Canadian Alpine Journal

2015


MEC
LONG ROUTES,
LINKUPS, ALPINE
Burn down big projects with lightness, speed and efficiency.
Find streamlined harnesses, low-profile helmets, and minimalist
packs to keep your setup spare.
MEC.CA
Get the MEC app
mec.ca/iphone
Available on the App Store
Follow us
@mec
Like us
fb.com/mec
Read us
blog.mec.ca
Sarah Hart
MEC Climbing Envoy
Andrew Querner, Squamish, BC

Patrons of the Journal

— PATRON —

MEC

www.mec.ca

— BENEFACTOR —

Marmot

www.marmot.com

— PARTNER —

Arc'teryx - $1,500 - www.arcteryx.com

— SUPPORTERS —

Banff Mountain Film & Book Festivals - $1,000 - www.banffmountainfestivals.ca

Patagonia - $1,000 - www.patagonia.com

— FRIENDS —

The Eric Brooks Memorial Fund - $3,300

William Buxton, Toronto Section member - $500

Paul and Willa Geddes, Vancouver Section members - $450

Roger Wallis, Toronto Section member - $250

— CONTRIBUTING ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA SECTIONS —

Calgary Section - $500
Edmonton Section - $500
Manitoba Section - $500
Saskatchewan Section - $500
Toronto Section - $500
Thunder Bay Section - $300

Rocky Mountain Section - $250
Vancouver Section - $250
Jasper/Hinton Section - $200
Ottawa Section - $200
Whistler Section - $200

Montréal Section - $100
Okanagan Section - $100
Outaouais Section - $100
Saint-Boniface Section - $100
Vancouver Island Section - $100
Yukon Section - $100

The Canadian Alpine Journal, Volume 98, 2015

ISSN 0068-8207 — Copyright 2015 The Alpine Club of Canada

EDITOR — Sean Isaac
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR — Helen Rolfe
COPY EDITOR — Lynn Martel
LAYOUT & PRODUCTION — Suzan Chamney

The opinions and information contained in the *Canadian Alpine Journal* are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of either the editor or The Alpine Club of Canada. While we attempt to check the articles for accuracy as best we can, it is not possible to do so authoritatively in all cases. Please use caution regarding ratings, route information, etc.

INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

The *Canadian Alpine Journal* welcomes contributions in either English or French.
Submissions can be made via email to **caj@alpineclubofcanada.ca**.
For further information on submitting text and photos, please refer to the guidelines at
www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/CAJ

Submission deadline is February 1, 2016.

ACC Board of Directors

President — Gordon Currie
Secretary — Isabelle Daigneault
Treasurer — Neil Bosch
Vice-President, Access & Environment — Wayne Campbell
Vice-President, Activities — Frank Spears
Vice-President, Facilities — Jim Gudjonson
Vice-President, Mountain Culture — Zac Robinson
Vice-President, Sections — Sandy Walker
Vice-President, Services & Athletics — David Foster
Honorary President — David Toole
Executive Director — Lawrence White

Section Council

Marko Marjanovic, Yukon
Christine Fordham, Vancouver Island
Rob Brusse, Vancouver
Mitch Sulkers, Whistler
Val Hunsaker, Prince George
Kevin J. Witzke, Okanagan
Claire Levesque, Jasper/Hinton
Lara Seward-Guenette, Rocky Mountain
Lil Lezarre, Edmonton
Robert Bigelow, Central Alberta
David Roe, Calgary
Bradley Hagen, Southern Alberta
Jeff Dmytrowich, Saskatchewan
Simon Statkewich, Manitoba
André Mahé, Saint-Boniface
Frank Pianka, Thunder Bay
K. Sparky Russell, Toronto
Janet Campbell, Ottawa
Josée Desjardins, Outaouais
Gaétan Castilloux, Laurentides
Simon Deschenes, Montréal
Marc Dyke, Newfoundland & Labrador

For information about ACC sections in your area, please visit:
www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/sections/

The Alpine Club of Canada
P.O. Box 8040, Canmore, Alberta T1W 2T8

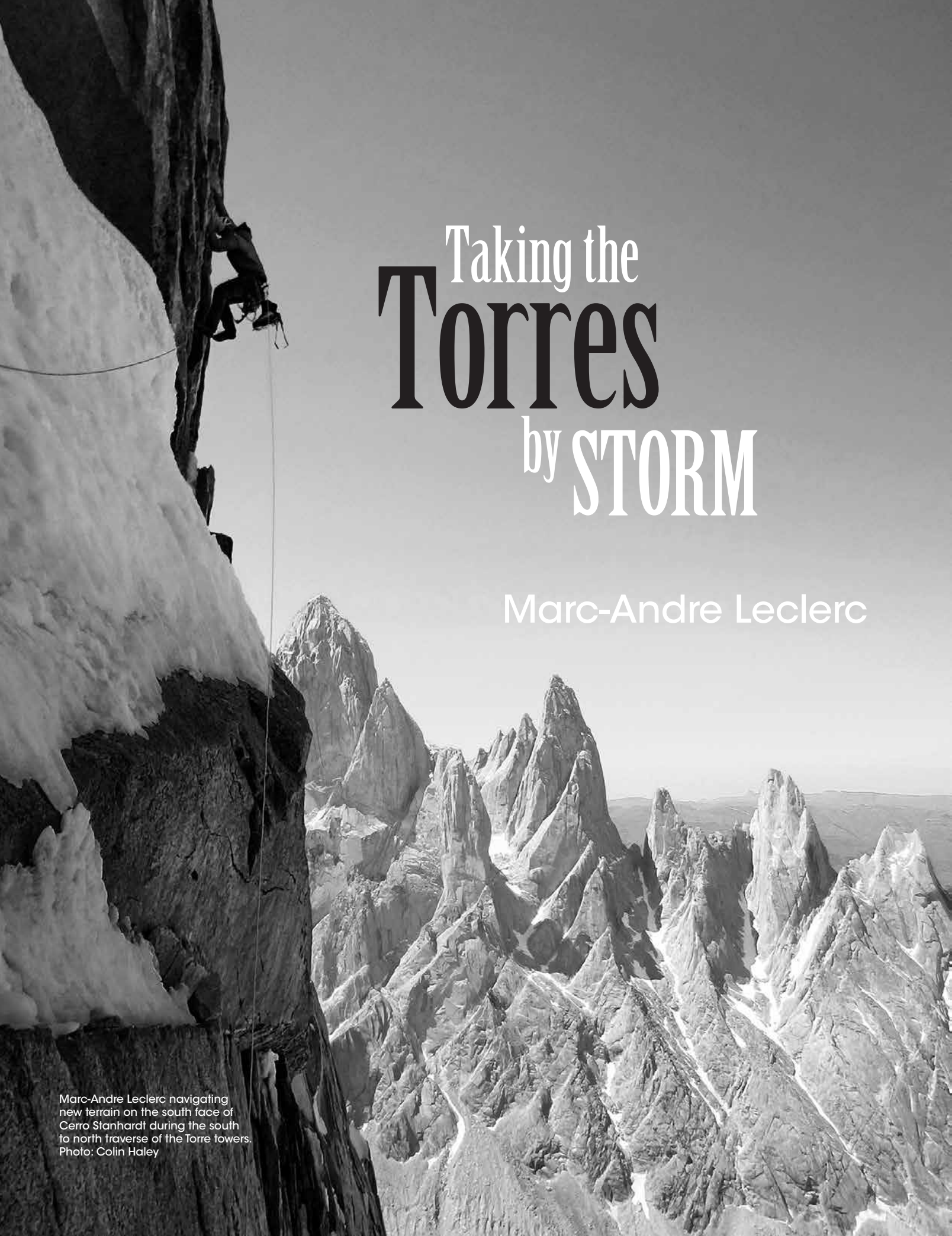
PRINTED IN CANADA

Contents

Cover: Margot Talbot on the crux pillar of Louise Falls during a night ascent, Canadian Rockies. Photo: John Price
Back cover: Jon Walsh (leading) and Michelle Kadatz on pitch seven of Electric Funeral on Wide Awake Tower in the Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. Photo: Paul Bride
Patrons page: Gary Wolkoff on pitch seven of Cardi Yak Rhythm, Yak Peak, Cascade Mountains. Photo: Lyle Knight

Taking the Torres by STORM

Marc-Andre Leclerc



Marc-Andre Leclerc navigating new terrain on the south face of Cerro Stanhardt during the south to north traverse of the Torre towers. Photo: Colin Haley

When I suggested the idea to Colin Haley to solo the Corkscrew Link-up on Cerro Torre in a day from the Col of Patience, he deemed the idea rather ambitious. It certainly would be a serious endeavour, but I felt confident that I could make a strong attempt. After all, the southeast ridge is so littered with rappel anchors that retreat would be simple with the 80-metre half rope that I planned to carry. The climb would only truly become committing after beginning the traverse across the south face….

I first visited the famous Chalten massif of southern Patagonia in December 2013. During that trip, poor weather and difficult climbing conditions prevented us from climbing any routes aside from a short moderate ice route on El Mocho. However, my eyes were opened to what was possible given more favourable conditions, a high level of fitness and skill, and a bit of luck. So, I made plans to return to the range in January 2015 with hopes to climb in the wild ice-capped spires of the Torres.

A two-week trip to the Canadian Rockies in November 2014 provided the opportunity to further hone my ice and mixed climbing skills, and a night spent shivering near the summit of Mount Chephren after a one-day ascent of The Wild Thing was a good introduction to alpine suffering. These would prove to be key ingredients for success on the climbs that followed during the Patagonian climbing season.

I arrived in El Chalten on January 15 with Brette Harrington. I had planned to climb with Colin until February 7, but expected that the usual poor weather would provide an opportunity for me to help Brette familiarize herself with the topography as well as find her partners to climb with for the initial three weeks. Surprisingly, the day we arrived was to be the first of a five-day period of stable weather, meaning that Colin and I had little time to do anything other than pack our bags and prepare ourselves to attack. Luckily, Brette was able to find a partner for the window, which made me feel slightly less guilty about hiking into the mountains the morning of January 17 with big plans—after all she is my girlfriend, and it was her birthday.

Colin and I were both inspired to attempt a traverse of all three Torres from south to north, an objective that had seen a couple of attempts, one by Colin and our mutual friend Jon Walsh, but had yet to be completed. During December 2014, I had contracted a serious gastrointestinal illness on Cerro Aconcagua from which I was still recovering, and this would prove to be my personal crux during the days that followed.

On January 18, we made the long approach over Col Stanhardt into the Cirque of the Altars beneath the west faces of the Torres, and then began to slog through warm, heavy snow under a beating sun towards the Col of Hope—the launch point for our proposed traverse. Even with Colin breaking trail, I was unable to keep pace. I had lost a great amount of weight due to my sickness, and with that I lost much of my strength and fitness. This was a huge frustration as I wanted nothing more than to be in peak form and to be a strong partner, capable of carrying my weight on this climb.

After reaching a flat basin beneath the col, we spent the afternoon relaxing in the tent. I focused on eating recovery-specific foods and hoped that a good night's sleep would render me more useful the following day. We woke up at 2 a.m. on the morning of January 19 and began climbing the Via Del Ragni on the west face of Cerro Torre. We were able to move reasonably fast on the initial pitches; however, as I began leading up the Elmo, the first steep pitch, my progress slowed. Despite being a confident waterfall ice climber, I had never climbed the unique rime found in the Torres, and feeling rather dubious about the tensile strength of the medium, my pace slowed accordingly. I lowered off to let Colin, a highly experienced rime climber, take over so that we could keep moving quickly, and so I could familiarize myself with rime climbing with the security of a rope from above. Colin continued to lead

most of the route, although I took a couple of easier mushroom pitches near the top, and we summited Cerro Torre shortly before noon. I was in complete awe of my surroundings while standing on the precarious summit, but we had little time to spare as we had hardly even begun our journey.

A few rappels and a short moderate pitch of ice brought us to a mushroom on the northwest shoulder of the mountain overlooking the precipitous north face. We were unsure of the stability of the overhanging rime mushrooms capping the wall, so we opted to pitch the tent and nap until the sun had left the face, reducing the likelihood of being squashed during our descent to the Torre-Egger col below.

At about 5 p.m. we packed up the tent then buried a stuff sack for a rappel anchor and dropped in on Cerro Torre's north face. Colin had rappelled this face before, during his attempt on the traverse with Jon Walsh, and he efficiently led all of the rappels to a narrow platform situated just above the Torre-Egger Col where we pitched the tent for our second bivouac.

During the night, the winds picked up and small chunks of ice continuously bounced off the fabric of the tent, making me feel somewhat uneasy as I tried to rest before the day of difficult climbing that lay ahead. We slept through our alarm in the morning, and it was already 8 a.m. by the time we began climbing the spectacular Venas Azules on the south face of Torre Egger.

Colin led the first three pitches, the first two consisting of moderate mixed terrain and the third a more difficult tube of steep blue ice on the edge of the main rime formation. I took over on the fourth pitch, a clean C1 dihedral in dry conditions, but a rather challenging mixed pitch in the conditions we found it in. Tenuous moves on ice of dubious quality interspersed with pulling on gear brought me to the belay ledge after an hour-and-half-long battle. As he arrived at the belay, Colin gently reminded me that quick and efficient climbing was going to be crucial to succeed on our objective. The pitch had been hard, harder than Colin might have realized while following it on jumars, but his comment still ignited something within me that made me attack pitch five with a newfound ferocity.

Encountering a narrow groove in the vertical rime, I used my tools to widen it to the size of a squeeze chimney that I could quickly squirm up the inside of until it widened into another groove of perfect blue ice. Pitch six looked spectacular, a large groove of blue ice that constricted at its top into a cobra hood of white rime ice. I was able to climb efficiently until the hood closed completely, and I found myself digging a tunnel up the inside of the rime—something I had only heard of through the legends of climbing in the Torres. Now feeling more confident with the sugary substance, I battled upwards, but the slow nature of tunnelling in rime was clearly going to present a problem in completing the traverse in the allotted time.

At Colin's suggestion I dug until I could build a V-thread to lower from, and then we made a rappel into the upper section of the American route, the line of Torre Eggers' first ascent. This proved to be a wise manoeuvre as we were able to make relatively quick progress over more moderate mixed ground with only occasional sections of difficulty. In one of these crux sections, Colin spent nearly 15 minutes trying to place a piton in a thin crack, and I briefly thought about commenting on speed and efficiency but wisely kept any snappy remarks to myself. After all, Colin was the more experienced of the two of us and the mastermind behind our strategy and the traverse we were attempting.

We arrived on the summit of Torre Egger late in the evening, having been slowed considerably by our late start and our route-finding error. We pitched the tent only a few metres beneath the summit mushroom for our third night out, a truly spectacular place to bivouac. Likely due to my youthfulness, I had been regaining my fitness each day by eating well in the evenings; however, this came with the consequence of having eaten nearly all of my food early in the traverse. As I fell asleep near the summit of Egger, I had to face the fact that I only had four energy gels left, amounting to 400 calories with which to complete the mission. The final day of the traverse would be a hungry affair.

We awoke early the following morning and kick-started the day with a free-hanging rappel from a carbon-fibre stick buried in rime. Two more rappels brought us to the col with Punta Herron, a small sub-summit of Torre Egger, which we climbed in two relatively moderate pitches before rappelling Spigolo Dei Bimbi on the north face of Punta Herron. During this descent the ropes got stuck after pulling a rappel, so I climbed up to free it, thoroughly enjoying the quality climbing despite the overall situation of our ropes being caught.

Soon we were in the col below the south face of Stanhardt, the final objective of the traverse. The upper half of the face had been climbed by Colin and Jorge Ackermann via a high traverse from the east face, but there still remained several pitches of unclimbed ground in order to link into their route. This section was to be my main contribution to the traverse.

On these pitches, I was finally on terrain that suited my skill set as a climber: a combination of technical free climbing on wet granite mixed with thin aid moves. On one pitch, I truly felt in my element as I tipped small bird beaks into a bottoming seam then used the wire of a #1 micro-nut as a mono while stemming in rock shoes, thus avoiding a half-hour of tediously standing in etriers. This pitch brought us back to mixed terrain where Colin resumed the lead, now on the familiar terrain on his and Ackermann's route, El Caracol. The last pitch was one of the cruxes of the traverse, and required tediously aiding an overhanging knifeblade seam while digging through rime before arriving on the summit ridge of Stanhardt—another great lead by Colin.

Only one pitch of easy ice now separated us from the final peak of the traverse, and it was with a great deal of disbelief that I crawled out of a tunnel and stumbled onto the summit of the third and final Torre. As psyched as we were, our journey was still far from over as we still had three thousand feet of steep terrain to rappel by headlamp. It was not until the

Marc-Andre Leclerc leading through the upper mushrooms on La Via del Ragni during the south to north traverse of the Torre towers. Photo: Colin Haley

first light of the morning and a couple of stuck rappels later that we found ourselves stumbling back towards the valley floor in a state of exhaustion and hunger. I was so hungry, in fact, that I considered immediately walking the 20 kilometres back to town in order to eat, but luckily Colin had a stash of freeze-dried meals near our tent at Niponino. I was rather thankful for this, as my body was in such a state of emergency that I had to eat two of the meals before I was able to even contemplate sleep.

Colin's extensive experience in the range was crucial to our success on the traverse; he led about 75 per cent of the pitches as well as all of the rappels. There were many moments in which I felt I was simply along for the ride, and it was only fair that when Colin suggested a name for the traverse, I happily agreed with it. He named the route La Travesia del Oso Budda (The Buddah Bear Traverse) after his friends Bjorn Eivind Artun (Bjorn is Norse for bear, as is Oso in Spanish) and Chad Kellogg, who was Buddhist. The reverse traverse was Bjorn's dream, and he first attempted it with Chad. They were both tragically killed in separate climbing accidents in the year that followed their attempt.

Only a couple of days after the traverse, another window appeared in the forecast. Colin and I hiked back into the Torre Valley, this time to attempt a one-day fair-means ascent of Cerro Torre's Southeast Ridge. We set up camp below the east face of Cerro Torre and began our attempt at midnight, climbing the 300-metre mixed buttress up to the Col of Patience as well as several pitches on the ridge proper by headlamp. We made good time, arriving at the crux headwall with plenty of time to spend working out the final difficult pitches that guarded the summit plateau. Unfortunately, iced-up cracks running with water made the already serious pitches too difficult for me to manage on lead, and we had to abort our attempt. Although we did not succeed in climbing the Southeast Ridge, this mission allowed me to familiarize myself with the route. This would prove to be the key step in planning one of my climbs during the weeks that followed.

After hiking back to El Chalten we were surprised to see yet another promising weather window in the forecast, so with only one rest day, we again hiked back to the base of Cerro Torre, this time to attempt a new route on the north face. When we had rappelled the north face during the reverse traverse, we had seen many promising-looking crack systems that appeared to provide a direct line up the face from the Torre-Egger Col. We packed for two days and set up our tent on the same platform we had stamped out before our Southeast Ridge attempt. Our attempt was nearly foiled by a faulty gas canister that did not fit the Jetboil stove, but I managed to break a metal bead off my pocketknife tether that perfectly fit in the hole of the canister, allowing the Jetboil to puncture the seal of the canister.

We began to climb the lower east face of Cerro Torre at first light, with Colin leading the initial 300-metre dihedral to the prominent triangular snow patch low on the face. As the sun hit the face, the thin veneer of ice plastered to the upper face began to shed on top of us. The continuous shower of golf-ball-sized ice chunks was uncomfortable, to say the least. From the triangular snow patch, we could see our three Slovenian friends, Luka, Luka and Todej, descending. They had decided to abort their attempt on a new east-face route due to poor conditions. As they rappelled past us, I considered the chances of being knocked off of the run-out slabs by icefall—but Colin and I decided to continue.

I led up the slabs, sometimes running it out up to 15 metres between marginal cam placements in hollow flakes on sustained climbing. Normally this would not be an issue but the falling ice chunks were a continuous threat. A Jim Bridwell quote continued to circle through my mind: "There is a fine line between badass and dumbass." Just how close to that line were we?

By the time I was done with my block, my hands were a bloody and swollen mess from being pummelled by hundreds of pieces of ice.

Colin took over the lead, climbing more moderate mixed terrain towards the Torre-Egger Col. The moderate terrain was made rather unpleasant by showers of water cascading from the north face above us. In one section, the water was flowing so heavily it nearly came over the tops of our boots. We were happy to reach the col around 6 p.m., and we spent the remainder of the evening melting snow for water in our tent that we conveniently pitched on the same platform we had used during the traverse a week prior.

Like déjà-vu, the winds picked up during the night, and when the alarm woke us at 3:45 a.m. we had a brief discussion about whether or not to continue. "I think we should go up," was all I had to say, knowing that, if needed, we could rappel back to the col and bail. During the initial planning stages of the climb, we had thought that we would carry our bivy gear to the summit and rappel the southeast ridge, but because we had already descended the north face and knew the rappels, I suggested leaving the extra gear at the col and descending the same way we had come.

It felt good to make a contribution to the strategy of our climb as the Patagonia newcomer, and we left the tent, stove and sleeping bags at our bivy site before starting the first pitch of the north face.

It was still dark as I began leading, and the winds made the air bitterly cold, forcing me to lead with gloved hands. The first pitch was highlighted by a section where I made several consecutive aid moves directly from my ice tools, while wearing rock shoes, in a steep icy groove. The sun hit us on the next pitch, allowing me to remove my gloves and move much faster over perfect 5.10 splitters that appeared as if they were cut into the face simply to be enjoyed by climbers. On another pitch, a section that appeared as if it may be necessary to cut through a sheet of rime was easily bypassed via 5.10 face climbing on perfect in-cut edges. This bypass provided access to a two-pitch splitter hand crack leading to the upper section of the north face.

I led the first pitch of the glorious hand crack, and then Colin took over and led a pitch that brought us to a junction with El Arca de Los Vientos, the only other route to climb Cerro Torre from the north. Although we had initially planned for me to lead the upper pitches of El Arca, slab climbing being one of my fortes, Colin did an amazing job stepping up to the plate and quickly and efficiently leading these pitches. The final pitch on the north face was a tedious affair that required hacking through rime to aid the cracks beneath, and as the winds continued to pick up, I slowly froze at the belay.

Now at the top of the north face, it was my job to step up to the task of leading through the rime mushrooms of the upper northwest ridge. The experience I had gained during the traverse had me feeling confident in my rime-climbing abilities, and I was able to climb fast, rope-gunning the last few pitches to the summit of Cerro Torre. Although we had just climbed Cerro Torre's north face, the intense wind stripped away any desires for celebration. We did not stand on the summit for fear of being blown away by the powerful winds. Instead, we crawled on our hands and knees and stayed as low to the ground as possible while taking our summit photos.

The sun dipped behind the horizon as we rigged our first rappel, stuffing the ropes into a backpack to prevent them from being blown two hundred feet upwards by the storm. Clipped into the rappel anchor, I felt as if I were chained to a post while being shot with a paintball gun as the wind relentlessly drove bits of ice into our frozen faces.

Rappelling the north face of Cerro Torre had felt serious enough in good weather, but in ferocious winds, serious took on a whole new meaning. Miraculously, our ropes never got stuck, and the feeling of relief when we collected our bivy gear and dropped into the sheltered east face was immense. From that point on, the remainder of the descent felt relatively casual as the wind was no longer a threat. We continued rappelling through the night and reached the Torre Glacier the following morning, feeling very content. Italian climbers Elio and Roberto graciously invited us into their snow cave and gave us coffee and hot chocolate, a very kind gesture that we greatly appreciated.

Our line is essentially a variation to El Arca that avoids the traverse onto the northwest face and instead climbs the entirety of the north face from the Torre-Egger Col. We named the route Directa de la Mentira (The Direct Lie), because it follows the line that Cesare Maestri claimed to have climbed in 1959, a claim now widely considered to be one of the greatest lies in mountaineering history. On our ascent of the north face, Colin and I evenly shared the responsibility of leading. We both climbed well, and we were both able to adapt and take over the lead on sections of the route that might have been more suited to the other's skill set.

It was great to have the opportunity to climb with Colin. I was able to learn so much from his extensive experience in

the range. He is a very motivated climber, which made us a strong team as motivation is truly one of the most important ingredients for success in the mountains. Much of what I know about climbing in the mountains, I have gleaned from my more experienced mentors, and climbing with Colin taught me skills in efficiency and planning that allowed me to raise my personal standard of climbing immensely.

It was now early February and I was scheduled to climb with Brette for the remainder of our time in Patagonia. She had already had a successful three weeks in the range and had done a number of climbs, including the impressive Corallo on the west face of Aguja Rafael Juarez, and a day-trip ascent of Mate Porro y Todos Los Demas on Fitz Roy's Pillar Goretta.

When Brette and her partner climbed Corallo, she had been inspired by the northwest buttress of Aguja St. Exupéry, home to the classic Chiaro Di Luna, 750-metre 5.10+. Brette is a bold climber, and her first thought upon seeing the route was that it would make for an ideal free solo, but she wanted to scope the route first rather than onsight solo it. As I had only climbed in the icy Torre group, I was happy to pay a visit to the opposite side of the valley to climb the sun-warmed granite of the Fitz skyline with comparatively light packs.

So, with Chiaro Di Luna in our scopes, we hiked back into the Torre Valley at the next promising weather opportunity. With Colin, we had really paced ourselves in the days preceding our climbs, often hiking the first 20 kilometres of the approach on day one, and then spending a second day slowly sauntering up to high camps in order to feel as well rested as possible before each climb. Brette's idea of pacing was slightly different, being the ever enthusiastic and youthful ball of energy that she is.

With me in tow, she blasted right past Niponino then continued beyond Polacos, the usual high camp for routes on St. Exupéry, and then up to the base of the route in one push from town. Here, we found a few other parties with similar plans to ours, so we pre-racked our equipment and at the first sign of other parties awaking the next morning, we skipped coffee and breakfast and got a head start.

We carried minimal gear and planned to simul-solo a majority of the route, stopping to belay only for crux pitches. After soloing to the base of the initial 5.10+ crux, Brette took the lead, stopping only twice to place gear. A pitch higher, we unroped and scrambled several more pitches of 5.8 and 5.9 splitters on perfect stone. It was here that I stopped, for only 30

Colin Haley on the first ascent of Directa de la Mentira on the north face of Cerro Torre. Photo: Marc-Andre Leclerc

seconds, but as I tried to catch up with Brette, I turned an arête only to see her already near the top of another wildly exposed crux pitch. I had little choice but to follow her up the precarious mid-5.10 arête also unroped, suddenly finding myself free soloing "for real."

I caught up to Brette at a small ledge, where she was pondering an insecure reach left into a flaring seam. With my lanky arms, I casually reached over and started up the crack, stopping to place a nut that Brette could clip to with a sling to temporarily protect herself while she executed the tricky step across. The unorthodox belay technique worked well and soon we were cruising up easy 4th-class slabs that led us to a ledge where we stopped for a snack.

One pitch higher, we reached a headwall split by numerous cracks and flakes. Here we soloed side by side in parallel finger cracks—stopping once to high five! At the top of the headwall, Brette stepped left to an exposed flaring layback flake and decided that a belay may be warranted, so I popped in two cams as she lowered me the rope so I could put her on belay. A pitch higher, at the base of the final chimney corners, we unroped again and scrambled the last few pitches to the summit. It was a clear and windless day, a rarity in Patagonia, and we shared the summit with two German friends who had been climbing right behind us all morning.

After an hour of enjoying the sun-warmed summit, we located the rappel anchors and efficiently descended back to the route's base. Here we could see that some parties were still climbing the initial dihedral pitches, making us happy to have gotten our head start that morning.

We made our way back to Niponino, where we had stashed a majority of our equipment, before beginning the long march back to El Chalten. It was during the hike out when my energy began to wane and my ankles became sore from being unadjusted to the high concentration of hiking. At one point, thinking that I may be unable to reach town before the take-out pizza store closed, I told Brette that she ought to run ahead and secure me a pizza. Luckily, I was able to dig deep and pick up my pace enough to order pizzas myself.

In the morning, I felt as if I had been run over by a steam engine, but Brette was already energetically asking, "What should we do today, go for a run? Sport climbing maybe?"

I replied with a long and drawn out groan. The trip up Chiaro Di Luna turned out to be just the kick in the ass that I needed to fully regain my fitness after the devastating effects of my illness on Aconcagua. After two days of rest, I began to feel the usual bouncy energy returning, my bouldering finally began to improve again and I felt ready for another climb in the Torres—if only the weather would comply.

Brette had her plan to free solo St. Exupéry, and mine was the Corkscrew Link-up on Cerro Torre. After all, the Corkscrew links together the first two-thirds of the Southeast Ridge with the Ragni route via a wildly exposed traverse across an icefield on the precipitous south face. I had already climbed that much of the Southeast Ridge during Colin's and my attempt on that route, and I had done the Ragni during the reverse traverse, so much of the terrain on the Corkscrew would be fresh in my memory.

Colin Haley on the first ascent of Directa de la Mentira on the north face of Cerro Torre. Photo: Marc-Andre Leclerc

After waiting for a week, a small window appeared in the forecast. It looked far less than ideal, with some precipitation early on, and then closing with very strong winds, but we knew it could be our only opportunity to finish our proposed projects, so with headphones in and tunes blaring, Brette and I hiked once more into the Torre Valley. The following morning we received an updated forecast from Colin and Alex Honnold, who were headed up to attempt their own project. The updated forecast prompted us to hike up to our separate high camps earlier than originally planned. Brette and I wished each other luck, reminded each other to take care, and then parted ways with her headed to Exupéry and me to the Torre. It felt as if we were putting an immense amount of trust in each other; we each had to be confident in the other's skill so as not to let worries for one another distract us from our own climbs.

Hiking up the moraine to the Upper Torre Glacier I felt strong and sure footed. I soon caught up to Colin and Alex, and we, too, wished each other luck and safety on our climbs. The glacier beneath the east face had a fresh coating of soft snow, so I relied partially on my memory of where the crevasses were and partially on my ski pole, which I used to carefully probe the ground in front of me as I walked.

I wallowed through the partially filled-in bergschrund beneath the approach buttress leading to the Col of Parience, and kicked steps in soft snow until reaching the traverse ledge leading to mixed terrain on the buttress itself. As I climbed straightforward mixed ground, I could see Alex and Colin, now appearing like ants on the glacier as they set up their tent. I could also see Toni Ponholzer and Peter Ortner, two accomplished Austrian alpinists, at the base of Cerro Torre's east face, preparing for an attempt on Toni's long-standing project, a new route in the centre of the north face.

Approaching the col, I practiced hanging my pack from a fifi hook and tagging it up behind me, a tactic I had never employed before. The technique worked well, and I found myself at the col in good time, but just then thick clouds began to swirl in from the south and blotted out any view of the route above.

I dug out a flat platform in a small crevasse only a few metres below the first technical rock pitch, cooked dinner and arranged my equipment for the following day. As I lay in my sleeping bag, rain began to fall, causing the roof of the crevasse to drip water on my exposed down sleeping bag, which became wet since, in order to save weight, I had not carried a bivy sack. By the time my alarm sounded at 2:30 a.m., I was thoroughly wet and cold. The rain was no longer falling, but a dense, wet mist hung heavily in the air. I started up the first pitch at 3 a.m. and found a small river of water flowing inside the crack that poured over my frozen hand jams as I climbed. I knew that my goal was ambitious; I also knew that ideal conditions ought

to be considered mandatory to carry out such a plan, and yet, despite the running water, I was going up. I could not leave Patagonia without having tried my best.

On the next pitch, I found a steep hand crack filled with verglass. I carefully scraped out some ice then placed the largest piece I was carrying and stood in a sling to reach wider jams above. I committed to the jams and swarmed up the wet, icy crack with numb hands and fingers. I was operating close to my limit, drawn upwards through the darkness by the mystical forces of Cerro Torre.

As I climbed higher, I found increasing amounts of verglass coating the rock. Moving very slowly, I paused between each move to scrape ice from the holds with my fingernails. I removed ice from a small edge, tested the hold, my foot slipped. I scraped at the hold with my raw fingers again, but again my foot slipped on the icy surface. I persistently scraped away more ice until my foot found purchase at last, and then I moved upward and repeated the process.

In my isolated world, amidst the clouds and by the light of my headlamp, I moved upwards slowly but persistently, never once considering backing down. My backpack became stuck behind flakes, but each time I freed it and continued on. My hands often became numb, but always I found a stance where I could slowly and painfully bring the life back into them.

Marc-Andre Leclerc in the upper section of La Via del Ragni during his first solo ascent of the Corkscrew Link-up on Cerro Torre.
Photo: Caro North

My progress was painfully slow, and by first light, I was only halfway up the Banana Crack. I had always envisioned quickly free soloing this pitch, but as it was filled with ice, I had to painstakingly clean out the fissure and employ daisy-soloing techniques to move upwards. Above this, the verglass became so dense that I could not safely continue in rock shoes and my progress ground to a halt. I was now above the clouds and I could see the fading light of thousands of stars and the summit of Cerro Torre standing proudly against the dark-blue sky. Behind me, I could see the summits of the Fitz group protruding from the clouds, and beyond that, the deep orange light of the rising sun on the horizon.

Finally, the dynamic conditions of the Torres were to work in my favour. I clipped myself into a belay station, removed a pair of headphones from my chest pocket, and selected some liquid drum and bass to set the mood as the sun rose and melted the verglass from the rock. The whole process took about 30 minutes, and those moments were spent admiring my phenomenal surroundings. I watched as millions of droplets of ice fell from the mountain and slowly morphed into streams of flowing water before drying up completely, leaving the stone beneath perfect for climbing.

Once again, I exchanged boots for rock shoes and continued up, the climbing now taking on a different character. Instead of the painstakingly slow and rugged conditions of the morning's early hours, I moved quickly and fluidly over dry rock, enjoying the movement and the beautiful position. I daisy-soloed much of the Haston Crack, equalizing multiple micro cams into which I clipped my daisy chains. Before committing to two fixed knifeblades at its top, I built a back loop to belay myself, leaving gear that I would retrieve on my way down.

The next two pitches were my favourite: balancy intensive arête climbing on the very prow of the southeast ridge with the sheer south face falling away to my left and the blank east face silhouetted on my right. As I danced upwards on immaculate small edges, avalanches began to thunder down the eastern faces of the Adelas behind me, huge boulders released from their precarious perches by the warming sun. These pitches brought me to the point where I would depart from the ridge and traverse the wildly exposed south-face icefield. Here, I left my rock gear, rock shoes and all else that I would not need for the remainder of my climb.

The cold and brittle icefield that crosses the south face of Cerro Torre is hardly an inviting place to venture out on alone. The climbing is not technical, the angle usually about 65 to 75 degrees, but with the 1,000-metre overhanging wall of the south face looming beneath, the consequence of a misstep is obvious. I began my descending traverse, kicking and swinging my tools as the huge dinner plates of ice released and slid away over the brink of the wall beneath my feet. The tedious nature of the climbing was immediately apparent, and to save time and mental energy, I drilled a V-thread and made a 40-metre tension traverse to reach a lower-angled area, poised only a few metres above the bottom edge of the icefield.

I then began the long ascending traverse towards the junction with the Ragni route on the west face. I would climb until my calves burned with the strain of frontpointing on the hard grey ice, and then I would cut a small ledge where I could rest

for a moment. I repeated this process over and over, the cold breeze blowing across the face, reminding me of the need to keep moving, to get off the mountain before the fresh wind would become a storm with the force of a hurricane.

I traversed slightly too high and made one more tension traverse before finally reaching the final slope that brought me to the top of El Elmo, beneath the mixed section of the Ragni route. The traverse had been longer and more draining than I had anticipated, but now I felt a burst of energy with only 400 metres of ice and mixed terrain separating me from the summit of Cerro Torre.

I climbed the mixed terrain at nearly a sprint, enjoying the feelings of lightness and energy, and then climbed a tube-like feature to reach the base of the steep pitches known as the headwall. As I climbed the dead vertical ice on the headwall, fatigue finally began to build and the exposure was accentuated by the fact that I had somehow forgotten umbilical leashes for my tools. I reminded myself not to overdrive my picks as I needed to conserve my remaining energy, and I routinely shook out my arms to manage the slowly building pump.

I topped out the headwall and breathed a sigh of relief, and then increased my pace once again as I climbed a moderate halfpipe pitch followed by an incredible tunnel through the rime. As I approached the notorious final pitch, I caught a glimpse of Alex on the summit of Torre Egger and gave a loud yell to share the psyche. I traversed into the steep groove of rime and delicately moved upwards, using my hands in the insubstantial medium rather than trusting my picks to hold my weight. After a few metres of insecure climbing, I finally reached solid ice, and with the first *thunk* of my ice tool, I knew that I had the summit.

I emerged from the final ice tunnel and ran to the summit of Cerro Torre, where I had to sit down from a combination of fatigue and disbelief. Tired as I was, I knew I had little time to spare as it was already 5:30 p.m. and the wind was becoming stronger by the minute. After taking a summit photo, I began the rappels down the Southeast Ridge. Luckily, the rappels went more smoothly than I could have hoped for without even a single stuck rope, and I surprised myself by arriving at the col before dark. I crawled back into my sheltered crevasse and began cooking food and rehydrating. I managed to dry out my wet sleeping bag and fell asleep as the wind whipped outside of the crevasse through the night.

I slept in late the following morning, and then made the last few rappels back to the Upper Torre Glacier where the snow was frozen and in ideal condition for walking briskly. I floated down the moraines feeling deeply content, but before I could completely relax, I needed to find Brette. Sure enough, I found her all in one piece, waiting for me at base camp with news of her own successful ascent.

The next day, Brette was blown over in a violent wind and sprained her ankle. After walking out together, I returned alone to retrieve all of our equipment. The day I returned, the weather was fine, so I also free soloed Chiaro di Luna, a parting gift from the Fitz group. The hike out alone was horrendous with me carrying a 60-kilogram pack filled with all the equipment for two climbers—a final kick in the teeth after a very successful trip. Brette and I spent two days on buses and a final day flying back to North America where we parted ways for the next month—Brette headed to the walls of Yosemite Valley, and I headed home to a delighted family and a rainy Squamish.

Summary

La Travesia del Oso Buda (5.10 A1 WI6, 1200m), south to north traverse of Cerro Torre, Torre Egger, Punta Herron and Cerro Standarht, Patagonia, Argentina. FA: Colin Haley, Marc-Andre Leclerc, Jan. 18-22, 2015.

Directa de la Mentira (5.10d A1 WI5, 1400m), north face, Cerro Torre. FA: Colin Haley, Marc-Andre Leclerc, Feb. 2-3, 2015.

The Corkscrew Link-up (5.10d A1 WI6, 1400m), Cerro Torre. FSA: Marc-Andre Leclerc, Feb. 21, 2015.

Chiaro Di Luna (5.10d, 750m), Aguja St Exupéry. Marc-Andre Leclerc, Feb. 28, 2015.

About the Author

Marc-Andre Leclerc is a 22-year-old climber born and raised on the West Coast of British Columbia. His climbing has slowly morphed from bushwhacking up local forested hills as a child to climbing rocks, ice and mountains all around the world. Read about Marc's triple solo link-up on Mount Slesse on page 73.

Marc-Andre Leclerc on Cerro Torre during his first solo ascent of the Corkscrew Link-up. Photo: Marc-Andre Leclerc

Above Chamonix

Ian Welsted

"There are no routes on the face of lawrence grassi," my well-informed buddy told me. Really? It's the tallest alpine peak above Canmore, Alberta. There is a road, a school and the most popular tourist spot in town named after this famous climber, trail builder, miner, guide and local hero of the 1920s. And no one had put a route up it?

Lawrence Grassi Peak and Canmore Wall: (1) Perpetual Spring, (2) The Gash attempt, (3) The Hole. Photo: John Price

"Want to go peg boarding at the Playground?" It was 11 a.m.

"Nah, I can't get motivated for that hike. Let's go to Elevation Place; get a better workout anyways."

Dragging myself out of the leather seat and away from my fourth coffee, I stepped out of the café onto Main Street. My gaze lazed past Ha Ling to the easy-looking mixed face above town. Hard to believe that the man himself hadn't soloed it on one of his strike days when Canmore was a hotbed of coal-mining union radicalism. These days if it isn't tweeted and hash-tagged and filmed, it isn't fact. With full cell coverage just above town, we would take the climbing world by storm.

When I first moved to Canmore, I had heard through the rumour mill that the east face of Mount Lawrence Grassi had seen an attempt. Two of the top dogs of the day, Rob Owens and Sean Isaac, had been up there in the winter. The route had already informally been named The Town Gash and its reputation had grown. It had to be formidable if it had turned those two around. Both those guys have now reverted to a more normal lifestyle replete with kids and successful businesses. I figured young blood was the best bet for this mission.

At the local climbing store it wasn't a hard sell to Sam Eastman. I had heard that Sam could crimp with the best of them, and he sure was itching for some alpine action. He wanted to get past his Ontario background of single pitching, and I could use a partner who could make up for my lack of climbing ability.

"Hey, come over to the window."

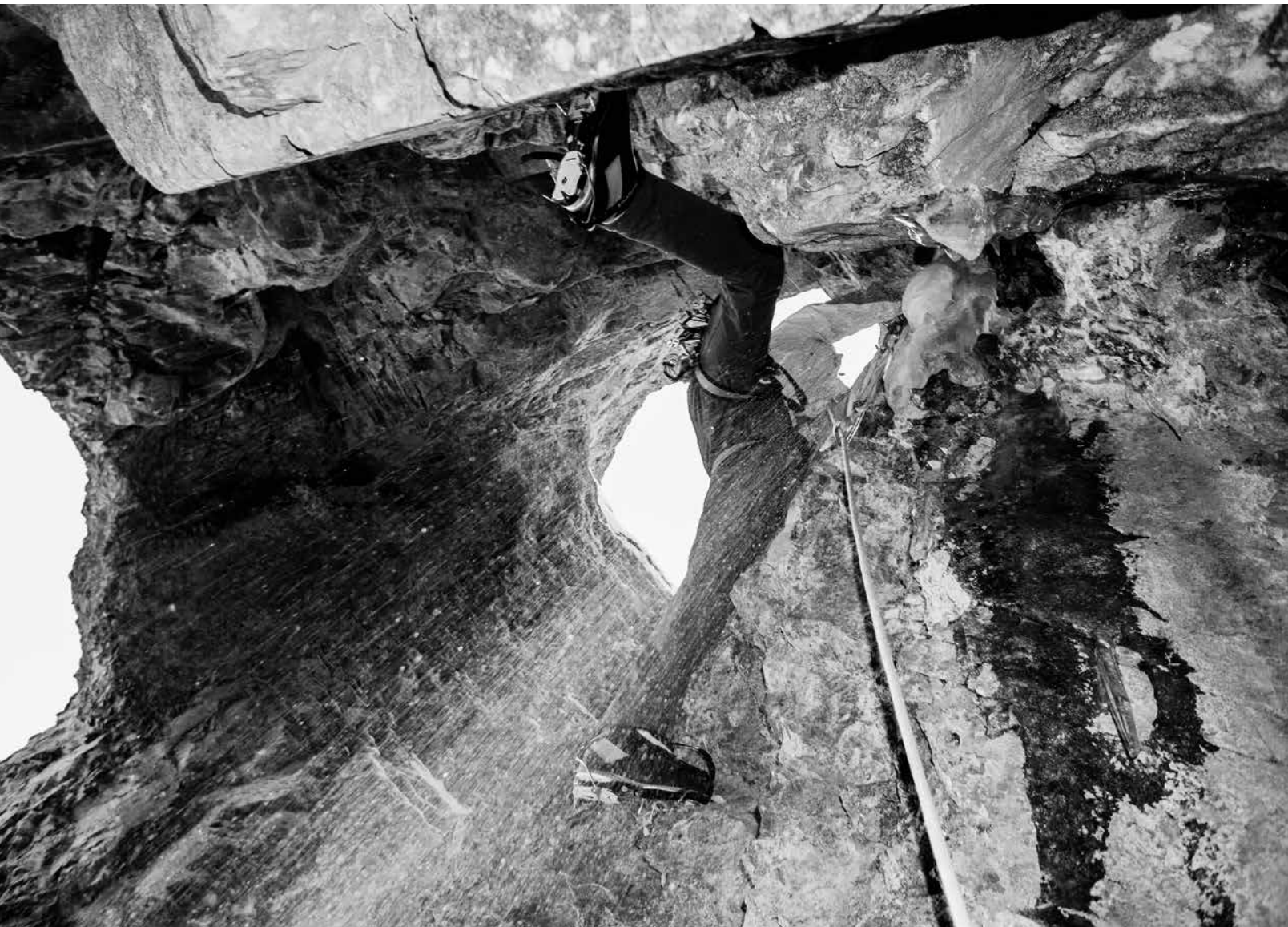
"Really, we could climb that?"

"Yeah, and no one's ever climbed anything up there, so we'll be famous. You'll be able to point it out to all your friends when they visit."

After an hour and a half of hiking from the trailhead, a similar length hike than to the vermin-feces-caked Playground I might add, we were below the face. I got us in position through some wily old-guy choss chimneying and pointed Sam up a blank wall. Soon he was lightheartedly chatting over his shoulder about fine chert crimping before the six-metre run-out off the piton had him downclimbing to me. The youth was ready to head down when I suggested, "Why don't we just walk along this grass-covered sidewalk here and see where it leads."

When in the alpine and in doubt, traverse. Sam later said

Raphael Slawinski on the crux of The Hole. Photo: Ian Welsted



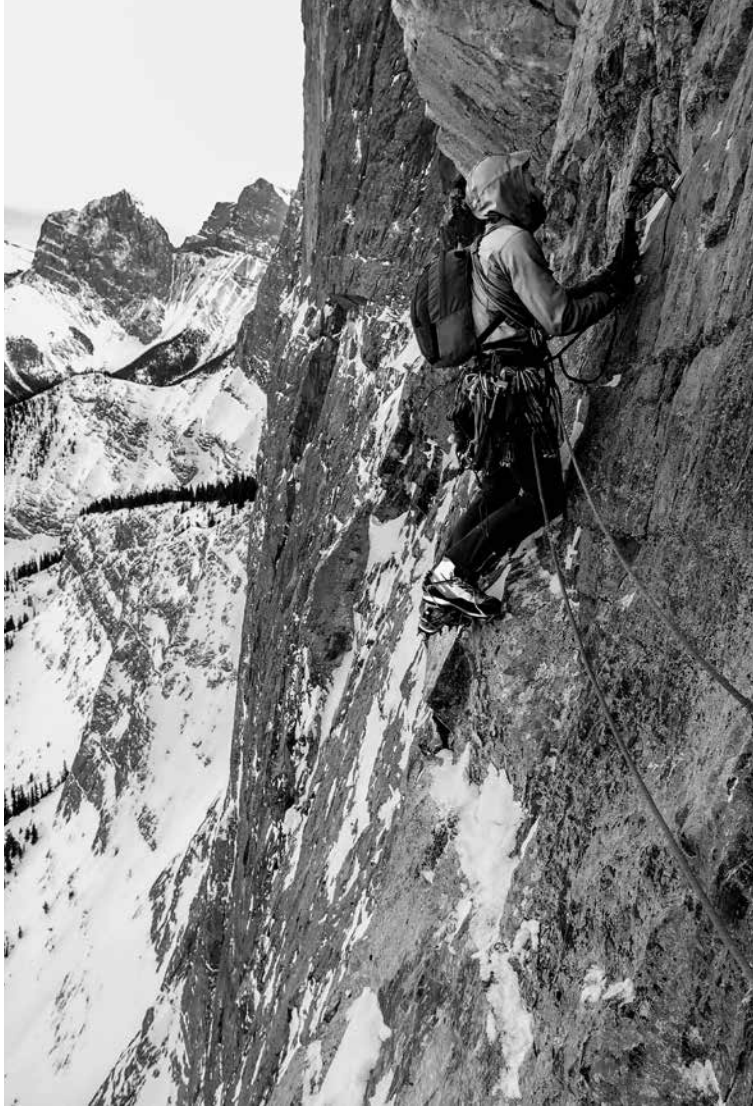
he was impressed with my alpine intuition. Our talents were nicely overlapping. After that there was some over-glamorized scrambling as one of town's better known crushers has called classic alpine climbing. It was for Sam's future benefit in town and with sponsors that I Facebooked from the route. Miner's Waltz in C(hoss) Sharp with a Minor is a better route name than our scramble deserves. Having moved from Ontario, Sam was even legally quaffing a pint at the end of the day.

The highlight of this summer route wasn't the climbing but an amazing feature we spotted half way up the face—a huge hole puncturing the wall. It was to draw me like a warp in the space-time fabric. And who better to investigate with than the astronomy prof? Dr. Raphael Slawinski was looking for long days of cardio training in preparation for his next trick, a new route attempt on the big E. For me, the draw was doing the first winter ascent of the face and the bragging rights it would confer to my ego.

I got us lost on the starting pitches. We traversed and were faced with the giant hole in the gully above us. A small dribble of an icicle at the start of the pitch let us pretend we were legitimately on a mixed route. The water-worn smooth top-out of the arch, above a rattly cam placement, had Raph momentarily excited. It was selfish of me to later argue that we had only added two new pitches to my effort with Sam, so it didn't deserve a new route name. Really, I just wanted to finally do a first ascent without Raph's name attached. It was the first time we had to return a call to the Kananaskis Country rescue service that had been advised by caring Canmorons of headlights from missing "hikers" on the peak.

Next, in spite of being a committed married man, Raph decided it was worth paying a visit to The Gash. Raph is super successful at what he does best, new routing in the Rockies. As a result, it can be difficult to convince him that he is wrong in a given aspect of this pursuit. Thus, we found ourselves traversing around the front side of Ha Ling Peak, negating one of the prime features of our newly loved crag, its short approach up the well-established backside trail. Sam seemed to think he was witnessing high-performance alpinism. Really it was a projecting day for Raph to plug in a bunch of bolts on a very steep roof, and then bail back down the climb. Sam and I were battling it out trying to one-up each other in our best skater-turned-climber style as we weren't topping out anyway. When you are 25 years older than your 18-year-old friend, it's impossible to outdo him in hipness. I tried with my used army surplus camo pants, but Sam won with his triple-oversized hoodies all hanging akimbo as though he were on the street corner. A second call to K-Country rescue was made as they tried to guess which one of the town's likely suspects was triggering the alarms this time around.

By now, I was intent on sending the direct route through The Hole. A no-nonsense approach was required. By drafting two ACMG guides the style changed to Arc'teryx with blue and white patches. J. Mills was establishing a couple of new alpine routes a week in his work shoulder season. David Lussier, visiting from Nelson, British Columbia, commented on the amount



Alik Berg on pitch seven of Perpetual Spring. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

of "scratching" required, but there are photos to prove he had a smile on his face. Third time lucky. At the top of the approach slope, David started asking about avalanche conditions. Jay tipped it over the edge and started down the convex lee slope without discussion. I figured he had to know something; he has sat in classrooms in Revelstoke, B.C., and knows all of those acronyms. We found the direct start, comprising of one short overhanging chimney pitch and a second run-out moderate face pitch. It took me a good bit longer to commit to the crux exit of The Hole than it had for the prof. David, being a thoughtful person, phoned the wardens and his wife from half way up the face. We joked about being at play in Canmonix as we topped out with the lights of town glimmering below. The *raison d'etre* of the route is not so much in the climbing but in the amazing photo potential of the spot. Truth be told, one can easily traverse around The Hole on a huge ramp. When alpine gods like Steve House and Rolo Garibotti comment favourably on your Instagram feed though, who cares what the climbing is really like.

By mid-winter, the guides were busy working, Sam was off to a future in Vancouver as a cutting-edge contemporary artist, and Raph was exclusively training lungs and legs. I needed a new strong, young rope-gun for my next, most obvious, new can't-believe-it-hasn't-been-climbed natural line above town. A

little convincing was needed before Alik Berg agreed that there was a winter line on the Canmore Wall, located to the left of Lawrence Grassi Peak—and a first winter ascent to boot. Alik comes from a special pedigree. About two decades ago, I met a dad and son combo who made me question what was normal. In the Grand Wall parking lot in Squamish was a cute kid with a bowl cut who was maybe four feet tall.

"My son just rope-gunned me up the Grand Wall," said the obviously proud father.

I wondered whether I should be contacting Child and Family Services.

That was Alik at the age of 10. He repeated the task once more when he was 12. Since then Alik has climbed 19 El Cap routes up to A5. Having that special calm demeanour that comes from hanging off tiny pieces of metal poked into granite irregularities, one has to coax these astounding facts out of a self-deprecating talent.

Two hours uphill from Lawrence Grassi Ridge Drive, we started up our line, hoping for convention's sake there would be ice in the upper gully. We were dubious at our chances of success. The forecast was for a five-day storm arriving by noon. Waves of spindrift washed down the face as we laughed at our worsening wet-glove situation. By about 2 p.m., I was Facebooking away again only to be informed that we were next to an established bolted rock route, Kurihara. Simultaneously, Alik called out that he had spotted a bolt. Well, we had to be on route then! I missed the two-bolt anchor on the next pitch, but staying on the natural line got us to the bottom of the corner we had come to investigate. Only two pitches separated us from the upper weakness we were aiming for. I started up perfect corner cracks, plugging in gear at will with beautiful and plentiful positive edges for front points everywhere. Then, as though specially placed to thwart drytooling, a two-metre section devoid of edges for the feet appeared. First my sidepoints were on the wall, attempting to smear, and then my knees were on, attempting some unknown technique, and then the inevitable happened and I was trying out my best impression of Alik on El Cap, hanging from the gear. It's key to always have one's excuses ready at hand before starting out on a day of climbing, and the weather couldn't be overlooked as atrocious.

The move that Raph pulled out of his repertoire at the crux section on our successful visit is the second most bizarre move

Raphael Slawinski on the crux pitch (pitch five) of Perpetual Spring. Photo: Ian Welsted

I've seen climbing in winter—a sideways mantle with the tools only for show. Good thing Alik had his camera at the ready to capture the move. I was suddenly distracted by the popping piton no longer in the anchor, a great cue for strong laughter among some. Looking at the image, I still can't figure out what Raph was standing on. I had spent considerable time hanging there investigating precisely this issue on our first attempt. Next came the easier but more adventurous pitch. Our special invitee pinch-hitter cast out left for eight metres, following a series of edges with no gear beyond the corner. Alik got the glee of leading the seventh pitch and cleaning choss for trundles that could have been clearly seen from town.

By my leads, it was a foregone conclusion that we would summit. In the dark, I chimneyed through easy corners choked with spindrift. We named the route Perpetual Spring after the winter that wasn't of 2014-15, or alternately for the fountain that keeps on giving of new natural lines within sight of town. An obvious ramp at the bottom of the face, a huge chimney at the top, unclimbed in winter. Somehow Raph was flip-flopping between buying it as a great new-route experience and being unconvinced. My case seems unassailable to me. We put up two new winter routes in four days out. And while The Town Gash has seen upward of 10 days on it, and the hole count is creeping upwards, it is yet to be climbed.

Guess there are different offerings for different climbers. To paraphrase from the movie *Team America*:

> Being a gear climber isn't so bad. In Canmore, there are three types of winter climbers. Peg boarders, bolt clippers and gear climbers. Bolt clippers think everyone can get along and peg boarders have never seen a hole they don't want to drill. And gear climbers just want to bang pitons into everything.

Summary

Miner's Waltz in C(hoss) Sharp with a Minor (5.5, 300m), northeast face, Mount Lawrence Grassi, Canadian Rockies. FA: Sam Eastman, Ian Welsted, July 16, 2014.

The Hole (M6, 300m), northeast face, Mount Lawrence Grassi. FA: David Lussier, J. Mills, Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted. Dec. 16, 2014.

Perpetual Spring (M7, 350m), Canmore Wall. FA: Alik Berg, Raphael Slawinski, Ian Welsted, Feb. 18, 2015.

About the Author

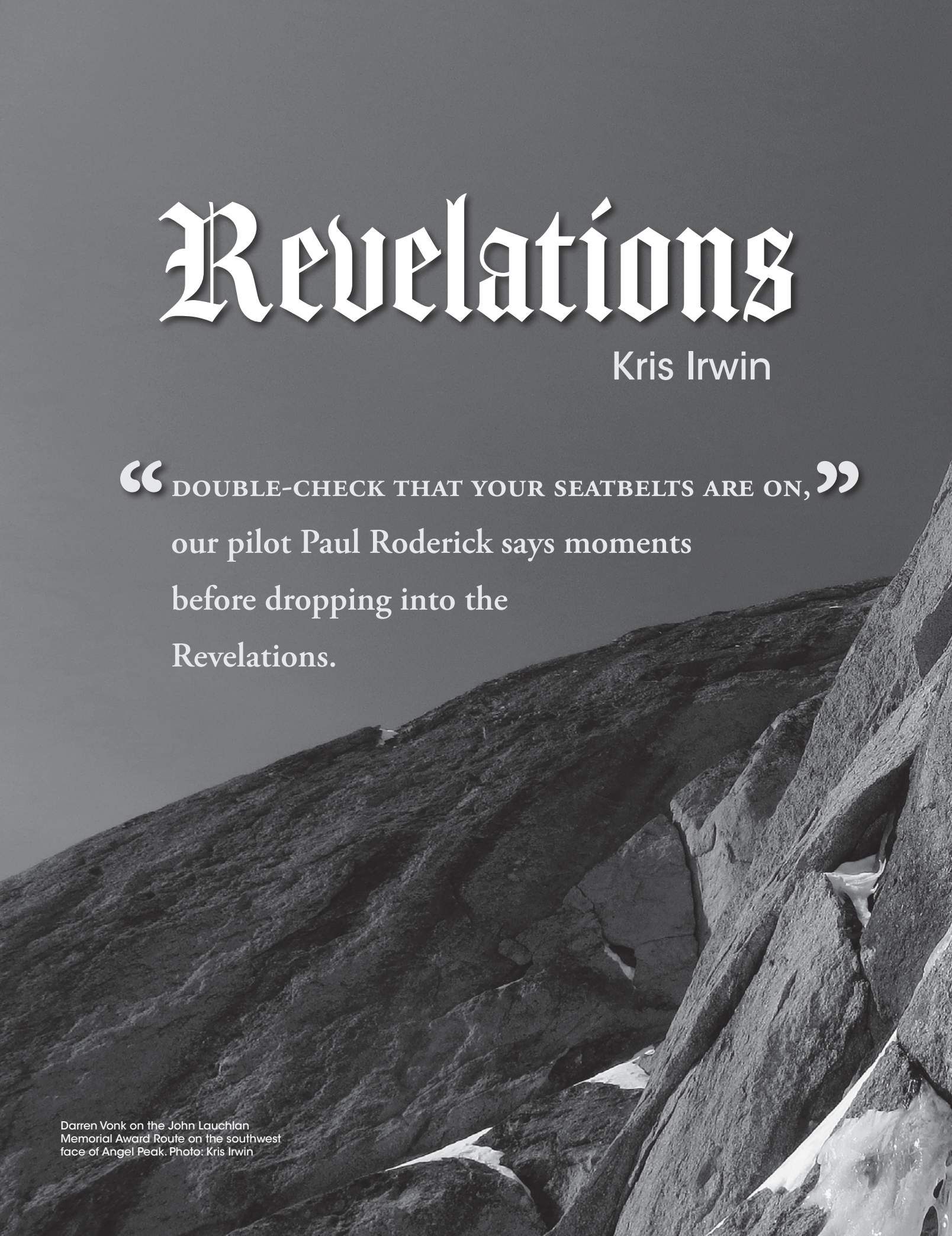
Ian Welsted has committed his life to climbing despite beginning to believe this might have been a mistake. He tree plants for three months a year and climbs for the rest. In 2014, Ian and his climbing partner Raphael Slawinski won the coveted Piolet d'Or award for their first ascent of K6 West in Pakistan's Karakoram.

J. Mills exiting The Hole with Canmore in the background.
Photo: Ian Welsted

Revelations

Kris Irwin

"DOUBLE-CHECK THAT YOUR SEATBELTS ARE ON," our pilot Paul Roderick says moments before dropping into the Revelations.



Darren Vonk on the John Lauchlan Memorial Award Route on the southwest face of Angel Peak. Photo: Kris Irwin

A MASSIVE VALLEY OPENS UP BELOW US and we are all impressed by what we are looking at: three- to five-thousand-foot granite walls; tumbling icefalls; hanging glaciers; long and steep snow couloirs; and hundreds of large nunataks that dot the glacier below. Paul makes three turns in his Otter to make up the distance between us and the ground and scopes out a landing on the upper glacier. There is a French team of four climbers that are not expecting us and they run out from behind one of the large nunataks in time to see us land next to their camp—our home for the next three weeks.

The Revelations in Alaska are remote and seldom visited. As the crow flies, this area lies 225 kilometres southwest of Talkeetna, 70 kilometres southwest of the Kichatnas and a long way from Denali National Park. Talkeetna Air Taxi's motto is "Hike for a week, or fly for an hour." On foot, this trip would likely take three times that, plus you would need to cross some serious mountainous terrain. The highest peak in the range is Mount Hesperus at just less than ten thousand feet. Most peaks lie between seven thousand and that. Although not very high, the vertical relief between valley bottom and these summits can be up to 1,500 metres, offering numerous snow, ice and mixed lines.

The Revelations: (1) Powered by Beans on Dyke Peak, (2) west face attempt on Pyramid Peak. Photo: Ian Welsted

Dave Roberts and fellow Harvard Mountaineering Club members George and Rick Millikan, Matt Hale and Ned Fletcher first explored this area on a 52-day expedition in 1967. Roberts and company achieved nine first ascents and named the range and many of its notable peaks. They endured atrocious weather throughout their visit and were turned back on several outings from bouts of wind and freezing rain. Since that first

recorded visit, the range has seen very few visitors, and there were only a half-dozen parties that made the long journey until 2008. Between 2008 and 2013, Anchorage mountain man Clint Helander along with various partners made annual trips to the range and racked up numerous first ascents. His article in the 2013 *American Alpine Journal* unselfishly highlighted many of the unclimbed peaks and unclimbed mixed routes.

Ian Welsted, Darren Vonk, Mark Taylor and I were recipients of the 2014 John Lauchlan Memorial Award. After reading Helander's article, we were intrigued by the Revelations, its solitude and its unclimbed gems. Unfortunately, Mark suffered a back injury while ice climbing in the Ghost Wilderness Area and was forced to bow out from the trip one week before our departure. Preparations were in place, so Ian, Darren and I decided to go as a team of three.

John Lauchlan was a talented and prolific ice and mixed climber in the Canadian Rockies and abroad during the late '70s and early '80s. Lauchlan made many notable ascents and pioneered new routes nationally and internationally. An endowment fund was set up by The Alpine Club of Canada in his honour after an unfortunate climbing accident took his life in 1982. I never met Lauchlan (I was three years old when he died), but I learned that he inspired those around him and gave every climber a fearless example of what they can become. We were honoured and privileged to be in the Revelations, representing Canadian alpinism and the spirit of John Lauchlan.

Our home for the next 23 days was set up at the head of the Revelation Glacier at approximately 1,500 metres. Camp consisted of two four-season tents within fortified snow walls and an impressive two-room igloo that was built by the French team. We renovated the igloo to include cooking platforms for our camp stoves, shelves, seating for three, a spice rack, food storage space and a liquor cabinet. Nearly every food item (except for the bourbon) froze within the first week as temperatures plummeted to -25 C for a few days. It's a good thing we brought lots of stove gas as the food needed to be boil-thawed before we could cook it.

On our second day in the range we geared up for a cragging day on what I thought was a low-elevation mountain called Hydra Peak. Two discontinuous parallel mixed lines had formed on the east face, and we went for the more appealing right-hand line. After climbing 12 pitches or so of new mixed terrain and post-holing for a couple of hundred metres, we arrived at the top of the massive 600-metre buttress to where we could see a ridge before us that led to a much loftier peak. After a couple of hours of ridge walking and an icy traverse around a large gendarme, we finally reached the glaciated summit plateau. Not wanting to retrace our route, we decided on the most direct line down the northeast icefall. Thirteen long rappels off glacial ice, one large bergschrund crossing and some nighttime navigating brought us back to our camp 17.5 hours after we left—the longest cragging day I've ever had! We unknowingly climbed Angel Peak by a new route that we called the John Lauchlan Memorial Award Route. The ridge to the summit had been climbed before, so 600 metres of this route was new terrain.

Over the next week, we attempted and retreated off two mixed lines on the neighbouring Four Horsemen and Cherub peaks. Both lines were of high quality, but spindrift avalanches and snow-filled chimneys turned us around. On our flight in we spotted a snaking thin ice line on the unclimbed Dyke Peak. We caught another glimpse of the line after a ski recon in deteriorating conditions, and the bottom half of the line looked so good we had to try it. The route did not disappoint, and we found pitch after pitch of amazing thin ice and single-swing steep névé. Two thin pitches of WI5 ice opened up passage to the moderate upper mountain. We traversed right and entered the dyke feature after which the mountain is named. We climbed the dyke past an impressive chockstone and onto the summit for our second new route and the first ascent of the mountain via Powered by Beans in 17 hours camp to camp.

Kris Irwin on the crux of Powered by Beans on Dyke Peak. Photo: Ian Welsted

With two routes down and warmed up to climbing in the Revelations, we were ready for our main objective, the unclimbed central gully on Pyramid Peak. This line was pitched in our application for the John Lauchlan Award as something we wanted to try. The peak had remained unclimbed until the French team established a new route up the right-hand flank of the west face called the Odyssey (1100m, 6b A1 M7), just days before our arrival. On our first attempt, we climbed 10 pitches with vertical sections of high-quality mixed climbing and some not-so-high-quality snow climbing. Ian made a good point that if you dig far enough down through the snow, you will eventually find cracks. He was right, but the time and effort to find these cracks was eating up the day, and we had not yet reached the small slope we had planned on digging into for the night. On top of all this, it started to snow, ever so slightly, but spindrift avalanches started running down over us with alarming size and frequency. We bailed and agreed to return when we had a solid weather forecast.

After a day of rest from our foray on Pyramid and a good weather forecast ahead of us, we looked for something close to camp. Darren had spotted a shorter-looking line on the east face of Hydra Peak. With a long snow-gully approach, five to six pitches of technical mixed climbing and a beauty ridge climb to the summit, this turned out to be an excellent outing after our disappointing turn around on Pyramid. After a fun 10-hour day we decided to call this the Casual Route.

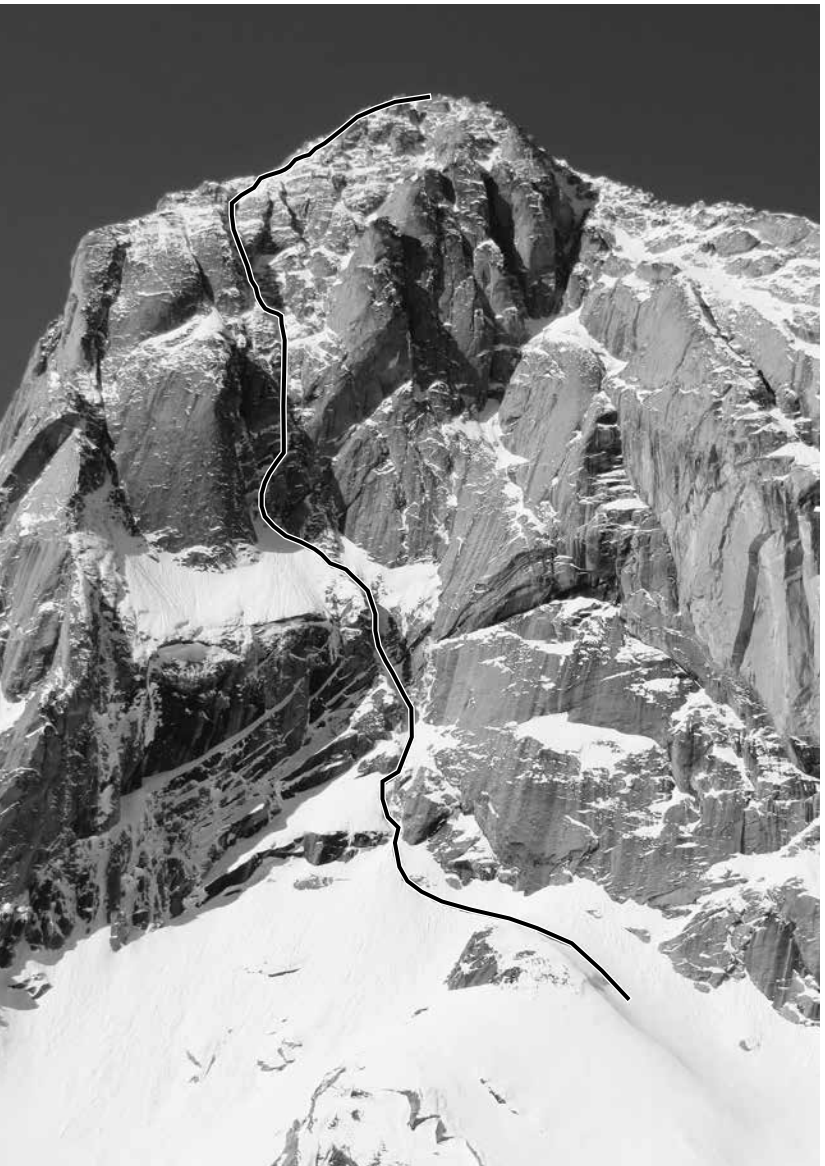
With three new routes completed, we channelled our remaining energy for another attempt at Pyramid Peak. Our trusty weather man—my good friend Rob Smith—sent us a weather forecast via sat phone: "High pressure next few days, time to go big!" We packed light and planned for a bivy at the midway snow ledge. On day one, we quickly reached our high point, utilizing the rappel anchors we had left the week before. New pitches of increasingly steep snow mushrooms and blank granite slowed us down, but we reached the snow ledge by 6 p.m. We fixed the next pitch and spent an hour digging out a suitable platform for our small tent. Darren and Ian shared the tent while I chose to spend the night in belay pants curled up on my empty backpack.

At dawn we started to pack up and continued climbing

for two long and tedious pitches. More overhanging snow and increasingly unprotectable climbing was futile. After closer inspection, the pitches ahead were very steep and wide cracks were plugged with snow. We were hoping to find a long WI6 pillar that Helander had photographed the year before, but it had not formed. We wanted to continue, but the decision to descend was unanimous—and smart. A half-hour after skiing away from the base of the route, a large chunk of cornice collapsed from the summit ridge and debris charged down the entire length of the route. I stood there gasping, knowing that if we had still been up there we would have been swept off the mountain.

This beautiful and remote valley is worth the visit. Solitude and true adventure is almost guaranteed. There are more possibilities for both moderate and cutting-edge climbs, lengthy ridge traverses, enchainments and steep couloir skiing. The Revelations are the last of a largely unexplored region of Alaska, and one of the few true wilderness areas of North America. I was lucky enough to have such a remote experience, and my journey there will never be forgotten.

The John Lauchlan Memorial Award Route on Angel Peak.
Photo: Kris Irwin



Summary

The John Lauchlan Memorial Award Route (AI4+ M5, 1200m), east face, Angel Peak, the Revelations, Alaska. FA: Kris Irwin, Darren Vonk, Ian Welsted, April 3, 2014.

Powered by Beans (AI5 M5, 1000m), west face, Dyke Peak. FA: Kris Irwin, Darren Vonk, Ian Welsted, April 11, 2014.

Casual Route (AI4 M6, 600m), east face, Hydra Peak. FA: Kris Irwin, Darren Vonk, Ian Welsted, April 17, 2014.

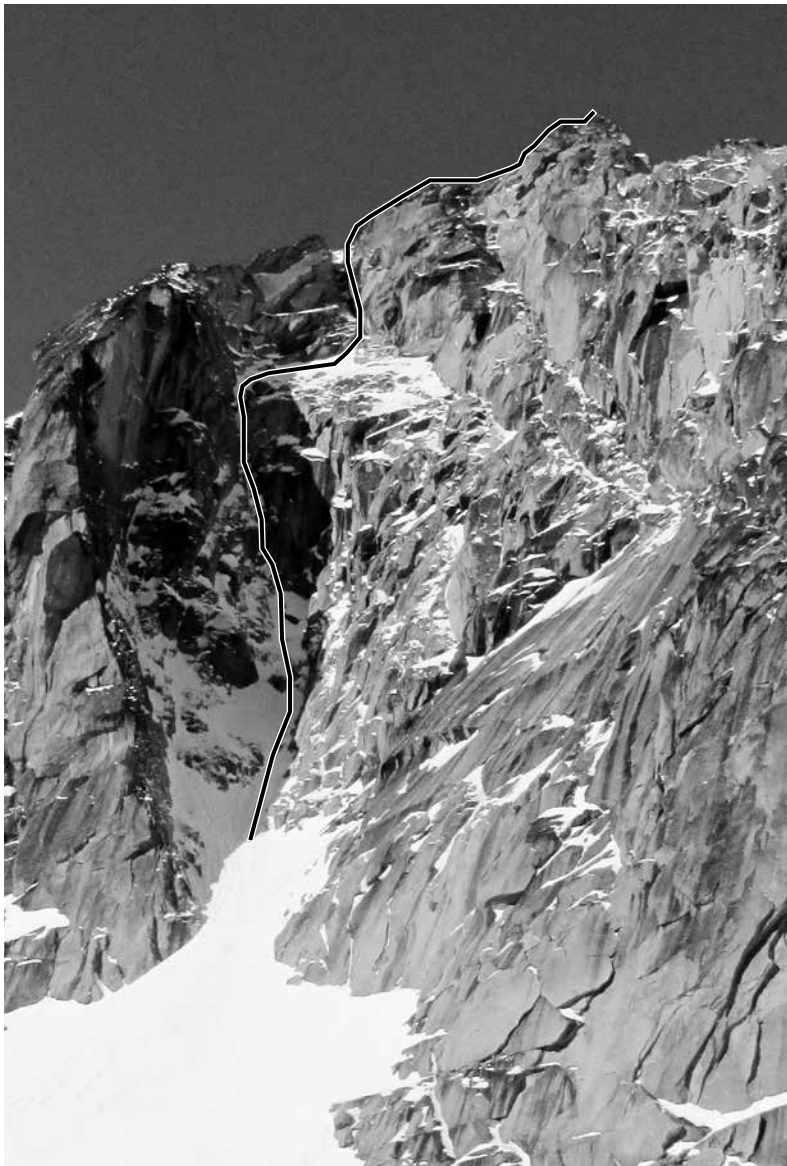
Acknowledgements

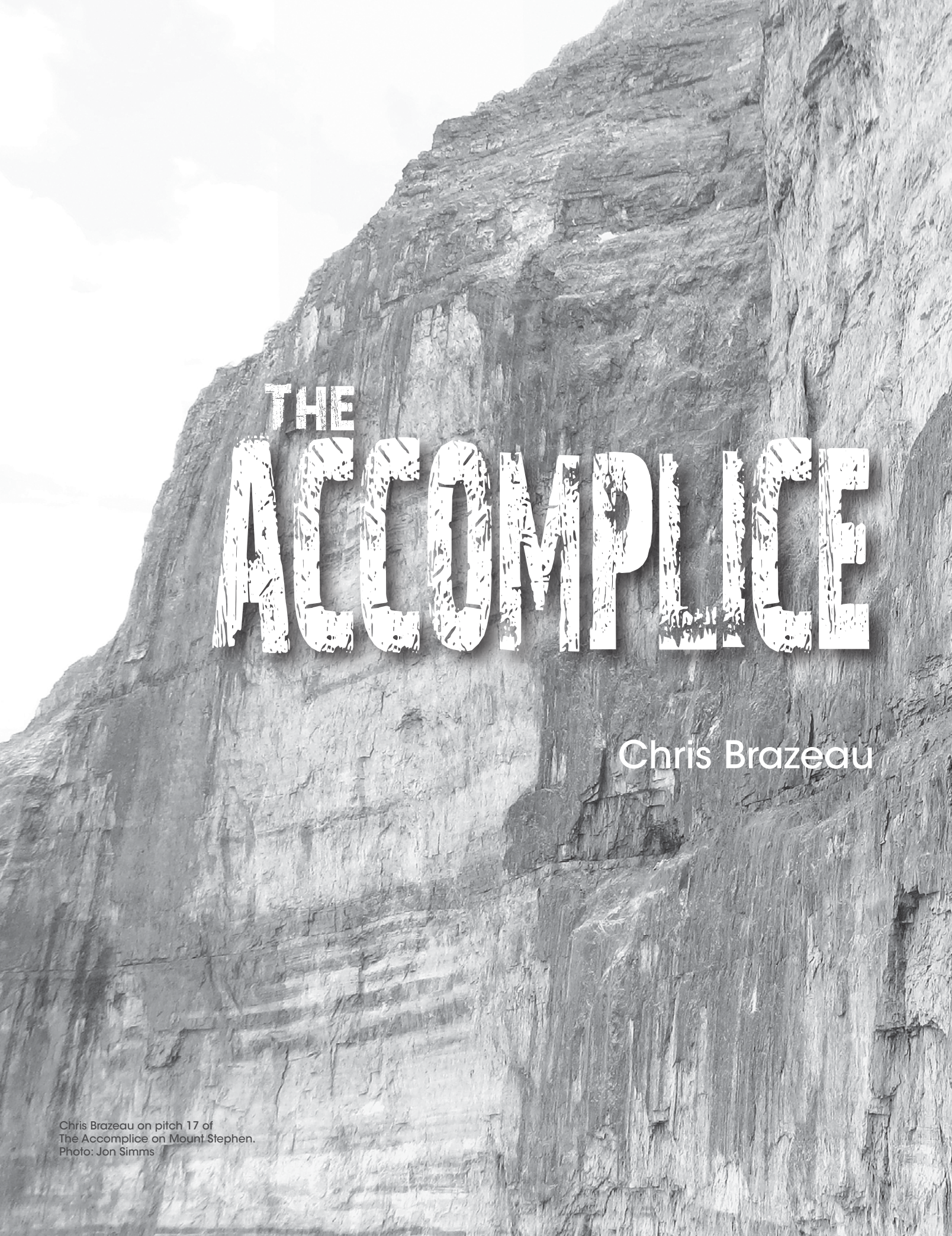
This trip was made possible with the financial support of the John Lauchlan Memorial Award.

About the Author

This was Kris Irwin's second trip to Alaska in as many years. In 2013, he and Rob Smith made a quick ascent of Moonflower Buttress on the north face of Mount Hunter and fell in love with the granitic ranges of Alaska. He is an ACMG alpine guide and lives in Banff, Alberta, with his wife and newborn daughter.

The Casual Route on the east face of Hydra Peak.
Photo: Darren Vonk





THE ACCOMPLICE

Chris Brazeau

Chris Brazeau on pitch 17 of
The Accomplice on Mount Stephen.
Photo: Jon Simms

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR WAKES ME UP. The clock reads 4:10 a.m. My alarm is set for five.

"Hey, Chris, I need a ride to the bus station," comes a voice from the front door. "What!?" It's my neighbour. She's definitely one who isn't afraid to ask for a favour.

"Bernice, its four o'clock in the morning!" I holler from my bed. My curses hang in the predawn silence for some moments, long enough that I wonder if I was dreaming.

"It's 4:10," she replies frankly. I stumble out of bed mumbling and cursing. I open the door and she's standing by my car smoking a cigarette. I'm up now—might as well help a sister out I suppose. Among her belongings is a stroller and she pulls a toddler out of it. I've only lived in this apartment for a few months, but I've never seen or heard a baby from Bernice's flat. And I never imagined her having a kid. I'm still half asleep when I drop them off at the bus station.

I tell the story to Jonny when I pick him up shortly after 5 a.m. He laughs. "Man, you just helped her smuggle a kid outta town!"

"What the hell just happened?!"

It's a bizarre start to the day, but provides some humour and small talk on the approach to the Great Wall of China, as the face on Mount Stephen is locally known. Jon Simms and I had often talked the talk about this wall—a massive chunk of overhanging limestone and quartzite. We finally made a plan and committed to at least checking out the approach and taking a closer look. Not having much of an idea what to expect, we left the Trans-Canada Highway with five days of food, a couple of ropes, a rack, pitons, 20 bolts (a mix of self-drives and buttonheads) and a couple of packs of smokes.

The events of the morning make what would have been a pleasant approach even easier—just some simple scrambling up a moraine, no bushwacking, all the while laughing and speculating about Bernice and the kid and how I may have been an accessory to the crime.

"'It's 4:10.' What kind of response is that?"

The ease and lightheartedness of the approach slowly gives way to the shadow of our objective. It looms ahead, vertical to slightly overhanging for about 800 metres, and despite trying and willing and hoping as hard as we can, we can't eye any weaknesses that would take natural protection. It will require a serious bolt-up.

Adding to how underequipped and tiny we feel is the seriousness of approach pitches. We will be exposed to rockfall from above for five or so slabby pitches.

As we snack and bino the wall, it becomes obvious a change of plan is needed. I am content with the approach and just scoping the wall, but Jonny is fired up and glassing a line of weakness to the right that is more in line with our time frame and fitness levels. He is the instigator and convinces me to carry on with him, aiding and abetting in his scheme.

We leave the tent, extra stove, binoculars and a bit of food, but still tip towards the heavy side of things. Hoping a proper up-close inspection will yield some pro possibilities, we start up.

The first few pitches are only 5.7 or so, but they feel like 5.10

Chris Brazeau with the Great Wall of China looming above.
Photo: Jon Simms

with a bit of choss and ridiculously large packs. After about five pitches of mixed rock quality—mostly good on the steeper stretches but serious choss on the ledges between bands—we hit the big ledge system that runs across the entire wall where we had hoped to find a bivy spot. A trickle of water is found, but the ledge is quite sloping and will require much excavating to get a flat spot. Plus, it offers no shelter from falling rocks.

Simms disappears around a little rock rib looking for other options.

"Braz, you have to check this out," he states in a monotone that disguises a deeper enthusiasm for his discovery.

He belays me over to an amazing hole in the mountain, about a metre in diameter and running about 10 metres into the mountain. It's flat and has a floor of beach sand.

"Are you kidding me, Jonny?" I laugh in amazement.

We take the harnesses off and enjoy a respite from the stresses of route finding, run-outs and rockfall—the three R's of the day. We have a good view of the main wall from our nook, but our hopes of traversing over to check it out vanish. It's too blank. We're underequipped and under-gunned. However, there still is an amazing chunk of rock towering over us.

After a pleasant night and leaving a bit more gear in the cave, Simms starts off and climbs a few pitches to the first steep rock band. It looks like difficult, blank climbing. Traversing right and left for a rope length produces no signs of weakness or protection possibilities. Jonny has a smoke as I drill a protection bolt; I stand on that one to drill another. It's slow-going hand-drilling over my head and feels a lot like pounding nails at work. I thought this was supposed to be my vacation. The east-facing wall is baking in the sun, and I start to lose stoke

and steam as the tediousness and labour of drilling catches up to me.

"One more bolt, Braz, and I'll run it out to the roof," quips Jonny, hoping we can find traditional gear. I do my part and fully play into my role as the accomplice. I lower to the belay and have a cig. Jonny keeps his word getting us through the biggest blank section and crux of the day with some heady 5.11 climbing.

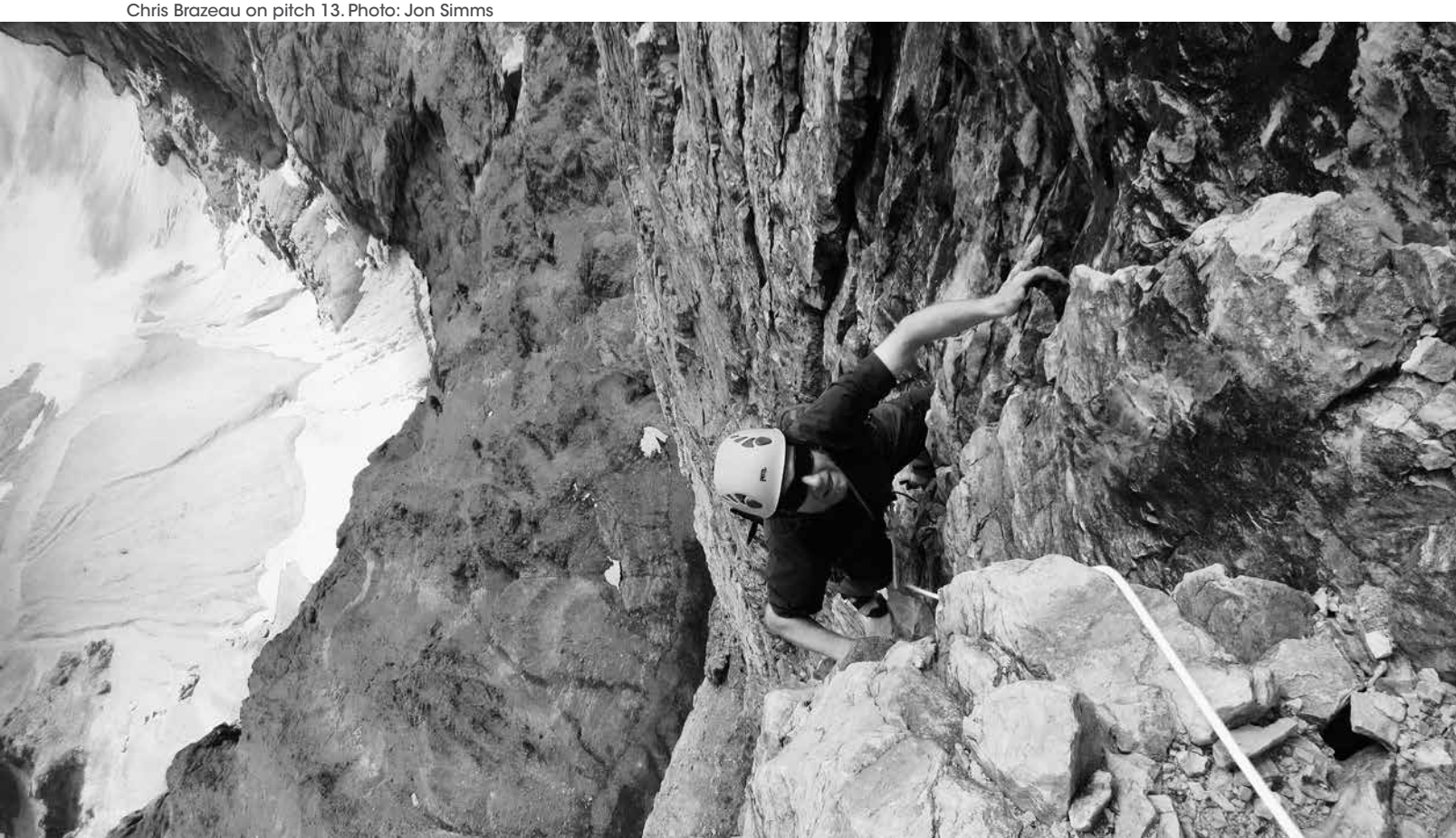
A few more pitches of steep limestone interspersed with chossy ledges brings us to a big ledge with a large roof—perfect bivy shelter complete with a drip of water. With a bit of landscaping, a couple of flat spots are made. Slowly, we collect enough water for dinner and tea and by the time we're in our bags, curled atop our ropes, we have enough water for the next day.

We stare across at the vastness of the wall in wonder. Its striations look incredible, going from limestone to quartzite to weird combinations of the two. To tackle it looks to be a gargantuan mission, but we scheme and conspire for the next morning. Day three starts with a 100-metre traverse to the left to an awesome quartzite corner system we had glassed from below. This provides some of the best climbing on the route with two pitches of steep jamming and stemming. A few more limestone pitches then Simms drills an anchor before the crux pitch.

I hand drill a buttonhead off the belay and commit to some delicate traverse moves to gain a steep corner. It's easy to stay in the moment and not let the mind wander as it does at some of the long belays. Laser-sharp focus on the tiny footholds,

Chris Brazeau on pitch 12. Photo: Jon Simms

Chris Brazeau on pitch 13. Photo: Jon Simms



making sure every handhold is solid, acute awareness of body position, and somehow taking everything in and relishing the time and place—special moments indeed. Thirty metres of beautiful steep limestone with good but spaced gear capped by a small roof define the crux pitch.

One more pitch gets us to the top of the steeps, and we find ourselves looking down on the north glacier. Memories of our epic ski descent from the previous winter engulf us. We have a break here, glad to be off the wall and to have a few descent options. We were really hoping we would not have to rappel our line, and now it looks like we can easily traverse a ledge to the col between the wall and Stephen proper, and then bail from there.

However, the northeast ridge of the tower rises above us, tantalizing us with a steep crack. I know what Jonny is thinking, and he is only waiting for my consent, my concurrence. We've come this far, there's only one logical conclusion, only one way for this to go. So we continue up the ridge to a last 5.11 pitch in an outstanding position that Simms eagerly leads. A couple of hundred metres of simul-climbing brings us to the junction with the northwest ridge and easier ground. Dropping everything, we run for the summit.

Standing atop the main event is dizzying. I have to take a few steps back. If it wasn't for the 2,200-metre technical approach, I would imagine this takeoff to be on every BASE jumper's tick list. We have about an hour of light left and only one functioning headlamp, so we quickly soak up the amazing views of the Goodsirs, Vaux, Victoria, Stanley and so many other peaks, and then turn around.

We race back down to our gear, pack up and start a torturous descent. In true Simms style, he concludes that if my headlamp isn't working, he won't use his either. So we stagger down 1,000 metres of heinous heel-bruising, ankle-twisting, knee-wrecking scree in darkness. After a couple of hours, we stop for a brew and wonder where the Stephen Fossil Beds trail is. We had assumed it would be easy to find, but in the dark and the expanse of the south bowl, it now seems unlikely we'll stumble across it. A nice buff Parks Canada trail would be much appreciated at this stage of the game.

"I can't believe we didn't bring a map," I groan to Jonny. His eyes light up.

"Freakin' technology, Braz! I've got the map on my phone!" In a couple of minutes he's got the map up and our GPS co-ordinates plugged in.

"One hundred and forty metres this way!" he says and takes off traversing right. I scramble after him. Sure enough, we soon hit the trail and continue our staggering, but at least our footing is much more secure. Simms stops for a moment to empty some pebbles from his shoes and I lurch downwards, hoping the end comes soon. Minutes later a red light flares behind me and turns me around. Then a bright flash followed by a *click* as my photo is taken by a motion-activated camera. I'm too numb to think much of it and continue my wobble down.

Jonny catches up in a few minutes.

"Did you get your mug shot taken?" I ask.

"What are you talking about?"

I tell him about the surprise photo shoot. He has a mild freak-out rambling about Parks Canada, the Burgess Shale, the RCMP and a criminal record for stealing fossils.

"But we're just climbing," I try to reason with him. "If anyone is truly looking for us, they can check our packs. And just look at us. We're a mess! I think it's obvious we've just had an epic adventure."

Nothing doing. "We gotta get outta here!" he yelps as he takes off down the trail.

I'm way too wasted and can't feel my knees, so I just continue down at my own pace. When I get to the trailhead, it's empty. The town of Field is sleepy, especially at 2 a.m.

I hear a whistle and see a flash of light in the bushes. "What the hell, Jonny?"

"OK, here's the plan," Jonny whispers as I collapse beside him. "I'm going to run the five kilometres back to the car then pick you up in the getaway vehicle."

I try to reason with him again, arguing that someone running down the Trans-Canada at 2 a.m. with no shirt on is way more suspicious than a couple of climbers with nothing to hide. Again, he's not to be swayed, plus he has got us this far, so I watch him jog away.

I make myself comfortable on our packs and light our last cigarette. Inhaling deeply, I reflect on my role in the past few days and smile. I've been a good accomplice.

Summary

The Accomplice (VI 5.11, 1100m, 20 pitches), The Great Wall of China, Mt. Stephen, Canadian Rockies. FA: Chris Brazeau, Jon Simms, Aug. 5-7, 2014.

About the Author

With Golden, B.C., as his home base, Chris works construction and coaches free-ride skiing when not givin'er in the mountains. He has climbed difficult new routes on Snowpatch Spire (see *CAJ* 2013, p. 91) and the north face of Mount Alberta (*CAJ* 2007, p. 146), but is equally adept on skis, as proven with his first descent of the north face of Mount Bryce (*CAJ* 2013, p. 46).

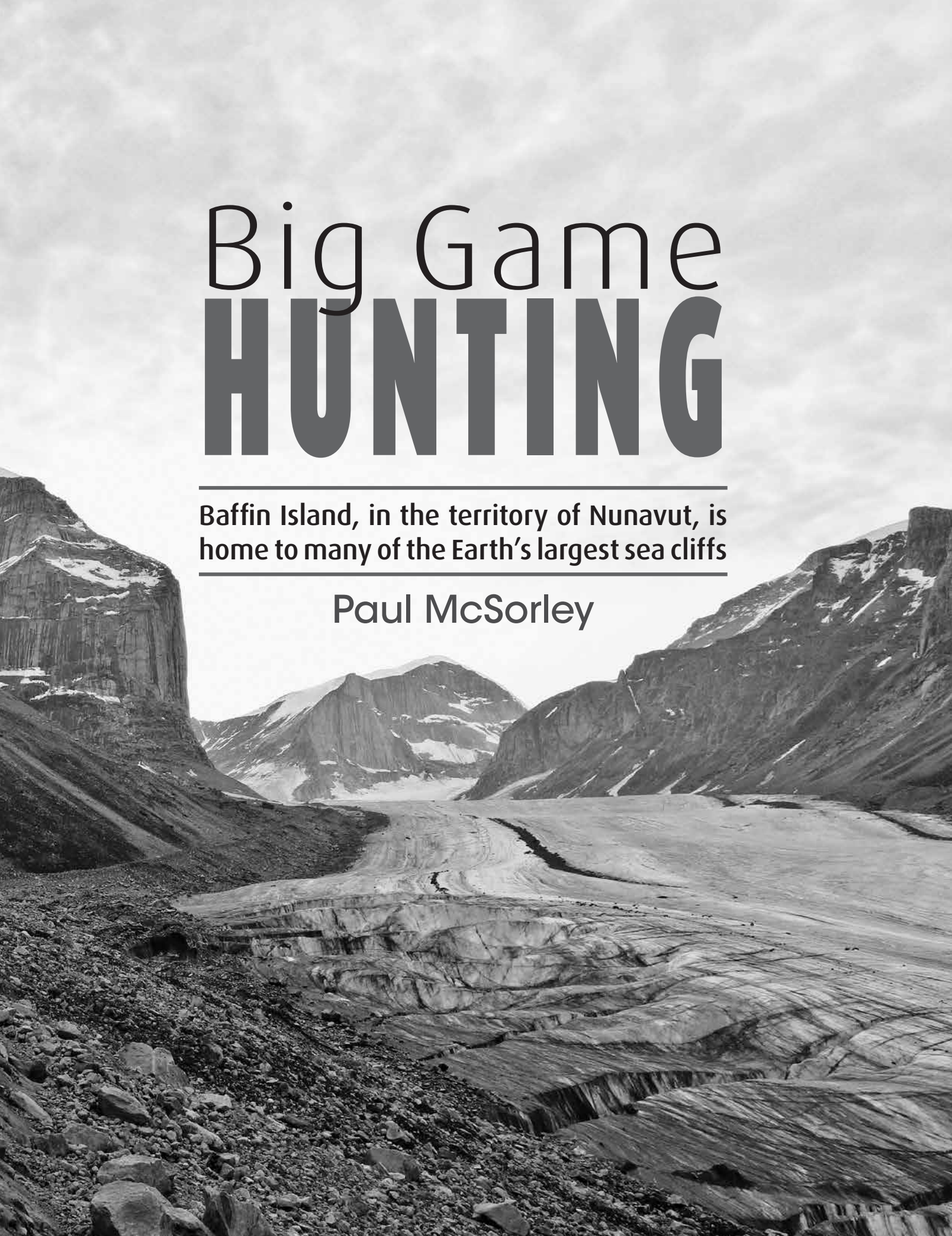
The Accomplice on the Great Wall of China on Mount Stephen. Photo: Jon Simms

Johnson-Loving Route on the north face of The Turret. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

Big Game HUNTING

Baffin Island, in the territory of Nunavut, is home to many of the Earth's largest sea cliffs

Paul McSorley



Paul McSorley 1,200 metres above the ocean on the first ascent of Harpoon on Beluga Spire. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

BAFFIN'S RELATIVES—GREENLAND, NORWAY AND ICELAND—are all stacked with oodles of impressive terrain, but Baffin is the daddy. The Walker Arm of Sam Ford Fjord on the east coast of the island houses walls almost a mile high, dropping hallucinogenic-like into the depths of the sub-zero ocean that becomes ice-free for just a couple of months each year.

Most climbers venture into the fjord lands on Baffin's east coast in May and June, using komatiks powered by Ski-Doo or dog team. The frigid temps of pre-breakup spring offer only curt windows for climbing in rock shoes. Heavy-handed aid tactics and weeks of work are normally needed to top out on these monster pillars of stone.

Crosby Johnston, Joshua Lavigne, Tony Richardson and I seized a chance to visit this past summer and take advantage of warmer temperatures so we could move quickly and free on these massive objectives. The logic was to climb these cliffs without cumbersome aid gear and save ourselves the misery of big wall slogging.

Access to the fjords that time of year is cruxy. Breakup is slow, heavily influenced by the whims of the winds. Our outfitter, Levi Palituq, had his hands full organizing the revival of a traditional Inuit whale hunt, so he put us in the capable hands of his kin, Esa. Boating from Clyde River involved hours of jostling with icebergs and motoring a bumpy 120 kilometres deep into the Arctic wilderness on an aluminum outboard. Through the course of the 12-hour journey, we spied two giant bowhead whales, a lone polar bear and innumerable icebergs so big you can scuba dive in the meltwater pools that form on their surfaces. It was from Esa that we learned our very first word of Inuktitut—"*Siquaru*," he muttered in the face of a bay packed with sea ice, meaning lots of ice.

Joshua had trumpeted this zone with stories from a previous mission, during which he had skied the 1,000-metre Polar Star couloir adjacent to a rock pillar that was 1,300 metres tall and by all accounts unclimbed. Beluga Spire neighbours the mythic Polar Sun Spire, which was first climbed by departed Swiss legend Xavier Bongard. According to Baffin veteran and guidebook author Marc Synnott, Polar Sun at 1,450 metres is the largest sea cliff on the planet. The north wall of Beluga, which is about 150 metres smaller than its neighbour, had been attempted by prolific soloist Dave Turner in the spring 2009. He took mixed gullies and reached a high point almost half way up its north pillar.

Once we bid adieu to our guides and became somewhat adjusted to the flabbergasting surroundings, we dumped a stash of gear at a meadow base camp two kilometres up Broad Peak Glacier. It was decided to forgo a warm-up climb and jump right on the unclimbed north pillar of Beluga. None of our crew could rightly call us seamen, so it was with high trepidation that we launched a leaky two-horsepower motorboat and putted several nautical kilometres to the base of our objective. Passing under Polar Sun Spire and a hanging serac that threatened to drop a tsunami of hurt on our little vessel left us breathless with commitment. It's rare to experience overhead hazard at sea, but pushing further from shore seemed at least as risky as running the serac gauntlet, so we held our breath and giggled nervously at our ludicrous position.

None of us had ever been anywhere like the summer iteration of Baffin's eastern fjords. The ambiance of ocean, Arctic and alpine rolled into one like nothing you find in a standard mountain range. So, to continue the trend, the climb started uniquely as well. We docked the boat using rock anchors, put on harnesses and helmets, and began scrambling up the approach pitches.

It was 6 p.m. before we finally roped up at the start of the pillar. Owing to the perpetual daylight ubiquitous in Arctic summers, the time of day didn't matter and we romped up

Tony Richardson on pitch three during the attempt on the west face of The Turret. Photo: Joshua Lavigne

over a half-dozen pitches before considering a bivy. There is something comforting about climbing in the mountains as a group of four. No one is ever too busy to heckle the person next to them, flake a rope or shoot a photo. It goes without saying that with a bigger team the safety margin also improves, but out there in fjord country, the thought of ever needing a rescue was beyond unsavoury.

The lower pillar unfolded excitingly with loose rock and provocative route finding that kept us all on point. Joshua spearheaded the route, dancing up wet face climbing and crack systems that involved proper 5.10 and 5.11 thuggery. Crosby followed by traditional means while Tony and I carried the loads burro-like, while free climbing with Mini Traxions for self belays. Something about our system didn't scream manufacturers' guidelines, but this modern approach allowed for fast progress and negated loathsome jumaring on all but the most awkward pitches.

Crosby's spicy leads took us through the loosest terrain of the climb, and just as fatigue began to creep in, we found a fortuitous stash of ice ensconced in a rocky crevice. With some frigging, we strapped a torso-sized hunk of the frozen manna to my pack, and I lumbered it up one more pitch to some sloping ground, which we excavated for a bivy that was not entirely uncomfortable.

The mood was light at our dirty scoop, and we all had a good laugh at our own expense when the single Therm-a-Rest we shared burst under our collective load. Eventually, we all managed some sleep and the usual comment, "You kept me awake with your snoring," bounced around when we finally came to.

Day two served up several moderate pitches and after a few hours we reached a massive sun-blessed ledge around halfway up the mountain. After a quick *siesta*, Crosby attacked the immaculate splitters of the upper headwall. Three incredible pitches up to 5.11+ stoked the crowd, and Josh used this momentum to crank us around some impressive roofs that led to our final bivy. Our perch was nothing shy of Olympian with Sam Ford Fjord spread out a vertical kilometre below us. Dwarfed by our surroundings, we felt like hobbits getting away with the goods.

For breakfast, I got pumped to the moon hand-stacking a leaning off-width corner, which to my great displeasure was nonchalantly laybacked by the seconds. After another wide-crack battle up a soaking corner, I conceded to my weakness and tensioned on a piton to bypass a hard section. Tony got the next pitch, by far the most technical of the route. He had to make a couple of ballsy tension steps, which Josh managed to free seconding at 5.12 and change. These two pitches were the only bits of aid we used on the whole route, and though the artificial climbing was a disappointment, the cresting wave of summit fever was overtaking all of us.

Pitch 28 saw Joshua go into beast mode, onsighting a techno 5.12 crack transfer and a bold run-out squeeze chimney. One more sensationally positioned pitch took us to the summit slopes and a round of high fives that couldn't have been higher. The bliss topping out on Beluga was a life highlight, and though the climb was hard work, the culmination of our efforts felt more like a surreal dream than a stint on the front lines. Smoke from forest fires in the Yukon turned the Arctic sky a burnt ochre, and through the twilight of this endless day we stumbled over two more summits and down to our base camp after about six more hours.

Good weather continued for a three more days and in that time we made an attempt on the Turret's west face. Storms shut down a summit bid, but a few days later in near freezing temperatures Crosby and Joshua snuck in an ascent of a new route on the north side of the mountain. It was super impressive to watch the boys battling it out on the 5.12 crux a vertical kilometre above camp. Their free bid was stopped by a short wet section that resulted in a heartbreaking whipper for Joshua that Tony and I watched through the zoom lens in a surreal episode of Fjord TV.

The remaining time in camp was characterized by cold rain and snow with a few short sucker windows of clear skies. During one of these, Tony and I made an attempt on the unclimbed south buttress of the Turret, but were caught in a snow storm a third of the way up the wall.

A few days later, Levi's boat buzzed into the bay where we had been dropped nearly three weeks earlier and whisked us back to civilization amidst choppy seas with metre-high whitecaps.

We had long wondered what climbing in this storied land would be like. Our trip was a realization of the area's massive potential and a dream come true. Climbing a virgin big wall right out of the ocean is indeed a rare experience, one that we will never forget.

Summary

The Harpoon (VI 5.12 A1, 1200m, 29 pitches), north pillar, Beluga Spire, Sam Ford Fjord, Baffin Island. FA: Crosby Johnston, Joshua Lavigne, Paul McSorley, Tony Richardson, July 30 - Aug. 1, 2014.

Johnson-Loving Route (VI 5.12 A0, 700m), north face, The Turret. FA: Crosby Johnston, Joshua Lavigne, Aug. 8, 2014.

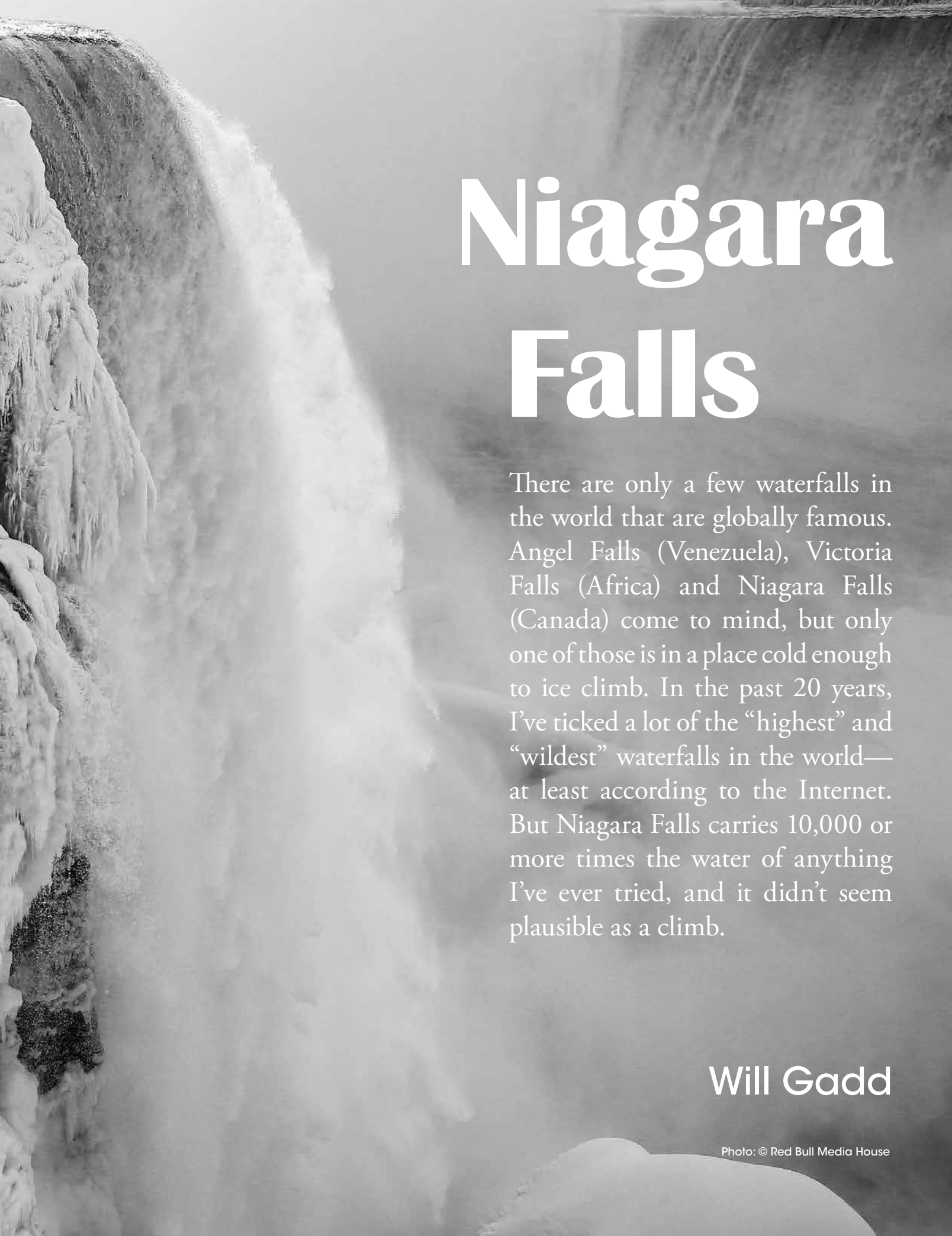
Acknowledgements

Thank you to Arc'teryx, MEC, Clif Bar and Innate for supporting this trip.

About the Author

Paul McSorley lives in Squamish, B.C., where he works as a climbing guide and movie rigger. Aside from climbing and new routing, he's been cautiously getting into paragliding. His favourite flight is from the top of Mount Habrich in the Coast Range, with the Squamish Chief a close second.

Crosby Johnston on the crux pitch of the Johnson-Loving Route on the north face of The Turret. Photo: Joshua Lavigne



Niagara Falls

There are only a few waterfalls in the world that are globally famous. Angel Falls (Venezuela), Victoria Falls (Africa) and Niagara Falls (Canada) come to mind, but only one of those is in a place cold enough to ice climb. In the past 20 years, I've ticked a lot of the "highest" and "wildest" waterfalls in the world—at least according to the Internet. But Niagara Falls carries 10,000 or more times the water of anything I've ever tried, and it didn't seem plausible as a climb.

Will Gadd

Photo: © Red Bull Media House

A COUPLE OF DECADES AGO I SAW SOME great-looking mixed lines in the gorge below Niagara Falls, but I knew it was illegal to climb there, and when I discreetly did some checking, I heard the security was for real on the banks of both the U.S. and Canada. I also saw some wild spray-ice formations along the sides of the falls, but didn't have a clue on how to climb spray back then, so to me it was all unclimbable. And illegal. Climbing Niagara Falls seemed like a good idea if it ever froze into real water-ice—but that would never happen.

In January 2014, the media went into full spin mode and declared, "Polar vortex slams east!" And it was cold—cold enough to build some really huge spray formations along the sides and in the middle of Horseshoe Falls, the main falls of the several big falls that make up the collective Niagara Falls. My Facebook feed started filling up with posts from people asking, "Will, when are you going to climb it? Ha ha...." My eyes have been forever changed by climbing spray ice at Helmcken Falls, and I now understood that the spray ice around Niagara was climbable. But it was still illegal—really illegal—and the easiest access was on the U.S. side, right next to the police station.

Then a very good friend called up and asked if I wanted to try a clandestine ascent of Niagara. It's easy to check conditions at Niagara Falls as there are numerous webcams pointed straight at it, and it was clear that the smaller but still cool-looking "American Falls" had some lines on it that would go easily on top-rope. I checked flights, thought about getting busted, thought about all the permits I would have to pull in the U.S. to do my filming and work, and decided the reward for top-roping a small section of the short side of the falls simply wasn't worth the risk. Plus top-roping wasn't what I was after; I wanted to start at the bottom and head for the top of its steepest line. Rumour (and some photos) has it that in 2014 (as well as a decade or more ago, but that's another story), the American Falls were top-roped, but nobody had actually climbed at all on Horseshoe Falls.

A few years ago, I'd pitched Red Bull on climbing Niagara, but the paperwork to get any sort of permit to go there was too much for me to solve (I only made it as far as the "no stunts" part of the website, to be honest). Then my phone rang, and a laid-back voice made small talk for a minute before asking, "So, Niagara Falls. Think you could climb it?" Why yes, yes, I do think I could climb it, but its super illegal....

Jenner Richard works for Red Bull, and he's a master of negotiating permits. His call began eight months of writing the most complex safety plans I've ever seen, meetings with park officials ("Hell, NO!") and discussions with the governor of New York's office ("Hey, boys, that looks pretty cool. Really? You do this all the time? Well, that's neat! Could be some good media if you don't kill yourself, but you say you could do it reasonably safely...."). I took the red-eye from Canmore to Niagara Falls a silly number of times for meetings, more safety plans, discussions with more local and state agencies, computer presentations to biologists and big raw-boned cops with big guns who told me I'd die for sure and that they could help with that if I tried to illegally climb it, big New York guys who didn't need guns and told me I'd die for sure, more flights, more late nights of writing safety plans while the kids slept, dozens of conference calls, and a whole lot of people working together because I'd said I could climb Niagara Falls if it froze up enough.

I visited the place twice in the summer, and the power of the falls literally shakes the ground. I've seen some crazy waterfalls, but there is only one Niagara. If you stand too close to most insanely powerful natural phenomena, they will kill you—avalanches, tidal waves, tornados. Niagara has that same bowel-loosening power, and it's just right there to look at and feel in the part of our brains that kept our ancestors alive when they contemplated doing stupid shit that involved big forces. The spray soaks the tourists on the boats on the river a half kilometre below the falls, and fires hundreds of feet into the air above it. I originally had in the back of my head an idea that maybe it would be cool to kayak it. After a few trips there in various seasons, I am absolutely sure that is a really terrible idea. In the summer the base of the falls is unarguably lethal. But in winter? Ice climbing? Hmmm….

Finally, in late December, we had a tentative "yes, if you meet every single one of these criteria." I normally climb with one partner high in the mountains, or at the most, maybe a few people are involved if it's a filming effort. A big comp or event involves even more people, but in a super-controlled environment. Every one of the video and photo guys I work with are rock solid in the mountains, and we implicitly trust each other. But suddenly, I had a cast of approximately 200 people to manage, most of whom had never seen crampons. If you were to walk around the wrong side of a fence at Niagara Falls in winter and slip, you'd be going for a one-way death slide off a 60-metre cliff. And if someone did that to watch me, it would be on my head. Suddenly, we needed crowd control,

Photo: © Red Bull Media House

barricades, media plans, more paper, more time on the phone, huge amounts of my life invested to climb a rope length of ice—but, a very cool rope length. And I still didn't know if the falls would actually freeze enough to climb. I wanted the best line, which was located on looker's left of Horseshoe Falls. The more I dug (I talk about the positive power of negative thinking in my presentations and it's a real tool I use), the more I realized how many unknown unknowns I was dealing with.

For example, the water levels dramatically change depending on hydroelectric power use, and a sudden surge would be catastrophic. There were a dozen other crazy hazards that had to be understood and mitigated. Niagara is different.

In early January, I spent a day going through our safety plans on the spray ice near the falls with the New York State Park Police, who do all the rescues from long-lines to body bagging the suicides. These guys are tough, and as I got to know them, I gained more respect for their world. Their main rescues involve people who decide to commit suicide at the falls then get near the lip and decide they don't want to go over the drop. They decide they don't want to die after all. Right on the lip, the water is moving fast but is only about knee-deep in places, and there's the odd rock to grab onto. The New York state police long-line in and grab 'em from their precarious perch, or try to. Sometimes they have to swim in on a rope and grab the soon-to-be victims. They've seen some heavy things over the years, and they were genuinely concerned that they'd putting me in a body bag.

After working together on rescue plans we gained respect for each other, and these guys are now friends for life. A big thanks to them and all the park people who could have shut this idea down at any point, but believed in it without ever having seen ice climbing first-hand. I was also extremely happy that I'd made a rare good decision and not poached the American Falls on top-rope. I could not have worked with the police, sheriff and everyone else involved with that hanging over my head.

December was warm, but finally in mid-January the necessary polar vortex hit, and I was soon spending a whole lot of time watching the Sheraton webcam. It looked good to go if it didn't get warm, but if I said "Go!" then that was it—I had only one chance. I don't think I've ever stressed out about weather as hard as in the week leading up to the call to say go.

I brought in some good guiding friends to do scene safety on top, and Red Bull brought in their events people as well as the same firm that does security for events like the Super Bowl, and suddenly it was game on for January 26 and 27. Except that the sheriff's office was using my climb as an exercise for their helicopter rescue operations, and in fact, the park would only let me climb if the sheriff's helicopter could fly, and it was too windy in the forecast, and we had dozens of people on jets headed to Niagara Falls—which I'd said I could climb, but to be honest hadn't even seen a decent line because there was so much spray and cloud from cold temperatures that you couldn't see anything. I don't know the total budget that was invested into this climb, but it wasn't cheap, and it all depended on some guy actually being able to climb it.

The team that assembled in Niagara Falls on January 26 was the absolute best group of people I could imagine, from photographers to the video crew to my climbing partner, Sarah Hueniken. I also had Mark Synnot and Kevin Mahoney, guides from New Hampshire, to help with scene safety, and a cast of people I didn't know but were all essential. I doubted that at first, but it was true—this was a really big deal on a lot of levels, and I still hadn't seen what I was supposed to climb.

I'd also told park authorities that I could climb Niagara without any new bolts. I love every bolt I clip, but I wanted to climb Niagara on clean gear and leave as little trace as possible. A climb this cool deserves the best possible standard. When I finally saw the line I was supposed to climb, that whole ethical stance suddenly seemed like a stunningly bad idea. There's a reason we had bolt protected all the spray ice that we had climbed to date, and it's simple: the holding power of ice screws in frozen mist is measured not in kilonewtons but in the much softer psychological units.

The wall was overhanging mushrooms of wild spray ice with the odd "normal" ice dagger mixed in. But I had some secret weapons that showed up by FedEx, literally the morning of the climb, from Black Diamond. Pectres—they look like a normal Spectre ice piton with a child's shovel welded on the back, but cooler. BD's designers had worked overtime to make my rough drawing a reality. I gave them a thorough testing in the spray ice at the top of the falls and they seemed like they might hold a good hard fall… maybe.

If you fall off within the first 10 metres of most ice climbs you might break a leg, but as I turned and checked with Sarah at the base of Niagara Falls, she looked at me and said, "Whatever you do, don't fall into the Cauldron of Doom." I had to start climbing directly above a psychotic mixing bowl where the

entire force of the falls slammed into—a, well, Cauldron of Doom. I was concerned about this problem, and there was no real way to protect the traverse due to too much water falling onto the ice. Plus, the entire river was frozen over too, so you'd really die for sure if you fell down into the mixing bowl and were then swept under the ice.

One of the New York State Park Police lieutenants stood nearby, tied into a rope and holding an orange lifesaving ring, like one of those found at swimming pools. If I fell into the cauldron he told me was coming in after me. And he meant it. While I thought the idea was likely a poor one, it did drive home the point that if I screwed this climb up, there were going to be some massive repercussions. And if I succeeded? Who knows.

I'm used to competing and dealing with pressure, but honestly, this was another level. Months of work, hundreds of people, I kept waiting for a voice on the radio to tell me to stop because the permit needed another safety plan. It never came, and so I climbed.

The line I wanted was about 45 metres high (the Cauldron of Doom was 25 metres high, thus knocking the 60-metre height down to 45). I put my hood up and took Niagara on the head to get to the dry ice just left of the main falls. The wind blew the mist away enough to see the climb, yet the winds were still low enough for the helicopter to fly, which allowed me to climb. I belayed in a small nook after about 15 metres and brought Sarah up.

We've climbed a lot together, and I know she'll speak up if things are getting too out of control. At the safety briefing the morning of the climb, I told the packed room that our main job was for all of us to be able to go home that night; I meant that for always—no climb is worth dying for. My biggest fear is not my own death, but that of a camera person or a client I'm guiding. Sarah helps me stay on the right side of the line, and I know if things go bad she'll deal with it. She hid in her classic water ice cave, and I started up the business while Niagara roared to my right like a freight train straight out of a nightmare. I'll be honest here and note that I'd rappelled the line and beat the hell out of it to clean it up, but the ice was low quality and if I cleaned it too much there wouldn't be any ice left to climb. I found a mediocre screw or two in real water-ice attached to spray ice, a V-thread or three and used a couple of my new toys. But the best piece of gear was near the top. I found an ancient one-inch steel bar that was left over from some failed industrial experiment, and I had faith when I slung it. It only took less than an hour to carefully climb the falls while a long camera boom swung over my head and I heard the radio going nuts in the iced-closed pocket of my jacket. I welded every tool placement as best I could and put all the years of Helmcken Falls spray-ice into practice. I was not going to screw this up!

Halfway up, I surfed right on delicate soaked ice formations and Niagara Falls arced out over my back and down into the Cauldron of Doom. It was like standing behind the world's largest cold shower—with pieces of ice falling down the shower

Photo: © Red Bull Media House

Photo: © Red Bull Media House

the same size as trampolines. As I moved back onto the steep ice, the water shifted as I looked up and I took a good bucket on the face and down the neck. Niagara doesn't taste good, and it's cold. When I pulled the top bulge it felt surreal. I had put more effort into the climb than anything I've ever done, plus all the effort from the many people who believed in the crazy idea. It took dozens of days of meetings and work, learning a political system, making real friends, and then finally getting the job done safely with a huge team of truly great people. I have done harder climbs in my life, but I've never worked so hard to be somewhere so cool. And I got to climb it twice more for the cameras, and because the climbing was truly some of the best I've ever done. Sarah patiently put in three hours in the ice box, and although the permit had been rather explicit about only me climbing Niagara, I figured the safest way to remove all of our gear was for Sarah to second it—which she did with her usual competent and strong style. We didn't celebrate until every last person was out of the gorge and safely off the various locations, and then we sure did.

I'm now working with the U.S. parks on opening up ice climbing in the gorge below Niagara Falls, which has been illegal for decades. I've heard of a few more climbs in the gorge done illegally over the years, but I don't recommend that if we want to get them opened for real. The falls will always be off limits, it's just too crazy of a place to climb, but there is some absolutely world-class ice and mixed climbing a few hundred metres downstream.

The media picked up the story in a huge way and one of the best things about the whole experience was sharing a sport that I love with the rest of the world. I did more than 200 interviews ranging from CNN to Vice TV to Brazil and Asia, and the coverage was uniformly positive, if sometimes a little hyperbolic. More than 1,000 TV stations alone aired the story. Our mountain sports often only hit the mass media when someone needs a rescue or dies, but real climbing made the global news in a positive way for a couple of weeks thanks to the amazing Dawn Wall ascent on El Capitan in Yosemite, and then Niagara.

I'm proud to have climbed Niagara Falls, but most proud of the fact that we did it safely as a team. Sarah and I only swung tools because of a huge network all working amazingly well together for months. Thank you to every single person who said yes when it would have been simpler to say no.

Summary

Horseshoe Falls (WI6, 50m), Niagara Falls. FA: Will Gadd, Sarah Hueniken, Jan. 27, 2015.

About the Author

Will Gadd is a mountain sports guy, dad, guide, speaker, writer, filmmaker and Instagram hero. His favourite mountain range is the Rockies, but he's climbed, flown, paddled and explored on most of the world's continents and is excited to keep at it for another 30 years.

The Cultural Ranges

The Injustice of Mount Fay

Rhiannon Davies

JULY 2015 MARKS THE ANNIVERSARY of a 111-year-old controversy that is not resolved to this day. The race to the summit of Mount Fay near Moraine Lake in the Canadian Rockies tarnished the reputation of two of the best Swiss mountain guides Canada has ever seen, and obliterated a rare tribute given to the First Nations people by one of the Rockies' early explorers.

In Banff National Park, there are hundreds of postcard-perfect lakes. One of the most exquisite, and famous, is Moraine Lake in the Valley of the Ten Peaks.[1] The 10 peaks were originally named by Samuel Allen in 1894 after the Stoney Indian numerals one to 10, and known fondly for years as the Ten Indians. These 10 were poetically named: Mount Heejee, Mount Num/Nom, Mount Yamnee, Mount Tonsa, Mount Sapta, Mount Shappee, Mount Shagowa, Mount Shakhnowa, Mount Neptuak and Mount Wenkchemna. And, they are overlooked by their Chief, Mount Hungabee, also named by Allen. Sadly, these names were not destined to last. Just a decade later, the Canadian Pacific Railway helped to remove this rare tribute to the native inhabitants of the area, and by naming one of the peaks after Professor Charles Fay, cemented the association of the American Alpine Club with one of the most beautiful landmarks in Canada.

The trouble started in 1904 when the CPR gave a rather extravagant thank-you present to Charles Ernest Fay, Professor of Modern Languages at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts. As head of both the American Alpine Club and the Appalachian Mountain Club, he had brought many wealthy friends and skilled climbers into the area. But, unlike many fellow gentleman climbers, his name was not on any peak. So, as thanks for helping to publicise the area, the CPR told Fay to choose a mountain, be the first to climb it, and the CPR would persuade the naming authority, the Geographic Board of Canada (GBC), to label the mountain with his name. The mountain he chose was Peak 1 in the Valley of the Ten Peaks (already given the name Mount Heejee by Allen in 1894). It is not unusual to re-name mountains, but "reserving" a mountain for someone who had money and influence to climb it first goes against the sport of climbing. However, in 1904, Banff National Park, and its tiny mountain town, like many railway towns at the time, was firmly in the grip of the railway company and few people could object to the CPR's plans.[2] So there was genuine shock when someone defied the CPR and climbed Mount Fay before the old professor.

The person who climbed the mountain before Fay and took the risk of angering the CPR was a gutsy 36-year-old British climber, Miss Gertrude Emily Benham. Miss Benham was an incredibly experienced British mountaineer who had ascended more mountains than most male climbers of her day.[3] The version of events that has been repeated for 111 years is that both Benham and Professor Fay set out to climb Peak 1 on the same day (July 20), but each by a different route. Benham and her Swiss guide, Christian Kaufmann, climbed up via the couloir between Peak 3 and 4. Whereas Fay and his Swiss guide, Hans Kaufmann, younger brother of Christian, made their unusual attack on the mountain via Consolation Valley. Unfortunately, the route that Fay's Swiss guide chose (against the professor's original wishes) proved impossible for the 58-year-old professor to complete. So after only a few hours on the trail, the old professor had to abandon his attempt. When he returned to the chalet at Lake Louise, he heard that Gertrude Benham had already climbed Peak 1, but she was keeping quiet about it.

On August 5, when Fay finally climbed Peak 1, he found a stone cairn on the top confirming Benham and Christian Kaufmann's ascent. What should've been a polite acknowledgement that another (and better) climber had beaten Fay to it, turned into a mud-slinging match. Fay blamed Hans Kaufmann for taking him up the wrong route and somehow the story that the Kaufmann brothers tricked him out of "his" mountain took hold. What made the situation worse was that a woman had out-climbed Fay and that one of the CPR's own

1 Known as the "20-dollar view" for its appearance on the back of the 1969 and 1979 versions of the Canadian 20-dollar bill.

2 Most inhabitants were trying to make a name for themselves and stay in business. They couldn't afford to get on the wrong side of the major employer in the area. For example, Annie Mollison, manageress of Mount Stephen House at Field, was dismissed for supposed insubordination, with one day's notice after 15 years of faithful service. (See letter from Mr. Brown to Sir Thomas in the Shaughnessy Letterbooks (number 61316) and letter from Miss A. Mollison to Sir Thomas (69949), 1902.)

3 By the time she reached Canada, Benham had already climbed more than 100 mountains in Europe, including Mount Blanc, the Matterhorn, Monte Rose, the Weisshorn and the Jungfrau, and was eager to climb as many of Canada's unclimbed peaks as possible.

"Mount Fay" pen, ink and pencil drawing by Glen Boles (2001)

guides had helped her do it. Officials in the CPR scrambled to look for another unclimbed mountain in the valley for Fay to climb and christen. But they found that either Miss Benham or one of the Kaufmann brothers had already summited those that were deemed suitable. Reluctantly, Fay stuck to his first choice and Peak 1 (Mount Heejee) was renamed Mount Fay by the GBC, paving the way for most of the 10 peaks to lose their First Nations names.

Edward Feuz Junior, a rival Swiss guide, maintained for years that the Kaufmann brothers "played dirty trick"[4] on "his good friend" the professor, and Feuz repeated this story for a good 75 years.[5] Feuz maintained that the brothers deliberately conspired to get back at Fay and get another climber up the mountain first. Feuz also claimed that Christian knew what he was doing to outsmart the professor as "he'd been there with an American named Allen, who had made a map, and climbed several of the peaks… both brothers thought it would be a great joke to fool old man Fay."[6] Feuz also insisted that Hans Kaufmann was fired as a result of his actions, although this has never been proved.

Although an interesting story, there are inconsistencies in Edward Feuz Junior's description. In some accounts, Feuz claims Professor Fay went straight to William Van Horne, the head of the CPR, and said: "Either they [Kaufmanns] go, or I won't come back."[7] But over the years, this morphs into a version where Feuz himself plays the hero, approaching the manager at Lake Louise, demanding that Hans be "sent down the road."[8] As the esteemed author and climber Chic Scott notes in his 2001 article for the *Canadian Alpine Journal*, Ed Feuz Junior is one of the only sources for this "dirty trick" version and that Feuz had a deep hatred for the Kaufmann brothers to his dying day.[9] So, we need to look closer at these allegations and the facts. The five-foot-one Feuz was a rival of the tall handsome Kaufmanns and had a vested interest in keeping them (and their descendants) out of the picture.[10]

We can disprove some of Feuz's accusations immediately. His claim that Christian Kaufmann was with an American named Allen who drew a map of the area is completely false. Samuel Allen's famous map was drawn in 1894-95 when Allen gave the mountains their Stoney names. This was seven years before either Hans or Christian Kaufmann came to Canada. Next, by 1904, the CPR was headed by Thomas Shaughnessy, not William Van Horne. If Fay had indeed approached Van Horne, Van Horne would then have had to convince Shaughnessy to do something about it—all of which would surely have resulted in a paper trail somewhere. Edward Feuz Junior's personal involvement in Hans's alleged dismissal also seems doubtful. In 1904, Feuz was just 19 years old and not yet a qualified mountain guide. He had come to Canada as a porter in 1903 to learn English and in 1904 was stationed at Glacier House with his father, far from the action at Lake Louise. It would have been remarkable that a non-qualified Swiss national, who had very low status within the CPR hierarchy, could have approached anyone and demanded that a well-respected, first-class guide like Hans Kaufmann be fired, let alone to have that request granted. Certainly, Hans did remain in his native Switzerland in 1905 rather than return to Canada, but this may have been a result of the more varied guiding opportunities in his homeland, unlike the summer-only employment in Canada. Unfortunately, however, by not returning to Canada, Hans's achievements here have been overshadowed by this one disastrous climb, and his absence in the years to follow allowed Feuz free rein to repeat his version of events, which unfortunately has virtually become accepted as truth.

There is also no evidence that the Kaufmann brothers were the tricksters that Feuz claims them to be.[11] According to their own clients, Christian and Hans were the ultimate professionals with impeccable records.[12] In just six summers in Canada, Christian had a mountaineer's wish list of first ascents[13] and was considered one of the CPR's best guides. Between 1901-1906, he guided prominent climbers like the famous Norman Collie,

4 Kauffman, Andy and Putnam, William. *The Guiding Spirit*. Revelstoke: 1986, p.84.
5 Scott, Chic. *Canadian Alpine Journal*, 2001.
6 *The Guiding Spirit*, p.85.
7 *The Guiding Spirit*, p.85.
8 Patillo, Roger. *The Canadian Rockies: Pioneers, Legends and True Tales*. Victoria: 2007, p.191
9 Scott, Chic. *Canadian Alpine Journal*, 2001.
10 In 1980, Christian Kaufmann's son, Christian, travelled to Banff for an international convocation of mountain guides. As head of the Swiss delegation, he was introduced to Ed Feuz Junior, who instead of recognizing his (and his father's) mountaineering achievements, spat at him and called his father a "drecksackel" (scum/dirtbag). *The Guiding Spirit*, p.87.
11 When Christian was handpicked as one of four Swiss Guides to accompany Sir Edward Whymper, conqueror of the Matterhorn, on his first trip to Canada, the other guides played tricks on the overbearing Whymper, but Christian was singled out by Whymper as being different from the others and was asked to mediate when disputes arose. (See Whymper's diaries, a copy of which can be found in the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff, Alta.)
12 Hans and Christian were talented sons of a prominent guiding family from Grindelwald, Switzerland. Christian had many famous clients like Tom Longstaff, the young Winston Churchill and Gertrude Bell, and according to multiple entries in their guidebooks, they were courteous, polite and excellent company. (See any of the entries in the The Führerbücher of H. Kaufmann or C. Kaufmann as printed in the *American Alpine Journal* Vol 5, New York: 1943-5, p.111-125 or as held in the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies in Banff, Alta.)
13 As Chic Scott argues: Christian was "one of the greatest of the early Swiss guides in Canada […] a most remarkable guide, and deserves a special place amongst the giants of Canadian mountaineering," in *Pushing the Limits: The Story of Canadian Mountaineering*. Calgary: 2000, p.65.
14 The great British climber Norman Collie and his party hired Hans for six weeks during their 1902 trip: "We consider him a first-class guide. He is an excellent rock-climber with a good knowledge of snow and ice, very strong, most willing and obliging and a charming companion. We have great pleasure in recommending him." (Entry 89, The Führerbücher of H. Kaufmann, 1902)
After climbing with Hans for two summers, Charles Thompson, one of Fay's good friends and climbing companions said of Hans: "We are glad of this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation of the strength, the skill and the faithfulness of [Hans] as a guide and give great satisfaction with his general efficiency and companionableness." (Entry 79, The Führerbücher of H. Kaufmann, 1901)

James Outram, Herschel Parker and even Professor Fay to impressive feats in the Rockies. Hans, just two years younger, was the quieter of the two brothers. He also came to Canada in 1901, but only spent four summers here. Even so, Hans's guidebook is heaped with praise from the people who hired him, for his judgement, skill and manners. Even Professor Fay's friends and colleagues did not hesitate to recommend him.[14] In fact, in 1903, the Kaufmann brothers were presented with engraved gold watches courtesy of "their friend" Herschel Parker of Columbia University, for the first ascents they helped Parker and Professor Fay achieve that summer. This is exactly one summer before the fateful Mount Fay climb, and it's hard to imagine that the brothers went from "perfect reliability" to "scumbag" status (as Feuz alleges) in one summer. The gift of a gold watch also makes it dubious that either brother had any motivation to get back at Professor Fay or spoil an obviously lucrative client-guide partnership with Fay's circle of friends. Nor would the brothers want to get on the wrong side of the CPR, who had brought them to Canada and helped build their reputations on an international level.

So why did Hans Kaufmann apparently encourage Professor Fay to take the route up via Consolation Valley when the professor wanted to take the trusted route up the 3/4 Couloir? When Fay asked Hans why he chose that route, Hans admitted he had another mountain in mind. This is not unreasonable as Peak 1 is not immediately visible from the head of the lake, and because of the complicated topography in the series, other peaks like the Tower of Babel, Mount Babel and Mount Bident have been mistaken for Peak 1. When Fay questioned Hans on why he insisted upon the route via Consolation Valley, Hans replied that he had Fay's friend Thompson's mountain in mind. Fay believed Hans was referring to Mount Little (Peak 2), so dismissed Hans's comment as odd as the normal ascent to Peak 2 is also via the 3/4 Couloir.[15] But in 1903, Hans took Thompson up another potential Mount Fay. Mount Bident was erroneously referred to as Mount Fay on many occasions[16] and one does ascend Mount Bident via Consolation Valley. So Hans could equally have had this mountain in mind and therefore wanted to use a route that he knew. This is likely, as R.W. Sandford says about the area: "There was still confusion as to the names of some of the mountains… local maps were confusing."[17] So despite being one of the most experienced guides in this valley,[18] even Hans did not have a clear picture of which mountain was meant to become Mount Fay.

The apparent "ease" of Benham's climb and Fay's whereabouts immediately afterwards also provide proof against Feuz's allegations. If indeed Christian Kaufmann chose the "easy route" and "romped" up the mountain with Benham, then how come they weren't successful on their first attempt? In an article for the British *Alpine Journal*, Benham reported that on July 18, she and Christian Kaufmann left the chalet at Lake Louise for the Valley of the Ten Peaks.[19] On July 19, they climbed what they thought was Peak 1 and returned to their camp at Moraine Lake. When they discussed the climb with Walter Wilcox, who also was camping at the lake, they discovered they had not actually climbed Peak 1 but had climbed another unnamed nearby peak. Like his brother, even Christian Kaufmann was foiled by the complicated topography of these initial peaks. According to the account in the *Alpine Journal*, Benham and Christian Kaufmann then set out on July 20 for the actual Peak 1, and it was only on this second attempt that they were successful. Feuz's version of events neglects to mention that his rivals were also unsuccessful in their first attempt.

Next, if it was so important to Professor Fay to summit "his" mountain first, then why didn't he try again the next day or the day after with the route he wanted to take? Benham and Kaufmann did just that to try to rectify their mistake. So if it was indeed a race to the summit as everyone claims, then why did Fay wait until August 5 to try again? According to an appendix in the *Journal of the Appalachian Mountain Club* written by Professor Fay himself, the day after his disastrous first attempt Fay chose instead to summit a different mountain entirely and with a different Swiss guide: "On July 21, 1904, accompanied by Mr. J. H. Cameron of Chicago and guide Christian Häsler, I left camp at Moraine Lake at 6.30 a.m. to make the ascent [by a new route] of Mount Temple."[20] So, he was still in the area but decided to climb a peak on the other side of the valley. This doesn't sound like a man who was rushing to claim "his" prize. Would there have been such a reaction if the climber who beat him to it had been Norman Collie or James Outram?

If the Kaufmanns did not foil Professor Fay, who did? Gertrude Benham was a serious climber who loved a challenge, and as a fellow resident at the Lake Louise chalet it was unlikely she was unaware of Fay's intentions. At this time, the British and the Americans were still competitive, trying to "bag" peaks

15 "Hans alleged that he supposed I had your Mount Little in view! Why did he suppose I wanted to get to it by going around the head of Moraine Lake, as I insisted? It is a curious case, however viewed." Fay's letter to C.S. Thompson in Dowling, Phil. *The Mountaineers: Famous Climbers in Canada*. Edmonton, 1979, p.29.

16 Their ascent up Mount Bident was written up as *The First Ascent up Mount Fay* in *The Alpine Journal* 1904-5. Thompson also wrote in Hans's guidebook stating the same: "August 6th 1903. This day Hans Kaufmann guided me to the summit of Mount Fay, the sharp two-pointed peak on the northern side of the pass at the head of Consolation Valley, a first ascent. This was the seventh ascent I have made in these mountains with him and in every case I have found him very careful, cautious and efficient. His bodily strength is remarkable, a guarantee that he would see his party through in any emergency requiring skill and strength," (as published in *The Führerbücher of Hans Kaufmann*, in the *American Alpine Journal*, Vol 5, 1943-45, p.114).

17 Sandford, R. W. *The Canadian Alps: The History of Mountaineering in Canada*. Vol 1. Banff: 1990, p.242-3.

18 C.S. Thompson wrote in *The Alpine Journal*, "Since my guide [Hans] had made the first ascent of four peaks in the group, the only ones thus far climbed, I have suggested 'Kaufmann' as the name for the pass." *The First Ascent of Mount Fay, The Alpine Journal*, 1904-5, p.205.

19 Benham, Gertrude. *The Alpine Journal*. Vol XXII, 1904-5, p.333.

20 Fay, Charles E. *Ascent of Mount Temple (Canadian Rockies) by a New Route*, in *Appalachia*, Vol XI: 1905-8, p.72.

for the old country or what the Americans saw largely as their new continent. Benham was, of course, British and her imperial streak ran strong. She was also a non-conformist in outlook and in religion. Her father, a wealthy businessman, had taught her to climb in Switzerland and she continued this sport throughout the world; for example, being the first woman (and the first Briton) to climb Kilimanjaro in Kenya in 1909.[21] She loved the mountains and the freedom they represented, and judging by her letters to the British Government later in life, she didn't appreciate officialdom getting in the way of her explorations, or being told she couldn't climb where she wanted to.[22] In her opinion, mountains couldn't be reserved like a table at the exclusive Savoy Hotel or a garment at Selfridges, London's best department store. Moreover, Benham was the only person who actually spoke out against what the CPR was doing. It was perhaps not the fashion of the time to have such an important landmark named after native people, but by writing over these names Benham could see American imperialism creeping ever nearer. In an uncharacteristically opinionated article, she wrote: "In this country, where nearly all the peaks are named after persons, it is a relief to find a few with other names […] But the quaint name of Hiji [sic] has since been changed to Mount Fay, although there was a smaller peak already named after Professor Fay."[23] This fondness for the original Indian names was later echoed by *The Crag and Canyon* newspaper when Henrietta Tuzo climbed Peak 7 (Mount Shagowa) and the mountain was renamed Mount Tuzo after her.[24] But in most accounts of the naming of the Ten Peaks, the so-called climbing scandal still overshadows the whole story.

RE-EXAMINING THE FACTS OF JULY 1904 means it is unjust for the reputation of the Kaufmann brothers to be tarnished by Edward Feuz Junior's erroneous version of events. The more general injustice is that done to Canadian history and the First Nations people when the Stoney names for the peaks at Moraine Lake were changed. If we revert to the original 10 names, we would re-instate a rare and historical mountain tribute to the people who guided the early explorers along their trails and passes. Otherwise we are left with yet another symbol of American power obliterating our own national narrative.

21 Howgego, Ray. *A 'very quiet and harmless traveller'*. Plymouth: 2009, p.19.
22 In the 1920s, Benham tried to sneak into Tibet, becoming a thorn in the government's side. Her letters and inexhaustible determination show she didn't have much time for officialdom or people telling her that she couldn't do something. Howgego, p.42-49.
23 Benham, Gertrude. *Alpine Journal*. Vol XXII, 1904-5, p.332.
24 "…Christian Kaufmann built a stone man to show the conquest of this, the last unclimbed of the Ten Indians, as their discoverer, Mr. S. Allen, called them, giving them the pleasing Indian numerals for their names." *Crag and Canyon*. Banff: Saturday August 4, 1906, p.1.

The Valley of Ten Peaks above Moraine Lake, Canadian Rockies. Photo: Paul Zizka

Sitting Still

Eva Holland

IT WAS A WEIRD WEATHER DAY. Blue skies and bursts of bright sunshine alternated with streams of fast-moving cloud and fog that came in suddenly and covered the peaks around me, before thinning out and vanishing just as quick. I reclined in a Therm-a-Rest camp chair on a large boulder, with notebook, binos and mug of tea spread out around me, and watched the clouds come and go, come and go—like a time-lapse video playing out in real time. There was nothing else for me to do but watch and wait: I was in the Cirque of the Unclimbables, one of the jewels of Nahanni National Park, and I couldn't walk for more than a few minutes without pain.

I sat with my back to most of the Cirque, facing Crescent Peak where it stretched above our camp, forming part of the valley's outer rim. Somewhere on that slope, my five friends were scrambling up steep scree, weighed down with ropes and wearing harnesses for when the hike became a genuine climb. When the sky was clear, I scanned the mountain through my borrowed binoculars, squinting to spot bright yellow helmets, and blue and orange Gore-Tex jackets. Every once in awhile, I swore I could hear one of their voices drift down to me on the wind—the Cirque was that quiet and still.

I was frustrated and grumpy at being left behind, but it had been my choice to come here when I knew I would be unable to do much besides sit still. I had been injured three weeks earlier, on a short backpacking trip: a long slog over rough, uneven ground had left me with a stress fracture in the top of my shin bone where it met the kneecap, on the tibial plateau. I was told that I should avoid walking, running, hiking, or any activity involving repetitive impact on my knee, for at least a month, maybe two. I had asked about the worst-case scenario if I didn't stay off it. I was told the fracture might deepen and spread until my leg was properly broken.

By the time I got that verdict, my flight into the Cirque of the Unclimbables, organized through the Yukon Section of The Alpine Club of Canada, was less than a week away. I gathered the group and explained my situation. I didn't want to miss the trip, but going meant taking a calculated risk. I figured if I kept my pack as light as possible—especially on the descent—and leaned heavily on my trekking poles, I could grit my teeth through the grueling hike in and out of the Cirque itself. Then, once we made it in, I could hang out at base camp while the others hiked and climbed. I figured that as long as the others were comfortable with the risk that they might have to carry me out, and if they didn't mind carrying some of my share of the weight, it could work. I promised to cook frequently and to do lots of dishes. They were game.

Now that I was here, though, I wasn't so sure if the trade-off was worth it. I was in the Cirque—great! But I couldn't *do* anything. I was surrounded by sheer, ominous peaks sprouting from an almost ludicrously pleasant meadow, all bright green grass and a babbling creek—Mordor meets the Shire. It was surreally beautiful. I wanted to hike across every inch of the place, drag myself up to every big viewpoint and lay claim to it all. I wanted to put on my daypack and lose myself in the Cirque. Instead, I sat on a rock and drank herbal tea.

Across the creek from where I sat, maybe six to eight metres away, a marmot poked his head up and whistled, long and piercing. He froze, stared in my direction, and then clambered down off his rock perch and hopped across the water towards me. He disappeared for a moment behind the boulder next to mine then popped up again on top of it. He was about two metres away. I slowly put my mug down and sat perfectly still, watching, as the animal climbed up and over his rock, down onto the grass, and then up onto my boulder. One metre away. I barely breathed.

The marmot stepped on my map of the area and the binos as he came right up to me, sniffing, dark eyes fixed on mine. His toes were unexpectedly long and dexterous, more like fingers than feet, and covered in short dark fur. While I sat, taking shallow breaths, he touched his nose to my elbow for a moment before backing slowly away. Then he seemed to lose interest, hopped down off my boulder and wandered towards the outhouse, eating grass as he went.

My bad mood had evaporated like the latest blanket of fog. Stillness, I realized, had its advantages. Hiking would have been amazing, sure, but I didn't need to be in motion to experience the power of this place. I looked up through the binoculars and spotted my friends rappelling down a rock face, their orange rope bright against the mountain. Somewhere nearby, a pika squeaked. Another marmot whistled. The creek tumbled down through the meadow, and the sound of its passage echoed off the walls around me. From across the valley, I could hear the occasional grumble of rockfall. The fog thickened then thinned again. And I sat still, taking it all in.

Confessions of an Edmonton Alpinist

Jarrid Kolodnicki

FEW THINGS ARE MORE UNFORTUNATE THAN someone who is unable to see what they are capable of. Our life is our own opportunity to make our potential come into fruition, and the alpine environment is one of the most potent of venues to test ourselves. Those experiences never leave us, and they have subtle ways of continuing to change our lives as time passes. I started climbing with the sole intention of gaining the skills to attempt Mount Robson. It took me more than 10 years to finally stand on the mountain's summit.

I grew up on the fringes of the Whitemud Ravine in Edmonton, Alberta. Some key ingredients that led to my alpine addiction were having a dog when I was young, attending summer camp in my youth and having a summer job as a wrangler in Lake Louise shortly after high school. These experiences gave me a taste for a diet regular in fresh air, campfires and mountains, respectively. Even after that job, I had no desire to start climbing. The catalyst that brought a rope into the equation was when I started to substitute the horse for a backpack. Solo backpacking trips into the backcountry naturally led me to consider other possibilities. In my early 20s, I thought about how ridiculous it would be to climb the tallest mountain in the Canadian Rockies—my dad's favourite peak. That idea never left me. It was too late in his life for my dad to try such a trip, but not for me. All I had to do was get over my huge fear of heights. After all, at summer camp I would stop three metres up the climbing wall and get stuck, psychologically. How does one get to the top of Mount Robson? I had no clue.

By 2002, I had already committed to the climb in my mind, and I gave myself a deadline of 2012. My deadline was based on some easy math where I realized that I did not have much time before my dad might be too old to fully appreciate the accomplishment, and I might be "too old" to learn the high-stakes game of mountaineering. By this time, I had assumed I would need to learn something about climbing and had invested in a harness and climbing shoes and started top-roping at the gym. As the years went by, I held onto the vision of a sincere attempt at climbing to the top of Robson. Climbing partners came and went, as did university, work, holidays, birthday parties—life continues when you have a long-term goal, but throughout all of the highs and lows I held onto this dream that I turned into a life goal. Without realizing it, I became a "climber" as my mind and devotion became orientated toward that goal. As my circle of friends grew, more and more were of the vertical persuasion. I bought books, read route descriptions and I sought out the advice of those I respected. Relationships had to be made. You and your buddy can't just rent some gear and go climb the Weeping Wall like you can rent a canoe and paddle around Lake Louise. That would be like renting and flying a helicopter after a quick tour of the aircraft and watching a short how-to video.

By 2006, I was introduced to Nordegg's Tri-Ice-A-Thon hosted by the Centre for Outdoor Education. There I met Dave Edgar and Mike Adolph. On the final day of the festival I picked Dave's brain about Robson. He gave me some key advice regarding my dream objective. He recommended that I get more experience climbing big peaks in the Rockies and become comfortable climbing ice. If I did that I would really enjoy the experience of climbing Robson, and it wouldn't just end up being a big suffer-fest. My plan was always consistent: Robson was just going to be me and a guide. As I learned more about alpinism, more about the routes for that peak, and slowly gained the days on ice, I became more practical about this objective. I wanted to make sure I possessed the skills to survive the mountain in case things went sideways.

It wasn't until 2010 that I was able to afford the mentorship and services of a guide. So, of course, I contacted Dave, but he was busy working in Vancouver. He recommended J. Mills for the job. I had no idea I was being set up with a world-class climber, not to mention a great person. Up until this point, I really only had top-rope experience in a gym and a handful of days on ice, much of it at Tri-Ice-A-Thon. Now it was time to really see what I was made of. Over the next four years I gained what felt like a lifetime of mountain experiences. J. guided safe passage up many classic multi-pitch ice routes and to the summits of the Eisenhower Tower, Haddo Peak and Mount Fable, and a rare ascent of the north peak of Mount Murchison. Every trip started with the same question and answer: "What would you like to climb?" J. would ask, and I would reply, "Whatever prepares me for Robson."

As 2012 came closer, I realized I would have to push the attempt to 2013 thanks to worldly obligations. Life has that tendency to get in the way from time to time. At the end of the 2011-12 ice season, J. had informed me that he might not be available to guide Robson in the summer of 2013. Nothing was confirmed yet, but there were plans in the works for J. to join Raphael Slawinski in the Himalayas that summer. Who would I want to guide Robson now? Who could I trust? Who would be good company in a tiny tent? Through Tri-Ice-A-Thon I had met several of our country's superstars as they had presented slide shows and given workshops. Also, being a member of The Alpine Club of Canada for a few years, I had the opportunity to meet more stellar alpinists through those channels. The list of legends is solid and I consider meeting these people to be highlights of my life. For example, I've been to the ACC Early Season Ice Camp twice. When you are told that you will be coached by the likes of Sean Isaac, Sarah Hueniken and Will Gadd, you feel privileged, to say the least. I had also met Barry Blanchard at Tri-Ice-A-Thon. I wondered if it would be possible to climb Mount Robson with Barry. I contacted him and he was keen, but shortly after that, J. got back to me with news

that he would be available for a 2013 Robson attempt after all.

I had visions of climbing Mount Robson with Barry for a while, so I felt like I needed to do something else that would be special. I wondered if Barry would be willing to try ice climbing Takakkaw Falls. Sure enough, he was all over it. Takakkaw Falls is one of those places that just blows your mind. I had first seen it while taking supplies up to the Twin Falls Tea House with packhorses as a wrangler in 1996. When I first learned that it was an ice climb, I had trouble imagining that it was possible. How could that waterfall freeze over? It had taken a dream-like position in my mind much in the same way as Robson had, but I had never considered it a real objective. It was too out there for me, but with Barry Blanchard as a guide, why not give it try?

We roped in for Barry's third visit to Takakkaw Falls on January 29, 2013. He told me that the last time he was there was 1984. My heart skipped a beat at the comment. This was not going to be like anything else I had ever done. The climb was huge and the ice was shaped in languages I'd never seen before. I learned a lot that day, but if it wasn't for the new skills I had learned at the ACC ice camp that season and making sure I was prepared, I probably wouldn't have enjoyed myself, let alone made it through the crux. Seeing Barry lead the crux of Takakkaw was nothing short of witnessing a masterpiece, a work of art. It was terrifying and beautiful at the same time, and I will always be the only person to have witnessed it firsthand. I take the role of a client very seriously, because in reality, at that moment, there is nothing related to client/guide at that time. Once we are roped together, we are partners, and I was just as responsible for Barry's life as he was for mine. There is one of the many lessons we really come to appreciate in the alpine, the true meaning of the word trust.

The winter of 2012-13 was my best to date. I banked 37 days of ice climbing and snowboarding in four months that season. Many of those days were day trips. Day trips are huge endeavours for us Edmontonians, and it seems that only my ice climbing friends are the ones that are keen for such regular foolishness. We are the people who will wake up at 4 a.m. to drive for five hours, climb for three hours (or less, or not even climb at all due to conditions), and then hop back in the car and drive five hours home. I've even done a day trip from Edmonton to Marble Canyon. I'm sure anyone living in cushy Canmore would find that insane. I'm not jealous at all. The mountains do that to you, and I find that ice climbers, in particular, have a unique zest for life and for driving early in the morning. As the ice season ended, I had one thing on my mind—Mount Robson.

Life had other plans for me. At the beginning of April 2013, I found myself locked in a license dispute, with my business and livelihood caught in the balance. In the end, I had to cut my losses and close that chapter of my life. It was a devastating blow, but my experiences in the mountains have taught me much about perseverance. I would move on. No need to panic. Unfortunately, the loss of my business was not all that life had in store for me. Just a few months later on July 13, days before I was to meet J. Mills for a final preparation trip before our attempt on Robson, my dad, the inspiration and reason for this goal, was suddenly clinging to life at the University of Alberta Hospital. He survived another 13 days.

My whole life had been uprooted and torn apart at the seams. I was in a fog, disillusioned. I was fortunate to have a great relationship with my father. He loved the mountains, and Jasper in particular. I learned to ski at Marmot Basin with my dad holding onto me while I practiced the snowplow technique. The image is still fresh in my mind of my skis inside his, and feeling the pressure of his grip under my arms. I am unable to explain how beaten down I felt in my relationship to Mount Robson at that point. The year 2013 became the most challenging one of my life. It started with an amazing trip to Takakkaw Falls with Barry Blanchard, and within months was completely transformed into a nightmare I would have never conceived. In spite of all of that adversity, I still felt the pull towards Robson. In hindsight, a good friend, one who does not climb, stated that Robson was like a beacon during a thick fog. I rescheduled for 2014.

On August 2, 2014, for the first time ever, I began my day at the literal start: 12 a.m. Just over nine hours later, I shook the hand of J. Mills on the summit of Mount Robson, a dream come true. My dad was with me every step of the way, along with what felt like everyone else I had ever met in my life. The learning really begins in the wake of achieving a personal life goal. Having the experiences of climbing on Takakkaw Falls and reaching the summit of Mount Robson are dreams that have come true for me and will feed me every day from now on. It is possible to achieve your full potential in certain arenas of life. The most surprising to recognize, in hindsight, is what I have really gained in this long-term pursuit. At the mere mention of the tallest mountain in the Canadian Rockies, and I will be flooded with what seems as my whole life experience.

I am a better person for my time spent outdoors. The process of transforming myself into a competent mountaineer (and I use that term cautiously) also had the unforeseen effect of transforming me as a person. My only dream now is to continue to have safe travels in wild places, and hopefully to help others achieve their life goals, whatever those may be.

The North

Baffin Jam Session

Bob Shepton

BAFFIN WASN'T EXACTLY STRANGE TO THE Wild Bunch, as I had dubbed them when they first made contact with me some years ago. They had done new routes on Mount Asgard in 2009, and then captured some superb big walls from my 10-metre sailing boat in Greenland in 2010, which won us all the Piolet d'Or. Over the years, my teams and I had also managed to amass a considerable tally of new routes and peaks north and south along the huge west coast of Greenland from the boat, via climbing, mountaineering and ski mountaineering. In 2012, my South African crew pioneered an extreme route on a line of unclimbed cliffs 65 kilometres southwest of Pond Inlet off Eclipse Sound in north Baffin, before we continued on to complete the North West Passage.

The Wild Bunch. I had only named them this because of the inevitable cheering, dancing and high fives at the top of their incredible new bigwall routes. In reality, they are a bunch of extremely talented climbers: three Belgians, Nico and Oli Favresse and Sean Villanueva; and one American, Ben Ditto, also a professional photographer. Also unique, they are talented musicians who usually take their instruments up the big walls in their haul bags to compose new songs on the way.

I had left the boat in Greenland for the winter and went out early to make preparations. The lads joined me there, in Aasiaat, in early July for some sampling of Greenland granite while waiting for the ice to clear off the east coast of Baffin. We were receiving

Right: Sean Villanueva high up on Shepton's Shove on Walk Citadel above Sam Ford Fjord. Photo: Ben Ditto

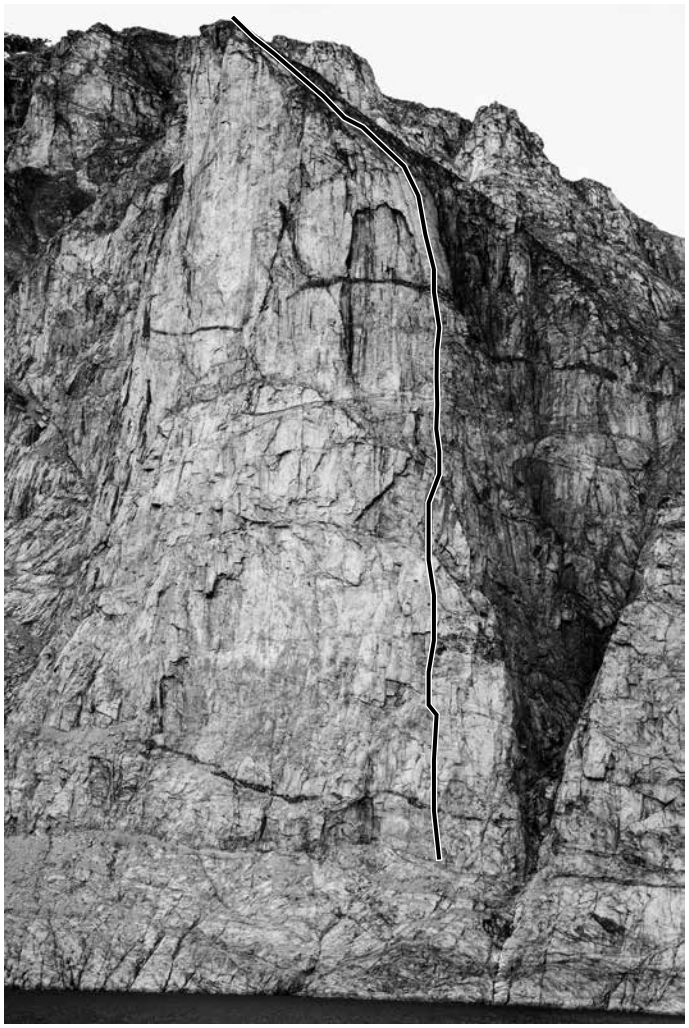
Sean Villanueva two pitches below Walker Citadel's summit on the first ascent of Shepton's Shove. Photo: Ben Ditto

ice reports by email from my man in Scotland, but they showed the pack ice sticking stubbornly to the Baffin coast in the area around the settlement of Clyde River. Meantime, much climbing and bouldering was done at the west bay of Uummannaq where we were anchored, waiting. We met up with two other boats that called in to this excellent anchorage. They were not there to climb, but they did enjoy the jam sessions by the Wild Bunch.

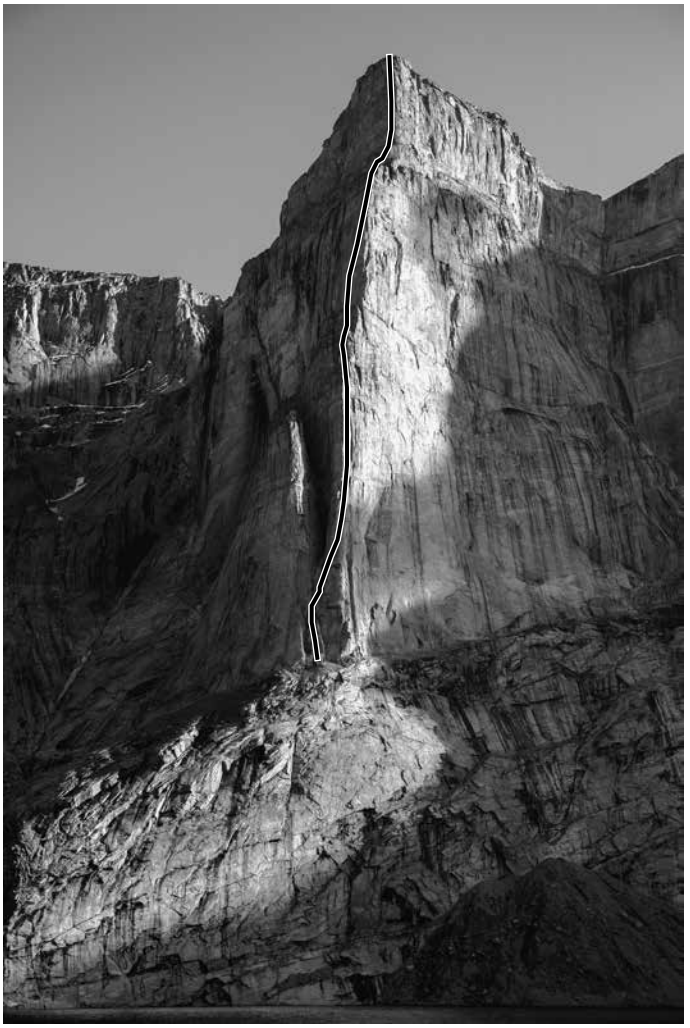
Finally, it looked as if the ice over on Baffin was beginning to move. A last-minute purchase from stores in the town of Uummannaq and we set sail, or rather motored. There was no wind. We anchored for the night on a hidden bank by a stream outlet near the village of Niaqornat towards the end of this huge peninsula of Nuugssuaq, and set out for Baffin the next morning. Manoeuvrability is one of the great advantages of climbing from a boat. We motored to begin with, and then the wind came in and gradually increased. I kept too much sail up that first night, but then we settled down to a lively but uneventful three-day passage across to Baffin. It was uneventful except for the last stretch when 120 kilometres out from the coast, early on a misty morning, we suddenly came to a huge field of pack ice. Obviously that stubborn shore ice was at last moving out, but fortunately the wind and swell had sufficiently broken the pack up for us to weave our way through. We made our way into Clyde River to check into Canada, sighting eight polar bears and cubs on the ice floes on route.

We were soon on our way again the next day towards Sam Ford Fjord for the climbing. It is perhaps important to point out that all the new routes on this trip in Sam Ford Fjord and Gibbs Fjord were climbed onsight and completely free, in an area where nearly all previous climbs had been done with aid (though to be fair, this was partly because they were usually done earlier in the year with approach by Ski-Doo over the ice). The first route in Sam Ford, perhaps more wine induced than wisely planned after a pleasant evening aboard another boat that had come around to see us, was Up the Creek Without a Paddle—a paddle was lost landing in the dinghy from the boat, which incidentally reappeared floating back on the tidal current when they were three pitches up. After seven pitches, Sean and Ben were surprised to come across bolts and lots of gear. They

Up the Creek Without a Paddle on Lurking Tower. Photo: Ben Ditto



Walking the Plank on Plank Wall. Photo: Ben Ditto



completed the climb entirely free without using any of it. It turned out that the upper part of their route is shared with Mike Libecki and Jonas Haag's new route (see page 59) from May 2014. Sean and Ben had climbed the wall so fast that they had a 15-hour bivy under a boulder in a gully in the mist and rain waiting for us to collect them in the boat.

In the meantime, Nico and Oli had attempted the southeast pillar of the Walker Citadel, also starting out at midnight, but were defeated by bad weather setting in. Another attempt was also aborted, but finally on a third attempt in fine sunshine both days with a snow shower in between (I got into trouble for not telling them it had been mentioned in the forecast, hence its name), the first ascent of this arête was made in a 24-hour push and called Shepton's Shove. Meanwhile, Sean and Ben had made the first free ascent of Super Unknown Tower by Imaginary Line, rappelling back down the sheer wall of the original aid route, using some of the bolts left from 20 years before—but only for descending.

Nico and Oli added another quality route to the list, the first route done on the east face of the Turret. Living on the Kedge was sustained in the 5.11/5.12 range and 900 metres long. Picking them and their gear up the next day from the dinghy in gusts of 30 knots of wind was a little too exciting. Sean and Ben were not so lucky. After nine pitches up a dihedral on the east side of Big Cross Wall, and an involuntary peel by Sean, they decided the rock really was too loose and came back down. They then had to wait for two more days—fortunately, they had a tent and food at the bottom—as wind and waves were just too strong and vicious to let us pick them up.

We took the boat round to Gibbs Fjord, again a remote land of stupendous rock sculptures with clear undisturbed evidence of how the glaciers have receded over the years. Initially, the rock here also looked rather loose. The desolate, remote nature of the land (both here and in Sam Ford Fjord), bad weather and the minimal nature of some of the anchorages were making this a tough expedition. We had made an inspection of the Ship's Prow and the west face of Scott Island, but the logistics of landing climbers on the sheer walls and, even more, picking them up again afterwards if the weather worsened made us cautious. But another quality

Shepton's Shove on Walker Citadel. Photo: Ben Ditto

route on a north-face arête further into Gibbs Fjord was climbed here by Nico and Sean. Walking the Plank was a 900-metre 5.11+ on excellent rock, though some sections were covered in snow.

Whilst Nico and Sean were climbing that route, Ben and Oli walked up the hill above the boat's anchorage, thinking they didn't need to take the rifle. At the top they admired the view and had just started down when a polar bear suddenly appeared from behind a boulder only 15 metres away. They froze, but fortunately it was the polar bear that turned and ran. They returned to the boat suitably chastened.

A climb in big-wall style with portaledges had been staked out in Sam Ford Fjord, but the weather never co-operated. So all of these big wall climbs were completed by way of long alpine-style pushes, rather harder and more stressful than by conventional big wall tactics—and, completely free. There was again good bouldering at the anchorages in the inlet by Walker Citadel (Sam Ford Fjord) and at Refuge Harbour (Gibbs Fjord).

We ran out of fresh water on the return sea passage, but there was an iceberg nearby with bits broken off in the water that we could hook on board in buckets, so we were saved from a nasty death. On the final rock-strewn approach to Sisimiut, we encountered 44-knot winds—a fitting finale to a tough expedition.

Summary

Up the Creek Without a Paddle (E5 5.11+, 500m), Lurking Tower, Sam Ford Fjord, Baffin Island. FA: Ben Ditto, Sean Villaneuva, Aug. 15-16, 2014.

Imaginary Line (E3 5.10+, 1000m), Super Unknown Tower, Sam Ford Fjord. FA: Ben Ditto, Sean Villaneuva, Aug. 21-22, 2014.

Shepton's Shove (E6 5.12a, 1000m), southeast pillar, Walker Citadel, Sam Ford Fjord. FA: Nico Favresse, Oli Favresse, Aug. 23-24, 2014.

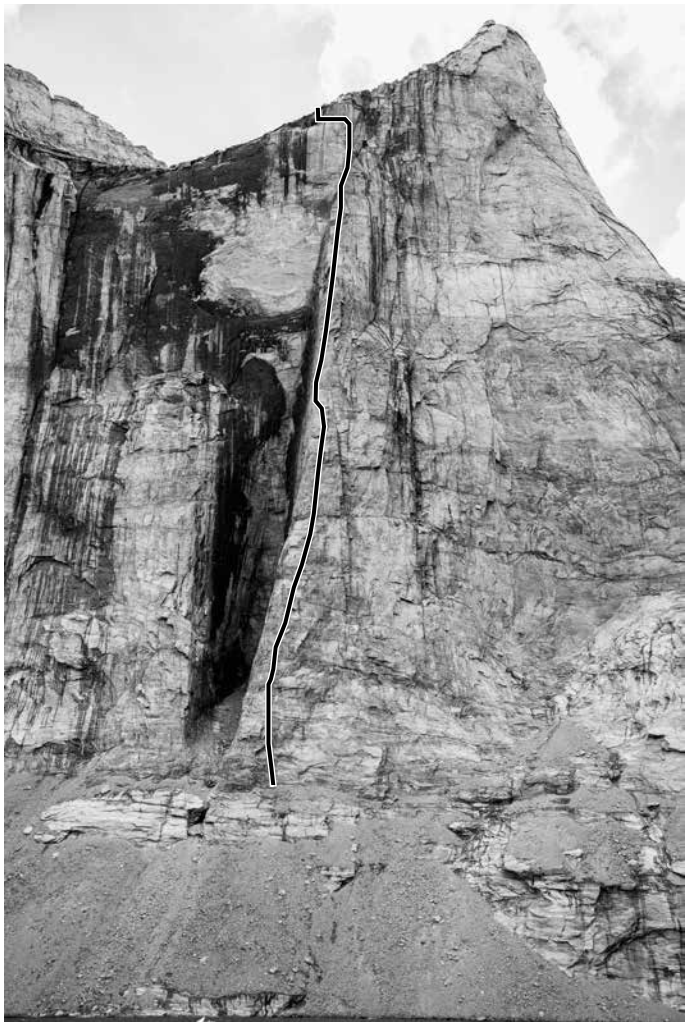
Life on the Kedge (E6, 5.12, 900m), The Turret, Sam Ford Fjord. FA: Nico Favresse, Oli Favresse, Aug. 28-29, 2014.

Walking the Plank (E4, 5.11+, 900m), Plank Wall, Gibbs Fjord. FA: Nico Favresse, Sean Villaneuva, Sept. 4-5, 2014.

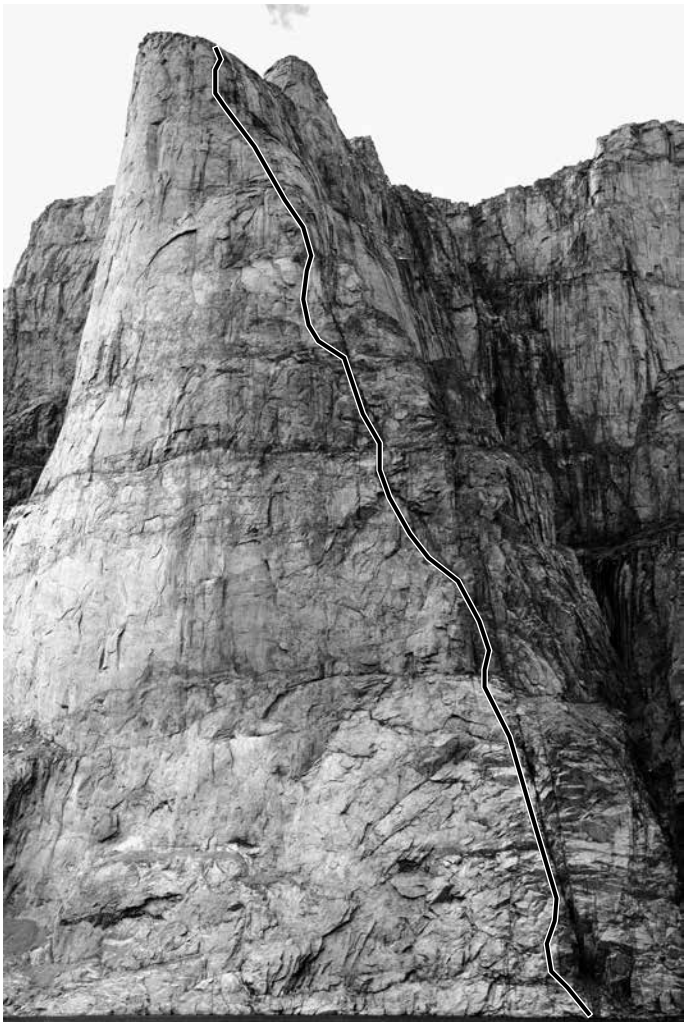
Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the Gino Watkins Memorial Fund for their generous support of this expedition.

Life on the Kedge on The Turret. Photo: Ben Ditto



Imaginary Line on Super Unknown Tower. Photo: Ben Ditto



Lurking Tower

Mike Libecki

I first went to Baffin 17 years ago. It is where my true love of expeditions and big wall first ascents began. This magical Arctic land planted the seed of passion, obsession and, admittedly, addiction that has led me to every continent and the most remote areas of the planet on more than 55 expeditions.

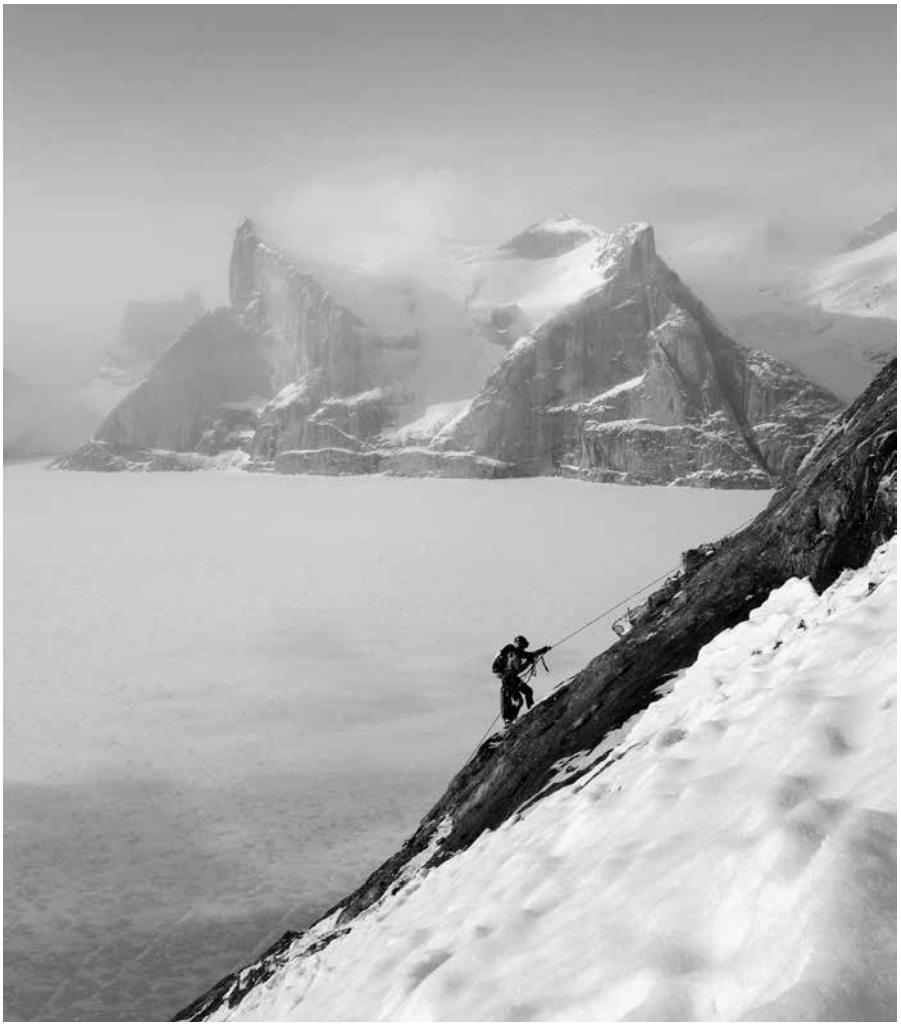
I had planned to go alone—as I often do. But then I got a random call from a good friend of mine from Sweden, Jonas Haag. I had already secured my tickets to Baffin and the trip was less than two weeks away. In the months prior, Jonas had expressed interest about getting into big wall climbing, yet had never attempted it. I said to Jonas, "Hey, man, you should just come to Baffin with me. Get some intense big wall experience—fast!" He had some knowledge from cragging and such, and had been up Denali, as well as Cotopaxi and Antisana in Ecuador, so he had a good idea about the enjoyment of expedition mayhem. He called me the next day after somehow getting a month off from work. Baffin bound!

Before long we were sitting in a komatik behind a snowmobile, gliding over the frozen ocean on the way to Sam Ford Fjord. I had never seen so many polar bear tracks in Sam Ford Fjord before. Levi, my friend and local Inuit guide, mentioned the bears were busy in this area more than ever before. There was a mother and two cubs and two big males within a few kilometres. Our goal was to go into Sam Ford Fjord and look for the best line we could find. It was not necessarily about the formation, as it sometimes can be—we were going to reconnoitre as many walls as we could with the time allotted on the komatik and focus on finding a line that any obsessed climber would be organically drawn to. After cruising around the fjord for many hours on snowmobiles, scoping with binoculars, we found our destination—a beautiful tower on the northeast side of Walker Arm. I remembered staring at this tower from the other side of the fjord for more than a month in 1998 when Josh Helling, Russell Mitrovich and I climbed the Mahayana Wall on Walker Citadel.

When we arrived at the base of the tower by snowmobile, I immediately saw two possible lines. We unloaded our haul bags and set up base camp below. The following day, we studied a line on the southwest buttress, and the more we looked, the more aweing it became. Almost half the route looked to be comprised of thin, splitter cracks up golden granite, and the rest was mysterious red-granite corners—some of which would end up providing journeys through mottled sections of black-and-white, narwhal-skin-coloured rock.

I got to lead every pitch and haul the bags. Jonas learned to jug and clean, which is no easy task—along with the hundreds of variables that go along with a huge first ascent on a sub-zero Arctic wall. I was blown away by Jonas' work, psych and commitment. After a week on the wall, climbing capsule style with two portaledge camps, we fixed ropes high above the second camp then blasted to the summit in a 35-hour push. A total of 17 pitches led us to an easy hike to the summit. We climbed the pitches hammerless and all clean, which was

Jonas Haag on pitch 15 of New Dogs, Old Tricks. Photo: Mike Libecki



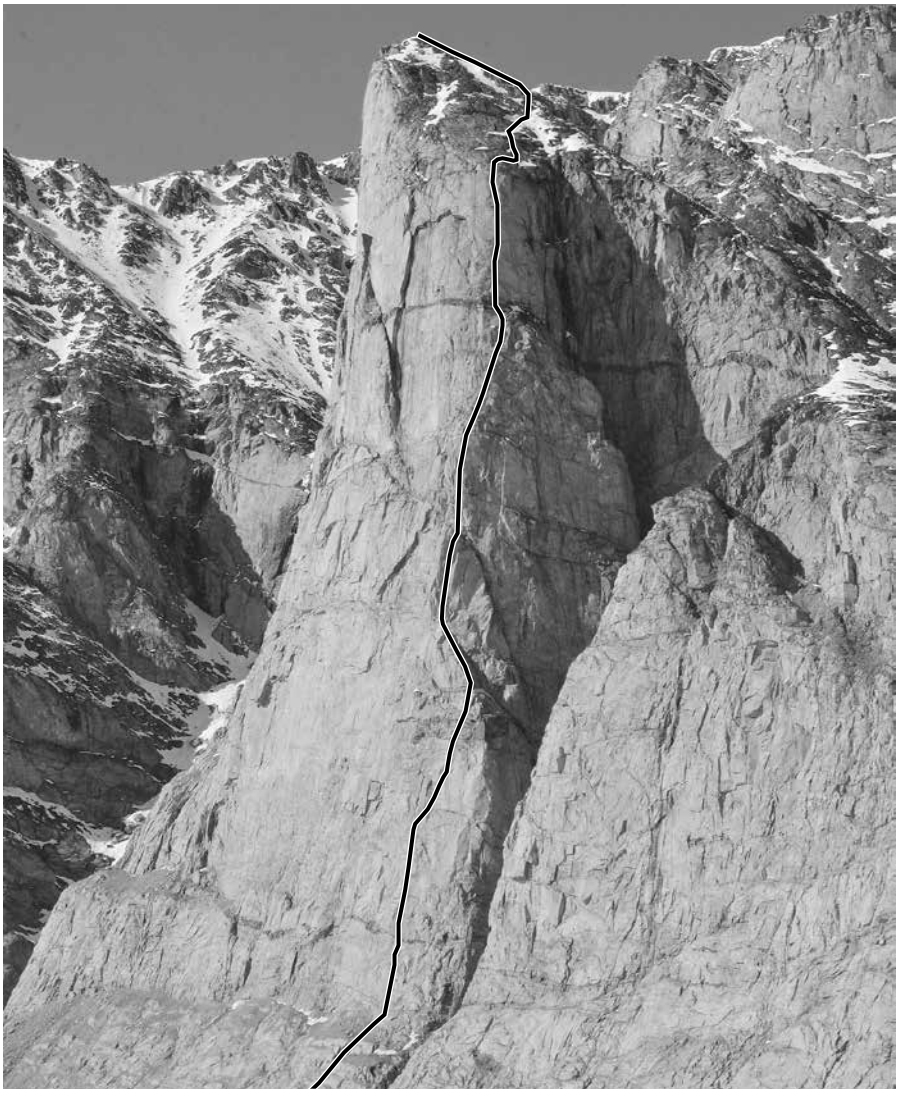
pretty cool for a first ascent on an Arctic wall (I did place some anchor bolts). Plus, there were only about five pitches of Russian-roulette rock climbing on loose flakes. For the most part, the rest was splitter dream cracks.

I had a terrible rockfall experience when I lightly tapped on a big flake and it suddenly came off, pinning me against the wall. The flake weighed at least 150 kilograms. It was hyper madness! It took everything I had to lift the flake and drop it below me. Luckily, it did not hit the ropes below, or Jonas. I always place anchors so they are out of the way of possible rockfall. This has saved my partners and me more than once. A crucial part of a first ascent on a big wall is knowing where and when to build anchors.

Horizontal crux of the trip? We saw two huge male polar bears, one not far from our base camp and another just a few kilometres away. On the ground, we slept with a loaded rifle, hoping for the best. On our way out, we learned a bear had ambushed two Inuit hunters north of us, and they'd barely survived. One hunter had been dragged out of the tent with his head in the jaws of the polar bear.

Summary

New Dog, Old Tricks (VI 5.11 C3+, 900m, 17 pitches), Lurking Tower, Sam Ford Fjord, Baffin Island. FA: Jonas Haag, Mike Libecki, May 8-22, 2014.



New Dog, Old Tricks on Lurking Tower. Photo: Mike Libecki

Meije

Laurnet Janssen

WHEN WE FIRST THOUGHT of going to Baffin Island, getting there always seemed to be the crux of the trip. It took us about 10 years to finally round up a plane ticket to Pangnirtung, Nunavut. Our objective was to climb in the renowned Auyuittuq National Park on Baffin Island with a base camp at Summit Lake for an attempt on the Scott Route—possibly the most repeated line up the 1,200-metre south face of Mount Asgard—and whatever else we would fancy to climb.

From Pangnirtung, the best way to get through the fjord and into the valley is to hire a local to take you by boat. This saves dozens of kilometres of back-breaking trails along the south side of the valley. Weighing in at 50 kilograms, our packs did not carry themselves. Since we were on a tight budget, we opted to spend the extra loonies on a boat ride rather than hire a guide to drop a gear cache over the preceding winter. Freeze-dried food, nuts and cereals it would be.

We trudged to Summit Lake in four days. Three of which were spent hiking and one waiting for the water level to drop to safely cross a side creek. We averaged a speed of about one kilometre per hour. We walked every day as far as our legs could carry us, which was not much; they would cramp in protest after about 10 kilometres.

Upon arriving at Summit Lake, we were fogged in for four days, and then the sun came out and the forecast called for a long-lasting and stable high-pressure

system. We packed our stuff and left for Caribou Glacier towards Mount Asgard with five days of food and fuel. We pitched our tent next to the Upper Parade Glacier and the descent route. It was a strategic spot and the view of Asgard was incredible.

The next day, after a restless and anxious night, we approached the Scott Route under a bluebird sky and the morning sun. An incredible amount of good climbing went by very quickly—most of it simul-climbing. We then unroped for the 4th class and roped up again at the base of the headwall. Thirteen hours after leaving our tent, we were on the flat top of Asgard. The 12-year-old dream became a reality. A pretty straightforward but slightly exposed descent got us back at our campsite three hours later. Our good friend Lagavulin was glad to see us.

After a day of rest and feeling really good, we headed towards the base of Mount Loki. We pitched our tent near the base of its southwest face. With not much route information, no set goal and even less pressure, we hiked up the glacier to scout its south-facing wall. We found an appealing line that would follow a big dihedral and buttress system that led to the ridge just west of the main summit. The line seemed reasonable, and we both agreed we should give it a go instead of trying to follow previously climbed terrain. We argued over the attack plan and what gear to bring. If it were me, we would carry packs; if it was up to Vincent, we wouldn't carry anything. In the end, we met in the middle and carried one reasonable pack with one ice axe. We would leave the other pack with the crampons and the other axe at the base of the climb. This would allow us to negotiate the crevasses on the way to the climb with the necessary gear, and pick it up on the way back after the west-ridge descent.

We thought the glacier looked pretty safe between the west ridge descent and the start of our climb, so why bother carrying crampons?

The next morning, with an alpine start, we navigated the crevasses and were quickly at the base of the climb. We ditched the one pack on the glacier, and once on rock, we threw our crampons as far as we could down the glacier. The climbing was good and pretty steady around the 5.8 to 5.9 grade. The rock was clean and the line obvious. Some pitches in the dihedral were wet, but the rock was featured enough. At the top of the dihedral, we traversed right onto a buttress to reach a good crack system that led to the top. The higher we got the easier the climbing became. We slowly realized that we would make it to the top and complete our first ascent. Neither of us mentioned anything, too scared to jinx it.

We managed to cover the last 200 metres in two pitches of simul-climbing that led us to the ridge. From here, the way on the west ridge was obvious, yet scary. The north face of Loki, to the right, is overhanging and very airy. Some scary rappels off old pins (that we replaced) and super exposed scrambling got us to the glacier.

This is the point where it got really scary. The glacier was steeper and more crevassed than we expected. We did some crampon-less crevasse hopping and made slow progress. Nevertheless, we found our crampons lower on the glacier and finally got back to camp 16 hours after leaving it. Our good friend Glenrothe was glad to see us.

Summary

Meije (5.9, 600m), south face, Mt. Loki, Baffin Island. FA: Laurent Janssen, Vincent Octeau, July 30, 2014.

Meije on the south face of Mount Loki. Photo: Laurent Janssen

The West Coast

The Heart of Darkness

Colin Haley

THE HEART OF DARKNESS is a very obvious feature—a giant gash that goes straight up between the Northeast Buttress and North Rib on Mount Slesse. It's been attempted by a lot of hardcore local climbers going back to at least the early '80s, including Peder Ourum, Perry Beckham, Greg Child, Joe Buszowski, Guy Edwards, John Millar and Jeremy Frimer (and quite likely others whom I'm unaware of). It was even once on the radar of Michael Kennedy and Jeff Lowe, which Michael told me about in an email from 2009. For those who don't know, this was in the immediate wake of Michael's first ascents of both the Kennedy-Lowe on Begguya and Infinite Spur on Sultana (one of the most badass Alaska trips of alltime):

"Jeff Lowe and I drove from Colorado to Seattle in 1977, and then flew up to Alaska. After Jeff broke his ankle [on Mount Hunter], George and I went to Foraker. We had a little money and a few days left when we got back to Seattle, so Jeff convinced me to head up to Slesse for a look. As mentioned above, I was a little wasted. All I remember is driving up a logging road (I think it goes much further in now) then slogging for a very long way through the brush until we got into the valley below the face. With Jeff's partially healed ankle, the weather (not so appealing) and my almost-catatonic state, we didn't have a chance. I think we spent the night but maybe not."

For many years the high point on the Heart of Darkness had only been reached by Guy Edwards during an attempt with Jeremy Frimer. Several years ago, Dylan Johnson made an attempt with Roger Strong, and they matched Guy and Jeremy's high point.

Ever since Mark Bunker and I succeeded on Mount Stuart's complete North Ridge in winter 2005, the Heart of Darkness has been my highest-priority project in the Cascades. However, in the past decade, I haven't spent much time in the Cascades in general, and I never made a real attempt. Dylan and I drove to the trailhead a couple of years ago with the Heart of Darkness on our minds, but realized immediately that we had come too late in the spring.

Hiking into the basin below Slesse's east face, I could feel that my legs were tired from a first ascent on Mount Colfax in Washington the day before, but it was obvious that conditions were exceptionally good. Before us, we could see all the awesome attributes of winter climbing—spectacular scenery and vegetation-free climbing—with none of the disadvantages, like long approaches and wallowing in deep snow. We hiked all the way to the memorial plaque on dry ground, and then crunched across the basin on firm snow. By contrast, my last wintertime visit to Slesse (2012 with Nick Elson) ended in metre-deep soft snow at the memorial plaque, having spent a long, hard day skiing from the Chilliwack Lake Road.

On March 8, our alarm malfunctioned and we didn't leave from our tent in the basin until almost first light—an unintended late start. Nonetheless, we definitely appreciated the extra sleep after several days of early wake-ups. We had a bit of trail-breaking on the way up to the start of the route, but nothing in comparison to a normal winter. Dylan crossed the bergschrund and we started simul-climbing up the couloir at 8:20 a.m.

The Heart of Darkness has three distinct sections: a lower couloir, a crux section midway and an upper couloir. We climbed both the upper and lower couloirs as individual pitches of simul-climbing. Under more typical conditions they might have had some tricky bits, but in the exceptionally good conditions we encountered, the couloirs had difficulties only to about AI3/AI4.

In the couloirs, the exceptionally good conditions allowed us to move faster than we would have otherwise. In the crux section, the excellent conditions made a much larger difference. On Dylan's previous attempt, Roger led a pitch of M6 R to their high point, which was estimated to be roughly the same as Guy's high point. A pitch that turned back Guy must've been serious business. By contrast, on our ascent, I led an 80-metre pitch of straightforward AI4 to past the previous high points—conditions make all the difference in the world.

After the long AI4 pitch, I led a short traversing pitch rightwards to rejoin the guts of Heart of Darkness at the base of the upper couloir. This pitch involved some straightforward aid climbing to start, and I'll even say that it was enjoyable, pounding horizontal knifeblades into a traversing crack. When the pro ran out I had to make a few free-climbing moves on a balancy traverse (M5+), which felt spicy with a big overhang below, but a fall

Dylan Johnson halfway up Heart of Darkness. Photo: Colin Haley

only would have been scary, not dangerous. We were both blown away by how casually we had negotiated the crux. We had come expecting a very serious, very difficult battle through this section. Instead, it was fun and fast.

For years of scheming about the Heart of Darkness, I always knew that I wouldn't consider it complete without continuing to the summit of Slesse (it's easy to bail down the west side). I always imagined difficult mixed climbing on the upper North Rib, and it was for exactly this reason that I climbed the North Rib in 2010 with Nick Elson, to learn what the terrain was like. Upon arriving at the col, however, we were delighted to find the upper North Rib almost entirely free of snow and ice. Dylan led these last four pitches, which we could climb bare-handed in the afternoon sun. What a prime condition combo: plentiful ice in the shady, north-facing couloir followed by dry, warm rock in the sun.

Our descent was smooth with just two short rappels near the summit and a bunch of downclimbing. One slabby section, which I often rappel in summer, we easily downclimbed on a nice fat flow of WI3. The crossover descent that is normally a long, drawn-out affair of post-holing in the winter, was an enjoyable névé scamper, with amazing views back towards the north side of Slesse and out to a sunset over the Fraser Valley. Before long we were back at our tent, and a couple of hours later, back at the trailhead.

Alpine climbing is often about timing, and in this instance ours was perfect. We did nothing better than the previous attempts other than deciding to go at the right moment, which fortunately occurred when we were available to take advantage of it.

Summary

Heart of Darkness (AI4 M5+ A2, 880m), north face, Mt. Slesse, Cascade Mountains. FA: Colin Haley, Dylan Johnson, March 8, 2015.

Heart of Darkness on the north face of Mount Slesse. Photo: John Scurlock

Rethel Headwall

Jason Kruk

THE WEAK EL NIÑO weather pattern created very unusual conditions in Western Canada this winter season. Powder skiing was not happening locally and the lower-elevation waterfalls all fell down early on the West Coast, even the stalwart classics that usually remain climbable all winter. Atypical conditions meant I was visiting zones I don't visit often in mid-winter. Following my nose higher than usual, I discovered perfect winter climbing conditions on the prominent north-facing alpine wall of Mount Rethel above Wedgemount Lake, immediately north of the Blackcomb ski resort. I'm not sure of a previous unique name for this cliff other than the Wedgemount Lake Bluffs, so I propose that a better winter name for the crag would be the Rethel Headwall.

In late February, Tony Richardson called me up wanting to ditch the dampness of Squamish in search of frozen ice to climb. He was thinking we would have to drive to the Rockies, but I knew exactly where I wanted to go, just an hour's drive away. On March 2 and 3, Tony and Kye Petersen joined me for the first ascent of the two nicest-looking and least cornice-threatened of the many awesome-looking lines on the Rethel Headwall. You know the ski quality must be terrible when a pro skier of Kye's calibre wants to join an ice climbing mission!

Both lines involved 140 metres of vertical gain from the base of the wall to the rim and offered all the joys of winter climbing: steep ice, thin ice, sn'ice, névé, snow mushrooms, drytool sections and frozen turf. Neither are hard routes, but folks gunning for a repeat will want solid skills and a headspace for slightly bold climbing. The rock on Rethel is good but compact. The maximum grade for both routes was around WI4+ and M5+, with the plus added to denote the seriousness for the leader. A large selection of gear was used, including cams, nuts, pitons, stubby ice screws and 70-metre ropes. I might be a sandbagger, but ice grades are more confusing to me now than ever. These are great training routes for folks wanting to climb larger alpine features. And the little metal hut at Wedgemount Lake couldn't be more convenient.

Rethel Headwall: (1) No Cupcake, (2) Intolerant Tearin'. Photo: Jason Kruk

If the conditions present themselves, these lines should be high on the list for any coastal ice climber. They are definitely jewels. Ideal ice climbing conditions will likely coincide with great ice-skating conditions on the lake so climbers could combo with another very Canadian winter past time. The longer I live in this amazing corner of the world, the more I realize the possibility for adventure is truly limitless.

Both new routes are named for a couple of our close friends. Intolerant Tearin' is a homage to our young friend Taran, who portered cocktails and a rope up to the hut for us the night previous. A few pulls on the whiskey bottle made him less than stalwart and much too giggly walking solo on the trail back down in the dark. No Cupcakes is a wise Jonny Simms' reference. A cupcake, of course, is something that is handed to you.

Summary

Intolerant Tearin' (M5+, 140m), Rethal Headwall, Coast Mountains. FA: Jason Kruk, Kye Petersen, Tony Richardson, March 2, 2015.

No Cupcakes (WI4+, 140m), Rethal Headwall, Coast Mountains. FA: Jason Kruk, Kye Petersen, Tony Richardson, March 3, 2015.

Cardi Yak Rhythm

Lyle Knight

ANYONE WHO HAS DRIVEN the Coquihalla Highway that runs beneath the south face of Yak Peak just north of Hope, British Columbia, may know of its literary flare. The engineer of the complex series of bridges and tunnels through Coquihalla Canyon was an avid reader of Shakespeare, and it was said he would read passages from the plays to his workers around the campfire. As a result, many of the structures along the roadway are named after Shakespearean characters, such as Romeo, Juliet, Lear and Portia. One name option we considered for our new route up the sweeping south face of Yak Peak was the Twelfth Night. It felt especially poignant on the drive home in the dark on the Coquihalla Connector after our twelfth and final long day completing our 17-pitch route. Cardi Yak Rhythm (5.11b or 5.10c A0) weaves a cunning line up the centre of Yak Peak between Reality Check and Hole in My Heaven. It links up numerous clean corners and breaches a series of overlaps through gradually steepening terrain to the summit slabs.

Yak Peak (2,039 metres) is the highest point along the Zopkios Ridge that also includes Nak and Thar Peaks and part of the "Asian Group" of peak names. From the busy, four-lane highway, Yak appears as a beautiful, clean expanse of south-facing granodiorite slab that steadily steepens before the final summit slabs. It has turned the head of many a travelling climber since the "Coq" was pushed through the valley in 1987.

Rob and I were both intrigued by the potential on the face and began talking route options in 2010. We debated the pros and cons of a ground-up versus top-down approach. While the former has merit in style, it can result in unprotected slab run-outs until the next reasonable bolting stance. The top-down approach wouldn't earn us any bravery points; however, it would allow for the development of a safer and more accessible route up the face. It would provide intermediate climbers with access to the wide expanses of clean granite without having to commit life and limb to do so, including our own! In comparison to other climbs on the same face, Yak Crack (5.9-, 12 pitches) has its multiple loose and run-out corners while Reality Check (5.10+, 13 pitches) has its unnerving 35-metre 5.10+ run-out slab pitch.

From our homes in the Okanagan valley, it's about a three-hour drive and 45-minute hike to the base of Yak Peak. In the winter, we had poured over high-res photographs of the face to determine what features could be linked. On August 19, 2011, Rob and I built our first rap anchor near the top of Yak Crack and ventured down onto the summit slabs. We made long rappels, wandering around the face to assess the features and determine the route. The 12 stations we installed that day would provide for a quick escape in the event of inclement weather and future belay points for us to work between while developing the route.

From August 2011 to September 2014, we visited Yak Peak 12 times as a party of two or three, commuting more than 6,000 kilometres and making eight trips to the summit to establish the climb. In September 2011, I put up pitch one to three solo. In July 2014, Rob and I rapped down and climbed out from the top of pitch 13 to establish the last three pitches on lead. We were able to sufficiently bolt those six pitches without having to run it out between adequate stances.

The remainder of the pitches were

Gary Wolkoff on the crux pitch (pitch eight) of Cardi Yak Rhythm. Photo: Lyle Knight

top-roped before the redpoint to best determine the bolt placements. Run-out sections or areas of marginal gear were later supplemented with bolts to keep the route consistently protected from bottom to top. We redpointed all pitches over four climbing seasons and climbed the route in a 12-hour push to the summit in September 2014.

Pitch one through three is easy slab-plodding and follows a general line of weakness. Finding the bolts on the sea of granite may be the hardest part of this section. The second half of the third pitch is a beautiful, left-facing layback flake that widens to four inches (5.6). This may be where Don Serl and Geoff Creighton's Madness crosses over. Pitch four and five ramp up through a series of three overlaps and provide good entertainment. The first half of the fifth pitch follows a shallow finger crack onto considerably thinner padding above (5.10c). The top of pitch five or the end of the arch on pitch six (5.9) may be the rappel point for less-experienced friction climbers and provides a good day out all on its own.

If your feet and head allow, pitch seven takes Cardi Yak Rhythm up another notch in difficulty, and the final few metres to the station (5.10+) are a good warm-up for the crux pitch above. On pitch eight, the 5.11b section is best belayed from the intermediate station. There are enough bolts to pull through at A0 if necessary, and the pitch is less than 20 metres long. Pitch nine is mostly on gear from thin TCUs up to four inches through a sweet roof (5.10c).

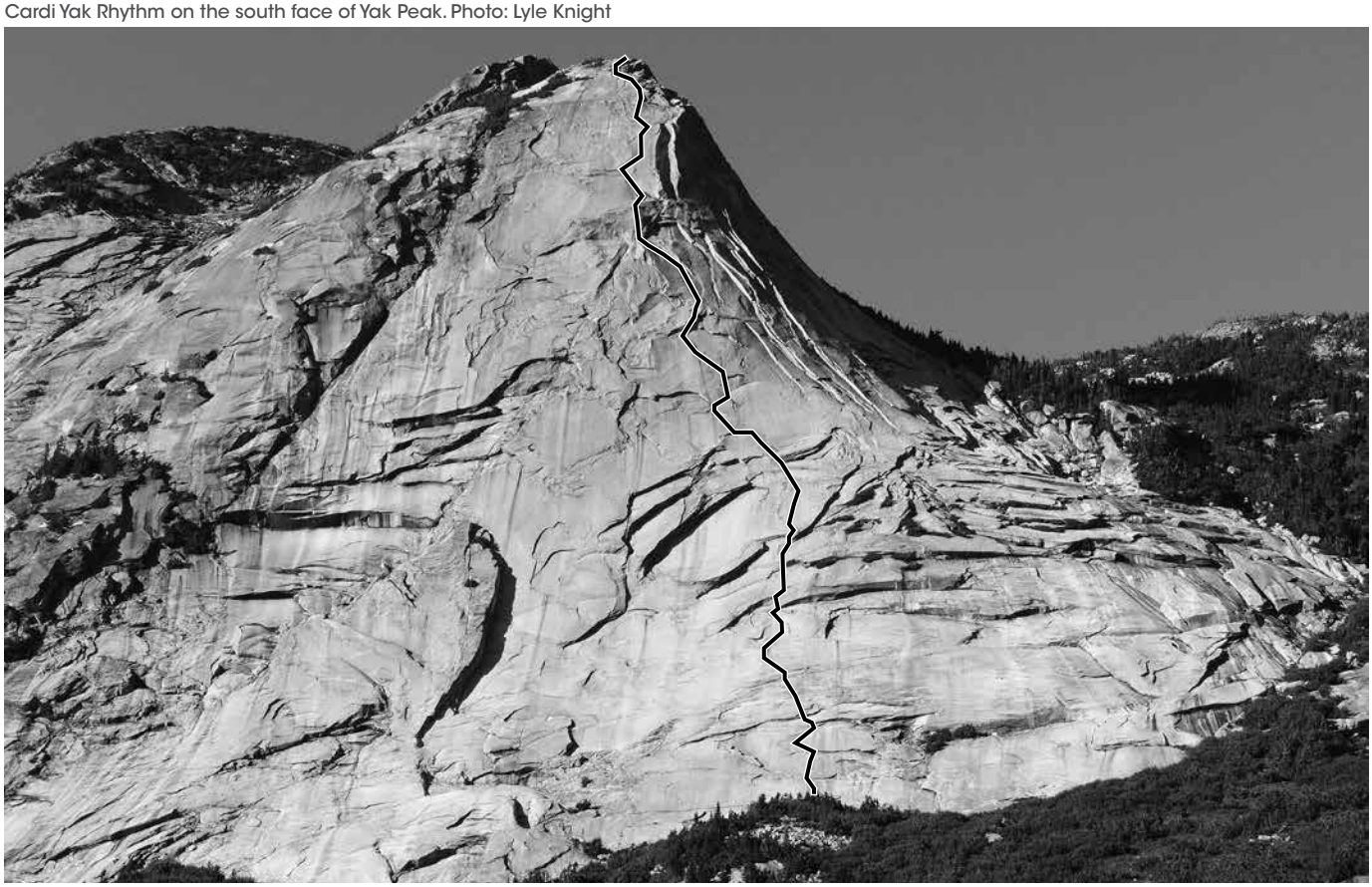
Pitch 10 and 11 arch out left with pitch 10 (5.10a) being a bit stout and the start of pitch 11 (5.10b) often being damp (there are three bolts to help navigate through just in case). The top of pitch 11 junctions with pitch eight of Yak Crack. I expect pitch 12 (5.10c) may become a popular bypass for the loose chimney pitch of Yak Crack. Pitch 13 (5.10a) arches out left to belay at the base of the final crux headwall. Once established on the face, clean golden granite patina edges make for a memorable pitch (5.11b). From there the route easily plods up slabs to the finish and walk-off.

Cardi Yak Rhythm is best climbed with a single 70-metre rope (trailing a second cord for long raps) and a standard rack to four inches (maybe double up on cams 00 to 2.5 inches). There are numerous mid-stations if rope drag becomes an issue on the long, slabby pitches. The climb starts easy and gradually ramps up in angle and grade through a series of overlaps. It's straightforward to quickly bail from any pitch, so less-experienced slab climbers can pitch it out until they've reached their limit. The route provides ample adventure for climbers of all skill levels, with reasonable access to this broad sea of clean granite.

Summary

Cardi Yak Rhythm (5.11b or 5.10c A0), south face, Yak Peak, Cascade Mountains: FA: Rob Birtles, Lyle Knight, Gary Wolkoff, Sept. 6, 2014.

Cardi Yak Rhythm on the south face of Yak Peak. Photo: Lyle Knight



Unfinished Business

Philip Stone

AS A CLIMBER AND GUIDEBOOK author, I've been on both sides of the perennial pitfalls of written route descriptions. All climbers seek accurate beta, and writers do their best to research and present that beta, but we all know that there are some notorious bloopers out there. Over the past decade, alpinism on Vancouver Island has exploded—likely due to a whole list of factors, one of which is definitely inversely related to the stock pile of *Island Alpine* guidebooks in my office storeroom. As 2012 rolled around, I began to realize that my 2003 print run was almost sold out and that there were close to 5,000 people with that book on their shelves, some of whom may possibly expect an update. Not to mention the new climbers that would be without a guidebook if I didn't get to work on it. Thus began a three-year mission to rewrite the bible for Island mountaineers.

Along the way, there were many new routes to include, classics to revisit and, inevitably, mistakes to correct. I discovered one of the more egregious errors as I reread Ferris Neave's account of his climb with his brother Hugh and Karl Ricker on the west face of Mount Colonel Foster in the 1958 *CAJ* (p.41). It became glaringly obvious that I had completely misinterpreted the couloir they had climbed, assuming it was up a strikingly obvious crescent-shaped snow chute in the middle of the west face. On closer inspection, I realized their route had taken a much less distinct gully between the southwest and southeast peaks, which had led them onto the summit ridge painfully far from the main summit. That trio was more than capable of reaching and claiming the Island's last great summit prize, but their miscalculation of the peak's high point stymied their effort and left it to Mike Walsh to finally reach the Colonel's apex a decade later.

Luckily, Neave's account is so well written that there would be no need to repeat the climb to craft an accurate description, made all the better by actually now being able to pinpoint its location. But the process of correcting the misunderstanding began to make me ever more curious about this great west couloir. What was it all about? The main reason for my confusion is because it is such an obvious line. Despite being in the middle of the sunny west face, it holds snow from bottom to top most years all the way into fall and it tops out on the summit ridge only a couple of hundred metres from the main summit. The Great West Couloir clearly has potential to become a standard route to the top of Mount Colonel Foster, a summit renowned for repulsing attempts to climb it.

To get to the point, the more I worked on the new guidebook edition, the more I found myself thinking about Colonel Foster. And it wasn't just the Great West Couloir. In August 2014, Darren Wilman and I had made a timefoiled run up the long ridge arm that wraps around the south side of Colonel Foster's east cirque high above Landslide Lake. From various vantages, I had seen that the ridge was quite narrow and it looked to be technically quite straightforward, potentially giving a really outstanding moderate scramble right through the heart of Vancouver Island's most spectacular alpine terrain between Foster and Rambler Peak onto a high point, Slocomb's Rise (1,840 metres). Darren and I advanced quite far up the ridge before encountering a funky dogleg that the clock just wouldn't allow for, so we had turned around leaving unfinished business that gnawed at me the closer the book drew to completion.

In July 2014, my wife, Renée, and I headed for the Great West Couloir, opting to approach it from the North Col. This turned out to do us no good as we discovered that despite the map giving the impression of the couloir being midway on the west face, the approach is half as long again from the North Col as the South Col.

I mentioned both the ridge and couloir to my good friend Josh Overdijk, and in late August 2014, the two of us set off up the Elk River trail with it in mind to climb one or the other. As we barrelled up the trail, I reviewed the various ways I had accessed the ridge in the past. At some point we agreed that instead of covering the same ground that Darren and I had the previous year, following the ridge crest direct from Landslide Lake, we would hike up the Elk valley closer to Rambler Peak and use a sidehill shortcut I had used twice before to reach the base of the upper steep part of the ridge.

We passed the hemlock camp and began the uphill grind through the boulder field and onto the open avalanche chutes, where there is an excellent view of the ridge that leads up to Slocomb's Rise. It wasn't the ridge crest that really caught our eye but a steep, clean buttress on the east side of the ridge, joining it immediately above the dogleg that had turned Darren and I around the year before. Should we take a chance on that? There was decent rock and nice scrambling on the crest for sure and the buttress looked especially inviting and clean, all except for a series of roofs at the very base—but experience said there would likely be a way around that. If not, we'd lose time and the gamble would be lost.

Josh and I crossed the little torrent of the Elk River and scratched around on the hillside for a bivy spot. We found a couple of gravel patches that levelled out and we hit the sack.

Next day we were up before first light and went through the morning rituals of cursing the chilly early fall temperatures and savouring every last drop of coffee before heading up some smooth rock slabs above our camp. The outline of the roofs we had seen the evening before had given us a pretty good landmark to aim

for, which was invaluable as we crossed bands of 3rd-class rock and patches of 5th-class bush searching for the clean buttress above. The ledges and steps gradually steepened until we found ourselves on a surprisingly narrow stance right below our roofs. Sure enough, it looked like there was a line that avoided them up to the right. We roped up and Josh took the lead, gingerly stepping over a few loose blocks to get onto a ramp underneath the roofs. Sure enough there was a steep but straightforward corner system that was the key to unlocking a wide sweep of clean rock above.

We continued, basically following the crest of the buttress as it steadily tapered and the views of Rambler Peak and Elkhorn opened up. The rock was flawless—clean coarse red basalt that Island climbers are so familiar with. The terrain varied from 3rd class to about 5.8, with most of the climbing clocking in at low- to mid-5th class. At the top of the sixth pitch, the buttress was pinched to a narrow width as a deep gully cut in on the left side. At a ledge on the crest of the buttress was an amazing boulder-pinnacle belay and one of the steeper 5.8 pitches above. These next two pitches were highlights with great rock and fun climbing. The last pitch was fairly easy, but delivered a fantastic finish onto the crest of the main ridge and jaw-dropping exposure that overlooked Landslide Lake and the huge east face of Colonel Foster.

Josh and I had joined the main ridge just above the dogleg that Darren and I had turned back from; a quick look down revealed no major surprises. Now for the part I had been waiting for: from the first high point on the ridge, the crest sweeps down in a beautiful narrow arc, like a suspension bridge hanging between two alpine bridge towers. It's all easy terrain, just a walk, but it's a couple of hundred metres worth savouring as the atmosphere amidst the neighbouring faces is stunning.

At the far side of the suspension-bridge ridge, a pair of exposed vegetated gullies led up to the top of the second bridge tower, which marked the end of the exposed terrain. We walked along the crest and up to the top of Slocomb's Rise, enjoying the warmth of the south-facing slopes and a refreshing drink from the clear meltwater that ran off the high snowfield on Slocomb's east side. From near the top of Slocomb's Rise is a gully that leads down to the South Col of Colonel Foster. Now that the Suspension Ridge has been fully explored, someone should complete a full traverse around the Landslide Lake cirque, including the Mount Colonel Foster summit traverse.

Josh Overdijk on Gambler's Bluff. Photo: Philip Stone

Josh and I dawdled plenty on the way down. The upper Elk Valley is a shady place (other than at midday) and there was no need to shiver back at camp any more than necessary. We chatted about the Great West Couloir and agreed that we had made the right choice to hit up

the ridge as a summer route; we would have to come back that winter to have a look at the couloir.

A few months later, the new edition of *Island Alpine Select* was out the door. The Island was blessed with a nice early winter cold snap, and I had squeezed in a couple of good days, including a quick trip with Hunter Lee up King's Peak where we looked over at Colonel Foster and plotted a trip with Josh to the west face. Hunter had used the couloir as a descent off a climb up the east face the winter before and confirmed its character.

The cold weather held through Christmas, and between unwrapping presents and eating seasonally decadent meals, the obsessive checks of the forecast promised a perfect weather window between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve. With a plan in place, Josh, Hunter and I were once more back on the Elk River trail headed toward Mount Colonel Foster.

It was a little strange hiking up a clear trail in the dead of winter. We didn't reach snow until Landslide Lake. The snow was consolidated and we carried our snowshoes, but about halfway across, water began to pool in our tracks and it seemed prudent to use them to spread out our weight. Not to worry since the forecast was for temperatures to drop that night and stay cold until December 31—two days from then and just enough time to get up and down.

We bivied at Foster Lake under a crystal-clear, star-studded sky as the silhouette of Colonel Foster's east face loomed impossibly overhead. We chewed over a variety of objectives, including climbing an east-face route, but eventually agreed that the face was still a bit lean and we would push up the south chute toward the South Col instead. There had been about a foot of fresh snow a day or so prior, and we half expected to be spooked by the snow stability. But the more we looked, observed and studied, the more reassuring things became. The slog up to the South Col went without incident. The steepest thing encountered all day was Josh's learning curve on the snowshoes!

There was a stiff, bitterly cold wind ripping through the col as we huddled behind a large boulder for lunch. With the wind at our backs, we ascended a bit above the col, and then began the traverse across the wide snowfield below the west face toward a treed spur ridge and flat shoulder that overlooked the bottom of the Great West Couloir. The golden light of the low winter sun was glorious as we trudged across the snowfield. There is massive exposure above Donner Lake, but, again, the snow seemed locked solid onto the slope and we made it across to the shoulder just as the sun set. Above our little camp, the jagged towers of Colonel Foster were every bit the impressive alpine scene.

A pre-dawn start saw us drop off the spur ridge on its north side into a massive cirque under the north half of the Colonel's west face. The whole cirque seems to funnel up toward the Great West Couloir, showing how the glacier and subsequent avalanches that scoured out the cirque were being fed from the surrounding high terrain and at the top of the couloir. We slogged up with our snowshoes as the slope tapered into the gully. As the ground steepened, we stashed the shoes off to the side and switched to crampons. The angle was moderate with no technical climbing, but the situation was awesome. The rime-coated walls that bounded the couloir were fearsome-looking and increased the sense of isolation as we continued into our third day of travel. The entire adventure was a thrill to soak in.

After about 350 metres of 45-degree snow, there is a short 50-metre AI2 outlet (55 degrees) that leads onto the upper glacier on the summit ridge. Once again the wind was relentless through the notch at the top of the couloir. There was no qualm it was winter.

Josh and Hunter made an attempt

The Great West Couloir on Mount Colonel Foster. Photo: Philip Stone

for the summit, but I was happy enough to be on the summit ridge. My quest had been to see the couloir first-hand and figure out if it was viable as a year-round route to the main summit. Standing there below the Corporal gendarme, I now had no doubt, with the only caveat, which applies to pretty much all Island alpine snow gullies, that conditions are bound to be best with full snow cover. It's safe to say that the Great West Couloir is the fastest, least technical route to the summit of Mount Colonel Foster, and it eliminates much of the loose rock, long rappels and frequent bergschrunds that are encountered following the summit ridge from the North or South Col.

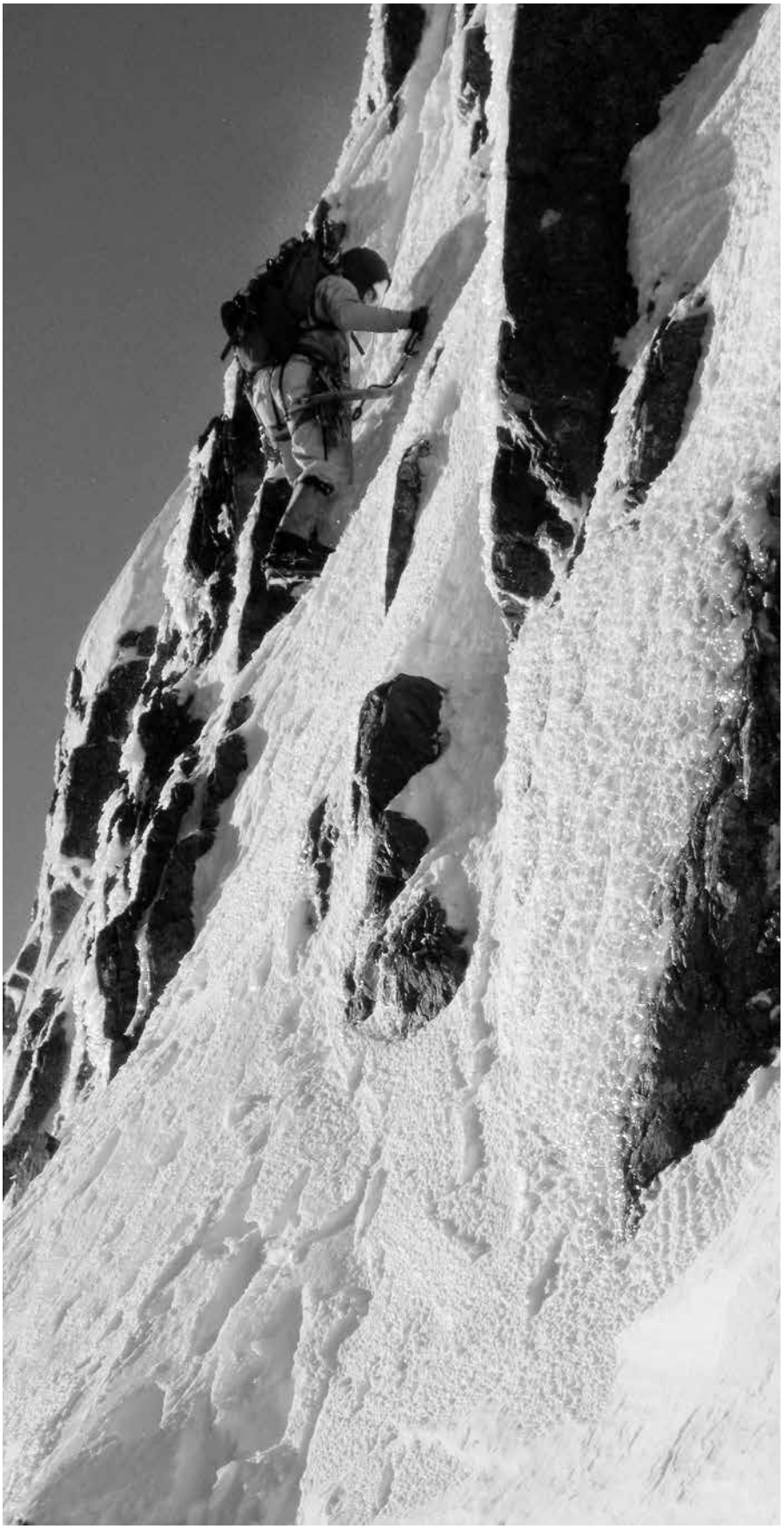
After a valiant attempt along the summit ridge, finding sketchy un-protectable rime on a crucial slab, Hunter and Josh returned to the top of the couloir and we headed down.

Our descent through the couloir went smoothly, and we were back at our bivy spot in no time. I was a tad reluctant to leave so soon since the west shoulder is such a beautiful place, but the forecasted warming trend underscored the need to avoid lingering, and we headed back. We traversed a lower line across the snowfield back to the South Col and made our way down the south chute as darkness settled in. After a questionable rappel in the lower part of the chute that kept the adrenaline flowing, we were back at our first night's bivy spot at Foster Lake for a late supper and a very deep sleep. The next day we retraced our steps out the Elk River trail and headed home for New Year's Eve.

Summary

Gambler's Bluff Righthand (D- 5.8, 350m), southeast ridge, Mt. Colonel Foster, Vancouver Island Ranges. FA: Josh Overdijk, Philip Stone, Aug. 26, 2014.

Great West Couloir (AD AI2, 325m), Mt. Colonel Foster, Vancouver Island Ranges. FA: Hunter Lee, Josh Overdijk, Philip Stone, Dec. 30, 2014.



Josh Overdijk on a steep ice step in the The Great West Couloir. Photo: Philip Stone

Straight, No Chaser

Marc-Andre Leclerc

IN LATE JULY, Brette Harrington, Hannah Preston, Andrew Rennie and I spent the better part of two weeks in the Waddington Range. We base-camped out of Sunny Knob and enjoyed near perfect weather for the majority of our stay. On our first day in the range, Brette and I established a new direct variation to the 1,500-metre south ridge of Serra 2. Although most of the route consisted of easy quality scrambling in the 5.7 range, we climbed several more difficult pitches to 5.11 A1 on the steepest section of the buttress in the vicinity of the Grand Cappuccino Tower. The route would certainly go free at 5.12, but we aided through the crux due to our backpacks, as well as only having a single rack to one inch. At one point, I ran out the rope up a long steep hand crack without any protection, due to not carrying any cams in that size, only to have the crack narrow to cruxy 5.11 ring locks. Of course, I had left my .75 Camalot lower down and found myself struggling to place a large nut to protect myself from a very dangerous ledge fall. Lesson learned.

We descended the steep avalanche-prone slope on the mountain's southeast aspect and continued directly back through the Stilletto icefall to Sunny Knob. This descent is fast, but a high level of competence in glacier navigation is required, and the objective hazards are not to be underestimated. Our new route—Straight, No Chaser (5.11 A1)—climbed approximately 400 metres of new ground. Be sure to bring a standard rack to three inches with some doubles.

A few days later, Brette, Hannah and Andrew made the first ascent of Dentaform's south ridge, beginning from the Tiedemann Glacier southeast of Sunny Knob. They encountered long sections of loose rock on the route, as well as technical climbing in the 5.9 range, and rappelled to the Upper Tellot Glacier to spend the night at the Plummer Hut before descending back to Sunny Knob. It's possible that a faster-moving party, or a party prepared to bivouac, may be able to continue this route beyond Dentaform to the summit of Stiletto Peak itself. It's worth considering; however, the fact that those three are a highly competent party, pushing beyond their high point in a single day would be a formidably long undertaking. In other words, a bivouac is very likely to be required on this route.

The same day that the others climbed Dentaform, I made solo ascents of both Serra V and Asperity Mountain in an 18-hour push from base camp. The couloirs leading to the Asperity/Serra 5 col were severely threatened by rockfall due to the dry and warm conditions, so I climbed numerous variations in order to avoid these hazards. I climbed the rock buttress climber's right of Carl's Couloir, which was approximately 400 metres in length with difficulties to 5.10a. Above this, after entering the wild cirque and crossing a steep bergschrund, I stayed climber's left of the upper couloir, finding loose rock on low-5th-class terrain. On reaching the col, I quickly bagged Serra 5 via its Northwest Corner, finding the route to be in excellent mixed conditions. This was the first solo ascent of the mountain. On returning to the col, I deemed the temperatures too warm to descend the couloirs, so I spent the next couple of hours climbing Asperity Mountain as well. Once back at the col, the sun was now off the southern aspects of the range, so I tediously downclimbed the couloirs, always feeling on edge due to frequent rockfall. The 400-metre rock variation to bypass Carl's Couloir was later named Serra Marco by Hannah and Andrew, but I decided not to call my Asperity line a new route, as it was just a criss-crossing variation to avoid objective hazards I encountered.

Hannah and Andrew later re-climbed my route to Carl's Camp, and made the first free ascent of Thunderbird on the spectacular south buttress of Serra V, eliminating a section of A1 with free climbing to 5.10+.

Brette and I made an attempt on the southeast face of Grand Cappuccino, climbing eight fantastic pitches of steep granite to 5.12a. We were turned back by an exfoliating wide crack a pitch below the summit of the tower.

We flew out after 13 wonderful days in the mountains, feeling tired, scruffy and very content. It is likely that all of us will return to climb in this wonderful and remote region of the Coast Mountains. Brette and I certainly have unfinished business with the Grand Cappuccino.

Summary

Straight, No Chaser (TD+ 5.11 C1, 1500m (400m of new terrain)), south ridge, Serra 2, Waddington Range, Coast Mountains. FA: Brette Harrington, Marc-Andre Leclerc, July 2014.

South Ridge Integral (TD 5.10a, 1100m), Dentaform Peak. FA: Brette Harrington, Hannah Preston, Andrew Rennie, July 2014.

Serra Marco (TD- 5.10a, 400m), Serra 5. FA: Marc-Andre Leclerc, July 2014.

Thunderbird (ED1 5.10+, 1500m), Serra V. FFA: Hannah Preston, Andrew Rennie, Aug. 2014.

Marc-Andre Leclerc on the crux pitch of Straight, No Chaser on Serra 2.
Photo: Brette Harrington

Slesse Addiction

Marc-Andre Leclerc

IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT I have some kind of addiction to climbing Slesse Mountain. I have now climbed the mountain more than 10 times by at least five different routes, both solo and with partners. I think the main reason for this is that the ratio between ease of access and the radness of the climbs is quite favourable when compared to much of the North Cascades. Growing up near Chilliwack, British Columbia, the regular point of access for Slesse, the mountain always seemed a formidable challenge by any of its east-side routes, but after returning from the much more serious Waddington Range, my perception shifted and Slesse began to seem a much warmer and cuddlier mountain by comparison.

With this shift in perception, I was able to envision a link-up of routes that would previously have seemed absurd: solo climbing both the Navigator Wall (ED1 5.10d, 21 pitches) and the East Pillar Direct (ED1 5.10c, 25 pitches) in a single day.

Unsure of the rock quality on these routes, I opted to systematically climb each of them with a partner in order to decide whether or not they would be reasonable to free solo. On two consecutive weekends in August 2014, I climbed Navigator Wall and East Pillar Direct with Brette Harrington and Tony McLane, respectively. Feeling confident, I returned the following weekend with Brette Harrington to attempt the link-up, while she planned to attempt a solo ascent of the North Rib (TD 5.9, 25 pitches).

Leaving the memorial plaque at 4:20 a.m., I briskly walked up to the base of the wall and began scrambling the first pitches of the East Pillar Direct by the light of my headlamp. By the time I reached the beginning of the difficult climbing, daylight had arrived, but dense fog enshrouded the mountain, providing an ominous atmosphere.

I climbed carefully over friable rock to the end of the main difficulties, and then switched back into approach shoes for the upper pitches of climbing before topping out after spending two hours on route. From the summit ridge, I made a sneaky traverse over the south summit and downclimbed the Southeast Buttress (D, 5.7, 17 pitches) until I intersected Navigator Wall in the vicinity of its third pitch. I switched back into rock shoes at the base of the first 5.10d crux and made good time soloing the route despite climbing cautiously around sections of loose rock.

From the south summit, I downclimbed the Southeast Buttress a second time, all the way to the base of the eastern wall, and found that it was only lunchtime. Jason Kruk had half-jokingly suggested adding a third route to the link-up, and now I realized that I was, indeed, in an ideal position to attempt the big triple. While it would have been easy to simply stop after two big routes, I decided I ought to take advantage of the situation, so I quickly sauntered over to the base of the Northeast Buttress (TD 5.9, 25 pitches) where I stripped down to nothing but shorts and plugged in my headphones for added motivation.

With electronic music blasting in my ears, I speed-climbed the buttress in just over an hour and added my triple link-up to the summit register before

Marc-Andre Leclerc soloing the Northeast Buttress of Mount Slesse during his triple link-up.
Photo: Bram Whillock

descending via Crossover Pass. Back at the memorial plaque, I found Brette waiting for me, reading a book. She had soloed the North Rib to the notch at the top of pitch 20, where the route meets the standard descent, and decided to stop there due to the rather threatening weather conditions. We quickly walked back to the car and were at my mother's place in Agassiz in time for dinner with the family.

Completing the triple link-up was indeed satisfying; however, it would certainly not be the last of my endeavours on Slesse Mountain.

I HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO CLIMB a big route on Slesse in the winter, and after learning to properly mix climb in the Canadian Rockies during the fall season, it became even more of a priority. I spent most of my winter in Patagonia, managing to complete some great climbs in the Torres, including a solo ascent of the beautiful Cerro Torre (see page 4).

As I made the journey back north to Canada, a bit of sleuthing had me convinced that Slesse must be in the condition of the century for winter climbing. I tried to find a partner to attempt Navigator Wall, but with only one or two days of stable weather remaining it was too short of notice. Listening to an interview with Stevie Haston on the airplane, I heard him describe his free solo ascent of the Walker Spur in winter, which got me psyched. I began to formulate a new plan.

I had now climbed the Northeast Buttress of Slesse too many times in summer, but in winter I hoped that the climb would regain much of the mystique and formidable aura it had possessed in my younger years. The line had only seen one winter ascent, in 1986 by Jim Nelson and Kit Lewis, and that ascent had required aid on the crux pitches. The unknowns lying behind the difficulty of free soloing the route in winter only added to the feeling of a true adventure in the works, but it did seem a lofty goal, so I brought along an 80-metre six-millimetre cord and some pins and wires to bail with just in case.

My sister, who lives in Chilliwack, dropped me off at the start of Nesakwatch Creek Forest Service Road, and I briskly walked to the memorial plaque beneath the mountain, where I spent the night. I awoke at 4 a.m. the following morning, and after spending nearly an hour huddled in my sleeping bag, I mustered the psych to get moving.

At 5 a.m., I left the memorial site and approached directly through the basin beneath the mountain. The snow conditions were generally quite good, and a short WI2 step soon brought me to the slightly threatened slopes beneath the toe of the buttress. I veered left here, joining the standard summer approach through the pocket glacier cirque. The upper section of the cirque still held a surprising number of deep crevasses, likely caused by avalanche debris from the east face forming deep craters on impact.

I crossed over several bergschrunds on the right hand side of the cirque and then climbed directly up to the bypass ramps leading to the buttress crest. This section, normally a 3rd-class ledge walk in summer, was a surprisingly steep and exposed traverse on snow. As I neared the crest, the angle and exposure kicked back, and I quickly made my way upwards on good snow to the first 5.8 rock pitch.

This pitch was surprisingly easy in the conditions I found it; the air was just warm enough that I could climb barehanded, as long as I stopped every two minutes to re-warm my numb fingers. The pitch only required a few minutes of careful climbing, and soon I was back on steep snow and névé, now accustomed to the exposure.

On the traverse into the Beckey Ramps, I climbed slightly too high and had to make a very exposed downclimb to reach the correct ramp on the north face. The ramps were coated with perfect ice and névé, making for fun, fast and easy climbing with a spectacular view down into the Heart of Darkness (see page 63). "This is rad," I said out loud.

The ramps led me back onto the crest of the buttress and the second 5.8 rock pitch, which looked to be slightly more mixed than the pitch lower down. I removed my gloves again and was able to climb about half the pitch with my hands before transitioning to proper mixed climbing. Finding a thin crack for my right tool, I danced over leftwards with my feet on small patches of ice until I could reach a thin veneer in which to place my left tool. The pitch felt around M5 in difficulty. Above, the climbing slowly eased off until I reached the huge bivy ledge at mid-height.

At the bivy ledge, I took a break to eat some snacks and assess conditions on the upper headwall. The steepest pitch appeared to be fairly free of ice, but above, where the angle relented slightly, the rock was decorated by a patchwork of thin white ice. It looked interesting to say the least.

The snow slope leading to the headwall was relatively boring and does not need much description, nor does the WI3 runnel I took to bypass the first 5.8 pitch on the headwall. The "rotten pillar" pitch was straightforward enough, and soon I was on the crux, stemming in crampons around detached flakes in a corner. On top of one of these flakes, I paused to remove my crampons and warm my hands before embarking on a slightly insecure bit of climbing on downward-sloping holds.

I traversed back right to a small roof, which I passed on juggy finger locks, and now at the apex of the small overhang, I was able to peer upwards to the iced-up slabs I had observed from below. It was clear I was going to need my crampons again.

I placed a large nut and clipped myself to it for security, and then gingerly stepped into my crampons one foot at a time. I mentally rehearsed my next sequence as it appeared from my airy stance, and then removed the nut securing me to the wall, and committed. I switched my feet on a good hold and stepped up and right onto the slab. With my frontpoints set in small divots, I balanced upwards, holding a small edge with my left hand for balance. I unclipped the ice tool from my right side and reached upwards for a small bit of ice pasted to the wall. Now at the edge of my comfort zone, I gently tapped

the tool twice against the ice until the first two teeth sunk in. I tested the tool carefully then took care not to make any sudden movements while I slowly searched out higher edges for my feet.

The edges I found sloped slightly downward, but my frontpoints found purchase enough to balance higher still. I carefully pulled out my left tool and placed it in thin but good ice above, bringing me to a comfortable stance on a ledge. The crux now behind me, I allowed the mental RPM to decrease steadily until I was ready to continue.

As I climbed excellent mixed terrain above, I could really admire my wildly exposed position on this beautiful mountain. The whole buttress stretched out below me, black stone stained white with snow and ice. My tools found purchase on the well-featured rock, and the climbing gradually eased off pitch by pitch until I crested the final summit ridge and found myself standing in the sun. Eating a bar with the summit register in hand, I wrote, "Northeast Buttress – 2nd winter ascent. March 9, 2015. Very exciting."

The crux pitch was likely delicate M6, perhaps M5+, but someone will have to do a second free winter ascent to verify. The west side of the mountain was surprisingly warm compared to the shady, iced-up north face, but the ledges and gullies were still covered in snow, making for a quick and pleasant descent.

Descending the scree slopes on the Crossover Pass descent was nicely facilitated by the well-settled snow, and I was rewarded with a spectacular view of the route I had just climbed. After stumbling down the steep, wooded trail below, I arrived at my bivouac site and ate a candy bar before packing up my equipment.

Walking the road back towards civilization, I pondered my options. I had no ride back and considered walking the 50 kilometres through the night to my sister's house. I thought back to the ascent I had just made, It's often surreal when a long-time dream, like climbing Slesse in winter, glides into the present, and then into the past. I knew that my mind needed a break; I needed to relax and digest the adventures of the past months.

As I thought of these things, an animal-control vehicle pulled up to offer me a ride. The driver was a likable guy named Mark and we chatted, mostly about travelling, until he pulled up to a bus stop in Chilliwack and bode me farewell. A bus arrived a moment later and soon I was just a block from my sister's home. Her husband, Robert, saw me walking down the street through the window and came to greet me at the door. They happily welcomed me in, and at 6:30 p.m. we all sat down to a delicious supper.

Summary

Slesse Triple Link-up: First solo ascents of East Pillar Direct (ED1 5.10c, 25 pitches) and Navigator Wall (ED1 5.10d, 21 pitches), Northeast Buttress (TD 5.9, 25 pitches) speed ascent, Mt. Slesse, Cascade Mountains. Marc-Andre Leclerc, Aug. 30, 2014.

First female solo ascent of North Rib to the notch at pitch 20 (TD 5.9, 25 pitches), Mt. Slesse. Brette Harrington, Aug. 30, 2014.

Second winter ascent, first solo winter ascent and first free winter ascent of Northeast Buttress (M6), Mt. Slesse. Marc-Andre Leclerc, March 9, 2015.

Mount Slesse in winter with the classic Northeast Buttress on the left. Photo: Dylan Johnson

Vancouver Island Report 2014

Lindsay Elms

WE ARE SEEING A REBIRTH in climbing on Vancouver Island by many young climbers. Although they periodically exit the Island for the "bigger" mountains, they are finding remote peaks and rarely visited walls to ply their skills, with spectacular results. They post the details of their climbs, often through photographs on Facebook, usually within hours of returning home, which in turn motivates other climbers into action and creates a snowball effect. For climbers, all this information can be found in Philip Stone's edition of *Island Alpine Select*, a new book in the Wild Isle Guide series published in December 2014.

THE WINTER OF 2014 STARTED like no other on Vancouver Island. Although some of the higher mountains received some snow, the local ski hills were wondering when they were going to get enough to open for the season. During January, very little snow fell and Mount Washington Alpine Resort remained closed. Without the ability to make snow, they were hurting. February saw a few days where there were some flurries, but it wasn't until March when the Island finally started getting any real snow accumulation and Mount Washington opened. However, what we saw unfold was climbers taking advantage of the conditions by getting into the mountains, and making a number of outstanding winter ascents. This was made possible by the lack of snow on many of the lower-elevation access roads, but still frozen conditions higher up.

The new year started off (January 3-5, 2014) with Hunter Lee and Henrik Hinkkala climbing a new route on the northwest face of Rugged Mountain in the Haihte Range [see *CAJ* 2014, p. 73]. This was the second winter ascent of Rugged Mountain—22 years after the first ascent by Sandy Briggs, Dennis Manke, Gerta Smythe and Don Berryman. Lee then went off with Philip Stone and made the first winter ascent of Crown Mountain on January 18. Three days later (January 21) Stefan Gessinger, Shanda Lembcke and Ian Kilpatrick climbed the North Summit of Triple Peak. On January 26, Josh Overdijk and Mike Boyd made the second winter ascent of the main summit of Triple Peak. Overdijk remained busy putting up two new solo routes on the east face of Kings Peak: January 29 he climbed Royal Flush, and the next day, Crown Royal.

Conditions remained perfect into February. Ahren Rankin and James Rode climbed Elkhorn Mountain (February 2-3), and then Overdijk and Joe Koropecki climbed it on February 3-4. Although one day behind Rankin and Rode, they never saw them. There were numerous ascents of the Newman-Foweraker route on Mount Arrowsmith and on the Ice Box throughout February, but the big news was a repeat ascent of the Directissima Route on the east face of Mount Colonel Foster by Lee and Mike Shives (February 6-9). The last time Colonel Foster had been climbed in winter was in 1989 (Rob Wood and John Kelson in February, and Joe Bajan and Steve Risse in March). On February 8-9, Gessinger, Kilpatrick, Lembcke, Nadja Steiner, Jonathon Bell and Anthony Bergson climbed Triple Peak (third winter ascent). Other known ascents during February include Hkusam Mountain and Pogo Mountain.

In the beginning of March, Patrick Parker and Ryan Van Horne climbed In the Groove on the east face of Mount Colonel Foster [see *CAJ* 2014, p. 82]. This was the first new winter route on Colonel Foster in 25 years.

On May 4, Brandon Hopkins, Angelica Lauzon, Valerie Wootton and Lindsay Elms visited the Nomash Valley and made the first recorded ascent of Nomash Peak (Peak 4400 in *Island Alpine*) on the south side of the valley. Two days later Wootton and Elms climbed Beano Mountain at the head of Spud Creek, the valley famous during the 1940's gold rush in Zeballos. The highlight in May was Gessinger's traverse of four peaks at the southern end of the Mackenzie Range. Although one of them, Razorback, had been climbed in 2013, the others were probable first ascents. Gessinger returned to the Mackenzie Range a little later and again traversed the peaks, but took in The Centaur this time with Lembcke.

In early June, Van Horne and Michael Loch established new route Sutton Express on the east face of Sutton Peak—seven pitches up to 5.11a. A few days later (June 7), Van Horne and Loch put a new route up on Warden Peak. They began by scrambling up the east ridge (500 metres) and intended to finish up the east face of the summit tower, but due to wet rock, they were forced around to the south where they found solid, dry rock. They also climbed Just An Other Best Day Ever on the north end of the west face of Warden. A month later, on July 1, Van Horne and Aum Song established Holy Horseshoes on the north end of Sutton Peak's east face. Also on June 7, but on another part of the island, Matt Coady, Randy Mercer and Francis Bruhwiler climbed the remote Mount Hall via its southwest ridge.

Early July, Van Horne and Marie-Lou Piché completed a new route—In the Presence of the Queen—on the east face of Warden Peak. Meanwhile in the Haihte Range, Wootton, Elms, Chris Ruttan, Rod Szasz and Walter Moar made the first ascent of the northeast face of Ya'ai Peak. The Haihte Range saw quite a bit of activity this summer with several ascents of Rugged Mountain, the Merlon Peaks, Haihte Spire, Ya'ai Peak and several smaller summits. In late July, Van Horne, John Waters and Curtis Lyon climbed a new line on the south face of Ya'ai Peak.

Another route that saw a lot of

activity this summer was the beautiful west ridge of Rambler Peak at the head of the Elk River. The Golden Hinde (the Island's highest mountain) continued to be a popular destination with numerous ascents, including a light and fast 16-hour 18-minute return trip via Phillips Ridge in early August by Rumon Carter and Jamie Spalding. They took four hours off the existing fastest known time. In the same area, The Behinde saw several ascents, and The Comb, the summit immediately to the north of The Golden Hinde, saw two ascents. The Golden Hinde Northwest, immediately to the north of The Comb, was climbed from the Wolf River by Elms and Wootton.

In August Mike and John Waters climbed Cyclops on the east face of Warden Peak, and in late August, Van Horne and Parker put a new six-pitch route up on the north face of Victoria Peak. Other ascents of rarely climbed peaks in August included: Ptarmigan Pinnacles, Mount Haig Brown, Mount Cobb and El Piveto Mountain. Mount Cobb was again climbed in September, as was Mount Filberg. The summit register on top of Mount Cobb was placed there in 1992, and between 1992 and 2014 there had been only nine ascents.

In early September, Darren Wilman spent a few days in the remote peaks south of the Burman River and climbed Splendor Mountain, Hygro Peak and The Scissors, while a little further to the south Elms, Wootton and Rod Szasz climbed Centre Peak, Sabre Peak 1, 2, 3 and 4, Sabretooth Peak (first ascents), Scimitar Peak via the south ridge, Mitla Peak and Mitla Spire. This was the seocnd ascents of Mitla Peak and Mitla Spire after Darren Wilman and Alana Theoret first climbed them back in 2008.

Between September 5 and 11, Overdijk and Boyd undertook a six-day traverse of the Elk River Watershed. This was first attempted by Greg Foweraker and Peter Croft, and more recently by John and Mike Waters and Renee Monjo in 2009. The pair started late on the day and bivied below the north ridge on Kings Peak. On the second day, they climbed the north ridge on Kings Peak and traversed the pinnacles over to the north ridge of Elkhorn Mountain. From the summit, they descended the West Couloir and traversed across the southwest face to a bivy in the col between Elkhorn Mountain and Elkhorn South. On September 7, they continued over Elkhorn South, and after looking at the traverse towards Rambler Peak, they decided to drop down into the east branch of the Elk River. From Elk Pass they climbed Rambler Peak via the Spiral Staircase and then bivvied at Elk Pass. On September 8, they climbed over Mount Slocomb and traversed the summit ridge on Mount Colonel Foster where they bivied between the northeast and northwest summit. On September 9, they descended the gully between these peaks and crossed Butterwort Creek at its headwaters. They continued on up the South Ridge of Puzzle Mountain and traversed across to Wolf Mountain. Their final bivy was just beyond the summit of Wolf Mountain overlooking the highway. The next morning they had an easy descent to the highway near Crest Creek Crags.

On September 13-14, Loch and Van Horne established a new route, Loch'n Horne's, on one of the buttresses to the north of Rambler Peak from Cervus Creek. All summer long they had been thinking about this line, but were forced into action when a photo of the buttress appeared on Facebook. Van Horne was concerned that someone would beat him to the line, but there didn't appear to be any takers. On the Saturday, Loch and Van Horne hiked up the Elk River and climbed over the pass between Elkhorn South and Rambler. It only took them six hours to reach the base of the climb. They soloed about half the route and slept on the route. Next day, they soloed some more then roped up and climbed five pitches of 5.8 past two roofs and onto the summit ridge.

Van Horne continued climbing into November and put a new route up on the east face of Mount Adam with Piché. At the same time, Overdijk, Peter Hartmann and Laura Marie drove up the Nomash Main to the Rugged Mountain trailhead (November 11). The next morning, starting bright and early, the three made it to a ridge just below the alpine. Hartmann and Overdijk kept going, reaching the summit of the South Merlon via a new line on the southwest face. With the wind picking up in strength, they hastily rappelled the route. It remained windy all night so they decided to head home instead of attempting another summit.

Unusual cold snaps continued to dominate the island off and on throughout November and December and a number of ice routes were climbed. Father and son, Derek and Steve Janes, along with Kory Green attempted Elkhorn on December 26, but were thwarted by deep fresh snow high on the west ridge. However, the weather continued improving and temperatures dropped due to an Arctic outflow from the interior. Some of the Island's hardcore climbers were out taking advantage of this break. Daniel Booy and Connor O'Sullivan made the first winter ascent of the rarely climbed Mount Romeo from Montague Creek on December 29. On the same day Mike and John Waters, along with Aaron Smeeth made the first winter ascent of Mount Harmston from Kweishun Creek and Milla Lake. This is one of the last of the 2,000-metre peaks on the Island to receive a winter ascent and has been an ongoing project that the Waters twins have been working on over the last few years. Another notable ascent during this period was made by Stone, Overdijk and Lee on Mount Colonel Foster. After going over the South Col, they traversed around the west side of the mountain to the West Couloir and climbed it to the summit ridge (see page 68). Unfortunately, the main summit wasn't reached due to conditions. This is the first winter route on the west side of the mountain.

The Interior

Ethereal

Jen Olson

THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL of days in a climber's life when weather, conditions and partner align like the planets to create a rare event—a magical first ascent. Tim McAllister and I have more than 50 years of climbing between us, and we both cherish Ethereal as one of the highlights of our climbing careers. The amount of work and sweat equity put into our passion definitely defines climbing as a career.

We arrived at the Kain Hut at midnight after making the last-minute decision to capitalize on an improving weather forecast and prime conditions. After sleeping in past our alpine start time, we were happy to meet our friends, Jeff and Mike, in the kitchen of the hut. We all agreed upon different objectives and went merrily on our way under starry skies. Tim and I couldn't stop taking photos so we ended up being almost an hour behind our fast friends.

We had planned to attempt a new line on the far left side of the northeast face of South Howser Tower, but we hadn't expected to see the arrow of ice—between our planned line and Perma Grin—that drew our eyes and hearts into longing and excitement. The best and worst thing about attempting a new line is the unknown, the uncertainty. Will it go? Will we have to retreat in disappointment? Will there be protection, or even a retreat anchor? Uncertainty prevailed for the first half of the route. However, the excitement of a small child on Christmas Day also filtered through the shadows of doubt.

Jen Olson on the crux (pitch five) of Ethereal. Photo: Tim McAllister

We were so psyched to be climbing such an exquisite line of ice in one of our favourite places in the world, all under clear skies. It was worth the risk of failure and retreat.

We melted some extra drinking water at the base of the face while we fantasized about the possible exits to the obvious gem of a line we were drooling over. We made a mental note of the options that would become less apparent once we were climbing on the wall.

We found a super aesthetic line up through the bergschrund. Tim began the hard climbing over the 'schrund with a pumpy start through icicles to a Styrofoam ice ramp to the base of the gully feature. He put in a few pins and brought me up to his anchor. We could have brought more small cams on our route, but I was nervous about cams in icy granite still since an earlier accident in Scotland, so Tim made short work several times with pins. I found the cams to be really solid in general on the South Howser Tower and not at all like the humid, frosty conditions in the Cairngorms. Bomber cams and pins gave me more confidence. Also, the combination of lots of dry-tool training and enough time having passed since my Scotland whipper lets me trust myself again. We both agree that the longer we climb, the more complacent we get. We need to constantly be diligent to double-check our systems and be aware when we feel too relaxed in such an extreme environment.

I love placing a nest of gear, like a couple of nuts or cams. Then my mind is free to try hard on the next difficulty. I enjoy the challenge of uncovering the treasures that are hidden by a blanket of snow—cleaning gravel or ice out of the cracks and finding a solid placement for my tool or gear. This can be a very creative part of climbing and integral to the flow of upward progress.

I called pitch four the crampon-dangler pitch. While belaying Tim on this pitch, I was witness to the ultimate in self-trust and calm demeanour when the shit hit the fan. As Tim was moving up, trying to decide the best route to gain the left-facing dihedral above, his crampon popped off his foot. It was dangling from his ankle while he negotiated a steep crack system. He made it another body length to a snowy ledge, delicately hopping his cramponed foot up while systematically hunting out pick placements. After placing a three-point pin and cam nest, he felt comfortable enough to put his crampon back on and continue up to the cruxy finish of the pitch—very improbable climbing that included hand-jamming cracks and front-pointing small edges to a sling and nut belay at the base of the Ethereal corner system.

Tim inspired me, and left me no choice but to attempt the stunning corner above. How could I not step up to the plate after witnessing such bravery and mastery of the climbing craft? There was the potential of protection and good pick placements in the right-hand wall that kept pulling me upward. Also, the promise of lower-angled sn'ice lured in my periphery. I love the challenge of finding the stemming position that will gain the next good pick placement, and the dance begins.

Despite lingering uncertainty, there was a relaxed confidence with each

movement up the icy face. Our belief increased with every pitch. The only question that remained in our minds was which line would take us to the summit. I often felt reassured knowing we had a Siltarp, stove, food and puffy pants to save us from any unexpected delay or bad weather.

Tim's pitch naturally led him up to the left. It made the most sense not to fight this continuous line of sn'ice in a shallow corner system. We quickly found ourselves moving into the major left-hand weakness that led to the summit ridge. This 70-metre pitch flowed with occasional fun cruxes separated by lower-angled snow and ice, spotted with bomber rock placements.

Tim suspected we would be on top in one or two pitches. I, the skeptic, disagreed, but soon after I was belaying from the summit ridge in the sunshine, grateful that Tim was right.

Luckily, Tim recently guided the Beckey-Chouinard on South Howser Tower, so we made quick work of the descent in deteriorating weather. As the wind picked up, we methodically made our way towards the haven of the Kain Hut. We had a very satisfying deep sleep in the hut before descending to the Columbia Valley the next day.

Summary

Ethereal (D+ M6 WI4 R, 320m, 8 pitches), northeast face, South Howser Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Tim McAllister, Jen Olson, Oct. 10, 2014.

P1: 50m. Cross crevasse and traverse under the overhanging bergschrund to rock and ice belay.

P2: WI4, 30m. Tunnel through the bergschrund trending rightwards up sn'ice to a piton anchor at base of gully/chimney.

P3: M6, 30m. Steepening sn'ice gains a small gully feature with rock protection on side walls. Climb through a bulge, dry tooling to sn'ice. Belay under overhanging flakes at a #3 Camalot crack for the anchor.

P4: M6, 25m. Move left six metres then straight up M4 cracks. Head for left-facing corner, using straight-in hand crack. Belay at the base of the corner at a sling and nut anchor.

P5: M6, 40m. Head up sustained corner of thin ice, finding decent protection and hooks in the right-hand wall. This is the same dihedral as Thompson-Turk Route (D+ 5.10R).

P6: WI3 M5 R, 65m. Continue up right-leaning corner 10 metres then step left to sn'ice climbing, with occasional nuts and horns.

P7: WI 3 M5, 70m. Continue up left-leaning sn'ice gully. Step left under flakes across a snow-covered slab to a major weakness. Follow this main weakness through short-lived cruxes to summit ridge.

P8: 20m. Scramble on rock to summit and find the bolted rappel route on north side of summit block.

Tim McAllister approaching the northeast face of South Howser Tower: (1) Ethereal, (2) Perma Grin, (3) The Big Hose. Photo: Jen Olson

Diorite Heaven

Matthew Morriss

IN THE GEOLOGIC HISTORY of western North America, the late-Jurassic and Cretaceous period was a time of mountain building. A modern corollary to this time would be the Andes in South America. Whether they know it or not, climbers have been tromping around on the granitic results of these mountain-building events, be it quartz-monzonite at Joshua Tree, granodiorite in Yosemite and the High Sierra, or diorite in the Bugaboos. In August 2014, Winter Ramos and I ventured into a more remote and less well-known bleb of granite in the Purcell Mountains just south of the world-famous Bugaboo range. We found the Leaning Towers in pristine condition and with long untouched lines waiting to be climbed.

A two-day approach was much easier with the help of Kootenay Raft Company's horse packers who took our gear in for the first 12 kilometres. A year before, two of our friends, Ryan Leary and Evan Reimondo, put up a new route on the east face of Hall Peak (*CAJ* 2014). Ryan told me in an email that the best line in the range was still unclimbed: the Direct East Buttress of Hall Peak. This buttress would have more than 600 metres of technical climbing to the summit. Winter and I spent a day scouting our descent off the summit, taking photos and recovering from two days of brutal hiking. On August 6, we roped up for our attempt on the east buttress.

From the ground, the crux of the route appeared to be a roof two pitches off the ground. Winter snuck through around to the right, just below the roof, on airy 5.8 edges. We followed our noses and memories for pitch after pitch. Block leads led Winter to the crux, a 5.9+ hand crack, on pitch nine. After summitting the gendarme on the east buttress, we began following the ridge again on lower-angled, less difficult climbing. Shorter pitches took us to the summit. The entire route had impeccable rock; we only encountered a few loose blocks and found sticky rubber perfect for smearing on the textured diorite.

With more food and time, we examined some of the lines along the northern side of Hall Peak. The face was shorter and cleaner, offering attractive crack systems. On the morning of August 8, we started up a delicate corner. Solid 5.10 climbing with the cleanest granite I had seen in the alpine took us 150 metres off the glacier and deposited us 30 metres to the left of the now-fixed rap station. This shorter route was the icing on the cake, and we called it Post Credit Cookie.

The Leaning Towers make you work for any climbing. It's a burly approach that involves plenty of bushwhacking and creativity; however, the peaks are on a scale comparable with the Bugaboos. The rock is excellent, and there are plenty of opportunities for new lines. Plus, a bear on the approach turned Fred Beckey back, so you can climb in at least one place without a Beckey route.

The east face of Hall Peak: (1) Direct East Buttress. (2) Post Credit Cookie. Photo: Matthew Morriss

Summary

Direct East Buttress (IV 5.9+, 600m, 17 pitches), Hall Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Matthew Morriss, Winter Ramos, Aug. 6, 2014.

Post Credit Cookie (II 5.10a, 150m, 4 pitches), north face, Hall Peak. FA: Matthew Morriss, Winter Ramos, Aug. 8, 2014.

Acknowledgements

This trip was funded in part by the Mazamas Leader Exploration Expedition Grant.

Electric Funeral

Jon Walsh

A TRIP INTO EAST CREEK last summer with Michelle Kadatz and Paul Bride didn't get off to the best start. While trying a new route on Wide Awake Tower with Michelle on our first climbing day, we made it nearly three-quarters of the way up before the skies started to unleash thunder and lightning, and going down became the only option. While pulling the ropes after the first rappel, a toaster-sized block popped off and landed right in the pile of rope that was stacking itself in front of us. The result was that both lead and tag lines were chopped in the middle. The storm intensified and we had no choice but to hunker down in a chimney while rain, hail and a lot of very close lightning came down all around us. With backs against the wall and all the metal off the harnesses, we slowly became more cold and wet. Multiple rounds of this continued until it finally passed and we made it safely down to the glacier.

By the time we were walking back to camp it was sunny and calm, so we lapped the first three pitches of Solitary Confinement with a 35-metre rope (exactly what was needed). It was great to get back on this gem of a route as it had been eight or nine years since I had climbed it, and it was on Michelle's Bugaboo to-do list. Unfortunately, we didn't have the off-width gear we needed to get the last pitch done, so Michelle will have to go back.

The following day we hiked to Applebee to try to get two more ropes, a trip that took the better part of the day via the Bugaboo Glacier. On day three, we got back to work on what we were now calling Electric Funeral, a reference to a Black Sabbath song as well as our close call with lightning on the first day. Paul and I tend to have a Black Sabbath theme when we get together, and Michelle didn't know the song but liked the name. Day two on the route went well, although the seventh pitch resulted in two dead ends before I finally figured out what to do. Not comfortable with a run-out traverse to a grassy crack, I pendulumed across the face to the seam and went into aid and cleaning mode. By the time I got to the next ledge, I was so psyched to come back to send the pitch as well as the amazing-looking splitter above that beelined for the summit. It was cold, windy and getting late, so we decided to save it for the next day.

Despite some bad weather and low confidence of being able to complete the project because of said weather, we went back anyways as it was the last day of the trip, this time with a bolt kit. We were content to have gone through the process a couple of times without bolts, but felt like the route was worthy of setting up to attract more climbers to enjoy its quality. There aren't actually that many routes in the Bugs that have sustained 5.10 climbing with a couple of short 5.11 cruxes. Fortunately, the weather held and even got pretty nice. On pitch seven, I led out to a small foot ledge and placed the only protection bolt as high above my head as I could, and then sent the pitch, which was delightfully sustained and interesting to climb. It was more like face climbing with a thin crack for protection than the typical crack climbing that's far more common in the area. The crux came right off the belay on pitch eight while laybacking off amazing chicken heads to pull a small roof. Trending right, beautiful cracks and transfer moves continued and the rope was nearly used up before finally reaching a good stance.

Sweet views from the summit and a smooth rappel had us celebrating back in camp before long. Our time was up, and we had the heavy, half-day slog then half-day drive home to look forward to the next day. It had been a fun process exploring this obscure corner of the Bugs. I know I'll be back again.

Jon Walsh and Michelle Kadatz on pitch seven of Electric Funeral. Photo: Paul Bride

Summary

Electric Funeral (5.11+, 300m, 9 pitches), south face, Wide Awake Tower, The Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Michelle Kadatz, Jon Walsh, Aug. 7, 2014.

P1: 5.10-, 30m. Climb through a bulge from the belay and trend left to a left-facing corner. A couple of balance moves gain you to a crack that leads back right to a left-facing corner with two wide cracks in it and a two-bolt belay station.

P2: 5.10, 20m. Climb the obvious wide cracks up the left-facing corner to a good ledge and a gear belay (#.5, #.75, #1 Camalots).

P3: 5.10, 20m. A few off-width moves give way to nice hand jamming. Belay at a good ledge with a huge horn for the belay.

P4: 5.9, 50m. Climb a short bulge above the belay and make a rising traverse to the right until a short down-climb becomes necessary. Move down a few metres then back up to a good belay ledge with a gear anchor.

P5: 5.10+, 50m. Great hand and finger cracks head up and slightly left. Belay at a small but comfortable ledge below an overlap off of gear.

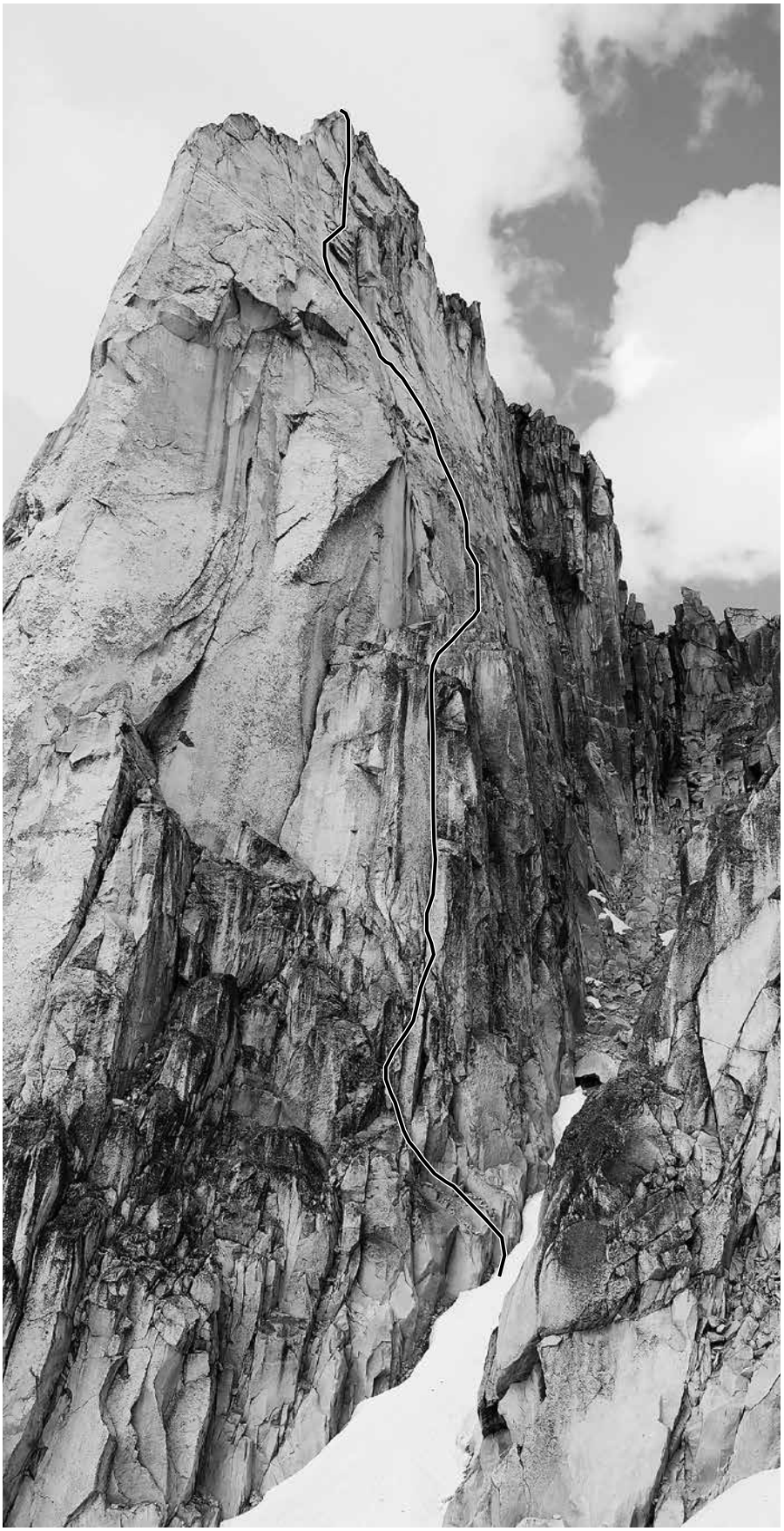
P6: 5.10+, 15m. Pull through the overlap and up a short groove. Rather than continuing up the dirty right-facing corner, make face moves out left onto the exposed featured golden face to a two-bolt belay at a small ledge.

P7: 5.11-, 30m. Face climb up and left past a bolt to gain a thin crack that leads straight up towards a roof. Finish at a two-bolt belay below a roof at small ledge.

P8: 5.11+ 50m. A crux roof sequence leads to spectacular crack climbing that trends rightwards towards the summit, sometimes transferring from crack to crack. A two-bolt belay ends the pitch at a good stance.

P9: 5.9, 20m. A short straightforward pitch passes a chimney and gets you to the summit.

Descent: Walk off or rappel the route.



Electric Funeral on the south face of Wide Awake Tower. Photo: Paul Bride

Sashimi Don

Colin Haley

IN JULY 2012, MY FRIEND Dylan Johnson and I made an 11-day road trip through interior British Columbia, and although we climbed several fun things, the highlight for me was the Northwest Arête of Mt. Sir Donald. Although I had driven through Rogers Pass many times, I had never climbed there before, and I knew so little about the area that we found route information only from Google searches the afternoon beforehand. The Northwest Arête is technically quite moderate, mostly 4th class with a few sections of low 5th, but it is "The Nose" of moderate alpine ridges. It gains about 800 metres of vertical on technical terrain and is consistently exposed on excellent quartzite, with amazing scenery. I honestly think it's one of the finest alpine climbs on the continent, and it certainly opened my eyes to the quality climbing at Rogers Pass. Thus, when I saw the new guidebook to Rogers Pass by David P. Jones, I had no hesitation buying it. The cover of the book is a photo of the north face of Sir Donald, and it showed a very obvious, unclimbed gully that looked like it would make a nice snow/ice/mixed route. Dylan and I briefly planned to try it last spring, but unsure if the weather and conditions were good enough, we didn't gamble on the long drive and ended up rock climbing in Squamish instead.

In June, my girlfriend, Sarah Hart, had to drive through B.C. to Canmore for work, and I came along to keep her company with the plan to tag on some climbing together as well. We brought all sorts of climbing gear to keep our options open, but plan A was the unclimbed gash on Sir Donald. Spending the first three days of the trip just driving across B.C. in the rain with no physical activity wasn't so awesome, but at least we were travelling in her deluxe work-supplied Sprinter van. After Sarah's work duties were finished, the weather improved and we drove up to Rogers Pass for a crack at plan A.

On June 17, we hiked up the Asulkan Brook Valley—first on mostly dry ground then almost entirely on snow—to a bivy at the Uto-Sir Donald col. The next morning we woke up very early and left our bivy around 2:30 a.m., downclimbed to the Uto Glacier, and then traversed to the base of our line. So near to the solstice, there had been only about four hours of darkness and the snow wasn't nearly as re-frozen as I had hoped, but it was enough, barely.

We climbed the route relatively quickly, mostly because we were concerned that in the afternoon there might be ice or rockfall on the face. The route follows a very obvious straight couloir for the first half, and then goes partway up an obvious ramp/gash before branching left onto a mixed rib near the end, and finally joining the Northeast Buttress route. I'd estimate that we simul-climbed about 75 per cent of the route and pitched out the rest. We climbed one distinct crux pitch, which

Colin Haley on the crux pitch of Sashimi Don. Photo: Sarah Hart

was M5 R, possibly even M6 R. From below, it looked like a very easy step of AI3, but turned out to be much more difficult up close. However, this pitch could have been easily avoided via easier terrain further to the left, and we would have gone left if the pitch didn't look so easy from below. Most of the climbing was 60-degree névé, with an occasional step of 70- to 85-degree ice, and lots of sections of easy M4'ish mixed climbing on good quartzite.

So, the route was quite easy from a technical standpoint, and in hindsight, I'm sure I would've been comfortable free soloing it, but it is decently long (850 to 900 metres total vertical gain with the final 75 metres on an existing route) and wouldn't be trivial to descend.

We had no set plan for our descent, and we figured that during the climb we would choose between rappelling the route, descending the Northwest Arête or descending the South Ridge. On the way up, good protection was often difficult to find and we developed a sense of how large the face is, and thus, soon ruled out descending the route. The Northwest Arête can be a quick descent in summer (Dylan and I free-solo downclimbed the route in our approach shoes, partly in the rain), but covered in snow, it looked like it would be a very long, tricky descent. So, after a short break to relax on the summit, we started down the South Ridge. All in all, I think our choice of descent was the right one, as we were able to lose much more elevation by downclimbing than by rappelling, but any descent off of Sir Donald is a long endeavour, and it was past 6 p.m. when we finally took our harnesses off in the basin below the mountain's west face.

Sarah carried our climbing gear down to the dry trail while I hoofed back up to the Uto-Sir Donald col to retrieve our bivy gear. Then we hiked out to the car, yelling obscenities into the pristine, deserted valley to let the bears know that we were two badass mofos not to be messed with and that we would perform degrading sexual acts to them if they charged us.

We named our route Sashimi Don after my favourite dish at Squamish's KOZO Café. While it will never be the ultra-classic, highly-recommended Northwest Arête, it's a logical route on a grand face. Conditions were neither amazing nor terrible for us, and I suspect that finding good conditions will always be the trickiest aspect of repeating it.

Summary

Sashimi Don (AI3 M4, 900m), north face, Mt. Sir Donald, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Colin Haley, Sarah Hart, June 27, 2014.

Sashimi Don on the north face of Mount Sir Donald. Photo: Felix Parham

Men with Options

Joshua Lavigne

THE EAST FACE OF Snowpatch Spire has become one of North America's premier free-climbing big walls, with a concentration of routes similar to Longs Peak in Colorado, the Gand Capucin in Chamonix, or the North Walls in Squamish. The sustained steepness of the wall and its technical difficulty give the east face a hallowed place at the altar of trad climbing and has become a pilgrimage for devote disciples.

The rise to distinction of this dark monolith is primarily due to the tireless efforts of the "locals"—the climbers and route developers that make the commitment to either live in the park or commute back and forth from their life on the outside. This crew of inspired and motivated individuals has made it their ambition to develop the modern free-climbing potential on the east face. Often starting their efforts in alpine style—bottom to top—they clean and bolt as they go, similar to the original ascents. Sometimes the routes are freed in their entirety on the first go, but more often than not, they return over a period of years, always aiming for the cleanest style—a continuous free ascent.

This is where the infamous, sometimes scandalous and mostly blue-collar tactics used by the Squamish climbers has been adopted. It's a technique of route development mastered by climbers who have ADHD, OCD, or a PhD. Their routes are meticulously spit-shined from either the bottom up or top down. Bolted anchors are common place, but protection bolts are scrutinized—the constant debate about how to create the perfect balance between free climbing and sketch factor. Not too much spice or fear, otherwise it won't get repeated, but not too boring so that the adventure and thrill is quickly forgotten.

In summer 2013, I returned to the Bugaboos to join the locals in this gold rush, having climbed a half-dozen routes on the face already. I knew why they were repeatedly putting their toil and labour into the wall. That season I wasn't expecting to get to the top or finish the job, as I knew it would be a multi-year endeavour, but I was excited to see what lines we could connect and to potentially uncover my own masterpiece. Chris Geisler was also keen. After a 10-year hiatus from the Bugaboos, he was open to anything. He also didn't have any illusions that by participating in such a thankless labour there would be any distinction or summits.

The first year, we established six

Men with Options on the east face of Snowpatch Spire. Photo: Marc Piché.

pitches, enduring marginal weather, mud from our eyeballs to butt cracks, and knuckles swollen and beaten from relentless digging and hand drilling. Within the first couple of hours of climbing with Chris—after he had stepped off the glacier, over the 10-metre moat and directly onto an expanding flake which led into a blank face—I discovered several of his affable qualities. First there was his school-boy enthusiasm for exploring the improbable and unlikely, and second, his deep reserves of patience and resourcefulness when faced with crisis. He had dead-ended only 20 metres above the glacier while hooking on an edge with his nut tool. He wanted to drill a bolt to continue to free climb but needed another nut tool to stabilize his stance. I graciously sent him mine and craned my neck and tightened my ass cheeks as he spent 30 minutes tapping away.

That first year on the wall, we free climbed infrequently and often revelled in the absurdness of the endeavour, but eventually, like a mother oblivious to the repugnant disfiguration of their child, we started to coo the vision of perfection that was "our route" and the free climbing potential for future attempts. This is how I convinced Simon to pick up the sickle and toil for the greater good the following year. Simon Meis is a Bow Valley local and master route developer in his own right, but he's primarily interested in the pursuit of climbing on overhanging limestone. He is a loyal and unwavering friend and therefore easily convinced. Even if his intuition tells him to steer clear of my adventures, his loyalty holds firm.

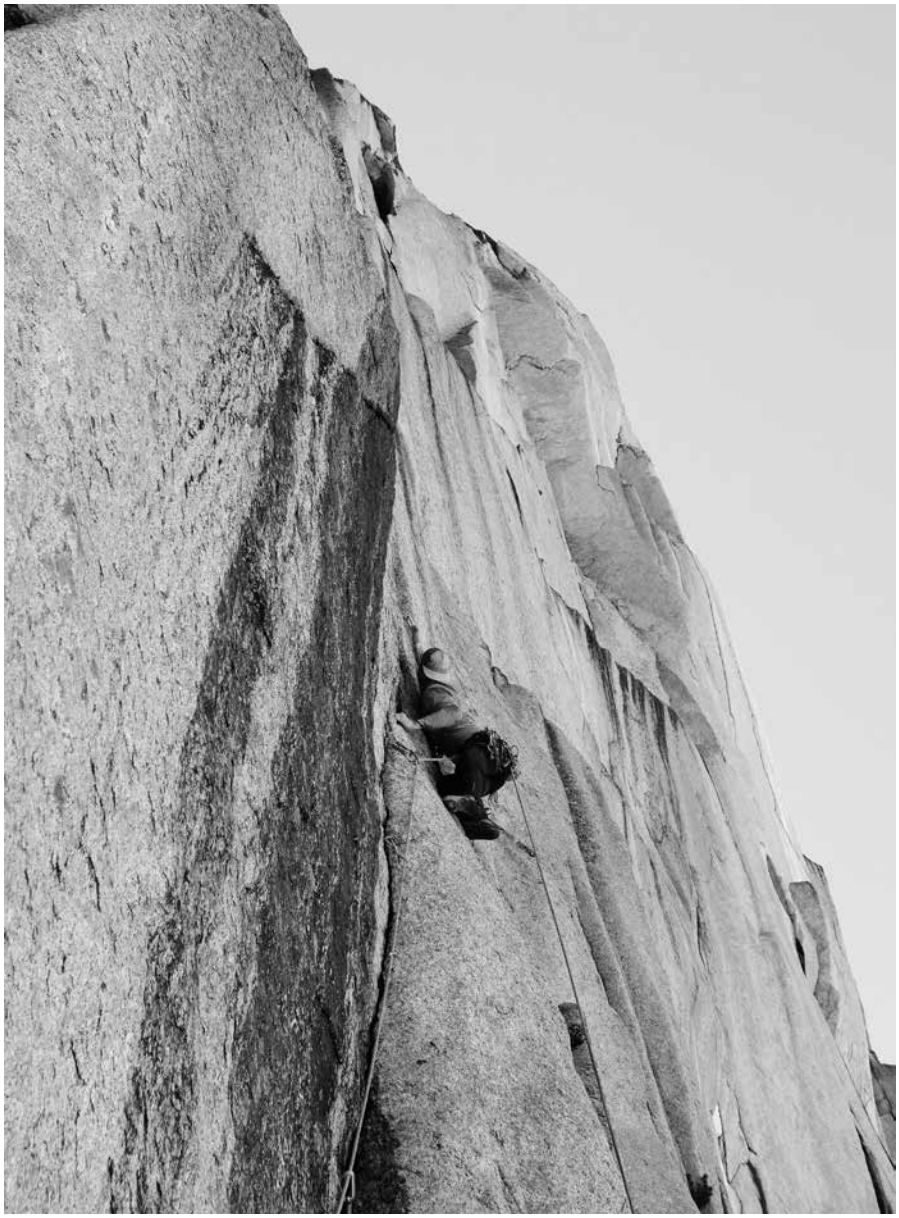
The five days spent scrubbing and scrapping our way up the wall was akin to a manual labour camp, except that this was our vacation. Every morning we would shoulder our packs, like Sisyphus his rock, unpack our dirt-ridden gear at the glacier's edge, decorate our harnesses with garden and climbing tools, and attempt to push the line higher. As the days went on, the task of completing the route seemed more distant than ever before—mostly because the mud from above continued to pile up below, but also because at every belay a new option or crack presented itself. We were like married men just discovering the Internet, options abounded, but every distraction pushed the summit a little further away.

When it came time to focus on the true prize, we enlisted the infallible Crosby Johnston, freshly recovered from a week of guiding and excited to see firsthand what we had been going on about all week. We climbed the route to our high point, selecting the finest of options and pushing towards a steep headwall below the summit—a headwall with a single splitter. The perfect line and the complete free ascent had been baited, hooked and reeled in. Unfortunately, the line snapped and the winning prize got away. We summitted, beaten but in good spirits, knowing that sometimes even a man with options goes home empty-handed.

Summary

Men with Options (5.12 A0, 11 pitches), east face, Snowpatch Spire, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Chris Geisler, Crosby Johnston, Joshua Lavigne, Simon Meis, July 19, 2014.

Joshua Lavigne on pitch three of Men with Options. Photo: Simon Meis



Son of a Beast

Stephen Senecal

IN AUGUST 2014, David Lussier and I set out early from Nelson, British Columbia, with plans to get into the Devil's Range and explore. New routing would be a bonus. I like these standards; it's hard to get let down.

The Devil's Range is an east-west running group of spires nestled in the Valhalla Range of the Selkirk Mountains. It's bound to the west by Lucifer and Bor peaks, to the east by Slocan Lake, to the north by Evans Lake, and to the south by Gwillim Creek. Exploration in the range has been limited due to its challenging access since the majority of the approach is through B.C. bush. With some careful planning, one can limit the bush bash and weave a reasonable line to Devil's Dome, the most popular and accessible peak in the range.

We had five days and a decent forecast with two of these days dedicated to entry and exit. The entry was much more pleasant than expected, and despite being rained on as we navigated sections of bush and avalanche path, morale was high. Evening found us camped at the edge on a glassy tarn under the looming face of Devil's Dome. The majority of parties that make the trip into the range have their sights on the east ridge of Devil's Dome (III 5.6, 7 pitches).

Rambling from camp to the west face of False Dome (a sub-summit of Devil's Dome), a plethora of natural rock climbs lay waiting for some happy climbers. Shawn West's line, Son of Odin, climbs the obvious right-facing corner system in the centre of the wall. The next obvious line is another right-facing corner system 50 metres to the right of Son of Odin. We racked up and I stepped onto featured Valhalla "granite"—a mixture of different types of rock someone more enlightened could tell you about. I just know its frickin' sweet! Lots of cool flakes, chicken heads and many long, clean cracks. After making a few moves, I looked down at David.

"Have we ever climbed together, Dave?"

"I don't think so!" he replied.

Was alpine new routing as an ice-breaker a testament to our laid back personalities, or an indication to the lack of keen alpine partners in the Nelson area? Who knows? I was just happy to be climbing.

The route, which we named Son of a Beast, went clean and without any major difficulties. The highlight was a massive, overhanging fin to climb around midway up. The descent is a short scramble down the south ridge to a 60-metre rappel from a fixed (old) station. Overall, it was a really fun climb and a surprisingly relaxing outing for my first day of alpine new routing.

The next day had us aiming for an existing route up the South Face of Devil's Dome. It was of reportedly high quality, but had been affected by a large rockfall in the lower third. The line started on a broad buttress left of centre on the south face and drifted right into a long, deep right-facing corner. One pitch of moderate climbing led to the base of this long corner, where an ominous wide crack loomed above. This was the site of the old rockfall and would be a new variation to the existing south-face route. David made a valiant effort tip-toeing around some loose rock while leading up the wide crack, and I followed, cleaning huge volumes of rubble. Neither of us really got to appreciate what is likely an excellent pitch—steep

Son of a Beast on False Dome. Photo: David Lussier

climbing up a wide crack with many protection possibilities and fun stemming into juggy steep sections.

The original description called for climbers to "wiggle through a tight hole" in the upper third. Watching David contort through this rabbit hole was definitely a highlight. It's hard to be graceful belly-flopping through a torso-sized hole, but somehow he made it look easy. The rest of the route followed closely to the original South Face and clocks in at around 5.9 (6 pitches).

Day four had us hiking east to the south end of Chariot Peak to an unnamed wall we dubbed Dark Horse Wall. This south-facing wall was scattered with options. In the end we chose a long rib on the right side. Fun moderate climbing in the lower two-thirds had us pretty jazzed, and a short scramble brought us to a final headwall. Steep technical climbing through the last pitch was the cherry on top and a great finish to this photogenic route. A quick walk northeast to the summit of Chariot Peak offered great views of Banshee Peak and Diablo Peak, an abundance of steep, clean, untouched rock. The descent was by two 60-metre rappels and bits of scrambling down the west ridge of Dark Horse Wall.

Tired and satisfied after three fun days, we sat in the bear grass, beer in hand, that evening and watched one of the finest lightning shows I have ever witnessed. Bright, red sky loomed over the Mulvey Group and pounded the peaks with lightning and hail for close to half an hour. Happy to be off the mountain and with full bellies, we laughed at the prospect of being high up on Gimli or Asgard, hunkering down for dear life.

The escape from the Devil's Range proved to be a casual affair, downhill rambling with light packs and a better route than the way in. Lush huckleberry bushes slowed the progress and stained our hands and faces. Dang! Those berries are the best!

This area is easy enough to access with some careful planning. Most choose to approach it from Drinnon Pass trailhead. It is a recommended adventure for those seeking a beautiful unexplored range with few people and huge climbing potential.

Summary

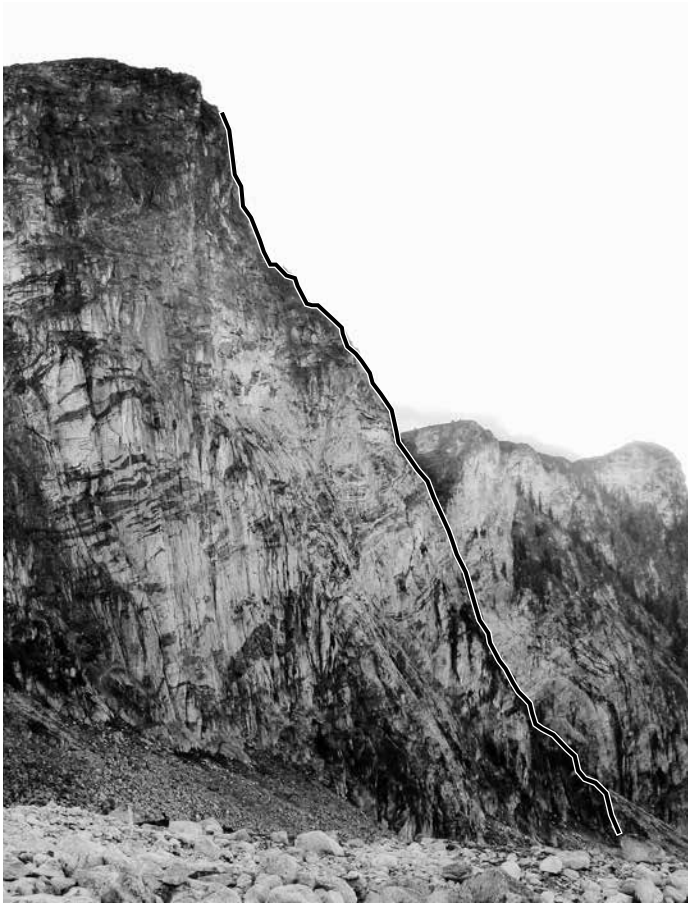
Son of a Beast (5.10+, 300m, 7 pitches), west face, False Dome, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: David Lussier, Stephen Senecal, Aug. 25, 2014.

South Face - Rockfall Variation (5.10-, 6 pitches, 250m), Devil's Dome. FA: David Lussier, Stephen Senecal, Aug. 26, 2014.

Horse Mane (5.9, 8 pitches, 300m), Dark Horse Wall, Chariot Peak. FA: David Lussier, Stephen Senecal, Aug. 27, 2014.

Rockfall Variation on the south face of Devil's Dome. Photo: David Lussier

Horse Mane on Dark Horse Wall, Chariot Peak. Photo: David Lussier



Quarter-life Crisis

Michelle Kadatz

TALES OF GRANITE WALLS with endless potential for new routes tantalized me. In August 2014, Katie Bono, Hannah Preston and I formalized plans for an adventure in the Leaning Towers. Located 150 kilometres south of the Bugaboos, the Leaning Towers is a rarely visited climbing area due to its remoteness, gruelling approach and general lack of available information. After an hour of driving on windy logging roads outside of Kimberly, British Columbia, we began to sincerely feel the remoteness of our position. This feeling continued to intensify as we left the main trail and didn't see another person for the rest of the trip. Burdened with our 35-kilogram packs, we travelled along a horse trail for 10 kilometres. To reward our efforts, we indulged in a brief stop in a natural hot spring. It was not reassuring to know we had finished the easy part of the approach, which felt hard enough. The trail ended, and we continued to bushwhack our way up steep terrain, navigating streams, loose boulders, mossy cliff bands and swarms of mosquitoes.

The mountains did not favour us, and we were afflicted with heavy rain storms that impaired our ability to move camp. Staring into a thick fog unable to navigate, we were confined to the tent for three days. After several days of rather damp and food-rationed tent time, we moved our camp to the base of Hall Peak. Making our home in this wild setting, we regularly watched the glacier release large chunks of ice, and rigged methods to dry out our gear and keep our food from the pack rats. We scoped multiple routes that looked appealing, but a promising line on the east face caught our attention. Ultimately, we devoted our only weather window to it.

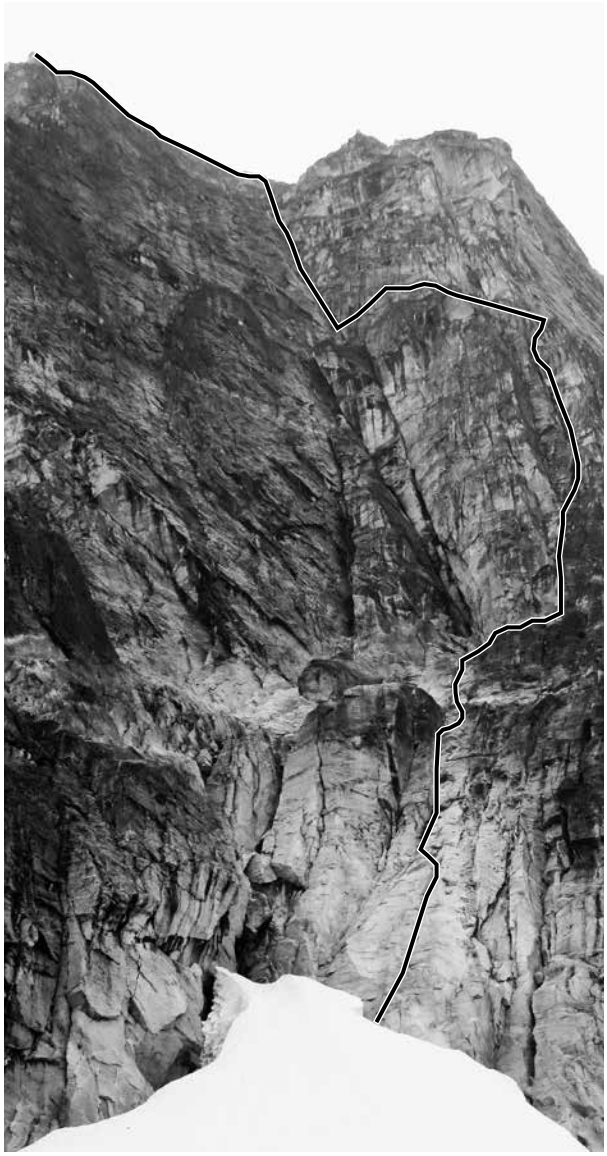
At sunrise the next day we eagerly kicked steps up a snow slope, though the moat-crossing to gain the rock required creativity and acrobatic movement. The crack systems were delightful, took excellent gear and required only minor scrubbing with a nut tool in the more challenging sections. The rock was surprisingly clean and featured, with chicken heads and crimps to provide frequent reprieve from jamming. Other than a traverse two-thirds up, the route finding was straightforward and fairly direct.

Swapping leads, we free climbed 12 pitches to reach the summit ridge. The camaraderie of climbing was pleasant and fun, and the dynamics within our group of three took away some of our stress.

Upon summitting, breathtaking views of the surrounding peaks (Block and Wall towers) reminded us of a miniature El Captain surrounded by glaciated terrain. The descent was pleasantly straightforward, scrambling down the ridge line until a few rappels led to exposed icy snow slopes. Looking down the imposing drop from the snow slope inspired a deep sense of fear, as it was a definite no-fall zone.

The next day, a storm moved in again and was projected to last several days, so we decided to cut our trip short. One long day of adventure hiking brought us back to the car with water-logged boots and blistered feet. Later, we found that our route on Hall Peak consisted of several variations of an old aid route climbed in 1975, called the East Face. It originally went at 5.9 A2 and took two and a half days to climb. We named our route Quarter-life Crisis (5.10). The Leaning Towers is an enchanting place, hosting a mecca of unexplored lines on multiple features.

Quarter-life Crisis on the east face of Hall Peak.
Photo: Michelle Kadatz



Summary

Quarter-life Crisis (D+ 5.10, 600m, 12 pitches), east face, Hall Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Katie Bono, Michelle Kadatz, Hannah Preston, Aug. 18, 2014.

Sharkshead Tower

Kirk Mauthner

THE LEANING TOWERS area in the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy (PWC) is truly a very special place, and we all owe huge thanks to everyone involved in ensuring this place is protected and kept as a wilderness area. It's genuinely wild land (read: no signage or handrails, and access to Fry Basin is by faint game trails), and is seldom visited, thus offering spectacular climbing opportunities. To obtain a permit to guide in the PWC requires submitting an application to the government months in advance, and making contact with First Nations and other stakeholders (hunting outfitters). It's well worth the effort.

Jeff Bury, Joanne Mauthner and I used the services of the hunting outfitter that operates in Dewar Creek to ferry our packs by horseback to Bugle Basin. Meanwhile, we donned runners and daypacks for a pleasant hike in on August 3. That afternoon, we laboured up to Dewar Pass and established camp. The next day we ascended Twomey Peak via the east ridge, in honour of Art Twomey, one of the key advocates in establishing the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. The views of the Towers from Twomey Peak are impressive, and it's from here that we could scout our potential climbing and access options into Fry Creek.

On August 6, from our 1,900-metre camp in a basin at the Fry Creek headwaters, we ascended the glacier to the solid granite rock wall under the Pew—the ridge trending south from the Pulpit on Hall Peak. A few pitches of moderately steep and enjoyable blue-glacier ice climbing bypasses the nunatuk to access the east face of Sharkshead Tower. A snow ramp reaches high onto the east face but terminates with a massive impassible moat at its highest point. The rock climbing begins on a bench system to climber's left. Six short pitches (about 30 metres each) led up clean granite.

The first pitch (5.6) went straight up clean cracks to a ledge. Pitch two (5.4) continued up and left. The crux third pitch (5.9) ascended an arcing crack, trending left under a roof to its end. Pitch four (5.8) climbed a vertical off-width with excellent horizontal protection options, and then the next exposed and extremely fun pitch (5.4) traversed right atop a series of flakes. The final pitch (5.7) worked through horizontal granite bands with a beautiful mantle finish to the summit ridge.

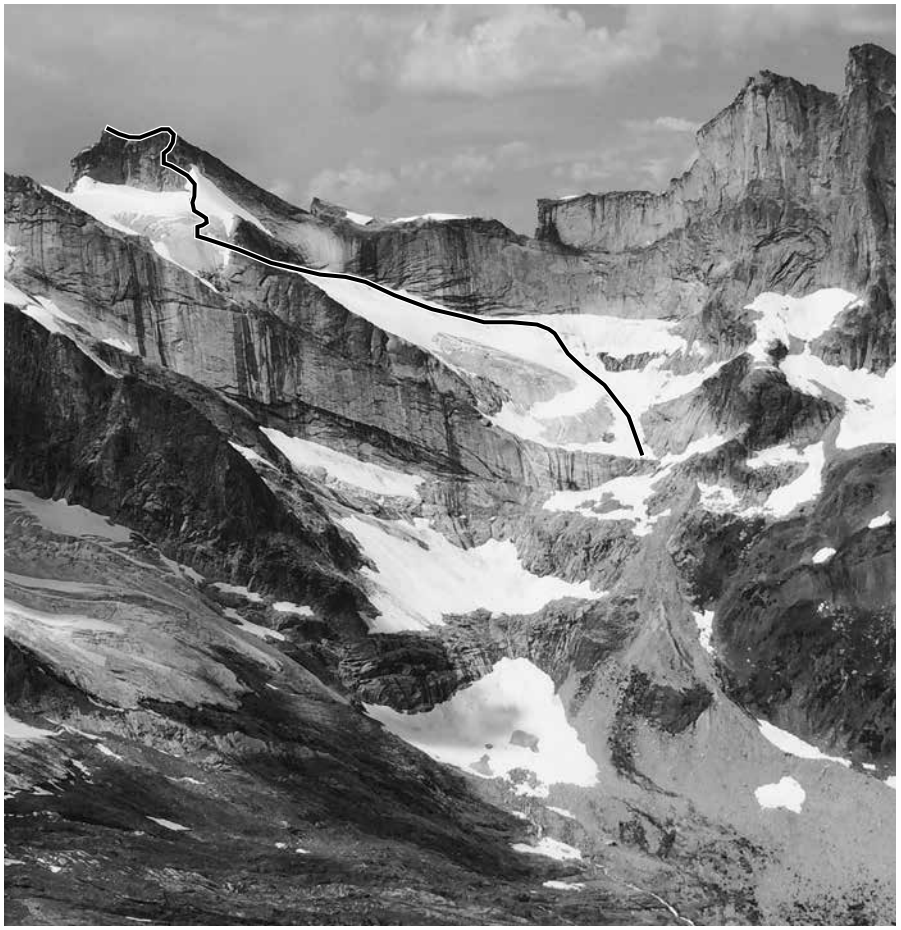
The summit cairn was 10 metres south, and several more minutes of summit traversing led to the south summit—a sensational pinpoint *au cheval* summit.

We descended the east face via a rock gully (that separated the north and south summit) in three 30-metre rappels to the glacier below, and then downclimbed the nunatak ridge, trending east to a piton anchor. The next 30-metre rappel down moderate-angle slab gained a second piton station, which was rappelled northwards 30 metres down to a good ledge and a wired nut station. One more 30-metre rappel completely bypassed the heavily crevassed, blue-ice portion of the glacier. Round trip from camp to camp was 12 hours. A bonus for the hike out was a nice long soak in the Dewar Creek hot springs.

Summary

East Face (PD 5.9), Sharkshead Tower, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Jeff Bury, Joanne Mauthner, Kirk Mauthner, Aug. 6, 2014.

East Face route on Sharkshead Tower. Photo: Kirk Mauthner



Finding Nemo

Adam Ghani

THE HELICOPTER THUNDERED its way up the valley to a magical place comprised of massive rock formations protruding from ice—such an amazing contrast to the green valley below. Twelve of us from the ACC Calgary Section were on our way into the Nemo Group in the Battle Range, looking for fun and adventure in an alpine playground that is seldom visited.

I heard a week earlier that the 2014 ACC Calgary Section camp was set up in a location that was a good distance away from most established objectives, and this was foremost in my mind as I was scouting peaks under the thumping of the helicopter blades cutting through the warm summer air. Finally the helicopter flew over a ridge where I could see a lake below with a few canvas tents scattered around. The site was so stunning that for a moment I forgot about the distance to the pointy granite peaks and glaciers that loomed above. Our home for the next week was around a lake that was high above the valley floor and flanked with steep granite slabs that were capped by the Iron Glacier.

I did not know much about the Nemo Group except for the pages that were copied from the *South Selkirks* guidebook by David P. Jones, which is now out of print. I had a rough idea of some of the peaks and a few routes on these peaks, but the rest were a mystery waiting to be unlocked. The lack of information was part of the adventure.

To get a feel for the area, we sampled an established route on our first outing. The route we set out to climb was the North Ridge of Haematite Peak (5.7/5.8). The route was straightforward once we established where we were going. The ridge offered climbing up to 5.8 on heavily lichen-covered rock. Some steeper diversions were climbed on the east side of the ridge. From this ridge we could see the surrounding peaks and many unclimbed granite faces and buttresses. A playground of granite lay in every direction, most of it unclimbed. Another basin revealed itself on the west side of where we climbed. Across the basin was a peak with a prominent corner system that split its face. We found our next objective.

Adam Ghani on pitch six of Patagonia Dreaming. Photo: Sly Kulczynski

The alarm rang at 5 a.m., and before I knew it, we were blasting up the granite slabs toward the glaciers. The travel to the unnamed peak from our camp involved a lot of elevation gain and loss, crossing a snowfield, steep glacier, descent from a loose and scrappy col to a second snowfield, across a basin and up a talus and boulder field to the base of our route. The corner system was immense and steep. The first pitch provided an interesting and challenging wet crack to a roof at 5.9+. The next four pitches were climbed up a beautiful clean and steep corner that deposited us on the summit ridge. We blasted up the easy 5th-class ridge and were standing on the summit. According to the guide book, the descent was 4th class but felt more like low 5th-class downclimbing and scrambling. A full 15 hours later, we were back in camp enjoying a nice cold beer that had been chilled in the glacial lake.

As the days went on, I kept passing a buttress at the end of a ridge that comes off of Haematite Peak. It was covered in heavy black lichen, but on the south side of the buttress were a number of clean corner and crack systems. On the morning of August 7, Sly Kulczynski and I departed camp at 6:30 a.m. and made the usual slog up the slabs toward the buttress of rock that I had my eye on. The approach was relatively short

from camp and an hour later we were standing in the boulders at the base of the route.

The first pitch opened up with a short, steep crack that gained an easy 5th-class ramp. The first belay was set up at the end of the ramp where the wall steepened. On the second pitch, I climbed up steep and featured granite to the base of a left-facing corner. I climbed the left-facing corner and placed a belay at a block with a three- to four-inch crack in the block. The third pitch climbs over the belay block to the second corner system. Other options may exist at this point. I climbed an amazing hand crack in the steep and clean right-facing corner to a rest, and then climbed a short steep wall to belay at a flat ledge with an arête on the right. Pitch four climbs around the arête then downclimbs a short finger crack into a large corner. I climbed up and left out of the large corner on good holds to a rest below a steep and vegetated groove. I then climbed the awkward groove to a small roof then a finger/hand crack to a good belay stance. This pitch is not the most aesthetic, but it is the technical crux of the climb (small nuts and cams are required). The fifth pitch climbs blocky ground out to the right and around an arête to gain the major left-facing corner. I climbed a three- to four-inch crack to an overlap, pulled the overlap and climbed a perfect finger crack to a belay at the base of the smooth headwall.

Good route finding is required for the sixth pitch. I initially tried to climb straight up from the belay with the cracks ending about six metres above the belay. I felt defeated despite only being a mere 30 metres from the top of the buttress. Sly convinced me to climb up and left, crossing a number of crack systems in the headwall to a steep four-inch crack that climbs back right to the roof that guards the prominent V-groove. I pulled the slightly loose roof and finished up the groove to the ridge.

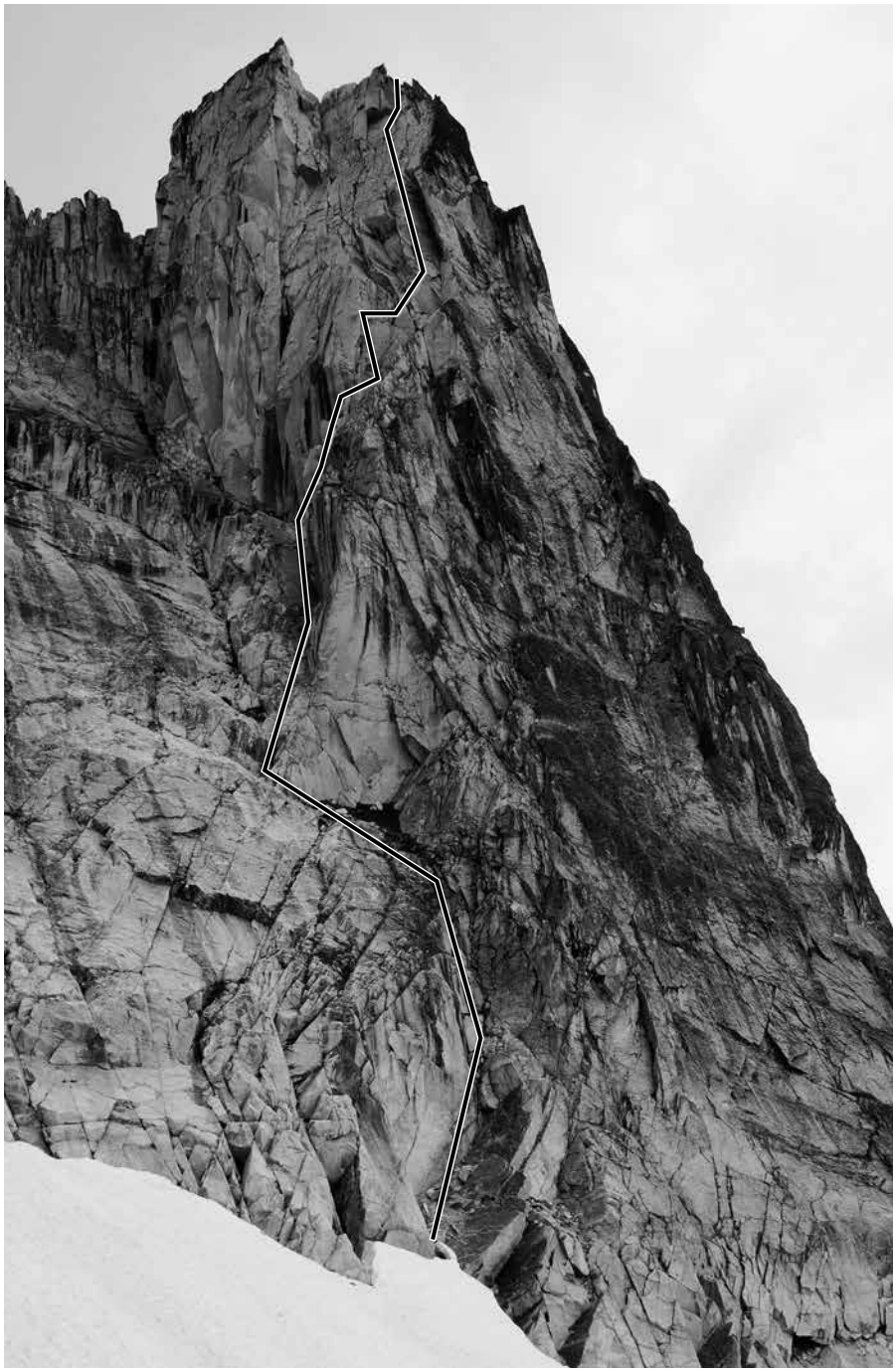
We rappelled the route from four slung blocks and chockstones back to our packs, with the longest rappel being 60 metres. No fixed gear was left on this route with all natural protection used for the climbing and belays. The route was christened Patagonia Dreaming, and many other options exist on this wall for new routes.

The next day the weather came and settled upon the range. We were tent-bound until evening when the skies opened up and provided a beautiful backdrop for our final night in camp. We cut loose with many beverages and a roaring bonfire by the lake—a most celebratory finish to a successful trip.

Summary

Patagonia Dreaming (5.10+, 200m, 6 pitches), southeast buttress, Haematite Peak, Nemo Group, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Adam Ghani, Sly Kulczynski, Aug. 7, 2014.

Patagonia Dreaming on the southeast buttress of Haematite Peak. Photo: Sly Kulczynski



Dodging Deanna

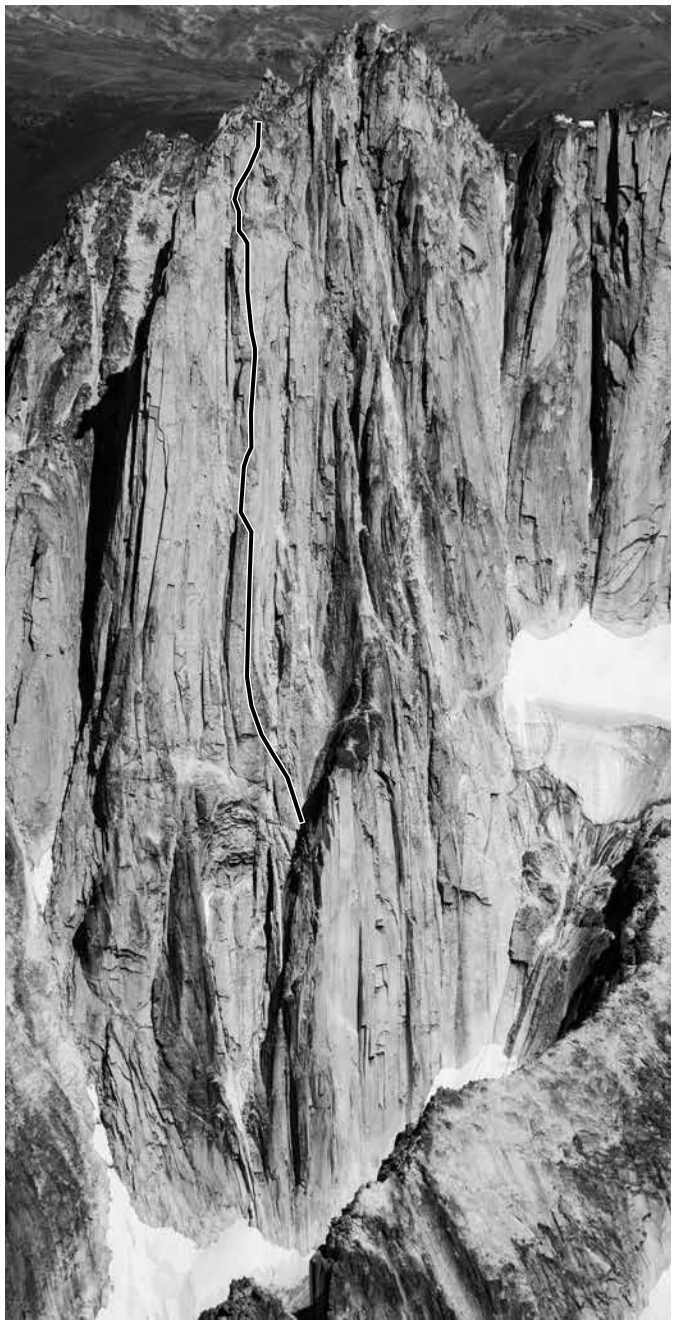
Tony McLane

THE LINES OF NORTH Howser Tower's west face, in late afternoon sunlight, were beautifully clear. I was lounging on a rock on the seldom-travelled west-face scramble approach, resigned to no more climbing. I'd taken to snapping photos and concocting a plan for the near future.

Shadows of right-facing corners and flakes seem drawn in plain language at that hour. I was eyeing the most plausible, beautiful and unclimbed line of the west face as it appeared to me. It sits dead centre following a large prow between the Real Mescalito and Spicy Beans. A trip up Shooting Gallery or Seventh Rifle provides easy access to the initial crack system. With such a wealth of features at that angle, the moves cannot be too hard. I figured it would only be a question of protection. Having previously been scooped on two new lines in this area boosted my motivation. The 100-metre upper headwall crack visible to the naked eye looked to be the real goods.

Two weeks later, I was thrilled to be back with my friend Nathan, lacing up on a nice ledge below Shooting Galley. We simul-soloed through low-angle corners and blocks until the steepening and somewhat loose nature of the corner system prompted roped attention. Further scrambling through the Seventh Rifle gully put us in line with new ground. We led in two-pitch blocks; Nathan started out with an easy corner to a semi-hanging belay and finished with a wider, slightly scruffy crack-switching pitch that ended at a perfect spike belay. My first pitch followed a deep chimney leading onto a stance atop a large flake below a fist-crack corner. The fist crack then a groove led onto a large ledge system on the edge of the prow in a 70-metre rope-stretching pitch. After a brief discussion of climbing out left, Nathan led toward the centre of the prow, covering some confusing terrain through flakes and crack switches. He yelled "Off belay!" as I craned my neck for a better look and jarred outwards when a shallow anchor piece popped out.

Dodging Deanna on the west face of North Howser Tower.
Photo: Marc Piché



I took the next lead through a series of staked flakes, loose at times but moderate enough to make for a long 70-metre pitch to a nice ledge. The upper headwall crack was quite inviting, with only a short thin section leading to a long hand and fist splitter. A final easier stemming corner led to the summit ridge. Content, with no need for summit backslapping, we began our descent.

Climbers seeking the path of least resistance on the west face should take note that Under Fire (5.11a) and, easier still, Seventh Rifle/Young Men (5.11a) are far-more attainable climbs, being far-less sustained with better rock and easier route finding. Also a consideration, should aspiring climbers bail from the west face, is to follow your nose back to the East Creek bivy, going downhill and skier's left at the first feasible break in the ridge. It is about a two-hour scramble, not described in the guidebook, and difficult in wet conditions.

Summary

Dodging Deanna (ED2 5.10+, 900m, 18 pitches (10 new pitches)), west face, North Howser Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Nathan Macdonald, Tony McLane, July 28, 2014.

2014 Frenchman Cap GMC

David Dornian

2014 Frenchman Cap GMC. Photo: Thierry Levenq

THE LOCKER HIGH felt set to last forever, stretching from the beginning of… childhood it seemed, with enough momentum to extend another decade. Blue skies. Calm air. By week four, the sand was getting between our toes and pattering the participants' tent flies in the dark downflows from the glacier at night, making us dream about rain. Brave Rockies' men looked in disgust at the black base layers that filled their duffels. Sunscreen traded like a commodity through the camp. Nitesh, the young first-timer from the Middle East who had chosen his visit to Canada from an Internet search, arrived without a hat, and we fixed him up with one of the coveted Chuck-Young-Order-of-Canada caps left over from a previous week's celebration. The kid wore it like a good-luck charm. Between it and the weather, we could climb anything we wanted, any time we wanted.

Apart from the impossibility of keeping your beer cold, the site chosen for the ACC's 2014 General Mountaineering Camp was a candidate for "as good as they get." With the camp's 20-plus tents spread over a level bench at 1,980 metres (GR 956831) just north of the headwaters of Big Eddy Creek, we had southern exposure, evening twilight and climbing that started right out the door.

Regular, almost daily, ascents were made of the camp's namesake Frenchman Cap (2,897 metres). From the camp, Levers Pass could be attained over moraine, talus and snow by climbing directly north. From a nice place there, the glacier on the far side could be traversed to the east, where it rises to abut the south ridge of the Cap. Clambering up one of several gully options would put you on the broad shoulder, where you could move easily, short rope a few rock steps, detour a couple of others and look down into the Columbia while you ate your sandwich on the summit. Retracing the route across the glacier and returning uphill to Levers Pass in the afternoon sun was often the hardest part of the day.

As for Mount Levers itself (2,760 metres), as it crumbled and castellated above the camp, we generally treated it like the treacherous obstacle that it was. To the west of Levers Pass, the comparatively better rock of the southeast ridge of Cat Peak began almost at once. It provided entertaining 4th- and lower-5th-class climbing over a series of progressing geographical points that run roughly west-southwest, and we named "Pussycat," "Cougar" and "Cattail" as they eventually descended toward the Bourne Glacier. These promontories could also be attained via the cols between them, approached directly over the glaciated slabs and retreating snow and ice to the northwest of the base camp. These heights provided interesting and varied climbing opportunities and were combined, or not, in link-ups, traverses, glissades and other ways as the summer matured. Further to the north, on the far side of the Park Glacier, Feline Peak was reached, unproblematically, after a long walk around to the west.

To the south of the camp, down and across Big Eddy Creek, the peaks and points along the heights of land running generally west from Hat Peak were visited frequently, but in smaller numbers. The approach in that direction required a descent to the toe of the glacier flowing down from these points, followed by some back-and-forth route finding though crevassed areas that became more problematic as the summer wore on and the snow retreated, and the bergschrunds and moats opened to create barriers to rock access. The rock climbing on these features tended to be straightforward, once the ice was passed.

Schrund Peak (2,917 metres) itself required a long day of linking benches between crevasse fields as your party ascended from the very toe of its northeast glacier (known locally as the Big Eddy Glacier), winding back and forth to gain the ridge running northeast from the summit, and thence via short roping to the summit. At least one group made a circuit of their day and descended more easterly, to pass behind a sub-peak, rig a couple of lowers and gain the glacier descent from the Hat Ridge objectives before climbing back to camp.

On the program side of things, a very pleasant rock school location was found on glaciated slabs near the confluence of Big Eddy Creek and the Levers Pass drainage, where many happy hours were spent top-roping slick rock in the sun. Chuck Young, a multi-decade amateur leader for the GMCs, was recognized during week two for his volunteering, philanthropy and dedication—qualities which eventually earned him the Order of Canada. The North Face Leadership Training program ran during week three, and we hosted a class from the University of Alberta during week four. All in all, it felt like nothing so much as a beach party.

Running with the Devil

Nelson Rocha

I CAN STILL REMEMBER the day the idea materialized. It came after a successful two-week trip into the Bugaboos. Having climbed nearly everything I wanted in almost perfect weather, I was on a climbing high and was on the lookout for a new challenge, something closer to home. I asked a friend if he would join me in a one-day attempt at a complete traverse of the Devil's Range in the Valhallas. I was unsure myself if it was possible but was keen to give it a try. The further reaches of the Devil's Range, away from Gwillim Lakes Campground, don't get a lot of traffic, so it was difficult to get reliable beta on the route. Having missed the weather window that summer then embarking on other adventures the following years, it would be another three years before the Devil's Range Traverse was set into action.

Earlier in the year, I convinced my climbing partner and good friend Cam Shute to join me on an epic high-ridge traverse through the Valhalla's most notoriously named peaks. We set a date as close to summer solstice that our schedules allowed and prayed for the Nordic gods to give us the weather we needed to pull it off.

The digital tweet of my watch woke us at 2 a.m. We shared a brioche from the local French bakery and set off half an hour later in blackness, two pinpoints of white light scrambling up towards Lucifer Peak. Breezy but clear, we wasted little time on the summit and carried onto Trident Peak. We roped up for a short section of exposed climbing on the southwest ridge and summitted just as the day's light began to emerge over the horizon. It was a beautiful time to be scrambling high in the Selkirks and we cherished the moment.

The next peak we climbed, Mount Mephistopheles, was an easy 4th-class scramble to the top. Having the benefit of daylight now, we summitted and descended without incident. The next two peaks, False Dome and Devil's Dome, were the first real obstacles of the traverse. We picked our way up along grassy ramps, blocky terrain and a broken ridge to the pinnacle of False Dome, and gained a good perspective of the steep northwest face of Devil's Dome, the highest peak along the traverse. Studying the wall, we wondered if our goal of completing the traverse in a day would be concluded with a slow ascent of the wall, but we managed to find a route with only a few tricky sections and established a first ascent in the process that we called Running with the Devil. From the top of Devil's Dome, we enjoyed our first break of the day and

Cam Shute on Satan Peak looking towards Devil's Spire (foreground) and Devil's Couch. Photo: Nelson Rocha

looked east towards an all-star line-up of diabolical giants clad in premium gneiss. With the first crux of the day behind us, we had set our gaze on peak number six, Chariot Peak, way off in the distance.

As we reached the lower eastern flanks of Devil's Dome, our blank stares were mirrored by an equally blank headwall that separated us from a gentle ridge leading to the summit of Chariot. Penetrating the imposing buttress turned out to be one of the biggest challenges of the day, not for its technical difficulty, but for its unpredictable crumbling rock. We took our chances on the northwest side of the headwall, hoping to find a weakness that would lead us to the plateau above. We found a way up that I wouldn't recommend to my worst enemy, but managed to delicately tiptoe our way up a gully and broken ramp feature that was chock-a-block full of choss. We were 10 hours in now and had covered just under half the distance.

The walk up to Chariot Peak was far, but we moved quickly over easy terrain. After topping out and completing yet another summit registry, we carried on to Banshee Peak, wasting little time. Banshee, Mount Diablo and Satan Peak are all relatively close to each other and offer some fun low 5th-class scrambling to gain their summits. In the interest of time, we decided to bypass the more technically challenging west ridge of Banshee and seek out a blocky gully on the southwest face with some low 5th-class climbing. We topped out on a broad ridge and scrambled the rest of the way to the summit of Banshee.

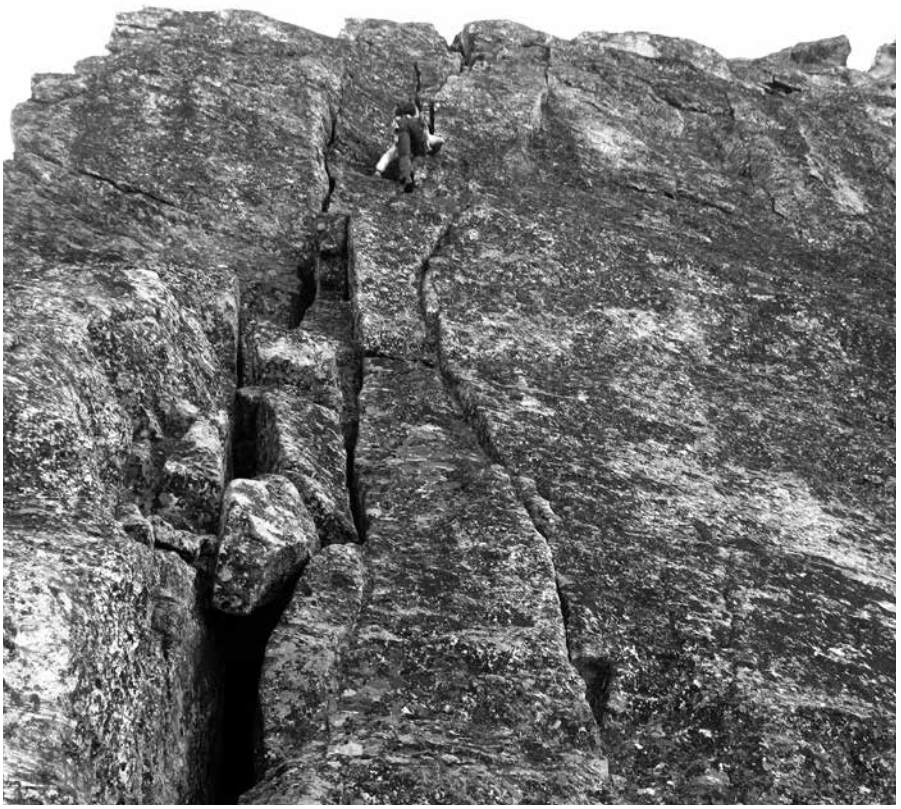
We stayed high and traversed the ridge that merges with Mount Diablo, enjoying spectacular views north down to Evans Lake and south to Asgard, Dag, Gimli and other formidable peaks of the Valhalla Range. A steep section of wall on the west face of Satan Peak diverted us to an easier ascent up the southeast ridge. As we skirted across the steep south face of Satan Peak, the devilish sun arced its way across the sky. Its seething rays pilfered every last drop of moisture from our bodies, our liquid reserves having long since run dry. We desperately searched for water or any bits of moisture seeping from the rock. A skim coat of moisture trickling down a smooth rock face was all we could find to replenish our parched bodies that began the day as 60 per cent water. Cam and I spent the next 15 minutes puckering our lips and sucking hard on rock.

Our route to the tip of Satan offered more fun scrambling with some low-5th-class moves. From Satan Peak, we looked east to the last peaks of the range: Devil's Spire and Devil's Couch. We felt somewhat deflated by the long distance, but convinced ourselves to push on, knowing that we likely wouldn't be venturing this far back into the Valhallas anytime soon.

Regrettably, we made the decision to bypass a summit attempt of Devil's Spire. This was arguably the most difficult climb of all the Devil's Range peaks, and we had neither the time nor the energy to attempt it. Another hour of trudging and steep scrambling brought us to the top of the massive chaise-lounge-shaped hunk of rock known as the Devil's Couch. This is a peak that I see every time I drive through the Slocan Valley, and it felt good to finally stand on top of it. We reached the summit in true Kootenay style at 4:20 p.m. We took some time to enjoy the view, eat some food and contemplate the best way back to camp.

It was nearly 5 p.m. when we left the Devil's Couch and began the long and arduous slog back to Gwillim Lakes. With our heads down and barely stopping to rest, we reached our camp in six hours at 10:30 p.m. We slipped into our down cocoons and drifted off, our bodies tired to the bone after sucking the marrow out of a day in the mountains.

Cam Shute soloing up False Dome. Photo: Nelson Rocha



Summary

Traverse of the Devil's Range (2966m vertical, 20.5 km, 10 summits, 20 hours), including the first ascent of Running with the Devil (5.9, 85m, 2 pitches), northwest face, Devil's Dome, Valhalla Provincial Park, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Nelson Rocha, Cam Shute, July 27, 2014.

The Rockies

Rub Your Nose in It

Raphael Slawinski

STEVE HOLECZI'S NAME appeared on call display. "There's a cool-looking corner system just left of Homage to the Spider. Wanna go check it out on Tuesday?"

I briefly thought about the sport climbing fitness I'd lose by going into the mountains, but in the end, adventure won out. I even agreed to meet at 5 a.m.

After just a few minutes of wading through long, wet grass in the grey light of dawn, our shoes and pants were soaked. The sky might have been clear now, but the night's downpour lingered in the mud on the trail and in the dark streaks on the rock faces above.

"The north side of Edith is completely wet. Think it's worth walking all the way into Louis?" Steve wondered. I'm a believer in Steve DeMaio's saying (one of many) that no matter how a route looks, you just have go rub your nose in it.

"We're already here. Might as well check it out," I suggested.

We left the trail where it descended into Gargoyle Valley and traversed below the east side of Mount Louis, awkwardly side-hilling across steep slopes of grass and shale. Pushing our way through a dense patch of small pines left us soaked to the skin. However, we were elated to find the vertical corner of our desire was unaccountably dry. Maybe not altogether dry—the bottom 10 metres were a glistening black streak. A stretch of scrambling, made unpleasant by slick dampness seemingly coating every foothold, and we were emptying our packs on a gravelly ledge below the streak.

I pulled on a few pieces as I splashed up the corner, rationalizing that what mattered today was getting as high as possible, before inevitably rappelling off. Higher up, where the crack turned gently overhanging, I was rewarded with dry, prickly rock. Arriving at a stance, I pulled up the drill and sunk a couple of bolts into perfect grey stone. We were on our way.

A month and another visit later, we were back for the send. There was a sharpness to the early morning air, which, along with the red leaves underfoot, spoke of changing seasons. A month earlier, I'd sweated in a T-shirt and swatted mosquitoes on the approach trail. Now I wore fleece gloves. However, the initial corner was dry, the holds and smears crisp in the yellow sunshine streaking over the ridges to the east. Unfortunately, by the time we were hanging below the overhanging ear capping the corner system, grey clouds had veiled the sky. As I started up the pitch, a snowflake landed on the sleeve of my windbreaker.

"Watch me," I grunted down to Steve. "I can't feel my toes."

At least my fingers were warm as I squeezed and palmed my way across the underside of the ear. It helped that the driving graupel held off until we were changing into approach shoes on the huge platform above. Wearing every layer we had brought, we scrambled toward the summit.

"Holy shit, check it out!" As the summit cross came into view, so did five figures just below it. The prospect of lineups on the rappels had us nearly running across the final stretch of ridge. I suppose I don't always live up to the ideal of detachment and equanimity that I aspire to. I clipped the chain of the first station mere seconds ahead of a French guide with two clients in tow.

"Vee have a hundred-tventee-meeter rope," he said, dubiously eyeing our single cord.

"If we end up holding you up, you can go ahead." Politely but firmly I stood my ground. However, they were nowhere to be seen as we coiled the rope below the last rappel and happily skidded down toward the valley. Our project was finished, and so was summer.

Steve Holeczi on pitch four of the Holeczi-Slawinski route on Mount Louis.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Summary

Holeczi-Slawinski (5.11-, 250m), east face, Mt. Louis. FA: Steve Holeczi, Raphael Slawinski (with help from Sam Eastman), Sept. 1, 2014.

Approach: The route climbs the next corner system left of Homage to the Spider, so approach as per the description in *Banff Rock*. While scrambling to the start of that route, you'll pass two single-bolt "rappel" stations. At the second bolt, traverse to climber's right and up into an alcove in the big gully above the Homage start (watch out for rockfall early in the season from snowmelt up high). There is a single bolt left of the crack that marks the start of the route. The bottom 10 metres of the crack are often wet until early August, but still climbable.

Gear: A single set of TCUs, cams to 4" with doubles in 0.5-2" (optional 5" for one section), 15 quickdraws (many extendables), single 60-metre rope

works well for the climb and the fixed rappels from the summit.

P1: 5.10, 25m. A gently overhanging crack with good gear leads to a two-bolt station.

P2: 5.8, 50m. Climb a V-notch corner plugging cams into the crack in the back. After reaching a small ledge, continue up the corner to a two-bolt station below a short off-width.

P3: 5.10, 40m. Sling chockstones or plug in a 5" cam to protect the wide section above the belay. Upon reaching a ledge, climb a stunning dihedral that turns into a "better than it looks" chimney that leads to a two-bolt station with a blank wall straight above and a chossy gully up and right. Note: An alternate 5.9R start to this pitch climbs around the off-width on the left (fixed piton), but isn't recommended.

P4: 5.10+, 50m. An airy step left into the adjacent corner system leads to face climbing past bolts to a ledge. Continue past a mix of bolts and gear to a cruxy bulge and a two-bolt, semi-hanging belay below the overhanging ear. A single rack up to 4" suffices for this pitch.

P5: 5.11-, 35m. Climb slightly friable rock past bolts up and left around the ear. Once past the overhang, the crack starts to widen into a loose chimney/alleyway. Unless you enjoy grovelling, don't get into it. Instead, once past the last bolt, gain the fin on the right. Great rock with intermittent cracks for pro leads to a stance and a gear anchor. Only small to medium cams are needed for this pitch.

P6: 4th class, 50m. Climb along the exposed fin until you can easily step left into the alleyway. Continue to a huge ledge, which also marks the top of Homage to the Spider.

The Holeczi-Slawinski route on the east of Mount Louis. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Capricorn Peak

Eamonn Walsh

THE SMEARS ON THE NORTHEAST face of Capricorn Peak were looking in good shape in November 2014, probably more so because there was no snow clinging to the slabby nature of the wall, so the ice lines were more enhanced.

Many moons ago, Raphael Slawinski, Steve Holeczi and I approached this same face in a snowstorm. We headed in the direction that we believed Capricorn to be and after a couple of hours of slogging through the storm we suddenly found ourselves back at the road! Needless to say, we were very surprised by this; none of us had ever been that disoriented before, or since. So complete was our confusion that we were unsure which direction we had parked our vehicle. We waited for the next vehicle to come by to flag it down and ask if they had seen our car parked in whichever direction they had come from. To add salt to an injury (our pride), the first car to stop was our friend Grant Statham who had a good laugh at our expense, and then gave us a lift.

Round two was joined by J. Mills. This time we all looked at maps to find the best spot to park and off we went. The weather was clear, so the approach was a no-brainer. Indeed Steve and I wondered at the incompetence of young us. As we had pulled up to park, another vehicle did the same; it was our mates Mike Verwey and Jon Simms. We all tromped off towards Capricorn with non-stop banter for the entire two-hour approach.

Jon and Mike headed for the plum out left while J., Steve and I went for the left hand of the two most obvious lines on the right side of the cliff. After scrambling up a gully a little ways to a ledge, we roped up. The climbing from here to the top was better and more challenging than expected. The first pitch was probably the best, nice mixed then ice climbing for 60 metres, and another 60 metres of nice rambley ice to a 50-metre pitch that was the transition from ice to rock. Then a 60-metre snow wallow up and left to the final rock barrier, which ended up being a 35-metre pitch of run-out, snow-covered slab. It traversed up and right to a nice rock corner that gained access to the top of the wall. We rapped back down the route: first two were off rock anchors then two V-threads followed by a short rap from an icicle.

A quick hike out brought us back to the car after an 11.5-hour round-trip day. Mike and Jon climbed their line to the top of the ice; they thought it could be taken to the top of the wall also, but would require some bolts. J. then returned a couple of days later to climb the most right-hand line with Rob Owens.

Summary

Big Ears Teddy (M4X WI4R, 300m), northeast face, Capricorn Peak. FA: Steve Holeczi, J. Mills, Eamonn Walsh, Nov. 16, 2015.

The Serpentine Dilemma (M6X WI5+, 150m) FA: Jon Simms, Mike Verwey, Nov. 16, 2015.

Space Goat (M5 WI5+X, 320m) FA: J. Mills, Rob Owens, Nov. 20, 2015.

The northeast of Capricorn Peak: (1) The Serpentine Dilemma, (2) Big Ears Teddy, (3) Space Goat. Photo: J. Mills

Kahveology

Jon Walsh

THIS PAST WINTER I climbed two new mixed routes at one of my all-time favourite mixed crags, the Storm Creek Headwall (Stanley's less famous twin). The first one went down with Marc-Andre Leclerc. It was Marc's first route in the Rockies and I didn't want to disappoint him with anything less memorable than a traditionally protected, multi-pitch mixed rig in a wild setting. A week earlier, I had seen it with way more ice than the other half-dozen times I had ventured to the back of the wall. I couldn't stop thinking about it all week, anticipating a big send the following weekend.

It had been 10 years since I had attempted that line with Rich Marshall, my main mentor at the time, and he had led what he claimed was his hardest lead ever. Although he's not as into it anymore, Rich was a true mixed master, and one of the boldest I've ever climbed with. I had dreamed about getting back to that line someday.

Marc-Andre is as hungry for good climbing as anyone and he really wanted the crux pitch, a shallow corner with little dribbles of ice dripping down it. He methodically sent it, pounding four pitons along the way, three of which we left fixed. It was definitely the psychological crux, as it's hard to see the protection or the holds coming until you're locked off and feeling around for them.

I had the pleasure of getting the highly entertaining second pitch, which consisted of mostly thin ice climbing protected by rock gear. Even though there were a few rock moves, the pitch was 90 per cent ice. The WI6 grade is definitely more for the technical difficulties than the pump; however, it's harder than your average pitch of fat WI6.

Our bail anchor of two nuts part way up from a decade earlier was a convenient rappel on the way down. A final third pitch checked in at thin WI4. We were soon making another nut station at the top before rushing off to meet friends for beers and sushi at the Banff Mountain Film Festival, stoked on our new route, and even more stoked that the bolt kit had never left its place from the bottom of the pack.

In January I was back with Jon Simms, this time trying the direct start to Check Your Head, a route that Jason Kruk, Joshua Lavigne and I put up together a couple of years prior. We had rappelled it directly, and even though it was dark at the time, I had noted the potential. It is one of the closest routes to the road on Storm Creek Headwall,

The Plum on Storm Creek Headwall. Photo: Jon Walsh

Kahveology on Storm Creek Headwall. Photo: Jon Walsh

Jon Walsh on pitch two of The Plum. Photo: Marc-Andre Leclerc

and you can see the upper ice from the highway. I believe it's probably climbable most years.

I had tried the first pitch a weekend before with my girlfriend, Michelle Kadatz, but it had been brutally cold and I only got halfway up the first pitch. As the route started in a chossy cave, it required six bolts through the technical crux to get to the good rock. With the bolts in, I was able to send the pitch first try with Jon. The sustained 50-metre pitch still needed a healthy dose of rock gear to reach the *goulotte* and belay ledge. One of the most notable things about this pitch was that it offered the best quality limestone I had ever drytooled on, and the gear was excellent the whole way.

Another long, superb pitch of thin ice protected by rock gear on more of the same phenomenal rock got us to the junction with Check Your Head and its two final pitches of WI4 and WI5. We added bolted stations so the route is rigged and ready for those psyched to venture up there and get their trad mixed on. We named the route Kahveology—the science of coffee; also the Portland-based coffee roaster that used the name Man Yoga (a route that Jon Simms and I put up on the Stanley Headwall [see *CAJ* 2012, p. 105]) for one of their main coffee blends. The business even linked the video we made of the ascent to their website. We were honoured, of course, and in return named our latest creation after them.

Summary

The Plum (WI6 M7, 120m), Storm Creek Headwall. FA: Marc-Andre Leclerc, Jon Walsh, Nov. 8, 2014.

The climb is located about halfway along Storm Creek Headwall and just right of The Peach [see *CAJ* 2011, p.104]. We accessed the first pitch via an exposed snow ramp from the right that would not be recommended in times of high avalanche hazard.

P1: M7, 40m. Traverse easily left from the belay then make steep moves to gain a shallow right-facing corner that leads to a roof. Two Peckers and a knifeblade were left fixed in the corner. Move left through the roof to gain a good crack that trends back right to a belay ledge with many good anchor options. The gear on this pitch is not very obvious but seemed adequate.

P2: WI6, 60m. Work through ice blobs and mushrooms past an old anchor (used for rappelling) to a stance below an overhang. Make some technical moves up and left past delicate ice, and then move around the arête on good holds to gain ice-filled grooves that led to an excellent ledge with good cracks for an anchor a few metres left of the main ice flow.

P3: WI4, 20m. This pitch could vary in difficulty depending on the thickness of the ice. A fixed rock anchor of two nuts is just beyond the end of the ice.

Descent: Descend the route in two rappels off fixed-nut anchors.

Kahveology (M8 WI5, 160m), Storm Creek Headwall. FA: Jon Simms, Jon Walsh, Jan. 23, 2015.

Kahveology is one of the closest routes on the Storm Creek Headwall to the road, and you can see the upper ice from the highway. It is likely climbable most years. Gear up at a sheltered spot below a small overhang about 20 metres down and right from the start of the route.

P1: M8, 45m. From the highest point of snow below the ice, trend slightly right up easy, scrappy mixed terrain. A fist crack provides protection for a steep body length to the chossy back of the cave. Follow four bolts up and left requiring a few hard pulls to get to a nice crack. Follow that up then pass two more bolts and a fixed nut from the old rappel anchor. From there, trend right then back left to a bulge below the ice, which is used to gain a small ledge and a bolted anchor on the right. Be sure to put a runner on the first bolt, a medium-length draw on the second bolt and extend the traditional protection where necessary to reduce rope drag.

P2: M6R, 50m. This pitch might be much easier and more protectable on fatter years. An 80-degree ice *goulotte* with occasional but good rock protection leads 15 metres to a gully that averages 60 degrees. The ice was a very consistent three-centimetres thick, and the climbing was unprotectable for 30 metres after the angle kicked back. Fortunately, the ice was of excellent quality, making it seem reasonable. The bolted anchor is about five metres right of the main pillar.

P3: WI5, 30m. Climb steep ice that is thin and hard to protect at first. Good rock gear can be found on the left side at the steepest part, although the right side is more direct. A bolted anchor is on the right below a rock roof.

P4: WI4, 25m. Straightforward ice climbing to a bolted anchor about three to four metres above the top of the ice in the rock.

Soft Moth

Brandon Pullan

I remember the first time I saw the Iron Butterfly on Windtower, an esthetic 450-metre 5.11 A4. I dreamed of climbing it one day; who hasn't—who hasn't wanted to *be* the Iron Butterfly. But, before I could attempt it, I needed experience on all sorts of Rockies' terrain. That path led me to climbing new routes, which eventually led me to the realization that no one was climbing my new routes.

Too many times I had established routes far off the beaten path, too far. My old-school method of climbing new, easy, run-out routes miles from the car in hopes that someone would make the long trek to repeat them proved out of date, even for me. So I adapted. Instead of aiming my sights on "must use binoculars to see" new routes, I focused my energy on the closest undeveloped rock to the road I could find. Following the popular approach to route setting—proven by other Bow Valley climbers—I left the pitons at home and packed the power drill.

In 2007, Nick Rochacewich and I climbed a new route on the west face of Ha Ling. There's a west face on Ha Ling? Not really, but there are low-angled slabs that ramp away from the north face eventually transitioning into scree slopes. And that's where Nick and I climbed our new route, between the steep face and the southern slopes. We called it Slayer because from a distance it looks like the band Slayer's logo, a slashing letter S. The route was never popular, despite the moderate 5.8 grade, likely because there was no available topo and those who did climb it never appreciated it for what it was—an easy 600-metre romp close to the road. Haters gonna hate.

In 2013, Darren Vonk was with me when I started my new-age style of route development: find rock close to the road and bolt it. Far out, eh? From the same parking lot used to access Ha Ling (and the popular Grassi Lakes area), we fought scree above the lot west towards EEOR, but stopped after five minutes at a wall once known as Whiteman Crag. Due to its position next to Kanga Crag, I have called the wall Kanga South because Whiteman Crag sounds a tad old school, like my out-of-date new route methods. It boasted a number of those old-school lines I once desired. But, with a new trusty Hilti drill, Darren and

Brandon Pullan on pitch five of Soft Moth. Photo: Gaby James

I looked for the cleanest piece of rock and found it with our two-pitch route Hot Fuzz (5.8).

"What joy," I thought, "What satisfaction." After a few hours, we had a route that someone might want to climb, and climb they did. The route was so popular that in 2014 I added a second route to the wall, to the right. Joined by Gaby James, I led ground up (like I'm told "real" climbers do) and established Sharknado. The new four-pitch 5.6 (or 5.9 direct) also proved to be popular. Sure, the rock was dank in some spots and, despite warnings of it being a new route, some parties climbed beneath other parties and almost died from rockfall. Remember, it's still the Rockies. Don't climb beneath other climbers!

It was then, atop the mighty Sharknada, that I looked across at the so-obvious Slayer S I'd climbed seven years previous, and thought, "Hey, what if I straighten out that S, connecting the slabs between the ramps?" Then, I suspected, it might get climbed. I shared my desire to climb a new route up the west "face" of Ha Ling with the new-to-town Texan Gaby. She opted to stay north of the border for the push.

Only a few weeks later, we made the 20-minute hike from the car to the base of the 600-metre wall. I looked for a direct pitch that would avoid the long 60-metre traversing first pitch of Slayer, but again, dank rock spoiled plans. So I climbed the first pitch of Slayer and added protection bolts. I lopped off big blocks that crashed and made dust clouds on the scree. Trundling is always sort of fun (Gaby was safely out of the way, tucked into a corner 30 metres to my left, in case you wondered). Next was the choss band, which will never be clean so heads up, but it's easy third class and short. Then you're into the goods, kind of. A loose-ish crack, but easy to a ledge. A few new bolts guide the way.

Now you're into the money. It took some digging, but the next pitch revealed some classic limestone rock. Slayer climbed the chimney left, no easy task, so I added a safer variation to the side. It's the crux of the route with thin 5.9 climbing that pops you onto a ledge where Slayer continues up easy ground to the right. The new route climbs straight up on solid black stone with surprisingly great crimps and ledges. After two pitches, Slayer crosses from right to left. Continuing direct, I found more solid rock and it continued to get easier with short cruxes where I added bolts.

With three pitches left, the path of least resistance steepened and a few exposed 5.9 moves brought us to a fork in the road. On the left was an easy 5.8 face/crack pitch; on the right, a crack. We opted for the left-hand fork then rappelled back down to our anchor and climbed the right-hand variation splitter we dubbed the Moth Crack—some of the best 5.10 cracks in the Bow Valley (bring a full rack). The last pitch is not the best, but it's short and easy (5.5 corner climbing).

Despite a decade of warming up for Iron Butterfly, which still has no second ascent, I realized maybe I won't *be* the Iron Butterfly. Instead, maybe I'm just a soft moth, and that's fine with me.

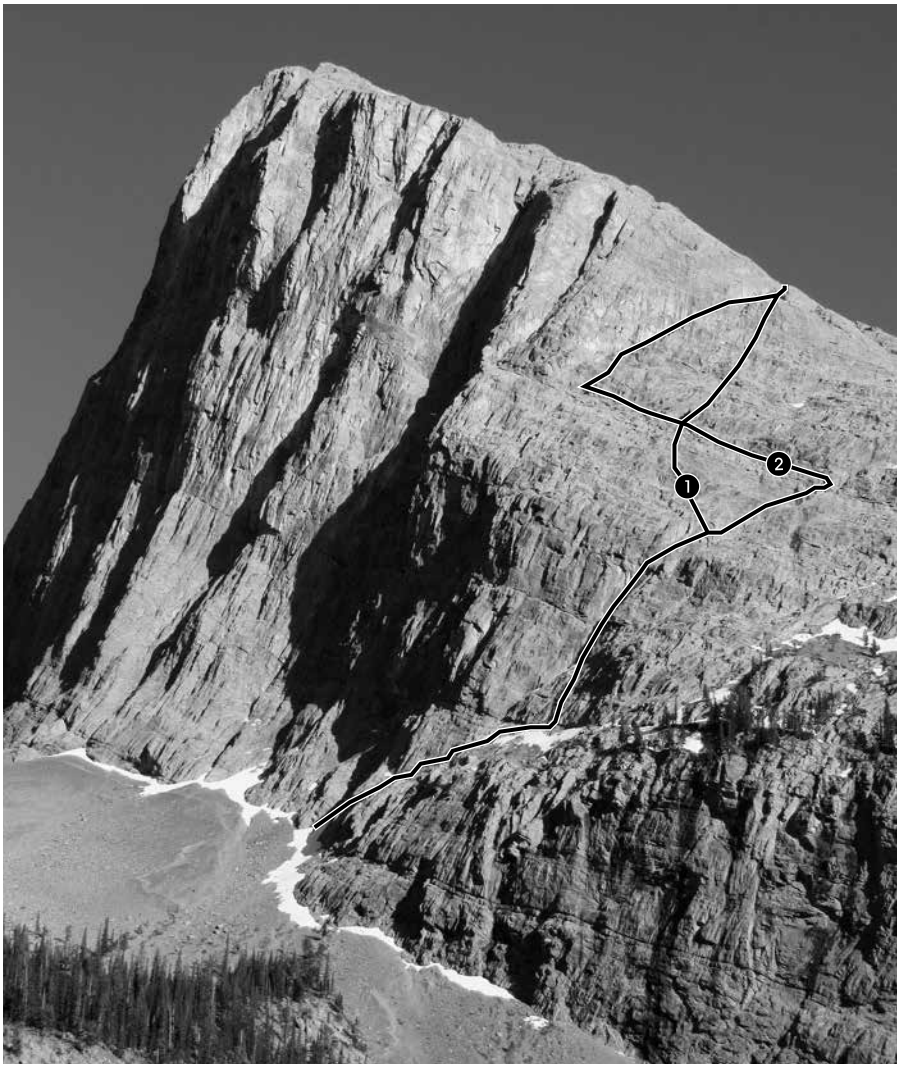
Summary

Hot Fuzz (5.8, 85m, 2 pitches), Kanga South. FA: Brandon Pullan, Darren Vonk, Sept. 4, 2013.

Sharknado (5.6 (5.9 direct), 110m, 4 pitches), Kanga South. FA: Gaby James, Brandon Pullan, Aug. 6, 2014.

Soft Moth (5.9, 500m, 11 pitches), west face, Ha Ling Peak. FA: Gaby James, Brandon Pullan, Sept. 8, 2014.

The west face of Ha Ling Peak: (1) Soft Moth, (2) Slayer. Photo: Brandon Pullan



Descending the Goodsirs

Trevor Sexsmith

THE GOODSIR TOWERS are an immense limestone massif, surpassed in height in all of the Banff/Yoho/Kootenay Park area only by Assiniboine and Forbes. When I first saw a sliver of snow in satellite imagery of the South Tower, I slowly became obsessed by it. A traverse the winter previous gave me a look at the Goodsirs from the other side of the Columbia Valley, the views only echoing the previous determination that those were bloody big mountains, and they wouldn't easily be skied. The weakness in the tower walls I wanted to ski was tilted just a bit too far out of sight to be seen. Late in the summer when a buddy offered to spend a weekend at the Parks Canada cabin at Ice River, I couldn't say no, and during that time, I went for a walk up river to see if my conviction would pay off. But again the mountain raised its guard, and clouds and valley walls thwarted my view. Another trip in the winter to the Ice River cabin was likewise fruitless. Each failed attempt to see the line only served to strengthen my resolve and deepen my curiosity.

Finally, in late March 2015, I got my answer. Ian Button and I went to ski the north face of Chancellor Peak, a formidable mountain that looms over the Trans-Canada Highway. I've wanted to ski it for a while, and like the Goodsirs, had made a summer survey of it, leaving only more questions and fewer answers. The choss just looked a little too steep and a little too continuous. We went for it anyways. I knew it had been skied before and it looked more rocky than expected. Ian didn't feel it would be a good ski, and I felt the same but didn't care, the bigger reason for an ascent was the view to the Goodsirs. Ian was content to wait and ski some better-looking slopes around, so I soloed up, and after a couple of cruxes, found the face to be much better than it looked from below. The angels (or my heartbeat) sang in my ear as I topped the ridge and emerged into the brilliant sun. Just beyond, across the Ice River valley, was my quarry looking like a perfectly doable bit of gnarly skiing. I was ecstatic. I couldn't have imagined a better-looking face emerging from the shroud of mystery that had blocked my view before. After some great skiing down Chancellor, I told Ian what I had seen and the stage was set for next weekend.

The Northwest Face of Goodsir South Tower. Photo: Trevor Sexsmith

After working a 16-hour shift till 11 p.m. the preceding night, and with an extra day at the end of my weekend booked off, Ian and I drove up the Beaverfoot valley till we hit too much snow, and then started skinning to the park boundary. We skinned down a bit of road and the Black Ice trail into the cutblock near the lower Ice Creek cabin, and kept skinning up the Ice River trail and into the park to the now-defunct upper Ice Creek cabin, 7.5 kilometres from the truck along the gently sloped valley. The valley, I knew was flat enough that we would be skinning back out as well. After we got to the upper Ice Creek, the trail ends and we had to find our way across the river flats. Soft, windless snow was coming down on our way up the Ice, promising good ski conditions. After a couple of more clicks in the Ice valley, we broke east up the valley leading to the Goodsirs. The side valley had the opposite problem of the Ice, being steep and difficult terrain, and quickly losing its snow cover. After 400 metres of climbing up the ravine, it opened up as it diverged into three ravines, respectively following steep small valleys heading to the North, Centre and South Goodsir towers. Climbing 200 metres more brought us up to a stand of trees between the Centre and

South ravines as the storm started to really lay down the snow, but with no wind still, which was exactly what was needed for these high, fickle west faces.

We woke up the next day at the leisurely hour of 7 a.m. to bright sunshine highlighting more mouthwatering lines across the Ice valley. We had our own to get after, and we decided to try for the prime line: the northwest face (ca. 3,450 metres) of Goodsir South (3,567 metres). The idea being that if we were unlucky with weather this day, we could make another attempt the following day. Even though it looked great from Chancellor, I was still expecting all sorts of difficulties, having to rappel some ice barely covered with snow, or a rock step, something like that. This is a very big, burly mountain after all. We made quick work skinning up the lower scree slope and got up close under an awesome wall of rock to dump some excess gear. We switched to plates (think of it as a snowshoe for boot-packing steep slopes) and crampons and started booting up. After the lower choke, a slough came down that Ian caught the edge of. We decided to keep going, as it wasn't all that large, and with cloud building around the summit, we reasoned slough activity would only decrease. We didn't see another. All the way up I was expecting to find something disagreeable about the bond between yesterday's snow and the underlying well-weathered snow, but it just never came. The only hard part was all the wading through deep, non-cohesive powder.

Riding back down was awesome, far better than I ever expected from inspection a week ago. The deep fresh snow made a run that should be made with careful turns and a measured approach into a fun, carefree run. Such is the power of powder snow. The deep ribs of fresh on the upper face led into slightly denser but much deeper piles of slough. After grabbing the gear at the cliff, there was still more turns to be had down the drainage to camp. All told, it was 1,400 metres of the best pow down a very direct, fall-line face. It sure is hard to complain after a day like that! Ian discovered that he lost his ice axe on the way down somewhere in all the fresh snow. He decided that he wanted to look for it for the next day. I decided to stick with the original plan to check out the North-Centre Tower col (3,160 metres) and maybe, time permitting, the Centre Tower (a.k.a. Rae Peak, 3,364 metres) for a possible west couloir descent.

The next morning, we got up for 6 a.m. and went our separate ways. I headed up the north drainage and found nearly identical conditions to yesterday. The snow was deep and the going good all the way up to the col between the North and Centre Towers. I decided then that the descent of the 250-metre west couloir on the Centre Tower would be a good objective since the weather was co-operating. It was even deeper than the South Tower due to the protection of the couloir allowing the snow to stick without sloughing—seriously deep pow. Without the extra floatation of the plates on my feet, I doubt I would have made the ascent with good enough speed for our planned exit time. It was hip deep even with them on. The ski down was just as good as the South Tower, deeper snow but with more reason to turn to avoid exposed rock and the confines of the couloir. I continued down mostly the same way I came up for a 1,300-metre run down to camp.

We exited that afternoon, opting to ski on the northerly aspect of the steep ravine leading to the Ice River. It still yielded plenty of difficulty for our heavily laden group, but the waning fresh powder helped. The rest of the Ice was slightly downhill skinning, making our best attempt to follow the partially buried tracks we laid on the way in.

Summary

First ski descent of the Northwest Face of Goodsir South Tower. Ian Button, Trevor Sexsmith, Apr. 5, 2015.

First ski descent of the West Couloir of Goodsir Centre Tower (Rae Peak). Trevor Sexsmith, Apr. 6, 2015.

The west faces of the Goodsirs: (1) West Couloir, Goodsir Centre Tower, (2) Northwest Face, Goodsir South Tower. Photo: Trevor Sexsmith

Sam's Gift

Sam Eastman

AS WE DROVE PAST the complex ramparts of Castle Mountain, I ran through the different routes in my head. Last year, I had been involved in developing a mega sport route on one of the finest features anywhere. Castles in the Sky was born when Sonnie Trotter linked the 50-metre 5.14 crux pitch in one mega effort [see 2014 *CAJ*, p. 32]. Glancing out the window, the yellow illuminated wall to the right of Castles in the Sky beckoned me to return to the lofty heights of this inspiring playground. Teaming up with Sam Lambert, a psyched fellow young person, who was also involved in last year's new route, seemed like a no-brainer. Developing a big line is more work than play, and I had forgotten that since last summer. We trampled up the approach, laden down with 100 bolts, a monster rack and fixed rope upon fixed rope. If you are going to murder the impossible, bringing traditional gear along for the ride helps to convince you that you're not actually littering a beautiful wall with stainless steel that will last for years longer than yourself. Anyways, down the face we went—a slightly overhanging wall of mixed dolomite and limestone. Rests came at the few tiny ledges on the face.

People always tell me that every Rockies' mountain is loose. Well, Castle is no exception. As we cleaned away, more and more loose choss would rain down upon the fixed ropes. We watched as car-door-sized blocks rained on the cords. Although we had some close calls, nothing ever cut the necessary life lines.

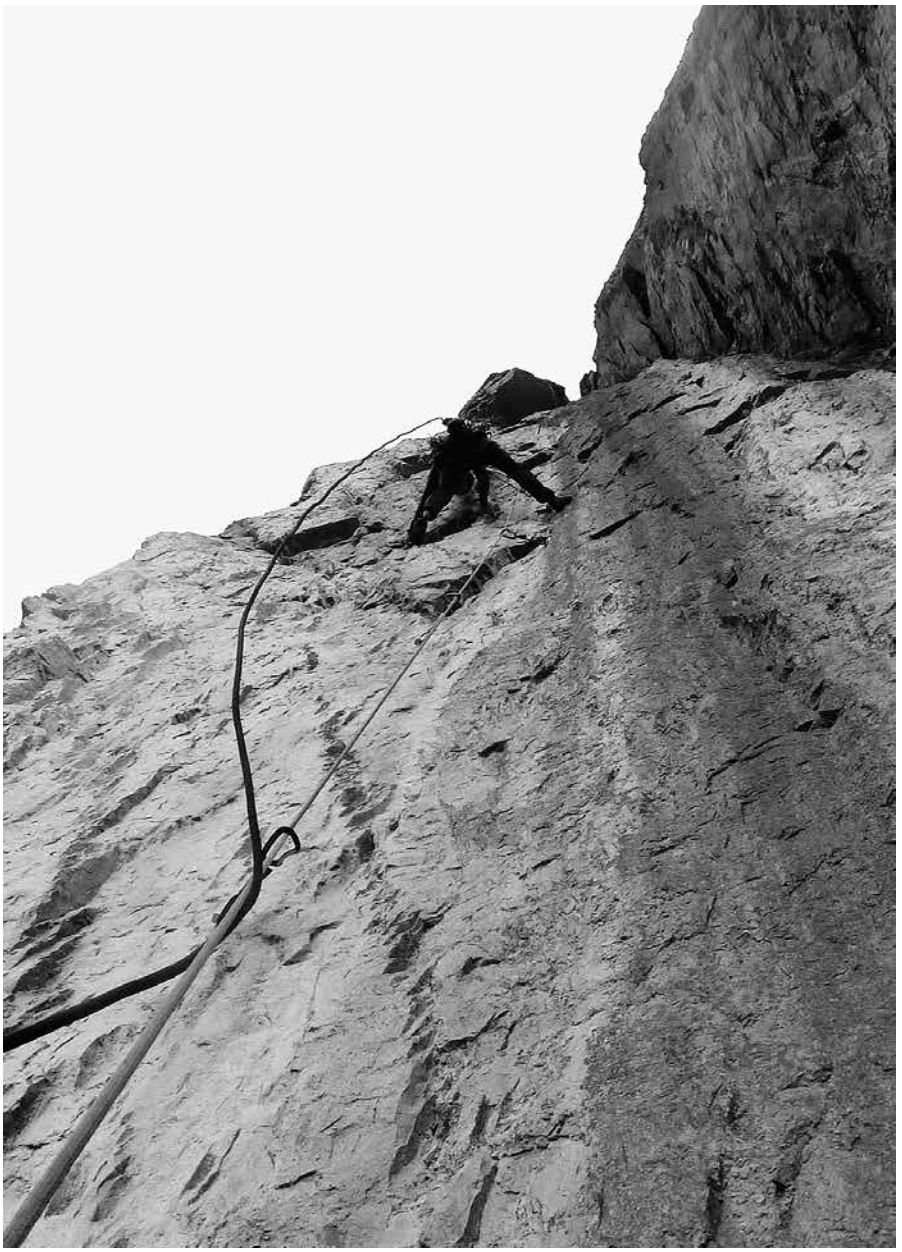
About a month after first starting the project, we began redpoint burns. Often both of us were too fixated on the climbing to notice the brewing clouds overhead. The meat of the route was found on the third pitch—a 55-metre enduro war, unrelenting until you can climb into a half-moon shallow cleft and shake the forearms 10 metres from the anchor. At first, the top bit of this pitch felt like a devious V6 boulder problem—with serious air underfoot. A few attempts later with easier beta, the sequence became apparent, taking the grade down to a manageable 5.13.

Developing a long and remote sport route is about the love of creating—not for any good reason, or socio-political platform for discussion—art for art's sake. I know that I will never forget those months with Sam up on the wall, an amazing experience with a good friend.

Summary

Sam's Gift (5.13, 200m, 5 pitches), south face, Castle Mountain. FA: Sam Eastman, Sam Lambert, Aug. 12, 2014.

Sam Lambert on pitch five of Sam's Gift. Photo: Sam Eastman



Baldy to Fullerton Traverse

Glenn Reisenhofer

HOW DO OTHER PEOPLE'S ideas morph into your own thoughts and desires? Marc Schaller had envisioned touring southwards from the summit of Mount Baldy. How far he wanted to travel was up for debate, some mountain ridge chains seem to go on continuously. This ridge continued seamlessly until a split near Mount Fischer. Having only two days at our disposal, we decided to take a less lengthy route that ended with Mount Fullerton—45 kilometres with roughly 3,750 metres of elevation gain.

It was a split-second decision to set out one fine day in July 2014. The weather was excellent. We hurriedly arranged a pickup at the south end of our ridge. Five a.m. is too early for me, so I sleepwalked as we started upwards, getting Marc to wake me at any sketchy bits. It took very little time to arrive on top of Mount Baldy. Other parties were on the hill as the heat of the day started to rise.

At Baldy Pass we met hikers. The ascent up towards Midnight Peak (GR 380492) caused cramps in my legs. This was a definite problem for we had just started the journey. Better to drop the leg gears down into a slower mode of travelling. On the summit, we spotted a large group of heli-hikers near Belmore Brown Peak. Four other folks joined us on the top of Midnight Peak. This ridge was busier than we had anticipated.

We continued southwards towards Tiara Peak (GR 406451). From previous experience, we knew to traverse around the east side, reaching a much needed shaded area. Here we cracked our first beer of the day. The blocky and steep Tiara Peak tempted us, but we continued with the plan. To the north, the effects of the Spreading Creek forest fire near Saskatchewan River Crossing diminished our views. Below us, to the east, massive logging operations continued along the Powderface Road.

The ridge chain flowed and blended into summits, following one another endlessly. Every high point and minor summit had a cairn. Evening approached and with it arrived the magic hour of intensified light. We were at a col (GR 388393) when we met our first serious obstacle. It appeared that we could no longer stay on the ridge. We decided to sneak around the southeast side of this minor summit to the col on the other side (GR 381387). A few bits of 4th class got us up the sloping terrain and scree to the narrow col. We found nothing but steepness in every direction. We searched around for a suitable windless bivy spot. Not finding one, we retraced our route back down. The 4th-class downclimb was somewhat intimidating in the semi-darkness. Tucked tightly against the base of the rock wall was an excellent flat bivy spot.

The second beer of the day was mighty tasty. The appropriately named Super Moon shone on us as the mosquitoes did their very best to inflict injury. Why were there mosquitoes well above the vegetation line? The crinkly nylon tarp did little to hide us from the beasts. After very little sleep, we descended into the valley at first light.

We knew about the 1941 Avro Anson airplane crash in upper Canyon Creek, but we had no real idea as to where it was located. We scanned slopes as we travelled but had no luck. We gave up searching on reaching the valley floor. At 6:30 a.m. we already were stripped down to T-shirts. Another hot day was preparing to pound on us. Staggering through the light bush we suddenly came across an old weathered aluminum airplane door, the crash site at last (GR 391377). Had we been a few metres to either side we would have missed it altogether. The main body appeared to be missing and relatively few pieces remained. Later research revealed that a bet between the flight school and the recovery team had occurred, with the latter winning a bottle of Scotch for their efforts. They carried the wreck off the mountain and out Canyon Creek for 48 kilometres.

The south side of the ridge (GR 387364) reaffirmed that this was the technical part of the entire traverse. We continued southward feeling somewhat guilty at avoiding the hardest part. Ridges and small summits began to blur once again. The terrain to the northwest of Mount Fullerton was miraculous, consisting mostly of open easy terrain. Unfortunately, this was short lived. Upon reaching the northwest ridge of Fullerton, we encountered the worst scree of the entire trip. Besides good footing, shade was also becoming scarce. From the summit of Fullerton, a beautiful line descended the southeast side of the peak directly to the Little Elbow River. A bit of scrambling followed by an excessively soft downhill forest walk led us into the cool water of the river.

Overall, we managed to stay on the ridge in its entirety, except the portion near the plane wreckage where gear would have been needed. The number of summits you traverse depends on what you call a summit. All of them had cairns on them. The trip was about 45 kilometres long with roughly 3,750 metres of elevation gain. The cool river at the end of the trip helps soothe your sore toes from tight boots on a hot day.


LA SPORTIVA

The East

Apocalypse Now

Will Mayo

AT THE END OF FEBRUARY 2015, Anna Pfaff and I were laying plans to explore the northern reaches of Gros Morne National Park. The plan was to reconnoitre aerially then fine-tune our objectives terrestrially by snowmobile and ski approaches. We were packing bivouac gear and logging coordinates on aviation charts when I received a photo from our friend and mentor, Joe Terravecchia. There it was—the central Cholesterol Wall high above the east end of Ten Mile Pond. This coveted line was a long-standing nemesis for Joe, but he graciously shared the project with us when he learned that we were planning to visit Gros Morne, knowing we were hungry for the full engagement of a hard traditional mixed project. I gaped at the image that appeared on my screen, my phone clasped tightly in my sweating palm. Utter disbelief washed over me. The wall was exactly what I had longed for—a towering vertical precipice of granite, stepped with overhangs draped with icicles and smears, and capped with wild, three-dimensional daggers and roofs of ice.

Less than a week later, we stood on the frozen surface of Ten Mile Pond as the departing sound of our snowmobile guide's sled faded amongst the howling gusts of wind. Alone in the remote desolate heart of Gros Morne National Park, we shouldered our packs and made the steep approach up the snow-choked talus, still wearing our parkas. Reaching the base after a half-hour post-holing exercise, we racked up with frozen fingers. The giant wall seemed insurmountable to us, cowering amidst the sandblast of spindrift-laden gusts. We resolved to break it down, focus on one pitch at a time, thus avoid feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the fiercely overhanging vastness that surrounded us from above.

Will Mayo on pitch two of Apocalypse Now. Photo: Anna Plaff

On the first day, we started up a rotting dike below the icicles in the centre of the lower wall. I climbed about 15 metres, finding several hard-won pieces of decent gear along the way before being stymied by horrid, unstable blocks of dike rock. I traversed left and climbed some delicate, parched, sun-baked icicles to try to end-run the ice. Again, I was shut down by a lack of gear. My fingers were completely numb in my skimpy drytooling gloves, and my third tool flew out of my hand mid-swing when I was trying in vain to hammer in a knifeblade piton. I downclimbed to Anna, who patiently belayed in the battering gusts at the base of the wall. I expected her to lobby for a descent, but she said, "What about the corner to the right?"

I warmed my hands in my mittens for 15 minutes, racked up then started up the corner. I was shocked to find solid, coarse granite there, and the opening section went quickly with good finger-sized Camalots for protection. I pulled up into a chimney, tagged a welded grey smear of ice and stemmed up underneath the first ceiling. I pounded in a bomber angle piton, heel-hooked a horn on the right and reached above the lip to find secure hooks in a fingertip-sized crack. The small wires slid into the crack at will, and I reached the second overhang as my hands began to numb. A finger-sized crack appeared above the next overhang. I placed gear and committed to tenuous hooks in a corner that hung above. At precisely 30 metres, an ideal foot ledge was reached with gear available just above it. I built an anchor and yelled "Off!" The first pitch (M8, 30 metres) was complete, and it was a knockout. We were on the wall and the climbing was spectacular. Our morale soared.

The second pitch (M8, 15 metres) required a bit more work. The intermittent seams that split the wall above were discontinuous and tight. I failed to onsight it and resolved to aid the pitch to get the gear then climb it free. The protection consisted almost exclusively of Peckers, Tomahawks and knifeblades, but I cobbled it together after a full day's effort. We pulled the rope, rappelled a line we fixed on the first pitch and the next day sent it with the pitons in place. The free-climbing is excellent with tenuous hooks and pick torques in the seams and a delicate dance up delaminated smears of ice to reach the belay (a comfortable ledge below the wide sea of ice that hangs across the middle of the wall).

On the third day, the third pitch (WI4, 40 metres) went quickly. At midday, we arrived at a snow pedestal below the surreal ice formations that hung above. I continued up the fourth pitch (WI7, 35 metres), working out left and climbing a vertical step of ice, but was forced back right toward the frightening giant blobs of sun-baked ice that guarded the upper wall. Well above a good screw, I delicately worked up under the belly of the first formation. It resembled something out of *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, like a cartoonist's

bizarre creation. Like magic, a horizontal pin-crack appeared at the base of the ice. I pounded in a #6 knifeblade that rung with the unmistakable perfect ascending scale of rings of solidity. I thanked heaven and committed to surmount the fearsome structure of ice, making my way upward on plates of two-inch-thick dry, sun-bleached ice to find a belay on good angle pitons behind the Doric-like column of ice that stood solitarily in the centre of the upper wall below the ice roofs that loomed above.

On our fourth day, we ascended the first two pitches on fixed ropes, re-climbed the ice of the third and fourth pitches and got organized. We needed to traverse right to get to the rock corner beneath the menacing daggers of Joe's nemesis. I tried a high rock traverse, but was stymied by completely compact granite, unable to find a single piece of gear. I climbed back to Anna belaying behind the column. With much trepidation, I started a low traverse on horrid shell-ice that covered a thin layer of hoar snow that somehow clung to the vertical slab of featureless granite. Carefully, I kicked my crampons into the snow-ice and punched my picks through the shell-ice. Hooking the eggshell, my picks bore into the gypsum-like structure. Halfway across, I managed to find a seam in the rock above and placed a decent #1 knifeblade. I continued across and finally reached a blob of ice on the airy arête left of the base of the corner, placed a stubby screw and stepped right into the corner. With complete joy I found a solid crack on the right side of a giant flake that spanned the entire shallow chimney at the base of the corner, which provided a solid anchor situated in a site out of the fall line of the icicle that hung above the corner. I fixed a rope and called the fifth pitch (WI5, 20 metres) done. I climbed back across the traverse to Anna's belay. We rappelled from the fourth belay and regained our composure as we descended. This rig meant business, but now we were confident that it would go.

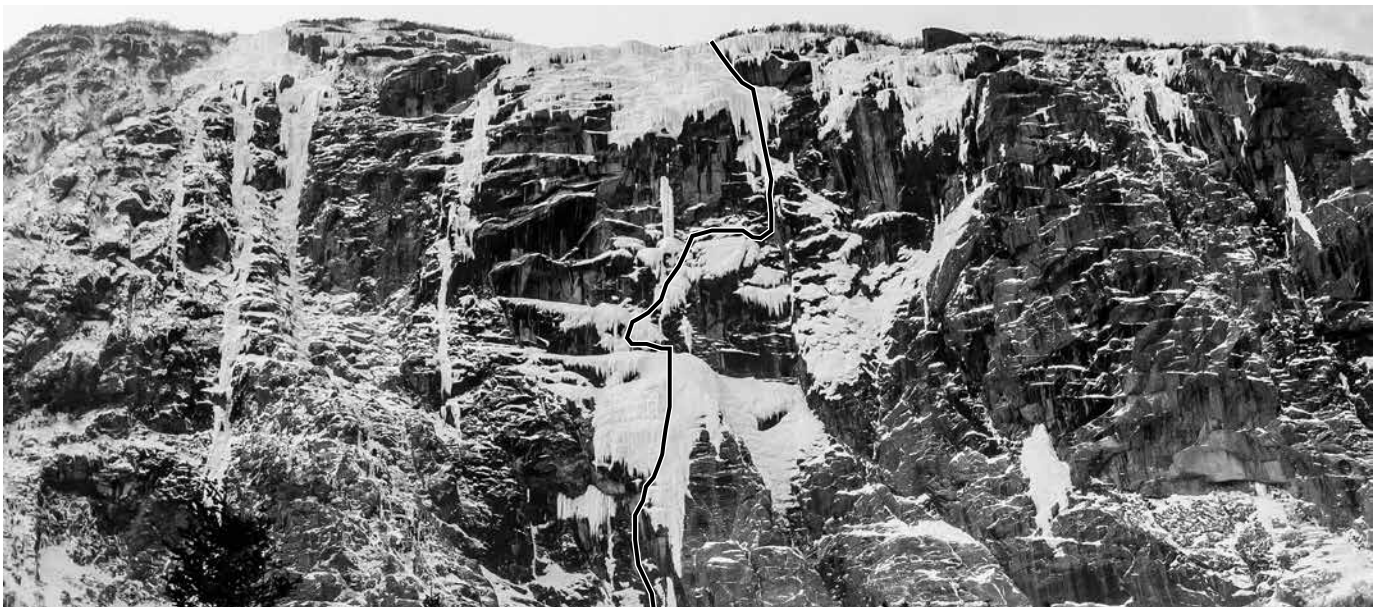
On the fifth day we returned to the wall early, ascended our ropes and re-climbed the ice pitches and set up at the base of the corner. I racked up with frozen hands and a racing heart, knowing that this pitch was going to push me to the very edge. What followed is locked forever in my mind and memory. The pitch flowed, the gear opportunities kept coming, the tenuous hooks in the corner crack and seam held fast. Just when I would feel a sinking feeling of desperate doubt, I would get solid gear, my tool would find purchase. I pushed upward, stemming on tiny edges, the solid gear giving me the confidence needed to try hard without hesitation. A dream-like state overcame me; there were no thoughts anymore, only movements. I found myself hooking placements that would scare me if I had a bolt at my waist, but I was onsight climbing virgin terrain above gear in a savage and remote location high up a frozen wall. I tapped the smears of sublimated ice on the arête on the right and committed to the placements—went in with all of my chips—and it held. I reached the solid water-ice and swung my tools into the succulent frozen water with so much force that I scared myself, my picks buried to the welts. I found a protected stance on the right side of the column, placed five screws and screamed in victorious rage, "Off!" I didn't recognize the voice that echoed back at me seconds later from the walls across the pond. Anna screamed up at me, "Dream line!" The sixth pitch (M9, 40 metres) was in the bag.

The seventh pitch (WI6, 40 metres) was the icing on the cake. The satisfaction of climbing the wind-tortured chandeliers at the top of this climb was one of the most joyful experiences of my life.

Summary

Apocalypse Now (WI7 M9, 220m), Ten Mile Pond, Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland. FA: Will Mayo, Anna Pfaff, March 7, 2015.

Apocalypse Now on Cholesterol Wall. Photo: Will Mayo



Hidden Treasures

Max Fisher

AFTER ANOTHER AMAZING austral spring season in Chilean Patagonia, I reunited with my girlfriend in California on January 6 and we drove her '79 Westie back to New Brunswick. As most Westie owners know, there are often challenges along the way—we had to push-start the van from Oklahoma City to Sackville, N.B.

You're probably wondering why we didn't stick around the American Southwest for sunny, warm rock climbing. Well, first of all, I love ice and mixed climbing. Secondly, the ice season in the Maritimes was just getting started and I didn't want to miss out.

We arrived home just before a monster Nor'easter hit, which was followed by more snow and cold temperatures until late March. During this period of cold and snow, a small crew of N.B. ice climbers went on a spree of exploring and new routing along the Chignecto Peninsula, Grand Manan, St. Martins and the Little Salmon River Valley.

In St. Martins, Lucas Toron and Joe Kennedy climbed Wish You Were Here (WI5, 35m), in honour of the late Cory Hall (see page 135). Dorchester had three new routes added to its roster: Land of Plenty (WI5, 35m), Rocket Launcher (WI5, 35m), and The Beard and the Billy Goat (M5R WI4+, 35m). Ravens Head had five first ascents from WI3 to WI4 with loads of potential. In Cape Chignecto, I added a few first ascents with Toron and Luc Gallant, including Living in the Spirit of (M4R WI5-, 200m), also named for Hall.

Little Salmon River in N.B. saw a few new routes, too, with White Fang (WI5, 20m) being the highlight. Five new routes were established at Grand Manan: Business Time (WI4, 45m), Eggs (WI3, 15m), Steak and Eggs (WI4+, 45m), Island Speed (WI4+, 50m), and Sunday Driver (WI4, 30m).

Moose River got a lot of much-needed attention this season with Cauldron of Doom (WI4+, 16m), Sack Vegas (M4+, 15m), Simply Forgotten (WI5 M4, 60m), and Can't Always Be a Rock Star (M4 WI4, 55m).

As the season came to a close, people either headed inland to climb ice in the Sussex area at Parlee Brook, or out to the rock crags in Welsford. I headed to Chamonix to adventure in the Alps for the first time. Once again, thanks goes to the Maritimes for being my home, to winter for showing up strong, and to all the motivated climbers ready to get out and explore.

Living in the Spirit of Cape Chignecto, N.S. Photo: Max Fisher.

Le dernier Rōnin

Louis Rousseau

LA MÉTÉO EST PARFAITE, sauf pour le vendredi 13 mars ; il n'y a rien à redire. On s'arrête prendre café et brioche à Baie-Saint-Paul, à la boulangerie À Chacun Son Pain. Classique ! Ça augure très bien pour finaliser ce projet que nous avons commencé l'année dernière dans la face nord du Mont Gros-Bras. À nous trois, on a essayé cinq fois de passer la deuxième longueur, mais il n'y avait rien à faire ! C'était presqu'un miroir : des mini-réglettes pour placer les piolets, une ou deux micro-fissures, pas de protection possible. On avait beau y retourner, on ne trouvait pas la solution pour donner une suite à cette incroyable première longueur que l'on avait découverte ensemble à la fin d'une journée de « prospection », à ne faire que des faux départs qui ne menaient nulle part. Même Nick Balan est venu me prêter main forte, mais c'était en ce fameux 2 janvier 2014, et le lendemain on pouvait lire à la une des journaux : « *Des records de froid ont été pulvérisés ce jeudi dans plusieurs régions du Québec.* » Et nous de décider d'aller grimper sur le Gros-Bras. Face nord à l'ombre… Mémorable !

Cette fois-ci l'ambiance est différente. Un bon mélange de conviction et d'un sentiment de la dernière chance.

Quand on arrive sur place, on scrute encore une fois la face nord pour être certain que rien ne nous échappe. La discussion ne concerne plus la deuxième longueur ; on s'attarde plutôt sur les différentes options pour terminer la voie et atteindre le sommet du Gros-Bras. On part, et il fait quand même froid pour la mi-mars. La neige étant solide dans le sentier, on gagne du temps sur l'approche. Quand on arrive au pied de la voie, on décide que Mathieu fera la première longueur. François, le plus brave, aura la lourde tâche de sortir le deuxième et je me trouve chanceux d'hériter de la suite, que l'on ne connaît pas encore.

Le départ est douteux et Mathieu est surpris, mais il travaille fort pour ne pas tomber de la rampe diagonale qui mène à la superbe fissure. Par contre, le Gros-Bras en hiver égale inévitablement mains *frrreettes* et les « *screaming barfies* ». Même au mois de mars, on gèle comme d'habitude. Après une bonne bataille, Mat réussit la longueur en s'offrant le luxe de nous lancer quelques blagues d'en haut lorsqu'il place ses protections. On le rejoint en constatant une fois de plus que ce premier passage est comme un violent coup de poing dans les dents : ça surprend ! La protection est bonne, mais il n'y a rien pour les pieds à quelques endroits, alors ça pompe les avant-bras.

C'est au tour de François. Du relais, on peut difficilement voir la fin du passage vertical, de roche couleur charbon. C'est un drôle de sentiment que de voir son ami s'élancer là-dedans en sachant très bien qu'il a de très bonnes chances de chuter avec deux lames tranchantes au bout des mains et des pointes de métal acérées sous les pieds. On a les yeux rivés sur lui quand il arrive dans le passage clé. C'est extrêmement délicat. Il avance lentement, petit placement par petit placement. On peut voir que tout est dans le jeu des pieds, mais il avance — *wow !* Le silence est total quand une des lames de piolet de François lâche d'un coup sec. Au relais, on fait une grimace de peur — *iiiiccchhh* — pendant le vol plané de quelques mètres. Par chance, les crampons n'ont pas accroché la roche. Le corps de François est un peu tout croche quand il reprend ses esprits, mais, à peine de retour en position, il repart vers le haut à la recherche de micro-prises, en sondant avec les lames de ses piolets. Moi, je suis impressionné. Je lâche un « *ayoye !* » à Mathieu, qui encourage François en l'assurant minutieusement.

François finit par décrypter la séquence de la deuxième longueur pour ensuite s'engager dans un long passage plus dalleux et verglacé. C'est long et on a froid au relais, mais deux grands sourires nous fendent maintenant le visage d'oreille en oreille. On est vraiment énervés et on a hâte de se faire crier « RELAIS !!!! » par François, afin de pouvoir le rejoindre. La deuxième longueur est de loin la chose la plus délicate que j'ai eu à grimper. Chaque placement de piolet ou de crampon demande de la concentration. Rien de trop physique : tout est en subtilité. L'état d'esprit est

Mathieu Leblanc dans la première longueur du Dernier Rōnin. Photo : Louis Rousseau

exactement le même que lorsqu'on fait un château de cartes. On retient son souffle, puisque tout peut subitement dégringoler.

François me donne les restes du matériel de protection. C'est à mon tour d'y aller et j'essaye de faire un tracé le plus direct possible pour ne pas briser l'esthétisme de la ligne que nous suivons depuis le début. Ma première option ne fonctionne pas. Le petit surplomb que j'essaye de négocier semble se poursuivre sur une dalle ignoble qui ne pardonnera pas. Je ne veux pas que l'on perde du temps à cause d'une erreur de lecture. J'effectue donc une traversée vers la gauche jusqu'à une série de ressauts rocheux avec quelques petits tas de mousse rouge surgelée, dans lesquels mes lames de piolet trouvent ancrage, ce qui me réconforte un peu. Cela se protège mal, mais c'est beaucoup moins technique que les deux premières longueurs. J'arrive enfin sur une petite vire sous un surplomb et je prends le temps de faire un bon ancrage pour assurer mes compagnons.

On s'entasse au relais comme trois sardines congelées pour discuter de la suite. On commence à être préoccupés par l'heure et le nombre de longueurs qui restent avant le sommet. Mathieu se porte volontaire pour terminer ça en beauté. Son premier choix semble prometteur, mais après quelques mètres il ne voit pas de suite logique et doit rebrousser chemin pour effectuer une traversée surplombante afin de rejoindre une dalle raide recouverte de gros blocs instables. Quand on voit notre premier de cordée enlever son petit sac à dos, on déduit que ce passage ajoutera du piquant à la voie. Effectivement, on le voit s'engouffrer dans une cheminée d'environ trois mètres de haut, et c'est le début d'un combat en espace clos qui mène à un dièdre complètement fermé, sans aucune fissure pour sécuriser la progression. Après de longues minutes, Mathieu trouve enfin un emplacement pour le plus petit coinceur mécanique au monde, afin de faire le seul pas en C1 (A1) de la voie. L'ironie est que c'est le dernier mouvement à effectuer avant la section des dalles, où deux courts ressauts de glace restent à surmonter avant qu'on ne puisse rejoindre le sommet en marchant.

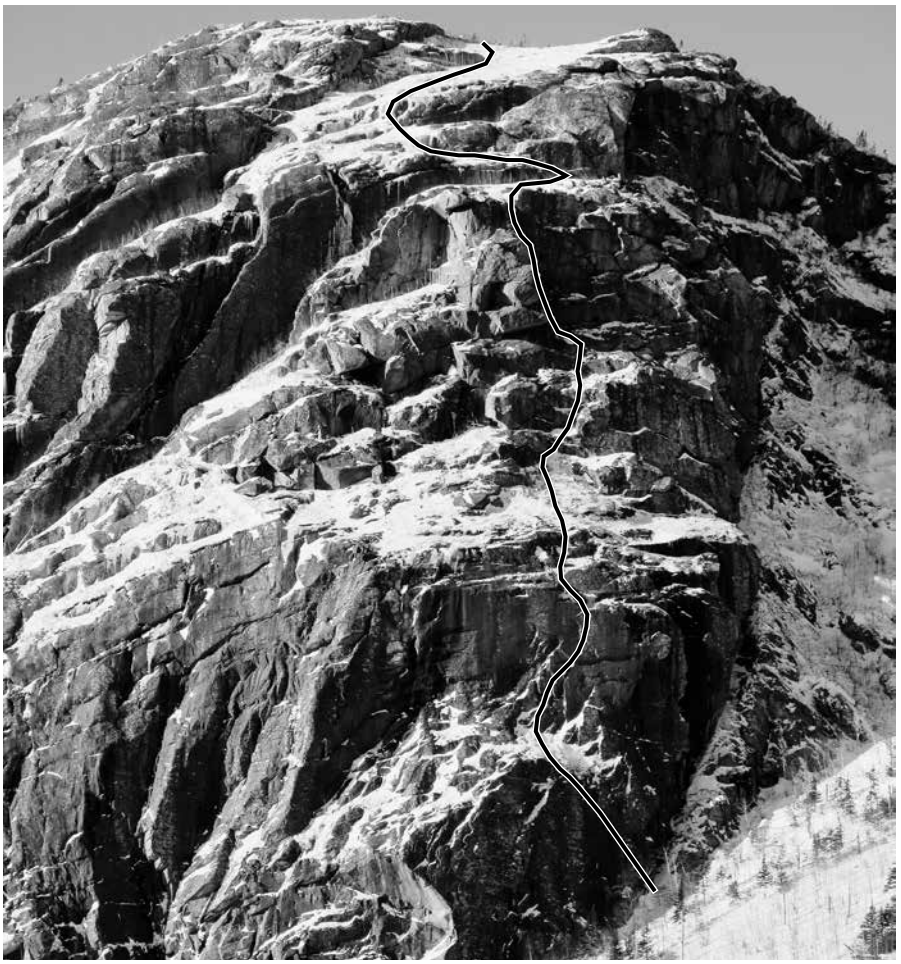
On s'affaire à plier les cordes, tout en félicitant Mathieu pour son impressionnante performance en tête dans la dernière longueur. L'ambiance verticale que l'on est venu chercher s'estompe rapidement à mesure que l'on marche ensemble, nos piolets à la main en position canne, vers le sommet du Mont Gros-Bras. Il ne reste qu'une subtile lueur orangée foncée à l'horizon quand on atteint enfin le grand cairn. Les lumières des petits chalets de la Sépaq au fond de la vallée nous offrent une petite atmosphère de voyage à Chamonix. Je sais que notre aventure tire à sa fin quand je cherche par terre quatre petites roches et j'en remets une à Mathieu et une à François. On les place en même temps sur l'amoncellement de pierres. Je prends le temps de poser la quatrième en mémoire de notre chum Yannick, qui nous a guidés d'en haut pendant toute la journée sur une des parois du Québec qu'il affectionnait particulièrement et où il aimait venir user les lames de ses piolets avec de bons amis.

Le dernier Rōnin : Nom de la voie en mémoire de Yannick Girard (1977–2014). Dans le Japon médiéval, les *rōnin* étaient des samouraïs sans maître. *Larousse* : « Samouraï qui quittait le service de son maître et se mettait à parcourir le pays en quête d'aventures. » Mot japonais signifiant également « homme flottant ».

Résumé

Première ascension du Dernier Rōnin (IV, M6 C1, 175 m), face nord du Mont Gros-Bras, parc national des Grands-Jardins, Québec. PA : Mathieu Leblanc, François Bédard, Louis Rousseau, 13 mars, 2015.

Le dernier Rōnin, dans la face nord du Mont Gros-Bras. Photo : Louis Rousseau



The Crown Jewel

David Broadhead

SOME OF THE MOST coveted things in life are born from our hardest-won victories, our fondest memories forged in the flames of our desire, and then tempered hard and fast by the cold unknown—personal rewards obscured yet permanently coaxed from the mists of uncertainty. To seek and find, to strive and achieve and see a dream come to its fruition can be akin to finding one's own pot of gold. Some of the best things in life are free—but not easy.

My friends and I live in Southern Ontario, an area that wouldn't make most climbers' road-trip short lists without some sort of esoteric piss-taking. The Niagara Escarpment, an ancient coral reef cum crag foundry has some excellent three-season limestone climbing. More importantly though, for a small clan of winter enthusiasts, away from this southern escarpment opportunities exist for exploration with the chance of finding new gleaming lines of caramel, emerald and sapphire ice. Recently, a few of us have been making the long drive north to southeastern Algoma to bushwhack amongst the steep hills and valleys of this largely untapped resource for new ice and mixed routes.

The main protagonist for exploration and development in this part of Algoma is Danylo Darewych, who quickly realized the scope and potential about four seasons ago. Some friends and I have accompanied him many times since, and what we have found is manna for the explorer's soul—a huge area with heretofore untapped potential. Paradise found.

Three seasons ago, while exploring on a warm March day, Danylo, Shaun Parent, Josh Burden and I turned the corner of a cliff band and our jaws hit the ground. Jackpot! There in front of our eyes was the most beautiful ice line I had seen in all my years of schlepping around in the woods, and it was unclimbed. It was melting away that day; however, that didn't stop our fingers from blistering over our camera triggers. We vowed to return.

After a few false starts over a couple of seasons due to less than favourable conditions and personal scheduling conflicts, Jon Gullett, Danylo and I arrived at the base again in January 2015, and despite a projected high of -15 C, decided to give it a try. The climb is split into two halves. The demarcation point is a huge roof where the ice spills over the right edge. The first section, a long, steep, technical column, is followed by a rolling upper tier. The roof is so deep that as the ice pours over its right side, it creates its own shade on the initial column.

The first section of the column was candled and technical. The featured, brittle and aerated ice dictated the route to me. It was apparently unenlightened by our discussions and strategies shortly beforehand. After a steep and lengthy start that had all my synapses rapidly tweeting one another, a welcome rest at the base of the crux column was accorded me. Pulling around onto the face of the column and into the shade, the task at hand was crystal clear. Challenging ice lay ahead for the foreseeable future and I felt that I could ill afford to think past it. Every aerated screw seemed to add to gravity's constant objection to my efforts. The brittle nature of the ice forced me to fight hard for each tool placement, harder still for each screw placement, sometimes multiple attempts were required. The surface fractured and plated on impact, blocks bounced off my shoulders then bounced off the rope that stretched between me and my last screw, at times threatening to pull me from my hard-won stances. Time ticked on.

Near the top of the column, I hit the red line. My arms were near exhaustion, my calves not far behind. I was staring at the point where the angle relented a bit when the crumbly ice under my right foot gave way. I was afraid the chandeliers under my left foot would follow suit. The shock load on my arms was almost more than they could bear, wrenched to full extension, fingers peeling from my axes. I looked down to spot my landing and yelled at myself internally to fight, since flight was not an option. I barely managed to hang on. Strained to my limit, I regained my insecure stance, shook out for a minute or more, and with multiple swings (pleading in my head for a good stick), finally sunk a tool into the 70-degree ice at the top of the column. Sweet merciful joy and the end of round two. Ding! Ding!

Atop the column a marginal rest set me up for the final challenge, a steep, leftward-rising traverse over crumbly, chandeliered ice that led to a welcomed entrance onto the rolling upper tier and into the sun. After a final steep step, I pulled onto the upper flow. I felt the sun on my face, and the ice became a bit less like plate glass. At last, it felt as warm as -15 C. At the top, I set up an anchor, clipped in, yelled "Secure!" and sat back. I realized that the time it would take for Danylo and Jon to join me here should be just long enough to accept the fact that this experience would take a while to fully assimilate. A while later Danylo arrived at the anchor and we smiled and shook hands, and he moved about 12 metres to the right to set up the rap stance in the best spot while Jon, who had belayed me, graciously came up last. We shook hands and mulled over some of the day's events then made our way over to Danylo's stance. We rapped through the setting sun into twilight. This included a lengthy free-hanging segment under large daggers across which the rope fluttered and skated, providing, almost as closure, a memorable descent from one of our most memorable first ascents.

Summary

The Crown Jewel (WI5, 55m), Algoma Canyon, Southern Ontario. FA: Dave Broadhead, Danylo Darewych, Jon Gullett, Jan. 25, 2015.

David Broadhead on the first ascent of The Crown Jewel. Photo: Danylo Darewych

Foreign

Return to Rongdo

Joie Seagram

simply savouring the fine memories, which lingered after my first expedition to Rongdo valley in August 2012, would not suffice. A return trip became an obsession.

Rongdo is a remote valley located in the eastern part of the Nubra region in Ladakh, India. Historians of South Asia are familiar with this area of Nubra for its ancient trade route between Yarkand and northern India. Nubra flourished during the last several centuries as trading was lucrative on this spur route of the Silk Road. Rongdo valley is located south of the original trade route, on the east side of the Shyok River, and has seen virtually no tourists, save for a very small number of climbers and researchers. Tom Longstaff passed by the Rongdo valley as he travelled north along the west bank of the mighty Shyok in 1909, during his reconnaissance of the Siachen Glacier and Soltoro areas. This region of the eastern Karakorum is securely guarded by the Indian Army, due to the sensitivity of its border regions with both Pakistan and China.

There were two climbing routes etched in my mind from 2012, which hastened the planning process toward a promising target date of August 2014. By December 2013, after several months of wrangling possible partners from around the globe—finding everybody sandwiched between kids, work and aging parents—Graham Rowbotham and I finally settled on a minimal team of two. With both of us now equally obsessed, there was no turning back, and the arrival of January 2014 brought the inevitable task of accommodating with the Indian bureaucracy to secure the mountaineering visa required to climb in many parts of India. Having navigated this process in 2012, I mentally readied myself to exercise large amounts of clarity, patience and diplomacy in order to facilitate smooth passage of the visa, which would allow us to climb in Rongdo. All our paper work was dealt with by February 6, thus placing us squarely at the mercy of the bureaucratic agencies—four Indian government ministries and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF).

With our trip-planning hurdles cleared by early April (except for my Indian visa), it was time for me to depart for Nepal where I was scheduled to attempt Singu Chuli with a small Swiss team. Following this climb, I was booked to stay in a rental suite in Kathmandu for the monsoon season, where I had organised some Nepali language lessons and consulting work (volunteer) in the school system regarding special education. It had long been a dream of mine to spend an extended period of time in Nepal, to immerse myself in the culture—both within and beyond the mountain world. My husband, Dave, was on deck to process the visa online (my passport to be couriered trans-globally), and I would then meet Graham in Delhi in late July to begin our trip. We waited ever so patiently for the visa permission letter from the IMF to arrive via email to the Indian Consulate in Vancouver and to me by the reasonable date of late May.

Still not having heard by mid-June, several strong letters were written to the IMF on our behalf by Rimo Expeditions in a bid to hasten delivery, in addition to a carefully crafted letter from me, all to no avail. Finally, in early July, having waited on pins and needles, we watched as the last feasible arrival day came and went. This left us with no choice but to investigate alternatives to Rongdo. In a dejected and depressed state of mind, I was reminded by Rajesh Cadgil, honorary editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, that despite the infamous bureaucratic delays in his country, "India is also known as a land of miracles, and I believe one will happen for you." And this is why one cannot but love India!

Indeed, said miracle showed up on July 8. The permission email arrived, causing heart failure all round. After not much indecision, I immediately hopped a flight to Vancouver to join Graham in dealing with the visa process at the Indian Consulate there. All went very well to the credit of consular staff (as the miracle continued to unfold) and our passports were duly processed, allowing us both sufficient time to get to Delhi by July 22.

After meeting our obligations with the IMF in Delhi, we gleefully departed by air to Leh, spending the following three nights there for acclimatisation. We met our congenial liaison officer, Tongpangkokba Jamir (or Tongpang) from Nagaland state, eastern India—a fine, knowledgeable fellow with a good sense of humour and easy-going personality. While in Leh, we intermittently visited local tourist sites (monasteries, stupas, ancient palaces), rested, shopped for last-minute food items and began to soak in the Buddhist energy around us.

Joie Seagram on the first ascent of Tara.
Photo: Graham Rowbotham

July 27 saw us head out in a comfortable van to cross the infamous Kardung La, en route to Rongdo valley. Once over the height of land, we could finally see the formidable Shyok River in the distance, creeping steadily north. After crossing the Shyok, we arrived at our appointed destination for the night in the village of Kyagar (Tiger village), located just north of the confluence of the Shyok and Nubra Rivers on the east bank of the Nubra. That evening we had the privilege of watching the *Reyway Odzer* or "Ray of Hope" dance group of 15 women, who perform folk songs and dance in traditional Ladakhi costume to traditional Ladakhi music. We were delighted and mesmerized. The dancers perform willingly during the tourist season (July to September) to "share happiness with the tourist" and to raise money for various local educational causes.

The following morning we travelled south and west (back over the Shyok) to Diskit, where we took in the enormous 32-metre statue of Maitreya Buddha and the Diskit Monastery. Toward late morning, we were ready to recross the Shyok and drive south along the intermittently disappearing sand road to Rongdo village (3,270 metres), where we arrived about 1 p.m. It was wonderful to meet the local villagers again who remembered me from 2012—a deeply heartfelt reunion. Camp was already established in a local family's field, and we were happy to meet our excellent camp staff: Bir Bahadur (cook) and Noresshri Kulung (cook's assistant), in addition to Tsewang Gylson and Tshering Bhutia, our very competent climbing support staff.

We took time to tour the village, had some dinner and packed in preparation to begin our trek up Rongdo valley the next day. On July 29, we gathered, with many villagers on hand, as staff packed and distributed loads on four *dzos*, four donkeys and one horse. It was good to see the local *dzos* at work. In 2012, we had used horses for our loads and initially experienced delays as there were not enough in the valley to manage the loads. Additional horses were brought over the Kardung La. We grew curious moving up the valley, as to why the magnificent *dzos* grazing freely were not being used for load carrying. Tourism was unknown at that time in Rongdo and the animals were designated for grazing. Now the locals seemed more adept at hosting and managing their foreign visitors, and this practical hospitality was to continue as we travelled up valley.

Over the next two days, under generally clear skies, we walked leisurely northeast following the Rongdo River, first on the north side then crossing over to the south side near Fatha, where we made camp 3 (4,273 metres). Along the way, we looked longingly at the huge granitic walls surrounding us and pondered plans for climbing these. We were fascinated to see ancient stone dwellings, eroding Buddhist stupas, well-tended barley fields and rich potato patches, in addition to the Rongdo Gompa—a small Tibetan Buddhist monastery hundreds of years old.

On July 31, we made our way to camp 4 (4,616 metres) where we had planned to lunch then continue on to base camp. Unfortunately, Graham was not feeling well, with a wretched tummy bug and slight fever, prompting us to stay at camp 4 for the night. The site is a lovely open flat area, which is an established shepherd's camp with good grazing and hot springs. While Graham lay in some discomfort, Tsewang and I explored the valley to the southeast as there were potential climbing routes there.

On August 1, with continuing fine weather, we moved up to our old 2012 base camp at 4,802 metres (about 21 kilometres from Rongdo village). It's a beautiful spot with ample water and grazing, and splendid views of distant peaks beckoning. We were all happy to stop a while and settle in, allowing for more recovery time and acclimatisation, and in this vein August 2 was quickly declared a rest day.

Graham and I took time during the day to pour over our maps and information to try to nail down our climbing objectives. We decided to temporarily bypass the (now semi-official)

The north ridge of Tara. Photo: Graham Rowbotham

"Canadian Cirque" where we had climbed in 2012, and head northeast toward the southeast Shukpa Kunchang Glacier, where there looked to be some interesting prospects. Graham and I had been tormented for some months, trying to sort out exactly where the Indian Air Force had climbed during an expedition to Rongdo valley in spring 2013. We did not want to repeat their peaks or routes, and we could be certain from the two expedition reports (kindly copied to us by expedition members) that they had not climbed in our proposed direction. I also thought (naively) that it might be possible to get as far north as peak 6,730 metres (15 kilometres northeast as the crow flies)—the highest remaining unclimbed peak in the vicinity. On August 3, we all explored the feisty river just below base camp, which drains from the northeast, in hopes of fixing a safe crossing—which we did. We were to learn next day that our efforts to fix said safe crossing were in vain, upon realizing a more efficient approach was available just below our old 2012 advanced base camp. In my very limited experience of exploration, I have been humbled on more occasions than I like to admit.

Our team (Graham, Tsewang, Tshering, Tongpang and I) departed base camp at 5:30 a.m. on August 4 to do the first reconnoitre of our destination, with the goal of getting to a southerly arm of the great southeast Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. Under generally clear skies, we made fairly good time (despite the unnecessary river crossing and detour) and arrived at the glacier's edge (5,525 metres) by 11 a.m. We left a stash there, lunched and returned to base camp via our new-found route. We took the next day for rest. Although Graham was now fully recovered and keen to resume our trek, I needed a day for acclimatisation.

At this point I was becoming concerned and perplexed about my slow pace and laboured breathing. In 2012, I had climbed without difficulty to 6,300 metres, but now I was really feeling the thinner air. This disturbing mystery was not resolved until I reached Nepal in September, and stopped the course of two antibiotics I was taking the entire trip in Ladakh, for a stubborn urinary-tract infection. The unbelievable difference in body comfort and climbing efficiency between Ladakh and high altitude in Nepal was like night and day, not only due to pre-acclimatisation.

The team departed base camp early on August 6 under mainly clear skies, with more provisions for what we thought would be a week's meandering on glacier (overcoming several rock walls along the way) to reach unclimbed 6,730-metre peak. Reaching our stash, we regrouped and started up the glacier for an undetermined advanced base camp. After tromping for about one and a half hours and feeling our loads, we found a suitable site on a large island of moraine debris at 5,538 metres. We dumped our loads and made camp.

Next day we departed about 8 a.m. and began the upward haul to our next unknown camp. The glacier proved tough going, with large sections of penitentes, making for tedious, balancy high-stepping, interspersed with semi-frozen lakes and various deep unconsolidated patches of mush. We were doing penance for something. There were also numerous annoying holes into which we quite frequently fell, usually only waist-deep but causing great bursts of laughter as we perfected the turtle roll to right ourselves with loads. After several hours, and a few of frustration, we reminded ourselves that climbing was our objective—not glacial gymnastics. And besides, the unclimbed 6,730-metre mountain wasn't all that appealing judging from Google Earth, so we decided to stop at the next best site for camp.

As the support team caught up to us (with faces rather glum from burdensome loads), they were instantly transformed to happiness on hearing the new plan. We travelled a few kilometres further and found a lovely protected spot, just beneath a high ridge. We pitched camp, had a late lunch and admired the views of intriguing-looking peaks surrounding us for 360 degrees. We were now on the expansive Southeast Shukpa Kunchang Glacier proper, and

The summit ridge of Amitabha. Photo: Graham Rowbotham

it was a wondrous spot at 5,880 metres. Although all three support staff had mild headaches upon arrival, these had resolved by after dinner (except for Tshering's, which returned during the night). Otherwise we were feeling fit and tired, ready for sound sleep.

August 8 dawned clear and after a leisurely breakfast, Graham departed for the ridge just above camp, which he explored on broken rock and icy hard-packed snow to 6,250 metres. This north ridge led to an attractive peak that we would definitely climb. I chatted with Tsewang, Tshering and Tongpang about their health and all seemed well except for Tshering's headache, for which the other two had given him Aspirin and insisted he drink lots of water. By 11 a.m. Tshering was feeling fine with no headache, and the three walked north across the glacier to look at a potential route on a wedge-shaped peak, which forms the north rim of our large (several kilometres in diameter) circle of peaks. By 3 p.m. the weather was overcast with flurries evident in the west. We dined early (Tshering ate very little but drank some tea) and discussed plans for the next day.

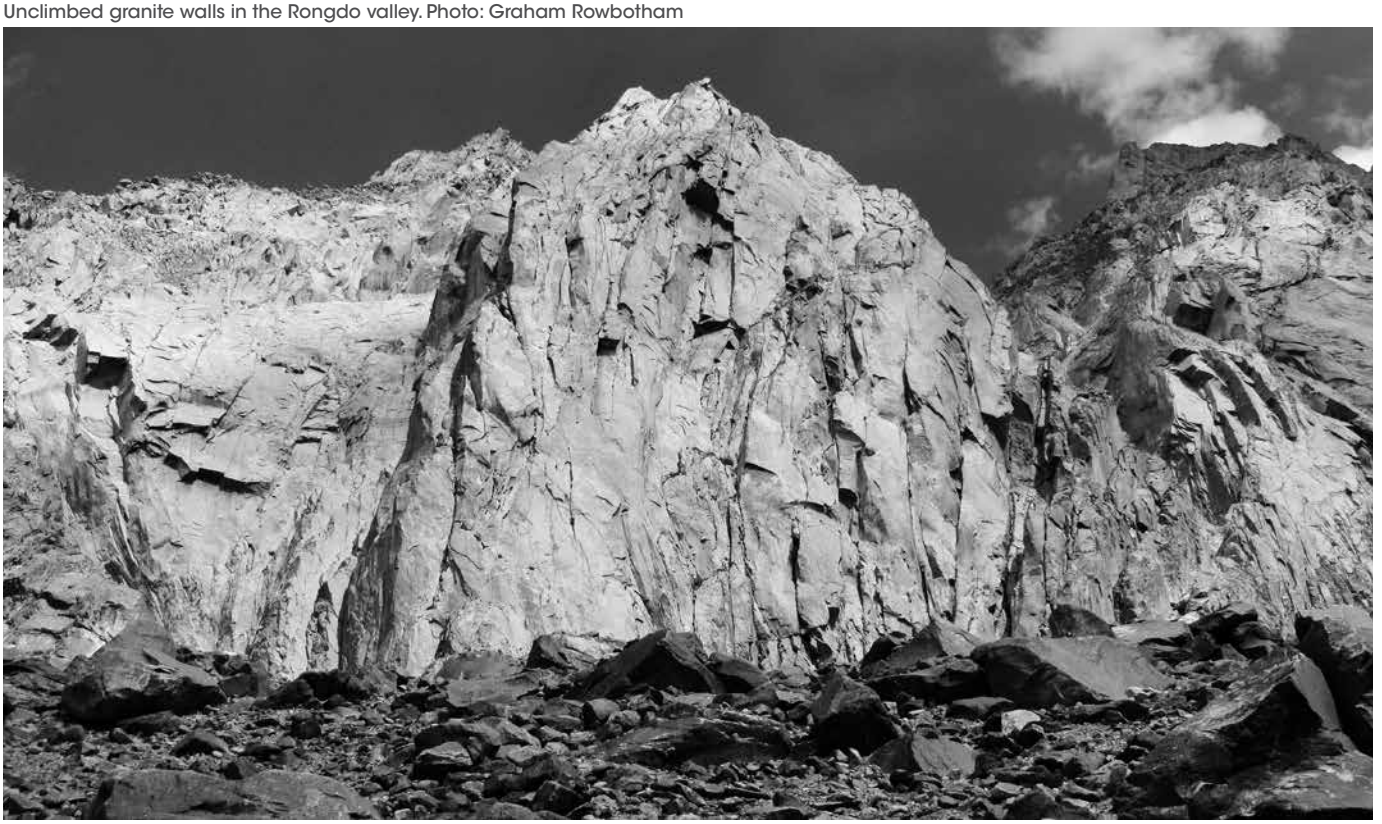
August 9 brought a change in weather with overcast skies and a change in program. Tshering was not well, feeling very lethargic with no appetite and suffering a severe headache, which had plagued him during the night, and he had vomited in the night. A severe headache that persists for two nights is generally not a good sign at altitude, and in combination with his other symptoms, we deduced Tshering was in the preliminary stages of high-altitude cerebral edema. He took a Diamox, and there was little debate—we all descended together to base camp. At the lower elevation of base camp, Tshering soon perked up and within a few hours his classic Bhotia smile returned.

August 10 saw cloudy periods with rain—somewhat unusual for this time of year in Ladakh—so we rested and regrouped, deciding that only Graham and I would return to the high camp and climb. Still needing more rest as the antibiotic course dragged on, Graham kindly waited out another day for me.

On August 12, the three Ts accompanied us to the lower advanced base camp where we bivied, after which we trudged up to the upper advanced base camp the following day. The weather was holding with clear skies in the morning and partial overcast by afternoon. We had a surprise encounter with some "moving rocks", which Graham spied as we neared the upper reaches of the glacier. I had just said, "Isn't it magical to have the place to ourselves," to which Graham replied several minutes later, "There are moving rocks over there." We waited patiently as several more appeared on the horizon coming from the west. Yes, there were, indeed, intruders!

We were delighted to meet Boris and his team of four from Russia who had been making their way independently for several weeks from the Arganglas area to the northwest. They were a tough lot with full loads, and Boris was clearly well travelled in Ladakh. We exchanged pleasantries and fruit cake and stories of glacial sink holes, about which we all laughed. In due course, we said *adieu* to

Unclimbed granite walls in the Rongdo valley. Photo: Graham Rowbotham



Boris and carried on our separate ways, relishing the moments of this extraordinary meeting. Arriving at advanced base camp still upright and in place, we lunched late and relaxed the day away.

Graham left early the next morning for the wedge-shaped peak to the north of camp, and he made quick time of this distinctive-looking peak (three hours return). Following a route up the south face to the southwest ridge then to the summit, he named this 6,167-metre peak "Mariushri" (male Bodhisattva of wisdom). I took a rest day.

August 15 brought fairly clear skies overhead in the morning (with thick overcast to the west), so we departed smartly at 7 a.m. for the peak just above camp, which Graham had explored earlier. We followed the broken north ridge then mixed snow and ice slopes to the upper deck, which presented several pitches of delightful ice climbing, led by Graham in the 45-degree range, in an enviable position. The rocky summit was cold and windy, and the weather wall to the west was moving in with fair rapidity as we took a GPS reading of 6,248 metres.

We thought there might be a shortcut down, further to the east than where we had ascended on the north face, but this turned out to be more exploratory humbling, so we retraced our steps to return the way we had come. The descent was frigid with gusting winds to 65 kilometres per hour blowing us off balance, lots of spindrift and blinding snow. The climb, including the detour, was 11 hours return and we named it "Tara" (female Bodhisattva of compassion).

The wind continued and picked up considerably, with lots of rat-a-tat-tat all night. Snowfall amounted to about seven centimetres by the time we rallied next morning. August 16 remained windy and in whiteout all day; there was no point moving anywhere. We stayed warm in our bags and made loud small talk between tents, mostly about upcoming meals. August 17 continued white-out conditions with very strong winds. We figured we better start down lest we be frozen in for winter. This was not the weather Ladakh is supposed to have in August. It felt like early fall had arrived. We packed up our gear and battened down the tents with a plan of returning to gather these later. Going was slow on the glacier that now seemed to be almost complete mush, with more sink holes than ever. The wind raged and lashed at us with great ferocity as we leaned more and more into it. About an hour into our trek we spotted Tsewang and Tshering moving up the glacier. We hadn't expected this search party. With perpetual smiles, they greeted us and moved quickly up to camp to bring down the remaining gear. I kept thinking the wind would die down and the temperature would warm up as we descended, but no, it just kept pounding as we laboriously negotiated the penitentes. We made base camp by mid-afternoon, and it was freezing cold (0 C) and windy there, too. There was talk of moving base camp down to camp 4 where it would be warmer and less exposed. Our local horseman and friend, Kunzang, from Rongdo village had remained in base camp throughout the trip to assist and to get supplies if necessary from the village. He indicated this weather was most unusual and definitely indicative of an early fall.

August 18 saw clear skies but continuing cool temps. Graham and the three Ts left mid-morning for camp 4 to reconnoitre the southeast valley and scout potential lines, since we still had several days available for climbing. They returned with news of a wonderful campsite and the possibility of ascending what Graham considered to be the plum of the area—an unnamed 6,300-metre peak. We had seen this conspicuous peak in 2012, and it has a beautiful rib leading to its east sub-summit, which would have been great to climb had we the gear and warmer weather. However, prospects seemed good for a different route to the summit. August 19 we rested and packed, leaving early the next morning for our third advanced base camp of the trip, located at 4,952 metres.

Graham departed camp after lunch and did a reconnoitre of the approach route, returning with good news regarding the likelihood of the upper ridges he could see, potentially linking up and leading to the summit some distance away. I was attracted to the northwest face, which afforded a spectacular position and sported about 1,000 metres of good-looking ice, ranging anywhere from 40 to 70 degrees, leading to the northwest sub-summit at 6,000 metres. We discussed our preferences and decided to go our different ways the following day. I was interested in hiking further up the valley in an effort to sort out the continuing mystery of just exactly which peaks the Indian Air Force had climbed (though I held deep misgivings about missing a day of ice climbing).

Graham departed about 3 a.m. for what was to become a very long solo day under somewhat sketchy skies. He stumbled back into camp at 9 p.m., one tired but happy climber. I had lots of soup and pasta on hand, which he gobbled down, shortly thereafter falling into deep sleep. His route had taken him up a 500-metre rock gully to a wet slabby ramp, which was climbed to reach an icy slope that provided access to the northwest face. The northwest face was ascended to the northwest ridge and sub-summit, after which Graham followed the exposed ridge southeast, over several rock towers to reach the main summit at 6,335 metres. Graham named his plum "Amitabha" (Buddha of infinite light).

Morning came and it was time to leave our superb camp encircled by spectacular vistas. Rongdo valley is endless in its mystery and beauty, and it was immensely satisfying to have explored this new valley.

Summary

"Mariushri" peak (PD, 6167m) via the south face, Rongdo valley, Ladakh, India. FA: Graham Rowbotham, Aug. 14, 2014.

"Tara" peak (AD, 6248m) via the north ridge. FA: Graham Rowbotham, Joie Seagram, Aug. 15, 2014.

"Amitabha" peak (AD+, 6335m) via the northwest face. FA: Graham Rowbotham, Aug. 20, 2014.

The Zahir

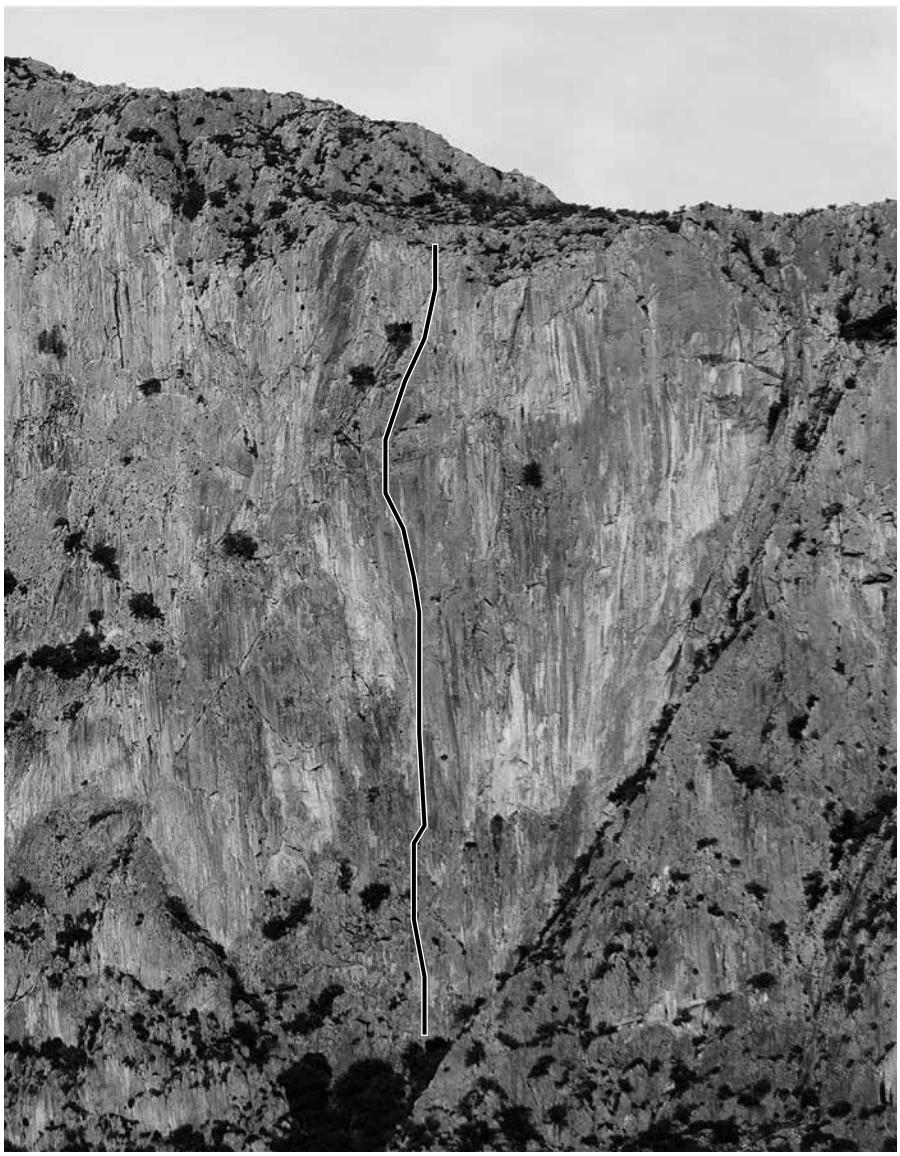
Paul McSorley

On my second trip to Morocco, I was tipped off by some Spaniards about the Akchour Valley. Our crew travelled into the Rif Mountains and spent a week exploring this amazing limestone paradise. The potential for new routing seemed endless, and I vowed to return to get in on some first-ascent action.

Vikki Weldon was keen for an adventurous project, so in November 2014 we rendezvoused in Malaga, Spain, and jumped a ferry to the Mos Eisley of North Africa—the city of Cueta. The cacophonic port town slapped us out of our West Coast chill and opened our eyes to what life is like for most of humanity. We Heismaned our way through the chaos of the border zone and took a three-hour taxi to Akchour.

It took a few days to recon a line and dial in the thrashy approach slopes, which hosted vipers, wild boars and, as you would expect, crazy monkeys. Once decided, we went to work from the ground up, bolting on lead through featured grey and tan rock. Vikki, new to the bolting game, caught on quick, and we settled into a routine of mini-tractioning fixed lines and pushing the route higher by the day.

Zahir in the Akchour Valley, Morocco. Photo: Paul McSorley



Some untimely cold, stormy weather pushed through the valley and we endured several days of morale-crushing rain. A visit to Chefchaoen, the blue village, helped boost spirits, and with an improving forecast, we headed back to the wall while the getting was good.

Over the next six days, we completed the cleaning and equipping process and not wanting to leave empty-handed, rallied on day seven for the send. By now the steep terrain was familiar so the climbing flowed smoothly. Vikki hung on for the ride on the crux fourth pitch, which sported sustained moves and mischievous route finding.

With good pacing, we arrived at the final crux of pitch seven with daylight to spare. I started up the incredible overhanging pockets and stemmed my way up a corner draped with *colonettes* and *tufas*. Pulling into the final bulge, my gas tank emptied and I hung, shattered from the punishing effort of the previous week. Though this pitch was two number grades beneath her sending abilities, Vikki was also feeling the effects of the toil and had to dig deep to send this burly 12a. It was fitting that Vikki took it to the top on her first-ever new route; I don't doubt that she'll have a few more up her sleeve.

Summary

The Zahir (5.12b, 250m, 8 pitches), Akchour Valley, Rif Mountains, Morocco. FA: Paul McSorley, Vikki Weldon, Dec. 10, 2014.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Arc'teryx, Petzl, Clif Bar and Innate for helping to get this trip off the ground.

The Ice Princess

Paul McSorley

FROM FEBRUARY 20 to March 7, 2015, Jon Walsh, Jesse Huey, Michael Pennings, Paul Bride and I visited the island of Senja in northern Norway. Conditions wildly varied during our stay, but we managed some good climbing and ski touring.

During the first few days, Jon and Jesse climbed Finnkona (WI 6+), which they agreed was one of the wildest ice routes anywhere. They also attempted to free the still unrepeated Ines Papert test piece Finnmannen (M9+ WI6+), finding hard, insecure and spicy climbing. Mike and I enjoyed a Polar Circus-like route on Hesten, which was a real highlight because it was in great shape and it really felt more like holiday climbing than going into battle.

Conditions became very coastal, and the danky rains mirrored the health of our team who all battled with a flu-like sickness that took us down, one after the other. A spirit-boosting visit from Charlie Long, a Canadian expatriating in Norway, saw us get out for a few roadside flows and some spectacular ski tours. During one of these tours to Senja's highest peak, Breidtinden, we scoped the "Scottish Wall," finding it ripe with potential.

The Ice Princess on the north face of Breidtinden. Photo: Paul McSorley

Only two routes ascended the steep 400- to 600-metre north face: Crazy Maze (Ines Papert/Tomas Senf) and Fantasia (Sjur Neshhiem and partner). With our interest piqued, Jesse and I returned in better conditions and launched up an unclimbed system of *goulottes* and mixed ground to the left of Fantasia. Right away we knew it was game on. I found only a couple of pieces to protect the 60-metre first pitch (AI4). That theme continued for the remainder of the route, but when the difficulties increased and the terrain got steep, we always found just enough gear to make the next move.

As a full moon began to rise and the multi-hour Arctic sunset turned the sky a pallid pink, we topped out on the summit ridge, howling as you do when a fist pump just isn't enough. A rappel off the back led to long snow slopes and a circumnavigation of the mountain to get back to the car, 17 hours after leaving. Our 450-metre route was christened The Ice Princess and we graded it AI4+ M6+ R, but like most mountain experiences, the grade only tells part of the story.

Our trip to Senja was just a glimpse into Norway's massive potential, and we all agreed that we'd be back to this most unique corner of the world.

Summary

The Ice Princess (AI4+ M6+ R, 450 metres), Scottish Wall, Breidtinden, Senja, Norway. FA: Jesse Huey, Paul McSorley, March 3, 2015.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Arc'teryx, Clif Bar, Innate and Scarpa for supporting this trip.

Kooshdakhaa Spire

Max Fisher

FROM MAY 25 to June 14, 2014, Erik Bonnett and I climbed about 45 pitches of rock, ice and snow in a relatively unknown glacial area on the border of southeast Alaska and northern British Columbia that bears similarities to the Kichatnas. We then travelled over many kilometres of glacier as we bushwhacked and pack-rafted our way back to civilization along the Chilkat River.

We flew into the area with Drake Olson out of Haines, Alaska, intent on making the first ascent of what we've called Kooshdakhaa Spire, the southern summit (2,100 metres) of Kooshdakhaa (main summit 2,200 metres) and the most prominent feature among the complex granite mountain.

I saw this feature during three different trips with NOLS into the range from the Northern B.C. side. Its location and aesthetic nature grabbed my attention, and when I presented the idea to Erik, he was game. I knew of one other expedition to the range by a group of NOLS instructors who attempted a 300-metre spire just north of Kooshdakhaa. From what I understand, they were turned around by poor rock quality and weather.

We spent 15 days at our base camp below the spire. In that time, we successfully climbed Kooshdakhaa Spire via a sustained couloir on its north side, to a col, and then to the summit. We also climbed a gully on the opposite side of the spire.

Our main objective—the steep 700-metre north-facing granite wall comprising Kooshdakhaa Spire proper—turned us away during both of our alpine-style attempts. We bailed after we were met with tricky route finding, poor rock and difficult climbing (up to 5.11) about two-thirds of the way up the wall. The lower part of the climb generally followed sustained and continuous splitter cracks up great rock.

We also attempted an additional couloir to the north of Kooshdakhaa Spire, just across the border in B.C. on another granite feature; however, we were forced to descend about one pitch from the top. The route contained physical mixed climbing (up to M5).

After the climbing portion of our expedition, we walked 25 kilometres across the glacier over two days and began rafting toward the Chilkat River through small tributaries. Upon reaching the river, we paddled two short sections of Class III whitewater in our pack-rafts before dropping to the Chilkat River valley where we paddled more Class III whitewater. To our knowledge we are the first people to paddle the Upper Chilkat in pack-rafts and the second team to paddle the 60 kilometres of river from the glacier to Haines. Toward the river's exit, we encountered a thriving game area full of wolves, bears and moose, inciting much nervousness—it was the most scared I was on the trip!

The name Kooshdakhaa is derived from the lore of the Tlingit and Tsimshian Indians of southeast Alaska. Loosely translated, Kooshdakhaa means "land otter man"—mythical shape-shifting creatures capable of assuming both human and otter-like forms. In many stories, the Kooshdakhaa save a lost individual by distracting them with curiously otter-like illusions of their family and friends as they transform their subject into a fellow Kooshdakhaa, thus allowing him to survive in the cold. Naturally, this is counted a mixed blessing. However, Kooshdakhaa legends are not always pleasant. In some legends it is said the Kooshdakhaa will imitate the cries of a baby or the screams of a woman to lure victims to a river. Once there, the Kooshdakhaa either kills the person and tears them to shreds or will turn them into another Kooshdakhaa.

Summary

South Couloir (AI3 M3, 350m), Kooshdakhaa Spire, Alaska. FA: Erik Bonnett, Max Fisher, May 28, 2014.

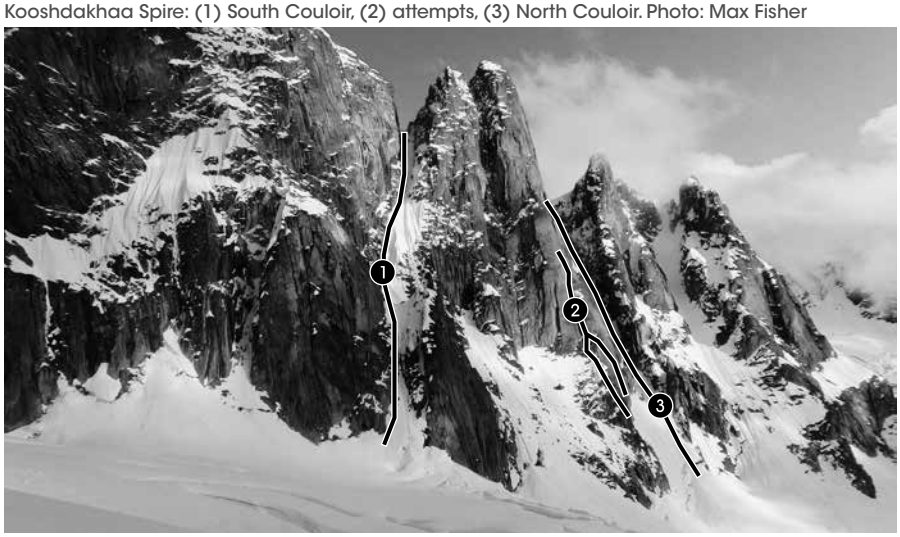
North Wall attempt (5.11, 400m), Kooshdakhaa Spire, Alaska. Erik Bonnett, Max Fisher, May 29-30, 2014.

North Couloir (AI3 M3, 600m), Kooshdakhaa Spire, Alaska. FA: Erik Bonnett, Max Fisher, June 3, 2014.

Acknowledgements

Big thanks to the Copp-Dash Inspire Award. We would also like to thank Alpacka Rafts and NOLS for their kind support.

Kooshdakhaa Spire: (1) South Couloir, (2) attempts, (3) North Couloir. Photo: Max Fisher



Miss Alms of Var

Jen Olson

I considered cancelling my trip to Norway because I could not line up a climbing partner. Plus, I wasn't sure I could justify the jet fuel, travel days and Kroners in my already debt-ridden climbing-bum life. Inspired by my ancestral origins, I started searching for a partner when a friend of a friend of a friend was recommended to me. Jørgen Vestvatn had only a couple of years of climbing experience, but he was keen and willing.

Jørgen's family offered fantastic hospitality from a clean and comfortable bed to some hot, locally foraged dinners. After gathering the necessary supplies for a week of climbing and making the decision that it would be worth it to drive north for five hours, we embarked on our journey after Jørgen finished work.

We drove during the night along fjords and past granite monoliths until we arrived in Sordalen to an idyllic farmhouse in a quiet valley filled with ice and ski lines. This was just one of thousands of similar valleys in this Scandinavian winter heaven. Recent rain in the south meant snow in the north and reports of avalanches over roads and unexpected vehicle burials. Despite finding good snow stability at lower elevations, I decided I was not up for the risk and decision making involved in moving through the approach avalanche paths to the icy ribbons that loom far above the valley bottom. Our time was limited, so we decided to relocate another five hours north to Senja.

We awoke in the comfort of Senja Lodge, 20 metres from waves crashing onto the rocks, looking across the bay at sheer faces that plunge into the ocean. Small classic alpine objectives littered the shores of this remote northern island. We chose a route called The Great Corner. It had more ice than other years, and we found six long pitches of interesting mixed climbing protected with ice screws, cams and nuts in good rock—ultra classic! Jørgen graciously let me lead the whole route as he had limited experience with mixed climbing.

We also attempt a new route, but we found most of the alluring ice lines to be unprotectable sn'ice, and the warming temperatures defrosted the moss that resulted in my picks sliding through. Some loose rock and a setting sun encouraged a retreat of downclimbing 15 metres back to the ground. On our way out of Senja, I witnessed a plethora of future climbs and first ascents. My neck was cranked upwards and my trigger finger on the shutter button became callused.

With one day left, we decided to climb in the Bodø region. Lucky for me, Øyvind Skogstad and local guidebook author Sveinung Bertnes Råheim wanted to go climbing in an area with new-route potential. After driving along fjords for a couple of hours, a short walk across a lake provided the ripe pickings of many an ice and mixed line. The temperatures were still warm, and I shied away from a pure WI6 line pouring with water and resembling a cold icicle shower.

We chose a really pretty line that looked a bit mixed but with some blue ice. I felt nervous about finding slush for protection, but I had already been surprised in Norway by just how strong water ice slush can be, and so, I reassured myself that rappelling would be an option.

As I moved skyward, the ice felt better than I had expected and I could find enough protection to calm my cold Canadian heart. I was in the flow of upward exploration, and I quickly moved through the transition as if I was leading the whole climb. My partners let me know later that they had hoped to lead a little, but they didn't want to get in the way of an overzealous lead hog.

I chose the name Miss Alms of Var because I felt so blessed by how well this trip had worked out for me despite not having an initial plan. I researched Norse Godesses and found one that represented wisdom and oaths between men and women. I saw this climb as a gift given to me by a Norse goddess as well as the locals of Bodø, to whom I am very appreciative.

Summary

Miss Alms of Var (M5 WI5, 130m, 4 pitches), Saltdal, Norway. FA: Jen Olson, Sveinung Bertnes Råheim, Øyvind Skogstad, Feb. 18, 2015.

Miss Alms of Var in Saltdal, Norway.
Photo: Jen Olson

Cochamó

Andrea Eitle

AS IT OFTEN GOES WHEN so many elements of a trip are unknown, intimidation was high. Yet Lisa Jenni and I were chasing an adventure we'd been dreaming of for a long time, and excitement levels were equally matched. I had first read about Chile's Cochamó valley in a 2008 issue of the *Alpinist*, in which it was dubbed the northern Patagonian "Lost City of Gold." The article drew tales of a mythical climbing mecca, a coastal range of thousand-metre granite walls, ancient forests, raging rivers, jungle approaches and wild adventure. Once the idea had been hatched, we searched for topos, read through reports and collected any beta we could find, noting that there were still many unknowns that lay ahead.

Deep into the trip planning, we were caught off guard when we learned that the remote valley, barely explored by climbers and literally untouched by modern development, was at risk of being completely developed in a matter of a few months. International investors were vying for rights to build seven hydro-electric projects throughout the valley along two main rivers and their tributaries. One of the best things people could do, stated one website, was to explore the beauty of the area, spread the word and help increase local tourism as a sustainable industry instead. We were set and curious to learn more about the situation.

Some friends of ours, seasoned Patagonian climbers, suggested starting off the trip in Frey, Argentina. From the nearby town of Bariloche, stocking up on good food, finding a copy of the guidebook and catching a bus to the trailhead proved so easy that we found ourselves in the alpine shortly after landing in the Southern Hemisphere. We woke up to a charming alpine cirque filled with small granite towers that stand guard around a beautiful alpine lake. The bright orange shades of the rock, proximity of the climbs and friendly camp personalities immediately welcomed us, along with perfect weather in the forecast. Frey has a rich climbing history, and what the short multi-pitch climbs lack in length, they make up in bold style. Slightly run-out in nature, the climbing offers discontinuous cracks mixed in among wind-carved huecos, delicate patina crimps and glacier-polished stone. Not exactly the splitter granite climbing we were used to, learning to trust our feet on the slippery granite and work through the run-outs felt like the perfect warm-up for the bigger climbing objectives we would encounter in Cochamó. Yet back at camp at the end of each full climbing day, chatting with local climbers only increased our intimidation of what was to come. We had read about the *tabanos* that bite harder than horse flies, coastal rain showers that could pour down for days, and long arduous jungle approaches, accepting it all as part of the adventure. The campfire tales seemed to embellish the *tabanos* to ferocious bugs the size of your fist, the rain showers to evoke vertical drowning and the approaches to necessitate swinging from vines with a machete in hand. "If it starts to rain, get down as fast as possible," we were warned. "Or you will drown under waterfalls while hanging from the side of the cliff." The Argentinian people have a reputation of being boisterous by nature and were quick to joke around, but we couldn't help but wonder what this mythical place would turn out to be.

Linking buses required about a day and a half to make the roundabout trip from Frey to Cochamó, given bus connections and border crossings, even though Frey is located just east of the Cochamó valley as the crow flies. The entire 30,000-hectare valley of Cochamó has never seen a single road paved through it. As soon as we saw a clear forecast for the area, we packed up our stuff and started the journey across. The fishing village of Cochamó is located on the Chilean coast and is the launching point into the valley. Local opposition to the proposed hydropower project was unmistakeable as window signs, posters hanging in bus stops and large painted murals displayed messages to save the valley. Grassroots efforts towards conserving the land and creating a park were being initiated right in the small town. Before starting the trek, we queried a local about the status of the project. We got the impression that negotiations were headed in a positive direction and residents were optimistic of the outcome. "You'll see when you get there," he said. "It's one of the most beautiful spots on earth," he added with a humble smile.

Decades of horseback travel between the coastal fishing villages and inland farming towns have carved the trail into narrow trenches, in some places almost two metres deep. Hiking into the valley felt like we were weaving through a labyrinth built through the dense landscape. The valley is filled with lush, coastal temperate rainforest, giant ancient redwood cedar trees and flowing waterfalls. Our excitement grew each time we caught a small glimpse of rock through the dense forest canopy. A few hours later, we popped out of the jungle into a large, open meadow and the first full view of the surrounding granite domes. We had reached la Junta, the junction where two valleys merged, which climbers use as the main base camp prior to heading up into the side valleys to climb bigger walls. A basic cook shelter and a couple of outhouses were built here to support the climbers and trekkers passing through, and a small wooden cable car just big enough to carry one person and their pack crossed over the river.

Inside the cook shelter sat a binder overflowing with hand-drawn topos of new routes ranging from 5.6 to 5.13, displaying the recent surge of route development in the area. While the valley is growing in popularity, the massive

amount of rock leads way to far more untapped potential and future first ascents. Reports about the climbs didn't always match what the topos described, and it became clear that any climbing here still definitely entailed adventure. Some of the domes were known to have better rock quality than others, and after hearing a few stories in camp, we soon had an idea of which sectors had a reputation of flaring cracks, splitters or exfoliating rock. We copied down several route topos that we were keen on, packed our climbing gear, light bivy gear and five days of food to head up into a sector called El Anfiteatro.

We settled into an open-air bivy amongst the boulders and soon met two other climbing parties, local Chilean and Argentinean climbers also bivying in the area. They were surprised to hear we had chosen this as our first sector to climb in Cochamó, explaining that most visiting climbers go straight for the well-known 950-metre, 20-pitch 5.11a Bienvenidos A Mi Insomnio. It was on our list, we explained, but knowing a couple of other parties were headed that way, we decided to start here instead.

"Good, then you will climb the best route in Cochamó tomorrow," one said. He was trying to talk us into the route Al Centro y Adentro, a 450-metre, 12-pitch 5.11d known for having burly off-width pitches that required at least one #5 or #6 cam for protection.

"Do you have big gear?" he asked.

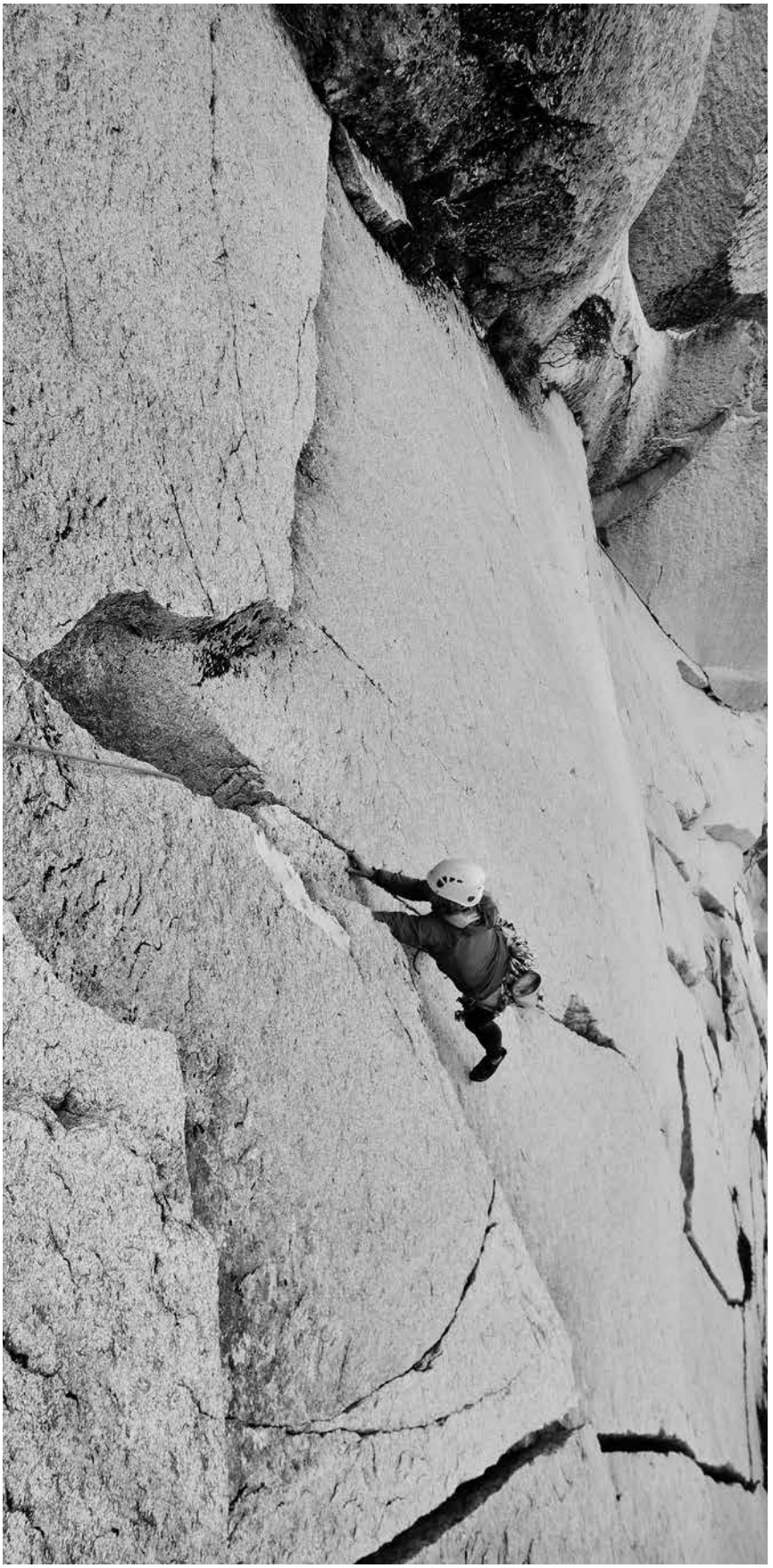
"Yes, we have a #4 cam."

He laughed. "Take this, we don't need it tomorrow," handing us a #6.

Sensing our hesitation, he pointed out the line, stating it had some of the best climbing of its grade in the entire valley. If intimidation was still a factor, it was time to get after it.

The next morning we woke early and started up the approach. We wondered if this was really a good idea, or should we have started with an easier line to get a feel for the climbing here.

"We already warmed up in Frey and we're solid. This looks way more like



Andrea Eitle on Al Centro y Adentro.
Photo: Lisa Jenni

the granite we're used to. Plus, when is someone going to lend us a #6 cam again?" Lisa said.

It was true, and the closer we got, the better it looked. The first pitch went smoothly, and when we joined at the first anchor, fear and intimidation were gone, replaced by pure stoke. The rock was clean, the friction was good and we were cruising. Not quite big enough to chimney but too big to chicken-wing, I was inching my way up the cruxy off-width, grateful for the #6 cam. Neither of us had ever placed a #6 before, but grunt work and excitement was getting us through it. Pitch after pitch, the route delivered splitter hand and finger cracks, beautiful corners and balancey face climbing from an amazingly exposed position. Impressive views across the valley showed off seemingly endless amounts of rock. For the next few days, we checked the other routes in the sector and found more great rock on routes, such as Excelente Mi Teniente, a 555-metre, 14-pitch 5.11a, and Through the Looking Glass, a 440-metre 5.11b, until unexpected dark clouds rolled in alarmingly fast one afternoon. Recalling what we had been warned, we immediately retreated from the wall. Water began to cascade down the walls and pretty soon everything was completely drenched.

The Chileans told us about a bivy site underneath a large rock roof sheltered from the rain, and the four of us squeezed in to wait out the weather. Breaks between showers gave us hope that the sun would soon come back, so we waited out a day and attempted to climb again the next morning. It wasn't long before the rain started again, and now completely soaked, we packed up our gear to hike down to base camp, needing to dry out and restock on food. Back at valley bottom we were devastated to hear that this was the start of two weeks of heavy rain in the forecast, the remainder of time we had left in the trip. We were able to get a weather report from the bed and breakfast located on the other side of the river at la Junta and found out the weather back in Frey would be better.

Before leaving, we spoke to the owners of the bed and breakfast about the proposed hydro power project. Over the years they've built trails, signs, outhouses and infrastructure to support tourism in the area. They spoke about the small coalition of climbers and trekkers that created the Friends of Cochamó and later rallied with the organization Conservación Cochamó; together they had a hand in keeping the hydro power projects at bay for the time being. Along with the efforts of the organizations, he hopes the momentum will continue and eventually allow the area to become a park to protect it for future years to come. We vowed to return someday, to explore more of the beautiful valley and the excellent climbing it has to offer.

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful for the support of The Alpine Club of Canada through the Jen Higgins Fund.

One of the many granite domes above base camp. Photo: Andrea Eitle

Freerider in a Day

Will Stanhope

LAST SEPTEMBER I was relaxing in Squamish, licking my wounds after another failed battle with the Tom Egan Memorial Route in the Bugaboos. My phone rang. It was Jesse Huey, one of the very few folks I know who climbs like a bat out of hell and also has a bottomless gas tank of energy. Jesse isn't one of those oh-so-serious, calorie-counting, tea-totalling climbers rather typical of this day and age. He isn't afraid to pop the tops off a couple of Sierra Nevadas and admire the sheer majesty of El Cap in the meadow. He's fast, safe and fun. Just the kind of guy I like to do business with.

Naturally, our conversation shifted to the Big Valley, a place that I find very difficult to ignore. I haven't missed an autumn trip since I first laid eyes on the place when I was 18. Where else can you walk 10 minutes from the road and climb 1,000 metres of bullet-hard granite? A few years ago the late, great Sean Leary told me that his free link-up of El Capitan and Half Dome in a day with Leo Houlding was perhaps the most fun day of climbing he'd ever had. "How about we try that, Jesse?"

In late October, I picked up Jesse at the Sacramento airport in my aging Plymouth Voyager minivan. We spent the first week of our trip getting into the groove of simul-climbing and becoming familiar with a nifty device called the Trango Duck. These little beauties allow the second to fall while simul-climbing, provided there's a minimal amount of slack in the system. Though we never actually fell onto the Duck while climbing, they added a great deal of assurance to our system.

After noodling around on the two routes for about 10 days, we set the alarm for 3 a.m. The plan was to tackle Freerider first, and then romp up the Regular Route on Half Dome at night. The night before the big day, I slept for perhaps a couple of hours. No matter how many times I step into the fray in the Valley, the nerves always get to me. Climbing in Yosemite always feels like the playoffs.

We were racing up the initial slabs of Freerider in the dark, and light hit just as we were motoring up the Monster Off-width. What a joy to be charging hard with a great friend, engulfed in the golden morning light with the first 300 metres of El Cap awash in darkness.

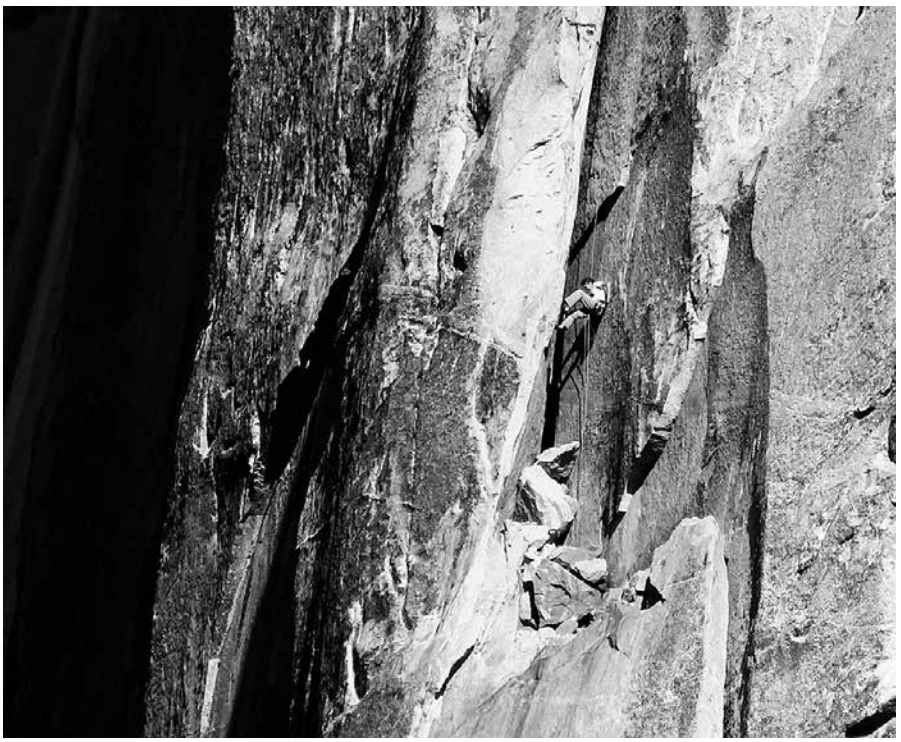
About six hours in, things came to a grinding halt at the crux corner pitches of Freerider. Despite having freed this route in a day in 2012, the zero-rest of simul-climbing had taken its toll on Jesse. He whipped off the corner pitch a few times and could feel the goal slipping away. I still felt alright, and briefly considered dragging him over to Half Dome to complete the goal on my behalf. But, in the end, I decided against it. We started the mission together and someday we will finish it together.

Six pitches from the top, on the Round Table Ledge, a couple of friends of mine from the east side of the Sierra were indulging in a smoky treat from Jah. It seemed appropriate to take a couple of puffs. So, I finished the route in a happy, slightly hazy fog, labouring up the final offwidths and admiring the perfect orange granite. What an incredible privilege it is that we have the opportunity to do these things, I thought to myself. We topped out to a glorious Yosemite sunset. The Double Header will have to wait until next year.

Summary

Freerider in a Day (VI 5.12d, 1000m), El Capitan, Yosemite. Jesse Huey, Will Stanhope, Nov. 7, 2014.

Will Stanhope on pitch 15 of Freerider. Photo: Tom Evans



Remembrances

Robson Gmoser
1969-2015

Born in calgary, alberta, on June 20, 1969, to Margaret and Hans Gmoser, Robson spent his early years running wild in the hamlet of Harvie Heights with his brother Conrad, two years his senior. Conrad took the name of a legend in the mountaineering world (Conrad Kain) while Robson was aptly named as his father was climbing Mount Robson at the time of his birth. His family's life revolved around Hans's career in guiding and his development of Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH), the world's first heli-ski company.

In his early teens, Robson left the small hamlet and began a new adventure on Vancouver Island, attending St. Michaels University School, where he graduated from in 1987. Robson decided on a career in ecology, so he enrolled at the University of British Columbia and attained his degree in 1991. He never ended up working in that field, however, as all the spare time he had while not in school was spent traipsing around the mountains with his family, which developed his love and passion for the outdoors.

Robson cut his teeth early in his ski guiding career as his father let him lead groups at Battle Abbey (Hans's ski touring lodge) while keeping an eye on him from behind. Robson's formative years were also spent under the tutelage of his uncle, Sepp Renner, at Assiniboine Lodge, guiding guests and learning the ways of lodge life. Before becoming a certified ski guide with the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG) in his mid- to late-20s, Robson was already working as a sea kayaking guide and a hiking guide. Robson maintained a guiding position at CMH as well, but never wanted to be a manager, preferring to just breeze in and have fun with the guests. He had his father's natural mountain sense and solid work ethic, and his mother's passion for outdoor pursuits. This, combined with an ability to relate and cater to people of all levels, made Robson an exceptional guide—one that people regularly booked two to three years in advance.

Battle Abbey was eventually passed on to Robson from his father, and together with Roger Laurilla, he created one of the best venues for ski touring in the Selkirks. His passion for the mountains shone there as he had spent many years as a boy on the "Gorilla Team," consisting of his brother, Conrad, myself and many others, working for Bill (Bear) Putnam, building the lodge. Robson's love of building was prevalent when he built a cob-style home on his property in Golden, British Columbia, in the '90s, making it completely off the grid and in his eclectic style.

In recent years, Robson acquired his ACMG certification as an apprentice rock guide, but seemed to enjoy skiing and water sports more. He was an avid kite sailor and would take to the frozen lakes in the winter as well as the cold lakes in the summer, loving the speed and the wind in his hair. More recently, Robson returned to the quiet hamlet of Harvie Heights, residing in his parents' home with his wife, Olivia, and young son, Max, living a life that most people dream of.

Unfortunately, an avalanche took Robson's life at the age of 45, shocking the mountain world and all who knew him. A gathering for the celebration of his life attracted upwards of 700 people, which is a testament to the Gmoser legacy and Robson's contribution to it.

Personally, I feel that a part of me has also died, as Robson and I were more like brothers than friends. He was only two years younger than me, but we were friends for 45 years, which is remarkable and very special. Our parents were very close, so when we weren't running wild in Harvie Heights, Robson was visiting my family ranch in Invermere, B.C., where we rode horses, fished and worked on the land. In our formative pre-pubescent years, we talked of becoming guides one day and how cool that would be, not realizing the influence that Hans, Leo Grillmair, Sepp Renner and others would have on us.

In our teens, we started ski touring unsupervised at Assiniboine Lodge, and Robson, although younger, would take the lead learning the trade of setting the perfect up-track. He learned from the best, and I willingly followed, eager to be as natural and fluent in the mountains as him. Everything came easy to Robson and I always marvelled at how nothing seemed to challenge him. I rarely saw him angry, and his giggle was always the solution to any challenging moment. As kids, spending a week at a time at Battle Abbey in the winter, we would build an igloo, and then proceed to spend the night in it. One time, as it snowed three centimetres per hour or more, Hans came out in the middle of the night to haul us indoors as we were precariously set under a potential avalanche slope. He had quite a time getting us out since we had made sure that the opening to the igloo was adult-proof.

Our lives paralleled each other and we remained best friends through all of our life changes. I've enjoyed the last decade of working with Robson at his lodge that we helped build, and I looked forward to many years to come, sharing our passion and love of the mountains as we grew old together.

Robson was unassuming and modest. He loved simplicity and could relax as well as he could go full speed. He didn't take risks and he lived life to its full potential. He is greatly missed, but we will all hear him laughing forever in our memories, and this will bring us peace.

—Marco Delesalle

William Lowell Putnam III
1924-2014

In 2002, the Alpine Club of Canada proposed that William L. Putnam be elected an honorary member of the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA). This motion was seconded by the German, Japanese and South African alpine clubs. Bill's election added to the many other honours bestowed on him by the world's climbing community. These include: honorary memberships in the Appalachian Mountain Club (1976), the ACC (1989), the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (1990) and the American Alpine Club (AAC) (1993).

Bill Putnam was born in New England in 1924 and while studying geology at Harvard University during WWII, he volunteered for service in the U.S. Armed Forces. He saw combat in Italy as an officer with the 85th Mountain Infantry (part of the 10th Mountain Division). Wounded in combat, he was awarded the Purple Heart, the Silver Star and the Bronze Star medals.

In 1942, Bill, along with members of the Harvard Mountaineering Club, made his first visit to the Selkirk Mountains in Western Canada, travelling by train to Rogers Pass. The result of this trip was, for Bill, the beginning of a love for the Canadian mountains that would last a lifetime. This passion for the Canadian mountains (he would make more than 62 first ascents in the Selkirks) made him, in 1957, the natural choice to become the editor of the AAC's Canadian guidebooks.

As the president of the Harvard Mountaineering Club, Bill led the first America ascent of Mount St. Elias (5,489 metres) in the Yukon Territory of Canada in 1946. Unfortunately, Bill's war injuries (shrapnel damage to his lungs) prevented him from going higher than 4,850 metres. Thus his formidable energies were turned to revising and editing James Monroe Thorington's *Guide to the Interior Ranges of British Columbia*, a task which saw three updates and revisions, the last being in 1971. In addition to editing guidebooks for the AAC, Bill also authored more than 20 books on a variety of historical and scientific subjects.

He was elected to the AAC's Board of Directors in 1969 and served in various capacities for 30 years, including president from 1974 to 1976 and honorary president from 2010 to 2014. Bill represented both the Canadian and American alpine clubs on the UIAA council from 1974 until he was elected UIAA vice-president, in which capacity, he served from 1992 until 1996. In this capacity he was responsible for drafting one of the most visible acts of the UIAA, the Declaration of Kathmandu (1982), calling for vigorous measures to protect the flora and fauna of the alpine environment worldwide, long one of his principal preoccupations.

In his business life, Bill was a successful TV broadcaster and the originator of the broadcast editorial (he was later elected to the Broadcaster's Hall of Fame). He also served as the sole trustee of the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, the largest private astronomical observatory in the world. During his tenure as sole trustee (1987-2013) Bill was the primary force in the development and funding of the 4.3-metre Discovery Channel Telescope.

In 1965, Bill was responsible for the construction of the first hut at Fairy Meadow, a Panabode cabin, and in 1973, was instrumental in the building of the current structure. In the fall of 2002, the ACC approved that the Fairy Meadow hut be renamed the Bill Putnam (Fairy Meadow) Hut in recognition of Bill's contribution to both the ACC and Canadian mountaineering.

Bill's wife, Kitty, died in January 2014, followed by his own death in December of the same year. He is survived by his three children, Kathleen, Lowell and Erica.

—Mike Mortimer

Gibson Reynolds
1924-2014

Gibson Reynolds, who took part in pioneering expeditions that helped open the St. Elias Range to mountaineering in the 1950s and made first ascents of several of its peaks, passed away on April 20, 2014. Born and raised in the flatlands of Alabama, Reynolds served in Europe during WWII in the U.S. Army Signal Corps. In the final months of the war, he found himself stationed on the summit of Zugspitze, the highest peak in the German Alps, manning a communications relay station. As the war wound down, Reynolds taught himself to ski and rock climb using discarded Nazi equipment.

Returning to college at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Reynolds joined the Outing Club and eventually became friendly with a group of Seattle-based climbers that included legendary U.S. mountaineer Pete Schoening. With Schoening, Reynolds took part in an expedition that made the first ascent of Mount Augusta (4,290 metres) in 1952, followed by the second ascent of King Peak (5,173 metres) three weeks later. Schoening later wrote that of all his expeditions, including a famous attempt on K2 the following year, he considered the 1952 King Peak expedition the "most adventurous."

"All of my other expeditions have had wonderful and exciting events, but none have had the extent of unpredictability experienced on the King Peak-Yukon Expedition," Schoening wrote in a self-published memoir in 2002.

Reynolds returned to the northern end of the St. Elias Range in 1954 and 1955 on expeditions aimed at the first ascent of University Peak (4,411 metres), at the time the highest unclimbed summit in North America. The 1954 attempt was unsuccessful, battered by avalanches and falling seracs that left Reynolds with a broken arm. He returned the following year on an expedition, which survived icefalls, crevasses and bad weather to reach the summit via the north ridge. It was a feat not repeated until 1998. The expedition also made the third ascent of Mount Bona (5,005 metres).

Reynolds was a life member of The Alpine Club of Canada, joining in 1947 and serving as chairman of the New York chapter from 1960 to 1965. He took part in several summer camps and climbed extensively in the Rockies, Selkirks and Cascades. He continued to hike and climb throughout his life, summitting all of the Presidential Peaks in the White Mountains and all the 46ers in New York's Adirondacks. At the age of 68, he climbed Mount Kenya to Lenana Point (4,985 metres).

After getting his degree from MIT, Reynolds became an aerospace engineer who helped pioneer the exploration of a second frontier—outer space. Working first for Bendix Corporation, and later AlliedSignal, Reynolds was part of the team that designed control systems for Apollo space missions, including the manual throttle used by U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong to land the first lunar module on the moon. He also worked on control systems for the B-52 and B-58 bombers and the traffic collision avoidance system (TCAS) for commercial aircraft. He retired in 1991.

In 1962, Reynolds married Monica M. Monahan of Dublin, Ireland, an early member of the Irish Mountaineering Club who served as secretary of the American Alpine Club. They settled in Tuxedo, N.Y. He is survived by his wife, five children and five grandchildren.

—Maura Reynolds Kelley

Yannick Girard
1977–2014

Yannick girard est parti de nos vies. Il crée un grand vide dans plusieurs cœurs.

L'aventure avec Yan était étudiée, planifiée, exécutée au quart de tour. Yannick était accompli dans tous les domaines qu'il touchait. C'était le Chuck Norris d'un grand nombre de sports. À l'âge de 13 ans, il possédait déjà une ceinture noire en taekwondo. À cette époque, il a été remarqué pour avoir remporté 11 médailles d'or dans des tournois consécutifs.

Il aimait le Québec : ses vertes collines, ses murs de granite, ses rivières. Il connaissait tous les oiseaux et les plantes de la forêt québécoise. Depuis 2010, il occupait le poste de responsable des loisirs à la Station Touristique Duchesnay, où il partageait sa passion pour le plein air.

Yan était un historien de l'escalade du Québec. Il admirait la résistance et la persistance des pionniers qui avaient conquis les murs vierges québécois à l'aide de moyens primaires. En 2000, en collaboration avec Stéphane Plamondon, Yannick a écrit le Guide des parois du Québec. La même année, il a reçu le prix Yves Laforest, décerné par la Fédération Québécoise de Montagne et d'Escalade et attribué à un individu qui s'est distingué par ses performances et ses accomplissements.

Au cours de sa carrière de grimpeur, il a réalisé de nombreuses premières ascensions extrêmement difficiles, été comme hiver, sur plusieurs parois au Québec : le Gros-Bras, le Cran des Érables, Tawachiche, Pont-Rouge, le parc national de la Jaques-Cartier, le mur du Lac-à-l'Écluse, la muraille des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie et le mur du Schtroumpf Costaud. En fait, il y en a trop. Pour ce qui est de la Patagonie, je ne connais personne qui a grimpé deux fois le Fitz Roy en moins d'une semaine, sauf lui. Athlète North Face, il avait récemment participé à la conception d'un film sur une ascension de Sens unique, qui documente la difficulté des aventures québécoises alpines hivernales.

Yan était méticuleux dans toutes les préparations d'activités. Il avait toujours le matériel le plus léger. Il préférait ne pas apporter de manteau sur un mur, et pourtant il grelottait tout le temps. Yan aimait la forêt en famille — les forêts sur une paroi abrupte où la progression devenait une affaire de famille. J'aimais quand tu débarquais avec ta gang : Sophie, Annabel et Alexis.

J'aimais nos nuits de Coupe du monde de badminton en famille, que l'on jouait à l'aide de lumière bricolée.

Lorsqu'on partait en rivière, tu connaissais déjà tous les rapides avant la mise à l'eau.

Ce que j'aimais de Yan, c'est que, l'automne, aux premières neiges, on devait absolument aller grimper des multi-longueurs de rocher. C'est alors qu'on souffrait des pires engelures de l'année.

Pour terminer, je veux souligner que Yan était un alpiniste des collines aimé de tous. Il avait une sagesse et toujours une bonne pensée pour éviter le doute. Il était courageux, fort, persévérant. Yan était un compagnon exceptionnel. Il a décidément laissé une trace dans l'histoire de l'aventure Québécoise.

« Mais surtout, j'ai tenté au meilleur de mes capacités à devenir un Samouraï des neiges du Québec en maîtrisant le ski de fond longue distance, le pas de patin, le ski hors-piste de tout genre, la raquette intense, jusqu'à littéralement marcher sur la neige, et par-dessus tout, grimper le granite l'hiver dans toutes ses facettes ... » — Yannick Girard, journal *Le Soleil*.

Décédé le 10 juillet, à Saint-Raymond, au Québec.

Je ne t'oublierai jamais. Au revoir, mon chum.

— Damien Côté

Cory Hall
1989-2014

Cory hall was killed in a climbing accident in Peru's Cordillera Blanca on June 25, 2014. It is hard to be part of the New Brunswick climbing community and not have heard about Cory. He started climbing in 2007 and not long after was onsighting 5.12 and leading WI5 ice routes. He set a standard for difficult ground-up routes in New Brunswick and for strong traditional ethics. Cory had a confidence about him that led to many solo ascents of numerous alpine classics in the Canadian Rockies and the Cordillera Blanca in Peru.

I had the privilege to meet and climb with Cory in Patagonia in 2012. We had heard of each other through being part of the same community, but had never climbed together. Our first objective together was Cerro Torres' Ragni route. We had success and built a strong relation over those four days. A week later we went to climb Cerro Fitz Roy with James Monypenny. Unfortunately, Cory had some ankle issues and headed back to Chalten while James and I went on to climb Fitz.

After having success and building a strong friendship in Patagonia, Cory and I stayed in touch and often talked about climbing in the great mountain ranges of the world along with James, our mutual friend and solid climbing partner.

Cory's impressive solo link-up in the Bugaboos put him on the same stage as famous Canadian climbers Peter Croft and Matt Maddaloni, having linked Bugaboo, Snowpatch, Pigeon and South Howser in a mere 13 hours and 40 minutes.

In the summer of 2013, Cory and I roped up again for a rare ascent of the North Ridge of Mount Alberta in the Canadian Rockies. A few days later, Cory was off to India to climb with James in the little explored Indian Karakorum. They climbed two new routes and the first ascent of Jungdung Kangri (6,160 metres).

After their trip to India, Cory came back to Canada to start his Pan American motorcycle trip that he had been planning. His objective was to bike from Edmonton, Alberta, to Southern Patagonia, climbing along the way. On his trip he climbed his first 5.13 rock route.

During a quick two-week trip to N.B. for Christmas holidays with family and friends, we climbed some new hard ice routes on the Fundy Coast. He expressed that Columbia's El Cocuy was the Andes best-kept secret and that we needed to go!

Cory consistently inspired me to be a better all-around climber and push my limits. He was probably the most talented climber I have ever roped up with. Thank you for all the good times, Cory, and I aspire to carry your motivation and passion for adventure throughout my future climbing.

—Max Fisher

Monty Alford
1924-2014

One of the yukon's most accomplished mountaineers, Monty Alford, was a principal planner and a party leader of the 1967 Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition (YACE)—a collaborative project between the Yukon Government and The Alpine Club of Canada that resulted in 13 first ascents in the St. Elias Range to commemorate Canada's Centennial.

A native of Britain, Alford visited Canada in 1950 with a friend, Roy Kerswill, to paddle by canoe from Castlegar, British Columbia, to the Gulf of Mexico, travelling 7,700 kilometres over nine months. Smitten by Canada, he invited his French fiancée to join him, and in 1951 he and Renée married, moving to Whitehorse in mid-February.

During the course of his 35-year career as a hydrometric surveyor for the Water Survey of Canada, Alford explored some of the Yukon's farthest corners. He participated in several major expeditions to the St. Elias Range, and was involved in U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy's 1965 climb in memory of his brother, President John F. Kennedy. Alford also spent two seasons in Antarctica with a Yale University scientific expedition, was appointed to the Polar Commission, worked as a member of the Yukon Geographical Place Names Board, and wrote five books and many more articles. In 1974, he was named a member of the Order of Canada. In 1985, honouring his significant experience in the St. Elias Range, Parks Canada invested Alford as a Pioneer of the Saint Elias.

Married for 63 years, the Alfords raised six children, have 13 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Making time to share outdoor adventures with all his children individually, Alford also shared his skills and enthusiasm teaching outdoor travel and survival skills courses. Fit and active his entire life, he took up sailing at 70 and from then on greatly enjoyed sailing off Alaska's coast every summer and fall.

Alford died on August 19, 2014 at the age of 90, shortly after completing a 10-day sailing trip on the Alaska Coast with one of his sons. Fortunately for ACC Yukon Section members, he presented a slide show on the YACE on July 25.

—Jacqueline Carew

Reviews

Mountain Romantics: The Whytes of Banff

by Chic Scott, Assiniboine Publishing Limited (2014)

Written in classic Chic Scott style, *Mountain Romantics: The Whytes of Banff* is a fascinating book. Filled with triumph and tragedy, adventure and loss, Scott explores the many interesting stories of this early pioneering family of Banff, Alberta. Following his excellent biography of Hans Gmoser (*Deep Powder and Steep Rock: The Life of Mountain Guide Hans Gmoser* (2009)), Scott has seamlessly transitioned between his early mountaineering histories and guidebooks to the biography genre—no easy task! Much like in *Deep Powder and Steep Rock*, Scott captures the complexities of the characters he is examining in his retelling of the White/Whyte family's history. In part due to the depth of Scott's research, but also the colour of his prose, readers are left feeling that they actually get to know the diverse members of the Whyte family.

This book is not only a history of the Whyte family, but one of all the foundational families. Ultimately, it is an account of how the Banff and Bow Valley developed as a tourist destination, a national park and a cultural centre. Part one focuses on Dave White and Annie Curren, the visionaries who made Banff their home. Originally from New Brunswick and Scotland, Dave and Annie cut out a life for themselves and their families in Banff with ingenuity and a whole lot of elbow grease. Part two examines the lives of Dave and Annie's children (Cliff, Peter and Jackie), but also traces an interesting period of history in Banff as the region is transformed from a backwoods wilderness to an emerging tourist town. The Whyte family was part of this process through their various businesses and the development of early ski tourism. In part three, Scott outlines the entrepreneurship of Clifford and Bev in the formation of Sunshine Village and other projects headed by the Whytes, but he also further explains the family's efforts to grow the cultural aspects of Banff. Peter and Catharine were paramount in this regard, but so was the work of their nephew, Jon. Part four profiles the next generation's (Cliffy, Brad and Tristan) continued involvement in the expansion of the ski-tourism industry as well as their contributions to the warden service and Parks Canada. Part five neatly ties the Whyte family histories together in an effort to understand their enduring legacies and how they helped shape the Banff we recognize today in the 21st century. As Scott emphasizes, it is hard to imagine one family making so many unique contributions to the region. From visual arts, outdoor sport, literature, economic development, conservation, community and public life, the Whyte families were part of it all.

As with his other works, Scott leaves few stones unturned in his drive to depict as much of the Whyte family story as possible. Meticulously researched with tedious attention to detail, the book uses archival evidence, interviews with knowledgeable Banff residents and the Whyte family members themselves to recreate the history of the family's presence in Banff. He draws from an extensive and diverse archival resource base that includes newspapers, government documents, personal collections and photographs. His inclusion of oral histories is an effective way to complement the archival sources consulted and enlivens the narratives. The book is also chalked full of captivating photographs and additional images that breathe life into the prose and accompany the histories. These include beautiful mountain photography, maps, the Whyte family tree, and examples of Catharine and Peter Whyte's paintings. Very rarely can one find a book published with such high quality images. It is clear that no expense was spared in the presentation of the images and the printing of this book.

The level and style of writing make this book very accessible to a general audience as Scott communicates with notable economy. He avoids jargon, which makes the text more appealing and easier to read. His writing conveys his rich familiarity with the history of the region and the flow of the book makes it easy to follow for diverse readers. Although chronologically presented, the themes developed by Chic are thought provoking as he uses organization to enhance his analysis. The result is a very approachable text that is suitable for general audiences and scholars alike. This book is a welcomed addition to the top-quality public and scholarly histories on the region. There is no doubt in my mind that this book will be considered required reading for mountain enthusiasts and Banffites throughout the decades to come.

—Courtney W. Mason

A Youth Wasted Climbing

by David Chaundy-Smart, Rocky Mountain Books (2015)

Sadly, not much has been written about the history of the climbing community in Eastern Canada. Chic Scott's book *Pushing the Limits* makes a significant nod in this direction, but as far as I know, there hasn't been a memoir or work of historical non-fiction that specifically focuses on rock climbing in Ontario. That is, until now. David Chaundy-Smart's *A Youth Wasted Climbing* dives right into the 1970s scene and provides intimate insight into a dedicated movement of Ontario rock climbing that has often been overshadowed by first ascents in Canada's Coast or Rocky Mountains.

I grew up in Ontario, and unfortunately, at the time, was not involved in the climbing movement. It was only when I moved west almost 20 years ago that I realized the rich climbing history and scope of difficult trad and sport routes that I had missed. Chaundy-Smart, however, embraced cragging at Rattlesnake Point and other local spots from his early adulthood spurred on by a vice-principal who told him he was wasting his youth by climbing.

"He warned me that I would have miserable jobs and gain glory only in something few valued or understood, that I would fall in with knaves and in the end have nothing to show for the years except my experiences. Some of this happened, but he was wrong when he said it wouldn't be worth it."

Coincidentally, I had the same vice-principal at Etobicoke Collegiate. It's a good thing I always had my head stuck in a book and didn't pay much attention to him either. Authority figures sometimes have a funny way of inspiring youth in the opposite direction, which is exactly what Chaundy-Smart did. He rejected the expectations placed on him by conventional suburban living and, in a type of modern-day romanticism, sought refuge in wilderness areas on the outskirts of Toronto.

Along with Reg, the Smart brothers took on climbing through a steep learning curve, often coming dangerously close to death because they weren't educated in the safety practices of the time. Luckily, a local group of older climbing mentors, like Californian George Manson, took the young brothers under their wing and literally showed the boys the ropes. Chaundy-Smart makes it clear that from the get-go he was addicted. He could think of nothing else but climbing, and even resorted to aid climbing the traffic overpass behind his high school to avoid attending class. Of course his grades were affected, and he was shipped off to a special arts school. But frankly, he was more interested in being schooled on the rock than in the classroom, a trend he didn't buck until later in life.

A Youth Wasted Climbing is as much a social commentary as it is a historical record. With classic dry wit, he takes the reader back to an era of glam rock, heavy drinking and rebellion. A transformative trip to Yosemite, while still a teenager who had just obtained his driver's license, saw him climbing alongside Wolfgang Gullich by coincidence. As a somewhat shy, youthful observer, he soaked it all in. Trips to Yosemite, The Gunks and the Canadian Rockies amplified what he had already discovered about the climbing clan closer to home. These were his people. They didn't care about school, jobs or owning property, but they taught him the importance of establishing goals and following dreams.

Innocence lost might be the theme throughout *A Youth Wasted Climbing*, but Chaundy-Smart had enough maturity to follow his gut feeling that this climbing thing might actually take him somewhere. The result, of course, was more than 600 new climbing routes established in Ontario in the 1980s, making him the clear forerunner of route establishment for the area. *A Youth Wasted Climbing* is a funny, thoughtful and engaging read. As a document of history, it is sure to become a true classic amongst Canadian climbing books and deserves a place in everyone's mountain literature library.

—Joanna Croston

Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906-1974

by PearlAnn Reichwein, University of Alberta Press (2014)

There has been a definite need for a finely crafted book on the relationship between The Alpine Club of Canada and Canada's Mountain Parks. *Climber's Paradise* tells the tale in an exquisite manner and, in doing so, reveals much about the complex paradise of Canada's mountaineering history and ethos.

The symbiotic relationship between the ACC, Canada's mountain parks and, to the telling and not to be neglected point, the role of politics and political parties, have not been probed and explored in quite the demanding way that *Climber's Paradise* does. This incisive is replete with fine photographs and short biographies of some of the main actors in the history of Canada's mountaineering drama. Each chapter, in an insightful and evocative manner, walks the curious reader down and up all sorts of pathways and ridge walks with the who's who of Canadian alpine life. The various and varied tensions that the ACC faced at different historic transition seasons in Canada are unpacked and clarified in a nuanced and detailed manner. Those who are keen on hard facts are delivered plenty of the goods; those who tend to be taken by diverse reads of controversial moments in Canadian alpine life are ushered into the thick of the fray.

Many of the sidebars in the book are biographical primers on significant Canadian mountaineers and activists, and they provide much needed information and delightful tidbits and morsels about the internal working, tensions and issues of Canada's mountain parks and the ACC—reads not to miss.

Climber's Paradise, wisely and judiciously so, unpacks the ongoing story of the ACC, Canadian mountain parks and politics in eight chapters that cover the terrain well in a historic manner: 1. Imagining Canada's Mountain Parks, 2. Canada's Alpine Club, 3. Mountaineering Camp in the Tented Town, 4. Advocacy for Canada's Hetch Hetchy, 5. Conservation, Sport Tactics, and War Measures, 6. Limitless Playgrounds?, 7. Belonging in Mountain Landscapes, and a timely and insightful epilogue. The appendices, footnotes and extensive bibliography make this hefty tome a book not to miss in the Canadian mountaineering archival and library collection. It definitely outdoes and surpasses previous work in the field.

My main regret after putting down this historic keeper is that the tale was brought to a close in 1974—so much has happened of worth and note in the ACC, Parks Canada and the fragile relationship between political parties and Parks Canada since 1974 that more of the controversial tale needs to be told.

Reichwein has certainly emerged as one of the primary keepers of the distinctive Canadian mountaineering tradition, and *Climber's Paradise* confirms yet again why this is the indubitable case.

—Ron Dart

Conrad Kain: Letters from a Wandering Mountain Guide, 1906-1933

by Zac Robinson, University of Alberta Press (2014)

Alpine club of canada members need no introduction to Conrad Kain. He is the stuff of legends and lore in the Canadian Rockies, and rightfully so. In fact, Kain was employed as the ACC's first professional guide in 1909 and left his native Austria with the promise of opportunity, the Wild West and virgin peaks on his mind. His Canadian first-ascent list is long, and many of the routes remain some of the most sought-after classics to this day and appear on every alpinist's checklist. Mount Louis (1916), Bugaboo Spire (1916) and Mt. Robson (1913), to name a few, were cutting-edge climbs of the day. At the ACC's 1924 General Mountaineering Camp, Kain guided Mount Robson an amazing four times in two weeks, a feat local guides today still deem remarkable. Although small in stature, those who knew him described him as having incredible strength and contagious charm. J. Monroe Thorington wrote of him:

"He brought glamour and imagination into the sport of mountaineering as few guides have done before him. Recalling his personality and amusing stories, one should not forget that his approach to mountains was first and foremost an aesthetic one; he saw a peak first as something beautiful—the technical problem was always secondary—and nothing counted beside that vision."

Much has been written about Kain, and his book *Where the Clouds Can Go,* like Kain's routes, has become a classic amongst mountaineering circles worldwide. So you can imagine the delight of historian Chic Scott and author Zac Robinson when they received a call from the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies letting them know that a box of previously unseen letters from Conrad Kain had been discovered and donated to the museum. Robinson dove into the challenge of sorting through the letters, researching leads, hiring translators and following clues back to Europe. The letters revealed a longtime friendship between Kain and an upper-class Austrian woman named Amelie Malek. Malek was, in fact, a client of Kain's from his guiding days in the Alps, and when Kain left Austria for Canada, what followed was decades-long correspondence. Sadly, Malek's return letters to Kain remain a mystery and have yet to be unearthed.

Robinson's book is a compilation of some of the most intriguing of Kain's letters to Malek. With a tone of sincerity and gentleness, they reveal the day-to-day life of an immigrant in the rugged mountains of the Canadian West, decidedly exotic and different from the society life no doubt led by Malek. When reading through the letters, there is a definite undertone of affection that's hard to ignore. One cannot help but think of love lost, in this case challenged not only by distance, but by class distinction. Kain later married Hetta Ferrara and settled near Wilmer, British Columbia.

The letters paint a lovely picture of Banff, the Rockies and the Purcell Mountains in the early days. Kain describes forming a ski club in Banff, for example, and breaking ski-jumping records to a delighted crowd. He is often homesick and often lets Malek know of his desire to return to Austria. He writes about grizzly bears and elk and of acting as manager of the ACC's clubhouse in Banff. He went on several expeditions with A.O. Wheeler as well, helping to survey and map out new vast areas of wilderness. Robinson has also included some letters from Kain's exploits in New Zealand where he wintered for several seasons, leaving the cold of Canada behind for the warmth and mountains of the Southern Hemisphere.

Conrad Kain: Letters from a Wandering Mountain Guide is a joyful read and is a must in every mountain library. It is the perfect companion to *Where the Clouds Can Go* and provides amazing new insight into this legendary man and climber who deserves recognition as one of Canada's true early explorers. Kain's love of vast remote places is clear throughout the letters and is inherently inspiring to contemporary climbers and to those that will climb these ranges next.

—Joanna Croston

The Calling: A Life Rocked by Mountains

by Barry Blanchard, Patagonia Books (2014)

Full disclosure: I have known the author for more than 15 years, climbed with him (at a low standard), slept on his floor, and over too much Scotch, figured out how to fix all things wrong in the world—many times over—only to have forgotten the just-discovered meaning of life by morning coffee at the Summit Café.

My words are inevitably rooted in bias, a bias out of which heightened curiosity is the most dominant arc to emerge. I had read several of Barry's shorter pieces, with their gonzo style of writing, and remember that "writing" was the answer to a long-ago question that I had posed, concerning what he thought of doing besides guiding. So what would he do with a longer format? How realistic was that ambition? Would I recognize the character in the book? And what would I learn about this person I knew, and what—if anything—would surprise me?

Let's start with first impressions—the book itself. A hefty object of 440 pages, there are no half-measures in this debut (which is fully in character). Then there is the design. Let me put it this way: some might find the typography and layout somewhat not to their liking. They might find that it makes the book harder to read (and the absence of an index annoying). In short, along with the cover design, the book has rough edges. Slick or flash are not words that will come to mind on first encounter—at one level, at least.

But then there is this other level. And, as with climbing, patience and persistence pay off in spades. Rough edges? Think of the man as you know him, or get to know him (as you will) from this volume. What else would you expect? The book is in character with the man and his climbing, which always has struck me as a personification of the fable of the tortoise and the hare: steady, reliable, respectful and determined persistence are what wins the day.

But there is more to it. As one absorbs the pages, what emerges is a realization that the design and typography bring to one's reading some of the same attributes that characterize Barry's approach to the mountains. They say, "Don't doddle, but also, don't rush. Set a pace that enables you to take in and savour what you are passing through." And believe me, the quality of storytelling, and the extraordinary turns of phrase encountered in this volume are well worth savouring.

As further aid, *The Calling* does something unique in my experience: a music playlist for each chapter. Rather than frivolous novelty, this provides a creative and nuanced way to reinforce an important sense of time and place, not to mention a key aspect of the author's character—one that otherwise may be too easily overshadowed by the broad strokes of the mountaineering exploits—namely, that Barry's passion for mountains may well be matched, or exceeded, by that for literature and music.

Of course, this is a climbing book. And yes, right from the start it is a cliff-hanger (literally and figuratively), finding Barry and company up the Rupal Face without a paddle, so to speak. But it is no climber-as-super-hero narrative, or anti-hero for that matter. In many ways, the book isn't even about Barry. Rather, the protagonist is often as much, or more, the mountains themselves, and the people and things encountered. Hell, in one way, rather than being a vehicle for self-aggrandizement, *The Calling* could be considered a love letter to the mountains and partners, such as Kevin Doyle, David Cheesmond, Ward Robinson and Mark Twight.

At this point in the history of the mountaineering literature, it is 5.12 hard to bring a fresh approach to a climbing book. With *The Calling,* Barry redpointed 5.14. It is an exhausting book, in a good way, an absorbing way. The whole experience is punctuated by intensity, relief and humour. And it does so while avoiding any "Rum Doodlesque" clichés.

I read the book in two sittings. I cannot think of a chapter in which I did not laugh out loud. And, despite knowing how many of the climbs turned out, often from Barry himself, I learned something meaningful and interesting from each—about history, climbing and my friend. Barry had better be careful. He may have found a second calling.

— Bill Buxton

Index

EVOLUTION IN ACTION

Defy Convention.
Introducing the new era in technologically advanced mountain footwear.
Built the Arc'teryx way.

ARC'TERYX

DESIGN | CRAFTSMANSHIP | PERFORMANCE

Defined by the Line

Josh Ewing had a good gig in Salt Lake—a corporate-job income, the comforts of a city, regular climbing partners. Then he moved to Bluff, Utah, where now he scrounges for climbing partners, makes long approaches to chossy rock and has to drive hours to get full-strength beer—all so he could be closer to the remote climbing areas he loved, like Valley of the Gods, Texas Tower and Indian Creek. But after seeing first-hand how aggressive oil and gas extraction and careless visitation were destroying the region, he drew the line. Now every hour he's not out exploring his adopted red-rock country, he's working to defend it.

DRAW YOUR LINE and join the fight to protect these desert areas recognized and revered by climbers around the world.
patagonia.com/climb

Photos: Mikey Schaefer
© 2015 Patagonia, Inc.

patagonia®

2015 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Visit banffmountainfestival.ca
for more information on programs
and application deadlines

BANFF WILDERNESS PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP
September 17 – 21 | Application deadline: June 10, 2015

BANFF ADVENTURE FILMMAKERS' WORKSHOP
November 2 – 9 | Application deadline: August 12, 2015

MOUNTAIN AND WILDERNESS WRITING PROGRAM
October 30 – November 20, 2015 | Application deadline: July 22, 2015

The Alpine Club of Canada

helping you reach your summit

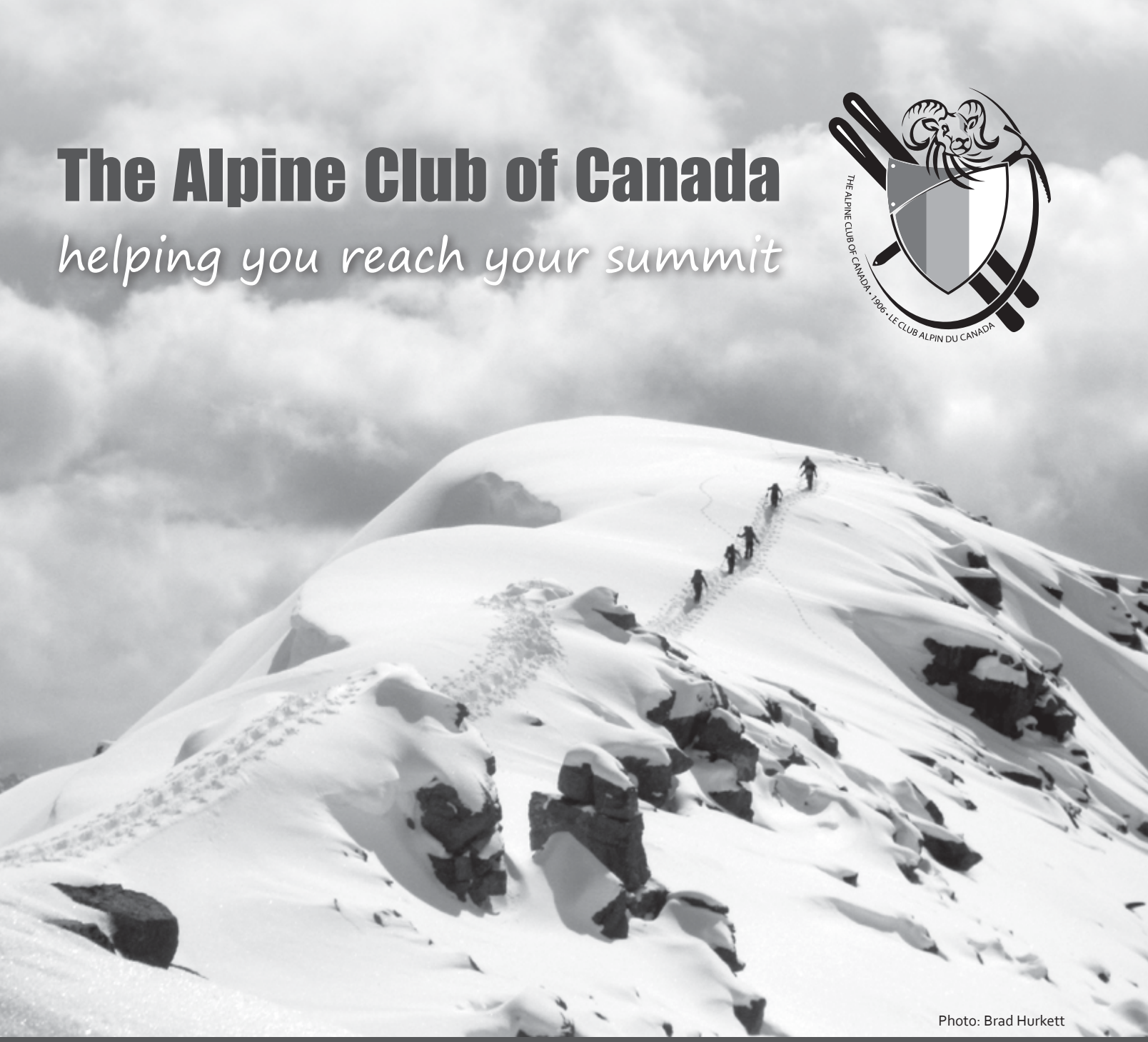


Photo: Brad Hurkett

The John Lauchlan Memorial Award assists Canadian alpinists with their expeditions.

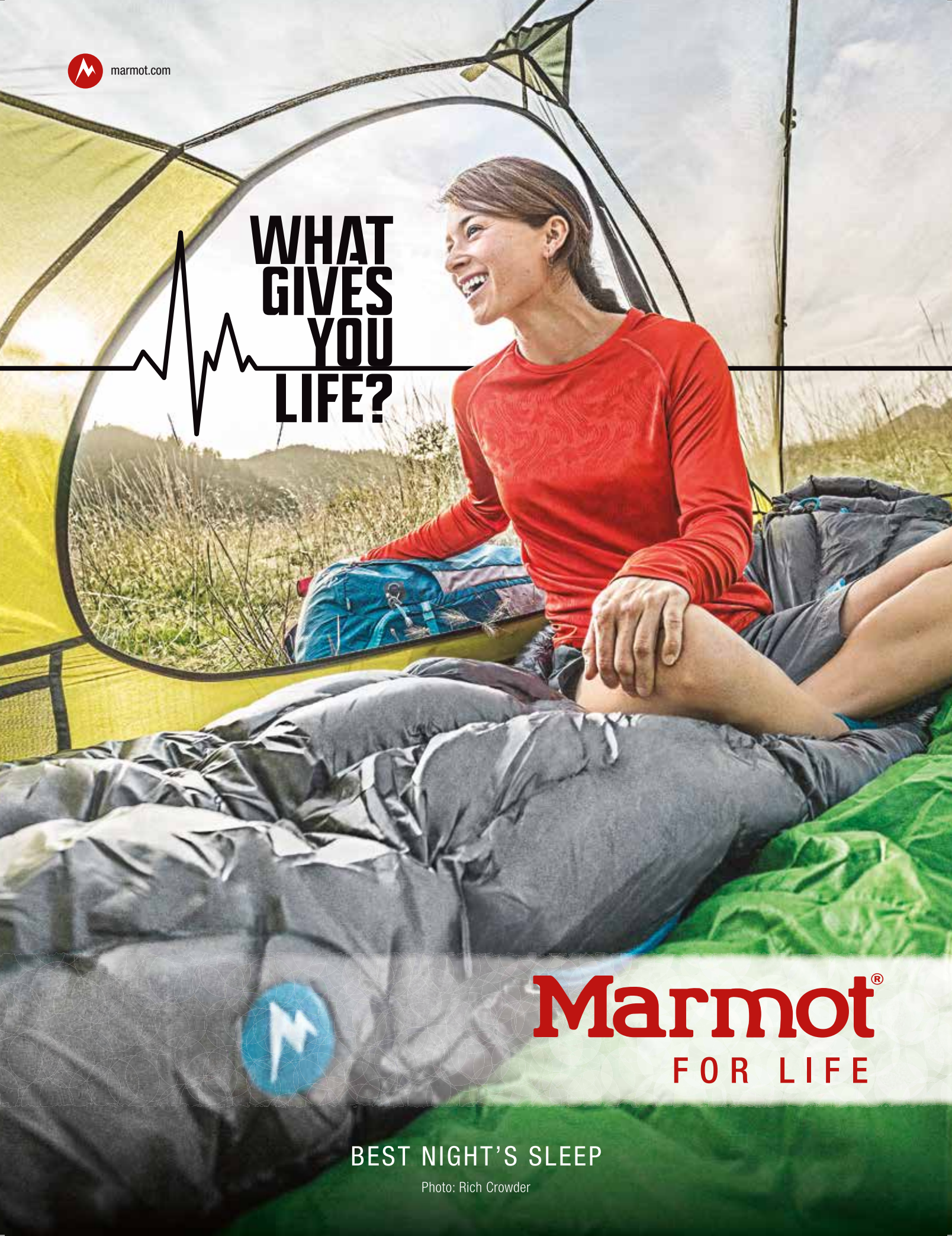
The Karl Nagy Memorial Scholarship is awarded to aspirant ACMG guides and ACC volunteer leaders to cover the ACC's General Mountaineering Camp fees, where they will shadow and learn from full guides.

The Jen Higgins Grant supports young women in their alpine-related outdoor pursuits.

The Jim Colpitts Memorial Scholarship supports young people on mountain-related training courses.

The ACC Environment Grant assists individuals and groups in their pursuit of activities that contribute to the protection and preservation of mountain and climbing environments.

www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/grants/


marmot.com
WHAT GIVES YOU LIFE?
Marmot®
FOR LIFE
BEST NIGHT'S SLEEP
Photo: Rich Crowder

ISSN 0068-8207 $29.95 CAN
9 8
9 770068 820001