

P5: M11, 40m. Still steep, and some nasty long pulls when you're starting to get tired. Go right about five metres below the belay since straight up is in incredibly bad rock. The fifth belay is right behind the waterfall.

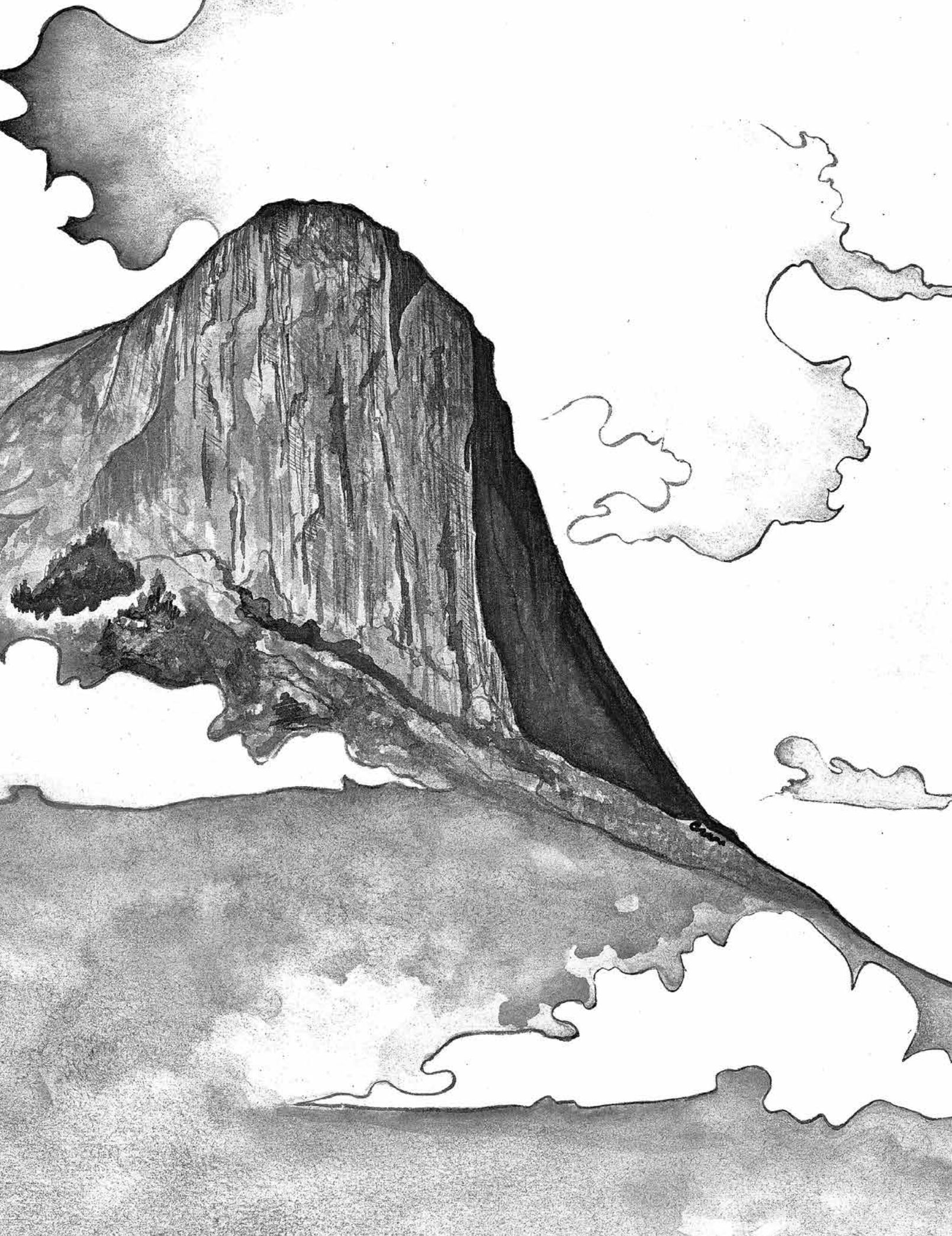
P6: M10+, 30m. Traverse left watching out for overhead hazard, and then up for about 10 metres to belay at a stance on the left.

P7: M7, 30m. Nice thin ice and spray climbing with well-spaced bolts. A #1 Camalot may be useful for the exit, but if you've made it that far you're probably too tired to be scared anyhow. You can reach the trees with an 80-metre rope.

**About the Author**

Will Gadd is a climber, paraglider, writer, filmmaker, father and mountain sports coach. He has won national and international titles in three different sports and set multiple world records in paragliding, and he has generally had a great time exploring the mountain world since he climbed his first peak (Mount Athabasca) with his dad 40 years ago.

Will Gadd on pitch six of Overhead Hazard.
Photo: Christian Pondella/© Red Bull Media House



# The Cultural Ranges

## Disbelief

Jerry Auld

WE WERE DIGGING FOR GOLD that morning the Chinese man came running up past us. This was autumn time, and we'd been working that hole for the length of that forgettable summer. 1896. Down the broad valley the blunt steel of human progress had burnt past 10 years previous, and now there were just the smoldering stumps and ash piles and the hard sooty work of rending the black coal from the tunnelled ground and smelting the cooling iron of promise into something resembling hope and even just sustenance. Even the Indians didn't sit their ponies and watch the engines puff into the siding like they once did.

There was no gold there, and we knew that months before, but there's a way to tell yourself that and a way to tell your partner that and another way to convince that intermediate thought between standing up on your shovel and throwing it down for good. An hour lost is often a year lost. But finally, late October, those ways all gathered up into one way, and we surrendered and headed down before the snows came for good and in time for the Chinese holiday. It was a warm one with a clean sky and the rock face above us hazy from the fires along the line.

Sven with his big arms and his big hands was slapping Olaf on the back and grinning though he had barely spoken that last month like he was at a loss to do something if he had no pick or shovel or haul-line in his paws. Rarely does such a friendship need words; it is a solitude opposite from the pain of loneliness. Olaf pushed him away, laughing. Go hit Bjoern. He wouldn't hit me. We were quitting the western apron of the mountain above the Canmore mines and packing into the town proper to get washed up and enjoy the surprises the Chinese always seemed to have: good food and abundant food like they had tapped a food seam underneath their cookhouse that led right back through the world to their distant orient. And under the crisp stars that evening, maybe fireworks. But the ones we imagined were not much compared to what was coming.

With the snow, we would down tools and slink back to hold our hats over our missing shirt buttons and take whatever work the company-bosses would give us. They always needed lumber, so I was looking at a winter felling trees and stacking them on the frozen Bow ready for the spring float to the Calgary mills. It was the end of our freedom that year after working like madmen picking away at the rocks hoping for a turn of colour, a little touch of yellow to that flat grey of the limestone. But, there was no gold.

We had our camp squirrelled into our packs and found there wasn't much there either when out of the green below came little Ha Ling running up like he had a bear at his ass. Aron and Olaf were off-balance and shock-still, perfectly exhibiting the quick reactions needed to survive in the mines or the forest. We watched him and his bright yellow neckerchief prance up into the grey slabs and barely heard him. His breath was so thin and on his feet were the woollen canvas-soled slippers most of them wore. But up he went, right up into the big bowl above us like he was a goat. It's the thin mosquitoes that bite the worse.

This was the wager, Olaf reminded us. The one bantered back and forth in the Canmore Hotel for the last month and raised and countered repeatedly. The previous Sunday when we'd gone down to church and bread and sat and ate soft chunks of it with black hands, we heard the town's news and how a Chinese cook had bet a summer's wages on a mountain. Ling was a cook, mostly for the other Chinamen, so we didn't know if he was any good but he had *yang* to spare. I never knew him well but from what I saw and what I heard, he never backed down from nothing, never. That's not the same as being belligerent, mind you. He was quiet and subservient to the whites, and he, like most of his ilk, would just bear the ridicule and threats until a horse race or dog fight claimed the attention of their present abuser.

At least the Mounted Police were there then bringing some civility to the proceedings. Yet, we should have known something was coming, not just because the size of the bet but by the festival. We clocked our days on the sun, which in turn set the timetable that governed the whistle at the mine house. The Chinese were on a moon calendar. And that October, the moon was looming behind the serrated eastern horizon like God's own locomotive coming round the mountain.

It was the ninth month according to the Chinese and nine is a yang number. And that day—that October 22—that was the ninth day of that ninth lunar month. Very yang. Too much yang, Ha Ling would say. A muscular day. A dangerous day. There would be no working in the mines, not for any money.

For us, it was just the time we ended our wildcat mining. But we knew this was a big day as it was every year. The

"Ha Ling" Indian ink painting on paper by Candace Webb (2014)

Chinese were not citizens, but they carried their country with them in their stories and those were good stories. They told us that thousands of years ago in China, a monster came to a mountain valley bringing disease and death. There was a man named Huan Jing who told his townsfolk to go hide safe on a tall hill while he battled and overcame the monster. On the anniversary of that day, the day of too much yang, too much male energy, to protect against danger, people climbed mountains. It was called the Chongyang festival, the Double Yang, and in Yangshuo among the high steep hills where the British and French have waged the Opium Wars for the last few generations and where most of the displaced coolie labour like Ha Ling comes from, there they tell us that it's not just popular to climb mountains, but to *race* to their tops; winners get to wear a wreath made of yellow dogwood, which the Chinese call Zhu yu. Why yellow, I asked Ling. Yellow is earth. Yellow a colour of freedom, from cares, he said.

He had cares. They worked for the railway making a dollar a day before being charged for food and shelter. The bosses paid me twice that and moved my camp for me. They got all the tough jobs, the dangerous ones. They were cheap and hard and reliable. Look down this valley at the scar of the right-of-way branded through the scrub pines, it's six-hundred miles until tidewater and every mile was 3,000 ties and every tie laid through the Rockies, a Chinese gravestone.

That foreman that made the bet knows that fifty dollars is more than the Chinese can scrape together as a group. But this happens, of course, at the barrelhouse. When the days were too hot and the streams dried out, we had to hike farther back down to Canmore to haul our water. It's nothing from there to walk the few miles more around the mine works and across the narrow gauge and the spur line trestle to the Waverly for whiskey. Early in the afternoon the Chinese were sometimes there, playing dominos or checkers with white and black stones they'd washed in the Bow River and drinking beer. It's fine and quiet for a man to sit. No music or girls back then—there was the school teachers or an assistant to the mine superintendent—not much else at that time, so you can see how things get pent up. When the mine would let out, in would pour the problems.

Within a few beers, the Chinese would be pushed out, hassled for their chairs. Sometimes I would stand up from watching their games and stand in the way. But they didn't push me. I looked down and grinned. Bjoern? means bear. Don't think I ever hit many men in my time in the mountains, didn't need to. Most men are cowards when confronted, but a word spoken is a stone thrown—you can't get neither back. Sometime in there that summer a claim was made by one of the Foremen that he could beat anyone to the top of the mountain. Empty barrels are the noisiest. How that bet got tossed around I have no idea, but as we started down that last October morning up went little Ha Ling, in his slippers, tip-toeing up out of the trees and onto the flat slabs of grey limestone and past us with a smile that was all animal, the way you think a hound is grinning when really they're just panting after a fight. We hollered and goaded him on, but in truth our noise died down as he dodged up into the big bowl above us that no one thought could be climbed and soon we turned and came to town.

Ling almost beat us there, passing us on the trestle bridge without his neckerchief and running like he forgot to stamp his timecard. Five-and-a-half hours round. It would be hard to believe he had been to the top if I hadn't seen him myself, so I understand how the English were whipped into a lather. When God brings treasure, the Devil brings heirs, they say. The festival was well under way, and the fun on the street Townside out front of the Canmore Hotel and Waverly's was just getting on. That's Ha Ling's Peak someone yelled, goading the Foreman. No way was he paying out on the word of a coolie. So the next morning someone grabbed an unused section flag from the railway division office and pushed Ling to the front and off he and the Foreman and his pals go, hiking up Canmore Creek to see. Took them a good eight hours to get up there resting on every step like mountain goats on a hot day. We watched from the Mountain House next to the station, over in Mineside, with the glasses the station master had, his good German Zeiss spotting scope, while the Chinese brought us juniper wine from their bunkhouse which was more like a spirit of turpentine. And when we saw the exhausted group finally reach the top and unfurl the big scarlet banner as they said they would if they found proof, a cheer went up and the mine superintendent kicked the ground and shook his whiskers and said, Well I didn't believe it but that is the Chinaman's Peak. Through the glass we could see the Foreman start to argue but there was no mistaking the bright yellow neckerchief flashing between their grasping fists.

We all bellowed with laughter. We've all seen those before. Ling dyes them from nightshade and moon flower and thornapple. They bleach out in the sun or tatter from under the sharp limestone chunks pinning them at summits. They all made a fuss as if Ha Ling's Peak was the first. Hard to say but my own bet is probably there's not many summits in this whole valley that hasn't seen one of those flapping at its top, one time or another.

# Frozen Finds in the Alpine

Todd Kristensen, Tom Andrews and Darryl Bereziuk

THE WINDS BODE WELL for a small group of climbers high in the alpine on an August afternoon. They are peering down below at unsuspecting caribou that have clustered on a patch of ice to stay cool. The stench of caribou dung left by thousands of animals that have returned to this area over thousands of years is a nasal reminder of how caribou are set in their ways. On a daily basis during the summer months, the animals migrate upslope to colder heights during the hottest time of day only to return to the valleys at night. This ancient habit makes the caribou predictable. And so, as long as caribou have been gathering at ice patches in Alaska, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories (for more than 9,000 years), people armed with sturdy moccasins and stone-tipped weapons have followed them.

Recent archaeological research from Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias Ranges to the Mackenzie Mountains in the Northwest Territories has revealed rare and delicate tools preserved in high-altitude ice that document a deep human history in some of the most remote alpine habitats on the continent. These artifacts were lost by ancient people, such as the hunters described above, and have since been encased in a barrier of ice that climate change has recently unlocked. A race is now on to find frozen relics from the past before they, and the icy archives that house them, disappear forever. Also fading are the memories of this traditional practice among local indigenous groups. Elders still remember an age-old mantra passed down for generations that may just as well describe the strategy of modern hikers: "Climb high and stay high." The important point was to approach game from above. Archaeology and traditional knowledge combine to tell an amazing story of mountain climbs in ancient times.

The story of prehistoric alpine hunters owes its existence to modern biologists in the Yukon who discovered an odd piece of wood above the treeline in the Coast Mountains. The find was reported to local archaeologists who realized that it was a wooden tool lost on the ice thousands of years ago. Indigenous people across the north still remember stories of life in the alpine, but until that lucky Yukon find, archaeologists didn't expect that much physical evidence of old activities would preserve in the harsh high-altitude conditions. It is very rare to find intact wooden tools that are thousands of years old, so the artifact triggered a series of research programs that focused the eyes of archaeologists upwards on lofty peaks where they eventually found themselves down to their knees in slippery caribou dung.

A suite of research techniques are helping to uncover the technologies used by alpine climbers, while radiocarbon dates are indicating when different weapons were used. The flurry of scientific methods in alpine research is an avalanche of acronyms to the uninitiated: GPR (ground penetrating radar), SEM-EDS (scanning electron microscopy-energy dispersive spectrometry), and our own invention, HUMT-FT (hiking up mountains to find things). Scientists also rely on caribou radio-collar data, ancient DNA research, mountain-range satellite imagery and snow indices. The result is an impressive library of information about alpine life in the days before hiking boots, crampons and Gore-Tex.

Archaeologists have learned that indigenous people used three major weapons to kill caribou, sheep, ptarmigan, small mammals and even bison in high-altitude areas. The first and oldest is the atlatl and dart system (or spear thrower). Picture a lacrosse stick, but instead of a basket on the end, a little spur or hole served as the seat of a small wooden spear. The spear or dart was launched from the wooden stick like a javelin. When compared to a basic spear, the atlatl increased the length of the thrower's arm and, in turn, increased the power, which drove the dart deeper into the target's body.

Around 1,200 years ago, the atlatl and dart were replaced by the bow and arrow. Broken bow fragments from the ice patches tell of failed hunting expeditions while frozen arrows tell of near misses that were lost in the snow. The benefit of the bow and arrow was that hunters could stand still while firing, as opposed to the running launch of the atlatl dart. Less hunter movement meant that animals didn't notice their two-legged predators until too late. The bows were made of maple and willow wood (bendy but durable), while arrow and dart shafts were made of birch, spruce and saskatoon. A traditional indigenous name of the saskatoon plant is arrow berry, which reflects the ancient roots of a raw material used more than 2,000 years ago.

Stone arrowheads were coated in thick, sticky spruce sap that glued the arrowhead in place on the arrow shaft. It was then tied tight with thread or sinew made from caribou back tissue. Sinew was also used to tie neatly clipped bird feathers to the ends of arrows. This is called fletching, and helped create drag that kept the arrows flying straight. Just as every old village in Europe had a blacksmith, every village had an arrow-maker, which explains the now-common North American surnames of Smith and Fletcher. Arrowmaker is also a common indigenous family name for this same reason. The ideal feathers for arrows were from hawks, owls and eagles, because it was hoped that their silent aerial hunting skills would be passed on to the flying weapons.

The last weapon system found in the high-altitude ice was used to capture the notoriously ferocious ground squirrel and marmot. Rodent snares have been found in the Selwyn Mountains of the Northwest Territories that are made of leather, loops that were triggered by wooden trip pegs set outside burrows. Indigenous stories tell us that ground-squirrel skins were stitched together to form beautiful robes, and that up to 200 snares in a single alpine area could produce enough food to last for months. Add the supply of caribou,

sheep, ptarmigan and berries, and alpine life from late summer to early fall was good.

The collection of preserved alpine tools in northern ice patches is truly unique in North America, and they are broadening our understanding of prehistoric ways. For example, a 1,400-year-old moccasin from the Yukon Plateau region represents one of the oldest pieces of footwear found in northern North America. The moccasin was likely replaced by spares that hunters carried with them while hiking over hard and rocky mountains. As modern climbers know, the right gear (in this case, new shoes) can be a matter of life and death. Moving around in the alpine was a critical thing, which is strongly echoed in indigenous stories. Living in the alpine meant knowing how to move through it, and more importantly, how to properly treat a landscape that held the fate of one's own life. People would regularly "pay the water" (offer gifts to spirits at water bodies), properly dispose of animal remains (to make sure the spirits could be re-incarnated), and "dream animals" (listen to the omens of alpine spirits that communicated to people through dreams). All of this helped maintain a healthy balance in which people took care of the land and the land took care of the people.

Over time, the caribou have seen it all from atlatls to snares and bows and arrows to muskets (a musket ball was found at a Yukon ice patch). In addition to all that technological change, the caribou are now watching a novel impact of human industry, one that is having bigger effects on caribou populations than prehistoric hunting. Warming temperatures are eating away at the ice patches that caribou rely on to beat the heat. For an animal adapted to surviving frigid arctic winters, it is the hot summers that may prove more dangerous to survival. Now, archaeologists and caribou are meeting eye to eye along the vanishing edges of alpine ice patches. While archaeologists eagerly recover ancient artifacts, caribou reluctantly clamour for pockets of cool snow. They are now laying on totally melted ice patches out of instinct, which is bad news because the exposed dark dung bands absorb solar radiation and drive up caribou body temperature. They are returning to cool down at ancestral resting spots that no longer exist.

Ice patches that lasted for over four millennia have vanished in the last 50 years. Jennifer Galloway of the Geological Survey of Canada studies changes in northern plant communities by inspecting ancient pollen, and her research helps uncover the rate, magnitude and direction of climate change over the last 10,000 years. She's detected dramatic changes in the recent past and hopes to use that information to understand how regions like the mountains of the Northwest Territories may experience future changes if the climate continues to warm.

The causes of global warming are debated but the alpine effects are clear. It is ironic that as the ice melts, it unlocks a story of prehistoric hunting while exposing those very clues of the ancient past to destructive high-altitude weather. A book is opening and quickly closing. Much remains to be learned.

If modern climbers find old bones, wood or a potential artifact, please leave them in place and contact the authors (toddk@ualberta.ca) with some photographs or map co-ordinates (so we can continue to learn) about the deep past of life in the alpine.

This moccasin held the foot of an alpine climber more than a thousand years ago. Photo: Greg Hare

# In the Bootsteps of John Clarke

Lisa Baile

FOR QUARTER OF A CENTURY, John Clarke—B.C.'s legendary explorer, mountaineer and conservationist (1945-2003)—tried to entice Howard White, publisher and owner of Harbour Publishing, to join him on a mountaineering journey. Similarly, Howard spent at least quarter of a century trying to persuade John to write his life story—neither succeeded. All that changed on November 16, 2013, at the launch of my book, *John Clarke: Explorer of the Coast Mountains,* at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival. Howard and I were chatting after the launch and he expressed a desire to climb Mount John Clarke. "You're on—we'll go next year," I said, sweeping aside Howard's doubts that he might be past this kind of trip. Although Howard had spent his formative years in a logging camp and was at home in the bush, he was no mountaineer. After Howard's expression of desire, I followed up and mailed a Christmas card to the staff at Harbour Publishing. It was a photo of Mount John Clarke: "This is where we're going next year—start training now!"

So that was it—at least until late the following summer when it dawned on me that Howard lacked the one piece of gear vital to ensuring a successful and enjoyable mountaineering trip: BOOTS! But after several sleepless nights, I realized a potential solution was at hand—John Clarke's mountaineering boots were sitting in pride of place on the top shelf of our bookcase. Just imagine if they fit Howard! They did. John's boots made four training trips up Mount Daniel with Howard, walked around the office with Howard and even "talked" to Howard. No mention of a poor fit. Howard was at home in them. John Clarke would have been thrilled—but not so for Howard's nephew: "What! You're wearing John's boots? They should be burnished in gold!"

The trip was on and the mountaineering support team assembled to help carry Howard's gear and food. We were: John Baldwin, Linda Bily, Ian McGillivray, Ed Zenger, Peter Paré, John Halliday, Rachel Baldwin and me. The Harbour Publishing team was: Howard White, Annie Boyer and Heather Lohnes. The two young women from the marketing department had done a bit of hiking but never a big trip in the mountains and were excited at being part of this pilgrimage to Mount John Clarke.

Mount John Clarke, named in 2010, lies on Squamish First Nation traditional territory. It is a glaciated summit situated at the height of land between Princess Louisa Inlet and Sims Creek, 56 kilometres west of Whistler. Mount John Clarke, which was previously dubbed Sun Peak, is at the apex of the traverse from Princess Louisa to Sims Creek that held a special place in Clarke's life as a mountaineer, conservationist and wilderness educator. Many of Clarke's early first ascents in the '60s and '70s were in this area. Much of his work as a conservationist and wilderness educator took place on the sandbars of Sims Creek, and in the forests and alpine areas in the terrain between Sims Creek and Princess Louisa Inlet. John Clarke's ashes lie on the shores of Sims Creek and in the surrounding ancient forests he helped to preserve.

Mount John Clarke may be accessed from either side—by driving 90 kilometres up an old logging road to reach Sims Creek and the John Clarke trailhead, or 80 kilometres by boat via Jervis Inlet to dock at the marine park at the head of Princess Louisa Inlet. We chose Princess Louisa because we had the key ingredient—Howard's 37-foot boat, the *Lisa-Diane*, designed as a fish boat but now used by Howard to explore coastal inlets.

Early on the morning of September 7, light marine cloud prevailed as we, the 11 pilgrims, casted off from Pender Harbour on the Sunshine Coast with Captain Howard at the helm. Shafts of sunlight filtered through the fleecy clouds but there was no glimpse of the higher peaks as Howard had wished, and so had we. It was calm, flat calm, as steep-sided rocky cliffs, deep green forests, distant waterfalls and drifting clouds slipped by. The peaceful timelessness of our cocooned world allowed old friends to reconnect and the chance to make new ones.

It was tea-time when we located a spot to tie up at the head of the crowded dock at the Princess Louisa marine park. We disgorged from the *Lisa-Diane* and hastened to explore this wild and fecund place. Here, high cliffs soared to the sky while spray from nearby exuberant Chatterbox Falls moistened the massive ancient cedars, the broad leaf maples and the dense understory of ferns and knee-deep mosses. Lion's Mane jellyfish skimmed the inlet's waters, trailing their elegant five- to six-metre-long tentacles. The water wildlife did not deter Annie, the eternal water baby. Unable to resist a swim, she plunged into the bracing ocean. In the early evening, small dogs and overweight owners walked the dock lined by their monster yachts. All of us, save Howard, had opted to set up camp on land and soon smells of supper wafted through the salty, steamy air. Dusk fell as we gathered for a nightcap on the *Lisa-Diane* and talked about next day.

The first sunlight burnished the sheer rock walls as Howard whistled and brewed coffee on the boat. He looked the part in his array of borrowed clothes and John Clarke's solid leather boots. Much of his gear had been divvied up amongst us—though Ian had the monster load. Soon we were packed up and plunged into the humid forest. All smiles, Howard posed by BC Parks' prominent yellow sign at the so-called trailhead: "CAUTION! This route is very challenging and potentially hazardous. This route is very steep. The trail surface is uneven and slippery. The route is not marked or patrolled. BC Parks does not recommend the use of this route."

Undeterred by this fearsome warning, we entered a world of dappled greens, moss, mottled maple leaves and gurgling

streams. The chatter of the falls slowly, slowly faded. Roots formed handholds and footholds in the vertiginous trail. I hung behind Howard, Annie and Heather. Howard liked the measured, slow pace: "If I'm ahead, I go too fast and get hot and sweaty. I worry I'll get exhausted." A few hundred metres later, I heard Howard mutter in surprise, "Oh, it's flat!' But it doesn't last as I hear, "I've not done so much crawling since I was two years old!"

Gradually, we spread out as each of us settled into our natural rhythm, with John Baldwin and Linda—the Lamborghinis as Howard called them—in the lead. John Halliday opted to act as sweep and hung behind, appreciative of the slow pace, while Rachel on her coltish legs flitted between the lead and the rear. The understory was laced liberally with many species of fungi, and Howard proved to be a keen mushroom gatherer. He identified edible from poisonous species, and we filled a bag with chanterelles and boletus for our supper.

As we approached the old trapper's cabin near the upper falls, Howard, who is steeped in the history and lore of the Sunshine Coast, told me about Charles Johnstone from Kentucky who kept edging west to stay ahead of civilization. Charles built this cabin back in the early 1900s. He used to send his sons Judd and Steve up to the alpine, where we are headed today, with only a jackknife, matches and salt for survival—all part of their education. Now all that remains of the cabin are a few rotten logs shaped in a crooked square, an old rusty bedspring stashed within. Lunch was in progress as we reached the falls. And no wonder, as the dramatic view of Princess Louisa Inlet below dictated a rest stop and a lingering appreciation of the vista.

Sticky warmth enveloped us and sweat dripped from overheated bodies as we pressed on forever upwards. At one point a rope appeared from Ed's pack to aid our ascent of a narrow fissure splitting a massive rock, and we filed up one by one. Another time, Ian and John B hoisted heavy packs to the top of a massive bolder while we squeezed through a triangular opening at its base to enter a dark cavern, which we exited by a steep chimney and a helping hand from Ed. Time blurred, but eventually blueberries replaced the understory of ferns and moss, and we gorged on these cherry-sized fruits, tongues stained purple.

As evening approached, the last stragglers staggered into the alpine and the full glory of the Coast Mountains. An undulating trail led us to the promised lake and tarns, our home at 1,300 metres. Here, packs were abandoned and in an instant bodies struggled free of sweaty clothes and floundered in the reviving chilly water. Only gradually did the grandeur of the setting enter our consciousness: a huge amphitheatre carved from granite, formed by glaciers over millennia of grinding, shaping and polishing, encircled Loquilts Lake. Soon tents sprung up among the sun-warmed granite rocks, and Howard's misgivings about mountain fare receded as I created a meal of delicate yellow chanterelles, crispy boletus and spicy rice laced with vegetables. Swirling mists rose, entwined the peaks and changed colour as the sun sunk below the horizon. Stars emerged and a green-red flash of a massive meteor plummeted towards the earth.

Soft mists lingered as we breakfasted on the rocks next morning. Decisions were made over tea and porridge. Howard had lingering anxieties about his previous life as a publisher. In the end, it was decided—the day will be devoted to relaxation and rambling, and the following day would be reserved for the ascent of Mount John Clarke.

The next morning, Swiss-born Ed was ready to leave precisely at the allotted time of 7:30 a.m., but the rest of us stragglers were not so speedy. We zipped up the tents, gathered the last bits of gear and headed out at 8:08 a.m. in the cool of the morning air. The light was clear and crisp and etched below were the camp's orange, green and blue tents imparting a sense of settlement to the wilderness. No dawdling, and our efforts were rewarded as Mount Tinniswood and other familiar peaks rose into view. Excitement and anticipation grew as we gained the next high ridge. John Baldwin led us along the length of the lateral moraine towering above us to gain access to the glacier. Then the moment we had been anticipating arrived. We reached the spot where John Clarke stood in 1998 when Greg Maurer snapped the photo of Clarke that now graces the back cover of *John Clarke: Explorer of the Coast Mountains*. A frenzy of activity ensued as we placed Howard in the exact same spot and dressed him in John Clarke-look-alike clothes—Peter's orange jacket on and Heather's red ice axe in his hand. And, of course, Howard was wearing John Clarke's very own boots. Paparazzo's clicked and clicked as Howard obligingly posed for the cameras.

Soon we reached the glacier and assisted the budding mountaineers into their unaccustomed gear in preparation for glacier travel. Ropes came uncoiled. Linda helped Howard squeeze into his borrowed harness, and then Peter knelt to secure crampons to Howard's borrowed boots. Apprehensive and excited, Annie and Heather got their first lessons in donning crampons, buckling a harness and tying into the rope. We snaked across the glacier like a bunch of nomads in an icy desert. Howard seemed to take all of this in his stride and later remarked, "This was the easiest part of the trip." Finally, crampons were abandoned at the rocky ridge leading to the summit. Near the peak, the climb was steep and exposed. Annie, scared of heights ("I can't even cross the Granville Street Bridge.") hugged the rock, refusing to look into the abyss below. Then the summit cairn appeared and that moment of elation for the Harbour trio: "Yeah! We made it!"

I searched inside the cairn and extracted the tube that contained a notebook of messages from Clarke's friends and relatives left on the first ascent of Mount John Clarke after the naming ceremony in 2010. I handed the little book to Howard who opened it and added our entry: "Harbour Publishing team of Annie Boyer, Heather Lohnes and Howard White were dragged up here by Lisa Baile, Peter Paré, John Baldwin, Linda Bily, Rachel Baldwin, Ian McGillivray, Ed Zenger and John Halliday—good friends of John Clarke all. John we love you and miss you. PS: I wore your old boots."

With remarkable foresight, Heather had stowed the cover from *John Clarke: Explorer of the Coast Mountains* in her pack. She pulled it out. Then Annie, Heather, Howard and I held up the book cover to pose for a summit shot. I replaced the notebook and the cover in the cairn hideaway, thinking too bad we couldn't have stashed the book in the cairn as well for future John Clarke pilgrims to enjoy.

Although Mount John Clarke is only 2,293 metres, its panoramic views more than make up for its modest size. One could spend many happy hours there picking off the whipped-cream peaks from the John Clarke country spread before us. Baldwin pointed out a few of Clarke's mountain friends to those of us unfamiliar with the spectacular array of peaks. However, there was little time for further dawdling if we were to make it back to camp by dusk. Content and lighthearted, we retraced our steps in the magic of the softly fading light.

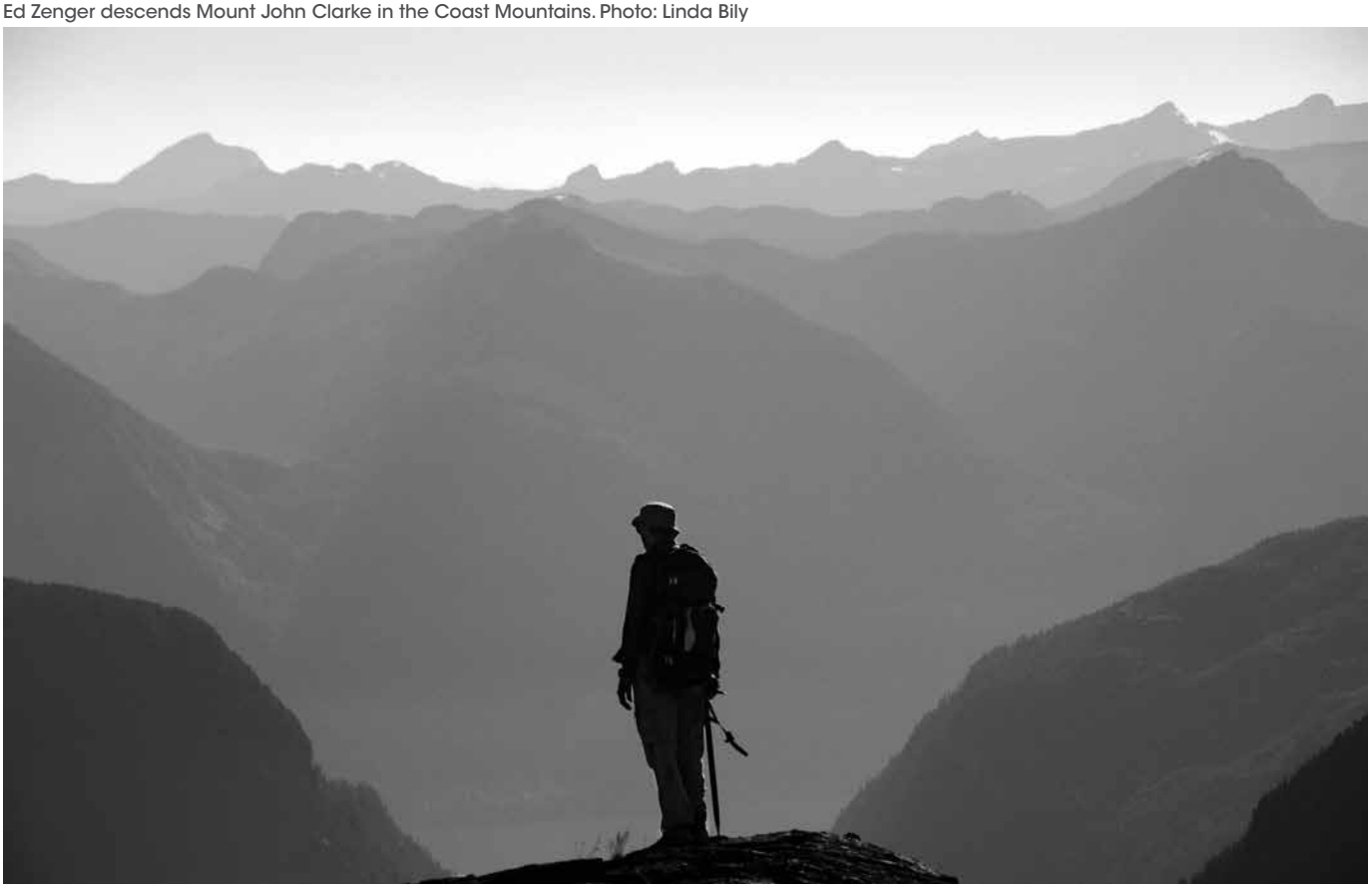
Next morning, sunlight splashed the western peaks. It was another stellar day! This was definitely what John Clarke would call a "do nothing day." We idled away many delightful hours strolling around the lakes near camp, sinking into the springy heather to chat and snack and snack some more. The sun blazed down and nudity took over. A diving frenzy ensued—bodies catapulting into the deep dizzyingly clear blue-green water singly and synchronously. Heat drove some to seek shade while others browsed among the blueberries. Somewhere across the valley tranquillity was briefly shattered as a house-sized flake split in a thunderous roar from the sheer rock face, precipitating clouds of fine white dust into the atmosphere.

Starving from our idle day, we prepared for the last supper, lounging on sun-warmed rocks as steaming pots of soup, aromas of pad Thai and beef-veggie hot pot wafted in the light breeze. It's a cliché but surely life doesn't get much better than that. We talked of books, science and future trips and how the world was made.

Four days is surely a short time to cement new friendships and develop new passions, but that journey to Mount John Clarke achieved just that. It seemed that all the stars were aligned for the perfect journey: an inspirational destination, flawless hot September weather, varied forms of travel and a tight-knit team. Despite, or because of, our disparity in ages (more than half a century), abilities and fitness, we had come to recognize and appreciate our strengths and foibles, both as a group and as individuals. Humour, patience and teamwork were an essential ingredients for this journey, as Howard remarked the first day, noticing the skill and efficiency with which we would tackle any given job on or off the *Lisa-Diane*: "You could go anywhere with these guys."

The spirit of John Clarke was surely with us. Howard's misgivings about undertaking such a trip were unfounded, as expressed by his inscription in a book he gave Peter and me on parting: "Thanks for one of the greatest experiences of my entire life."

Ed Zenger descends Mount John Clarke in the Coast Mountains. Photo: Linda Bily



# The North

## Baffin Wish List

Dave Nettle

FOR DECADES, BAFFIN ISLAND had been on my wish list of amazing must-go climbing destinations. All along I figured that a trip there would have to be in the grand old traditional style with improbable and arduous approaches over sea ice, humping inhuman loads up remote valleys for weeks, and then lashing myself to an icy half mile of sheer granite for a month, slowly inching up pitch after pitch on tedious aid and spending soggy hours in a portaledge, silently cursing the vertical passion I love.

Fortunately, over the years, my interests have shifted towards the joy and logic of fast-and-light movement and sticking to drier—and mainly free—climbing objectives. The possibility of employing this approach on Baffin Island had been shown to be a growing trend of late, most recently with impressive free climbing sprees from the likes of Jon Walsh, Nico Favresse, the Huber brothers and others. It was with the goal and desire in mind to visit Baffin for a relatively short, free-climbing trip that Reuben Shelton and I set our plan in motion.

In March, we shipped 90 kilograms of food and climbing gear to our outfitter, Peter Kilabuk, in Pangnirtung, which he snowmobiled in to Summit Lake near the ranger shelter to await our summer arrival.

On July 3, 2013, at 3 p.m., we touched down on the dirt and gravel airstrip in Pangnirtung, promptly attended our orientation with Billy (our Auyuittuq National Park official) and by 5 p.m., we were loaded up on Peter Kilabuk's fishing boat with one backpack each, motoring up the fjord to the drop-off point. Our light-and-fast program was in full swing.

Over the next two days, we backpacked up Weasel Valley in mild weather with spectacular views unfolding at every bend in the river. A good part of our hike up valley was dominated by the looming west face of Mount Thor on our right and the cluster of peaks and spires around Mount Northumbria to the left. The numerous creeks flowing into the valley were still running low and usually only required a few hop, skip and jumps to cross. By midday on July 5, we reached the emergency and ranger shelters at Summit Lake and breathed a sigh of relief to find our five boxes of essentials intact. We set camp and began to plot our strategy to climb Mount Asgard.

Rather than hauling loads up to a high camp near the route, we chose to base from the southern end of Summit Lake where our cache had been left. Although it would mean tacking on an extra 24 kilometres round trip to the approach, it also meant we wouldn't have to make several trips carrying heavy packs, and we could get right down to what we had come for—climbing. On July 6, in threatening weather, we made the commute along Summit Lake and up the Turner Glacier to the junction of the Parade Glacier and had our first views of the unique, massive twin-columned Mount Asgard and the symmetrical pyramid of Mount Loki. We stashed our packs with rope and rack and returned to the comfort and good food of our basecamp that we dubbed Campo-Relaxo.

Three days later, on July 9, we set off from camp at 4 a.m. with daypacks and a few snacks, and by 9 a.m. we were at the base of the Scott-Hennek route on the southern side of Mount Asgard. Post-holing up the Parade Glacier was as miserable as anticipated, and the first pitch or so of the route was sheathed in snow and ice, but the weather was stellar and we were stoked. We racked and roped up in the blazing morning sun with a couple of thousand feet of beautiful granite towering above us.

Reuben drew the first block of leads. He bypassed the snow on the lower apron via two rope lengths of delicate face climbing and an airy traverse right into the prominent left-facing corner system where we enjoyed half a dozen long pitches of 5.8-5.10 climbing. We simul-climbed about 150 vertical metres over 4th- and easy 5th-class terrain that led up and left to the base of the dramatic, steep 300-metre headwall.

The next eight pitches were money for sure. Pitch after pitch of sustained, varied climbing with just enough route-finding to keep us guessing, but always unfolding into another splitter crack or corner. Our dreamy blue skies and warm sun, however, had gradually given way to overcast and spitting rain. The last two pitches involved a masterful squirm-fest by Reuben up an overhanging, dripping-wet squeeze chimney, and a final arm-wrestling match with a damp wide crack that I slugged my way up.

Reuben Shelton climbing clean cracks that led up to the Orange Headwall where the splitter finger-crack crux of the route can be seen in the centre of the face.
Photo: Dave Nettle

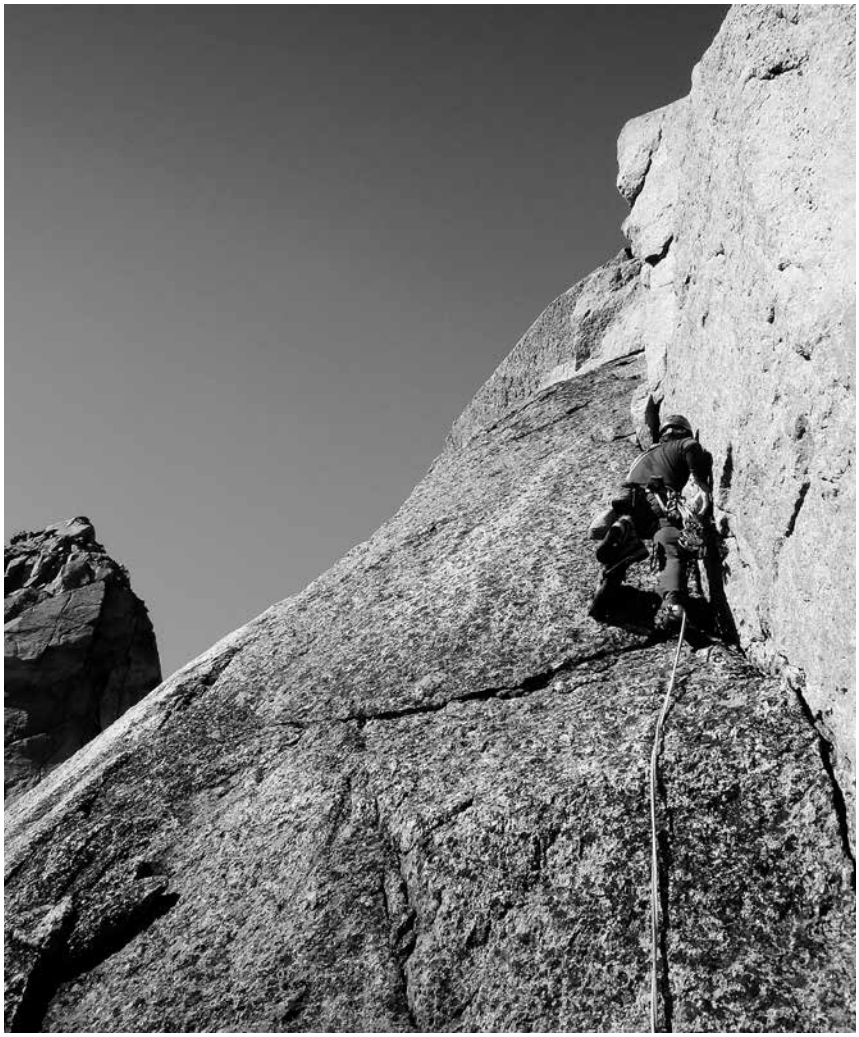
In his Baffin Island guidebook, Mark Synnott calls the Scott-Hennek route "one of the most classic long free routes on the planet," and as we stood on the summit at 5:30 pm after 20-plus pitches of splendid free climbing, surrounded by ice and rock as far as the eye could see, we had to agree.

Rather than descend the Swiss Route, which would have required hauling along boots, crampons and an axe, we had chosen to rappel the ascent route and travel light. We reached the glacier at midnight and made the long trek back to basecamp, arriving at 6 a.m. after 26 hours on the go.

Our timing was pretty good as the next five days were stormy with lashing high winds that kept us pinned to a rigorous schedule of eating, reading, sleeping and playing cribbage. Part of our information and entertainment at basecamp was the twice-daily brief weather reports from Pangnirtung over the radio that the park service kept in the emergency shelter. On July 15, the morning weather report indicated the winds would be calm, the daytime partly cloudy, and sunny by midnight—a very welcome, if a bit unusual, sort of report.

We left basecamp at 3 a.m. on July 16 with the plan to climb Mount Loki. During our stay, the average temperatures had been gradually warming up and the runoff from the glaciers increasing to the point where we could no longer rock hop over the creeks, and so our day began with a thigh-deep wade across the frigid, churning creek near camp. Soon we were hoofing it along the shore of Summit Lake under blue skies and a warming sun.

Reuben Shelton nearing the top of the false summit of Mount Loki on the first ascent of the Southeast Ridge route. Photo: Dave Nettle



On the Turner Glacier, we made good time as far as the Parade Glacier junction on the firm ice surface over terrain we had dialed from our Asgard approach. However, by 7:30 a.m., when we reached the upper Turner Glacier, the surface became an obstacle course of slush ponds, breakable crust and a maze of fast-running surface creeks that were too wide to leap across in most places and with serious consequences if you slipped. After wandering around, we finally pieced together a passage and were able to relax a bit and enjoy the wild view of the twin towers of Asgard mirrored in the azure glacial tarns along the way.

Originally, when we had seen the striking southern profile of Mount Loki, we had assumed that the one reported route on the peak went right up the long, elegant southeast ridge, as it was clearly the dominant feature on the peak. As we got closer, however, the information we had was definitely not jiving with what we saw. In the end, we decided that whether this ridge was the established New Zealand route or not, it had to be climbed. At 9 a.m. we set off up a nice crack system just left of the very toe of the southeast ridge.

The climbing was fantastic. After a few opening pitches, we veered to the very centre crest of the ridge and stayed there for the rest of the route. The first section of the climb followed a steep, clean and dry right-facing corner system for about 250 metres of continuous 5.8 to 5.10 jams and laybacks to a spacious sandy ledge. Reuben led up a steep headwall with a series of tricky 5.10 moves and onto easier ground.

From this point, we could now see that what we had thought to be the summit was really a sub-peak along the ridge that narrowed down to a steep barrier of orange rock that was blank, except for a couple of thin cracks that from a distance were hard to tell if they would go free or not. It was also at this point that we could see where the original New Zealand south buttress route ascended from high up the side valley directly to

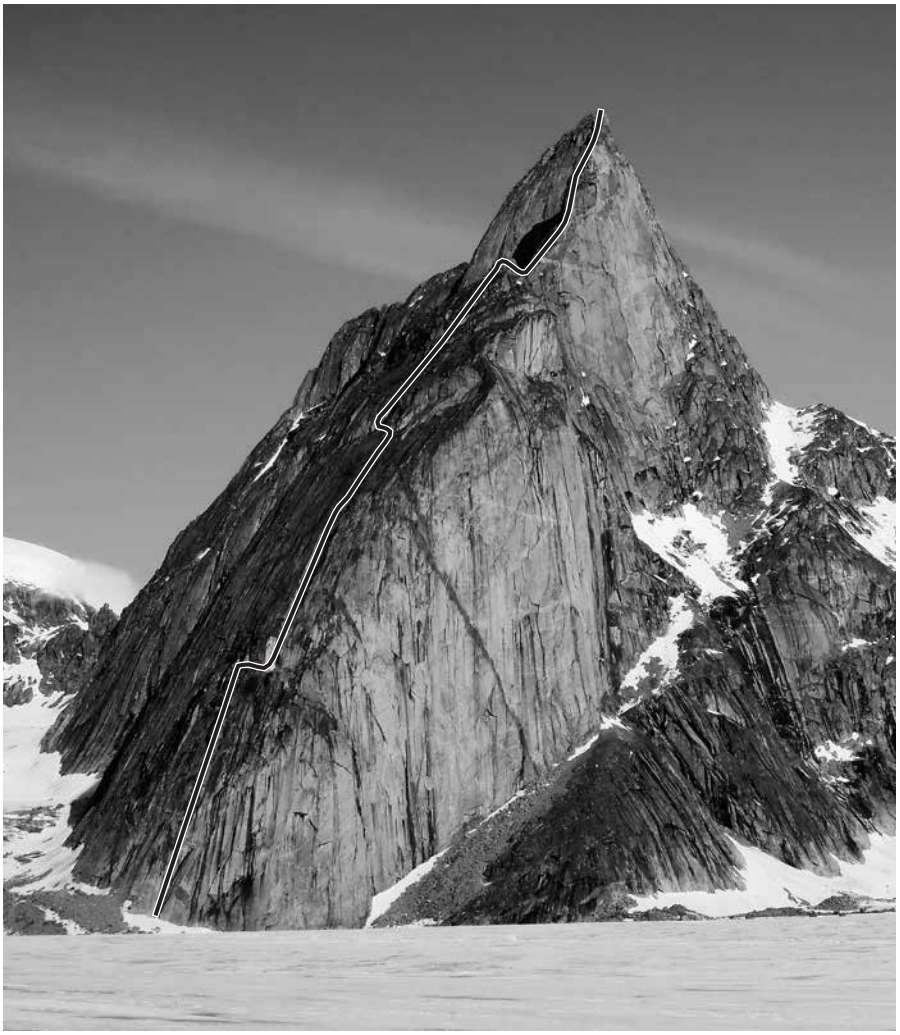
the summit. With the realization that we were on new territory that had so far been a brilliant route, we knew we had to finish the ridge as a free climb.

There are singular moments that can occur during the course of any grand event in life, such as being in love or climbing a long route, that can elevate a good, or even great, experience into an outstanding one. Such was the single rope length through that orange headwall. Tucked away in the middle of an unclimbed ridge in the far northern remote wilds of Baffin Island, that pitch was the defining singular moment, the tipping point, of our route. It was Reuben's lead and I could tell by his whoops and shouts that something was going on, that our great day was about to become outstanding. The pitch started with an old-school chimney grunt that fed onto a small stance below an overhang. The roof was split by a perfect 5.10 hand crack that rolled into a vertical finger crack that undulated with locks spaced just far enough apart to add significant uncertainty to the equation. For 30 metres the difficulty never eased off, but never topped the 5.10 scale either.

We summited Mount Loki at 5:30 p.m. on a cloudless evening without a breath of wind. Baffin had been kind to us once again.

Descending through the dim Arctic night via eight rappels off the north side, we left an assortment of slings and gear while aiming for a snowy col that appeared to lead to a large, easy ramp system that skirted the east face of the peak. Our plan was basically sound, though the easy ramp turned out to be many hours of sketchy, character-building downclimbing across steep snow and loose rock and rappelling wet slabs. At midnight, with a subtle, crimson sunset/sunrise casting a pink glow into a summer sky that never sleeps, we reached the glacier, recovered our packs and began the long hike to basecamp.

On our return across the Turner Glacier, as we were threading our way along a moraine, Reuben stumbled and started laughing. "I think that's the first time I've ever fallen asleep while walking!" Twenty-seven hours after leaving basecamp, we rounded the final bend and returned to our tents, food and sleep.



The Southeast Ridge route on Mount Loki. Photo: Dave Nettle

Climbing on Baffin Island and summiting Mount Asgard and Loki was the realization of a dream I had harboured for 40 years. Sharing the experience with Reuben after many adventures together, from climbing the Dru in French Alps to long free ascents in the Ak-su region of Kyrgyzstan, sweetened the deal.

In 1973, the year after Doug and Dennis forged their magnificent line on Asgard, I was desperately surviving my youth in Joshua Tree, making my first bold, ill-prepared leads up 5.6 flares with a rack of hexes and a high-school buddy feeding rope out through a sloppy hip belay. I was certain then, fed with stories of wild adventure and the dreamy confidence that only youth can lend, that someday I would take this new-found passion of climbing to the high and wild mountains of the world where great things of mythical proportions were happening. Thankfully, my desire for a climber's life of fun and adventure has prevailed over the other options life has attempted to throw my way, and fortunately, my wish list of places and climbs to share with good friends grows longer every year.

### Summary

Scott-Hennek (5.11, 20+ pitches), Mt. Asgard, Auyuittuq National Park, Baffin Island. Dave Nettle, Reuben Shelton, July 9, 2013.

Southeast Ridge (5.10+, 20+ pitches), Mt. Loki, Auyuittuq National Park, Baffin Island. FA: Dave Nettle, Reuben Shelton, July 16, 2013.

# The Icefields

## Pete Dronkers

WHAT PLACE EVEN COMPARES to the vastness and beauty of icefields? That was the question we asked ourselves upon squeezing out of the Helio Courier onto a dirt runway at Kluane Lake in Canada's Yukon Territory. A few weeks before, I had no idea what to expect, aside from simply knowing that any first ascent was going to be appealingly uncertain and riddled with doubt. We were not disappointed in that regard.

The idea spawned, once again, from a single black-and-white photograph in the *American Alpine Journal*. Simon Richardson and Dave Hesleden had been on the face before, back in 2008, before a run-in with an avalanche near the bergschrund turned them around. What conditions would we find on the south face of Lowell Peak? Would it be chossy, dangerous rock and ice that is difficult to protect? Would it be slabs of powder ready to fracture at any moment? What route would we take? How would we get down? The normal questions, I suppose.

The plane hadn't even been fired up for the season yet when we arrived in early April from Fairbanks, Alaska, where two of my three teammates and I lived. It had been bound inside its hangar for days at Kluane while extreme wind gusts battered the premises. But as luck would have it, the weather cleared just a few hours before our convoy rolled in and bivied next to the runway. This simple fact had a profound impact on our collective psyche. By noon, the plane was in the air for a quick test, and we were chomping at the bit to get onto the glacier.

The Canadian side of what is often simply called the St. Elias Range is a different type of place. It's the largest ocean of ice of all the world's non-polar regions, and it contains the highest mountain in Canada and the second highest in North America, Mount Logan. Our objective was not far from Mount Kennedy—one of the area's giants with a 1,800-metre-high north ridge that has tested some of the world's best alpinists. Our peak was tame by comparison, yet still entailed climbing what appeared to be a steep face roughly 1,200-metres-high on a peak that had only been summitted twice.

When we touched down on the upper Dusty Glacier (some maps call it Lowell Glacier) in perfect weather in late afternoon, camp was erected quickly so we could rest before launching into our project without delay. Jon and I sorted two and a half days of food and fuel, an ultra-light alpine tent, zero-degree down bags, double ropes, eight ice screws and a light rock rack, and took off the next morning to piece together an interesting-looking line that combined snowfields with couloirs and mixed rock. Meanwhile, Charlie and Eli headed out to repeat the West Ridge. Their plan was to wand the route, thereby also providing Jon and me with a reconnoitered descent route from the summit.

The approach to the south face was longer than expected, requiring several crevasse negotiations and some low-angle, blue-ice serac wall climbing. Nonetheless, we arrived at the base within a few hours and chose a route through the bergschrund that gained a couloir to reach the face proper. Conditions seemed legit, with firm(ish) snow rather than powder and nothing sending obvious signals of impending avalanches. But once the angle steepened, it became clear that it wouldn't take a very big slide to wipe us both off the mountain. It also became clear that neither of our two snow pickets would hold much of a fall, that the picks of technical tools probably wouldn't either, and that the rock was far too shattered and manky to accept rock pro. We entered the soloing mentality yet kept the rope on anyway, stopping regularly to dig mini pits and analyze it for weak layers. The decision was to keep going.

Beyond the entry couloir, we decided we had too much gear for what was likely going to be a snow climb. We ditched most of the ice screws, the other rope and all the rock pro at the top of a rock outcropping, and continued upwards. The route steepened and veered right over some cliff bands. The no-fall zone firmly reasserted its title, while Jon and I prepared to finish the line in full knowledge of the consequences. We were fairly convinced we wouldn't trigger an avalanche, but if either happened, we would be toast, and it was that simple.

The route above branched, and we almost made the mistake of heading onto the wrong side of a huge spire about halfway up the face, which would have ended up on the wrong side of the mountain. Any chance of finding good ice was gone, and climbing shattered rock the rest of the way was out of the question. We decided to stay right of the spire and keep it simple. As we kicked steps up the upper face to the summit ridge, it seemed like it would all work out.

By 5 p.m. we were nearing the top, and soon thereafter, Jon, in the lead, popped out on the summit ridge about a hundred metres away from the summit proper. No false summits and no complications, yet after nine hours of essentially non-stop exertion, our pace was slowing, and when I reached the top, I sprawled out on my back, knackered but in good spirits. Charlie and Eli's tracks could be seen hundreds of metres below on a snowy plateau but they clearly had not been on the top yet. The un-wanded upper west ridge seemed broken, crevassed and potentially tedious and dangerous to attempt to descend with no knowledge of how to get down it. Plus, the skies were darkening with storm clouds and night was approaching. A difficult decision was made to not bivy on the summit in sub-zero temperatures and increasing winds, but to take 30 minutes of rest, eat and drink, and then downclimb our route to just below the bergschrund where we would bivy.

The tediousness began. Step after step, down, down, down, don't lose focus, and don't fall. We descended unroped and after an hour it just became rhythm. We knew the slope wouldn't slide now, so Jon and I began a series of casual conversations about life, and the silence between them was filled with random thoughts, much like that of a dream that seems weird but you don't know why. By 10 p.m., we had picked up our cached gear and crossed the bergschrund. There was a tiny bit of light left in the sky and camp wasn't far away, so we rallied on, haggard but functional, arriving at basecamp 14 hours after leaving. Fifteen minutes later, Eli and Charlie rolled in from their attempt, reporting a highpoint in a couloir somewhere around 3,000 metres. Though defeated from the summit, they were psyched with their day as well.

Great Track on the south face of Lowell Peak. Photo: Pete Dronkers

We later named the route Great Track in recognition of a friend of Jon's who noted such about every song he liked, and the fact that the route does indeed follow one.

Although the following day was supposed to be a real rest day, in the afternoon Jon and I couldn't help but ski toward the southeastern aspect of Lowell to do reconnaissance of its eastern sub-peak. We believed a complete ski descent might be possible, and although not as high as Lowell, it was a dramatic, triangular peak from our perspective, and it drew us in. We skied up a slope, traversed another one, crossed the bergshrund and arrived at the base of several route options—mostly in couloirs. A pit dig revealed favourable conditions and minimal avalanche danger, so we dropped in and rode and skied a continuous run to basecamp. Meanwhile, Charlie and Eli headed up a small couloir near camp for a few runs.

When Jon and I returned to the sub-peak the following day, we chose a couloir above the bergshrund and skied switchbacks until the angle forced us onto our front points. The couloir eventually turned to ice, where Jon climbed a steep ice chimney while I opted for mixed rock and ice until we met up on the ridge above. Chossy rock, notable exposure, no rope and gusts close to 80 kilometres per hour later forced us off about a hundred metres from the summit (the next left couloir would probably end up directly at the summit), and we returned to basecamp that night.

Finally, after four days of generally sunny skies, the bad weather moved in and trapped us for three days. It was then that I decided to put a long-envisioned dream to the test—to build the most elaborate basecamp arrangement of my life. While the others fine tuned their snow block walls, excavated wind-driven snow from within them and built additional walls around the entire camp enclosure, I began digging a snow cave from within the vestibule of our three-person tent. By the end of the first storm day, the cave was established. From a one-metre-deep recess from within the vestibule, one side

contained a spacious boot cellar, while the other side led down another couple of metres into a three-person snow cave, requiring a large snow-block step to aid with the descent. The cave became our cook cellar, which was connected to the vestibule and the boot cellar, which was then connected to the tent in a multi-level snow condominium. Fantastic!

When the weather cleared, we all headed up glacier for more recon and skiing, wearing light shirts and plenty of sunscreen. Arriving at the top of a glaciated dome five hours later with views of Mount Alverstone, Mount Kennedy, Lowell Peak and Pinnacle Peak, we chose two different descent routes, then skied and snowboarded unroped most of the way back to basecamp. That evening, we began scheming up our next objective. One idea was to move basecamp east to attempt the first ascent of the northeast face of Pinnacle Peak, but we knew from our attempt on Lowell's sub peak that the main valley, which could lead us there, was exceptionally crevassed and looked fully heinous. Mount Alverstone Northeast 5 (on some maps at least) had been staring at us the entire trip with its gorgeous north ridge dividing the evening alpenglow on clear nights. We reasoned that there was no point in moving basecamp with a prime and aesthetic line just across the glacier. We rested up and planned for a 6 a.m. departure from basecamp the next morning, weather pending.

The morning was bitterly cold but clear with a strong west wind. We skied across the upper Dusty Glacier with full insulation on, but by the time we began frontpointing up the initial slopes, it was warm enough for soft shells. Near the top of the first shoulder, the slope turned from névé to solid blue ice, providing for rapid progress. After traversing the first section of the north ridge proper, we arrived at the crux—a steep snow fluting around 250 metres long. With avalanche potential on one side and death fall on the other, we carefully trenched our way up the fluting with pickets and running belays serving as psychological protection.

The fluting terminated at the start of another ridge traverse, which led to the base of a short crevassed slope and the crux of the route. By then, the weather had warmed substantially, the wind died completely, but visibility had dropped to less than a kilometre. Fortunately, we had wanded the route from basecamp. A 20-metre step of steep ice and snow with a crevasse in the middle required a screw and several pickets but soon gave way to the exposed summit ridge. After two false summits, we arrived on top in poor visibility, which only occasionally allowed for a glimpse of the north ridge of Mount Kennedy. We figured we were even with its halfway point. Mount Alverstone was in the distance, barely visible, and for a second we saw a flock of migrating birds in formation headed northwest.

The descent of the same route was tedious, and I punched through two icy

The attempt on the west ridge of Lowell Peak. Photo: Pete Dronkers

crevasses near the bottom of the final slope to our skis—one ultimately left a bluish-black fist-sized bruise on my thigh. Picking up our wands on the way out, we arrived at basecamp 13 hours after leaving, where we rendezvoused with Eli and Charlie, who had recently returned from cleaning their wands from their high point on Lowell. That night we learned that Eli (Elias) was named after Mount St. Elias and that his middle name, Sanford, was given after Mount Sanford—a prominent peak on the Alaska side of the range. Having never mentioned this before, Eli nodded as Jon and I realized that our newfound partner was experiencing his very namesake for the first time ever. It was a fine moment.

With clear weather once again, it was time for some skiing and snowboarding, so the next day we enjoyed fantastic turns down a steep(ish) 300-metre-plus couloir near basecamp. During our evening powwow, a weather forecast noted the arrival of a fairly stout storm for the next few days. With current flying conditions remaining excellent and with limited time on our schedules, we decided to get out before the storm's arrival. By noon the next day, we heard the distant whining of the Helio Courier. Andy Williams, a veteran mountain pilot, scouted our location, circled twice, landed a kilometre down glacier and gunned it uphill, full throttle, until arriving at the front door of camp. As with the flight in, it took two shuttles to get us out—a 50-minute jaw-dropping journey over oceans of ice with peaks protruding through them. Icefields... does any place even compare?

Cellar Root up the north ridge of the previously unclimbed Alverstone Northeast 5.
Photo: Pete Dronkers

Later research suggested that our route on Alverstone NE 5 (which we dubbed Cellar Root, after our basecamp setup) was the first ascent of the peak, and that it's likely that Richardson's expedition was the only other to climb from the upper Dusty Glacier. It seems that most people have climbed Mount Kennedy and Alverstone from different areas (the north ridge of Kennedy is accessed from the Great Shelf), and we knew that Pinnacle has only been climbed from the other side as well. This area is ripe for future expeditions, with many more notable lines waiting for first ascents and documentation.

### Summary

Great Track (IV 55°, 1100m), south face, Lowell Peak (3499m), St. Elias Range. FA: Jon Crabtree, Pete Dronkers, April 21, 2013.

Attempt on west ridge of Lowell Peak. Charles Parr, Elias Strum, April 21, 2013.

First ascent of Alverstone Northeast 5 (3365m) via Cellar Root (IV AI3 65°), north ridge. FA: Jon Crabtree, Pete Dronkers, April 27, 2013.

### Acknowledgements

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# In the Steps of Giants

Jerry Auld

Jerry Kobalenko heading down the Logan Glacier with the north aspect of Mount Logan dominating the background. Photo: Glen Crawford

IT SEEMED A LONG TIME since I first glimpsed the crystal mountain. Time, like light and memory, can be bent by gravity, and this mountain is the biggest on Earth.

It was only four years ago that I first managed to visit the Yukon, on a vacation with my family. On daily breaks I would hike every trail possible from the Haines road, but they barely penetrated the wilderness of Kluane park. Mount Logan cannot be seen from any road or vessel, despite being the tallest in Canada, second only to Denali in North America, and the largest in the world by mass. On our last day, I joined an air tour of Kluane. It was cloudy but calm. No chance to see the big ones, but arching around Mount Kennedy, through a fissure, I glimpsed something too big to be real. In the late afternoon sun, she seemed made entirely of ice. I was transfixed.

At the 2012 Banff Mountain Festival, Glen Crawford and I agreed to do a circumnavigation. "Just like Pat Morrow in '79," said Glen. I called Pat who described the route and the last thing he said was, "One of the best trips I ever did." Imagine that, coming from a giant like Pat.

Mid-May 2013. We invite a third: Jerry Kobalenko, also from Canmore. We drove up in a 27-hour blitz, dodging buffalo in the murky haze around Muncho Lake, as John Lauchlan's old stories of waiting around in Haines Junction for weeks, drinking up all their money and playing football with the rat people haunted my memory.

Everyone has to wait in the hall for an audience with the Kluane King. But our weather was beautiful—warm and blue, except for the winds up high that would force back the plane and empty out its cargo of white-faced climbers. We went camera-hunting Dahl sheep on the dusty flanks of Sheep Mountain, feeling more like Peter Matthiessen in the Snow Leopard. I thought of Steve Smith and Don Gardner who did the first circumnav just before Pat, but pulled sleds in from the road. After four days we were about to try. We bumped into the legendary pilot Andy Williams. He asked us which direction we were going. I told him clockwise, to leave the big pass on the west end until our sleds were lighter. He advised counter-clockwise, "The snow goes out on the lower Logan glacier early. You best tackle that right way." I told him that was the way Pat Morrow had taken back in '79. "Is he still alive? I guess the rarified atmosphere of Everest preserves men like that!" he said, laughing in a rough Scots baritone, unperturbed by the winds above us.

Finally, we rose into the realm of giants, flying up the 70-kilometre-long Kaskawulsh Glacier symmetrically divided by streaks of moraine debris, until the steep bulk of Logan appeared. Donjek put us down on the featureless white and I felt nothing—only realizing we were touching snow when I saw the plumes rise from the skids.

The snow, wind and sky were all perfect. We took pictures like we wouldn't see Logan again—a mountain of glittering edges—as we descended to the Hubbard Glacier to a small nunatuk. We didn't make it. The tiny nunatuk was a mountain. The scale was shocking, like a math equation that has nothing on the other side.

## Down the Logan (Day 2)

We aimed toward a jagged face at the end of a ridge for lunch. Got owned by the scale again. "Yeah, lunch tomorrow!" We looked at the peaks we passed to the north; some had three glaciers pouring down with medial moraines, unlike any in the entire Rockies, yet the mountain had no name. Glen said, "If that peak was in the Rockies it would have postcards and a viewpoint." We turn to look at Logan's enormous northern face—not just one face but many ridges and walls; a fortressed city-state frozen with more ice on it than in every glacier combined in the Rockies. The faces didn't look like they would take a day

to reach, but a lone avalanche exploded in a silent plume and the sound never reached us. And the silence! When I stopped, it rang so I could only hear my own heart, a beat that was too rapid for this landscape.

### Past the North Face (Day 3)

Twenty kilometres on large frost crystals that refracted the unrelenting sun into individual brilliant colours, like a field of gems. We could still see our landing site from three days ago. It took that long of solid skiing to pass the north face of Logan. We found the tiny warden cabin after crossing our first horrendous moraines. These looked like gravel smears from the plane but were towering icefalls and labyrinth crevasse fields that were brutal with sleds. In the heat of the afternoon, we looked down the glaring metallic ends of the massive Logan Glacier flowing out into Alaska. Andy Williams was right: in a week the surface would be bare ice. Saw a fox nearby. A sign on the hut warned of bears. But that place seemed desolate, far from any reason. We stood on the only solid ground of the entire trip.

### Up the Ogilvie (Day 4)

Two hours to solve a labyrinth 50 metres of broken moraine, then up the Ogilvie to the Muscle, which involved another hard moraine crossing, then in the hammering heat we found an erratic with a cool pool of water underneath. Later, I punched through into a crevasse, pinned on the lip by my sled traces. Camp was still and hot and a relief. The long ramp to the high pass awaited. Night was just twilight: 21 hours of light, and three of dusk. We couldn't believe our weather luck—too hot in the afternoon to pull a sled and not a cloud or a breeze to cool us. A lot of gear rested in the sleds unused.

### Up the Muscle (Day 5)

A long, hard pull to 10,000 feet. Of course, it didn't look long, but we arrived exhausted at the top of the pass eight hours later after pulling our 55-kilogram sleds up steep headwalls and deep snow at the top. We camped at the col in perfect weather. Glen says, "I'm running out of superlatives to describe this place." From our tent, we looked back across at the wide summit plateau of Logan, and in the other direction across what felt like all of Alaska toward Denali.

### Down the Quintino Sella (Day 6)

We skied down and I did tele-turns until I wiped and nearly broke my traces. We glided down barely poling for another 35 kilometres toward a towering and stunning Mount St. Elias. The sun was hot on my face, and life just could not be better. I remembered Pat Morrow saying that this was one of the best trips of his life. The size of the glaciers we slid past seemed surreal.

### Entering the Seward (Day 7)

Whiteout. We thought that's it, the weather we were blessed with is done, but it was just Kluane's way of making us stay impressed. As the fog lifted, we crested the last rise before the massive Seward Glacier: 60 kilometres long and 25 kilometres wide, flat with many huge crevasses so filled in you could straight-line for days. We could see Water Pass three days away clearly. Peter Jackson couldn't film something so inspiring. This remains as one of the most incredible views I have ever seen in my life. We passed the south-southwest ridge. John Lauchlan's ridge.

### The Hummingbird (Day 8)

Camp at the base of the Hummingbird Ridge. All day we had approached and it just got bigger. I read about that ridge my whole adult life and had always wondered about it—so long with knife-edged ridges interspersed with rocky spires and gargoyles, and going right from flat ice basin to summit. Just soaring. It took many seconds just to glide my eye along it to the top. Many mountains are hard, many evoke awe and this one did, but rarely did I feel fear like that. I stood at the feet of giants, and on the shoulders of the pioneering giants who first pushed ski tips through this place, and though the snow didn't show their tracks, they didn't seem far from me there, in time or space, as if the weight of Logan compressed everything together, and I realized I had no true sense of time in this always bright and open landscape.

### Water Pass (Day 9)

We sat at Water Pass for lunch and looked back at the Seward Glacier and the ridges of Logan. We couldn't find authoritative numbers on how many times this route has been done. Pat took 12 days and we hoped for two weeks. The question was floated, was this the fastest tour? We immediately decided to slow down. We may have gotten lucky with the weather, but we were not giants, not pioneers, and anyway—the team to traverse the fastest through paradise, loses.

### Up the Hubbard (Day 10)

All that's left was to ski up the Hubbard Glacier, passing our first camp. We got summit fever and were fooled by the scale yet again. We camped hours from the AINA site, laughing at ourselves. Hadn't worn my heavy toque all trip. Or my over-mitts. Or turned on my headlamp. I had hoped to have one afternoon skiing in my t-shirt. The audacity of every day!

### Back to the Plane (Day 11)

We skied toward the pick up and saw the tiny figures of humans and bright colours of tents. Couldn't wait to never pull a sled again. The Yukon Section of the ACC had their camp up and welcomed us with fantastic hospitality. We called the plane like calling a taxi. Surreal colours of the Kaskawulsh rolled below us as we saw green for the first time in ages. Logan has bent time again. I think of the men like Steve Smith and Don Gardner and I'm even more amazed at what they did: pulling sleds in from the road and circling Logan without much to guide them, and even ascending the mountain in the middle of their run. They are giants and we ski in their tracks. The dry solid ground of the landing strip felt weird, like stepping off a sailboat after weeks on water. It's the feel of gravity.

# The West Coast

## Rugged Mountain

Henrik Hinkkala

AFTER A FEW YEARS of contemplation, Hunter Lee and I confirmed plans to attempt the first winter ascent of the northwest face of Rugged Mountain. Rugged Mountain is the highest peak located in the Haihte Range on the northwest side of Vancouver Island. Being a somewhat remote destination, Rugged Mountain is not frequented very often, and we suspected that our attempt might be one of only a few that had ever occurred in the winter months.

The long drive began early in the morning on January 3. The weather forecast showed improvement into the weekend, but to our dismay, when we finally turned off the highway on to the logging road, it began to rain quite heavily. This made our outlook on the bushwhack approach appear ever more damp. Fortunately, as we parked at the trailhead around 9 a.m., the rain had stopped and the skies began to clear.

We left the vehicle wearing all of our Gore-Tex and began hiking up the N-20 logging spur, appreciating the trail clearing that had been performed the previous summer. Soon we reached the end of the cleared road and began slashing through the wet alder. We reached the alpine ridge quicker than anticipated and set up camp across from the route, thinking that the following morning's approach wouldn't take very long with the consolidated snowpack.

Many aspects about this route were still unclear, as must be the case with any first ascent. Upon scanning what we could see from camp, it was evident that the constriction in the lower couloir could present some difficult terrain, as well the upper portion directly above the Walsh-Hutchinson route, which skirted diagonally across the upper face. I had climbed a variation to the Walsh-Hutchinson several years prior, and then rappelled directly down from the summit, which gave me some confidence that the rappel line on the upper mountain could possibly be climbed in winter. Nevertheless, Hunter and I felt that we were prepared for whatever we might encounter, so we went to bed early in order to get a good rest for the next day. Regretfully, the inflatable Therm-a-Rest I brought spontaneously developed a hole that resulted in zero sleep for me that night as I had to re-inflate the mattress hourly to keep myself off the snow.

After me listening to Hunter sleep peacefully through the night, we were up around 5 a.m. and left camp an hour later. The headlamp hike to the base was surprisingly quick, and we encountered minimal to no foot penetration on the unseasonably thin snowpack. We began ascending the northwest face at 7:30 a.m. just as daybreak provided us faint views of our access to the face. With two half ropes and a mixture of rock, ice and snow protection, I took the first lead, traversing out onto the face. We simul-climbed to the base of the constriction below the obvious couloir where we encountered the first technical portion of the face. Hunter set up a rock belay on the right-hand side of this chimney, and I continued upward, placing several screws on what we figured afterward to be the steepest section of the route. This location funnelled spindrift off the upper mountain, but it was minimal on this day with low wind and ideal temperatures that hovered around -5 to -10 C. I continued upward, placing intermittent rock and ice gear, and then built a rock belay as the angle decreased above the chimney.

Hunter climbed quickly, continued past me for another rope length and built a belay as the couloir turned leftward. We were feeling ever more confident that the route would reveal itself with the excellent névé-like snow and Styrofoam ice that was ensuring efficient progress. We swapped leads again and I moved onward, placing sparse screws as needed. Since this next portion was fairly low angle with WI2 steps, I continued travelling for two rope lengths, placing a screw or two every 30 to 40 metres. This brought us to the top of the couloir, which then intersected with the Walsh-Hutchison summer route.

At this point we were roughly halfway, so we stopped for some food and water. While Hunter finished up, I began making my way up the rightward-trending ramp on the Walsh-Hutchison. I travelled roughly two rope lengths and built a belay before the next technical section. From here, the Walsh-Hutchinson continues on the same rightward angle and finishes on the southwest side of the mountain, but we were interested in taking a direct line to the summit.

Hunter took the next lead up a splendid and exposed ice pitch that brought him onto a well-protected ledge below a small rocky roof with good gear. We swapped leads again,

The Lee-Hinkkala route on the northwest face of Rugged Mountain.
Photo: Henrik Hinkkala

and I went up and rightward from the belay. Shortly after rounding the corner everything began to look ever steeper with no obvious line presenting itself. I was now out about 20 metres past the belay on a 60-degree ice slope and directly above me was a five-metre overhanging ice curtain that did not appear easily climbable. Not certain of which line to take, I traversed back leftward over some steep snow and ice flutings that put me above the rocky roof. After a short distance, it began to look like this line would work after all. I ran the rope out to 60 metres and was forced to climb into a steep awkward icy rock corner where I was only able to chop a single foot-sized ledge to stand on before hitting rock. This location was not ideal for a belay anchor, thus required me to equalize half a dozen marginal pieces of protection. I then belayed Hunter off my harness to back-up the dubious anchor, and up he climbed.

When Hunter was a few metres below me, I zipped my remaining gear down to him and he lead another rope length up the steep, frozen fluted terrain. I quickly followed and was pleased to see the last wide and low-angled snow ramp, which I knew would bring us to the summit. I climbed up to Hunter and continued past him to the end of that ramp, then belayed him up. We were less than a rope length from the summit. Hunter put me on belay, and I downclimbed a body length around the north corner of the summit, which presented an exposed short horizontal traverse overtop a steep gully that luckily had good gear. It included a body-length vertical pull over an icy bulge. After the bulge and some easy low-angle terrain, I was shouting for joy from the small icy summit of Rugged Mountain. I quickly belayed Hunter to the top and we shook hands at 2:30 p.m. in celebration of the new route we had just finished. The views on this clear day were spectacular and we embraced every moment, taking turns snapping photos.

After enjoying the summit, we built a V-thread and rappelled 30 metres down to the top of the east ridge. From there we simul-downclimbed the ridge, using protection, to the upper glacier. In fading light, we descended the glacier to Nathan Creek Col and returned to our camp at 6 p.m., 12 hours from when we left. With the added insulation of our backpacks now placed under my scrapped sleeping pad, combined with the satisfaction of completing a long-awaited line, I was finally able to sleep comfortably.

Hunter and I discussed what we should grade the route. We figured it was more difficult than Liberty Ridge and that it shared similar technical difficulties to the Bravo Glacier route on Mount Waddington.

**Summary**

Lee-Hinkkala (TD- WI3, 700m), northwest face, Rugged Mountain, Haihte Range, Vancouver Island. FA: Henrik Hinkkala, Hunter Lee, January 3-5, 2014.

Hunter Lee about three-quarters of the way up the northwest face. Photo: Henrik Hinkkala

# Dyke Gone Wild

Francis Bruhwiler

AFTER OUR 2012 SEASON of climbing and an early trip to Triple Peak in June, Mathew Coady and I promised to stick to clean and straightforward alpine lines for the rest of the 2013 season. We agreed that our next few objectives were going to be less nerve fraying. It was settled. We would climb a nice, fun clean line on Mount Tom Taylor in July.

As has happened in the past on arrival to the base of the walls, our plans were quickly dashed. Every line we pondered from photos captured in earlier trips had disappeared. However, one obvious line grabbed our attention—a red basalt dyke, about 15 to 20 metres in width, cutting down the entire length of the second peak. Decision made. While this route would not be on the beautiful grey granite of the peak, it was a proud line, and we wanted to climb it.

Following a restless night near the east col, we quickly sorted ourselves out and made tracks for the base of the climb. The early start had us scrambling the lower section to the base of pitch one before the sun hit the south-facing wall. The lower pitches of the climb went quite smoothly as the rock was featured and ledgy, but our preconceptions of the climb were being confirmed with each rope length. We were frequently finding ourselves climbing through sections of insecure rock that required redirects to prevent the rope from dislodging death bombs onto the belayer below. Once again we found ourselves in terrain that required a lot of concentration. We had taken the bait and were in anxiety country.

At pitch four we had come to the crux of the climb. We were given the option to climb an overhanging section of rotten dyke, or break out left onto a steep but cleaner section of granite and pull a small roof. The roof was quite well protected, but it also required a lot of self restraint as many of the holds were just about to dislodge and cause the belayer's head a lot more than a migraine. After a couple of sporty moves and shouts of fear, we were above the crux.

The next pitch consisted of a steep corner and included some excellent technical stemming and OK gear. The follower's pin hammer broke on this pitch from sheer mechanical failure as the leader had placed almost every pin on the rack into anything that resembled a crack. Needless to say, a couple of pins were left in place. This pitch brought us to a very loose but comfy ledge within eyesight of the summit ridge, and the climbing above looked less difficult. The next few pitches were quickly scrambled, but with caution given the large quantity of loose rock. By 11:30 a.m. we were on the summit and stoked to be taking in such a beautiful landscape after one of our most interesting alpine excursions. To get back to camp from the second summit, we made one rap onto the north side of the ridge and scrambled to the main summit of Tom Taylor. From there we used the regular route to get off the peak, and spent the remainder of the afternoon eating, packing and then hiking out.

**Summary**

Dyke Gone Wild (5.9+, 300m), south face, Mt. Tom Taylor, Vancouver Island. FA: Francis Bruhwiler, Mathew Coady, July 7, 2013.

Dyke Gone Wild follows the left margin of the obvious dark dyke. Photo: Francis Bruhwiler

# Mia Couloir

Philip Stone

SOMETIMES WE ARE DRAWN back to the scene of the crime. Big Den Mountain definitely has that pull for me. Back in 1990, Chris Lawrence and I had a close call dodging hypothermia when a four-metre-thick cornice and a bottle of water-contaminated white gas presented us with a December night to remember. Benighted at the top of a 300-metre gully that we aptly named The Great Escape, we spent one of the longest nights of the year soaked and shivering until the grey fingers of dawn spurred the last ounces of energy out of us to tunnel onto the summit and find our weary way back to our tent and fresh stove fuel.

The flat-topped summit of Big Den isn't anywhere near as dramatic as some of the better-known peaks of Vancouver Island, but it does have some perfect natural climbing lines secreted on its northeast face. The dark line of The Great Escape gully is one of the more obvious lines, and the parallel buttress to its right equally so. After that harrowing winter ascent, I returned the following summer in 1991 with Jacki Klancher and climbed the buttress, finding a fun and moderate scramble we called Perimeter Ridge as a homage to the "escape."

We accessed the ridge about halfway up from a shelf that cuts across the left part of the northeast cirque, the same way as Chris and I had reached The Great Escape. At that time the Elk River Timber Company logging road provided easy road access, and importantly, a bridge over Tlools Creek. As enjoyable as Perimeter Ridge was, I always had it in mind that one day I would like to climb the full length right from the base of the cirque and the exquisite Mia Lake. However, the years flicked by and my interests coursed elsewhere. The logging road was eventually deactivated and the climbing potential of Big Den seemed destined to slip into obscurity.

But those draws have an uncanny way of resurfacing, and last December three things conspired to renew my interest in Big Den. The first was a eureka moment in reimagining the access into the northeast cirque from the complete opposite side of the mountain, which avoided crossing both Tlools Creek and the even larger Elk River. The second was the unusual weather and snowpack that prevailed in the Vancouver Island Alps through late November and into December, keeping the ski hills closed but forming perfect winter climbing conditions. Lastly, and most importantly, was the fusion of a keen team of climbers brought together by the very successful Island Climbing Facebook group.

So it was on December 28, 2013, that Josh Overdijk, Garner Bergeron, Nic Manders and I pulled into the B.C. Parks Elk River parking lot with big smiles, big packs and buckets of enthusiasm. None of us had climbed together before, but one advantage of connecting online was that we each had a pretty

Garner Bergeron on the second main pitch 300 metres up Mia Couloir. Photo: Philip Stone

good idea of the others' resumés. Nic was the youngest member of the team at 19 and new to ice and winter climbing, but I knew Nic from home on Quadra Island where we had mountain biked a bit together. I'll never forget how as a whip of a 14-year-old he had kept up on an especially challenging cross-country ride. I had no doubt he would rise to the occasion. We were all coming off successful summer alpine climbing seasons, making for a solid team.

We made the decision to forego taking snowshoes, and with the gear sorted and packed we hiked out of the parking lot and west along the highway. We crossed the highway bridge over the Elk River and began looking for a line into the forest and hopefully an elk trail to follow to Idsardi Creek. I had seen major elk trails through both high passes at the head of Idsardi Creek on past treks, and it came as no surprise that quickly after leaving the road we found a well-worn path heading up the west bank of the creek.

The surprise was the ease of travel. Tales of coastal bushwhacking are legion in Island climbing circles, but Idsardi Creek defied the norm and presented us with an incredibly open forest—easy route-finding along an obvious elk trail and snow-free hiking for the first kilometre or two. Our plan was to hike up Idsardi Creek under the west flanks of Big Den Mountain, and then ascend a spur ridge up to a high sub-alpine shoulder that joined the long north ridge of the mountain. Ideally, from a camp somewhere on the shoulder or north ridge, we would find a line down the east side of the mountain into the base of the northeast cirque. Google Earth and the topo map all made it look eminently doable.

The steep lower whitewater cascades of Idsardi Creek levelled out a couple of kilometres up the valley, and we found a huge high snow-capped log to cross the creek. After the easy travel of the valley floor, the grunt work began to ascend the steep forested hillside and gain the shoulder.

A well-defined forested rib led us upward. There was still minimal snow cover, although the cold, hard, icy ground was a bit of a challenge to get purchase on, and Nic—wearing an old, worn pair of borrowed plastic boots—was having a bit of a time edging into the rock-hard ground. Eventually though, we reached snow, and travel improved. The terrain levelled off onto the promised shoulder, and as daylight faded we pushed on as high up the low-angle ridge as time and energy allowed.

We found a nice flat area between the thick mountain hemlock and yellow cedar trees for camp, and by headlamp light, Garner and Nic pitched their tent and Josh and I erected a tarp. Supper devoured, we headed to bed with plans for an early start.

Next morning we were on the move an hour or so before first light and continued weaving up between the trees through gradually more open terrain and the crest of Big Den's north ridge. The weather was overcast, a little warmer than we would have liked but calm and with decent visibility. Once on the ridge crest, we swung north following it until a line led off to the east, descending steep forest into an open gully then way down into the base of the main north east cirque. It was all coming together.

We had two options for climbing, either the full length of Perimeter Ridge or a long couloir that paralleled the right (north) side of the ridge. As we dropped into the cirque, the cliffs to our right were dripping with ice. Things were looking really good! We passed an awesome couloir that had us all licking our chops but pressed on to the very bottom of the cwm and the toe of Perimeter Ridge. The closer we got to the ridge, the less appealing the conditions on it looked. The snow and ice cover wasn't quite right, so we headed up to look into the adjacent couloir.

The lean early season snowpack meeting the huge remnant snow cone from past winters at the base of the couloir was an unusual sight. I had an aerial photo I had taken in June a few years prior that showed this couloir chock full of snow to the point it looked skiable. As such, I was prepared for little more than a long snow plod, but as we ate a quick early lunch at the jaws of its base, there were clearly some steep steps ahead before the rest of the chasm curved up out of sight.

We geared up, and Josh and I were off ahead and booted up the couloir to the first step. Nice WI2 steps with excellent snow led around a curve and more easier ground. About 150 metres up the gully, the walls closed in and we arrived at the base of a steep ice step. The unwelcome sound of running water took us back as we assessed the ice. There was a steep, vertical, hollow pillar to the left and a better, but poorly protected, ramp feature to the right.

We pulled out the rope and set a belay while we could see Nic and Garner coming up below. I was prepared for disappointment as Josh gingerly stepped up to the thin ice pillar. But, axe swing by swing, he calmly worked his way onto the ice and delicately made progress upward. He made it past the pillar and around the corner out of sight, but still the rope paid out and up he went. The other two joined me at the belay, and I took the second rope up to see what was in store. It was steep and thin but it worked—WI4 in those conditions, might be easier another time.

Mindful to leave as much ice intact for the others as possible I climbed carefully. The thin pillar gave way to much thicker ice and soon I was with Josh at the belay. Garner came next, and then we threw one rope end back down for Nic and I belayed him up while Josh and Garner soloed up more easy snow above.

By now the air had slipped above freezing and there was some activity from the side walls of the couloir. Small ice chunks repeatedly fell onto the snow around us and whizzed down the fissure. Nic and I made our way up following Garner and Josh's tracks. We found them in a second narrowing with an incredible ice pitch rearing up above them. The walls of the coulior were thick with deep blue ice. We were now about 300 metres up.

Garner took the lead and swung his mountain axe into the névé. This pitch looked incredible! No running water here, just lots of thick steep ice.

Garner disappeared above, followed by Josh, and I climbed third. The falling ice chunks were now coming down in a constant barrage of shrapnel. It was ominous but all very small, everything from spindrift to grape- or golf-ball size, but we never saw anything any bigger. Garner's pitch was long and I soon found myself breathing hard. I inhaled an ice pellet or two. It felt full-on pushing up through the maelstrom, but the quality of the ice was addictive—total hero névé. A full 60-metre pitch brought me to the belay jammed in a narrow slot between rock ribs. I took over the belay, repeating the process of returning one rope end back down for Nic while Josh and Garner pressed on up ahead. We could see a long stretch of easy snow above, but again it curved up around a corner, hiding more possible delights.

Nic joined me at the belay with a huge grin—what a fantastic first ice climbing experience he was having! I decided we should play it safe and keep us on belay, so Nic and I swung a handful of easy snow pitches up and around the curve to see the finish come into view. As we passed a particularly steep cliff off the side of Perimeter Ridge, the falling ice debris stopped. From a crazy, relentless ice storm, it went in an instant to an eerie calm.

We could see Josh and Garner huddled under the cornice waiting for us to get up and in a safe spot before the inevitable debris from hacking the cornice began. Nic and I found a good spot tucked behind a bit of rock, and then Josh worked up off their ledge to figure out the finish. It took a lot longer than it looked like it would—but cornices tend to be like that.

Josh swung away at the snow over and over. It's times like this when I wonder why adzes have gotten so small. Our Island winter climbing is very Scottish in style, and I hankered for my old Mountain Technology Vertige with its shovel of an adze. It was painful to watch how much effort it took Josh to dig enough of a trough before he could pull up and over onto the top. Still, compared to the last time I was dealing with a cornice on this mountain with Chris Lawrence, this was a cakewalk. At the top of The Great Escape, Chris and I had dug at least an eight-metre tunnel. It was so long we actually had to cut a dogleg landing as a safety precaution.

I was the last over the cornice just as darkness fell. And dark wasn't the only thing coming down. Right on cue, it started raining. Dark and rain be dammed, we decided we should make the summit, so turned south and up easy, wide-open snow slopes to find it. We found the ice-rimed cairn and took a few pictures of us in the downpour.

The descent dragged on a bit. We basically had to follow the north ridge until we found a line down to the point where we had reached the crest that morning, and then retrace our tracks back to camp. Even with a GPS, we still took a few blind stabs at getting down off the upper ridge, but eventually it all came together, and as the intensity of the climb and descent faded the weather obliged too. The rain eased, and by the time we were back in camp, it was pretty pleasant. It was 2 a.m. by the time we had cooked and eaten supper and enjoyed some hard refreshments before settling down for sleep.

The return trip down to the highway went smoothly, and I'd go as far as to say that the route we used up and off Big Den was the best of any off-trail approach I've found. It was simply excellent and definitely the recommended way to reach Big Den's awesome winter climbing.

**Summary**

Mia Coulior (WI4, 700m), northeast face, Big Den Mountain, Vancouver Island Ranges. FA: Garner Bergeron, Nic Manders, Josh Overdijk, Philip Stone, December 29, 2013.

Mia Couloir on the northeast face of Big Den Mountain. Photo: Philip Stone

# Native Copper

Jason Ammerlaan

FINDING THE TRAILHEAD is often the hardest part of climbing a peak. Alistair Davis and I embarked on climbing the north face of Joffre back in 2008. We left Squamish early in the morning only to be thwarted by a confusing description in the *Alpine Select*, which led us to an active logging operation and a bunch of sultry forestry workers. It was more our error than the guidebook's fault, as we did not thoroughly do our research. We were lost, and we didn't quite have the skills or motivation to find out where we were going. We drove back to Squamish after stopping for a hike up to Wedge Glacier on the way home. We had defaulted on the north face of Wedge rather than Joffre, but were halted by terrible blisters while frontpointing up the glacier. It was some time later when we finally started talking again about going back up to Joffre for a climb. Since then our mountain experience had increased exponentially, and our knowledge of the Joffre group had become intimate through many winter tours.

In the summer of 2012, we knew where we were going: the Central Pillar on Joffre's north face. This time we casually strolled up Cerise Creek and up Joffre's north drainage. A bit of a slog, but once we were out of range of the bugs, things became enjoyable. Bringing the north face into view, I felt a slight bit of disappointment. Although I've seen the face many times over the past few winters, I somehow thought the Central Pillar would be more intimidating. We had previously discussed the Flavelle-Lane route before embarking on this trip; however, it held the same amount of attraction as the Central Pillar. After talking through our moderate levels of excitement about the Central Pillar, we started gesturing towards the obvious buttress that split the Central Couloir and the North Face Couloir. Had it been climbed before? Not that we knew of. It lit the fire we were craving and set us off. There was a nice-looking line that we could spot right up through the centre of the buttress. It wasn't as striking, committing, steep or sustained as the Central Pillar, but that didn't matter. We were in search of an adventure.

Alistair showed me how to tie my first figure-8 in the summer of 2006. Shortly after that, we were bumbling up peaks together in the Rockies, and we even reached the top of a few of them.

Native Copper on the north face of Mount Joffre.
Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

Climbing steep mountains was always in my mind, but I just needed someone to show me the way up. Now that I had graduated from the early days, I had been relying on route descriptions to get me to the top. Finally, Alistair and I had a chance to diverge from the trail and carve out our own line, and this got us both pretty excited.

Crossing over the seracs of the Joffre glacier and over the 'shrund into the Central Couloir, we were able to scope the first few pitches. It looked blocky and compact, but we could see a few discontinuous splitters that led into steeper ground. We billy-goated to a nice ledge and set off on the climbing. We had four long pitches of mostly 5.10 climbing (5.10-, 5.10, 5.10+, 5.9) through some of the steeper portions of the wall. This was followed by a fun scramble above the deep gully of the Central Couloir to the summit. The compact nature of the rock made finding gear more challenging, but led to interesting sections of face climbing between pieces.

Most of the gear was found in horizontal breaks—about the size of a yellow TCU—that had formed from crystal development in the rock. Alistair had just finished his third year of a biogeosciences degree and explained that the green mineral found mixed in with these crystals is native copper. He said that a large chunk about the size of a fist was passed around in one of his classes and valued in the many thousands. He saw geology, but I just saw dollar signs and good TCU placements. On the summit, we decided that our first route needed a name. Native Copper was the obvious choice.

A long walk down found us back at the trailhead and celebrating on the side of the highway. The day was perfect. No epics, but still full of adventure and beauty. It was the first time that Alistair and I had stood upon a peak together in some time. Work, training and life engagements had led us apart and had made getting to the hills together all the more difficult. Finding the trailhead still ranks as one of the harder parts of a climb—although now, it's more of a balancing act than a matter of research.

**Summary**

Native Copper (D 5.10+, 250m), north face, Mt. Joffre, Coast Mountains. FA: Jason Ammerlaan, Alistair Davis, August 2014.

# On a Reccy

Joe Sambataro

IN JULY 2013, BEN KUNZ, Tim Halder and I enjoyed nine days of impeccable weather in the Waddington Range. We stepped out of Ben's 22-foot Sprinter van upon arriving at White Saddle Air Services on Bluff Lake and started packing for an immediate alpine ascent of McNerthney Pillar on the northern flanks of Mount Waddington. This was our primary objective. The route was originally completed in 1986 by the brothers Pat and Dan McNerthney, but had not since seen a second ascent. Described in *The Waddington Guide* by Don Serl as "providing far and away the most powerful climbing line on this face of Waddington," the absence of a second ascent in 27 years added to its allure.

The next morning, the plan was executed flawlessly by our pilot, Mike King. He allowed us to drop off our base-camp gear at Sunny Knob while the blades roared above, jump back into the chopper and fly into the Waddington-Combatant Col equipped for a three- to four-day climb. This highly recommended manoeuvre saved us a full day's approach via the Tiedemann icefall, where seracs pose an objective hazard from above. Landing on the col as we did is only possible during calm weather conditions.

Excited yet humbled by the massive 700-metre rock pillar, we deliberated for 10 minutes before deciding to rope up and take advantage of the windless, cloudless skies. Our three-person team climbed the pillar and reached the northwest summit in two and a half days before descending the Bravo Glacier on the fourth day. After crossing the bergschrund and climbing a long ramp of steep snow and ice, we navigated up discontinuous cracks with a creative mix of free climbing and tension traverses to reach our first bivy at dusk.

Sunny rock greeted us in the morning, but complicated bands of rock, ice and snow slowed us down on the second day as we swapped between boots and

Joe Sambataro on pitch three of On a Reccy. Photo: Ben Kunz

rock shoes. We finally found our way around right of the crest and released some substantial rock fall while pulling over a steep chockstone. Finally atop the middle buttress, we each chipped out a narrow ledge to sleep on for the second night, tired yet enchanted by the remarkable position.

While the climbing was slightly easier on the third day, we encountered strong winds and spindrift as we reached the Angel Glacier. Incredibly, we found easy passage between the miles of overhanging seracs. After a short celebration on a very windy Northwest Summit, we descended the Northeast Face and enjoyed a welcomed flat bivy on the Stroll below the main summit.

After a rest day, Ben and I went up the Stiletto Glacier to get a closer look at potential new lines on Dentiform. After a dead end, we eventually found passage across the crevasses. This exploratory mission took a big shift as I started mapping out a series of cracks and corners up the bone-white west face of Bicuspid Tower. We soon ditched our tools and boots at the base and climbed six pitches of flawless cracks, establishing a new line to the right of routes climbed earlier in 2004 and 2007. The second and sixth pitches proved to be the cruxes, requiring tricky sequences up thin cracks and seams, while the third pitch offered some of the most exhilarating splitter jams either of us had ever climbed. After reaching the south summit of this twin-topped tower, we rapped down and reached camp just after dark. Other potential lines exist on the face, which is a stellar single-day outing from Sunny Knob.

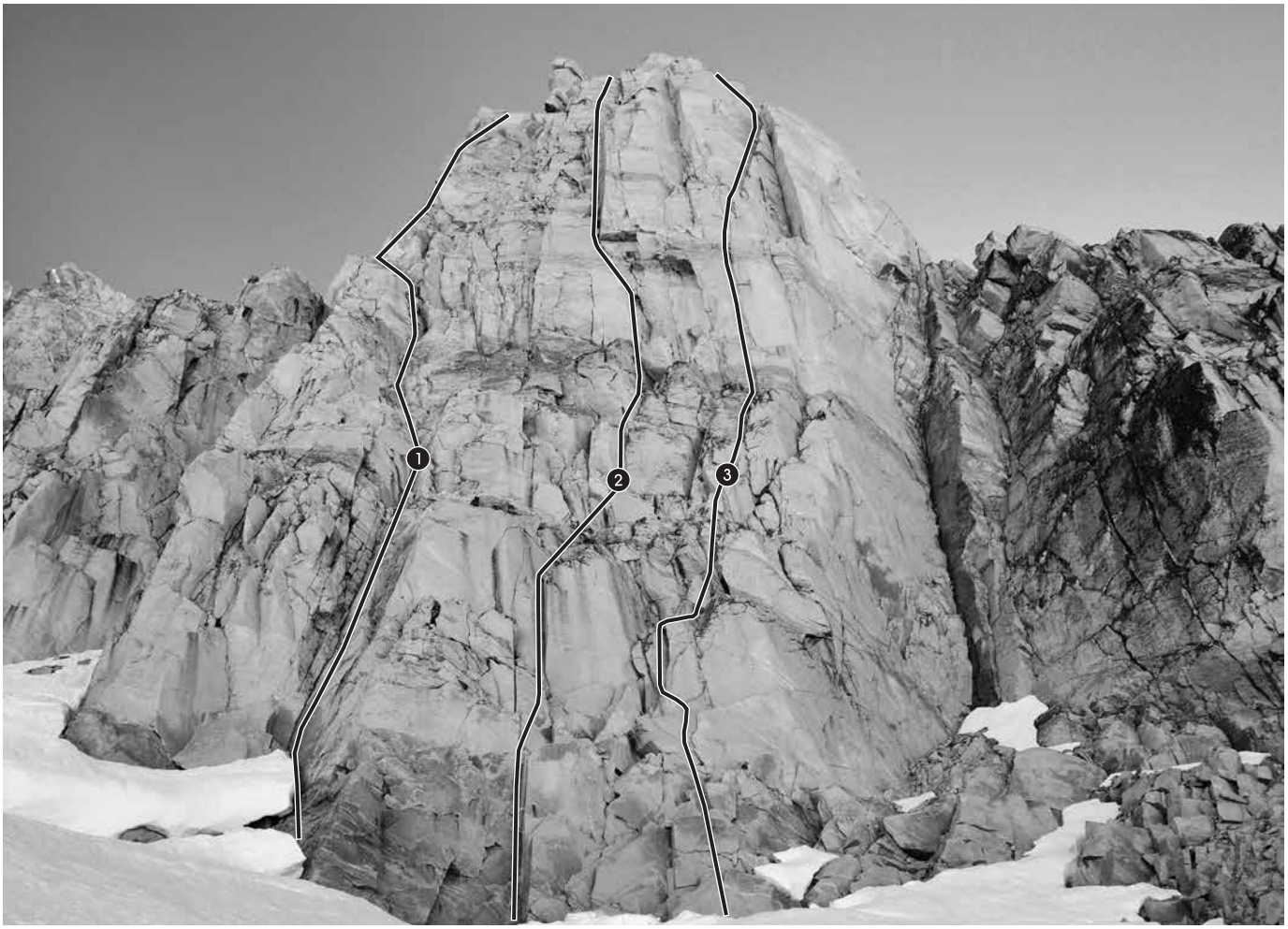
After sleeping in the next day, we scrambled up to Plummer Hut for a look at the climbing on the Upper Tellot Glacier. We enjoyed simuling mid-fifth-class climbing to reach the top of Serra One and another remarkable view of the Waddington Range. Satiated, we returned to Sunny Knob later that day and packed up to fly out on the ninth day of perfect weather before a storm came in the following week.

### Summary

Second ascent of McNerthney Pillar (V, 5.10 mixed, 980m), north face, Mt. Waddington, Coast Mountains. Tim Halder, Ben Kunz, Joe Sambataro, July 18-21, 2013.

On a Reccy (240m, IV, 5.11), west face of south summit, Bicuspid Tower, Waddington Range, Coast Mountains. FA: Ben Kunz, Joe Sambataro, July 23, 2013.

The west face of Bicuspid Tower: (1) Routine Brain Surgery (2004), (2) Life in the Fast Lane (2007), (3) On a Reccy (2013). Photo: Joe Sambataro



# In the Groove

## Patrick David

WE STOOD AT THE BASE of the 900-metre east face after seven hours of snowshoeing the Elk River Trail. While donning our harnesses, we gazed up at our potential first-ascent objective. The last winter first ascent put up on this mountain was 24 years ago by Rob Wood, Doug Scott and Greg Child. At this point, I just wanted to get up the cursed thing, but a first ascent would be icing on the cake. This was my third attempt this winter, after being thwarted by a combination of dangerously warm temperatures the first time and a massive dump of snow the second time. Ironically, my buddy Seb and I walked in for five hours, both times knowing it was likely a bad idea, but not wanting to be the first one to shut down the cunning plan. At this point I had invested 29 hours just in approach time and only climbed 450 metres. The line looked doable with only one or two sections of uncertainty. Just as we were ready to throw our packs on our backs, loaded with a few days' food and bivy gear, a torrent of wet snow and ice chunks ripped down the perceived crux of our plan-A line with a frighteningly loud roar.

This particular adventure started off with a Facebook exchange and a phone call the day before with Ryan—a new partner I had never climbed with, or even met. He had never climbed the Colonel in the winter and I had only seen it for the first time on the two previous attempts this year. It went a little against both our better judgments to embark on a multi-day winter alpine ascent having never met before, but we were both very keen on the mission, and after a few exchanges over the phone and Facebook, I think we were satisfied that it was worth a go.

Patrick David about halfway up on the first ascent of In the Groove. Photo: Ryan Van Horne

As the carnage and rumbling of the now-less-than-hospitable plan-A option petered out to silence, we both looked at each other hoping the other wasn't crazy enough to still get on it. As it turned out, neither of us was crazy (that day), and we immediately switched focus to the other option—an unclimbed line to the right of Directissima. It appeared that once you were above of the initial snowfield, the route looked like it went through some narrow grooves of water ice, another long section of snowfield then more narrow grooves and ice smears leading to the summit ridge.

Several hundred feet of soloing the initial snowfield gave access to the first narrow slot of ice. We anxiously roped up, wondering what the route was going to throw at us. We noticed that due to the unusual shape—an angled groove, like being in a giant chimney where the opposing wall could never be reached—it would likely not be possible to see more than a hundred metres of the route above at any given time. I racked up for the first lead of simul-climbing with screws, a picket and some Tri-cams, and headed off stemming between rock and ice for the first stretch above the belay.

Once through the short section of ice, things transformed to perfect névé caused by previous slides that carved out a bobsled-like track down the face. In the back of my mind, I hoped there were no more torrents of wet snow and ice due to make its way down our chosen line. The ideal pro for these conditions was pickets for the most part, but unfortunately one of our two had gone AWOL on the approach. We discussed sticks and trekking poles as

substitutions, but between the sporadic screws and rock pro, combined with the secure climbing conditions, it was never an issue. The top of the first stretch of simul-climbing ended on a narrow snow ledge stuck to the wall and with no rock or ice protection in sight. The one and only picket was placed several hundred feet below. A seated belay with my feet wedged against a large block of hard snow formed the end of the first rope stretch.

Ryan didn't pause for long as we were not keen on spending the night in a semi-hanging bivy, and with plenty of distance still between us and the summit ridge, we didn't want to doddle. He made quick work of the névé, pushing his tools into the firm snow in the back of the bobsled run. He disappeared from sight, but the rope continued to steadily pay out. As I sat at the belay, I recall looking across the face of the mountain and thinking it strange to see spruce trees above the glacial snowfield and bergschrund. This was my first year as an Island mountaineer and I was still getting used to the wet approaches and different scenery from the Rockies.

The rope, coming to its end, jolted me out of my daydream, and I quickly removed the belay device and started to climb so as not to hold things up. Eventually Ryan was running low on gear, so he set a belay at the start of another slightly steeper section of thin ice where, again, the route took a blind turn around a bulge. I had forgotten to hand over the stubby screws at our last exchange, so the belay consisted of two long screws hanging out of the ice above where the threads stopped. Fortunately, the climbing was still secure; my mistake wasn't an issue. I plugged in a stubby just above the belay as a courtesy screw before I disappeared around the corner for my next stretch.

More back and forth between good ice and névé grooves led to a slot/tunnel through the underside of a massive chockstone. I found a good rock belay just before the final lip, gaining access to the summit ridge and hopefully to what would be flat ground for a bivy. The sun was about to drop below the horizon as Ryan cruised up the final stretch to my belay. By the time he reached me, headlamps were required to pull the lip and start the bivy search.

In the Groove on the east face of Mount Colonel Foster. Photo: Ryan Van Horne

I was very happy to hear Ryan report that he had found a little shelf at the apex of the east face for a belay and possible bivy. We carved out small ledges—with our feet hanging over the edge of the backside gully—to lay out our bivy bags for a well-deserved night's rest. A hot drink and some food flushed the heat back into our bodies and morale was high. After a brief discussion on possible route names and recounting the day's events, we burrowed into our sleeping bags, not to be seen again for the next nine hours.

The following morning revealed rime-covered ropes and low visibility but relatively warm temperatures. Only half a litre into the first morning brew, the stove died a quick death, so it was trail mix and bars for breaky. The final day was another big one: downclimbing, rappelling, re-climbing and walking around the north end of the mountain to our start point where we had abandoned our snowshoes low on the first snowfield. The descent through baseball-sized avalanche debris was tortuous on my gimped ankle that I had shattered several years before in a 10-metre fall to the deck. Luckily, Ryan was going strong and broke trail pretty much the whole way. The final day became a 14-hour push from our bivy to vehicle. We ended with a gorging of fast food in Campbell River, and once again, in the dark.

**Summary**

In the Groove (AI3, 800m), east face, Mount Colonel Foster, Strathcona Park, Vancouver Island Ranges. FA: Patrick David, Ryan Van Horne. February 27-March 1, 2014.

# Catwalk

Philip Stone

IT WAS A LOOSE PLAN. We would head up the Elk River trail to the south col of Elkhorn and see what kind of rock line grabbed us on the southeast face of the "Island Matterhorn." Hunter Lee and I had made a reccy trip a month earlier along an adjoining spur ridge, which had given us two days of views of Elkhorn's east face, priming us for some technical climbing on the mountain's flawless basalt. Now, in early July, the Island's summer alpine rock season was hitting ideal conditions.

We filled the first day with the approach, hiking the steep but straightforward southwest route from the Elk River trail Gravel Flats camp to the open rock slabs and heather on the side of Elkhorn South. Some dark clouds treated us to a spectacular fiery sunset, and we hit the bivy happy but still without much of a plan.

The next morning, we roused slowly. The approach, however straightforward, is still a grunt, and I for one felt a little sluggish. But the sun was beaming down on the southeast face enticing us, so we packed up and headed down toward the narrow col at the toe of Elkhorn's south ridge.

The line into the cirque is tight but all there. In the early season conditions, a wide, exposed snow slope gave us some pause for thought, but soon we were across it and on easier ground hiking up the talus and snow toward the base of the rock face.

We naturally gravitated toward the foot of the left-hand of three main buttresses in the cirque. The far right one I had climbed in 1993 with Greg Shea (Into the Sadistic, 5.10b, 500m, 8 pitches). The narrow central arête, as fantastic as it is looks, also looks hard and time-consuming with a complex series of pinnacles all the way up, making the decision easy. We roped up at the base of the left-hand face and Hunter led off on some incredibly solid and coarse quartz-veined rock. Following a series of chimneys and weaknesses at about 5.8, we climbed three fun pitches directly below a huge, wild green-coloured roof. As we neared the roof, a broken band of scree-strewn ledges ramped up to the left and we followed this to the base of a beautiful face to the right of a sort of gully. We now know that the face would link up above (and deserves a look), but on that day we weren't sure, so Hunter led out, continuing a rising traverse to the left. He disappeared around the corner, and while I belayed, I savoured the memories of the many adventures these beautiful mountains have provided.

When my turn came I left the belay and scrambled up a chossy chimney. Stepping out left onto a block, I was blown away by the dramatic view ahead. The comfort of my shady alcove belay had given way to a narrow rising ledge with breathtaking exposure 1,500 metres above Cervus Creek. As I worked along the ledge, Rambler Peak and Mount Colonel Foster came into sight and the exposure notched up to 11 as I joined a grinning Hunter at the stance on the crest of the south ridge.

We swung leads for two more pitches above the catwalk, more or less following the regular south ridge route onto easier terrain and the base of the final finish to the south peak. Our late start was now catching up with us, and despite the long high summer day, the sun was dipping low and we knew it was time to beat a retreat off the mountain. If we were a bit higher, we could have traversed across the west rakes to the standard routes and descended that way. But time-wise, it was six of one, half a dozen of the other, and we decided to rappel down a gully system to the west of the south ridge crest. The first three rappels went fairly quickly but figuring out the anchors for the last two ate up a lot of time. Eventually, Hunter was forced to give up a #2 Camalot for a last safe anchor. The ropes ends were literally a metre off the deck. As darkness fell, Hunter joined me to coil the ropes and pick our way in the dark across the lower slopes back to our bivy. A great day, a fun adventure and a very fine climb!

Catwalk on the southeast face of Elkhorn Mountain. Photo: Philip Stone

**Summary**

Catwalk (D 5.8, 600m, 8 pitches), southeast face, Elkhorn Mountain, Vancouver Island. FA: Hunter Lee, Philip Stone, July 3, 2013.

# The Red Pillar

John Waters

THE STORY OF THE FIRST winter ascent of The Red Pillar starts in early March 2010. My good friend Grant McCartney, my twin brother, Mike, and I made the plan to drive the 50-kilometre Ash River logging road to Oshinow Lake in late winter—a time when the road should be mostly clear of snow. From there, we would paddle five kilometres along the lake to get a little head start, ski up the south flanks, then scramble up the final pillar to the top. Well, as local Island climbers have come to expect, the plan didn't come together quite so easily.

Actually, nothing worked out as planned. We hit deep snow halfway along the logging road and got the truck stuck 10 kilometres from Oshinow Lake. Not to be deterred, and since it was early in the day, we loaded our packs into the red Clipper canoe, clicked into our AT skis and towed the canoe all the way to the lake. It was unconventional, but with two guys in the front pulling and one guy in the back steering, it was quite easy and we made reasonable time. Deep snowpack should have been a good indication that the temperatures were still too low, but this wasn't confirmed until we arrived at the lake and found it almost completely iced over. We stubbornly loaded the skis into the canoe and tried our luck. The ice was too thick, and with one paddle broken in frustration, we gave up. On the 10-kilometre ski back out, we tried canoeing down the Ash River. After nearly capsizing a couple times and filling our ski boots with icy water, we elected for the safer and drier ski out to the truck. The ascent would have to wait for another winter.

Finally, the conditions were good in December 2013. There was very little snow for the many kilometres of logging roads we had to drive, and the warmer temperatures meant the lake wouldn't be frozen. This time it was just my brother and me, plus one canoe, no skis, light crampons and an axe each. With only a few centimetres of snow on the roads, we made good time to the lake, quickly unloaded the canoe and began paddling up the lake in the dark. Crunch! Again, we hit ice. We tried shifting our weight forward or back in the canoe, but it was a no go and we went back to the truck.

This time we had a plan B. We started along the rough trail that follows the old overgrown logging road on the north side of Oshinow Lake. We moved quickly along the side of the lake before grovelling up the very steep forested trail on the south slopes of The Red Pillar. The first 1,000 vertical metres are gruelling. It was slippery frozen ground with a light dusting of snow for fun. Our motto was "We'll keep going until we have to turn around." We were hiking strong, but our mix up at the start of the day and the tiring terrain were eating up our limited December daylight. The deepening snow turned to wind-scoured slopes for the last 400 metres. By now, the conditions had worsened—visibility was poor while strong winds and heavy snowfall made for full alpine conditions. Strapping on the light alloy crampons and pulling out the axes for the final pillar, we followed the South Ridge summer route. This route climbs some moderate ramps and a few gullies. The initial snowy ramp up to the prominent rock fin was straightforward. The next 50-metre section proved to be the crux. It started with a steep snow gully, and then finished up a short iced-up 4th-class rock gully. From here, we traversed under a cliff band and climbed one more gully before finally reaching the flat summit of The Red Pillar. It was late and with only an hour of daylight left, we had a quick bite before beginning back down. We made it down the upper pillar section and reached the steep forest slopes as it got dark. For the final three hours, we slipped and stumbled down the steep, icy slopes, and then bashed our way out on the washed-out overgrown logging road back to the truck. The trip took 13.5 hours round trip, with 1,700-metre-vertical gain and 30 kilometres hiked and climbed. I've been slowly ticking off the last 2,000-metre peaks on Vancouver Island that haven't had winter ascents yet. The few remaining peaks are more remote and difficult. The adventure continues.

**Summary**

First winter ascent of The Red Pillar (2034 m) via the South Ridge (AD AI2, 250m), Vancouver Island Ranges. FWA: John Waters, Mike Waters, December 30, 2013.

Mike Waters during the first winter ascent of The Red Pillar. Photo: John Waters

# Elk Well

## Mike Morris

WHAT'S IN A NAME? Depending on who you talk to and what map you look at, the nondescript hump that rises south of Strathcona Park's iconic Elkhorn Mountain may have a few. As seen from Landslide Lake, the slow roll of sun-ripened rock could easily be considered just a ridge, with no predominate peak of its own and none of the rugged character that mark the faces and pinnacles of its neighbours. The sleepy knoll fails to attract much attention. While proposed in 2003, it wasn't until 2010 that it was officially labelled Elkhorn South by the B.C. Geographical Names department, the name given to it in 1936 as a geological survey station. During the time the process had begun for official recognition and the granting of the name, Phil Stone, local mountaineer and guide book author, published his 2004 edition of *Island Alpine*, which labelled the hump Mount Colwell in honour of George Colwell, a member of the original survey team and certainly one of the mountain's first accentionists. While some might argue there is a controversy, others might say there is none at all. All I know is that when viewed from the east, deep in the depths of Cervus Creek, this nondescript is anything but ordinary and certainly a mountain of its own. The towering east face of Elkhorn South rises some 1,300 metres from the wild and rarely visited Cervus Creek drainage, and according to Stone's Mount Colwell tab, it is likely the largest face on Vancouver Island—and yet to be climbed.

It was late morning by the time we arrived at the Lady Falls trailhead. With packs loaded, we quickly made our way up the one-kilometre trail to the beautiful drop of Lady Falls. The refreshing mist offered a cool reprieve from the already warm day and a great spot to check maps, stash bevies and plan our nine-kilometre-bushwhack up Cervus Creek. From everything we could gather, it sounded like a heinous slog through notorious Vancouver Island bush, and Ryan and I couldn't help but make jokes about the two south-island Mikes' choice of shorts and sneakers for this sort of mission. Amid salmonberry, devil's club, wasp nests, barefoot creek crossings and heavily vegetated side slopes, travel was difficult for many kilometres. Deep in the valley, we were able to link up meandering elk trails, and after seven hours of wasp stings and thorns, the bush began to thin and give way to awe-inspiring silhouettes and sun-drenched buttresses well over a kilometre high. We revelled and were giddy with amazement that such grand features had not yet been explored. As the bush suddenly broke, we found ourselves in the middle of a magnificent meadow, not unlike an El Cap of our own. It was certainly a mountain made for a meadow and a meadow made for a mountain. We set camp in a small corner and were careful not to trample such pristine wilderness. We were fully aware of the contrast between the elk-less trail system of the Elk River valley and this one undisturbed, strewn with elk beds and broken antlers. There is great responsibility when travelling through such important wildlife habitat, and we were gracious visitors in the living room of another family's home.

We had all met the night before at Ryan Van Horne's house in Campbell River, and it was good to finally meet Mike Shives and Mike Loch, two Victoria climbers whom Ryan had meet while exploring new routes on King's Peak earlier in the year. For months, I had been working in the B.C. Interior, locked far away from the Island Alps that I love. With the exception of a couple of trips into the Valhallas, I climbed mountains vicariously through emails and social media, and I have to admit that, while stoked, I was amusingly jealous of Ryan's weekly exploits. It was by just such an update that he informed me that, while a top Queens Face, the three had hatched a plan for the four of us to attempt the east face of Mount Colwell. We had talked about it before, as I'm sure many Island climbers have, and it was definitely in our sights for the season. When viewed from the east, Elkhorn South's twin buttresses rise nearly 600 metres before joining at a sizeable ledge of snow then continue as one ending just north of the main summit. The plan was to climb each buttress in teams of two, meet at the snow ledge and continue the second half as a group of four. While slightly intimidated, the thought of a first accent in this style excited me, and I was looking forward to getting in on the action.

From our campsite in the elk meadow, we could see no easy way to get onto the undercut north buttress. With a not too early start, we set out traversing south along the base looking for a path of weakness that might open up to the rock walls above. After scrambling scree and a boulder ledge, we found a steep gully where we grovelled 4th-class berrybush, rock, moss and tree branches for a couple of hundred metres until the greenery subsided and mostly open faces of textured basalt led the way. At this point, we split up and the south-island Mikes tried to traverse north to the intended buttress, but it wasn't long after scrambling another hundred metres of 3rd and 4th class that we all joined up again at the base of a refreshing small waterfall. The steep gully walls to the north had stymied our plans for a duel buttress accent; however, undeterred we continued on our way.

We traversed right from the waterfall to lower-angle rock and found we had to traverse back just a hundred metres above the waterfall slab. In hindsight, heading straight up might have made for a more aesthetic line. From here we donned rock shoes and headed up the steeper rock above. Faces, ridges and chimneys—the inner works of the mountain unfolded as each took their

turn exploring the options above. As we scrambled, the generally solid rock flew by, and we seamlessly flowed up the mountain, each falling in line behind one other. By mid afternoon we had climbed well above the snow ledge and were all quite comfortable in this sort of 4th- to mid-5th-class terrain. In search of water and landmarks, I exited right of a chimney as the other three continued left. This became the diamond pitch as the three climbed an excellent chimney system while I zigzagged a ridge. We met up again as the shadows began to sit thick on the face, and we contemplated if we should continue or settle for this not very suitable bivy at the base of a funnel. We were maybe 250 metres from the summit and with limited light left in the day we pushed on. Some thought climbing through this corner and transitioning back out to the face to be the crux of our scrambling, and as we broke to the ridge, a sweeping ledge led to a left-facing corner steepening with decay. With light fading quickly, we could think of no better place to spend the night. By headlamp, we scraped and dug until we secured several anchors in the rock, and we were contented to bed down, eat, drink and bask in the moonlight, enthralled by the great distance we had climbed.

The sky brightened early but took a long time to break the peaked horizon. As the sun lit the face, Mike Shives piped two words from his sleeping bag, "I'll lead!" And so it was, on the morning of August 10, with little water and no time for breakfast, we roped up and cheered him on as he led a brilliant pitch through a sparsely protected corner, trending left on the face to avoid difficulties and finishing up an excitingly exposed corner block. By 8 a.m., we were all on the summit and celebrating in good cheer. With a melting snow patch nearby, we lazed in the beauty of the blue-sky day and enjoyed a well-deserved breakfast.

After several hours of sun bathing and photo ops, we ended up descending east from the col between Elkhorn and Elkhorn South. We did several double-rope rappels down to what's left of Elkhorn's lower glacier basin where huge sheer walls race skyward. I couldn't help but feel an awe of intimacy, wrapped deep in the arms of the majestic Elkhorns. After several more hours of downclimbing and jungleering, we managed to make camp just in time for dinner.

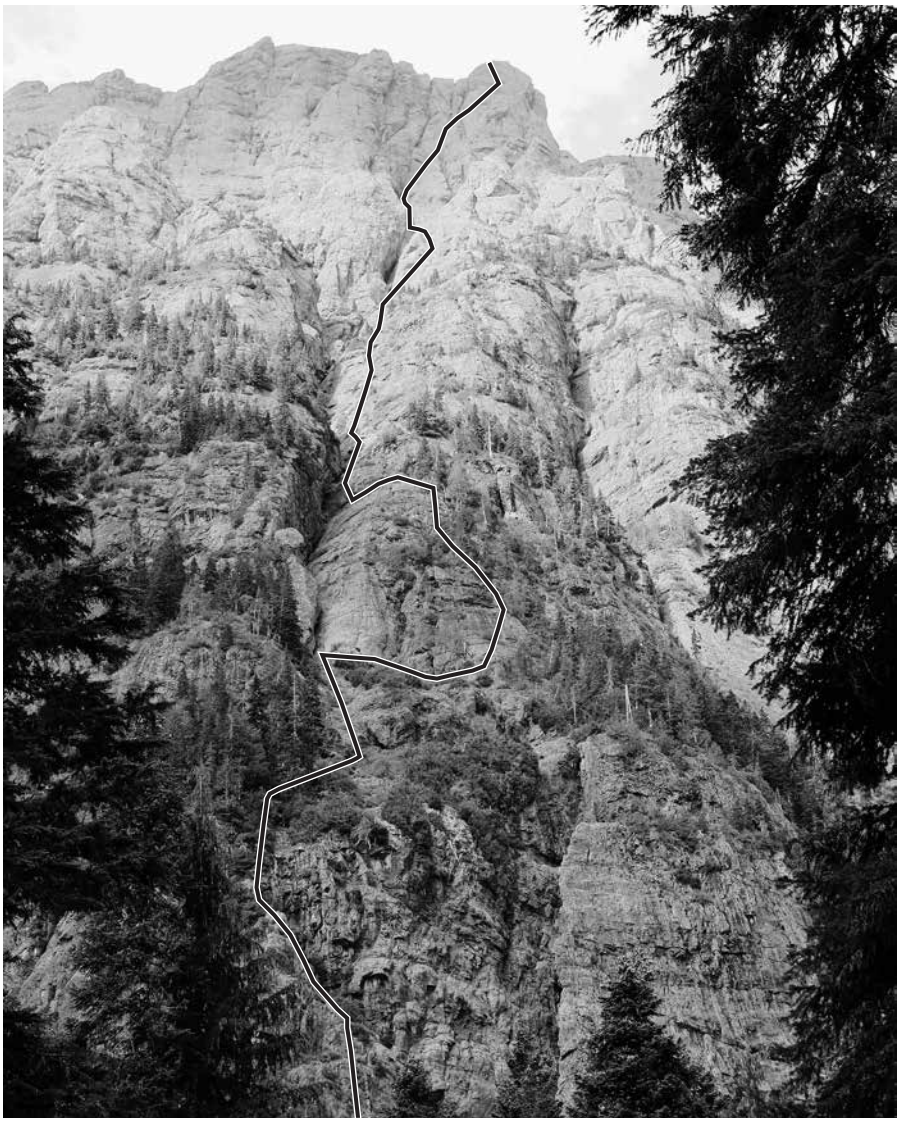
The next day, we moved further up the valley in hopes of more climbing, but the sky unleashed a heavy rain and we opted to bivy under a huge boulder. The following morning, when the weather refused to break, we decided to climb the pass between Rambler and Mount Colwell and make for the well-worn paths of the Elk River Trail. Bushwhacking up and over this col proved to be some of the worse bush I have ever traversed, and for tens of metres at a time there was little you could do but bounce cedar limb to cedar limb, rarely making footfall along the way. By the time we arrived at the Elk River Trail, all were bruised, beaten and bloodied, having been through one hell of a fight.

We called the route Elk Well in honour of all those who call these peaks and valleys home—no matter what name they use.

### Summary

Elk Well (IV 5.8, 1250m), east face, Elkhorn South, Strathcona Park, Vancouver Island Ranges. FA: Mike Loch, Mike Morris, Mike Shives, Ryan Van Horne, August 10, 2013.

Elk Well on the east face of Elkhorn South. Photo: Ryan Van Horne



# High Stoke Factor

Marc-André Leclerc

IT WAS EARLY JULY and the stoke was in high supply. I had obtained levels of energy that can only come from incessant amounts of climbing day after day, sunrise till sunset. I had envisioned a beautiful link-up on the northeast side of Slesse Mountain since the age of 15 as a neophyte alpinist. The concept was to solo both the classic Northeast Buttress and the North Rib routes in a push. At the time, to pull off such a linkup was far out of my league, but I had possessed the vision and it had stuck with me over the years until finally I felt ready.

I knew there would be cruxes involved, but that the actual climbing would not be one of them. The first obstacle was, in fact, just getting to the mountain. It seemed that in the four years since I had turned 16, I had forgotten to get a driver's license, mainly due to the fact that I had been too busy having fun to take a road test. Nonetheless, I was rather determined to make it from Squamish to Slesse, so I hopped on a bus to Vancouver, armed with a pair of rock shoes, aluminum trail crampons, an ice tool and a light puffy jacket. Upon arriving in Vancouver, I discovered that the next bus to Chilliwack was sold out. Waiting to leave the next morning simply would not suffice, so I made my way to the edge of town, stood at a highway exit and gave passersby a thumbs up and a smile until a young fellow stopped to give me a lift. He was a cool chap headed in the right direction and we listened to heavy metal and head banged our way as far as the town of Maple Ridge where he dropped me off. I walked over a rather long bridge and found myself in Langley, but it seemed that no one would stop to pick me up, so I opted for my last resort—a call to Mom. My mother, being the wonderful lady that she is, agreed to pick me up and drive me the remaining distance to the start of the gravel road that provides access to the trailhead that, in turn, provides access to the east side of Mount Slesse.

It was 11 p.m. when I started hiking the gravel road, and despite my fear of being eaten alive by bears, I arrived at the Slesse Memorial Plaque a couple of hours later. I pulled on my light puffy jacket and tried to open bivy until daylight, but I quickly became too cold and opted for hiking again instead. Regardless, I had managed to kill a couple of hours with my non-sleep, and the sun began to rise as I approached the infamous hanging glacier that guards access to the Northeast Buttress. The glacier was in bad shape and crossing it alone would provide a major crux for me, armed with only a single tool and light strap-on crampons over my Tennies. After about 20 minutes of ninja-like manoeuvring through tottering ice fins and a mind-bending 'shrund crossing, I found myself on the uppermost tier of the glacier, making my way towards the buttress, when a large rumbling occurred and a large section of the 'shrund collapsed in on itself. Understandably alarmed, I started running towards the glacier's end, but once again it rumbled and shook beneath my feet, causing me to trip and fall. I rolled out of my inelegant face plant and sprinted off the glacier and onto the start of the rock, panting heavily. Crux number two complete.

The buttress itself was easy climbing, almost never harder than 5.7 with the odd 5.9 move, and I soloed much of it in my approach shoes. I arrived at the summit in about two hours. I picked my way downwards off the west side of the summit tower and navigated the beautiful Crossover Pass descent fairly quickly, and soon I was staring up at the elegant fin of the North Rib, another 25-pitch 5.9 similar to the Northeast Buttress. A quick snack and I was scrambling my way up the rib, this time wearing rock shoes more often than not as the climbing was a wee bit less secure than the previous route. The rib seemed to drag on for a while, but sure enough I arrived at the notch below the summit tower from where it would be all too easy to bail. The sun was still high in the sky and I wasn't yet tired, so up I went to the summit for a second time.

This time, my descent felt a bit more tedious and almost dream-like as I made sure not to fall off the steep snow slopes of Crossover Pass. But like beforehand, I found myself in the basin below Slesse's north face sooner than later, skipping through the forest back to the memorial plaque where I picked up some items I had left there. I will never know if it was just my tired state or not, but I swear there were millions of mayflies swarming all about me as I stumbled down the gravel road back to civilization. I found it somewhat disturbing as they repeatedly flew into my mouth and nostrils. Still, I was quite content.

The next morning, after awaking from another ungraceful open bivy on the forest floor, my mother picked me up and we drove back to Squamish. As a big thank you, I took her out for a fun adventure on the lower flanks of the Grand Wall, followed by a delicious sushi lunch.

I was tired but not that tired, so I began scheming once again. The next Saturday I woke up at 4 a.m. and adorned my head with a psychedelic headband and began running gravel roads towards the north side of Mount Habrich, a small rocky peak just east of Squamish. I made good time and found myself at the base of the Fluffy Kitten Wall an hour and a half after leaving my house on foot. I pulled some rock shoes and a crude hand-drawn topo out of my pack and proceeded to make an un-roped ascent of The Wonderful Thing About Tiggers—a 400-metre 5.10+ that was quite wonderful, indeed. From the top of the route, I scrambled through nasty bush, eventually leading to nice rock and the summit of Habrich from its northeast side. From there, I scrambled my way in an easterly

direction down some cool chimneys and more monkey-like bush swinging to establish myself on an alpine ridge leading towards Sky Pilot Mountain.

I didn't mean to put up a new route on Sky Pilot—I just didn't feel like climbing the shady Gunsight Gap Couloir in Tennies, or skirting the west ridge to find more moderate terrain. I ended up climbing a series of awkward 5.10 overhangs on the right side of the north face, figuring it would be fast and direct. Sure enough, it was both, and I quickly scrambled the remaining easy terrain to the summit and off the other side towards the Co-pilot. I had wanted to include the Co-pilot in my traverse but found the rock to be quite poor and not much fun to climb on, so I skirted below the west face and ran beautiful alpine ridges and scrambled a quick couloir to gain the scenic Goat Ridge. A quick skinny dip in an alpine pool and a long tedious descent off the ridge brought me to a gravel road, where I took a wrong turn and ended up doing an arduous trudge all the way back to Furry Creek. I then walked the highway back to Murrin Park, my intended exit point, to pick up a stashed bike and rode my way home. In total, my traverse covered about 50 kilometres of ground that involved climbing up to 5.10+ and took a total of nearly 16 hours. For the fun of it, I called this The Wonderful Fluffy Sky Goat Traverse, although I doubt many people will feel overly compelled to go repeat such a thing.

Summer in Squamish continued to provide continuous fun, some highlights of which were an ascent of Mount Joffre's Central Pillar, some 3rd-class ascents of High Plains Drifter, and a rope solo ascent of the North Walls aid line The Raven, where I took a rather jarring ledge fall to knock some sense back into me.

A while later, in October, the weather cleared up into something quite fantastic and once again I got psyched. On the weekend of my 21st birthday, conditions were looking nice in the Tantalus Range, but I also wanted to rope solo a route on the Sherriff's Badge. I had commitments for Thanksgiving dinner with not enough time for both endeavours, or so it seemed. With too much stoke and too little time, I managed to race up the Sherriff's Badge and up to the top of Angels Crest on the Saturday, and then stayed up all night and soloed the East Ridge of Alpha in lovely mixed conditions to arrive at the summit early Sunday morning. As I lay on a rock gazing up at the peaks of the Tantalus in a tired daze, I noticed an unclimbed mixed dihedral line on Mount Lydia's East Face and swore I would be back shortly to climb it—after Thanksgiving dinner of course.

My girlfriend decided to join me for my return to the Tantalus, and the next Friday night we hiked up to Lake Lovelywater and rigged up a cozy hammock bivy for the night. I woke at 1 a.m. to an incredible full moon and perfect cold temperatures. I knew the sun would hit the east face early and the route might fall apart, so we packed up and did the long approach beneath Mount Niobe's north face under the light of the full moon, eventually reaching the Niobe-Lydia col, where we split ways. She took off up the long southeast ridge alone and I sprinted my way across the glacier below the east face. I quickly located the start of the line I had scoped the weekend before. The temperature was just cold enough, so I took off up 75-degree snowfields that angled up and right to the prominent dihedral and the crux of the route. The drytooling was never any harder than 5.8 or so, but the rock quality was sometimes marginal, and what ice there was tended to be thin and delaminating. This was fine by me, though, as I was still having fun, and I topped out the 400 metres of snow and mixed climbing just before sunrise to find my lady waiting for me on the summit. After a cliché Hollywood-like romantic rendezvous on the snow-glazed peak, we picked our way back down the ridge and spent much of our day chilling in the beautiful alpine scenery, enjoying the sun, until we eventually headed back to our bivy and spent another night in the magnificent scenery of the Tantalus. The next morning, we returned to Squamish where I received copious amounts of flack from my roommates about my lack of contribution to the housekeeping.

While it seemed that my coastal alpine climbing season would be over for some time, I was gifted with one more opportunity to go on a mini-rampage in early February. Having just returned from two months in Patagonia, the stoke was, as usual, in high supply. On a cold, windy day, I left Squamish at 7 a.m. and hiked up logging roads to pay Sky Pilot another visit. Perfect hard snow conditions made for quick progress, and I even found a lovely WI4 pillar on the approach that served as a brief distraction. I was soon staring at Sky Pilot's north face and considering climbing the Gunsight Gap when I noticed a large smear of blue ice in the centre of the face. The ice terminated a long ways below the summit ridge but the mixed terrain looked friendly enough for a solo. Off I went. The ice made for pleasant climbing; but the temperature was close to -30 C and I was forced to endure multiple cases of the screaming barfies. The mixed terrain above was quite moderate and soon enough I was strolling along the summit ridge, enjoying the stunning winter scenery all around me. As pleasant as the views were, it was frigid, so I took off down the west face. I followed switchbacking ramps and boot-skied downwards through bowls and gullies that brought me back to the road from where I had started. I picked up a pair of headphones that I had stashed in a bush and listened to the Rolling Stones as I hiked towards town as the sun set behind me.

Climbing season would now be put on hold as it was time to go to work and prepare for the next year of fun and excitement. The stoke was still high and showing no signs of fading.

# Warm Times on the Stikine Icecap

David E. Williams

WHITING LAKE EMBODIES the heart of the Coast Mountains for me. Situated at the northern end of the Stikine Icecap, the lake is surrounded by pristine wilderness abounding with unclimbed peaks. In May 1993, friends and I made the first complete traverse of the Stikine Icecap from the Stikine River to the Samotua and Whiting River drainages (see *CAJ* 1994, pp. 79-82), during which we climbed some wonderful summits east and south east of Whiting Lake. However, poor weather on the last few days of the trip prevented us from attempting peak 2,496 metres (58.090945º N, 132.536058º E). As far as I know, this remained the dominant unclimbed peak in the northeastern edge of the icecap.

In July 2000, two friends and I were dropped off on Whiting Lake. From there, we climbed the highest peaks to the north and west of the lake. We continued west in poor weather until we arrived at the seashore of Gilbert Bay (*CAJ* 2001, pp. 116-118). The inclement weather on that trip meant that we climbed little else that was not directly on our traverse route.

In May 2013, four of us—Peter Celliers and Denise Hart of Berkeley, California, Javier Garcia Fernandez from Spain, and I—flew by helicopter to a tributary of the Whiting River and were dropped off at the terminus of a small glacier seven kilometres east-northeast of Whiting Lake (58.111898º N, 132.710552º E). Our idea was to undertake a clockwise traverse around the lake while climbing an array of unclimbed peaks, after which we planned to be picked up again 16 days later west of Whiting Lake on the Whiting River (58.207078º N, 133058853º E). At least this was the plan.

For the first six days of the trip, we were treated to terrific weather—cold and clear at night with good conditions for travelling throughout the day. We climbed peak 2,496 metres (58.090945º N, 132.536058º E) on skis from the south, opting to walk to the summit along the east ridge for the final 30 to 60 metres. We were surrounded by clouds on the summit, but could see the peaks that we had climbed in 1993 and 2000, and those climbed in 1996 to the north across the Whiting and Samotua drainages (*CAJ* 1997, pp. 77-78). From the summit, we worked our way south then west, following our 1993 route for a few hours on the fourth day. We encountered a challenging descent south of peak 2,496 metres, and were forced to dismantle our crazy-carpet sleds, on which we carried our full 14-day loads.

We spent a beautiful still evening camped at a narrow perch (58.018555º N, 132.564125º E) that overlooked the moraines near where we had camped in 1993. The magnificent peaks 2,710 metres (58.031781ºN, 132.495203º E) and 2,779 metres (58.006643ºN, 132.476149º E) dominated in the background. From the divide (57.947659º N, 132.647209º E) two kilometres to the east of peak 2,420 metres (57.954035º N, 132.671413º E), which we had also climbed in 1993, we descended onto the upper Sawyer Glacier and made camp. We spent the afternoon and early evening of the fifth day climbing the east ridge of peak 2,326 metres (57.914939º N, 132.752609º E). The climb involved working our way up through bottomless snow to ascend the upper portions of the ridge. I particularly enjoyed one short pitch of mixed 4th- to low-5th-class climbing on firm snow and solid rock. The following day, we moved camp six kilometres west down the glacier and climbed the south-southwest ridge of peak 2,240 metres (57.962232º N, 132.794838º E). We skied most of the way to the summit, and made a short scramble to the top.

On the morning of the seventh day, the temperament of the trip changed dramatically. Overnight the temperature had risen considerably, and we awoke to rain that continued for the day. We were camped near to 1,600 metres. In this part of the world I was yet to experience such persistence of rain at this elevation in May. The new warmth caused us trouble in the days to follow. Initially, we all enjoyed a day of reading and snoozing. The following day we were able to move and continued descending the glacier to the west, entering Alaska. We camped a few kilometres across the border next to a small melt pond on the glacier surface. While we cooked dinner, the strong rain returned, accompanied by the sound of small and large sloughs cascading down nearby cliffs from the snow slopes above.

By morning, our pond had grown considerably. The rain continued until after lunch when we broke camp and attempted to move. We were at the crux point of the traverse, which involved a steep and committing climb from the north side of the Sawyer Glacier from the bowl (57.971064º N, 133.088551º E) up to the col above at 1,800 metres (58.010462º N, 133.095675º E). I believe this was the route taken by Guy Edwards and party in 2001 on their traverse of the entire Coast Mountains (see *CAJ* 2002, pp. 6-12). Under typical spring conditions, with a good solid overnight freeze, this would not have been a problem. However, over the next seven days the overnight freeze-up upon which we depended did not arrive until our 15th and last night out. With the warmth, ceaseless avalanches swept down into the approach bowl and over the very slopes that we needed to ascend.

During this time, we attempted to descend Sawyer Glacier to the west to the point where we would be able to turn north once again. But this route, as expected, would have forced us to descend into ice chaos and we abandoned the idea. We decided to go east back up to the border and descend to Whiting Lake

with the idea of following a low valley route that could eventually lead back to where we wanted to be. Although it was glorious to be down off the ice among the colourful and spongy moss and willows (57.997456º N, 132.914314º E), the terminal lake that had formed, that is not shown on the map, made getting off the glacier to the northwest impossible. This forced us to descend off the ice to the east, leaving us with the dilemma of a river crossing. With the rain and temperature well above freezing, the river was in full flood. We spent many cold, wet hours searching for a safe place to ford to the northwestern shore, but to no avail. We spent a portion of the next day returning up the Sawyer Glacier to the bowl to wait and see if we might still get the freeze required to attempt the high route.

After two additional days of waiting, time was running out and a storm seemed to be approaching fast. Again, we descended the Whiting Glacier to the alluvial flats for our helicopter pickup. Unfortunately, immigration and border issues and the approaching storm meant we had to spend three nights hunkered down a little below the toe of the Whiting Glacier. The irony is on the morning of our pickup, the 16th day of our trip, everything was frozen solid. The creek and river levels had fallen to relative trickles. I was certain our proposed high route would have been safe and perfectly manageable. Alas, this route was not to be this year.

**Summary**

Peak 2496m via southern slopes and upper east ridge, Stikine Icecap. FRA: Peter Celliers, Javier Garcia Fernandez, Denise Hart, David E. Williams, May 6, 2013.

Peak 2326m via east ridge, Stikine Icecap. FRA: David E. Williams, May 9, 2013.

Peak 2240m via south-southwest ridge, Stikine Icecap. FRA: Peter Celliers, Javier Garcia Fernandez, Denise Hart, David E. Williams, May 10, 2013.

Javier Garcia Fernandez skiing towards the north face of Mount Chutine, which is most likely still unclimbed. Photo: David Williams

# Snowcap Peak

## Conny Amelunxen

TENNESSEE PASSED BY MY PLACE at about 5 a.m. We didn't want to leave earlier because we needed daylight to cross the river. We had talked about getting on some ice for a while. By chance, everything lined up so that the snow was stable, roads were open and the cold spell was coming to an end. We were both really excited to try this new route.

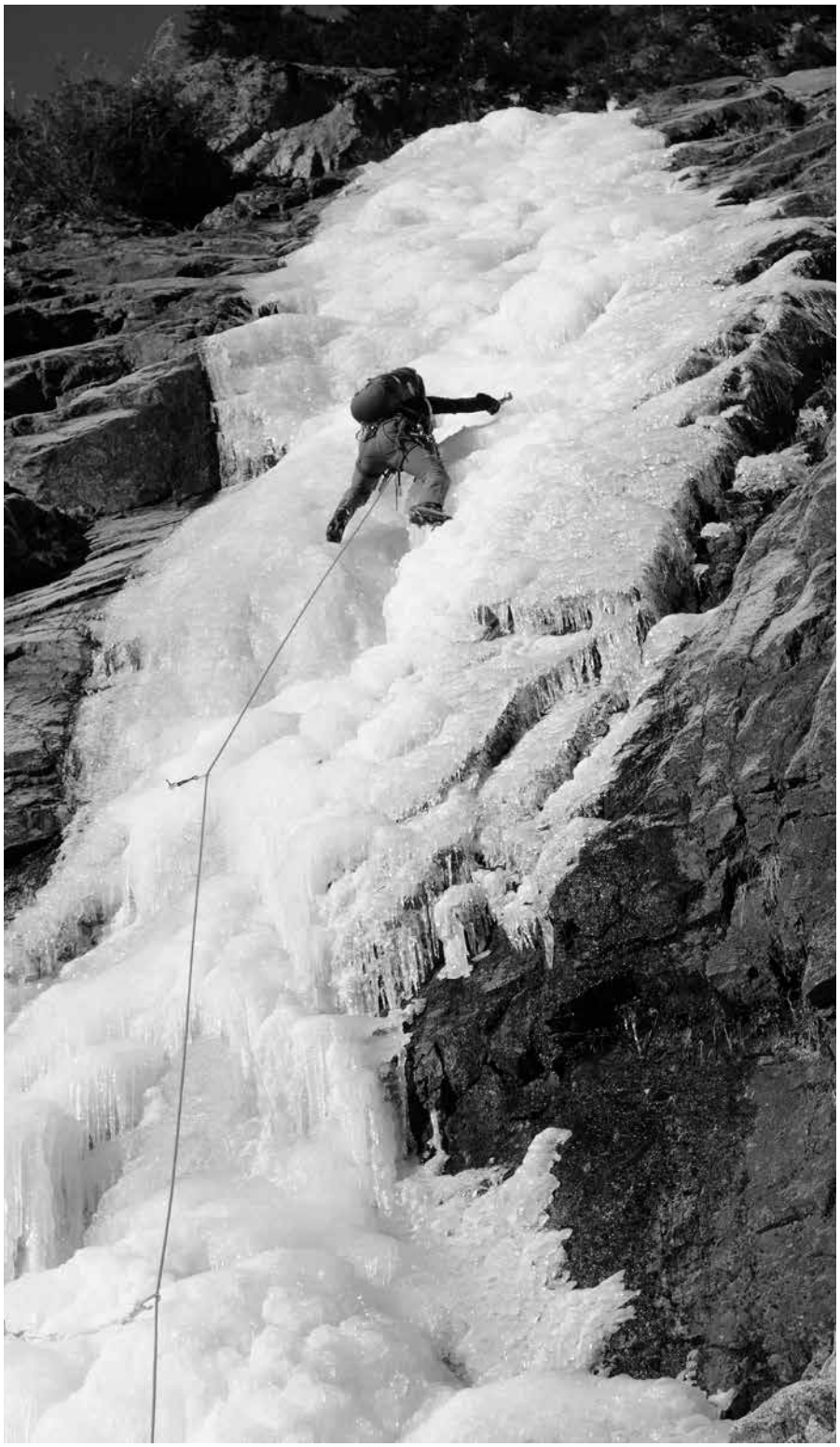
I had always wondered about the climbs on the west side of the Squamish River. I had seen many of them from regular fixed-wing flights I do for work, but had never been able to get across the river due to road conditions, ice on the river or weather.

Finally, after what was one of the longest winter droughts in recent history, the roads were clear and the temperatures were icy to valley bottom. Everything lined up, other than the fact that neither of us had climbed any ice for a couple of years. Tenn simply hadn't gotten around to it, and my shoulder had just recovered enough to test it on something moderate.

As it goes, we underestimated the approach and spent three hours getting to and across the river. From the riverbank up to the climb was very straightforward, and by 10 a.m. Tenn was in the middle of the first pitch.

It didn't feel like a lot of climbing, but by 4:30 p.m. we had pitched out four to five rope lengths and had not stopped moving. We climbed together over many steps of WI2-3, but roped up where the ice steepened, and where we were forced onto rock or near-vertical turf. We were wiped when we pulled out of the gully onto a wooded shoulder.

We quickly had a pot of snow melting and a fire going, and then built a windbreak out of wood that had been brought down by previous avalanches. Despite 800 metres of climbing, we were still in the trees. The night didn't last nearly long enough, and the next morning we were on our first roped pitch at the hint of daylight.



Tennesse Trent on the first roped ice pitch of the East Face route on Snowcap Peak.
Photo: Conny Amelunxen

After climbing a lot of rambly terrain and another three roped pitches, we topped out just before noon. We had never planned to go to the summit of the peak because it was miles away, but now it was even less appealing as we looked down at the 1,600-metre mostly technical descent.

A steep slope to the south of the route allowed us to walk most of the way to our camp, where we had left all our excess gear. The bulk of the rappels started once we were below camp. Moats between avalanche debris and the ice forced us to be very cautious pulling ropes and to make several shorter rappels. By the time we reached the bottom of the climb it was nearly dark and we had built more than a dozen V-threads and a number of rock and snow anchors.

Neither of us felt safe until we had completed the ferry across the Squamish River, which was pretty exciting by moonlight. It was after that when the real work began. It took us nearly two hours to get back to the car—only a kilometre and a half away. The canoe had nearly doubled in weight as the water froze to the hull, and all the gear made for two loads. We made it to the Shady Tree with a half hour to spare before the kitchen closed.

After a long discussion at the pub, we were never able to piece together how many pitches we actually belayed on or how many rappels we did, but looking at maps we are pretty certain we had our harnesses on for 1,300 to 1,400 vertical metres.

With all new climbing endeavours on the Coast, there is a degree of shrubbery, but you know it has been a good adventure when you are plowing through bush wearing a pack full of rock and ice gear while carrying a hundred pounds of verglassed canoe on your shoulders.

**Summary**

East Face (M4 WI4, 1300m), Snowcap Peak, Coast Mountains. FA: Conny Amelunxen, Tennessee Trent, February 8-9, 2014.

Conny Amelunxen on the third roped pitch (crux) of the East Face route on Snowcap Peak. Photo: Tennesse Trent

# The Interior

## The Plan

### Jason Ammerlaan

I HAVE NEVER BEEN particularly calculated in my choice of climbing venues or ascent styles. For the most part, I have had a passive attitude regarding objectives, and have simply tried to line up trips that sound interesting with good buddies who push me slightly out of my comfort zone. However, something seems to shift, ever so slightly, once the word "first" enters into the trip planning.

This summer was the second year that Tony McLane and I paired up to head into the Bugaboos. Our climbing ambitions had been growing steadily through the spring and into the summer. We were motivated to test our skills in a larger arena. Looking for long, committing free routes, we naturally gravitated towards the west face of the North Howser Tower. Tony had been up in that zone a few times before, and I was itching. He had climbed three routes on the North Howser previous to our trip, including a solo trip up Shooting Gallery and onto the Southwest Face route. Since then, he went on to solo the Nose-in-a-Day on El Capitan in Yosemite in the fall of 2012, and following our trip last summer, he returned to the North Howser for a 15.5 hour solo ascent of All Along the Watchtower. The latter was a proud endeavour, indeed.

Since Tony had already climbed the classic All Along the Watchtower, we began to look for other free-climbing objectives on the face. We quickly set our eyes on a route that Joshua Lavigne and Jon Walsh had freed the previous summer: Spicy Red Beans and Rice (V 5.12-). Originally climbed by Cameron Tague and Eric Greene in 1997, the route has surprisingly remained off the radar until recently. This route has now been articled in the previous two *Canadian Alpine Journals* (*CAJ* 2012, vol.95, p.99 and *CAJ* 2013, vol. 96, p.89). So far the consensus is that the route is quality. There is no doubt that, as conversation spreads, this aspect of the North Howser will begin to see more activity than its neighbouring All along the Watchtower. However, last summer the route was still awaiting an all-free one-day ascent. This became our goal. Although we were heading to climb something that has been done before, we upped the ante by throwing in the possibility of our own *first*.

After we had decided on our objective, I began to spray. As soon as there is mention that one is planning a trip into the Bugs, or anywhere into the alpine for that matter, a conversation quickly opens up: So what are you planning to climb?

Once the question is asked, the onslaught begins. "Well, I've got a couple routes in mind," I'd say.

"Really, like what?" a curious friend might ask.

"The west face of the North Howser," I'd mumble.

Then, if by chance my audience knows the face, they may respond, "Oh, are you going to try All Along the Watchtower?"

Then I'd look them in the eyes, and in a hush-hush, secretive way, I'd say, "No, Spicy Red Beans," as if this news might take them by surprise. Of course, it didn't. Most haven't even heard of the route before, and so I talk it up as being a 5.12 alpine route on one of the most remote walls in the Bugs. Although there is some truth to that, it's a far cry from reality.

Often when people are trying to quit smoking they strategically tell others about their plan. This gives them some social responsibility. They are making that plan bigger to include more people than just themselves—if they fail, they are failing to fulfill the social responsibility that they created. I began to do the same. Telling everyone about my plans to climb one of the longest and most difficult all-free routes in the Bugs built the same social responsibility that the smoker is looking for. And just like the smoker who tells everyone that they've quit while they occasionally sneak away for just one cigarette, I became a liar.

This year we decided to travel from Squamish in Tony's jalopy, a 25-plus-year-old Toyota Cressida. It has slightly more clearance than my car. Last year, my low-riding Jetta took a few hits. It lost a couple of parts and some oil on the route in. Unfortunately, the jalopy had no muffler, and the sound system consisted of a rechargeable speaker the size of a golf ball that had lost its charge. A common misconception about alpine climbers is that they enjoy a bit of suffering while climbing. I guess that Tony brings this suffer-fest on the road with him wherever he travels because my head was pounding by the time we made it to Golden.

I have learned a lot from Tony throughout our friendship. Unlike myself, he has found a way to be at peace with his climbing passion. In fact, he seems to have found peace

Jason Ammerlaan on the Catalonian Route. Photo: Tony McLane

and understanding in what so many people pass by—living in the moment. I always have a plan it seems. I often talk about my plan for new jobs, adventures, experiences and whatever else people can envision coming towards them. I once asked Tony what his plan was for the next couple of years. He simply replied, "Well, what I'm doing right now seems to be working pretty well. I guess that I'll just keep on doing that." Such a simple answer for such a complex question. Happiness, for Tony, is in the present and is not something that he is waiting for through the unraveling of a plan.

We spent our first day walking to the Pigeon-Howser bivy for an attempt on the South Howser's Catalonian Route the next day. We dropped a cache at Applebee and walked the rest of the way with light packs and minimal bivy gear. This was to be our warm-up route for the trip. Before leaving, we tried to get some information about this line. Everything that we found was vague, but we soon learned that a friend had climbed the route a couple of years back. It turns out that she had climbed to one of the last pitches on the wall and had to retreat back down the entirety of the face. This seemed a little odd, but it didn't faze our decision to go and give it a try.

We were awoken early to the cling-clang of climbers approaching the Becky-Chouinard route on the South Howser, but the cold weather and heavy winds kept us from emerging from our bivy for another hour or so. The snow was firm on the approach and we had to chop steps for our running shoes to make it to the base of the wall. We began 4th-classing up the initial few pitches to where the climbing became more difficult. Although the description seemed straightforward, we really didn't feel like the route was obvious. We had to do a little back and forth to set things right near the start, and throughout the route we were constantly confronted by choices. Nonetheless, things went relatively smoothly until we were well into the upper reaches of the headwall. Then all of a sudden the gears broke and the machine halted to a stop. We had several options for upward progression, and none of them seemed to be the way. After giving it a solid hour of my juice with no free-climbing success, I was physically and emotionally spent. I turned the lead over to Tony. He had a crack at a few of the options and eventually came back down to the belay. We finally understood why our friend had rapped the length of the face only a few pitches from the top. Fortunately, Tony is a mental warrior. Understanding that it was either up one of these cracks or back down the whole route, he took control of the situation and went up. After a fine display of stout Peter Croft all-points stemming in a thin RP corner, Tony eventually had to aid about four metres. However, those four metres left him with a nest of RPs below and a solid six-metre run-out of stout 5.11 climbing. As I said, he is a warrior. Two more long and interesting pitches of 5.11 brought us to the summit scramble and the familiar descent down the bolted rappel route. We were ecstatic. We rode our high all the way back to Applebee, where the rest of our comforts waited for us.

The next day we socialized underneath a bivy boulder in Applebee as the sky opened to rain. It's amazing how you can feel so far out there one moment—vulnerable to and uncomfortable with what is happening around you—and then the next moment be swarming with comforts and buzzing with ego-blasting bravado. Exchanging stories around camp always led to the inevitable question of what one's plans are for their time in the Bugs. Again, I would act coy, pretending to be modest about our objective, even though it was more committing than any other route I had previously attempted.

Our time had come to take action on our planned ascent. Strangely, I was much more nervous for the approach than I was for the actual climbing. I feared having to chop steps for ages up a steep snow slope in slippery Five Tennies. We had been enjoying soft snow conditions so far during our trip, and so we left our boots, crampons and all but one axe behind. We spared all extra gear and brought only what was necessary for the day.

Thankfully the snow conditions were perfect. The approach went well as we easily kicked our way up to the gaping bergshrund. Tony had the first block; I lowered him down into the 'shrund so that he could reach the corner to begin the climb. The first pitch was tough. It was a hard 5.10+ corner with varied pro and made for a real start to the day. Tony made it up smoothly and I quickly followed with a simul-belay from an auto-blocking device called a duck. We ascended the first 400 metres of the face by using this simul-climbing technique whereby the leader would climb the first 50 to 60 metres, and then would find an anchor and attach the duck. "We got a duck on!" the leader would shout down to the second. After the duck was attached we would continue on for another rope length until the leader found a good belay.

We quickly made it to the bivy ledge for a long break to drink and rest. The weather was stable, and the wall was starting to warm up and become quite comfortable. Conditions were good. It was Tony's lead, and he took off heading up a steep groove and into the main face of the headwall. The next pitch was where the business of the route began. The route follows a crack through a small roof, and then gets really thin. Although it was originally given a grade of 5.11+R, this pitch has had a pin placed in a lovely spot, which definitely softens the R-factor of the grade. The next 5.11 pitch follows a steep sustained hand-fist splitter in a fine position to a small ledge. From there, the next pitch follows a series of difficult cracks up and left to join The Warrior. The crux came in transitioning from one crack into another and another, until I had gone too far. With ever-worsening gear and rock quality around me, I began to get nervous. After an eternity of shaking out and testing footholds on what seemed like the way, I got frightened and downclimbed to my last good piece of gear. I hung. I hung and there was no bloody way I was going back to the belay to pull the rope for the free ascent. Everything that I had talked about prior

to this trip had involved me sending the route and not hanging on the rope. At this point, I didn't care anymore; in fact, my single A0 rest hadn't even crossed my mind until I was safely back in camp the next day. I had fought hard to make it to where I was on that pitch, but the route was far from over. Looking above, there was a blank-looking section before I could follow features back into the Warrior corner. I spent some time on the rope contemplating exactly where I was situated. I thought about commitment, and about how Tony had taken us to the top of the South Howser with his bold lead just a few days earlier. His motivation now seemed crystal clear to me.

Often the excitement of what lies around the corner of our experience and abilities draws us in. I felt this excitement as soon as I pulled back onto the rock. Finishing the pitch felt like going home, like being free, like walking on the moon. Tony followed to the belay and we exchanged big hugs of excitement and continued up the wall. Finally, we made it to the final 5.12 pitch of the route—the only pitch that was not freed on the original ascent by Tague and Greene in 1997. Tony took off up the right-facing corner. I wasn't sure exactly what was motivating him to move so fast at the time because I was gassed and had a hard time keeping an attentive belay at that point in the day. He moved well and sent the final crux of the wall in good style. As I scrambled over the final lip onto the summit shoulder, Tony looked down at me and screamed. Looking up, and then ahead, I screamed back even louder. I was inches away from Tony's steaming pile of... well, you know. I quickly understood his sudden motivation to reach the summit. With the poo-taster narrowly avoided, we continued to the summit and made our way back into camp after being away for 18 hours.

We spent the next day nursing our alpine hangover and contemplating the next route on our list— Wildfire on Wide Awake Tower. After a day of rest, we put our aches aside and climbed the route. It was steep, burly climbing, and to our

Tony McLane on the headwall of Spicy Red Beans and Rice. Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

disappointment, we didn't send every pitch. At one point I was afraid of crushing Tony with a massive loose flake, and at another point some sloppy footwork led me to drop a small loose flake onto him. Fortunately, he wasn't crushed, but our ropes were. We made it to the top after 10 pitches of quality climbing, and enjoyed a brief but welcome lie-down on the summit. All the way back to camp we talked about new lines we could come back and climb the following year. East Creek is full of potential firsts that are waiting to be snatched, each one a new adventure to unfold.

We left East Creek Basin the next morning and casually strolled back to Tony's jalopy. We spent the next day bathing in the Kicking Horse and lounging around Golden. Finally, we were back in the valley where we could reflect on what we had done instead of being enticed by the peaks around us and thinking about what to do next. Had we failed on achieving our objectives in the Bugs? We didn't free all of the Catalonian Route, and we were one hang shy of our proposed first on Spicy Red Beans. Now came the time to check in with our *compadres* at home and share the news of our trip. How were we going to tell our story? Did we overcome adversity to push ourselves to a new threshold of climbing, or did we succumb to the hardship and take the easier route off a few mountains?

These questions likely stir the minds of many alpinists upon return to regular life. And as alpinism evolves to focus more on the style of ascent rather than simply reaching the top, the line between success and failure often rests in the details. The details, however, are only revealed through the integrity of the climber. Who is to say that the leader didn't pull on a few pieces? How about the subtle differences between jumaring as a second or following every pitch clean? These are small differences on paper but, in reality, can change the outcome of a climb.

So did we fail on Spicy Red Beans? Failure in climbing is rarely such. Often the humble lessons learned form the true backbone of what it means to be a climber. In this case, I would rather tell the story about how I hung on a pitch of climbing when I was too scared to continue rather than talk about how I was rescued because I broke both my legs on the North Howser. The details of our ascent are bound to memory and may evolve through storytelling, but these details do not dictate success. What made this trip a success is that a couple of good friends took to the hills to push themselves a little out of their comfort zone. In doing so, they lived in the moment and found great reward in the entire process of planning, executing and reflecting. What made this trip a failure rests in the minds of those who value details over experience. The line between the two is subtle. It's all in what you make it.

**Summary**

Catalonian Route (ED1 5.11 C2, 600m), South Howser Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. Jason Ammerlaan, Tony McLane, July 12, 2012.

Spicy Red Beans and Rice (ED2 5.12- A0, 1000m), North Howser Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. Jason Ammerlaan, Tony McLane, July 15, 2012.

Wildfire (D+ 5.11 C1, 350m, 10 pitches), Wide Awake Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. Jason Ammerlaan, Tony McLane, July 17, 2012.

# Hall Peak

## Ryan Leary

IN AUGUST 2013, Evan Reimondo and I spent seven days in the remote Leaning Towers group of the southern Purcells. Over the course of the trip, Evan and I climbed Hall Peak twice, once by a new route on its east face

The idea for this trip was conceived while looking through aerial photos of the Purcell Mountains taken by legendary mountain photographer John Scurlock. His comment that the towers were seldom visited and the near absence of any Internet information on the area convinced us that the Leaning Towers would provide a spectacular setting for attempting new routes. Despite being solid climbers, neither Evan nor I had ever attempted a previously unclimbed route. This, in addition to the remoteness of the area and the high potential for bear encounters, added a strong sense of apprehension to our normal excitement leading up to a climbing trip.

En route to the trailhead, we were disappointed to discover that the road had been washed out some distance from where we had hoped to start. Not sure how far away from the trailhead we were (we later estimated it to be 14.5 kilometres), we shouldered heavy packs and started walking up the road. We camped that night at the normal trailhead, and then spent the next day hiking to the saddle above a backcountry campsite in Dewar Creek. The third day, we traversed around the head of the cirque bounded by Mount Twomey, Bivouac Tower, Shark's Head Peak and Hall Peak, and finally set up a basecamp beneath Hall Peak's east face.

We had identified several potential routes on Hall Peak and Wall Tower from John Scurlock's photos, and we had planned on spending several days scouting before attempting a new route. To scout the descent from Hall Peak and examine Wall Tower, we climbed the central north face of Hall Peak and descended its north ridge.

Because the road washout had

extended our approach, and because we had inexplicably packed meals for only seven days, not eight, as intended, we calculated that we would have only one day to attempt a new route. With this in mind, we settled on Hall Peak's east face since it was the most straightforward of the lines we had examined. The next day, we left camp early and started up a new route on the east face.

The route began with a dirty and rather improbable-looking chimney (5.7), which provided access to several pitches of low-5th-class climbing across a large bowl. In early season photos, this is all snow covered, and the route would be several pitches shorter under these conditions. Above this, four to five pitches of fun, well-protected climbing in an arching corner system (5.7 to 5.9 and A1) gained the base of the upper ramp. Lichen- and dirt-filled cracks caused us to aid two short portions of this, but these sections would likely go free at 5.9 with a little cleaning. This section of the route was the steepest, and we anticipated that the climbing above it would be easy since the ramp holds snow in early season. However, three pitches of slab climbing (5.7 to 5.9) along the left side of the ramp proved to be thin and sparsely protected in places—a notable departure from the 4th-class ground we had expected. Above the ramp, two long pitches of easy climbing (5.4 to 5.6) along Hall Peak's east buttress gained the summit ridge. We reached this point just in time to see a beautiful sunset, and a nearly full moon rose a few minutes later. We opted to descend without going to the summit since we had been there the day before, and it was getting dark.

The following morning, we packed up camp and began our two-day hike back to the car. During the trip out we encountered the first people we had seen in six days.

Our route on Hall Peak was the second documented ascent of its east face. There is spectacular potential for new routes on Hall Peak and on the surrounding peaks. This trip was the first Canadian backcountry climbing Evan or I had done, and although this will sound naive to the seasoned Canadian alpinist, we were blown away by the volume and quality of the climbing, and by the area's beauty and remoteness. Special thanks to the American Alpine Club's Mountaineering Fellowship Grant for helping make this trip possible.

### Summary

North Face (II 5.6), Hall Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. Ryan Leary, Evan Reimondo, August 20, 2013.

Upper Ramp (IV 5.9 A1, 500m), east face, Hall Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Ryan Leary, Evan Reimondo, August 21, 2013.

The east face of Hall Peak from the saddle above Dewar Creek: (1) 1975 route, (2) Upper Ramp. Photo: Ryan Leary

# Wile Flowers

Quinn Brett

**WILE:** DEVIOUS OR CUNNING stratagems employed in manipulating or persuading someone to do what one wants.

To an outside observer, it would seem that Chris Brazeau was using powers of persuasion in lining up our rock-climbing adventure for the day. The truth is, both of us were equally intrigued by the prospect of a new line. One should blame the events of my first day in the Bugaboos on the cosmic forces of the gleaming granite and a bluebird August day; not on the wily Canadian. From below, it was obvious that a prominent, unclimbed dihedral system sliced the west face of Snowpatch Spire just to the left of the Great Chimney.

Chris has scrubbed this plutonic mecca for a decade, establishing many new lines and freeing old aid routes. He was certain this system had never been climbed. Up, up, and away!

We blasted off from the snow onto a glorious grey granite finger splitter. This entry pitch was not new, having been established by Topher Donahue and Patience Gribble (Tower Arête, 5.11). The crack provided spicy gear and tenuous feet. The next pitch approached the dihedral via wandering through ledges, blocks and flowers (5.8). I stopped 50 metres up, beneath the gleaming right-facing corner, the bait that had lured us here. Slammed shut. I might have sworn. I might have giggled. Just another one of the many cracks and dihedral systems that look like they will provide when viewed through my wily camera's zoom. I waited for Chris to arrive, handed him the rack and gave him a pat on the back with an "I think it will go."

Or maybe I said, "I think it will go?"

He headed up for a closer look. No good. Not wanting to spoil the fun or momentum, we started looking around. Chris headed right, from below the blank corner, reaching an overlap with some flakey holds on a pillar. It looked spicy but provided the just good-enough edge or two, finishing with a granite hueco. I led the next pitch, gardening my way up a beautiful left-facing, widening hand crack that paralleled the dihedral system. Chris took the next wide hands and fists splitter, a burly and radical pitch with a thoughtful finish stepping left. This landed us back into the dihedral system to our left. The final pitch was mine, and I must admit I wanted out. I headed up a short ways, but the flaring crack was too intimidating, so I veered sharp right, foot traversing up a sketchy layback flake. With ridiculous rope drag, I stepped onto moderate terrain above the flake, taking the route to the summit ridge. A short scramble to the top, I was dancing on my first summit in the Bugaboos—a fun adventure. It was a wily climb but not a wild climb. Not at all what we expected but exactly what we were looking for.

**Summary**

Wile Flowers (IV 5.12), west face, Snowpatch Spire, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Chris Brazeau, Quinn Brett, July 30, 2013.

Wile Flowers on the west face of Snowpatch Spire. Photo: Quinn Brett

# The Dark Prince

Chris Brazeau

IT WAS THE SUMMER of 2008 when Paul McSorley casually mentioned a line he scoped on the north face of Snowpatch. Being a short stroll from Applebee campground, I was easily convinced to have a closer look. It was a good effort that first day, and with much tomfoolery we made it to the top of the crux pitch. With two pitches and plenty of light left, it seemed fitting to top out. However, there were some friends back in camp, and it was happy hour—so down we went.

Five years later, those last two pitches were finally climbed, the route scrubbed and the crux sent. I returned a couple of more times after the first free ascent to hand drill a few protection bolts and another anchor. It was a group effort over the years and many different partners brought this line to fruition. Thanks to all, and especially Lisa Jenni, who endured long belay sessions, sketchy trundling, dirt-filled cracks, cursing, whining and lame excuses.

**Summary**

The Dark Prince (5.12-), north face, Snowpatch Spire, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Chris Brazeau, Jon Simms, July 20, 2013.

Gear: Double set of cams from purple TCU to #3 Camalot with triples from purple TCU to #0.4 Camalot would be useful for the crux pitch, set of nuts, 12 quickdraws.

P1: 5.9, 30m. About 40 metres to right of Sunshine start, go up flakes trending right to left-facing corner.

P2: 5.10+, 60m. Go up the corner for a couple of metres then move left on some nice edges for your hands. Once your feet are on these edges, runout 5.7 climbing leads to a small overlap and a right-facing corner. Follow this up to big roof and a two-bolt anchor.

P3: 5.11, 40m. Hard moves off belay to a tough-to-clip bolt. One more bolt gets you through the roof, and up and over another small roof. Then trend right to the second of two big corners to a good stance and gear belay. The left corner is Hell or Highwater (Langsford, Moorhead).

P4: 5.11, 45m. Steep hands lead to the corner. Follow this as it curves right to a small stance and two-bolt anchor.

P5: 5.10+, 40m. Continue up the arching corner and over a small roof. Easier ground leads to a comfy ledge (gear anchor) and two amazing splitters. The crux pitch of this route starts on the right side of ledge.

P6: 5.12-, 60m. The Dark Prince. Thin climbing with good gear at the crux.

P7: 5.11-, 20m. Step down and hand traverse right past a bolt then up a nice fingers-to-hand crack to another big ledge.

P8: 5.11-, 60m. Climb the arching finger crack to finish.

Descent: Downclimb the ridge for 20 metres to the top of Sunshine and rap that route.

Chris Brazeau on the crux (pitch six) of The Dark Prince. Photo: Jon Simms

# Dreams of the Watchtower

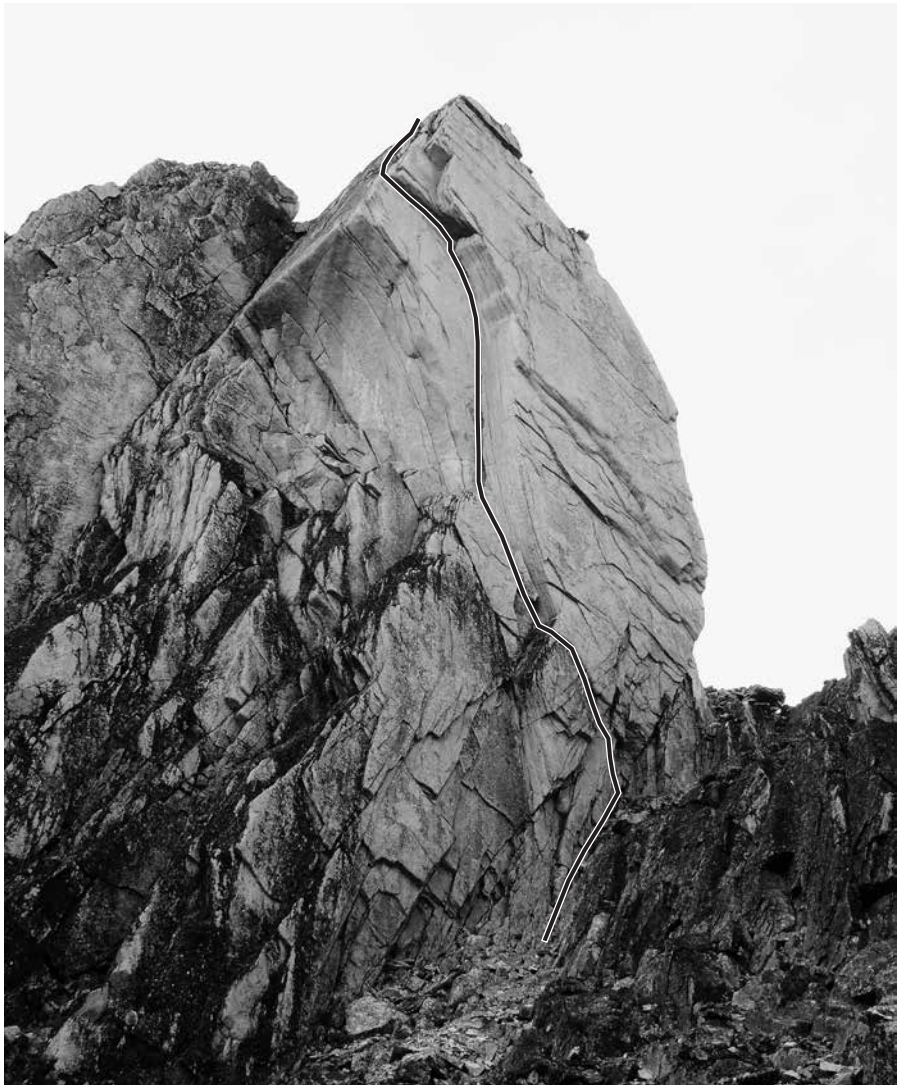
Mark Carlson

THE BUGABOOS HAVE SHAPED me more as a climber than has any other place. For two years, Beckey Chouinard's name was the battle cry Tyler Kirkland and I used to make each other train harder. Whether it was running endless laps in the gym in the winter, getting psyched for a long route or just shouting for joy, we always had the Bugaboos in mind. Our training paid off, and we were left with the question of what next.

I suppose that All Along the Watchtower is not really the next step up from the Becky-Chouinard, but it is a tantalizing prospect. Another long route with new types of challenges, it looked to provide quite the adventure. Of course, it didn't take too long for us to realize it was out of our league, but these sorts of ideas tend to linger in the mind. We would have to find something different this year.

Instead of long classics, we found ourselves climbing some of the easier, shorter and less-travelled routes in the Bugaboos. Westside Story, Wildflowers, and Lions and Tigers all provided memorable adventures. After getting shut down by snow leading up to Lightning Bolt Crack, we discussed the North Crescent Tower. It had been imprinted in my mind after we climbed Lion's Way on our first trip in the Bugaboos three years prior. From the Central Crescent Tower, it looks rather imposing; a skinny, steep tower of granite with not much by way of cracks or holds. Surely we would find something there. Perhaps practice for the North Howser.

Dreams of the Watchtower on North Crescent Tower. Photo: Mark Carlson



After climbing Lions and Tigers, we spent quite a bit of time studying the North Crescent Tower from every angle. On the descent, it appeared that the most dramatic line—the arched, roof-capped corner—could be protected straight from ground to summit. Neither of us needed much convincing, but we did need more gear, and our weekend was over, so we headed back to Calgary.

The next weekend, long after midnight and with heavy bags and high spirits, we made it back to Applebee. Poor weather facilitated the luxury of sleeping in and enjoying several rounds of espresso. After slowly organizing the largest rack either of us had ever climbed with, we were out of camp by early afternoon. With rain clouds present most of the day, we built a tarp shelter and scoped out the first pitch.

Two cracks converge below the main corner, with the left-hand line being more direct and the right-hand line providing a more sheltered belay. A few metres in, Tyler broke out the adventure brush, and it was employed regularly throughout the route. While the climbing up to the first ledge was not terribly difficult, several loose blocks up to torso size came off while we were cleaning, and I gained a new appreciation for well-manicured routes.

Standing below the thin corner crack of the second pitch, I noticed that we had grabbed the wrong pitons from the car. Alternating my glances between the carabiner of stubby fat pitons and a

knifeblade crack, I heard a shout from below, "Are you guys done throwing stuff down?" A party was descending from the Central Tower.

"Yeah," we replied, "Do you have any knifeblades?"

They didn't, of course, but it was worth a shot. I headed up the second pitch. Everything that looked like a hold crumbled with the lightest touch, leaving smooth, undulating granite in its place. I had never aid climbed before, but this seemed like as good of a time as any to learn.

From the top of a large flake, I analyzed the situation. The crack was roughly knifeblade-sized and parallel for as far as I could reach. Lacking creativity, and not wanting to risk a ledge fall, I cowardly hammered in a lost arrow and tied it off. A good small cam or nut should fit in the scar.

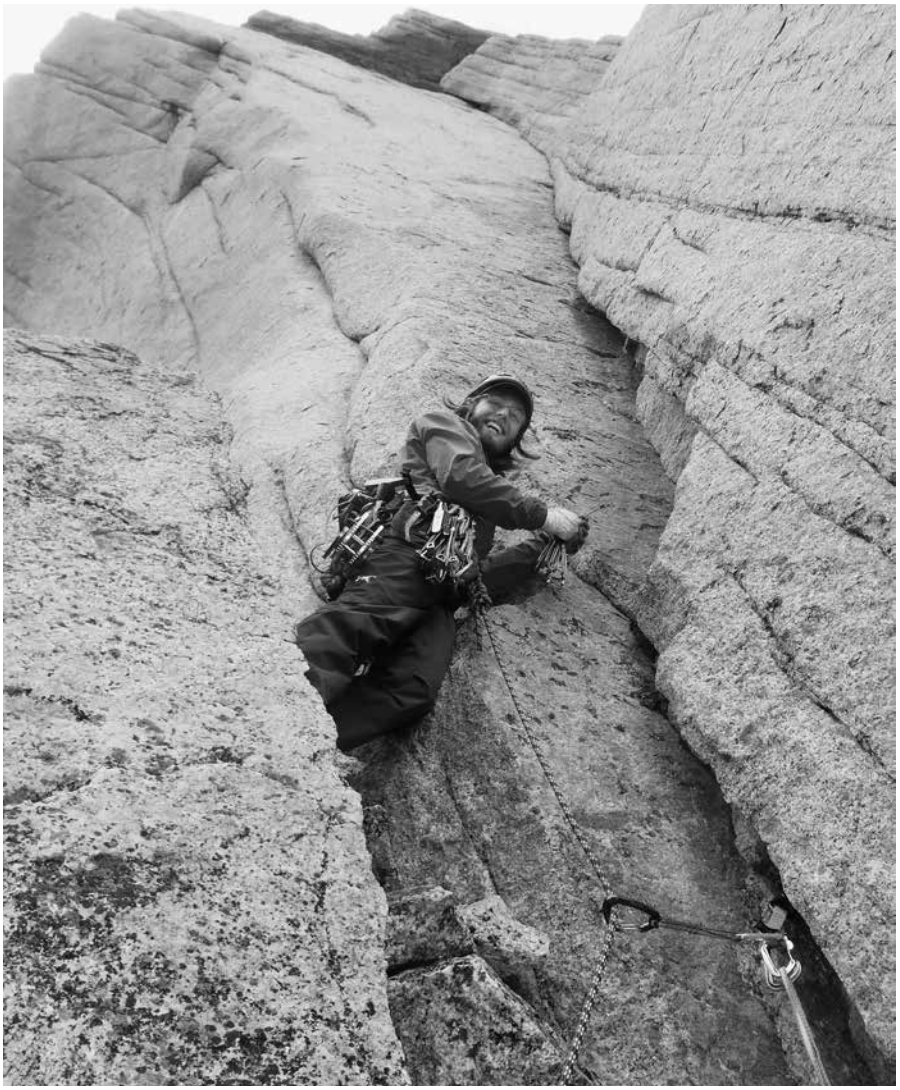
The rest of the corner was quite enjoyable. The crack opened up every two metres or so, usually providing great gear of varying sizes with marginal small protection in between. The hammer remained in its holster, and I did not regret leaving the knifeblades behind. Even the roof traverse proved to be less difficult than it appeared with shallow holes for small cams running its length.

At the end of the roof, I had to reach blindly around the edge and make an awkward but easy free move onto a tiny ledge and into unknown terrain. I was immediately surprised by two things: how blank it was in front of me; and how bad the weather had turned. I was able to place three shallow body-weight-only pieces before starting to rappel, soaking wet and shivering. We warmed up under the tarp before leaving the rope fixed and heading back to camp for the night.

The next day, we learned how to jug a rope by trial and error, and Tyler went up to put in a better belay anchor. An hour or so later, two new 3/8-inch bolts were in place. I brought the rest of the gear up, and Tyler took the lead for the final pitch.

The new bolts proved themselves worthwhile as the pitch started off with some A0 trickery followed by airy 5.9 campusing with no protection. A bit of zigzagging is necessary to stay on solid holds, but the line still ends up right at the summit block. It would be fun to rappel from the ring bolts on the top of pitch two, but we did not install any fixed gear on top. The ridge is a relatively easy downclimb and is the recommended descent.

It may be one of the shortest routes we have climbed in the Bugaboos, but it is an adventure I will not soon forget.



Mark Carlson on pitch two of Dreams of the Watchtower. Photo: Tyler Kirkland

### Summary

Dreams of the Watchtower (5.9 C2, 3 pitches), south face, North Crescent Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Mark Carlson, Tyler Kirkland, August 2013.

P1: 5.8, 20m. Make a short, cruxy move out of a right-facing corner into a left-trending crack. Continue up over blocks to a belay below the large corner.

P2: 5.8, C2, 20m. Aid the large, left-facing corner. The crack is primarily knifeblade-sized but opens up regularly. Follow the roof left to the arête. Soak in the exposure before making a committing free move to gain the bolt belay.

P3: 5.9, A0, 25m. Your choice of peculiar movement is followed by leftward campusing and a mantle to gain a small ledge. Start up the left corner and cut back to the right above the belay. Continue directly up to the summit block.

Descent: Downclimb the North Ridge.

# Steady as She Goes

Cam Shute

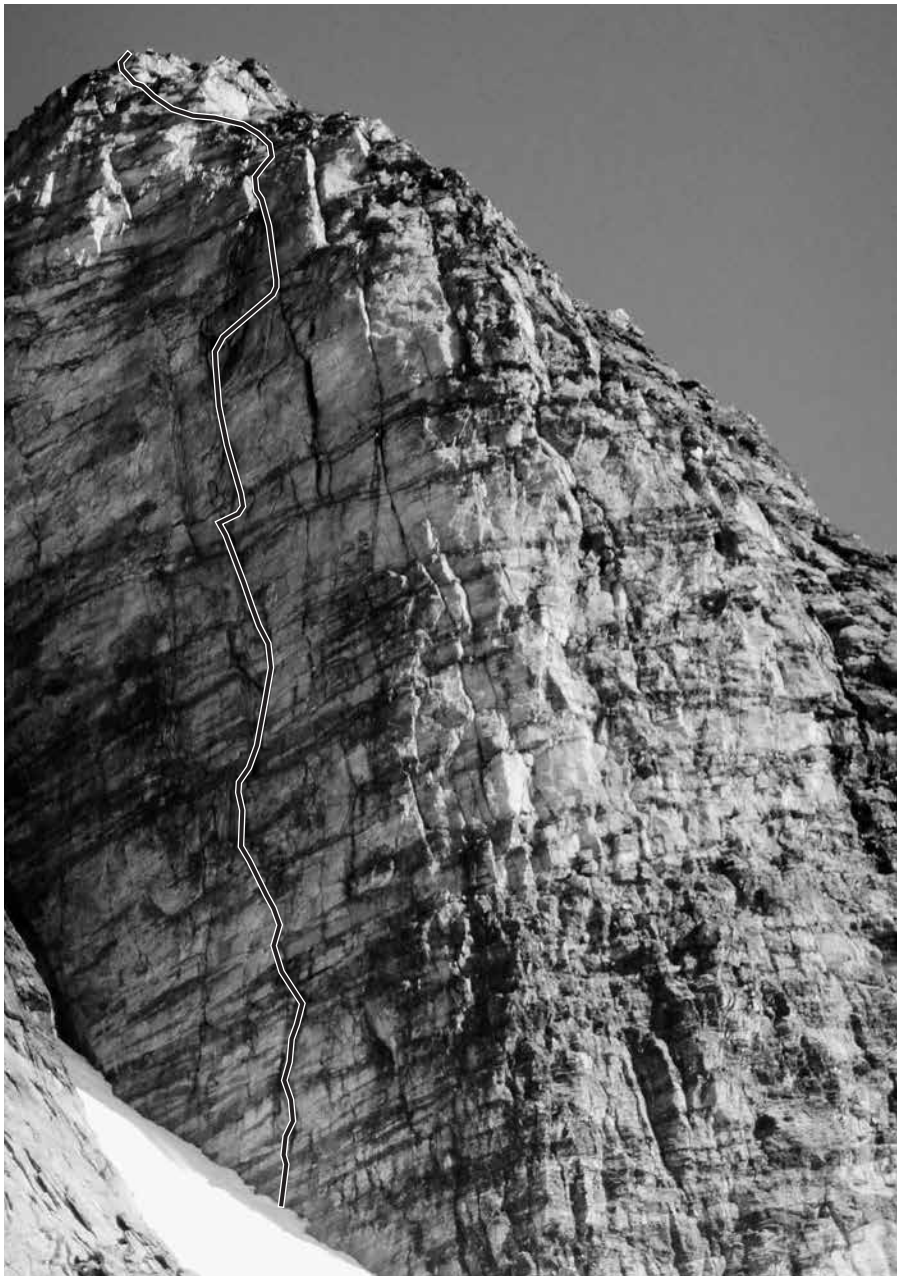
LAST SUMMER I ONLY MANAGED to alpine climb for three days in the Valhallas due to work and travel. Even so, JT Croston and I completed two new routes, each one climbed from the ground up in a single day. The first route was a Father's Day blitz after bivying in the Gimli parking lot. Rather than load up on carbs or get a good night sleep the night before our climb, we decided to drink a bottle of Sailor Jerry rum. Not the best call I've ever made, but we were still able to get up at 5 a.m., and in the process, wake up climbers camping at the so-called beach on the approach.

Our objective that day was a line we had eyed on the Little South Face of Mount Gimli, just left of David Lussier's project on the wall. There are a number of right-facing corner systems and face cracks that look fantastic. JT had been eyeing this zone for years, confident that a line would go. After rappelling down the face in May, I, too, was convinced. We got to the base of the gully by 8 a.m. after passing under the arching east face of Gimli, which didn't have a single route on it at the time. The approach gully for the Little South Face is threatened heavily by a cornice in spring and early summer, and by rockfall for the rest of the season. Definitely a heads-up place to be.

Once we started our second pitch, it became clear that the line we wanted to head for was sopping wet. The main corner system we were following seemed to connect for another couple of pitches, but it appeared to be capped by a massive roof that didn't look like it would go. Optimistically, we headed up and hoped for the best. The wall pretty much steepens and blanks out near pitch three. The climbing became a bit harder and the gear thinned out to the point where I felt that I was either going to drill a bolt or look for another way up. Just as I insecurely positioned myself to drill, I heard a huge boom. The cornice above the approach gully had calved and started a massive avalanche. Even with our bags securely clipped to the wall, the avalanche tore them off and spread our gear out across the lower fan of the snow slope. A bit rattled, I managed to drill a bolt, and then another a little higher up. I failed to send on the onsight attempt, so I lowered and JT fired the pitch. He took us up to just below the massive roof. Instead of getting shut down there as predicted, we saw what we dubbed the magic foot rail, a perfect mini foot ledge that allowed for a reasonably mellow traverse to another right-facing corner that took us to the top.

We named the route Sailor Jerry in

Sailor Jerry on the Little South Face of Mount Gimli. Photo: Cam Shute



homage to the previous night's libations. It is the first free route on the face, and it has everything that makes a route great—awesome rock, a direct line, quality moves and good protection. After we crossed under the east face for the second time that day, we planned to come back to have a crack at it later in the summer, if we could manage the time.

That time didn't come until late September when we hit a perfectly blue fall day to climb. The climbing on the first three pitches was excellent with white rock and great position. The fourth pitch had quite a bit of lichen and steep, hard climbing. Above that, we were forced to traverse to the right to top out. It's not the best route ever; however, pitch three is fantastic on good rock but tricky gear. This route is the first one established on the face, and we were stoked about getting it done in a single day without putting in a single bolt. We called it Rumble in the Jungle due to the weird stuff going on in JT's stomach and for the fight we had on pitch four with the lichen.

**Summary**

Sailor Jerry (5.10d, 5 pitches), Little South Face, Mt. Gimli, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: JT Croston, Cam Shute, June 16, 2013.

Rumble in the Jungle (5.10b/c, 5 pitches), east face, Mt. Gimli, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: JT Croston, Cam Shute, September 14, 2013.

Rumble in the Jungle on the east face of Mount Gimli. Photo: Cam Shute

# 2013 Scotch Peaks GMC

Alison Dakin

THE 2013 SCOTCH PEAKS GMC was located in the Purcell Mountains, west of Radium, at the northern toe of North Star Glacier. Bounded by the Scotch Peaks ridge to the west and the Welsh Peak ridge to the east, the camp sat at 2,320 metres beside the alluvial outflow of the receded glacier.

The GMC ran from June 29 to August 14. There were five full weeks of climbing, a week for camp set-up and four days for camp take-down. The North Face (TNF) course, run by Cyril Shokoples and Matt Reynolds, was held during week three and successfully trained another batch of keen volunteer leaders for the Alpine Club.

GMC climbers were fortunate to benefit from a predominantly dry weather pattern. This made both camping and climbing a fun and comfortable experience. The main concern was the risk of sunburn, dehydration, the odd thunderstorm and, of course, the unfortunate continued melt of both winter and firn snow on the glaciers. By week four, the crampons were out in full force, and watertight gators were a good idea for the emerging glacier swamps.

**2013 GMC Ascents**

| Objective | People |
|---|---|
| North Star Peak | 119 |
| Mount Alpha Centauri | 108 |
| Scotch Peak 3/4 | 102 |
| Gwendolyn Mountain | 115 |
| Black Fang | 98 |
| Mount Galloway | 36 |
| Mount Harmon | 38 |
| Carmarthen Peak | 64 |

Scotch Peaks GMC with North Star Peak in the background. Photo: Alison Dakin

# Awik Peak

Roger Wallis

THE NORTHWESTERN RIM of the Premier Range is formed by a 20-kilometre arc of mountains lying to the west of the Kiwa névé, glacier and valley. All the participants of the 2006 Centennial GMC in the Premiers had an armchair view of these mountains as they looked west across the Kiwa valley.

The peaks form a complex boundary wall running north from Mount Sir John Abbott (3,411 metres). Next lies the twin-summitted Mount Richard Bennett (south peak, 3,185 metres; north peak, 3,195 metres), first ascended on August 6, 1976, by Bob Kruszyna, Art Maki and Hamish Mutch. The second and only other ascent (I believe) and first traverse was made on August 17, 2004, by Paul Geddes, Willa Harasym, Bill McKenzie and me.

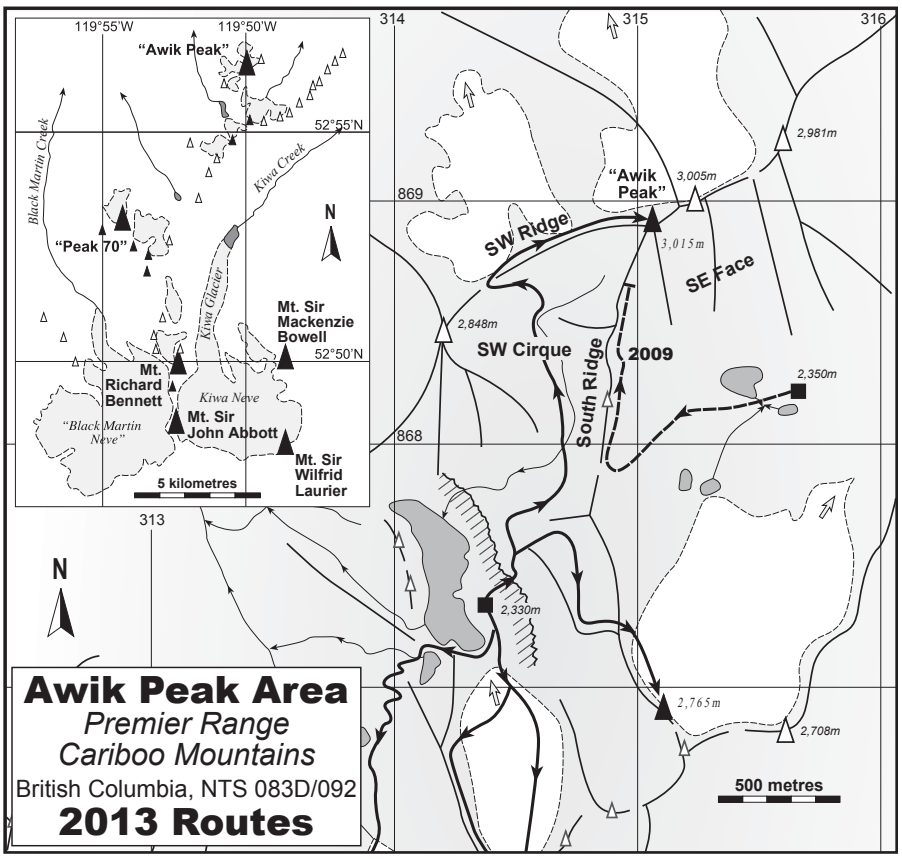
The col between Sir John Abbott and Richard Bennett was first crossed in 2006 by members of the Centennial GMC to reach the base of the west ridge of Mount Sir John Abbott, of which they made the first ascent.

Immediately north of Richard Bennett is an interlocking pattern of cirques and peaks, mainly draining west to Black Martin Creek. The only people known to have visited the central area of these peaks are the "Grizzly Group" in August 1991. They came to climb Peak 70 to celebrate Gordon Scrugg's 70th birthday by ascending the last 10,000-foot unclimbed peak in the Premiers (10,030 feet/3,060 metres). Grizzly Group members—Jim Fosti, Leon Kubbernus, Gordon Scruggs and Mike Simpson—climbed four other peaks on that trip.

Further north, the terrain becomes more broken, though numerous elegant peaks form the rampart above Kiwa Creek. Then north again is the final 3,000-metre-plus summit: Awik Peak (3,051 metres). Awik is one of the most striking rock peaks of all the Premier mountains with its 650-metre-high southeast rock face bound to the south by the south ridge, the Ridge of Towers. Bill McKenzie and I attempted this ridge in 2009, but retreated from about 2,800 metres after soloing numerous pitches of 5.4.

Returning in 2013, our Toronto Section ACC team looked for an easier, if more devious, route via the southwest ridge, which was accessed by the col northeast of peak 2,848 metres. This was reached from a large cirque on the southwest side of peak 3,015 metres. The climb was only 4th class, but the scrambling was made considerably more difficult by a half metre of fresh snow on the numerous rock steps.

Beyond Awik Peak, to the northeast, is the line of 10 or more striking rock summits.




## Summary

First ascent of Awik Peak (GR152687, 3,015m) via southwest ridge (4th class), Premier Range, Cariboo Mountains. FA: Don Chiasson, Norm Greene, Roger Wallis, July 16, 2013. Note: Grid references are from 1:50,000 83D/13, while elevations are from 1:20,000 TRIM 083D092.

First ascent of peak 2,668m (GR145659) via north face. FA: Don Chiasson, July 14, 2013.

Second ascent of peak 2,668m via northwest ridge. FA: Don Chiasson, Jim Goldmann, Norm Greene, Roger Wallis, July 15, 2013.

First ascent of peak 2,765m (GR150658) via northwest ridge. FA: Don Chiasson, Norm Greene, July 18, 2013.

Attempt on peak 2,743m (GR138652) via north face/east ridge (60m from summit). Jim Goldman, Roger Wallis, July 17, 2013.

# The Rockies

## Prowd Line

Cian Brinker

"MOUNTAINS FAVOUR FOOLS" is the most thought-provoking thing I can recall my high-school English teacher telling me. She had read the classics and was referring to a solo glacier travel technique using curtain rods. I think she meant it to be funny, but sometimes I wonder.

The first time I saw the ivory shark's-fin feature on Mount Wilson through climber's eyes was during my first winter of ice climbing. We were climbing Lady Wilson's Cleavage—a contender for most hazardous ice climb in the Rockies. We were just a couple of kids out for a romp on a splitter sunny day. Looking past the massive baking snow bowl, the fin stood prouder than anything I had seen before. You don't even have to leave the car to see it. It's right off the Icefields Parkway as you drive past the west side of Wilson. White and orange quartzite buttresses lined Wilson's summit like a crown.

Last winter I was lucky enough to have Larry Stanier as the instructor for an avalanche operations course. Those who have met Larry can attest to his enthusiasm and style. He told me of a climb called Ivory Towers, which he had climbed with Joe Josephson. It takes the buttress directly below the obvious fin. But due to weather late in the day, the Ivory Towers' line veers left near the top and misses the prize prow. It was an easy sale when Larry said the climbing was amazing.

In late August, I had the chance to try the prow line with a good friend from Jasper, Alex Lawson. We made plans for two chill days of adventure climbing. Somewhere along the line, we decided to ditch the stove and committed to bringing a big pack of cheddar smokies instead. Remember, mountains favour fools.

From the roadside directly below Lady Wilson's Cleavage, we walked easily up along the left-hand side of the creek, then up through bush until reaching an apex below the first cliff band. We traversed rightwards along the base of the cliffs across the creek to the top of the next apex. From there, it was fairly obvious route-finding up and left for three to four pitches of 5.6 ramps and ledges with one short but sweet 5.8 corner. This can be avoided in early summer by going up avalanche debris in the obvious slot, but by mid-summer, it's impassable.

This put us into the basin where the Wilson Major ice climb hangs out in the winter. We continued upstream, making sure we crossed to the left side of the creek below the next rock band, which was a scramble on the left side. Further upstream, there was another rock band that we climbed in two pitches on the left side of the creek. Following the major weaknesses, it was not harder than 5.6. On top of that cliff, we left the creek in search of something to burn. Up on the left was a nice little pile of dead shrubbery, so we spent the night perched above the creek, merrily cooking cheese smokies and watching a goat climb impressively steep lines on the south side of the cleavage.

In the morning the goat was still there. He looked stuck in the middle of the face across from us. I hoped our luck hadn't changed overnight like his.

We walked down close to the creek and started climbing up 50 metres past a right-facing corner to a ledge. We traversed right to a prow and up 45 metres to another ledge. From there, 60 metres of 5th class took us straight up to a broad gravel ledge. We walked right along the ledge for 80 metres to a creek, and then climbed easily up beside the creek until it was possible to scramble left and up along bedding planes, aiming for the base of the prow. One last short and exposed 5.5 pitch delivered us at the base of some of the best climbing on the Parkway.

We started directly on the prow, climbing up and left on ramps and corners for 50 metres of 5.7 to an alcove. From the alcove, an open-book corner led to a horizontal crack where we made a few moves right to gain another crack next to a left-facing corner until reaching a ledge (5.10, 40m). From there, we headed straight up for 50 metres, taking a left-facing corner near the top (5.9). The final pitch goes directly up on face holds for 30 metres of 5.7. These four pitches are comparable in quality to Back of the Lake at Lake Louise. Given the location, it is well worth the approach.

After topping out, we traversed north along the ridgetop towards Rampart Creek. Once we met the edge of the glacier and a rock outcropping, we walked down the northwest-facing slope. We had rudimentary glacier-travel gear and wanted to avoid the large 'shrunds in the slope directly below our top-out. Once on the flat glacier, the going was easy. The car felt close and the smiles were broad.

Alex Lawson at the base of the upper pillar of Prowd Line. Photo: Cian Brinker

That is until we reached Rampart Creek. Supposedly, there is a trail to the hostel on the other side, but the water was too high to be fjorded. The bush-whacking back to the car over several cliff bands was very engaging, almost as if payment was due for the easily won cheese dogs. At one point along the creek, we found a bunch of orange peels and a rock hammer. This find really made the car feel close with only two more cliff bands to go.

Looking back, it would be more direct to approach the upper pitches via the lower Ivory Towers' line; the climbing would be more sustained and potentially better. The descent could have been made more pleasant by taking the couloir down the south side to Saskatchewan Crossing, where cold beer, burgers and karaoke await at the pub. However, our way was a great time out. It was a classic Rockies' adventure, climbing on better-than-average rock.

**Summary**

Prowd Line (IV 5.10, 1000m), south face, Mt. Wilson, Icefields Parkway. FA: Cian Brinker, Alex Lawson, August 8-9, 2013.

Prowd Line on Mount Wilson. Photo: Cian Brinker

# A Dinosaur and a Dandy

Ian Welsted

JIM ELZINGA AND PETER Arbic's 1989 alpine-style attempt to 7,500 metres on the then-unclimbed south pillar of Nuptse is, to my mind, still the most proud Canadian effort of all time in the Greater Ranges. I had run into Peter at numerous Banff parties, but Elzinga was a more elusive, mythical figure. So when he proposed doing an alpine first ascent, I quickly signed on. Jim had a backlog of large unclimbed routes in the Rockies, which was the hunting ground of his generation of alpinists.

"You've never heard of the north face of Lyell 4?" he would question. Or bemoan, "What is up with you guys these days? Why doesn't anyone want to climb mountains?"

"Jim, I think it's a mix of a few things. You can wake up later and still get your adrenaline on ice pillars. And it's easier on the ego to succeed on a graded sport climb where you can measure your progress rather than fail repeatedly in the alpine."

Jim was methodical. He planned. He had flagged in the trail to this unpopular area. He had tried it twice with another young climber, but there was a falling out when the novice didn't realize who it was he was having a difference of opinion with. So it was down to us heading into the beautiful Height of the Rockies Provincial Park and the Royal Group.

On the summit, Jim, now in his 60s, revealed his joy in a successful unfolding of a first ascent in this latest period in his mountaineering life. Career, family, expeditions, life in Ontario, some brushes with health issues, so many elements had been pushed aside in the ongoing appreciation of the joys of summiting peaks by new routes.

"Why aren't there Welsted routes all over the Rockies?" he said, lighting a bit of a fire.

"I don't know, Jim. I guess sometimes it's just easier to go to Haffner," I sheepishly replied.

It was a good thing we got on it that day, too, because the jilted novice was one day behind. The mystery tent in the meadows the next morning, the truck we tried to break into to boost my dead battery on the logging road, both evidence of at least one other person in the Rockies who was into the same game we were playing. And if we had waited a day, the climb would not be called the Elzinga-Welsted route. I'm glad it is because it's an honour to have my name down on record with one of the greats of Canadian climbing.

**Summary**

Elzinga-Welsted (IV 5.6 M4 WI3+), east face, Mt. King George (3422m), Royal Group. FA: Jim Elzinga, Ian Welsted, September 15, 2013.

The Elzinga-Welsted on the east face of Mount King George. Photo: Kevin Barton

# Bigg Kidd

Raphael Slawinski

THE RELENTLESS BEEP-BEEP-BEEP of the alarm wormed its way into my dreams. Surely it was still too early to rise and get ready for my morning class. Slowly, reluctantly, I emerged from the depths of sleep and remembered the backpack full of gear sitting by the front door, the water bottles lined up on the kitchen counter. It was indeed far too early to get up for work, but not too early to rise if we wanted to hit the snow-covered trail below Mount Kidd by headlamp.

It had been a busy yet lazy fall. Classes and committees at the university seemed to claim more than their usual share of my time, while evenings and weekends were spent writing about last summer's expedition to Pakistan. I had an uneasy feeling that I was contemplating life instead of living it. The odd thing was, it was largely by choice. When Greg Boswell and Nick Bullock, visiting from the UK, suggested I join them at the Stanley Headwall, I replied that I would rather sleep in and write, maybe go drytooling for a few hours in the afternoon. I just couldn't bring myself to get up in the dark, drive out in the dark, and, still in the dark, trudge up a trail, every dip and turn of which I knew by heart. Was I burning out? Or did I just need the right kind of persuasion?

Another trail I knew well led up Evan-Thomas Creek. The 100-metre-tall Moonlight had been my first multi-pitch ice climb. And it lived up to its name as we topped out in the dark. Since that day, I had returned many times to the parallel flows pouring down rock that was shattered and rank, even by Rockies' standards. Sadly, none of those times rivaled the intensity of the first one. But I digress. On the walk out, with the last flat stretch of trail dragging on as usual, my eyes were drawn to the bulk of Mount Kidd across the valley. The icy haze of a fading winter's day blurred the sharp edges of the peak, but the exclamation mark of ice on the highest rock band was unmistakable. Then, upon arrival at the trailhead, that distant white ribbon was forgotten in the warmth of a fogged up car. Until, casting about for motivation, I remembered it last fall.

My toes tingled inside lightweight boots as Steve Swenson and I slogged through depth hoar at the base of the big northeast bowl on Mount Kidd. The frosty air of early morning seeped through layers of clothing like cold water. But the rising sun was already

Ian Welsted established on the ice above the mixed climbing. Photo: Raphael Slawinski


The northeast face of Mount Kidd: (1) Billy Goat Gruff, (2) Unclimbed, (3) Bigg Kidd. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

painting the highest cliffs a warm yellow, and it wasn't long before the fresh snow around us sparkled in the bright light, making me wish I had brought sunglasses.

The first avalanche rumbled down while we were gearing up. We rationalized the powder slough away. "It's just the morning sun hitting the rock. The face will go into shade soon." And we set off scrambling up snow gullies and ice steps. Pulling over a bulge, I looked up to see a white cloud charging down. "Avalanche!" I shouted to Steve 10 metres below, and sprinted for the nearest rock band. Fortunately, the trainload of snow rumbled down the gully next to us, but it had made its point. Thirty seconds later we were swinging and kicking down as fast as we could. It was only noon when I drove back to the city across the bare prairies, grasses waving in the wind like a yellow sea.

In two weeks I was back on Mount Kidd. At the base of the northeast bowl, where Steve and I had previously stumbled over snow-covered scree, Ian Welsted and I cramponed up massive piles of avalanche debris. It was hard to believe it was still November. A few hundred metres higher, I stood on a steeply tilted snow ledge and waited while Ian soloed a narrow ribbon of ice. Every few moves he would stop and wait, hooded head down, while spindrift washed over him. Then, "You're good to go!" he shouted as he stepped off the ice and disappeared from view over the lip. I knew snow stability was good but still felt relieved to move out of the gully onto a rib of windswept scree. Twenty minutes later we dropped our packs under the overhanging rock of the highest rock band and got to work.

A climbing partner once referred to new routes when he said, "You don't just walk up to them and send as science projects." Considering the short days of late November, a location a thousand metres above the valley floor and extensive blank rock separating us from the ice of our desire, I knew the Mount Kidd route would fall into this category. So I wasn't surprised to be making plans for a return visit as we drove away that evening. A few days later we were back. By mid-afternoon, after much scratching around, a couple of broken holds and just as many spectacular falls, we swung our tools at the desiccated fringe of ice at the bottom of the white ribbon. Two pitches higher, daylight was fading as I pulled over a bulge and gazed up into the snow bowl that fed the route. Far below, car headlights crept along the highway on the valley floor. Yet even as we drilled the first V-thread, I felt an irrational urge to head up instead of down, to the darkening summit ridge a hundred metres higher. Maybe I wasn't burnt out after all.

**Summary**

Bigg Kidd (WI5 M7+, 150m), Mt. Kidd, Kananaskis Country. FA: Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, November 30, 2013.

# Danish Freak Club

Glenn Reisenhofer

ROUND ONE STARTED with poor snow conditions. This unfortunate event forced Liam Kavanagh and me to venture along the east side of Cirque Peak on a narrow bench towards Observation Peak. A lengthy couloir and drainage system delivered us down to Dolomite Creek. On our tour back up towards Dolomite Pass, we stumbled across a massive chunk of ice and the beginning of a new adventure.

Round two was conceived when a willing partner was enticed by a photograph of the route. We had never climbed together, so this was to be an interesting trip. The closer we got to the trailhead, the more negative the thoughts about the approach exited my partner's mouth. After skiing only one kilometre up the trail, my partner had had enough. He sat on his pack, pulled out a cigarette and declared, "I hate skiing." Stymied before we even got to the waterfall. My wife later stated, "What kind of ice climber doesn't ski?"

Round three found two likely candidates. Both partners were keen, but the predicted avalanche hazard scared us away to safer places.

Success seemed certain on round four. Leif Godberson and Marc Schaller agreed to venture in and check out the fun. The four-hour approach did little to slow down this cast of characters. The day was perfect with great views and sunshine to warm our bodies. As we approached the base of the route, its length got shorter. "Well, I guess we won't need a hanging belay on that first pillar now, but what's that moving up there?" From below, a person appeared to be sitting on a ledge next to the crux first pitch. Much to our surprise, the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, sat on the ledge of snow while drinking a dry martini. He was tipsy and he told us that he was there to analyze our ascent.

Apparently, the lead of the first pitch goes to the one who found the line. While I was on the crux of this pitch, my right frontpoints temporarily skidded sideways until they caught. Kierkegaard yelled, "To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. Not to dare is to lose oneself." After I had moved past the hardest bit, the hunchbacked Dane waved his crutch and stated, "The highest and most beautiful things in life are not to be heard about, nor read about, nor seen, but, if one will, are to be lived." I mulled over these thoughts as I pulled my body like an ungraceful beached whale to the belay.

Sixty metres of WI4 delivered us onto a bench. The start and finish of the pitch were easy, but that middle part was quite stiff. Sticking near a corner of rock helped to find the easiest way up. The second pitch was comprised of some snow walking with a bit of easy ice smattered throughout. The last pitch had more snow and a 30-metre hunk of WI3. This led to a plateau top out with a grand view of the entire valley.

As all three of us reached the valley floor, Kierkegaard, who was munching on a gin-soaked olive, had one more message for us. He bellowed, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." Little did we know that it was this Dane who derived the three climbing types of fun: fun while doing it, fun after it's over and no fun at all. We felt that this day was a type-one fun day, especially if you combine the route with the Dolomite Circuit ski trip—a good full day with some extra training. Don't wait too long into spring for something is liable to become rotten in Denmark.

Danish Freak Club in Dolomite Creek. Photo: Glenn Reisenhofer

**Summary**

Danish Freak Club (III WI4, 150m), Dolomite Creek. FA: Glenn Reisenhofer, Leif Godberson, Marc Schaller, March 30, 2013.

The approach is four hours via Helen/Katherine Lake to upper Dolomite Creek (GR416295, 82 N/9 Hector Lake). Some steep slopes at base of ice. Cornices may be a problem in heavy snow years. The route is not visible from the classic Dolomite Circuit. It is just out of view down Dolomite Creek and located well above treeline.

# Hallowed Ground

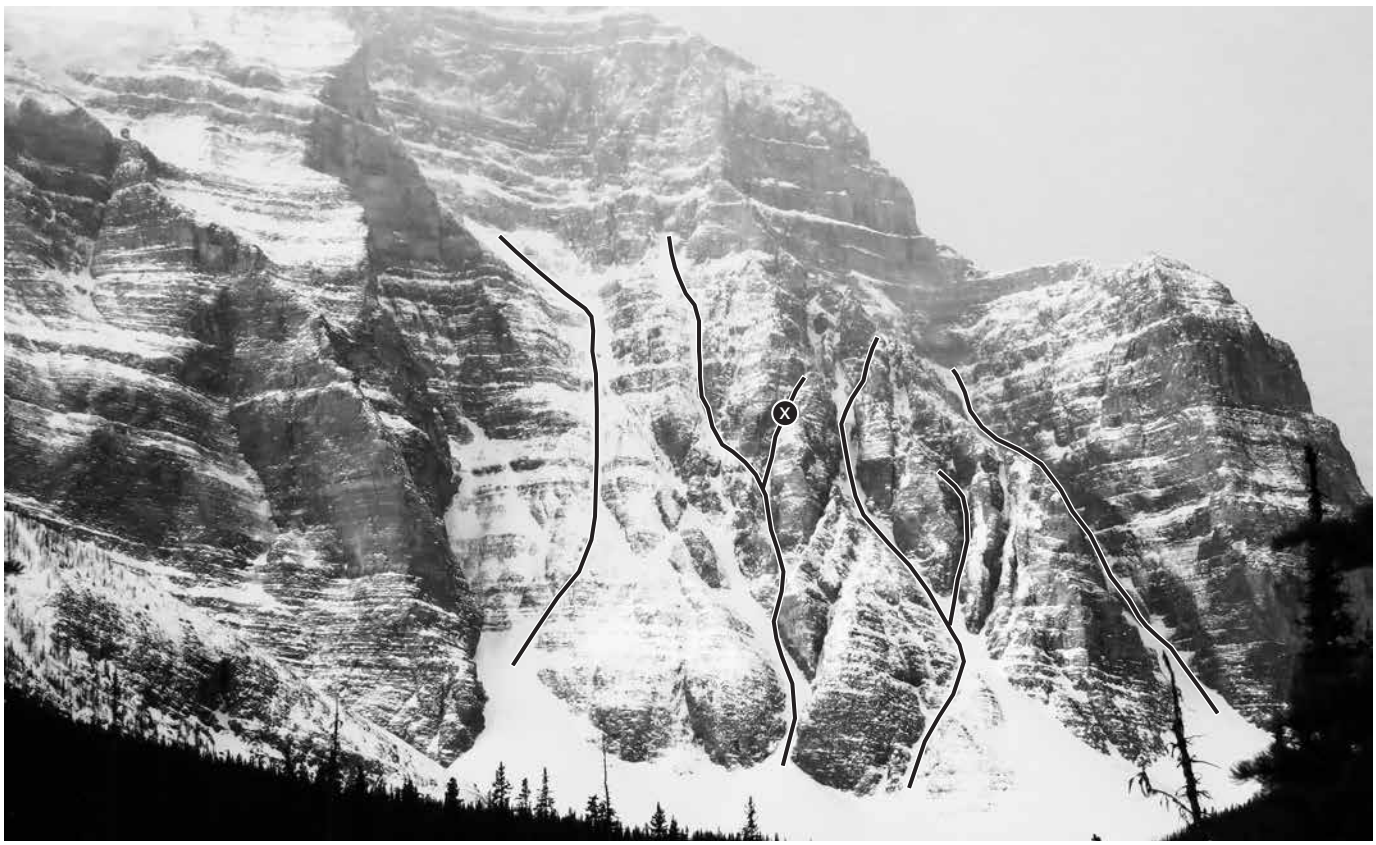
Ruari Macfarlane

HE HAD NEVER HEARD a howl like this before. He was certain of one thing: the world was ending. A second later, he saw his legs propelling him in a sprint towards the closest rocks. Detached thoughts. Funny. He had never expected to run on snow that was closer to plumb than flat. At the mid-height traverse into the route, a throat-tightening fear had set in. He had never before hyperventilated just contemplating a slope. He would have been disgusted were it not for the horizon line below his boots, the unrelenting hard snow sweeping up endlessly steeper and harder, or the tottering black headwall grinning mirthlessly down on its realm, sizing up the intruder. He had sensed the softness of his pale flesh, the fragile will of his blood to keep flowing. He had sensed the hardness, the lifelessness of this place. He took a long breath, stepped forward and up. And now the sky was falling. The howl grew demonically, driving out all else, filling all space. It just kept swelling. Running. Running. Finally, the first concussions of impacting rocks struck the slope.

MOUNT TEMPLE STANDS alone from the impressive sprawl of peaks around Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies. Many nearby mountains vie for attention: Lady Victoria with her sweeping snowy veil; Lefroy and his bawdy precipice. Mount Temple, however, has a mysterious magnetism. This is proven by Parks Canada's accident register, which Temple apparently leads. The Southwest Ridge scramble route draws all comers like lemmings—teenagers in flip-flops, ski-area staff on midnight acid—yet the towering north face, dominating Lake Louise Village, sits aloof and unsullied. Mountaineers will always find something real in this gargantuan 1,300-metre face of narrow couloirs, blocky quartzite and stern seracs. Far, far above, floats a distant blue summit ice cap. That ice cap has resonated within me since I first saw it, hovering between this realm and that. Those tangled snow leads were destined to draw me like a magnet—or a lemming.

I had barely stepped into the shadow of Temple for the first time when it issued a stern warning, one that would stay with me. On a cold April morning in 2012, shortly after entering Temple's über-classic ski line, the striking Aemmer Couloir (600 vertical metres on the far eastern fringe of this two-kilometre-wide face), we were

The right side of the north face of Mount Temple showing the author's various snowboard descents. X marks the spot of the photo on page 117. Photo: Ruari Mcfarlane



almost rinsed back out by a billowing loose snow avalanche. Despite the aspect, the sun had managed to tickle a hidden hanging snow slope and it had sloughed into the couloir. This was no mountain to be trifled with. We beat a quick retreat and headed for the centre of the face, far from any menacing rays. I was fairly new to the area, so I had put ear to ground and heard whisper of the Cobra and Dolphin couloirs. We were not left wondering. The Dolphin was immediately self-evident; however, what truly struck me was the plethora of tangled couloirs recessed into quartzite slots, some crisscrossing and others topping out under the distant, oppressive headwalls on steep, hanging faces. Why did one not hear of all this unbounded potential a mere three hours from the car? The seracs peering over the headwall provided a clue, but they mainly threatened the Dolphin.

In this place, eternal shade was a certainty and frigid air seeped down. My American friend opted to regain some composure by relaxing in the sun way out on the forest fringes. I headed up one of the more inviting lines away from the seracs. The deep non-cohesive powder was stable but slow, and the couloir just kept going. Three hours in, I was approaching my agreed turn-around time and was yet to even reach the line's crux. A narrow couloir beckoned on the right, a tributary of the main line, and I accepted. Here, I had the least objective hazard and the most stunning riding, especially in 40-centimetres of blower!

The Canadian Rockies have a lot to offer, but I must admit that my mind dwelled unhealthily and unjustifiably on my last view of Temple. It sat high and lonely, stark above the pines on that crisp evening. There was really no question of return. I spent the next frigid Canadian winter patrolling at Lake Louise. Temple stood across the valley, untouchable, a dwelling of cavernous shade, emanating cold; inspiring fear. We watched the snow-cover wax and wane, watched downdrafts, spindrift and ice avalanches pulverize the forest below, watched the clouds ebb and flow. Many months later, life began to stir again, as did we. Exactly a year from our Aemmer escape, I did get to ride it, this time with Aussie and Québécois workmates. It rode even better than it looked—length and consistency made it feel surprisingly steep for the angle. My idea to ride it switch only lasted three turns, before I chose euphoria over terror. Rum, as the weather closed in at the bottom, was delicious, as was our route back to Lake Louise via Little Temple—a perfect pyramidal outlier, stacked with powder, or, at least, deep soft facets.

Every skier who aims for Aemmer must pass before the rest of the north face lines en route. Once again, they had called me. A ridiculous-looking line next to the Dolphin looked possible with the addition of another year's experience. I had also noticed the Sphinx, the breathtaking web of snow once skied by Trevor Peterson. Wouldn't it be good to ride everything up there, whispered a voice. Perhaps even in spring. Madness, I thought, and for the next month I did exactly what I should have been doing: cragging, camping and swimming. There was only the odd ski-mountaineering daytrip to keep things spicy, and these were always powder lines in fresh locations. Somewhere though, quiet and persistent, the small voice nagged. On May 1, I went back for a day that concreted the notion into a goal that would destroy my idyllic spring, and created a template for my next few trips. They went something like this.

I JOIN ITALIAN AND CANADIAN friends for the beautiful Paradise Valley approach. Their company is a welcome distraction from the resident big grizzly bears. We part ways at Lake Annette; they head merrily to Aemmer Couloir, while I approach the face with misgivings. I stash lunch and transition under the stoutest available buttress, and then swing on up into a couloir, trying to move fast through exposed sections. I feel the air gather below my heels on the final hanging snow slope, glance nervously at the headwall and its frozen guardians. I cut a platform, strap in and take a final breath. Lake Annette is far below me now. Business time.

The powder is typically settled to catch each turn, although one time it's more akin to Chamonix, with icy hop turns and heavy breathing. The ice axe comes into regular play. At the bottom, I feel elated and drained, but after lunch it's up the couloir next door for a repeat act. As the sun slips behind the hills I stumble home, too exhausted for bear paranoia.

SOME POIGNANT MEMORIES have stayed with me. There were swathes of egg-sized ice chunks almost all the way out to Lake Annette—700 metres from the wall. Climbing alongside the Dolphin, which is the only heavily threatened line, it was helpful to picture the next free-falling serac also detonating on a ledge and disintegrating into space. The Dolphin is the standard start of the uber-classic Greenwood-Locke alpine route, but much safer is the couloir that joins it from the right at two-thirds height.

The next line right of the Dolphin was exceptional, widening to a terrifically exposed final snow-slope at its head, the steepest snow on the north face. Multiple chokes, powder, slough and a mandatory exit air completed the package, along with an interesting journey up another tributary couloir. Committing to climb (and subsequently reverse) a very awkward rock step, it was disheartening to discover only 40 more metres of snow beyond!

On the next trip, low cloud warmed the face in the afternoon, and I spent a good while holed up on a quartzite ledge while sloughs plunged down the runnel nearby. That very night we bivied within sight of the face, a beautiful late-evening clearance and privileged view. I reflected. My questionable project weighed heavily on my mind. No one moment had been incredibly stressful. But the sheer volume of time scurrying under the oppressiveness of this hulking black and green rock was a burden. It hadn't been strictly intentional, but other than in the Aemmer, I had been solo, and so was happy that the cheerful Italian Ben would be joining me in the morning. After we had done the Sphinx, I would never, ever have to come back.

We woke to the hush of thickly falling snow. It was a wet, empty-handed walk out.

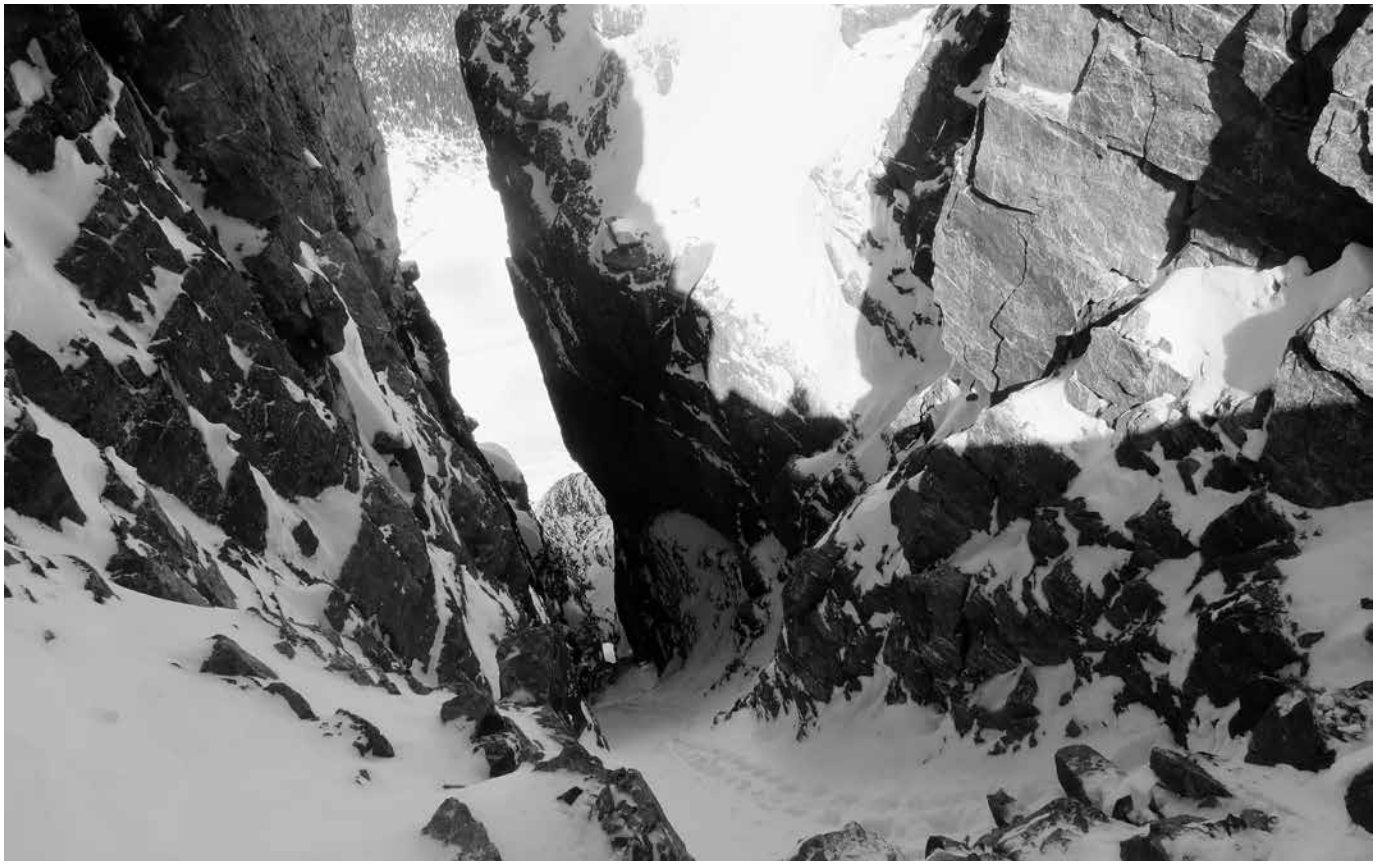
Relaxing back in Canmore was superb, as was forgetting all about the face. Resolution? Nah. The next night whilst heading out the door to see friends off from Banff, I glanced at the forecast and groaned. Tomorrow would be the day that everything could fall into place. Nothing could be less appealing, but as we drove home late that evening, I knew it—if I didn't go now, I never would.

A few hours later I drove to Louise under the northern lights. By now it was only truly dark for a few hours and Temple glowed ethereal in the pre-dawn, more beautiful than ever. I enjoyed the old game of trying to pick conditions from kilometres away, thinking over recent weather and limited information. Early birds sang as I skirted dirt patches and isothermal rot. I am not an early bird. Lake Annette had been shedding her winter mantel and glinted in the sunrise. The Sphinx looked okay; it had cycled during the last snowfall and left just enough behind for me, perhaps.

The rockfall was audible and visible whilst ascending the sinuous access couloirs and intoned that this whole Sphinx face was a different beast. Committing to the line proper had me really tense. Eventually, I was just 50 metres from the top. The snow was very steep. It got icier with each step, and also grew thinner on the blue glacial ice that had lain bare until a month ago. Then, abruptly and horrendously, the howl. The plummeting rocks that spun and smashed past me down the guts of the route did the trick in making up my mind. This was as far as I would go. Hacking a feasible perch was a tenuous affair in 20 centimetres of crust and facets on ice. I don't remember if I used a screw, but I know I felt precarious. Eventually, I grated out to the trenches that the rocks had run down the top pitch, and surrendered to the fall line for two milliseconds at a time. The snow grew more enjoyable where sloughs had left chalky ribs, and the angle graciously eased for the traverse left, loose snow pouring off bluffs below. The snowboarding just kept coming with endless, anxious turns. Rock band, snow, rocks, snow and eventually, after a climbing traverse to avoid the exit cliff, I was out.

Late the next morning, I woke to a bright room. Finally, I felt the glow of satisfaction, but more powerful was the wash of relief. It had become clearly impractical to ride every piece of snow on the face; too many had been slyly revealed. But I had enjoyed the seven obvious ski lines, two appealing tributary couloirs and Little Temple. The needless, self-imposed pressure was off, but I also stood upon and rode off the summit a few weeks later, like any good lemming, via the southwest face. It was a beautiful and fulfilling morning. Was I free of my enslavement to one mountain? Well, there's simply more there. Maybe, just perhaps, I may not have found my revelation quite yet.

Looking down the steep, narrow slot of a tributary couloir marked with an x on the page 115 photo. Photo: Ruari Macfarlane



# Mount Hurd

## Maurice Perreault

WHEN A CLIMBER talks about climbing a north face, most of his comrades think about the big peaks in the Lake Louise or Columbia Icefield group, with a few outliers such as Mount Robson. The north faces of most peaks have been climbed and documented. My interest in Mount Hurd began in spring 2011. I was grateful to have secured a job with Parks Canada, which would see me working the information centres in both Lake Louise and Field. As an added bonus, the position was for 37.5 hours weekly, which meant three days off every week. I thought to myself that I could even squeeze in a few outings in the evenings after work. Perhaps the best part of the summer job was that there was staff accommodation located 4.5 kilometres west of Field, B.C. The place was basic, and housed more mice than people until the rush of summer students showed up. Rent was cheap, there were hot showers and the mountains were close. It was away from the railway tracks, and the Parks Operations Compound, a stone's throw away, was mostly abandoned, quiet, and had a dusty old computer in a back office that could be used sparingly, as the staff accommodation had no Internet or cell reception. Perfect!!!

It didn't take much more than a couple of days of staying at the place before something began to irritate me. It was the unknown. The view from the front door was amazing. I saw it as I left every morning and stared at it even more after work when I wasn't in a rush. I couldn't live there all summer without unravelling that unknown, and snow was starting to melt fast at lower elevations anyways. What was I looking at?

I took out the Lake Louise and Yoho Gemtrek map, thinking that the peak would be too far away and be off the map. I was wrong. There it was, shadowed by countless contour lines bunched up together— the north face of Mount Hurd.

After studying the map, I figured an approach via the Ottertail Fire Road, crossing the Ottertail River and simply following Frenchman Creek up to the base seemed straightforward. I would go look at the approach after work the next day. I was disappointed when I arrived at the trailhead to find that the trail was closed for a prescribed burn. With a strong field background in forestry and knowing that all I would find would be blackened logs and possibly smoldering ashes from minor mountain pine beetle work, I decided I would continue with my hike.

The blackened logs haunted me for ignoring the posted sign. A hungry spring black bear would be perfectly camouflaged amongst those logs. Then I nearly stepped on a ruffed grouse that took off loudly and left me standing there with my heart pounding through my chest. Soon I was hiking through patches of snow and making my way down the steep bank to the river. I could see Frenchman Creek across the river but couldn't find a way to fjord the water in front of me. The spring melt had the river running quite fast and deep, and it was too wide for a fallen tree to be used as a bridge. On my way back up the bank, I encountered a large mountain goat. White things are friendly, I thought to myself, hoping the hike down would be more relaxing.

Later that week, I found myself bushwhacking along the west side of the Ottertail River, looking down at the raging torrent and cursing that getting into this place wasn't as easy as I had hoped. I slowly made my way up Frenchman Creek, following whichever side looked easier, until everything was covered in deep snow. Walking lightly with flat feet and making full use of snow baskets is a skill, but sinking waist deep in isothermal snow and having to belly flop out of it and end up on your feet is a bit of an art, though. I needed a cold night to freeze the snow if I wanted to ever get to the face.

There was a forecasted cool night and it was my last day of the shift. There was also a staff party that night, and there were bound to be some single ladies and friends to meet. The party would have to wait. I went and stashed my bike near the Finn Creek picnic area. The first ascent of Mount Hurd was from the southwest in 1948 by Mr. and Mrs. Cromwell. Getting down was a bit of an unknown that I would have to figure out from the summit, but I knew I would end up near Finn Creek. I packed a light 70-metre rope, an assortment of pitons and nuts, and a bunch of cord. Getting stuck up there by myself would be grossly embarrassing.

A few hours of sleep were followed by an alpine start, using the GPS with the previous track I had saved to bushwhack my way along the Ottertail River. A few slaps in the face by some B.C. bush kept me awake. There is a small pond at the end of Frenchman Creek, the recommended bivy spot for future ascents. Travel was reasonable, but the snow recovery wasn't as good as I had hoped. Also, the sun was starting to beat on the lower part of the route, which would soon be in the shade. The upper part of the route is eternally shaded. There was no time for a morning picnic; I had to climb into the shade as fast as possible to make it safer. Also, being such a last-minute decision to attempt the route saw me without a partner. This is not my style; I enjoy the company of both a rope and climbing partner.

I felt comfortable and ready to climb this couloir alone, and it was time to start swinging the tools. There was a bunch of avalanche debris that made for reasonable travel. The lower part of the route was ascended on the climber's left of the base of the couloir. A bit of zigzagging with sections of ice, rock and mixed eventually led into a steep, sustained left-trending snow couloir that splits the north face in half. This

appeared to be an endless steep snow climb with hard névé found in the bottom of the large runnel, which was mostly avoided. The couloir didn't make any sounds, the snow was fluffy and cool in the shade, and loose rocks on the face remained frozen in place. The only sound was my deep, uncontrolled breathing. I attempted to lower my heart rate and battle the lactic acid building up in my calves. The top of the couloir had a cornice, which was easily exited on the left, and provided a level area to take a rest. Following a snow slope and short ridge feature—minding possible cornices—put me on the top of Mount Hurd.

Exhausted, happy and satisfied, I named the route Playboy Bunny after a feature on the west face. A stone's throw away is another peak separated by a large gap. Debating which peak is Mount Hurd's true summit is not as important as giving Rick Collier and Reg Bonney credit for their first ascent of the northwest ridge.

I would encourage future ascents to reverse the route by rappelling and fixing anchors using pitons and nuts. I made my descent via Finn Creek and was faced with complex terrain, one tricky rappel and very bad bushwhacking. This descent is not recommended.

The most aesthetic route on the north face of Mount Hurd had been climbed, but there was more unknown left. There were, and still are, more opportunities for alpine routes on this face. I was excited when I convinced my friend Colin to join me for an adventure this past October. I had somehow misplaced my old GPS track, but was sure I knew the way. Plus, we were going to set up camp at the lovely alpine pond above Frenchman Creek this time around. I led us up the wrong way though, via a small trickling stream (not shown on map) north of Frenchman Creek, which had a steady flow, even in the fall. This caused us to suffer with heavy packs and steeper-than-necessary slopes, all to realize that we were some 400 metres

Colin Bissonnette starting up pitch two of Lost in the Mansion. Photo: Maurice Perreault

higher than the bivy and most of the way up Little Hurd. We scrambled to its summit by headlamp to find a large cairn and were rewarded by fine views of Rick and Reg's northwest ridge route in intense moonlight. We then put our heads down and walked through meadows and rubble to the proper bivy site and camped on the frozen pond. Colin realized that his sleeping pad was punctured and that he had no way of fixing it in the field. He made good use of 120 metres of half ropes and extra clothing and improvised well enough to get reasonable sleep.

The following morning, we easily followed the top of the lateral moraine to the base of Playboy Bunny (which looked pretty dry), and then traversed snow slopes to the right to the base of a large snow cone. Climbing snow and ice, and being wary of a couple of small bergschrunds, brought us to the base of the ice. The first pitch proved to be the crux with aerated and snowy ice. We encountered several short ice and mixed steps along the way. One of these steps required a few moves of drytooling but is well protected with a fixed nut on the left. Most of the climbing was on moderately angled snow in a narrow slot couloir with steep sidewalls. It was a very enjoyable and varied outing. We ended the route 30 metres past a large chockstone that you can walk under. After that, the confined couloir opens up to low-angle terrain that was mostly free of ice and had much shattered rock. An adventurous soul is welcome to explore further with more snow cover. Gaining the gap between the two peaks above the small snowfield via a steep corner is bound to provide some excitement.

All belays were well protected. Seven rappels were used for the descent, five of which are fixed gear anchors and two were V-threads. The only rappel anchor that was also used as a belay anchor is the one at the top of the first pitch. All the other rappel anchors would not protect a belayer. We returned to the road by way of the Ottertail River and fire road. Due to the low water levels of autumn, we only had to deal with knee-deep wading, making us wish we had approached this way.

So there you have it—another north face to climb in the Canadian Rockies. This hidden gem is definitely worthy of attention, being comparable to the north face of Popes Peak, but with increased commitment if you are seeking an adventure away from the more popular areas.

### Summary

Playboy Bunny (IV 60°, 600m+), north face, Mt. Hurd. FA: Maurice Perreault, June 2011.

Lost in the Mansion (IV WI3+ M3, 9 pitches), north face, Mt. Hurd. FA: Colin Bissonnette, Maurice Perreault, October 20, 2013.

The north face of Mount Hurd: (1) Playboy Bunny, (2) Lost in the Mansion. Photo: Maurice Perreault

# Always Chasing Dragons

Brandon Pullan

WHEN JIM ELZINGA showed me a photo of an alpine peak capped with a cornice, he knew I would be interested. Five days later, with Ian Welsted, we drove up Settlers Road in British Columbia toward Mount Aye near Mount Assiniboine. Elzinga had hiked into the area a few days earlier to scout for an ice route. He has always been keen to find new routes.

Two years ago, we climbed The Mentor on the north side of Cirrus Mountain in October—a first ascent. Last year he climbed a new route on the north face of King George with Welsted. For Elzinga, climbing new routes is old news. He completed many notable first ascents in the Rockies during the '70s and '80s, including the classic alpine waterfall route Slipstream with John Lauchlan. He pioneered routes in the Andes and Himalayas, including a 1986 Canadian new route on Everest. Welsted is no stranger to searching out the unknown, he had recently returned from the first ascent of the northwest face of K6 West (7,100 metres) in the Charakusa valley of Pakistan with Raphael Slawinski—an ascent that won the 2014 Piolet d'Or.

We hiked for five hours to our bivy beneath the face that was in the photo Elzinga had shown me. Below us was a lush valley free of snow, and above were alpine walls smeared with ice and covered in snow. As night fell and the full moon illuminated the mountains, it was Assiniboine that dominated the skyline.

Early in the morning, we suited up and post-holed for less than an hour towards the unclimbed north face of Mount Aye. Ian took the sharp end, getting the first swings of the season up the steep, brittle pitch. Under a starry sky he managed to stem and pick his way up the first crux of the route. After another ice pitch, we entered an easier snow and ice couloir. A number of rope lengths later we reached a dogleg in the route, beyond which we could not see from the ground the previous day. What was ahead was a complete unknown. Welsted looked back and said, "It looks good, there's ice." A thin ice pitch brought us to the exit slopes.

I took over, breaking trail through deep snow in a windy storm. I placed a piton below the final rock notch and reached the summit at 2:30 p.m. In a small snow squall, we found pockets through the clouds to view Assiniboine, and then rappelled the route in 13 60-metre raps. We were back at the bivy at dusk for an electric sunset.

Returning home, we discovered the mountain we climbed is actually a sub-peak of Mount Aye and had not been climbed before. Aye is on the B.C.-Alberta border and has had three ascents. We named our summit Aye West. The word *aye* is Scottish for yes; *ay* is Scottish for always, and on the route, Elzinga was talking about all of the routes he has chased over the years, saying it was like he had been chasing dragons his whole life. We named the route Always Chasing Dragons.

On top of the mountain Elzinga said, "Thanks, boys. I said this is my last one, and it just might be it." On the descent below tree-line he looked back up at the mountain and said, "My knees hurt, my back hurts, but I don't think that was my last one. Chasing the dragon!"

**Summary**

Always Chasing Dragons (IV WI4, 650m), north face, Aye West (3050m). FA: Jim Elzinga, Brandon Pullan, Ian Welsted, October 21, 2013.

Always Chasing Dragons on the north face of Aye West. Photo: Brandon Pullan

# Snowfields Forever

Paul Geddes

AS THE 2013 CENTENNIAL of Mount Robson Provincial Park approached, five long-time friends contemplated how to celebrate the event. We had all been members of the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) for many years, and our *modus operandi* in recent years had been to search out unclimbed or rarely climbed mountains.

We researched how the ACC had organized a climbing camp in the new park at Berg Lake in July 1913, which resulted in the first confirmed ascent of Mount Robson by Austrian guide Conrad Kain with ACC members Major General W.W. "Billy" Foster and American Albert "Mack" MacCarthy. At that camp, Mount Robson was attempted by at least two other routes, the Wishbone Arête being one of them. Swiss guide Walter Schauffelberger guided Basil S. Darling and Harley H. Prouty up the right-hand branch of the wishbone until deteriorating weather and time-consuming step-cutting on the upper section brought their ascent to a halt just 120 metres short of the summit. In the century since, Mount Robson, Monarch of the Canadian Rockies, has become an international destination recognized by mountaineers around the world.

Most of our group had climbed Mount Robson, and some, Resplendent. As well, Roger and I had completed the north face route on Whitehorn. Our goal was to forgo the summer crowds at Berg Lake. The park's master plan stated that the Swiftcurrent Glacier area receives little to no use—perfect for us!

The western boundary of the park runs across the summit of Mount Longstaff. This became our main objective. Perhaps fewer than a dozen people before us had stood on this summit in the summer mountaineering season. ACC Calgary Section member Glen Boles, in describing their six-person 1992 ascent of Mount Longstaff, wrote in the 1993 *Canadian Alpine Journal*: "We built a cairn and left a record. To our knowledge, no one had trodden the top since Gilmour, Holway and Palmer made the first ascent in 1916."

Mount Longstaff was named in 1911 after the suggestion by A.O. Wheeler that Dr. Thomas George Longstaff be recognized. In 1907, Longstaff had climbed Mount Trisul, a 7,120-metre peak in India, and for many years he held the record for the highest summit reached. His high-altitude experience was useful to the 1922 and 1924 British Mount Everest expeditions. Longstaff made a couple of visits to the mountains of Canada, including the 1910 ACC summer camp at Mount Assiniboine. In 1929, he was the chairman of the ACC UK Section.

After the early exploration of Mount Robson, the attention of a small, dedicated group of mountaineers shifted to the glacial system in the next valley west of Berg Lake. The mountains on the western side of the Swiftcurrent Glacier were first explored in 1915 by Professor E.W.D. Holway and Dr. Andrew J. Gilmour. On that expedition, they were unsuccessful in their attempt on Mount Longstaff, the most prominent peak on that side of the glacier. Undaunted by the effort, Holway and Gilmour planned to return by a different route the following summer. They recruited the talented mountaineer Howard Palmer to accompany them in 1916.

The three climbers met up at outfitter Donald "Curly" Phillips' cabin near the Mount Robson rail stop on July 17, 1916. Over the next few days they became the first people known to have viewed the headwaters of Swiftcurrent Creek. After a couple of false starts, on July 27 they were able to gain the summit of Mount Longstaff at 3,180 metres. Palmer's article in the *Appalachia Journal* of 1920 records in detail their epic endeavour to reach and climb Longstaff over the 10-day period. The text that really caught my imagination was: "After perhaps half an hour we started back, stopping a moment at the rocks to pile up a few stones as a protection for a small tin record box." Since the early 1900s, Swiftcurrent Glacier has been in steady retreat, losing several kilometres of its length and a hundred metres or so of thickness.

On the morning of July 21, 2013, our group flew onto the edge of the Swiftcurrent Glacier to establish our camp within the park on a relatively flat spot at an elevation of 2,300 metres. The view down the glacier, as well as of the summits of Longstaff and surrounding peaks, was perfect. We strategically placed ourselves to the northeast of Mount Phillips (named after the famous packer Curly Phillips) just out of the fall-line from the steep slopes above. Our tents sat directly on the stone-covered ice. With approximately 50 metres of ice underneath our campsite, we had a natural fridge for our fresh food.

After a day of settling into our new environment and gaining a modicum of acclimatization, we got an early start up the snow-covered glacier, which ascends all of the way to the summit of Mount Longstaff. The upper ice face was covered by 25 centimetres of snow, making step-kicking ideal. It is not a difficult climb by today's standards. In fact, by its easiest route its snowfields would be a worthwhile spring ski-mountaineering destination. Our group of three were five hours from camp to summit and good weather gave us time to lollygag on the summit ridge. In the distance to the south, we could see the Premier Range of the Cariboo Mountains. But the more stunning views were to the east: Robson, Whitehorn and Philips. The only recognizable entry in the modern-day summit cairn was from August 16, 1992, by Glen Boles. There were only a few other notes from year 2000 onward, which were mostly illegible.

Before starting our descent, I

wanted to have a look down the south ridge. From my experience on Mount Sir Wilfred Laurier in 2004, where we located the 1924 and 1925 first and second ascent register, I knew that snow-covered summits usually mean a cairn has been constructed somewhere in the closest rock outcropping. While today there is exposed rock on the bench below the snow-domed summit of Mount Longstaff, this would not have been the case 100 years ago. No cairn was visible along the down-sloping rock ridge. I searched around a couple of rock bluffs—then by chance, I noticed a small rusted tin lying by my feet amongst the rubble. Ecstatic with my good fortune, I put the tin to my ear and gave it a gentle shake. There was something inside. The lid was rusted tightly in place so I put it in my pocket and returned to the summit plateau. It was time for us to head down.

Back in camp I delicately removed the tin's lid and exposed the contents. Unfortunately, the paper inside was water saturated, making it very fragile and discoloured around its edges. I laid it out on a smooth rock in the sun and carefully unfolded it. First I could read the date: "July 27/16." Then the three names of the 1916 team (each in their own handwriting) were there in the classic script of that era, probably prepared beforehand while they were still at their camp. The paper's edges were frayed and I immediately did what I could to protect it from damage. This record of their first ascent had sat on the mountainside undisturbed for 97 years!

The next day I made a satellite phone call to the ACC office in Canmore and asked for the Club's executive director, Lawrence White, to inform the park and the Whyte Museum of our find. When we flew out several days later, we stopped by the Mount Robson Provincial Park office to meet with Park Superintendent Wayne VanVelzen and Senior Park Ranger Hugo Mulyk. They agreed that this item of park heritage would be best preserved at the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies archives in Banff. The ACC collection housed in Banff is one of the main resources for the study of Canadian mountaineering history.

Our find soon led to another discovery. On our return to the town of Valemount, we learned that Reiner Thoni had climbed the very challenging Wishbone Arête on Mount Robson on August 16, 2012, with Janelle and Mark Smiley. On the arête, 550 metres below the summit, they found a small canister. They soon realized that it was from the second serious attempt on the route by Fred Ayres, John Oberlin and Al Creswell on July 24-25, 1951, who had abandoned their climb due to the avalanche conditions. The canister, which contained a silver-painted wishbone, broke upon opening, so Reiner brought the hand-written record inside down with them, not wanting to see it lost to the elements on the mountain. Back in Valemount, they left it for temporary safekeeping with Reiner's mother. When we explained the important work of the Whyte Museum, Reiner was keen for us to add it to the ACC collection.

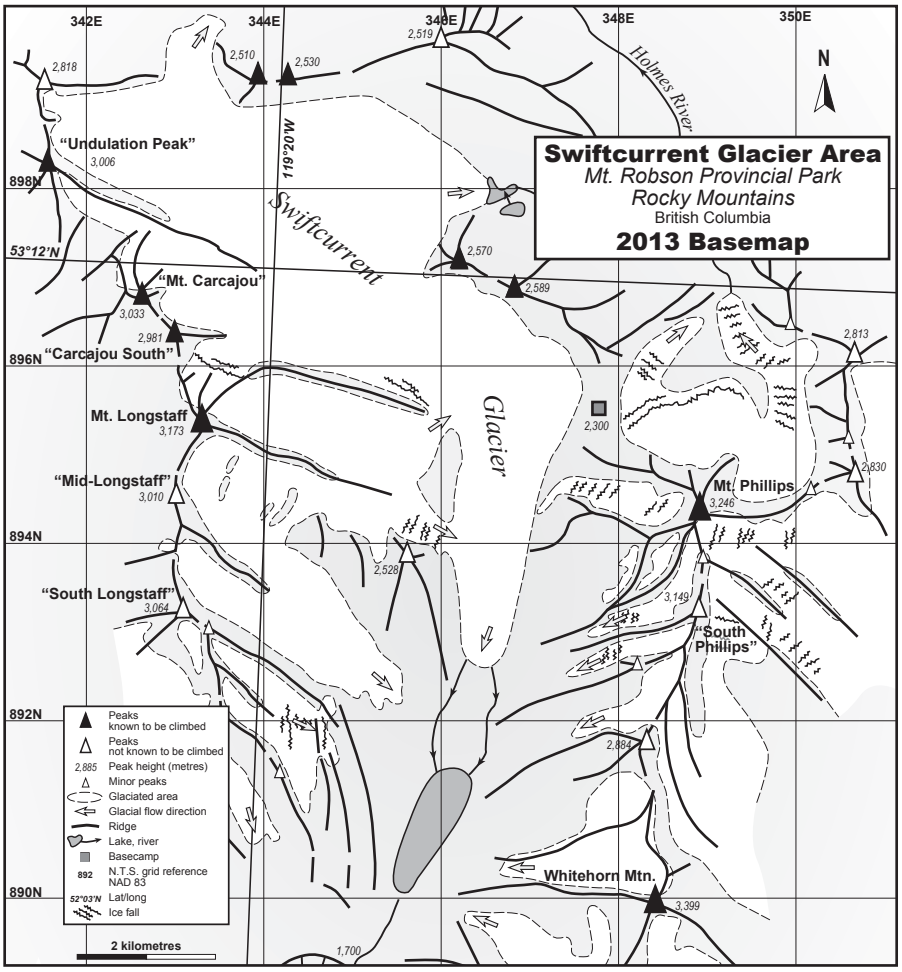
Our group enjoyed the week of July 21-29, climbing several peaks in this beautiful Canadian mountain area. Being able to deliver these two historic records to the Whyte Museum archives for conservation and safekeeping in Mount Robson Provincial Park's centennial year made our trip especially memorable.


## Summary

Fifth ascent of Mount Longstaff (3173m) via east ridge. Paul Geddes, Norm Greene, Bill McKenzie, July 23, 2013.

Third ascent of Mount Carcajou (GR425968, 3033m) via north face. Paul Geddes, Willa Geddes, Norm Greene, July 25, 2013.

First ascent of South Carcajou (GR430963, 2981m) via south ridge. FA: Bill McKenzie, Roger Wallis, July 25, 2013.

# The East

## A New Mecca

Sam Eastman-Zaleski

I ONCE READ that much of Ontario ice climbing is perspective—making the best of what is frozen and in front of you. This year, many have managed to make the best of what was frozen and in front of them, and in the form of some very remarkable new climbs. Young motivated climbers getting into the game, the exploration of new areas, the use of hammer drills, and competition for new routes all contributed to a large development of new mixed climbs. Southern Ontario is now home to a substantial number of bolted mixed and drytooling routes, causing tension with those used to the status quo. It has also created much discussion around route grades. Rockies' veteran and Ontario-based Jim Elzinga, who has 40-plus years of ice climbing experience, offered this 17-year-old climber sage advice: "It happened in the Rockies and other areas, kid. This is nothing new. More important and what is exciting, Southern Ontario is a worthy winter climbing destination. Get out there, send routes and ignore the noise!"

Late November saw early season lines forming. By mid-December, the very same climbs were closing in on fat—remarkable for the date. As the snow started to fall and the groundwater began to freeze, some local (and not so local) climbers began to pounce on new projects. Here is their story.

### Watt Lake

If there is a chairman of the board when it comes to high-quality route development in Ontario, it is Andriy Kolos. Kolos writes on his website (Kolos.ca): "Ice climbing in Southern Ontario is worthy of attention. It's special, unique and, like all ice and mixed climbing, engaging." This quote sets the context for all of Kolos' route development. At Watt Lake near Bancroft, he developed three new routes: Prisoner 24601 (M6, 20m), which can be climbed as a dry or thin ice route with bolt and gear protection; New Diesel (M6+, 20m), which follows a ramp to a smear near the top (a #1 Camalot protects the start but is bolted otherwise); and Almost Sorcery (M6+, 14m) that starts just left of New Diesel (stick clip the bolt and make your way up a crack to a lower-off anchor).

Peter Hoang on Streets Cry Freedom at Papineau North. Photo: Bojan Uzicanin

### Bear Lake

Kolos, joined by the recently transplanted westerner Josh Smith, put up The Shining (M7 WI5). The Shinning is an aesthetic line of drips and daggers that tumble over a series of dark granite roofs to the left of Frankenhooker. Frankenhooker is probably Southern Ontario's most impressive WI5 ice climb and shares the first thin-slab ice pitch with The Shining. At the top of the slab, move left and the real business begins as you surmount a larger-than-body-length roof to the hanging ice. Protection is in the form of bolts. The Shining and Frankenhooker are two Southern Ontario classics that represent the best of traditional ice and mixed climbing.

### Papineau North

January saw Elzinga and I visiting a little known crag called Papineau North. Papineau North is a low escarpment that forms one side of a gully on the northeast end of Papineau Lake. It has only one short, reliable ice flow—Consolation Prize (WI3/4), first climbed by ice explorer Danylo Darewych and Will Gilbert. Papineau North is five minutes from the road and hosts a series of tantalizing smears and interesting corners. Elzinga and I quickly bolted and climbed two lines to the right of Consolation: Trojan Horse (M6+, 18m), and Clip and Go (M6, 15m). Trojan follows thin ice to an impressive hanging dagger under a roof. A left traverse from the ice to the rock lets you escape the roof. A few big moves later, you are at the lower-offs. Clip and Go follows thin smears to thin holds to a thin blob. At first, we rated it M6, but since then, increased traffic has cleaned and broken in holds. M5 is more appropriate. The two routes are bolt protected and have become Southern Ontario's most popular mixed climbs.

In early February, Kolos visited Papineau North and developed routes on a wall at the north end of the cliff that he named The Face that Launched a Thousand Awes. First to fall was the pure ice route, Madawaska Shuffle (WI4, 10m). Streets Cry Freedom (WI4, 15m) was next up—a serious lead on thin ice with protection in the form of a sideways spectre and two stubbies. To the right, Kolos grabbed another plum line: Naked Soul (M5+, 18m), which follows cracks to a thin smear.

The Chairman's (Kolos) final stamp on the cliff was teaming up with Peter Hoang to climb Maynooth Goes Boom

(M6+, 18m), which climbs ever-worsening holds through one of the most impressive overhangs at the cliff.

Josh Burden and David Broadhead, two of Ontario's ground-up traditionalists, managed the first ascent of an intense line. They rated The Spectre M5, but do not let the grade fool you. This drytooling route climbs past a roof and into a beautiful dihedral. The Spectre gained its name and reputation after Burden had a hold break and took a fall onto a sideways-driven spectre. Much to his and Dave's surprise, it held. After his fall, Burden composed himself and went for the moves and had to run it out over an insecure snow-covered slab with only a soft Stubai and wobbly Lost Arrow pitons for pro. On the first free ascent, Burden taped a CCM hockey pad to his leg to protect a knee injury from previous serious falls. Burden and Broadhead decided to add a bolted anchor on a ledge before the dangerous slab.

Young gun Matt Norman climbed the impressive corner to the left of The Spectre. The obvious corner/crack line had been contemplated over the last several winters by some of Ontario's best ice climbers, but it had never been climbed due to a very difficult overhanging start and ice that never seemed fat enough. Norman worked his way through the bouldery start (M8) to a run-out and thinly iced-up corner capped by an overhang that forced him out right to get the top. He aptly called the route Wafer Thin (M8 WI4).

Not to be left out of the game, Danylo Darewych and Ontario rock-climbing legend Garry Reiss returned to the crag and climbed another often-looked-at corner they named Sticks and Stones (M3 WI4, 15m). The corner is located at the left margin of the Face That Launched a Thousand Awes. Danylo managed to lead through a squeeze chimney lower on the route, while Garry led the thin ice higher up. The dynamic duo also added Put Up You'll Be Fine (WI3+R, 10m) and Sorry Dave (WI3, 10m).

As the winter ended, Elzinga and I headed back to the crag and established Spartacus (M8, 18m). Eight bolts lead a difficult path through a pocketed, overhanging granite wall to the left of Consolation Prize. A saving grace comes at the overlap past the sixth bolt. A hard pull helps you get established on the short headwall, and then a thin crack splits the remaining face to the anchors. A stellar route!

Papineau Roadside is now Southern Ontario's new equivalent to the popular sport-mixed area Haffner Creek in the Canadian Rockies

## Other Diamond Lake—Hidden Gems Crag

The ice at the second or "other" Diamond Lake is not nearly as impressive as the classic southern ice-climbing destination of Diamond Lake near Combermere. What it lacked in ice, it made up in new mixed-route potential. Other Diamond Lake is located 21 kilometres northwest of Bancroft along South Baptiste Lake Road. Danylo Darewych had wandered in and discovered it during Christmas of 2010.

Elzinga and local hardman Justin Bryant visited Hidden Gems Crag in early January to check out conditions and new-route potential. Justin had already pioneered a couple of classic ice lines in 2011: Jade (WI4) and Onyx (WI3). They warmed up on Onyx then climbed the far left side of the waterfall. Elzinga led an impressive line up into a small cave with a rock overhang, and then made a few very strenuous jungle-warfare-type moves out of the cave onto a thin curtain of ice up to the top to produce Fools Seldom Differ (WI4+, 18m). Although an approachable grade, the insecure curtain, overhanging moves and delicate foot placements prompted Kolos to add a bolt next to the traverse to make for a safer climb. The ice builds as the season progresses.

Elzinga, always hungry for more, returned with me and Matt Norman for the first ascent of the Pedestal (5.9 M5 WI4), a thumb-like feature capped by a golden-brown ice curtain found to the left of the Onyx. A classic off-width crack prompted Norman to climb old school without tools, stuffing our only #5 Camalot into the crack as he ran it out to the top of the pedestal. After a good rest under the lacy curtain, he clipped a pre-placed bolt and launched onto the hanging ice in an impressive *tour de force*.

We spent the rest of the day scoping and bolting a big mixed line in the middle of the amphitheater of the main wall. Dubbed the Black Pearl by Bryant, the wall had several attempts. Warm temperatures and pouring rain caused the ice to recede, and like drowned rats we scurried home to dry out, hoping the ice would grow back during the next cold spell.

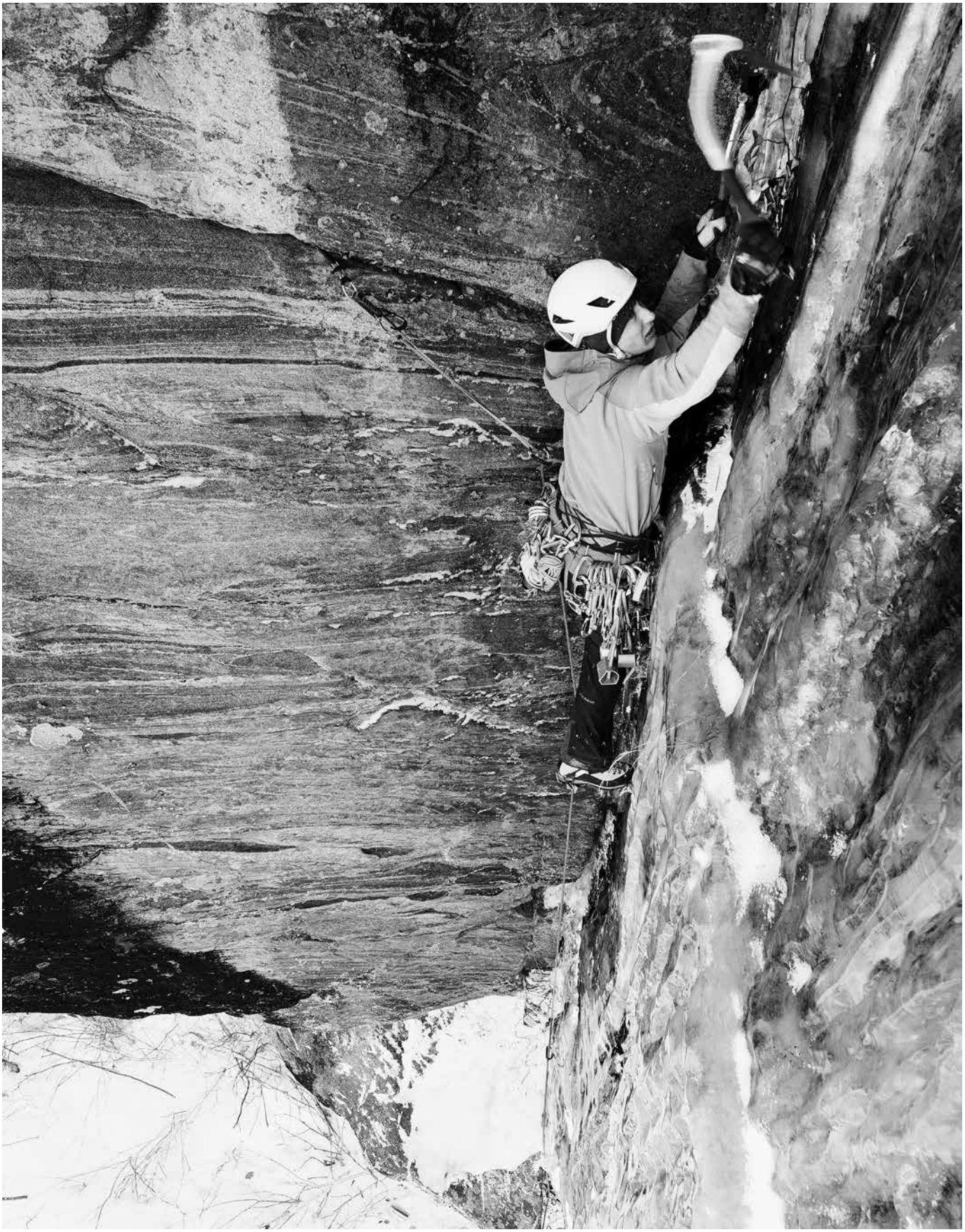
Elzinga went to climb in the Rockies and I came back to work on a new route to the right of the Black Pearl. Over two weekends, I bolted through an improbable set of overhangs and climbed an ungraded 25-metre route named Sisters of Jadeite. One of the more exciting sequences on Sisters involves a four-foot move sideways from a positive hold to a one-tooth sloper.

Nathan Kutcher and Rebecca Lewis, home from the Ice World Cup circuit, created two moderate routes: Black Diamond (M4 WI4) and Blood Diamond (M6 WI4). The routes are left of the Pedestal and finish on the jagged ice curtain that rimmed the top of the cliff. Nathan bolted both of them from the ground. "It was easier than bush-walking to the top," he explained.

Elzinga returned home briefly, and with his wife, Siu Mai, made a trip to check out the Black Pearl. The ice at the top had not grown, looked thin and was delaminating. Nevertheless, he jumped on it and the Black Pearl was climbed (M6, 25m), becoming an instant crag classic. The dangerous sun-baked ice at the top proved to be most problematic. Unable to protect it, he ran it out to the anchors with the ice breaking away underfoot with each move upwards. To Elzinga, it was just like another day in the Rockies.

Uninspired by the drytooling and scary ice, Siu Mai—in her mountain boots without crampons—led the route

Matt Norman on Wafer Thin at Papineau North. Photo: Brett Lantz



tool-less and made quick work of it up to the ice, at which point she asked to lower off. It was an extremely impressive feat by this talented climber, and required much more than physical strength.

Peter Hoang completed the second ascent of the Pearl and spotted a line between the Pearl and Sisters of Jadeite. With Dave Donaldson, they climbed the corner between the two routes, following a series of cracks and overhangs that Peter led ground up and entirely on gear. A bold and impressive lead considering that higher up, the pro consisted of equalized pins and crappy cams. When Hoang was asked about his lead, he explained, "I was full of negative emotions and had reached a point were death seemed irrelevant. I would often throw for holds, half expecting to take extremely dangerous falls." They called the route Raven (M7+R).

## Kluke Lookout (Bear Mountain)

Kluke Lookout is a big granite cliff (about 100 metres tall) with half a dozen decent ice routes. It's a long drive from Toronto (330 kilometres), about 20 kilometres from Barry's Bay. It is one of my father's favourite areas, and together we cut a trail into the east side and put up a new route called Chiraq (WI4 M5+, 43m). The route climbs overhanging cracks onto ice smears. Much of the gear is fixed (four bolts and two pitons)—an in-situ Bugaboo piton and a small stopper protect the crux. The steep ice took no screws.

Marc Bracken, in the foreword of the 1995 edition of the Southern Ontario ice guidebook, states: "For the growing numbers of ice climbers in Southern Ontario, there is no Mecca they can pay homage to. There is ice but it is scattered over tens of thousands of square kilometres of bush." Mixed climbing has changed this. All one has to do is drive to Bancroft and you will find yourself within easy striking distance of more than a half-dozen first-rate crags with high-calibre routes. We have found our Mecca thanks to the skill and tenacity of a handful of first ascensionists, many of whom are listed in this report.

Andriy Kolos on Almost Sorcery at Watt Lake. Photo: David McCaig

# 28 Days of Winter

Max Fisher

IT'S EARLY DECEMBER. I've just wrapped up work in Chilean Patagonia and I'm checking the weather forecast for the Maritimes, where I'll be for 28 days before returning to Chile. I want four weeks of cold weather because that means the ice will be in. Thankfully, the forecast is calling for below-zero temperatures, which gets me thinking of the ice climbing areas I want to explore—Cape Chignecto and Cape d'Or, or even back into the Moose River area, all in Nova Scotia. As I board a plane to return to the East Coast for the holidays and to celebrate my sister's wedding, I can already hear the whack-whack of my ice tools.

Home is Sackville, New Brunswick. Nestled along the innermost stretch of the Bay of Fundy coast, it boasts a population of about 4,000 people, Mount Allison University, and… sea cliffs! I arrived there on December 8, and the next day I headed out to check the local ice conditions.

A lot of rain had fallen and night-time temperatures had hovered around -10 C for about five days before I arrived. This made me feel pretty good about climbing a bit while checking out conditions.

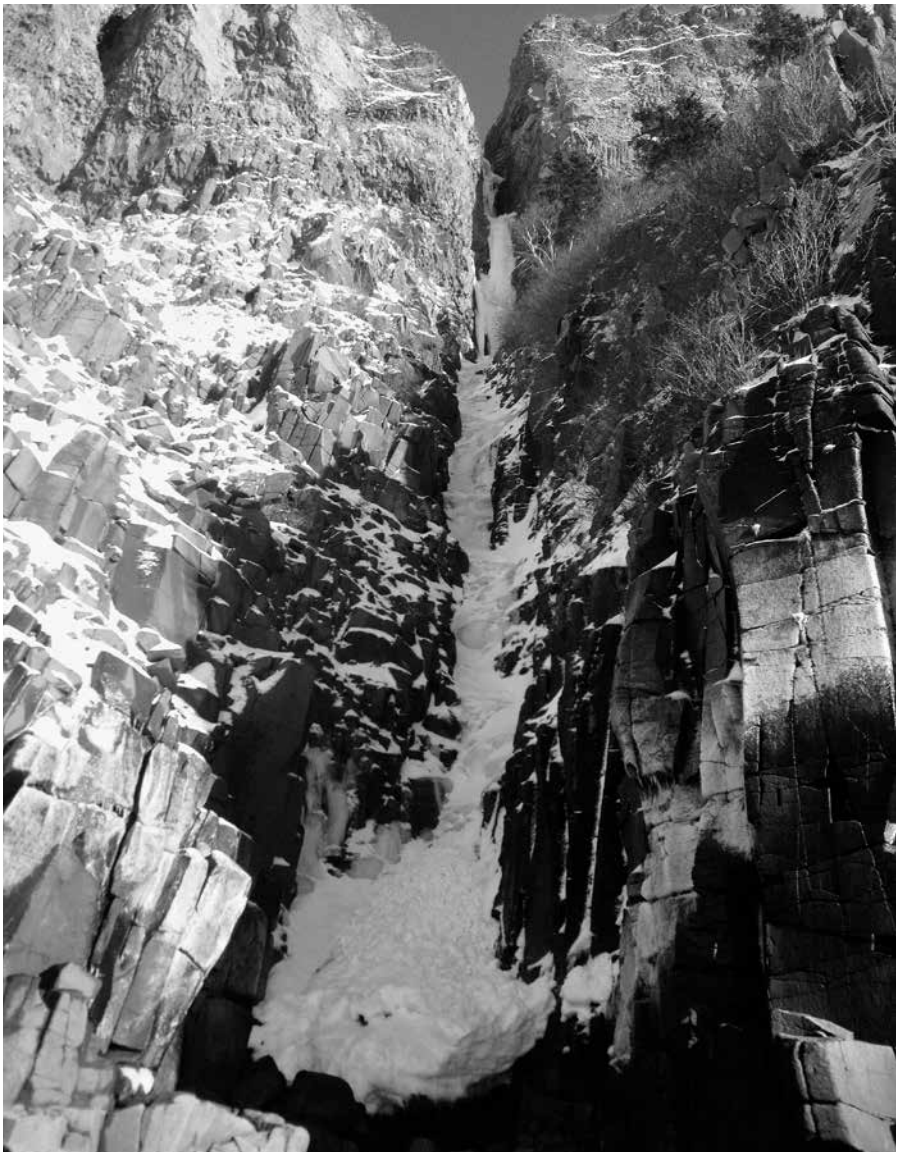
On my first day out, I visited Peck's Point. It has a few short routes that were all well formed. The next destination was Cape Maringouin, where everything was also forming well, and the third outing took me to Dorchester Cape, the ice mecca of the area, which offers 35-metre lines that range from WI3 to WI5. Its beautiful vertical ice was the best welcome-home present I could have hoped for, and by the end of the day, I had ascended 15 pitches of it.

Over the next few days I often found myself returning to Dorchester Cape, and I even made an early season trip into Parlee Brook and to Joggins, N.S. As the cold snap lingered and ice kept forming all along the Fundy coast, venturing to famous Cape Chignecto and Cape D'Or became a must.

On December 21, Greg Hughes, Mike Delaney and I went to Chignecto Provincial Park on the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy, where we followed the beach for about 6.5 kilometres to reach our climbing destination. Bay of Fundy tides are the highest in the world and they come in fast, only making the beach accessible during the low-tide window. We made note of the cut-off time for the more convenient exit strategy of walking out along the beach, which was about a 1.5-hour approach, if you get the tide times right.

We were greeted by an expanse of ice so impressive that it had us running up and down the beach with excitement. The numerous ice lines ranged from WI2 to WI5 and varied from 175 to 200 metres in length. Given the quality of the ice we found that day, it's completely understandable that we climbed past the tidal cut-off time. Walking out via the beach was no longer an

Enter the Dragon at Cape d'Or. Photo: Max Fisher



option. Instead, we located the cliff-top snow-covered Chignecto Trail and followed it for 4.5 hours to reach the car. Our day of climbing resulted in two new routes: High and Dry and Maritime Alpinism.

The next day, I headed to the neighbouring sea cliffs of Cape d'Or with Luc Gallant. To our knowledge, only the area east of the lighthouse had been explored and little had been climbed, but several steep, hard lines were rumoured to exist. We approached from the west and found a number of hard lines up to 150 metres in length. We climbed two 60-metre WI3 lines and also scouted a few routes by climbing the bottom pitches. We left that night with the pull to come back and climb again this magical place.

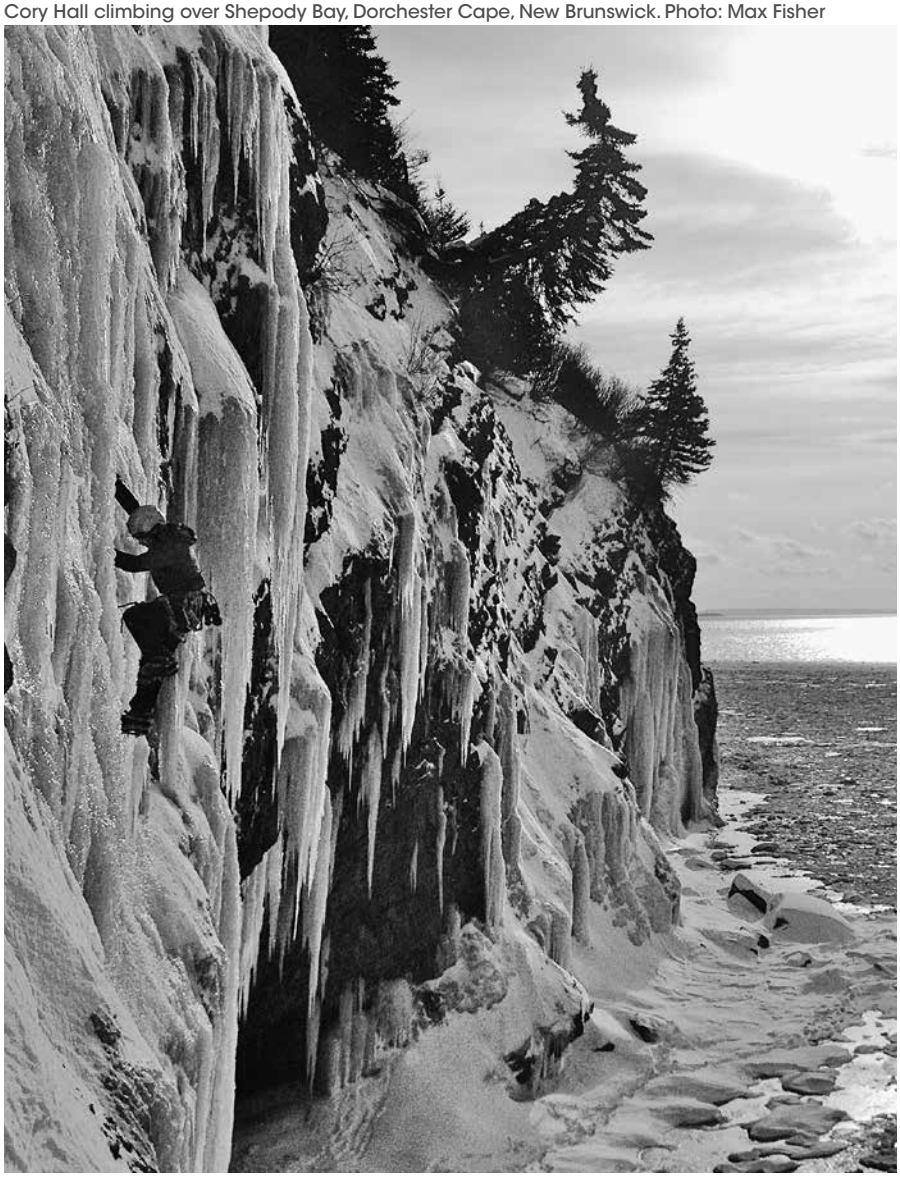
The following day, Luc, Greg, Cory Hall and I headed to St. Martins, N.B., in hopes that the area called the Controls was in. It's south facing and the bottom of the routes are commonly knocked down by the tides. After checking out the Controls and deeming them not quite in, we headed west 300 metres and found a number of 70-metre unclimbed lines. By the end of the day, we had completed four new routes.

On January 1, 2014, Greg Hughes and I met up with Matt Peck in Cape d'Or. Greg and I rented a small cabin to spend a couple of days there and see what climbs we could do. Since the tide times prohibited us from climbing in the morning, we hiked into the area at noon to reach the base of our first objective—a 130-metre line with a crux capped by wind-formed gargoyles. Enter the Dragon provided delicate, techy climbing over the gargoyles and through tunnels.

The next day, again knowing the tide times were at our disadvantage, we hiked in early and got on a route I had been eyeing since my first visit there. We roped up and climbed The Sweet Chimney of Love, which started with thin ice into the base of a chimney. We then proceeded to shimmy our way up the chimney and around ice bulges with limited gear to easier ground above.

After my 28 days on the Atlantic coast, I returned to work in Chilean Patagonia, getting acclimatized to the summer heat and preparing to go into the mountains for 32 days with my students at National Outdoor Leadership School. My winter was mostly over for the season; a decent trade off, I guess!

Cory Hall climbing over Shepody Bay, Dorchester Cape, New Brunswick. Photo: Max Fisher



**Summary**

High and Wild (WI4, 175m), Chignecto Provincial Park. FA: Mike Delaney, Max Fisher, Greg Hughes, December 21, 2013.

Maritime Alpinism (WI4, 175m), Chignecto Provincial Park, N.S. FA: Max Fisher, Greg Hughes, December 21, 2013.

Side Doggy (WI5, 70m), St. Martins, N.B. FA: Cory Hall, Greg Hughes, December 23, 2013.

Hot Sweet V (WI4+, 70m), St. Martins, N.B. FA: Max Fisher, Luc Gallant, December 23, 2013.

Unnamed (WI4+, 70m), St. Martins, N.B. FA: Cory Hall, Greg Hughes, December 23, 2013.

Unnamed (WI4 M3 R, 70m), St. Martins, N.B. FA: Max Fisher, Luc Gallant, December 23, 2013.

Enter the Dragon (WI5, 130m), Cape D'Or, N.S. FA: Max Fisher, Greg Hughes, Matt Peck, January 1, 2014.

The Sweet Chimney of Love (WI3+ M5 R, 110m), Cape D'Or, N.S. FA: Max Fisher, Greg Hughes, Matt Peck, January 2, 2014.

# Sens unique

Louis Rousseau

SENS UNIQUE est une voie trad de plusieurs longueurs qui suit un imposant pilier rocheux suspendu sur le flanc nord de l'Acropole des Draveurs, dans le parc national des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie. Cette destination populaire d'escalade de glace est surtout bien connue grâce à une voie de glace méga classique nommée La Pomme d'or (WI5+, 330m).

Tout d'abord grimpé en 1974 par Claude Bérubé et son partenaire Stephan Frick, Sens unique est rarement repéré en saison régulière d'escalade sur rocher, très probablement en raison de sa longue approche et de la piètre qualité de la roche dans sa troisième longueur.

Le 7 février dernier, Yannick Girard et moi avons accompli la première ascension hivernale de la voie. Vents violents, bourrasques de neige et des températures variant de -19° C à -28° C se sont allègrement mêlés de la partie. Ces conditions nous ont fourni de nombreux défis intéressants en remplissant de glace les minces et très utiles fissures. La difficulté globale a été augmentée par une approche en ski de 25 kilomètres à travers la vallée des Hautes-Gorges.

Après la portion de ski de fond, nous avons passé quatre heures à faire une montée abrupte en raquettes et crampons et puis à mener un combat de titans à travers une forêt de buissons et de neige dense jusqu'à la base du pilier sur lequel se trouve Sens unique. Lancés dans la voie, nous avons grimpé jusqu'à la noirceur, pour ensuite bivouaquer à ciel ouvert. Le lendemain matin, nous avons terminé l'ascension avant de descendre en rappel et de skier jusqu'à la voiture pour conclure notre aventure.

**Résumé**

Première ascension hivernale de Sens unique (M6+R A1, 200m), Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie, Charlevoix, Québec. PAH : Yannick Girard, Louis Rousseau, 7 février, 2014.

Sens unique, sur le flanc nord de l'Acropole des Draveurs. Photo : Ian Bergeron

# Hypothenuse

## Jean-Pierre Ouellet

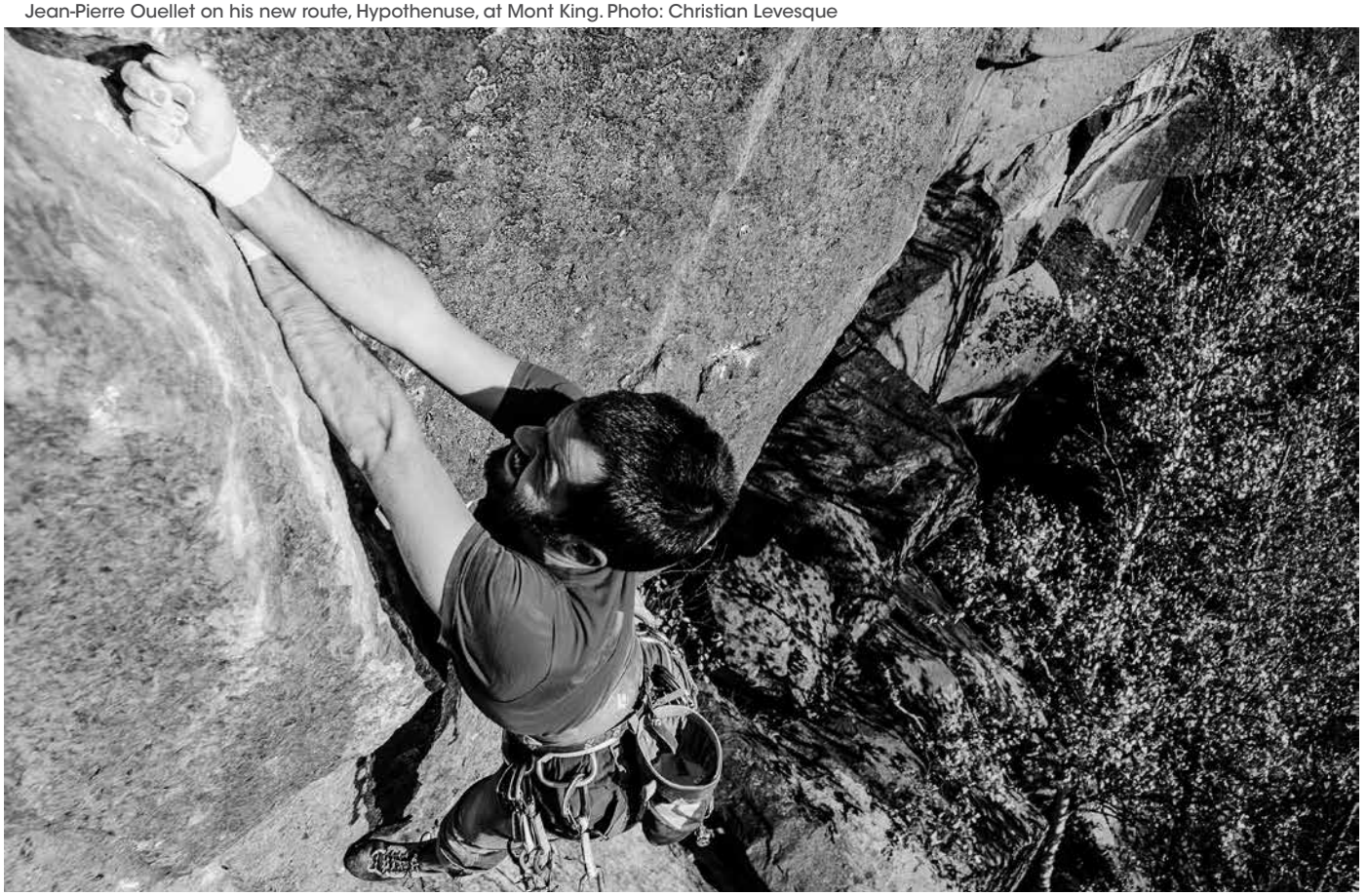
WITH PLANS TO CLIMB in the Trango Valley in Pakistan foiled by terrorism and violence, I decided to stay home and climb on local crags. I had a few ideas for new routes that would keep me busy.

The first route I set my eyes on was a short roof crack at an obscure crag near St-Hypolite in the Laurentides. If it were right off the ground, it would be a five-star boulder problem. But, since it is quite high above the ground, you definitely have to rope up. The roof itself is about seven metres long and the crack varies from hands to flaring fist to fingers. It climbs really well and is surprisingly powerful. I called it Dommages Collateraux (Collateral Damages) because I injured my knee doing a funky heel-toe foot jam at the crux. I think it goes at 5.13b. The gear is good but hard to place.

The second route I climbed is a cool 30-metre 5.13a thin hand crack at Mont Nixon near Mont Tremblant. It is on the huge boulder at the base of the main wall. This one was really dirty, so I had to spend a few days cleaning the dirt and loose blocks from the crack. The start is quite bouldery. After a few hard finger jams, you traverse right in a horizontal hand crack. From there, it is mostly thin hands and finger jams. The tricky part is that the route leans aggressively to the left and the crux is right at the end. I called it Predateur (Predator) because when you look at the route from far it looks like the Predator profile (from the movies).

The third route I put up is one of the best and hardest cracks in Quebec. I had tried it about seven years ago but had never found the time to attempt it again because I was stuck on other projects. It is the really obvious finger crack that leans to the left, to the right of La Zebree sector at Mont King. The route starts on a ledge under a small roof. Right from the first move you enter the crux. With a few hard pulls, you eventually reach the crack. The crux probably goes at V7-8 and the finger crack is deceptively hard. When looking at it from the ground, you would think you just layback this section, but it's too steep, so you have to jam and heel hook to a huge horn jug. From the jug you can place a nest of small cams and get some juice back for the redpoint crux. Hypothenuse goes at 5.13c.

Jean-Pierre Ouellet on his new route, Hypothenuse, at Mont King. Photo: Christian Levesque



# Blood Wall

## Sam Eastman-Zaleski

IN RECENT YEARS, the hilly Madawaska Valley northeast of Toronto has seen a flurry of mixed and ice climbing activity. Cliff lines dot the edges of small lakes, each hiding unique traits. Blood Wall may only be one of hundreds of cliffs in the surrounding area, yet it is one of the finest! Rising out of Harris Bay, an arm of Bark Lake, the 45-metre Blood Wall is an intimidating, overhanging granite wall with beautiful orange and black swirls running through it.

It was first discovered by intrepid ice explorer Danylo Darewych in the winter of 2012. He realized the potential and got the ball rolling by climbing two smears to the left of the wall—Meet the New Boss (WI3) and the longer Join the Revolution (M3 WI3). On a scouting trip with Jim Elzinga, Danylo looked at the cliff and realized the potential of developing a new mixed and drytooling area. In late October 2013, Elzinga, joined by local climbers Justin Bryant and David Broadhead, cut a winding two-kilometre trail to the top of the cliff over a couple of rainy weekends. In November, I joined Elzinga on a bolting mission. On the left side of the wall, Jim had scoped out a 30-metre partially ice-filled shallow crack system and face problem that leads to a ledge that traverses the cliff at two-thirds height. Eleven bolts, decent pods, small edges, a few falls and the help of western hardman Josh Smith, Battle's Just Begun (M7) was born—a crag classic with a short easier second pitch that leads to the top.

On the far right side, tucked away in a corner, lies the crag's gem: an aesthetic rustic-red granite crack with patches of ice that overhangs by five metres. We called it 17 Stitches (M9). It took two weekends of bolting before it was ready to be worked on. A low ice curtain leads to a very powerful sequence with a four-foot dyno from a side pull to a small bulge of ice. With your heart racing and your arms barely able to hold on to your tools as you hammer them into the moss-filled crack, you pull into the final overhanging dihedral and fight gravity to the anchors.

Further to the right, Elzinga and his wife, Siu Mai, climbed the new Pinch of Nerves. It is fun but run-out and serious for the grade (M4 WI3). They named their climb in my honour. While bolting 17 Stitches, I had a nasty nerve pinch that pulsed through my body, resulting in a day of sitting on the packs, watching the two of them delicately send thin delaminating ice.

Elzinga disappeared to the Rockies, climbed Slipstream in a day and returned at the end of March. We wanted to get one more weekend of climbing in before the lake ice disappeared. We very tentatively tiptoed across Harris Bay, getting our feet wet twice and risked drowning once—true Ontario objective hazards. We rapped and placed 17 bolts on a fantastic overhanging face/corner. It became Bloody Sunday (M8), another small-hold test-piece that combines power and superb technique.

The names—Blood Wall, 17 Stitches, Bloody Sunday, Battle's Just Begun—have all been inspired by U2 and a fall Elzinga took when establishing a fixed-line that helps getting to the top of the cliff while moving to and from different climbs. The Blood Wall cliff and the nearby Papineau Roadside crag are nice opposites to the drilled roofs that are becoming ever so popular in many of today's mixed and drytooling areas.

If you ever run into a six-and-a-half-foot-tall Clint Eastwood look-alike, who has the appearance and sound of a western gunslinger, you've met Elzinga. If you have the courage to talk to him, he may even tell you the story of 17 Stitches, but don't get your hopes up. He may just stare you down in true Eastwood fashion.

Blood Wall at Bark Lake: (1) Meet the New Boss, (2) Join the Revolution, (3) Battle's Just Begun, (4) Sunday Bloody Sunday, (5) 17 Stitches, (6) Pinch of Nerves. Photo: Robert Borotkanics

# Foreign

## Jungdung Kangri

Cory Hall

WITH PAKISTAN TRAVEL plans falling through due to visa hassles and recent conflict, my good friend James Monypenny and I quickly regrouped. With nothing more than a photograph and an incredibly vague topographical map, we set our sights on an unnamed, unattempted granite peak located in the Ladahk Range of northern India, known to a select few as Jungdung Kangri (6,160 metres). Sitting in a rain shadow and with a mid-July to early September climbing season, it sounded great. Weeks of jarring jeep rides and Indian bureaucratic headaches followed our arrival in Delhi.

Jungdung Kangri sits hidden in the Palzampiu Valley in the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir, only a few dozen kilometres from the heavily militarized disputed border with Pakistan. Logistics weren't going to be easy. We first tried to gain access from the south through the town of Likir, thus eliminating the need for military permits, but the pass was said to be impassable to donkeys. James and I secured nine-dollar military permits easily through a tourist agency in Leh, and headed north over the 5,740-metre Khardung La pass and into the Nubra Valley. Military permits are only valid for a period of seven days, so we planned to either hike out for days to the south avoiding the checkpoints, or chance that they wouldn't check us on the way out. It is also important to note that any climbing and mountaineering in India requires permits, which need to be acquired well in advance. Although, recent reforms have dropped prices, opened new areas, and sped up and simplified the process.

Through pure passionate will, quite a bit of luck and a couple of days of hiking, we managed to get ourselves, two donkeys and more than 90 kilograms of gear to a basecamp at 5,090 metres. We camped in a remote, pristine alpine meadow below the mountain—a playground of granite faces, alpine couloirs and tiny pointy summits awaited us. James and I hauled massive loads up moraine talus and glacial ice to set up our high camp at 5,522 metres.

We warmed up on what looked to be an easy central couloir, but it soon steepened to 85-degree alpine ice with threatening cornices basking in the sun above. Our un-acclimatized lungs burned, calves screamed and heads spun. James led a pitch of 5.4 rock leading up to the central summit tower, and after many chossy dead ends, I linked a 5.8 pitch to the central summit at 6,130 metres. We had established our first route but in the process realized that the western summit was, in fact, the highest point. Endless rappels led through the night.

The main face was calling—a 650-metre face of icy, steep granite. Early in the morning with a selection of rock and ice gear, minimal aid kit and an ice axe per person, we launched into the unknown, leaving bivy gear behind. Progress slowed as the brittle ice of the lower face steepened. I took over the leading at a steep, icy corner of M6 climbing, belaying under a chossy ice-covered roof. We were at an impasse, but an improbable 5.9 rock traverse led blindly into a six-inch off-width—a lead that left me coughing up blood. We carved out a small, poorly protected ledge and prepared for an unplanned shiver bivy at 5,800 metres. My legs dangled into the abyss as we spooned through the night.

James led pitch after pitch of difficult aid and free-climbing corners the next morning, but progress was slow, and dislodged granite boulders would often stop mere rope lengths away from our advanced camp far below. We made a team decision as I hung from a hook high in the chossy grey bands of the upper wall. Snow fell and night approached once again. A second bivy on the wall, this time without water, food, fuel or even a ledge, was a daunting prospect, so an exhausting descent ensued.

Time passed by as our bodies healed. We didn't have enough pitons left for a second go on the face, and the prospect of re-leading those pitches quickly put me off the idea. Besides, the mountain was still unclimbed. Feeling fit, we simul-blasted through Scottish mixed gullies on the western side of the mountain, often inundated by spindrift, and in a few hours reached the col below the highest summit tower. I attempted a dangerous delaminated mixed pitch, but it quickly ended in unclimbable slabs. James embarked on an epic three-hour aid lead, connecting discontinuous cracks via many large swings on poor aid gear, while I shivered.

We stood on Jungdung Kangri's true summit, accomplished and satisfied with a route to be proud of—The Monypenny Hall of Fame. An epic descent awaited, and, of course, our ropes jammed after pulling them just

James Monypenny aiding during the attempt on the south face of Jungdung Kangri. Photo: Cory Hall

far enough to leave the other end floating in space and completely out of reach. With my lungs screaming in pain, throat swelling shut and barley able to breath, James stepped up and did the death prussic from hell—60 metres of free-hanging 8.5-millimetre rope with nothing but the stuck knot keeping him alive. The rest of the descent went well with the exception of a car-size boulder bouncing over our heads while rappelling the couloirs.

The constant unknowns combined with the logistical challenges of this trip made it one of my most memorable to date. And, similar trips and objectives are in the works.

**Summary**

The Shaft of Justice (TD+ 80° 5.8, 630m), south face, Jungdung Kangri Central (6130m), Ladahk Range, India. FA: Cory Hall, James Monypenny, August 21, 2013.

Attempt on the south face (5.11 M6 WI4 A2, 550m to highpoint), Jungdung Kangri West (6160m), Ladahk Range, India. Cory Hall, James Monypenny, August 26-27, 2013.

The Monypenny Hall of Fame (ED1 90° A2+, 650m), southwest couloir, south face, Jungdung Kangri West (6160m), Ladahk Range, India. FA: Cory Hall, James Monypenny, September 1, 2013.

The south face of Jungdung Kangri: (1) South face attempt, (2) The Shaft of Justice, (3) The Monypenny Hall of Fame. Photo: Cory Hall

# Thalay Sagar

Paul McSorley

OUR TRIP TO INDIA was conceived in the summer of 2012 while happily cragging in the hills above Squamish, B.C. Our plan was to try the unclimbed south face of Thalay Sagar (6,904 metres) in the Garwhal Himalaya (September 5-November 3, 2013). Regrettably, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation denied us access to this side of the mountain for a variety of bureaucratic reasons. Our objective then switched to opening a new route on the seldom-climbed north face.

From Delhi, it took a little more than a week to reach basecamp at Kedar Tal—a beautiful lake at 4,700 metres, 20 kilometres south of India's holiest village, Gangotri. It took almost three weeks to acclimatize and fight a variety of illnesses that are so prevalent in this corner of the world. For training, we managed to top out on a 6,000-metre sub peak connected to the Jogin massif.

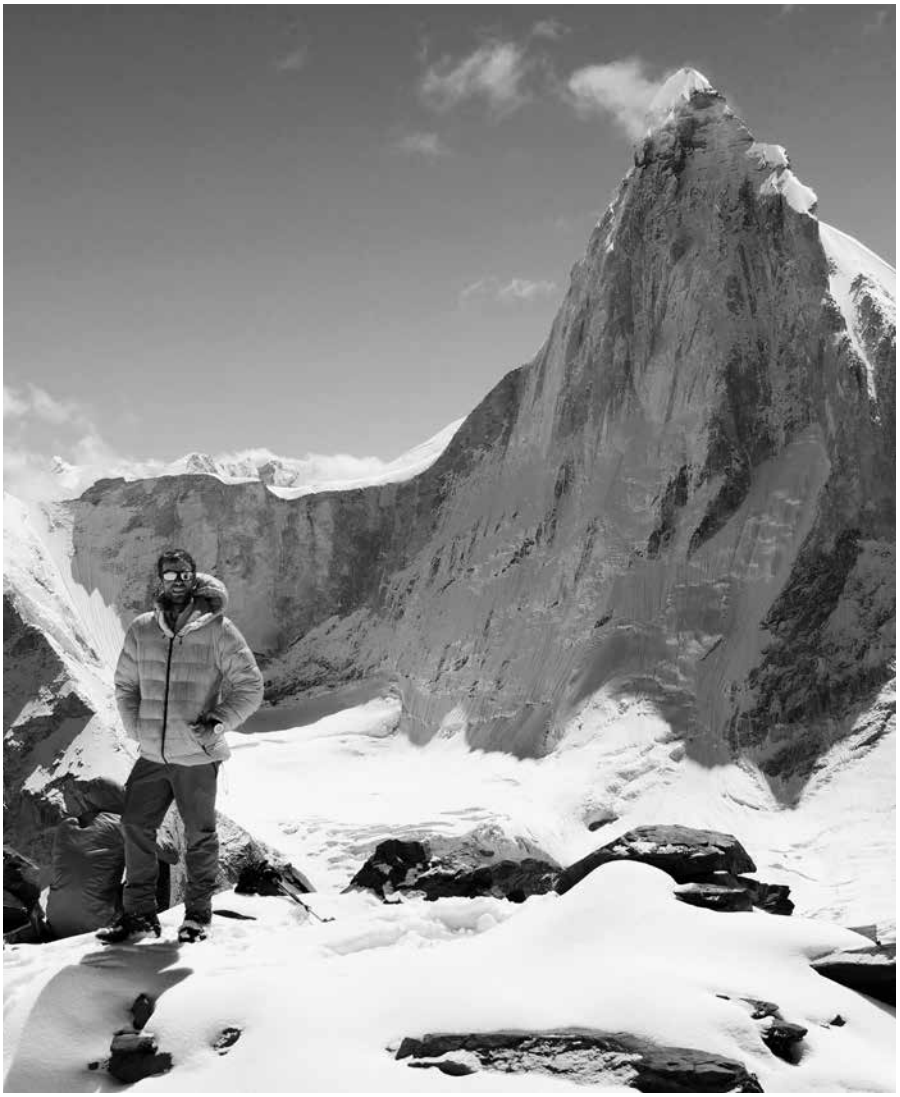
From our advanced basecamp at 5,400 metres, Joshua and I made a foray to the base of the north wall on the coldest day of the trip (-24 C). Then, while I battled intestinal sickness, Jason and Joshua locked horns with the wall, gunning for a beautiful line of goulottes left of the French Route. They climbed the massive ice apron on the first day and were able to set up a tent below the difficulties. The next day, they traversed in to the technical ground and found steep ice and mixed climbing. That afternoon, the daily storms that persisted throughout the expedition came again. Jason fixed a line at his highpoint and descended amid a maelstrom of spindrift. The team spent a night huddled under a Siltarp, unable to erect a tent in the full Himalayan conditions. After a rugged night, Jason returned to the highpoint and sensibly retreated in the face of continuous spindrift. The descent was a battle, more than a dozen rappels with multiple stuck ropes and desperate digging to build ice anchors under endless truckloads of spindrift.

The weather never let up for the remaining days in basecamp, and we packed it in after a month of living in one of the most impressive valleys any of us had ever seen.

On a side note, the state of basecamp at Kedar Tal and Jogin was woefully polluted. Decades of careless expeditions from a variety of nations dumped every kind of garbage from plastics to glass jars and cans to batteries and clothing. We packed out several burlap bags of detritus, but it barely made a difference. During our debrief with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, they were not very interested in hearing about this, despite waste disposal taking up more than a page on their questionnaire.

We are very grateful to MEC, Arc'teryx, Innate and the John Lauchlan Award for giving us a chance to try climbing in a style that met the mountain on its own terms and to leave this sacred place in better condition than we found it.

Jason Kruk and Paul McSorely acclimatizing at 6,000 metres with Thalay Sagar behind.
Photo: Joshua Lavigne



# BMC Winter Meet

Jon Walsh

I was fortunate enough to attend the 2014 BMC Winter Meet with my girlfriend, Michelle Kadatz. This year, 47 climbers from 25 countries, foreign to the UK, met at the Glenmore Lodge in Aviemore, Scotland, for the last week of January. Visiting climbers were paired up with a host climber from the UK who was familiar with the Scottish winter climbing scene. Together they would make a plan and go climbing. At the end of the day, everyone reunited for dinner and drinks, with the option to attend lectures or slideshows at the lodge's theater. Halfway through the week, we switched partners so that the visitor had the chance to climb with two different hosts.

Conditions throughout the week were tricky with an unusual amount of snow, a high avalanche hazard and generally bad weather. This combination seemed to force people to dig a little deeper though, and as a result, an impressive list of routes were climbed.

My first partner was Nick Bullock, a veteran of the Scottish winter scene who has been putting up cutting-edge first ascents and raising the bar for well over a decade, both in Scotland and in the greater ranges. Like me, he really liked to get after it. In order to do so, it seemed prudent to use our first day, a bad-weather day even by Scottish standards, to put a track into Creag Meagaidh and find the start of a route called Extasy (put up by Bruno Sourzac and Dave Hesleden during the 2005 winter meet). Nick had been stoked about this route since a friend of his made the only repeat and spoke highly of its quality. We couldn't see more than halfway up the 250-metre face that day, but with the boot track in and the start of the route located, the cards were at least stacked in our favour.

We made the route's third ascent the next day in a 17-hour car-to-car effort, and it didn't disappoint. The entire cliff was coated in thin ice and rime—prime Scottish conditions—and the climbing was fiercely sustained. Following the thickest, most supportive ice or névé, usually just a couple of centimetres thick and often too thin to hold body weight, we battled upwards for five long pitches. It never felt like we had the route in the bag until the very top. Protection was scarce and head-spinning run-outs were the norm. Nick stated on his blog: "It's difficult to imagine that I will have a more compelling, engaging day of the winter than this one. The gear to protect the climb was minimal and the descent 'interesting.' All in all, a pretty full-on day." In other words, a perfect intro to Scottish climbing for me!

The next day, the weather was the usual slashing rain in the valley bottoms and winds of 90 miles per hour or more up high. Extasy had taxed our bodies both mentally and physically, so we were happy to call it a rest day. That night, the event organizers initiated a partner switch, and I was paired with Greg Boswell. Greg is a crusher, as brave as he is strong, with lots of difficult and serious new routes and repeats under his belt. We immediately started making plans to climb a new line he had scoped on the beautiful quartzite walls of Beinn Eighe. Nick's new partner needed a rest day, so Nick insisted on joining us, too.

After approaching for a couple of hours, we reached the base of the route. Greg won the first rock-paper-scissors, and fired a series of roofs above a snow ledge near the top of the West-central Gully. Much to Nick's dismay, I won the second rock-paper-scissors and scored the second pitch: a long, slightly overhanging off-width with a thin coating of verglass. Fortunately, the rock had just enough other features, and it turned out to be one of the best pitches I climbed during the trip. Nick fired the final crack/corner system, and we were soon treated to an amazing sunset over a stunning view of the northwestern highlands. *Lochs* dotted the green valleys everywhere and the snowline at mid height gave the mountains a bigger feel, despite their low altitudes.

Nick wrote on his blog: "The perfect day. Stunning settled weather, a magnificent situation and a line both Greg and I had spotted a few years back. I lost scissor-paper-stone all day and climbed the third pitch, which was still good but not as spectacular as the second pitch, or as sustained as the first pitch. We called it Making the Cut after talking to Simon Richardson about the amount of entries he has on his blog Scottish Winter."

Two days later, we had hoped to climb another route on the same face, but after an hour of sitting in the car waiting for the winds and rain to calm down, we opted for plan B. This time it was Nick and me (Greg's knee strain was acting up), and Michelle and her partner, Ian Parnell. Two days earlier, Michelle and Ian succeeded on a nine-pitch mind-bending Ben Nevis route called the Centurion, one of the longest in the area. Another nearby peak called Mael Gorm offered the so-called shortest approach in Scotland, which by the time we got there made sense, especially with the gale-force wind gusts. Although not quite as spectacular as the first two climbs, it was a popular spot that day and many multi-pitch routes were climbed.

Back at the meet that night, wine flowed freely as everyone celebrated an amazing week. The energy was incredible, and it had a been a long time since I had seen so many passionate mixed climbers getting after it like that. For both Michelle and me (who had amassed a route list that made most locals jealous), there couldn't have been a better introduction to winter climbing in Scotland. We are deeply thankful to the BMC for organizing the week, to our UK hosts, especially Nick, Greg, Will and Ian, and for the support we received from the Alpine Club of Canada and to Arc'teryx for helping make it all happen.

After that week, it was time to get after it on our own, and our photographer friend, Paul Bride, had just flown over from Squamish to join us. Scotland had been on his bucket list for a long time, and he was psyched to tag along and snap some pics. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't panning out very well, and we were shut down two days in a row (and not for lack of trying). At least we managed to tour the countryside a bit and sample some fine local vintages. The folks that live in the hills were incredibly hospitable and easy to get along with.

Finally we had some weather decent enough for climbing, and we headed up the Number 3 Gully on Ben Nevis, home to some famous test-pieces I was hoping to try. A thick fog on its upper reaches forced us to stay on lower cliffs where we climbed some obvious thin ice lines—one called Mega Route X, which is classic, and the other a wild overhanging dagger called Feeding Frenzy. Late in the afternoon it cleared enough to see the crazy-looking rime plastered to some of the higher walls, which someday I'll have to go back for.

We descended to the town of Fort Williams, hoping to get another chance. Two more horrendously bad weather days passed, on the second of which we hiked through the slashing rain to the deluxe CIC hut at the base of the Ben's north face. The forecast called for a rare benign day on Friday, but the fog level remained much too low to climb the higher routes with the thick rime. Maybe it was just as well as the avalanche hazard was still high and we had observed a number of fresh fracture lines a few days earlier.

Eventually, we settled on trying a line that seemed to be unclimbed just left of Mick Fowler's seven-pitch classic, The Shield Direct. After two-and-a-half pitches of sustained overhanging dihedral action, laced with thin ice and névé, we merged back with the Shield Direct and continued it to partway up the fifth pitch. The benign weather was abruptly ended with strong winds, which turned the route into a river of spindrift, making upward progress virtually impossible. But at least the pitches had been wild, and the beast within was fed.

Scottish winter climbing is intense. Every pitch was a memorable battle and extremely rewarding. The Highlands truly are the quintessential real-deal venue for mixed adventure. Rich with history and virtually devoid of any in-situ gear, it is proper mixed climbing in its purest form, which was a refreshing experience. The addictiveness of it grew on me throughout the trip, and I know it won't be long before I'm back again.

**Summary**

Extacy (VIII 8, 250m, 6 pitches), Pinnacle Face, Creag Meagaidh. Third ascent: Nick Bullock, Jon Walsh, January 28, 2014.

Making the Cut (VIII 8, 3 pitches, 120m), West Central Gully, Beinn Eighe. FA: Greg Boswell, Nick Bullock, Jon Walsh, January 30, 2014.

Shield Indirect (VIII 8, 2.5 pitch variation to The Shield Direct), Ben Nevis. FA: Michelle Kadatz, Jon Walsh, February 5, 2014.

Jon Walsh on the second pitch of Making the Cut. Photo: Greg Boswell

# Lobito

Sarah Hart

El Chalten in southern Patagonia is most widely known for its huge granite spires. What many people don't know is that El Chalten also boasts a huge population of dogs. Just like the wonderful variety of granite towers above town, a healthy assortment of canine breeds can be found *in* town.

My favourite Argentine doggy of all, though, is Lobito. Lobito is a three-year-old German shepherd owned by the landlord of the apartment that Colin and I share in El Chalten. Over the last three seasons I've spent in Patagonia with Colin, we've watched Lobito grow from a clumsy puppy to the master of our domain. In Spanish, *lobito* means little wolf; a fitting name, in my opinion, for our furry guardian.

Naturally, after climbing a new route to the yet-unclimbed summit of Aguja Volonqui (2,200 metres) in Patagonia this season, Colin and I settled on the route name Lobito. Our favourite little doggy will now go down in the climbing history books.

Aguja Volonqui had previously been climbed to within two metres of the summit by Englishmen Alan Rouse and Rab Carrington in December 1976. They had turned around at the final summit mushroom after deeming it too unstable to climb.

On January 4, 2014, Colin and I hiked into the Marconi valley. Don't be fooled, this might be the longest one-day approach in the Chalten massif. It goes on forever as you traverse Lago Electrico, and then turn the corner onto Glaciar Marconi, where you finally get a glimpse of the Marconi peaks, Cerro Pollone, Cerro Piergiorgio and Cerro Domo Blanco. It's understandable that with such a ridiculously long approach these peaks see little traffic from this side, but I have no idea why people are not climbing on the west face of Piergiorgio. Next to the Torre, this mountain may be the most impressive piece of rock in the range. The west face of Piergiorgio is almost 900 metres of pure vertical stone. Seriously, why aren't people trying to free climb this thing?

Anyways, we slogged up the glacier to the head of the valley and settled in for another god-damned 2:30 a.m. alpine start. We woke January 5 to high winds, but rallied anyways and began our approach to the base of Aguja Volonqui in the dark. We fought high wind,

Sarah Hart on pitch six of Lobito. Photo: Colin Haley

Lobito on the east face of Aguja Volonqui. Photo: Colin Haley

blowing snow and deep trail breaking, but as dawn arrived, we were treated to incredible views of Gorra Blanca and the Marconi peaks. I'm beginning to recognize a theme for me when it comes to alpine starts. I hate them and always wake up with a frown on my face, yet if I can push through the grumpiness of being cold and tired, then by the time the sun comes up, I'm so psyched to be in such a spectacular setting that my enthusiasm for the day only grows with the rising sun—so, onwards and upwards. We arrived at the base of our chimney, racked up and began climbing perfect sn'ice. This is a new term for me. I only recently learned that sn'ice is a desirable climbing medium for the alpinist. I quite liked it, too. And in a narrow chimney where rock protection is abounding, climbing sn'ice is rather fun. One is almost always assured of good sticks—this is another new ice climbing term I recently learned.

We climbed six or seven pitches before arriving at the top of the chimney. Mixed in there was some sn'icey pitches, a couple of steep pitches of vertical ice and a few mixed pitches. It was all entirely enjoyable with mostly rock gear abounding, though Colin had to hammer in a few pitons for protection on a couple of pitches. Once at the top of the chimney, we manoeuvred around several small snowfields, and then gained the final summit ridge by climbing one last mixed pitch.

The summit of Volonqui may be its coolest feature. It was plastered in rime and resembled the summits of its big brothers, the Torres. This was also the closest I had been to the ice cap, and I can confirm that it is a very big piece of ice.

The descent was straightforward with a few rappels to gain snow slopes below the col between Volonqui and Colmillos Norte. Now all that remained between us and the glacier was downclimbing 250 metres of steep snow. Yes, this was indeed the thing I feared most about the whole climb. We made it down to the glacier and raced back to our tent with hopes of packing up camp and making it off the ice before darkness fell.

Good fun was had by all, but in typical Patagonian style, I felt like I still had to dig a little deep. Somehow, when climbing in Patagonia, nothing ever feels easy. I'm sure every first ascentionist says the same thing, so don't roll your eyes, but I really do have to add that you should go repeat it. It would be a perfect early season adventure to warm up for the big guys in the range.

**Summary**

Lobito (AI4+ M5 A0, 400m), east face, Aguja Volonqui. FA: Sarah Hart, Colin Haley, December 5, 2013.

# Skiing University Peak

Martin Lefebvre

THERE WE WERE, standing on ridgetop with our skis on, looking at the biggest run of our lives, after the biggest climb of our lives, doubts still running through our heads about whether we could be the first to ski this face without the use of rappels.

UNIVERSITY PEAK (4,410 metres) sits tucked away in the Wrangell-St. Elias reserve of Alaska. As a ski mountaineer, it is impossible not be inspired by such a unique and awe-inspiring face. And that's exactly what happened to Ali Hogg and me after I received *50 Classic Ski Descents of North America* as a Christmas gift. We've always wanted to ski in Alaska, and with a bit of convincing from Ali, we figured go big or go home—and it doesn't get much bigger than this. With a massive uninterrupted 2,300-metre glaciated face and a constant 50- to 55-degree pitch, it's no wonder that the guidebook calls the south face "God's own ski shot."

After a three-day drive from Canmore to the Chitina airport, we camped and met up with our pilot, Paul Claus, at the airstrip the next day. Due to poor flying conditions, we flew about a half hour from Chitina to Ultima Thule Lodge where we camped and waited for the weather to improve. After two days, we got the go ahead from Paul, and he brought us into the range. The weather still wasn't ideal, so we had to be dropped off about 20 kilometres east of University Peak. All of a sudden we were looking at a traverse through broken glaciated terrain, hauling toboggans to get to basecamp. It took us three days of slow travel, ferrying loads through the broken glaciers and dealing with heavy snowfall and white-out conditions on route. We set up camp (1,950 metres) in more heavy snowfall, about one kilometre from the bottom of the face, still waiting for our first real look at our objective.

The next morning, we woke up to a cold, clear sky and got our first look at the south face. We stared and high-fived with a mix of excitement and fear as the huge face was caked in snow with no blue ice to be seen in the main chute. It was in prime condition. We spent that day skiing other runs in the drainage near camp, getting a feel for conditions and watching how the new snow would react to the sun. We watched for two days as several loose size 2 avalanches poured out of the infinite number of start zones that threatened the ascent/descent route. Looking at the upper seracs through the binoculars, it seemed as though we could ski a chute from the ridge that would bring us back on the face without the use of rappels. The best way to minimize our exposure to the avalanche danger was to climb during the night and ski the line before it had too much sun affect.

We pushed off from camp at 6 p.m. and skinned to the base of the face through massive piles of debris, only gaining about 100 metres before the start of the epic boot pack. We ditched our skins at the base, put on our crampons, grabbed our tools and started up the face, switching leads and kicking steps for 100 metres at a time. By 9:30 p.m. we were up to 2,700 metres and took a break in the nook—the last real rest we would have until the summit ridge. We kept travelling at a good pace up the face, enjoying the incredible late sunset colours over the Wrangell-St. Elias with Mount Logan in the distance. The spirits were high, but the legs had already started to feel the work of frontpointing up the steady 45- to 50-degree lower pitch. We took another break at a rock band at 3,500 metres before we hit the steeper upper face. Having to dig ourselves out a ledge with our axes, Ali hacked just enough for us to put our packs down and fuel up. By now it was 2 a.m. and the snow conditions were still good, but the legs were wearing down. We switched our leads to 50 metres.

Looking down brought no comfort—a fall would be very hard to arrest, if even possible. We gained elevation, encouraging whoever was in the lead with our war cry, "I'm on vacation!"

The south face of University Peak. Photo: Ali Hogg

It was hard to tell if we were making any progress at all except by checking our altimeters. We hit 4,000 metres at 7 a.m., which felt like an achievement in itself, and took another rest. We had been moving up the face for almost 12 hours and the ridge was in reach. The first rays of sunlight came around the corner and brought a bit of heat to our bones and a renewed energy level. We had made it through the night, and only another 300 metres of climbing lay ahead before we could take our first real rest off our feet. But it was to be the hardest climbing we had ever done.

Trying to keep decent pace, we stuck with our 50-metre leads. Both of us physically tired, dehydrated and hungry at this point, we could hardly take 10 steps without crumbling on our ice tools. The mental exhaustion of having to focus on each step, knowing a mistake would be unforgivable, was also taking its toll. Very slowly we gained more vertical, finally reaching the upper serac band at 8 a.m. (4,200 metres). I had just finished my lead and Ali joined me below the next pitch: a 100-metre chute through the seracs, which we were hoping would be our ski-descent route without rappels. There was snow the whole way up, but we couldn't tell how much. Getting into the chute demanded a few steps on ice. Just when we thought we were home free, the face saved the most technical climbing for the very end.

Martin Lefebvre skiing the south face of University Peak. Photo: Ali Hogg

"Sorry to say this, bud, but it's your lead," I said, like I really needed to remind him.

"Yeah. I know," Ali said.

"Looks like we're going to have to pitch it out."

Ali was already grabbing the rope as I spoke. I placed some pro for an anchor, and Ali pushed off. Exhausted, he put on a great display of climbing, placing protection to get through the main crux while I tried not to fall asleep at the belay. We swapped leads two more times in easier terrain and finally reached the ridge (4,310 metres) at 9:30 a.m. We hugged it out and I immediately dropped my pack and fell on my back, totally punched. We had done it—2,300 metres of climbing in a 15-hour push. We caught our breath for an hour, soaking in the amazing view and getting some food in us. The south face has never been climbed all the way to the summit, so I decided to go look a bit farther up the ridge. Forty metres higher I was stopped by massive gargoyles with steep drop-offs on both sides. We decided that it would be too time-consuming to try and climb through the gargoyles to the summit, and by the time we would have gotten back to the lower part of the face, the snow would be isothermal and our exposure to avalanches would be increased.

Even after all that climbing, as soon as I clicked into my skis I felt my umpteenth wind come over me with the excitement for the run of my life. But, we still had to get through the serac chute. We opted not to rappel. I dropped into the 55-degree gully and my first turn told me right away this wasn't going to be an easy descent—10 to 15 centimetres of snow overlying blue ice was hard to trust. I skied the whole pitch very cautiously with a pole in one hand and an axe in the other. There was just enough snow and it stuck to the ice, even with the weight of a skier. Except for the bottom of the chute, the slough from above had flushed out the snow we had climbed and turned the exit into five metres of blue ice. I inched my way down as much as I could and committed myself to the skis' edges. I managed to ski over the ice and ditch all my speed on the upper part of the open upper face.

Ali was next, only I had sloughed out the entire skier's right of the gully. I yelled up to Ali to let him know what was going on and that he would have to go skier's left. Ali inched his way to the edge of the snow before the nerve-racking turn. This was it—if he made it out safely, we were home free. Ali made his jump turn, hit the slope, lost his edge and slipped out. The whole thing lasted about two seconds but felt like two minutes. I was watching Ali slide down the face gaining speed, thinking to myself, stop, stop, stop! And he did…. Once he hit the softer snow he managed to self-arrest using his skis and an axe.

"Holy shit! Don't do that again!" I said.

He agreed. Once we were both ready to go, we pushed off and enjoyed nice dry snow down the steady 50-degree upper pitch. Fighting the leg burn, I just kept going as long as I could hold on, enjoying the everlasting pitch. From about halfway down, the conditions turned to perfect predictable corn snow, and arcing massive turns down that incredible face is something I'll never forget. We reached camp at 12:30 p.m. after an 18-hour journey.

The rest of the trip was spent enjoying the bluebird spring weather and getting great heli-like runs in the range until it was time to ferry our loads back to the pick-up spot. After 13 days on the glacier, we flew out directly to the truck. We immediately drove 20 kilometres up the road to Chitina, where we had the pleasure of eating our first yack burger, drank a few beers and tasted moonshine with the locals at Uncle Tom's Tavern—the perfect end to an amazing trip.

### Summary

Third ski descent (first without rappels) of the south face (55°, 2200m), University Peak (4410m), Wrangell-St. Elias Range, Alaska. Ali Hogg, Martin Lefebvre, May 21-22, 2013.

# Remembrances

## Ferdl Taxbock
1942-2013

Ferdinand (ferdl) taxbock was born in Vienna, Austria, on June 15, 1942. In 1967, Ferdl decided to visit his father, who was living in Mexico, but to financially enable this trip he first needed work on the American continent. Canada was the country that granted him a work visa, and since he had graduated from agricultural college, it was as a farmhand. While he was working in Claresholm, Alberta, Ferdl contacted and met Hans Gmoser, who hired him as a mountain guide in the Rockies for the summer of 1968.

As it turned out, we both arrived in Canada broke and looking for work. Ferdl had just become an Austrian mountain guide, and I had just arrived in Canada and had obtained my mountain guide's license in 1966. My big advantage was I spoke English, but not Canadian English. Luckily, Ferdl met a beautiful young lady named Heather McKenzie, whom he married in 1971, and she helped him with his English. Ferdl's English improved, but mine didn't!

While Ferdl went on to have a very successful career as a geologist, he never lost his love for climbing and guiding. Over the past 47 years, Ferdl and I guided hundreds of people, and I knew when we first met, I had found a kindred spirit who not only loved the mountains, but, more importantly, loved to show and teach people how to enjoy the mountains that have provided us with the freedom to explore the greatest places on earth.

Ferdl always had a mischievous smile and twinkle in his eyes, whether he was with guests or family or friends. He loved to talk about the mountains and the joy of skiing or climbing, and would enthusiastically share many tales late into the evening, always accompanied by lots of laughter. I'm sure all the Alpine Club of Canada members who joined him for the 55-plus camp he started felt the same way.

If we measure our ages not in years but by how many friends we've made, Ferdl was as old as the hills themselves—he had so many friends because of his special charm and a thirst to live life to the fullest. Ferdl came into my life and left a large imprint on me and all the people he meet. It's been like a golden thread that has tied all our hearts together over all these years.

Last year, three senior citizens—Ferdl, Pierre Lemire and I—decided to go to Mount Waddington, the highest peak in the Coast Mountains of B.C., also known as the Mystery Mountain. The film K2 was shot in the area, with this mountain standing in for the giant peak in Pakistan. We were so impressed and overwhelmed by how spectacular Mount Waddington was. We were awed by the size of it.

You have to understand, between the three of us, we've got more than 150 years of guiding in the mountains of Western Canada, and also climbing in many parts of the world. So we left Banff with Ferdl's usual heavy foot to the pedal and arrived in Williams Lake that evening. Next morning, we arrived at the White Saddle Ranch and flew that evening to Plummer Hut. The hut will sleep eight people, but there's hardly enough room for three. Well, you would have thought there were three 10-year-olds in there as we were all giddy with hoots and hollers, and then we took off in three different directions to take pictures and explore. I knew we should have taken three ropes as we all liked to show people the way and not follow others!

After herding ourselves together and putting a rope on so we could travel safely over the glaciers, we sat that evening outside Plummer Hut and enjoyed the amazing scenery. We all thought if this is heaven, then we have arrived.

And then later that summer, Ferdl and I went into the Sir Sandford area with the Alpine Club of Canada camp, which is the most luxurious trip I have ever been on, and we both so enjoyed all the mountain people there.

We were gone at 4 a.m. every day, climbing different peaks for seven days by ourselves. What a treat for both of us. In the evenings, we would talk in the tent of how lucky we have been in life by having exceptional wives who have put up with our wanderings in the mountains all over the world, and having family who enjoy the mountains so much, and now grandchildren to spoil rotten.

And, remembering that moment, Ferdl might have said:

*I am not here as I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds that blow around the mountains.*

*And when you wake up in the morning and hear the winds picking up, remember me,*

*As I love to ski powder and climb mountains and have had an amazing life with family and friends.*

*And if you look at the stars coming out in the evening, look at them, as I will be in a bivy somewhere up there also.*

*And I have been set free to wander in the mountains and wilderness forever.*

I see Ferdl's legacy as an invitation to each of us to grab life with both hands; to enjoy the mountains and our time in nature; to stay engaged and open; to love deeply and make room for forgiveness; and to act from integrity and make lots of room for laughter and play. Ferdl, we will miss you for your kindness, your delightful sense of humour and your gentle soul.

—Lloyd Gallagher

## Denis Roy
### 1944-2014

Denis roy was a huge influence on the Rocky Mountain Section of the ACC in the early to late 1990s. When Denis became active, the section was struggling, membership was down and activities were in a state of disarray. Denis took on the task of trips coordinator and quickly turned that situation around. He scoured the Bow Valley recruiting strong and reliable leaders, which resulted in an active schedule of both summer and winter trips. Denis implemented a strong leadership-training program that the section still has to this day. The influx of volunteer leaders that Denis started had a ripple effect throughout the section. Some of these volunteer leaders also became very involved in the executive.

For me personally, Denis was very much a mentor in my backcountry skiing activities. It is through skills that I learned from Denis that the Backcountry Skiers in Training program originated. Denis was a very strong and passionate backcountry skier. In the 2000-10 decade, I would run into Denis somewhere skiing every winter. He had a nose for where the good snow would be and had an avid group of friends who skied with him.

Denis was always the first one to help when there were problems or things were going wrong. This was also how he lived in the Bow Valley community. Denis received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal and also the Canmore Mayor's Award for Adult Volunteer Excellence.

Denis grew up back east in a small town in Quebec called St-Charles-Sur-Richelieu. Denis and Sally moved to the Bow Valley in 1990 so they could take better advantage of all of the adventures the mountains could offer. Denis was a pharmacist by profession, graduating from Montreal University in 1968. Once in the Bow Valley, he did what a lot of local residents do to survive and that is to work various jobs in the area, including driving large gravel trucks.

Denis passed away on February 26, 2014, from ALS at the age of 69. He was diagnosed in April 2012 and continued skiing well into the just-ending ski season. He is survived by two daughters, six grandsons and two siblings. His wife and partner in life, Sally Roy, passed away the previous year. Hard to believe he is gone. Salut, Denis Roy!

—Rod Plasman

## Tim Jones
### 1956-2014

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the passing of Tim Jones—longtime leader and spokesperson of the North Shore Rescue Team and recipient of the Order of British Columbia.

Born May 30, 1956, in Edmonton, Tim's family soon moved to North Vancouver where Tim would spend many hours as he grew up exploring the local mountains. Tim passed away suddenly on a trail on Mount Seymour after attending a thank-you gathering at the Rescue Team cabin. The gathering was to honour the staff of the local Mountain Equipment Co-op store that had provided clothing for lost hikers and helped with fundraising for the North Shore Rescue Team.

After a brief career as a professional football player, Tim became an Advanced Life Support Paramedic and the Unit Chief for the B.C. Ambulance Service. Introduced to the North Shore Rescue Team, one of the busiest teams in Canada, Tim soon became an active member. Tim's commitment to the team and his devotion to helping others soon saw him taking on the job of team leader. Many hikers, climbers, skiers and snowboard enthusiasts owe their survival to Tim's participation and leadership in more than 1,400 search and rescue missions.

Tim is survived by his loving and devoted wife, Lindsay (nee Dougans), daughter, Taylor, and son, Curtis (who already has 10 years of search and rescue focus).

Tim was more than just your local search and rescue volunteer. He was an advocate for sustainable funding to the volunteer sector and an innovator in the use of new search and rescue techniques, including helicopter long-line rescue.

In recognition of his efforts and support for his community and community service at an extraordinary level, Tim was inducted into the Order of British Columbia, as well as being awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal and an Honorary Doctorate from Capilano University. Tim was posthumously honoured with a Terry Fox induction by Simon Fraser University.

Tim was a key advocate for the funding of volunteer rescue teams and instrumental in advancing the role of the professional volunteer in serving those who enjoy our mountains. Recognizing Tim's tireless efforts, North Shore Rescue has established the Tim Jones Legacy Fund, administered by the West Vancouver Community Foundation, to provide North Shore Rescue with supplemental funding when needed.

With Tim's passing, all of us have lost a true friend who wanted everyone to enjoy the mountains and outdoor activities. He wanted us to be safe, and if we encountered a mishap, he wanted to ensure that we would have the resources to support us and give us another day to enjoy the mountains.

—Ron Royston

## John Turner
### 1931-2014

As a 16-year-old climber in 1978, with my long hair, swami belt and patchy EBs, I stood on the damp little ledge at the base of Mazinaw Rock in Ontario and looked up at The Joke, a beetling 100-metre wall decorated with a couple of bent and rusted pitons. The route was one of only two Ontario climbs in Chris Jones's *Climbing in North America* and offered a whiff of glamour not found on the suburban outcrops that were my usual venue. The beautiful narrow ramp in the middle of the route, the exposure, the run-outs and the fact that it was created by the enigmatic John Turner in 1960 after two very serious falls, including one on which he broke his leg, comprised its reputation.

Sitting at my desk in our publishing house in Toronto in 2014, I was amazed to open my email to discover a message from Turner. He wanted me to know that instead of breaking left on the last pitch, as every subsequent party since the second ascent had done, he had climbed straight up a steep headwall. This more-or-less previously unknown last pitch might have been one of the hardest pitches in North America at the time.

Writing a response, I was flooded with personal memories of climbing Turner's routes in different times of my life and the people I had climbed them with. I felt something halfway between awe at having been contacted by a figure of climbing history and the fatuity of responding to a hoax, since part of the Turner myth was how reclusive he was about his climbing days.

Turner started climbing on gritstone in England's Peak District in 1954. His first partner was Geoff Sutton, an accomplished climber and writer whose translations of Anderl Heckmair's *My Life as a Mountaineer* and Lionel Terray's *Conquistadors of the Useless* introduced these great books to English readers. Sutton and Turner made second ascents of some of the leading English climbs of the day, some of which were harder than the American rock climbs of the time. When he arrived in eastern North America to study chemistry in 1956, he had to do new routes to climb at the same grade.

Turner's climbing partners in Canada and the U.S. included pioneering spirits Brian Rothery, Alf Muehlebauer, Dick Strachan and Dick Wilmott, as well as Vulgarians like Art Gran and the titans of early Québécois rock climbing, Bernard Poisson and Claude Lavallée. One of the first important new leads he did was a free ascent of Repentance in 1958, a poorly protected 5.10 crack at Cathedral Ledge in New Hampshire, which is now protected by a bolt not used by Turner. He also climbed Recompense, one of the most popular 5.9s on Cathedral now, but a bold lead in 1959. Besides The Joke, at Bon Echo, there was Sweet Dreams, a difficult traverse followed by a steep crack, which was once graded 5.8, but most feel it's much harder. At Val-David near Montreal, he climbed a dozen new routes, including Bastard, which, at 5.9, was among the hardest routes in the area. The discovery of Poke-O-Moonshine, a 120-metre-high roadside granite outcrop in the Adirondacks in 1959 was followed by a streak of new routes, including the unprotected 30-metre layback crack of Bloody Mary, a 5.9 not repeated until 1971 by hardman Jim McCarthy. He also did some new climbs in the Shawangunks.

The only new route Turner did in the west was in the Bugaboos. The Northeast Ridge of Bugaboo Spire, which was later enshrined in Steck's *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America*.

Turner returned to England in 1964 and climbed no more. In a photo in Jon Waterman's *Yankee Rock and Ice*, Turner bounced on a horse in full fox hunting gear and top hat. It couldn't have been an image more distant from the old photos of a muscular, shirtless young man in climbing boots and National Health Service spectacles with tousled hair. The sense among people who had known him was that he no longer wished to discuss climbing.

Was it his reticence, the shortness of his presence where he did most of his climbs, or the obscurity of the cliffs on which he did them that contributed to his absence from much of the climbing record? Colin Wells's *Who's Who in British Climbing* includes many Brits who did most of their notable climbing outside of the UK—Brian Greenwood, Robin Barley, Chris Jones—but Turner is absent. Neither the British nor American climbing press ran obituaries after he died. Perhaps he isn't as recognized partly because he climbed free at small, little-known cliffs in the golden age of aid ascents of big walls.

His last message before dying at his home in Church Farm, Long Buckby, on May 23, 2014, was taken down by his wife, Elsa, and sent out to his friends via American climbing writer Ed Webster. In closing, I quote Turner's last message, which shows that at the end, he had found his climbing memories and the fact that his climbs had provided so much enjoyment to be sources of happiness:

It is very gratifying that so many routes have been giving pleasure to so many people and somewhat surprising that this pleasure has persisted for so long. I should very much like to thank each of them personally but this would be beyond my capabilities. I wonder whether I might prey upon your good nature by asking that you should circulate copies of this email to everybody concerned…. May I say how much I have enjoyed the resurrection of happier days?

—David Chaundy-Smart

## Charles Turner
### 1950-2013

It is with great sadness that the Vancouver Island Section learned of the untimely passing of Charles Turner, when the float plane he was in struck a tree and crashed on the West Coast. The five-person party, which included other ACC members, was returning from a multi-day hiking trip near Hesquiut Lake. The pilot, a very experienced flyer with more than 20,000 hours, also died in the crash.

Charles was born in the UK, but moved to Canada at an early age. Living the life of a young itinerant with so much freedom and so many opportunities in his newly adopted country, he tried his hand at many things. From Whitehorse to Calgary, he worked and experienced the vastness of his new home.

After joining the ACC Vancouver Island Section in 1991, it was a measure of his energy that it took him just two short years to knock off all nine Island Qualifier (IQ) summits. Since the start of the IQ award program in 1987, only six people had achieved that status before him. In similar manner, as a member of the Island Ramblers, he swiftly demolished their list of 20 summits over 6,000 feet.

That level of passion for the outdoors, combined with a willingness to endure bad bush, non-existent trails and sometimes questionable rock, allowed Charles to rack up a long list of Island summits over the ensuing decades. His alpine interests also spread to more distant ranges, in Nepal, Argentina, Peru and beyond. He was always planning another adventure, and he instilled that love of the outdoors in his two children, Maddy and Joe, as they grew up.

On a rope, he was always dependable. On snow, he had great skill, and on skis, he was a dream to watch. As an ACC member, Charles also gave back. He led many trips, assisted in numerous workshops and for many years taught a telemark ski clinic at Mount Washington, where his style was the envy of all.

Being so active in the mountains, he climbed with almost everyone in the section. The turnout at his memorial in Comox was a testament to the many, many trips he had done, and the companions from those trips who had become friends. His quiet voice and solid experience, and his rope and axe skills, were highly regarded. He was an anchor when things were going badly, and I cannot remember him ever getting angry, or expressing fear. He will be greatly missed by many. He leaves a big gap in the energy and experience.

So let us remember him. Remember him for any one of the talents that were his. Remember him for those flashy gold fleeces and shells that he wore, that looked so good in photos. Remember him for his grace on skis, cutting perfect turns down steep slopes. Where others fell, he swooped with ease. Remember him for his gentleness, his softly spoken word, his kindness to others with a reassuring word when things weren't going well. Remember him for his silver spandex tights, worn weekly to his yoga class. Remember him for his understated forbearance after many hours of fighting bush. Remember him for his drive and passion to get into the high places of this world, where his soul was truly free. Remember Charles Henry Turner.

—Rick Hudson

## Gordon David Smith
### 1945–2013

Gordon david smith (a.k.a Speedy) died after a long and courageous battle with renal cancer. He was an avid mountaineer and rock climber, an engineer by profession and nature, and a millwright and builder, having constructed his own home. He was a dedicated teacher, instructing at SAIT for many years. He is survived by his wife, Susan, and his brother, Robert.

Speedy came by his moniker due to the fact that he cut in half the time it took to do classic routes in the Alps in his first few seasons. He had learned his climbing on gritstone edges of the UK and had mastered the long, unprotected run-out and the flared hand jam. As a member of the prestigious Rock and Ice Club in England, he had made yearly pilgrimages to the Alps since the early 1960s. In 1974, he climbed a new route on Peak Lenin with a British expedition that included Doug Scott.

He came to Canada from Derbyshire in 1977, and soon after his arrival, he settled in Golden, B.C., where he became involved in Roger Marshall's Mount Everest plans to make an alpine-style attempt on the mountain. As part of the training schedule for the 1982 Canadian Mount Everest Expedition, he led the highly successful 1981 winter expedition to Annapurna. He was one of the steadiest performers on the 1982 Everest trip, carrying two loads up the Lhotse face to the South Col without oxygen. In the winter of 1983, he returned to Nepal with the Burgess twins to attempt Manaslu.

In his later years, he climbed prodigiously in the Canadian Rockies, completing many of the classic rock and ice routes, including an ascent of Assiniboine and the north face of Athabasca. He solo-climbed many of the climbs on Yamnuska, including most of the 5.8s, and did early repeat ascents of the testpieces of the day, such as Balrog and The Maker. He was a very steady climber, with a cool head and without question—speedy!

—Carl Hannigan

## Sydney Walter Feuz
### 1922-2014

I first met Syd in 1966. It was my third week in Canada, I was guiding for Hans Gmoser in the Bugaboos, and I had to stop in Golden to pick up white gas at the Texaco Bulk Plant for the Boulder Camp stove. A guy came out and said, "You're working for CMH." He could tell I was Swiss. We introduced ourselves and I found out he was a Feuz. We had a good talk, and he wished he could help me carry the drum up to the camp just as an excuse to go for a hike. It's funny now to look back and see such an insignificant errand as the beginning of an extraordinary friendship. It was meant to be.

Syd was born in Golden, B.C., the first son and third child of Walter and Johanna Feuz's eight children. Syd's grandfather, Edouard Feuz Sr., was the first of two Swiss guides—the other being Christian Hasler Sr.—hired by the Canadian Pacific Railway to work from its hotels in the Canadian Rockies. In 1912, Walter immigrated to Golden with his brothers Edward and Ernest and their wives. Syd was raised in one of the six houses at Edelweiss Swiss Village that the CPR built for the guides and their families.

Syd grew up skiing and climbing every chance he had. By the time he was 16, he was guiding skiers from Temple Lodge between Lake Louise and Skoki. Then the Second World War began, and for three years he served his country in the navy. After the war, there was no guiding work, so he drove trucks, helped build Lake Minnewanka Dam near Banff, ran the Fridhem Hotel in Golden with his wife, Baeda, and delivered bulk fuel for Texaco up and down the back roads of the Columbia Valley.

After that first meeting in the fall, I stopped in at the house in Golden and met Syd's dad, Walter. It became an annual trip every fall to report to the guides what I did over the summer. I felt welcome, and they were such down-to-earth people.

When I decided to leave CMH and start my own company, Purcell Heli-Skiing, in 1974, I thought if I could get Syd to guide for me for 10 years that would be great. Syd passed his assistant ski guide's exam at the age of 51. Then he guided for me for the next 28 years.

Over those years, I worked very closely with Syd. He was tirelessly devoted to so many things. I was lucky I got to spend my time with him in the mountains, where he felt so at home. The most important lesson I learned from him was to be patient, not just when climbing, but hunting, too.

One day, we left early to go elk hunting. We walked all day and didn't find what we were looking for. I was pulling into his driveway, and standing right there was this big elk. And Syd said, "Good thing he wasn't here this morning—we wouldn't have had such a nice day." With Syd, hunting wasn't about killing something; it was just a good excuse to be out hiking and climbing.

Syd was passionate about guiding, and he cared deeply about every single guest who got into the helicopter with us. He didn't just go through the motions of being a guide; he always went over and above in getting everyone down safely with a smile on their face. He treated everyone with respect and seemed to have an endless supply of encouraging words and enthusiasm, so we could all share in the joy he got from being in the mountains. He was not only a mentor and a role model for his guests, but an important mentor for me as well.

Whether we were skiing, climbing, hunting, hiking or boogie boarding in Hawaii, Syd's love for life and adventure made everything we shared memorable.

Guiding in the mountains was his life, and I'm grateful to have been a witness to it. He will be missed, but Syd and his legacy will never be forgotten. I'll remember Syd as a great man and a true friend.

—Rudi Gertsch

## Derrick Hawkins and Mabel Hawkins
### 1919–2012 and 1920–2014

With gratitude, we remember the lives of Derrick and Mabel Hawkins (nee Duggan), Alpine Club of Canada Life Members.

Mabel was born in Kamloops in 1920 and grew up in Winfield, B.C. Mabel first discovered the freedom of the hills wandering the ridges above Okanagan Lake with her brothers. Mabel had to leave school in Grade 10 to her great disappointment. She went to work at the Kelowna Growers Exchange (later Sun-Rype), but completed her high school by correspondence, and then trained as a secretary and accountant. Mabel worked in Ottawa during the war and moved to Victoria after the war. She joined the Victoria Section of the ACC in 1948 and did her graduating climb of Mistaya Mountain at the Annual Camp at Peyto Lake in 1949.

Derrick was born in Thornbury, England, in 1919. He enlisted in the Royal Engineers T.A. in September 1939 and served in France and the UK as a sapper-lance sergeant. He was commissioned in April 1943 and served in Italy as captain until he was demobilized in July 1946. Following the war, Derrick qualified as a civil engineer and immigrated to Canada in August 1949. After riding his motorcycle with sidecar across the continent, Derrick found positions, first as an engineering assistant in Vancouver where he was captivated by the beauty of the coastal mountains, and then as a regional services engineer in Victoria.

Derrick and Mabel met on a

Vancouver Island Alpine Club trip in 1951 where Mabel, thinking this young man from England would know little of the Canadian wilderness, instructed Derrick to bring his toothbrush and waterproofs. Derrick joined the Victoria Section of the ACC in 1952. The two were active members of the Alpine Club in the 1950s, and one or both, attended the annual camps at Maligne Lake, O'Hara Meadows, Assiniboine, Hooker Icefield, Glacier and Mount Robson. In addition to climbing peaks on Vancouver Island and in the Coast Mountains, Selkirks and Rockies, Mabel climbed in the Alps in 1952, climbing the Matterhorn and Zinal Rothorn.

Derrick and Mabel were married in December 1957 and settled in West Vancouver where Derrick then worked. Mabel was the ACC Vancouver Section officer in 1959 and 1960, and after the advent of two children, Derrick held the same post in 1963 and 1964. In 1961, Derrick joined an ACC team to construct a cairn in the Waddington Range in memory of ACC member Elfrida Pigou. In the 1970s, Mabel invested much time as editor of the Vancouver Section newsletter, *Avalanche Echoes*.

The two participated in ACC trips into their mid-60s, attending the ACC Wates-Gibson Hut camp in 1984. They also became keen ocean kayakers and undertook many hiking and paddling adventures with their long-time ACC friends, Pat and Elizabeth Guilbride. When not hiking, kayaking or skiing, they could often be found tending their beautiful garden. Derrick died on July 5, 2012, at the age of 93 from complications from a stroke. Mabel passed away peacefully at 94 years of age on April 27, 2014.

Mabel and Derrick shared a love of the outdoors and passed on this love to their children and grandchildren. They had a great enthusiasm for life and were active into their early 90s. They were ever grateful for "a good life lived." We are inspired by their example and know that they are not gone, but just "gone to look 'round the next corner." Mabel and Derrick will be forever in our hearts.

—Barbara Hawkins

## Frank Baumann
### 1947–2013

Frank baumann loved to climb, ski and talk. He will be especially missed by his wife, Nadine, and his three daughters, Catherine, Julia and Amy. He was an avid outdoors enthusiast, accomplished mountaineer, professional engineer (geological), avalanche hazard expert and good friend.

As an undergrad engineering student at UBC, he was very active in the Varsity Outdoor Club, where a photo of him summiting The Hermit on Mount Tupper in Rogers Pass graced the cover of the 1968 VOC *Journal*. In the article, Frank talks about climbing Tupper first, and then being attracted to the Hermit tower on the way down. He had to place one bolt and pass an unnerving loose block. He also wrote an article in the 1967 VOC journal about climbing buildings at UBC. In the 1969 VOC journal, Frank wrote about climbing the Grand Wall with Paul Starr. In those days, it was an impressive aid route. They had to bivy after crossing Bellygood Ledge since it had gotten dark in the bluffs above the trail.

Later, Frank joined both the Alpine Club of Canada and B.C. Mountaineering Club. Frank's love of skiing had him volunteering with the Whistler Ski Patrol and starting a heli-ski business. He also developed an introductory avalanche awareness program for the Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C. that was delivered with the assistance of other backcountry enthusiasts. The course that he developed in the early 1980s was used for many years by the FMCBC instructors and guides before it was sold to the Canada West Mountain School. In the past few years, he updated the course and provided it for free to members of ACC and BCMC.

On his first trip to Switzerland to climb, Frank made some Swiss friends. This would lead to multiple climbing and ski trips to Swtizerland. Rene Buchner, one of his Swiss friends, summitted Warbler Ridge on Mount Logan with Frank in 1977. Also joining Frank on that impressive new route were David Jones, Fred Thiessen and Jay Page. Other climbs included Denali. Frank recently did the Haute Route in the Alps with me and his Swiss friends.

Frank was a notable, passionate and often outspoken member of the local mountaineering community who did not hesitate to opine on issues and matters where safety was at stake and where he felt his expertise could be of help. He came to be known as a respected avalanche hazard assessment expert and supported the Spearhead huts project by conducting an independent slope hazard and avalanche evaluation of the proposed Pattison Hut sites.

Frank was a registered member of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C., and a leading expert and consultant in geologic engineering. In recognition of his many significant contributions to the profession and our community, a few "Friends of Frank" and the APEG Foundation recently began work to establish the Frank Baumann Bursary in his honour. The goal is to raise $50,000 to fund an annual award of about $1,500 in perpetuity to a deserving student (B.C. resident) enrolled full-time in third- or fourth-year engineering geology studies at a Canadian university. To date, $36,000 has been raised.

Donations to help reach the goal of raising sufficient funds to support a self–sustaining annual award in honour of Frank's memory can be made by cheque payable to APEG Foundation (memo line: Frank Baumann Bursary) and mailed to #200-4010 Regent Street, Burnaby, B.C., V5C 6N2. Trustees of the APEG Foundation will administer the bursary and issue tax-deductible receipts.

—Jay MacArthur

## Peter Aitchison
1942-2013

I believe that those who knew Peter would be hard-pressed to identify another friend who has had a bigger impact on their lives. Peter was absolutely authentic, dependable, selfless, modest, compassionate and generous with his time. He was globally minded and locally active. Peter was always a teacher, both as a professor at the University of Manitoba and in his personal life. He always wanted to share what he knew with others. It didn't matter whether you were an experienced alpinist or a complete beginner, Peter would be happy to go on a trip with anyone just so he could share his knowledge of the things he loved, to enable others to explore the world for themselves. It was this passion for teaching that lead him to organize numerous trips for Manitoba's burgeoning climbers to "experience the mountains" in the Rockies. He was an outstanding mentor and had a gentle yet forceful way of encouraging team members to achieve their best, whether it was a child learning to climb or an experienced climber on a desperate pitch.

Peter was the original hardman and the most fearless of leaders. I remember the outrageously steep knife-edge ridge near the top of Mount Manitoba in 2002. Peter had led the previous pitch through bottomless snow and had belayed Bob France and me to the ridge, where we had dug in. The wind was howling sending spindrifts off the ridge, and it looked grim. Peter casually looked at Bob and me and said, "Why don't you two set up a belay and lead up the ridge?" We looked at the exceptionally steep, razor-sharp ridge and elected to stay put. In the end, Peter led up the ridge without a moment's hesitation, much to the admiration of Bob and me. Bob made some comment about "balls of steel" (but not so polite). Peter was the kind of guy who just did what needed to be done. He relished the challenge—the more desperate things were, the better Peter was. Peter used his dry British sense of humour to lighten sometimes stressful situations. Those who know him will remember him often saying, "It's not brilliant," referring to the foul weather, his memory of the route, rotten rock or whatever the current challenge was.

Peter started climbing at an early age. He climbed in England, Colorado and in Australia before coming to Canada and settling in Winnipeg in 1969. In the 1970s, Peter resurrected the then-defunct Manitoba Section of the Alpine Club of Canada and almost singlehandedly developed the rock-climbing routes in Manitoba. He got other Winnipeggers interested in climbing with him. So, in an area of the country where climbing seemed an impossibly silly idea, Peter found a way to make it happen.

Peter had many accomplishments in his climbing career. He served the Manitoba Section as president and vice-president for many years. Peter recently celebrated his 40th year of membership and support for the Alpine Club of Canada. In 1989, he received the Alpine Club of Canada's Silver Rope Award for Leadership. In 1992, Peter received the Order of the Buffalo Hunt, Manitoba's highest honour, in recognition of the first ascent of Mount Manitoba in the Yukon. Peter appreciated these accolades, but for him it was the people-filled encounters along the way that were most important.

It was on the annual "Experience the Mountains" trip this past August that Peter had his last climb. He had returned to Mount Victoria for the fifth time when, in a tragic turn of events, Peter was struck by a falling rock and fell to his death. At 71 years old, he was still strong and vigorous. Two days earlier, Peter had climbed 12 pitches to the top of Wiwaxy Peak and was still feeling strong at the end of the day. In the end, Peter died living a life he truly loved. He was in the mountains with friends and lending his knowledge to enhance the experience of others. While Peter's death was a tragic loss for those of us he left behind, I know that if Peter could have picked how he would leave this earth, this would have been pretty close.

In thinking about Peter, it occurs to me that he had such strong qualities that he could have pursued anything. He could have been famous, been president of the university, built a successful business or pursued wealth. He had the capacity to succeed at any of those things, but they weren't important to him. Instead, he chose to spend his life pursuing his passions, spending time with his family, building a strong community, mentoring and teaching others—and, in doing those things, he left our world richer.

This poem was written in June 2013 as a school assignment on love. Peter would be so proud that his grandson views the outdoors the same way he did.

—Jeff Aitchison

### Outdoor Amour

*I do not know how fast I'm walking*
*Here among the trees*
*For in this great land of mine*
*I tread the path with ease*

*The stress of life has slipped away*
*Nature everywhere*
*Light shines through the summer leaves*
*The flowers, oh so fair*

*My love for nature cannot be matched*
*For the outdoors is my home*
*As long as I do walk this earth*
*Forever I will roam*

*The joy I feel on the summit*
*Truly makes me want to stay*
*For the view of which I gaze upon*
*Takes my breath away*

By Ryan Aitchison

# R. Don Lyon
## 1936-2013

A strong, dependable and adaptable mountain man known for his humour and quick wit left us suddenly on October 11, 2013, in Nelson, B.C. Don Lyon was the consummate volunteer, seeing opportunities when others saw work. He quarter-mastered four major expeditions between 1960 and 1967, working out the logistics of each expedition in fastidious detail. He was also the workhorse for the Varsity Outdoor Club (VOC) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in the 1950s and the Calgary Section of the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) in the 1960s. During his retirement years, he led several hiking camps with the Kootenay Mountaineering Club (KMC) and was involved in many other community causes right up until his untimely death.

In 1959, having completed four years of teacher training at UBC, Don joined the ACC and Hans Gmoser's upcoming expedition to Mount Logan. When he was asked whether he would like to join the expedition, his response was, "Sure, why not, where is it, and how high is it?" Throughout the rigours of the expedition, he was steady, solid and ignored the inherent tensions that come with such expeditions. He stayed out of controversies and took on tough tasks with zeal and humour. He also kept detailed files of everything, except there was no file or list of peaks he had climbed. It's probable he climbed several hundred during his lifetime.

Don's appetite for alpine adventure began at UBC. After year-end classes in the first two years, he returned home to Powell River to work in the pulp and paper mill. He met a young engineer at the mill, Christian Schiel, an accomplished climber. He honed Don's mountaineering skills with weekend climbs in the mountains east of town so that when Don was with the VOC'ers working at summer jobs in the Rockies in later years, he and his rope mates would usually end up on a more difficult variation of the route being climbed. Here is one of many escapades.

In a climb in the summer of 1958, three VOC rope groups charged to the base of Mount Athabasca in the Canadian Rockies. The warden on duty hoped his advice would be followed to use the standard North Glacier route. As Don had neophytes on his rope, he agreed to go that way, while Sev Heiberg chose what is now known as Silverhorn Ridge. The third party went on a route along the edge of the north face. While working up these two routes, Don decided to veer off the ramps, selecting a tough line that required much step and hand-hold cutting, and it was hours before his party reached the summit. The warden was not amused by this spectacle.

After climbing Mount Logan in 1959, Don returned to the Rockies for another summer. In the autumn, he began his teaching career at Cloverdale near Vancouver. The following winter he organized an Easter-week ski expedition into northern Garibaldi Park. It was a stormy week, but they managed a winter (near) ascent of Mount James Turner before being weathered out of any further climbs. The following academic year Don was teaching in Golden, B.C., and in the spring he had a successful ski trip to the Columbia Icefield, which was probably the first party to reach the North Twin summit on skis.

Soon after, Don began his role as quartermaster for Sev Heiberg's Pioneer Ridge Expedition to Denali in Alaska. It was designed to be a training climb for an upcoming Himalayan expedition, and an opportunity to improve on food planning. After climbing Denali, which ran overtime and hence short of food, Don arrived back in Banff still suffering from hunger pangs. He joined Bill Tupper's Mount Clemenceau Expedition, which was a successful 10-day expedition starting from the highway; however, Don arrived back to Banff hungry once again, apparently having failed to check on Bill's menus or ration planning ahead of time.

In the winter season of 1961-62, Don was an avalanche technician working at Rogers Pass one year prior to the opening of the highway through Glacier National Park. Noel Gardner, his boss, saw that Don's skiing ability would have to improve immediately in order to handle the job requirements. At the conclusion of each day's work, Fred Schleiss, another technician, conducted mandatory ski-technique classes, and by the end of the avalanche season, Don was cutting a fine swath through the snow. During the quiet winter at the Pass, he began his task as quartermaster for the Canadian Himalayan Expedition, originally planned for 1962 but re-scheduled for 1963 due to lack of permission from Pakistan. Don filled the rest of his time climbing in the Rockies on the weekends and working for the Department of Public Works in Banff. One notable climb during this time was the probable first ascent of the northeast face of Mount Rundle with Ken Baker.

In the following autumn-winter, the organization of the Himalayan Expedition occupied all his spare time, although another political setback in Pakistan pushed the project to 1964. During this time, he continued to lobby the ACC for support for the project. When Don approached the VOC for help, UBC students contributed by packaging rations and crating food and gear for shipment by sea to Karachi. Upon arrival in Pakistan, the expedition was still unsure where they would be allowed to explore. Don described the political wrangling that took place, the detailed elements of planning the expedition, the expedition's progress thereafter and their discoveries in the area in a comprehensive report found in the 1966 *Canadian Alpine Journal*. He also wrote a light-hearted article on the expedition for the *VOC Journal*, entitled "Adventures in Chapatiland."

With the Himalayan Expedition behind him, Don married Heather in the summer of 1965. The following winter, he became a part-time ski instructor

at the former Pigeon Mountain Resort outside of Canmore, and took on volunteer tasks for the Alpine Club as program chairman of the Calgary Section and head of the newly established Camps and Expedition Committee.

During 1966-68, Don's quartermaster expertise from the three prior expeditions was evident in the development of, and planning for, the Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition (YACE), scheduled for 1967. Don searched out and bought all the camp and mountaineering gear as well as organized and purchased the food for the expedition camps—a huge undertaking with a budget of around $30,000. At the end of the expedition, the equipment was returned to Alberta, and Don's committee sorted through it, itemizing and stowing it away for future use. Don's report on this humongous task is in the 1968 *CAJ*.

Don was, by then, the Calgary Section chairman while the mobilization and demobilization of YACE was occurring, and remained as head of the Camps and Expedition Committee for another year (1968). During this time, he was also a member of the local Calgary Mountain Rescue group. At the same time, he was trying to modernize the Club, which had prompted him to consider running for the position of western vice president of the Club. By 1971, Don, the father of two young sons, decided to give priority to his family and reduce his involvement in the ACC. However, he continued to be concerned over the prospect of moving the ACC Clubhouse from its historic location in Banff and lobbied against the plan. That it was to be moved was a *fait accompli*; Parks Canada said so. Don felt strongly that the birthplace of mountaineering in Canada was in Banff—the Club office should be in the townsite and the clubhouse should be at the convenient central crossroads in Lake Louise. Neither one happened. As it turns out, the offices at the new Canmore clubhouse are a very successful venture.

In the autumn of 1971, Don moved his family to Burnaby, B.C. He joined the Vancouver Section of the ACC, but kept a low profile in the running of its affairs and only participated in the occasional weekend climb. He became increasingly interested in Bill Tupper's Wedgemount Glacier surveys, which were reported upon annually in the *CAJ* (1976 to 1986). With one or more family members usually in tow, Don trudged up the trail to Wedgemount Lake as part of the scientific entourage.

By this time, Don and Heather had discovered the lure of the central Kootenays area. They bought an old Japanese internment cabin at New Denver, B.C., and for 10 summers it was their base for outdoor activities. The Lyons established a postcard company to glorify the outstanding alpine and civic beauties of the B.C. Kootenays. Don's artistic endeavours were now expressed by his camera. In 1997, they moved to Nelson for their retirement, and thereafter, attended and led several camps as members of the KMC.

Don was a dedicated family man, who, along with Heather and their sons, David and Peter, took many adventurous hiking trips and travels. His last family outing was to one of his favourite haunts, the Little Yoho Valley, staying at the Stanley Mitchell Hut in mid-summer of 2013.

Don was a recognized leader and master organizer who did not expect awards. It should be noted, however, that many of the operations of the current ACC, though long in coming, are the changes that he sought. One of his continuing concerns, however, is the cost to the member to participate, something which has yet to be corralled.

At the celebration of his life held in Nelson, B.C., on a colourful autumn day, Don was described as "the glue that kept the early alpine friendships together for over five decades." It was also apparent that his friends who lived in Nelson were unaware of his very significant contribution to, and participation in, Canadian mountaineering exploits and explorations, as extolled in Chic Scott's history of Canadian alpinism, *Pushing the Limits.*

Don's unassuming manner, open heart, ever optimistic spirit, positive nature and deep chortle at a good comment or joke will be with us forever. He will be deeply missed.

—Karl Ricker, Dave Lyon,
Sue Leatherman and Darlene Nickull

## Sydney Charles John Watts
### 1927-2013

In 1990, the distinguished service Award from the Alpine Club of Canada was awarded to Syd Watts. Of course, Syd was elated to receive this great compliment, but he never considered what he did for the mountaineering community as anything special. He did what he did because he loved the outdoors. Syd could climb the highest peaks, amble along a stream swollen with spawning salmon, watch eagles soaring on thermals and admire the wonder of young plants as they pushed up through the soil to take their first breath before blossoming into the most incredible flowers, and never grow weary of the natural beauty that surrounded him. This was obvious if you were ever to do a trip with him (and many did), or, in my case, spend time at his home talking about the bush and the mountains.

Syd Watts was born in Olds, Alberta, on July 22, 1927, and moved to Duncan on Vancouver Island with his family in 1937. Upon leaving school, Syd became an apprentice mechanic for Wilson Motors. In 1958, he became the service manager, a position he held until 1977 when he retired at the age of 50. This

was a move he never regretted, as he was able to spend more time with his wife, Emily, and outdoors. Syd met Emily (Prout) on an Island Mountain Rambler trip to Victoria Peak in 1965, and three years later, they were married.

Soon after arriving in Duncan, Syd joined the local scouting movement and had his first mountain experience on nearby Mount Prevost. However, in 1949, he made his first trip to Strathcona Provincial Park and saw the jewel of the park, Buttle Lake, before it was flooded by the Strathcona Dam. This had a huge impact on Syd as he couldn't believe how much beauty was swallowed by the rising waters. Trees that were hundreds of years old he felt should have been protected under the Provincial Parks Act, but were felled for a few more kilowatts of power. Three years later, Syd went on a trip to the Comox Glacier with local members of the Comox District Mountaineering Club: Ruth Masters, Geoffrey Capes, Herb Bradley and Sid Williams. Syd found other like-minded people whom he could not only climb with, but discuss ideas about conservation and the environment. That same year he joined the Victoria Outdoor Club and the Victoria Section of the Alpine Club of Canada, and in 1953, Syd attended the ACC Hooker Glacier summer camp in the Rockies and graduated on Mount Scott. With his natural leadership ability, innate bush sense and the hard skills he acquired from the summer camp, he was soon leading trips into the mountains.

In 1958, Syd and his climbing companion Harry Winstone formed the Island Mountain Ramblers, a hiking group with an Island focus. Although Syd had made several trips off the Vancouver Island, he realized there was more than enough beauty on the Island to keep him happy for a lifetime. From 1958 to 1964, Syd, Jack Ware and Don Apps explored many of the high ridge routes in Strathcona Park. At that time it required following game trails through the valleys to reach the alpine ridges. Syd had a natural ability to find these trails and they became integral when developing the first hiking trails in the park. The next year (1959), Syd led the first post-war trip to the Golden Hinde, the Island's highest mountain. Syd went on to climb the Golden Hinde five times, once with Emily.

The first trail Syd encouraged others to help build was the Elk River Trail, which gave access to some of the most challenging mountains on the Island. In 1954, Syd was with the first party that hiked up the Elk River and encountered the devastation caused by the 1946 earthquake after a large portion of Mount Colonel Foster broke loose. Then in 1965, he began the project of planning and building the Marble Meadows Trail. This involved leading work parties over the next five years until the trail was officially opened in 1970. Syd also worked on several other trails, however, because of his extensive backcountry knowledge, editors for the Hiking Trails series of books consulted Syd for many years as new editions were printed. In the 1970s, Syd met John Gibson, a like-minded explorer, and together they climbed many north Island peaks, including several first ascents.

On one of their week-long mountain trips, Syd and Emily, along with Jack Shark, first climbed a mountain on the east side of Buttle Lake that became known as Syd Watts Peak. In 2010, Syd was fortunate to see this mountain officially recognized as Syd Watts Peak and, fittingly, it is just above a lake named for his long-time environmental friend, Ruth Masters.

However, mountaineering was just one of Syd's passions. He was a keen birder, a long-time member of the Cowichan Valley Naturalists, the Somenos Marsh Society and the Friends of Strathcona, and an advocate for wilderness and ecological reserves. In 1984, Syd and Emily were instrumental in having part of Mount Tzouhalem's Garry Oak ecosystem set aside as an Ecological Reserve. Since then, Syd has been the warden, or as some say, the "eyes" of the reserve, visiting it at least twice a week. In 2007, the Environment Minister Barry Penner recognized Syd Watts' devotion and presented him with the Volunteer of the Year Award for his long-term contributions to Strathcona Provincial Park and the Mount Tzouhalem Ecological Reserve. Sadly, Emily was not alive to share Syd's recognition, but her name is forever linked with Syd's in the preservation of the Mount Tzouhalem Ecological Reserve. Syd made many presentations at public meetings to save his beloved special areas and was always willing to share his wide naturalist knowledge. In 2008, a boardwalk at Somenos Marsh was named Watts Walk to commemorate Syd and Emily's work in preserving the marsh.

Syd's last (physical) smile was when he heard the news that some of the reintroduced bluebird eggs were hatching in the bird-boxes on Mount Tzouhalem. On the evening of May 25, 2013, surrounded by a few close friends, Syd got up and walked down the trail for the last time. He left behind his Trapper Nelson pack, his wooden ice axes, leather boots and old binoculars, along with many wonderful memories. As he walked down the trail towards Emily (probably with a smile as wide as the Island), one of his favourite songs, Happy Wanderer, could be heard playing in the breeze.

—Lindsay Elms

# Reviews

## Base Camp: 40 Days on Everest

by Dianne Whelan, Caitlin Press (2014)

*Base Camp: 40 Days on Everest* is the autobiographical book by Canadian filmmaker, Dianne Whelan, of the making of her award-winning documentary film, 40 Days at Base Camp. Before discussing the book, it will be helpful to set the scene with the film.

Apart from some footage shot on the trek in and self-video journal clips made by climbers on the mountain, Dianne Whelan's unusual portrayal of Mount Everest was filmed almost entirely in the tent city that springs up every year in April and May on the Nepalese side of the mountain. Whelan used a French documentary style, *cinéma-vérité*, where the film crew essentially watches life unfold around them, and the story line is revealed through ad hoc interviews rather than a narrator's voice-over. She chose 40 days because that's about the time it takes climbers to acclimatize and summit the mountain, and because, according to ancient tradition, that's how long it takes to get to know a people while living with them.

Base Camp is a small tent town of 800 to 1,000 inhabitants who somehow manage to self-organize and function for a few weeks each year. According to the picture painted by Whelan, this is no idyllic alpine campsite nestled in green meadows and bubbling streams. It's more of a nightmare of jagged rocks and melting ice at 5,364 metres elevation, where hundreds of tent platforms have to be built and shored-up by hand every spring amid the constantly changing terrain and rivers of melting ice. It's a place where dead bodies and garbage constantly emerge from the retreating glacier, where many expeditions stage their attempts on Everest and Lhotse, and where many thousands of trekkers stop by for short visits. The camp is large enough that finding one's way around, especially at night, can be daunting, and because of this, Whelan chose the subjects for her film from among expeditions located within a 15-minute walk of her tent. This tiny piece of moonscape, situated too close to the mountain to even see its summit, was her workspace for six long weeks, while she and her cameraman fought losing battles with the debilitating effects of altitude, and fretted over risks of low-budget filmmaking and the activities of Maoists back in Kathmandu.

Whelan's 2010 film presaged this spring's tragedy when 16 Sherpas lost their lives in the icefall, bringing the 2014 climbing season to an end before it began. In Base Camp, at the time of the 2014 disaster, the largest Everest expedition ever was about to be mounted, with crews planning to set up cameras in many locations on the mountain to film the first person jumping off the summit in a flying suit. The stunt never got off the ground, but instead the film crews were on hand to record the unfolding drama of the rescue and recovery operations in the aftermath of the avalanche. With the resources at their disposal, they were able to bring an hour-long documentary to air on the Discovery Channel within a few short weeks of the event. Dianne Whelan's film, similarly confined to Base Camp, provided a sobering backdrop to that film and to this year's tragedy.

While Whelan's book touches on the principle characters of her documentary, it is mostly an expose of her own experiences, trials and relationships in the course of making the film. It is well written and forthright, and hard to separate the basic challenges of nearly 40 days spent working at Base Camp from the author's stream-of-consciousness account of her time there. While most of the characters she chose for the film ultimately triumph on their chosen peaks, and the resulting film goes on to win awards, I did not get a strong sense of personal triumph from the author for her work. Perhaps that came later after the physical and emotional toil of the fieldwork faded and months of cutting and editing back in Canada passed.

Like its progenitor film, the book takes a hard look at problems found en route to Everest—at Base Camp and on the mountain—which the author describes as a microcosm of what we're doing to the rest of the world. She asks whether it should be more important to clean up the bottom than to get to the top. Yet she manages to put aside judgemental feelings and engage instead with the stories of her subjects as they each overcome challenges and experience personal humility on the mountain. One paragraph stands out where she describes the kind of film that she thought she was going to make: "…about how fucked up this all is, how crazy that the world's highest mountain has been commercialized." But she then goes on to talk about the humility forced by her own physical challenges and emotional strain: "Rather than judging the people I'm meeting I am now inspired by them and feel honoured that they have opened their lives to me."

This was not, for me, a page-turning adventure story in the tradition of classic mountain literature, but it would be unfair to expect it to be so. Despite the regrettable lack of an index that limits its utility as a reference, this is still a worthy addition to the literature of the world's highest mountain. As a down-to-earth narrative of trekking to and living at Everest Base Camp, it is valuable reading for anyone contemplating going there.

—Mike Nash

## Finding Jim

by Susan Oakey-Baker, Rocky Mountain Books (2013)

I MET WITH SUE for an hour on Harvest Thanksgiving weekend in Whistler to discuss her published book *Finding Jim,* as the sun turned to the west and autumn trees spoiled us with their flaming red, rust and yellow hues. Sue had recently returned from her 15th climb of Kilimanjaro to raise funds for Alzheimer's. Her first trip to the summit of Kilimanjaro was with Jim Haberl and the trip is poignantly and honestly recounted in *Finding Jim* (chapter 4).

Many of us remember, with predictable understated Canadian patriotism, the day Jim Haberl reached the summit of K2 in the summer of 1993. He and Dan Culver were the first Canadians to do so. The climb was marred by the death of Dan Culver, who died on the descent. Haberl recounted, in evocative and graphic detail, the climb in *K2: Dreams and Reality* (1994). Haberl continued his mountaineering tales with a follow-up book, *Risking Adventure: Mountaineering Journeys Around the World* (1997). *Risking Adventure* was dedicated "To Sue, my partner in the biggest adventure of all-life." In the acknowledgements, Haberl doffed his grateful cap to Sue once again: "And a very special thanks goes out to Sue Oakey, who supports who I am and gives me perspective."

Jim Haberl died in an avalanche in the University Range in Wrangell-St. Elias in April 1999, and in 2006, the ACC Jim Haberl Hut was opened in the Tantalus Range in the Coast Mountains. I remember, with some fondness, the ACC-week trip in 2006 to the Tantalus Range to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the ACC. The Haberl Hut was ever in our sights and imagination, having just opened a few weeks before our trek.

*Finding Jim* is a fast-paced and energetic book (44 chapters) that, in a vulnerable and raw sort of way, retells the intense phase of Jim and Sue's relationship in the 1990s, and more to the telling point, walks the reader, in a tender and transparent way, into Sue's extended mourning phase after Jim's death in 1999. There is nothing opaque in this see-into-the-soul book. There can be no doubt that Sue had knitted deeply with Jim (Goethe calls this "elective affinities"), and such an unexpected death shredded the knitting and unravelled Sue's hopes and dreams for a life that was supposed to unfold well and successfully. Joy (mixed with some early confusion in the early relationship) tended to dominate until the death of Jim altered the script of the drama. Woe entered Sue's life and joy was dimmed in the process of mourning and searching for meaning. There is a surgical-like precision as Sue touches, in a vivid and deft way, her many feelings and reactions to Jim's tragic death.

The burnished gold of *Finding Jim* is the way Sue does not flinch from feeling her pain, trying to ease such suffering and the varied places she goes (where she and Jim had spent life-giving moments) to what the Celts called "thin places" where she might re-find Jim. Death is never easy, but it is doubly difficult when it occurs at the beginning of lives that had much promise—a promise that will never be fulfilled. Life does go on after death, and to Sue's credit, she courageously lived into and through the mourning season. Each chapter in the mourning quest is packed with Sue's intense longing to find Jim, yet knowing he, at one level, is gone and can never be found. There is a certain comfort in being at places or wearing clothes that were there in the bonding stage of the relationship. Letting go is more difficult, and discovering how to live again is equally as demanding—such are some of the deeper themes of *Finding Jim.*

There are tender letters in the book, fine mountaineering photos near the end of the book, and many wise quotes worth meditating on for those seeking a way onward and forward after the unexpected death of a soul friend. Sue's journey forward is one of seeing that joy and woe are part of the texture and tapestry of life. When both dwell well and wisely in the soul and mind, the pilgrimage through time is made in a more mature way—never easy to live through, though, when the tragic side of life rears its demanding head and will not leave.

Sue brings to a close *Finding Jim* with a parable not to miss. The brief tale compares and contrasts a shallower view of what it means to be human (all bluster and bravado) with a more honest, soft-hearted and humane way of living life that recognizes the transformative power of suffering. The book does end in a rather positive way in which Sue is married again and has a child, but most of the book is more about her processing, in her unique way, Jim's death. The book, in some sense, should be called "Finding Sue," or "Sue Finding," for the simple reason that it is more about Sue in search of herself. Jim is the icon and portal she must see and live through to go deeper on such a quest, to ascend such a peak from which more can be seen and sifted through.

*Finding Jim* is as much about Sue's journey into insight as it is about entering the larger perennial issues of life—knitted relationships ending, death and life, joy and woe, hopes dashed and dreams crushed, yet living forward. Each and all can tell their own story of such growth experiences, but Sue's confessional approach and limpid prose makes for a read that is virtually impossible to put down. I read the book in a few hours, sitting on a mountain ridge on a clear, blue-canopy day after fresh snow returned for another season and autumn was fading. Autumn brings endings, the cold of winter can be hard to live through, but spring does return. Such is the latent message of *Finding Jim*. Sue has clearly demonstrated she is a writer of much passion and skill. We await a sequel with more delving and deeper dives. It seems a book on Kilimanjaro might be in the offing.

—Ron Dart

## Short Peaks: 33 Brief Mountain Tales

by Jerry Auld, Imaginary Mountain Surveyors (2013)

It was a memorable evening. On March 21, 2013, Jerry Auld launched *Short Peaks* at the annual En Vino Novellus wine-and-literature event at the Rose & Crown in Canmore. Yup, we all got lit on wine. At that event, Jerry also spoke of the publishing company he had recently formed with a few friends, Imaginary Mountain Surveyors. *Short Peaks* is IMS's premier release, and it's a winner.

If you haven't read Jerry's first book, *Hooker & Brown* (Brindle & Glass, 2010), then you should. It's a novel that plays on Canadian Rockies' geography and exploration history. From that rather dry combination, Jerry has created the world's only psychological trail-crew fantasy. This is the mind that has also given us Sister Extreme, a hilarious mock climbing video made by Glen Crawford and Brad Wrobleski. Jerry not only worked on the script, he played one of the lead characters, Rex Van Fuegoshmit, grandson of ballet-dancing super-mountaineer Rexal Van F. It's okay to stop reading this right now and get on YouTube to see Sister Extreme, if not for the first time then, like me, for the umpteenth.

Jerry has always wanted to be a writer, but he studied computer science at university instead of English because, as he said in the bio he sent me for the launch of *Short Peaks,* he "didn't want to become a rote editor." Tucked into that phrase is the sort of pun that pops out of Jerry's brain without even being asked.

After graduating he travelled the world, only to realize that the navel of the universe is found back home in the Rockies. Jerry has lived in Canmore since 1996, running a consulting company and writing more books.

*Short Peaks* is a collection of 33 short stories and other writings, some of which are pretty hard to categorize. I loved every one of them. It is said that a writer needs to find his voice. In *Short Peaks,* Jerry has found not one voice but many, all of them wonderful. In this book, he speaks as a near-east Muslim in the Middle Ages, an equally ancient Christian from the Alps, a British stuffed-shirt diplomat in India, a high-altitude climber babbling away under the influence of Diamox, and a mountain goat in conversation with a falcon. More, too.

Yet despite such astonishing variety, Jerry keeps bringing the reader back to certain characters and their experiences. In the usual short-story collection, there is no continuity. Each work stands alone. Jerry's stories are good enough to do that. The linkages make them all the more enjoyable. So does the understatement. You'll find yourself thinking, "hmm, I don't get that." Then comes the insight: "Oh, wait—I do!"

*Short Peaks* is honest, scary, touching and funny as hell. I'll leave you with a few lines from "Say the Words," story number 16. It's best read aloud among friends in a bar.

*It was a clear, suddenly warm, night at the door of the pub when the bouncer bulldogged into us.*

*— Mr. Padaso?*

*I shook my head. …*

*The bouncer … held a credit card out like he was reading his lines.*

*— Stuart?*

*Potts shrugged. He was a good shrugger, smooth, practiced. … The bouncer moved over to a crowd on the balcony.*

*— Stuart Padaso? he asked, peering close into faces. Stu Padaso? A pause, then shrieks of laughter.*

In the rest of this story, there are other amusing fake names, including, get this, Colin Zic, Hugo Cendit and someone named Enora, who is addressed in the last line of the piece as "Say, Enora."

The college humour alone hooked me on *Short Peaks.* I kept reading for the brilliance and the depth. Pick up a copy in the bookstore or from Amazon Digital.

—Ben Gadd


*Will Gadd climbing Louise Falls, Banff National Park* © Kennan Harvey

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November 3 – 10 | Application deadline: September 10, 2014

BANFF MOUNTAIN AND WILDERNESS WRITING PROGRAM
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# PURSUE PERFECTION

## DESIGN/CRAFTSMANSHIP/PERFORMANCE

Born in the Canadian Coast Mountain wilderness, Arc'teryx is built on the principle of obsessive, precise design and production. Unrivaled performance at the point of extreme need.

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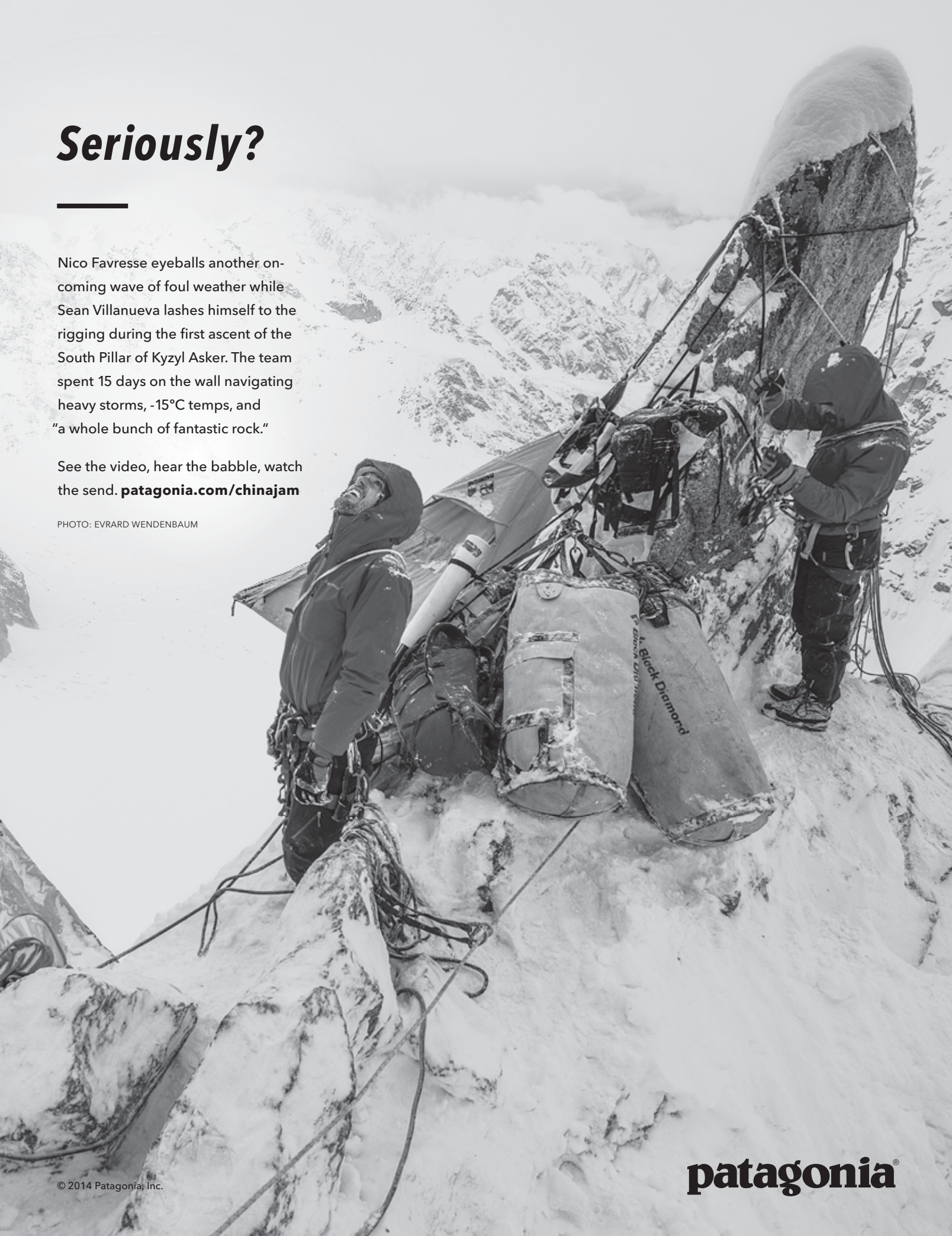
# *Seriously?*

Nico Favresse eyeballs another on-coming wave of foul weather while Sean Villanueva lashes himself to the rigging during the first ascent of the South Pillar of Kyzyl Asker. The team spent 15 days on the wall navigating heavy storms, -15°C temps, and "a whole bunch of fantastic rock."

See the video, hear the babble, watch the send. **patagonia.com/chinajam**

PHOTO: EVRARD WENDENBAUM



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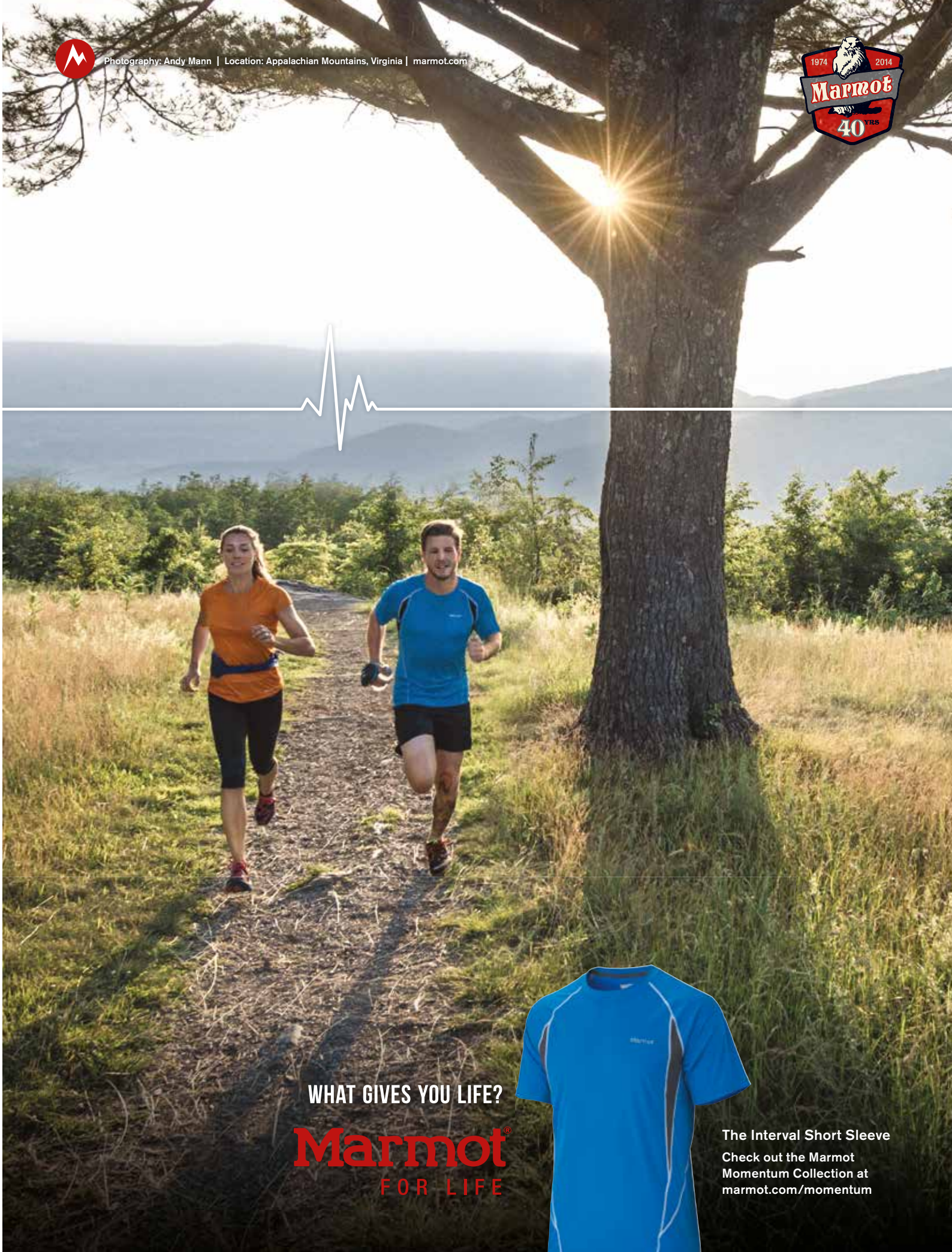
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