Canadian Alpine Journal

2016

Anna Smith

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David Allfrey ascends fixed ropes during the first ascent of Deconstructing Jenga on Great Cross Pillar, Baffin Island. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

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Psychological Effect

Marc-Andre Leclerc

WHEN LUKA AND I TOPPED OUT OUR NEW ROUTE ON MOUNT TUZO'S NORTHEAST FACE, I DON'T THINK EITHER OF US FELT VERY VICTORIOUS.

A WILD FOX HAD ROBBED some of our provisions, causing us to run out of food, gas and water on the route. Now on top, Luka Lindič (of Slovenia) and I were looking at a possible traverse of Mount Allen and Mount Perren to reach a couloir and descend. Moving slowly and without food, the traverse looked at least twice as long as it should have, so we opted to take our chances and descend to the Deltaform-Tuzo col to see if there might be a faster option.

As we began rappelling from the col, we were delighted to find an incredible strip of ice leading towards the valley floor, which was not only perfect for drilling V-threads, but also looked to be a classic route in itself. It was an easy excuse to make our backpacks lighter. We stashed all of our technical equipment under a boulder at Moraine Lake and vowed to return and climb the ice strip we had discovered.

Four days, 30 hours of sleep and 50 bagels later, we were skiing back into the Valley of the Ten Peaks armed with an entire wheel of brie and other tasty delights.

On the approach, I thought back to the previous adventure that we were still recovering from. The original plan had been to climb the East Face of Mount Fay, hoping to climb the upper headwall via an awesome unclimbed chimney. After a bivy above Consolation Lakes, we found temperatures

Previous page: Marc-Andre Leclerc on Psychological Effect on Mount Neptuak. Photo: Luka Lindič

Right: Marc-Andre Leclerc on the first pitch of the northeast face of Mount Tuzo. Photo: Luka Lindič

The northeast face of Mount Tuzo with the bivouacs marked. Photo: Luka Lindič

were too warm and that the face was releasing wet avalanches. We returned to a food cache at Moraine Lake to discover that a fox had been there and our things were gone. We carried on into the Valley of the Ten Peaks as we could see an inspiring unclimbed line on Tuzo's northeast face.

We only expected to bivy once, but the climb proved to be more sustained than we anticipated, and it quickly became two bivies and no food. There had been hard pitches digging through snow mushrooms, steep rock and very difficult ice—adding up to a rather full-value adventure. The ice strip we were now returning to climb appeared relatively moderate, and perhaps a route that others would wish to repeat.

We picked up the gear at Moraine Lake and followed our old tracks back to the base of our route on Tuzo. It felt great to be back in the mountains. We picked a spot to pitch the tent directly below the Supercouloir and packed our bags for the next day. After dinner, we skied towards Neptuak and found an incredible line of ice pouring from a keyhole notch on the unclimbed north face. The ice terminated in steep terrain about halfway in between the notch and the ground hundreds of metres below. I looked over to Luka and he nodded—this would be the next objective after the Deltaform-Tuzo col line.

The following morning, we were up with the sunrise. As we skied up toward the start of the line below the col, Luka mentioned that he was feeling tired, like a flat tire. We continued up into a couloir, avoiding a mushroom on great rock on the left edge of the feature. Higher, we exited the couloir via steep M5 cracks to reach its right-bounding arête, again to avoid snow mushrooms. We kicked steps to reach a great hose of ice, reminiscent of the famous Point Five Gully

on Ben Nevis. I was enjoying the climbing, but Luka was feeling unwell, with some kind of mild virus. Luckily, he was still keen to continue the route, so I led two quality pitches up the beautiful runnel of ice. The first pitch of the ice strip was 75 degrees or so in steepness and quite thin on quality ice—moderate but requiring some care with the tied-off stubbies that protected it. The upper pitch was well featured and had peculiar snow-ice not normally found on waterfall climbs. This brought us to the upper couloir and one final step of WI3 ice leading to the col. We stopped at the top of the ice, having visited the col on our previous visit, but I did walk over and retrieve the bird beak we had rappelled from a week earlier.

The rappels were already fixed, so it was not long before we were back at camp enjoying soup with melted cheese and hot tea. We named the route The Fantastic Mr. Fox, after the wily fox that raided our cache below Tuzo. As Luka said, "That fox must have felt fantastic after eating all our smoked salmon and Gruyere cheese."

A windy night dawned bluebird. After breakfast, Luka spent his time relaxing, eating well and wishing away the virus that had bothered him the day before. For the most part, I spent the afternoon attempting to cure my attention deficit. First came the discovery of the natural half-pipe to ski beside camp. This led to the construction of a jump from which many 360s were attempted.

Until midday, avalanches poured down our proposed line on Neptuak, released by the sun. Once in the shade, the slides ceased, and I skied to Wenkenchma Pass to suss out the descent from the summit. We went to bed early, not setting an alarm, and the next day got a casual noon start to avoid the morning avalanches.

As we approached the line, we wondered whether or not the white stuff in the lower couloir would be névé or powder snow. Luckily, it was the latter of the two, thanks to the frequent spindrift avalanches that raked the lower portion of the route on sunny mornings.

Marc-Andre Leclerc in the off-width on the lower part of Psychological Effect. Photo: Luka Lindič

Marc-Andre Leclerc on the crux mixed pitch on the headwall of Mount Tuzo. Photo: Luka Lindič

The Fantastic Mr. Fox between Mount Tuzo and Deltaform.
Photo: Luka Lindič

Two pitches flew by with little difficulty and some simul-climbing. Above this, a deep chimney was reached, its entrance guarded by a squeeze behind a narrow flake. The flake concealed a bit of hidden ice that helped us along as we wormed up the moderate off-width crack. We went up the chimney above, passing below a chockstone before reaching a great back-and-foot chimney and an escape ledge that brought us to the steep black rock. At this point, Luka took the lead and started up into steep mixed ground generously endowed with pick-sized cracks and solidly frozen flakes.

Each pitch increased in difficulty and commitment. Finally, shortly before reaching the ice, Luka had to make several hard technical moves above thin gear to reach a good ledge to the right.

From there, I continued up thin ice to where it steepened, and then continued up the steep stem box on the right instead. The climbing was as good as it gets, with vertical pick cracks, perfect quartzite and quality protection throughout. Now we were at the steep ice we had eyed from the valley, and as darkness fell, we passed through the keyhole with our headlamps illuminating our picks as we climbed, shaking our heads and marvelling at the quality of the route the whole time.

A long pitch of simul-climbing led us to a very steep curtain that appeared intimidating in the darkness. It was thicker than it appeared, and soon we were just below the ridge crest with just one moderate-looking pitch above. Instead of easy snow, we were treated to digging through unconsolidated sugar to reach the choss underneath. This was the one and only loose pitch on the route. Soon we were on the summit. It was sometime in the early morning, and we congratulated each other on a great climb.

We downclimbed the south face by the dying light of our headlamps, and then made a traverse to the northwest to reach easier slopes and the

Psychological Effect on Mount Neptuak. Photo: Luka Lindič

descent I had scouted from Wenkchemna Pass the day before. As we wandered down the snow slopes from the pass, the shapes of the surrounding mountains became visible as the day dawned clear.

I felt full of energy despite having not slept, and might have been able to jump to the moon had it not been for my backpack full of climbing gear weighing me down. We picked up our skis from the base and admired the line we had just climbed—truly aesthetic.

Luka had a short nap, but I couldn't sleep. At sunrise, we packed up camp and said goodbye to the Valley of the Ten Peaks, which had become our home for the past few days.

The route on Neptuak had been so phenomenal that it kept me energized for another full week and brought me to the summits of Andromeda and Robson before finally accepting that rock climbing season had arrived. We named the route Psychological Effect.

Summary

Northeast Face (M7+ WI6+ R, 1100m), Mt. Tuzo, Valley of the Ten Peaks, Canadian Rockies. FA: Marc-Andre Leclerc, Luka Lindič, March 31-April 2, 2016.

The Fantastic Mr. Fox (M5 WI5, 500m), Tuzo-Deltaform col, Valley of the Ten Peaks. FA: Marc-Andre Leclerc, Luka Lindič, April 9, 2016.

Psychological Effect (M7 WI5+, 700m), Mt. Neptuak FA: Marc-Andre Leclerc, Luka Lindič, April 11, 2016.

About the Author

Marc-Andre Leclerc began climbing at the age of nine and has since morphed into a dirtbag alpinist, following his passion for mountains around the globe. You can read his feature in the 2015 *CAJ* about soloing Cerro Torre in Patagonia. He is 23 years old and is still uncertain of where to call home, other than the mountains.

Matt Segal battles with the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch (5.14) on the Tom Egan Memorial Route. Photo: Tim Kemple

The Tom Egan Memorial Route

It was the summer of 2008. I was 21 and standing in the hot sun, sifting through a hodgepodge pile of cams and nuts that lay in a tangled heap in Chris Brazeau's driveway. Braz, Canada's undercover mountain master, was about to show me the Bugaboos for the first time, and I was giddy with excitement.

Will Stanhope

Driving in, we passed a roaring creek that paralleled the washboard logging road. Looking back, I can easily say that there is little that compares with that first glimpse of Marmolada Spire, or the feeling of stumbling upon a perfect cirque of mint granite spires.

Braz—a quiet, wide-smiling, alpine charger—knew all the tricks. He wrapped his car in chicken wire to prevent a porcupine attack and ferretted out a few barley beverages to stash in the creek to toast when the mission was complete. I followed him up the trail, with every step the humidity dissipating, hinting at the glaciers in the distance.

Wiping sweat from my brow after a couple of hours of trudging, the forest gave way to a rocky moraine and a view of the east face of Snowpatch Spire—a wide, beautiful wall with a creamy splash of snow on the left side. The steep prow on the right edge of the face caught my attention.

"What's that?" I asked Braz.

"The Tom Egan Memorial Route. A Daryl Hatten first ascent from the '80s."

Squamish is rife with Daryl Hatten legends. He established the wildest aid-climbs in the area and could party harder than anyone else, according to local lore. The Pan Wall, perhaps the most exposed pane of rock on the Squamish Chief, is spiderwebbed with a handful of Hatten lines. All of them are incipient, wild and technical. I never met the man; he died in 2004 rescuing a cat from a tree.

In 1981, with John Simpson, Hatten climbed right up the middle of the rocket ship overhanging prow on Snowpatch Spire. Amazingly, a sinuous splitter allowed passage up the wall. Tom Egan was a friend of theirs who passed away in a plane crash.

On that trip with Braz, we climbed a few of the neighbouring routes on Snowpatch. Belgian climbing masters, Nico Favresse and Sean Villeneauva, saw the Tom Egan Memorial Route as well. We watched in camp as they tried in vain to swing into the route's splitter aid crack, skittering across the wall without an adequate

Will Stanhope ascends fixed ropes while working on the Tom Egan Memorial Route. Photo: Tim Kemple

Will Stanhope on the Blood on the Crack pitch (5.14-). Photo: Tim Kemple

pendulum point to access it. I vowed to check it out myself.

In the years since then, I got the big-wall free-climbing bug—big time. Jason Kruk and I teamed up on many adventures, climbing in Patagonia and Yosemite. Trying my absolute best, with a great friend, way off the deck became my absolute most favourite way to climb. Many of the primo lines in the famous areas of North America have been climbed by aid. But free climbing allows us to be pioneers in the 21st century, and nowhere is this truer than in the Bugaboos. Hard chargers like Colin Moorhead, Jonny Simms, Chris Brazeau, Jon Walsh and others have pointed the way forward, attacking old aid lines with fresh eyes.

In 2009, Matt Segal, Jason and I took a look at free-climbing the Central Howser Tower from the East Creek side of the Bugaboos. A few pitches up on a route dubbed Chocolate Fudge Brownies, we thought we had come to a blank impasse. The crack above us petered out into a seamed-out arch. Our hearts sank, thinking the dream was not to be. Jason was still optimistic. In a damn impressive stroke of granite skill, he danced across a face to our right, eventually linking into some finger cracks that led to the summit. It was a crucial learning moment that I would remember forever. If you look hard enough and believe with the whole of your being, doors start to open for you. From then on we called Jason "the whiz kid."

I hadn't forgotten about the Tom Egan line. In 2010, visiting British trad crusher Hazel Findlay and I got the chance to see the route up close. We climbed the Power of Lard, which is a stone's throw to the right of the Tom Egan Memorial Route. At the ledge below the final pitch of the Power of Lard, I traversed over into the Egan, armed with a hammer and few quarter-inch bolts to beef up the close-to-30-year-old belays.

While rigging the rappels, my heart was in my throat. I had never been on a wall quite so sheer

Matt Segal stays hydrated on the Tom Egan Memorial Route. Photo: Tim Kemple

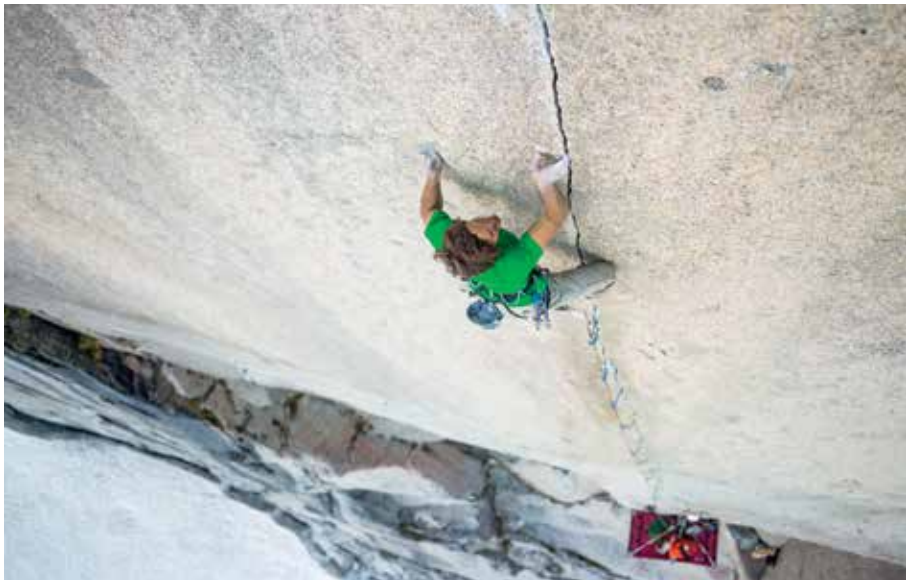
before. After equalizing everything just right, we tossed the ropes with a gunshot crack. They didn't even remotely touch the wall. Slithering down the cords, we gingerly poked the golden rock, finding intermittent barbed fingerlocks the whole way. The next pitch was even more splitter—rough alpine granite just barely wide enough for tips the whole way. Lower down, the crack pinched off into knifeblade nothingness. If there was going to be a way to free it, there would have to be a way in from either side, a grim prospect given that with the naked eye both faces looked almost completely blank.

In the summer of 2012, Matt and I arrived in the Bugaboos to begin the assault in earnest. Matt is a sparky, effervescent Floridian with a mop of unruly brown hair. He stands perhaps only five feet eight inches, but has more energy and enthusiasm than anyone I have ever come across. Bull-headed, strong as an ox, positive and undeterred, I couldn't imagine embarking on the project with anyone else. It soon became apparent that the crack itself, though perhaps the hardest we had ever attempted, would surely go free. The big question mark was whether or not there was a magic line of face holds that would link in from a neighbouring route. For the majority of that first summer, we swung around the wall trying to find a line of holds into the crack from The Power of Lard. We dead-ended many times and reluctantly reached the conclusion that perhaps the route wasn't going to go free after all.

Late in August, feeling a bit demoralized, the Bugaboo spirits dealt us a fat hand. Matt was toproping the crack and spied an invisible sidepull coming in from Sweet Sylvia, the route to the left of the Tom Egan. He found one hold, then another, then another. Sloping sidepulls and razor-sharp crimps—some of which were the smallest we could hold— leading into the Egan in a 15-metre crescent-shaped arc. This discovery had us hooting and hollering at the glacier below. A totally free line seemed possible. We had no idea how far that pitch, which we jokingly dubbed the Drunken Dawn Wall, would push us over the upcoming summers.

Over the next two years, 2013 and 2014, Matt and I essentially wrote off July and August as Tom Egan time. We had cleared the calendar and hiked into the mountains for the heat of the summer. We both managed to top-rope the crux splitter clean. Leading it was a different story. People at Applebee Dome campground could stare straight at us and frequently watch us bomb off the wall. It became known as Applebee TV. We called the crux splitter Blood on the Crack, after the Bob Dylan album, a favourite of mine. It still is the sheerest, heart-in-the-throat pitch I have ever had

Matt Segal on and off the Blood on the Crack pitch.
Photo: Tim Kemple



the pleasure of climbing. On early lead bids, my climbing ability would be short-circuited whenever I allowed my mind to drift to exactly how out there the pitch was. Plugged to the first knuckle on rough alpine granite, perched on tiny smears way the hell above a string of micro cams, and in the alpine wonderland of the Bugaboos was almost too much for my brain to handle. Whenever my mind drifted, I would whip, plummeting down the wall, ripping Matt off the portaledge.

However, nothing was remotely as tough as the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch. Insecure granite face-climbing at its finest with just enough holds to go free. A few more good edges and it would have gone down the first season. A few less holds and it would always remain a project—at least for us. Throughout the crux section, I had to let go of all thoughts. No future, no past, only now. It was only in that moment that the Bugaboo spirits would let us make progress. Never before would I get so rudely chucked off the wall without a moment's notice. Those were trying summers. We would get beat down, rappel, shuffle dejectedly across the glacier, hammer back a couple of cold Kokanee beers that were stashed in the snow and stare up at Snowpatch, scratching our heads at what it was going take to free climb this beast of a project. Come end of August, we would pack up camp with swollen knuckles and sliced fingers and hike out of the Bugs with crippling packs, utterly burnt out.

During the winter of 2014-15, I vowed to get serious and train harder than I had ever trained before. For most of the winter and spring, I had a job helping a hilarious Viking-esque arborist named Steeno in West Vancouver, which was essentially like CrossFit with a chainsaw. After running around all day, heaving rounds of cedar and Douglas fir and sawing branches, I would exile myself to the corner of the Edge Climbing Centre, the place where I first tied in as an eight-year-old kid. There, I would dangle with weights

The Tom Egan Memorial Route on the east face of Snowpatch Spire. Photo: Tim Kemple

on a hangboard for an hour or so. Kids would stare at me and ask quizzically if I was OK, wondering what that weird guy was up to. Come Bugaboo season, my fingers felt stronger than ever.

At the start of summer, we quickly matched the previous year's high point on the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch. After a few weeks more of work, we stashed portaledges, water and food on the wall. It became clear that any time soon one of us was going to climb that crux pitch, and we wanted to be ready to auger in for the long haul should that happen. Come August, we started making ground-up pushes on the wall.

One day in mid-August, the stars aligned for me. On my second try that day everything clicked and I managed to free the face pitch. I arrived at the anchor in total disbelief. It was also a bittersweet moment, because in sending that pitch, I had put Matt in a very stressful, unenviable position. He now had to send it as well. I put him on belay. Matt quivered through the first moves, making several giant spans that, for him, were much more difficult due to his smaller stature. Many times he made it deep into the crux sequence, fighting with every ounce of his energy. I could barely breathe at the belay, eyes locked on him, dragging in rope, whispering encouragement under my breath. In the end, he came up short, but in the process he put in some of the fiercest efforts I have ever witnessed in all my climbing. The tension that evening on the portaledges was palpable. I vowed to stay up there as long as Matt wanted to keep trying, but a looming storm in the forecast had us both worried.

Over the next couple of days, I climbed the remaining three beautiful crack pitches to the end of the headwall. Each evening, we would return to the face pitch for Matt to resume the battle. He made sterling efforts in the cool of every evening but didn't climb it. Fingers brutalized and psyche demoralized, Matt admitted defeat. It was a crushing moment. We had begun the project four years earlier and climbing to the top without him freeing the pitches was a tough pill to swallow. In

the midst of intermittent rain showers I texted my friend Colin Zacharias, mountain guide and weatherman extraordinaire. I caught him as he was driving his cat to the veterinarian. He quickly dialed in the forecast and fired us an ominous text: By 9 p.m. you guys don't want to be on the wall.

We rocketed up the fixed lines to the top of the headwall. I started leading through wandering 5.10 terrain at breakneck speed, terrified the storm would arrive early, dousing all hopes of completing the route. Matt followed as fast as he could. At one point a crimp crumbled under his weight and he fell onto the rope. I winced, knowing that if I had snapped off the same edge on lead, it would have meant a disastrous fall.

We reached the Yellow Tower on the summit ridge as the sky turned from grey to black. This was the end of the Tom Egan Memorial Route. At this point, we could see the legendary Howser Towers in the evening gloom and the storm that was already enveloping those stunning fingers of granite.

I couldn't help smiling at the irony of rappelling a route called Sunshine in the dark in a total electrical storm. Every so often, the sky would illuminate for half a second as the lightning struck. Booming echoes bounced around the cirque. Near the end of the rappels, the hail began. Never have I experienced pelting like this before. Neither of us could move for about 30 seconds. We just burrowed deep in our hoods and took the beating. Penance, perhaps, for sneaking into the dragon's den and stealing the gold.

Arriving back at the ghostly, deserted Applebee Dome campground, there was only one other tent swaying in the cold night drizzle. Our friend Ian Welsted had left us a bottle of Ballantine's Scotch. We uncorked it, took a couple of swigs each and passed out. The saga was complete.

We spent the next couple of days in Golden. I frequently returned to a spot by the Columbia River, gazing out at the churning green water, thinking about what I had gained during the whole process. The realization of the long-held dream was hard to fathom. I was sure of a few things though. I had forged a deep friendship with Matt and had the chance to dig deeper than ever before, all on the most stunning alpine rock wall I had ever seen. It was a rare gift.

The classic Yosemite Valley definition of a free climb is that every belay ends in a no-hands stance. There are no hands-free stances on the entire four-pitch headwall of the Tom Egan Memorial Route. We clipped the old aid belays. Leading the 5.14 face pitch into the 5.14- splitter into the next 5.13 splitter and into the 5.13-R splitter is a project for future generations. It would perhaps be an 80-metre pitch of 5.God-knows-what. We did the best we could up there, but I'll be the first in line to hand over an ice-cold six'er of Kokanee mountain-sized beers to whoever climbs that route ledge to ledge. May the progression continue.

Summary

Tom Egan Memorial Route (V 5.14, 500m, 13 pitches), east face, Snowpatch Spire, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FFA: Will Stanhope (and Matt Segal), Aug. 11-14, 2015.

About the Author

Will Stanhope started climbing in the dusty Edge Climbing Centre at age eight. At 18, with Jason Kruk, he bailed on post-secondary education and drove to Yosemite Valley, equipped with a fake ID that looked nothing like him and a lust for big granite. Now, at 29, he remains hopelessly in love with exploring free climbing on big, beautiful granite walls.

Matt Segal relaxes at Applebee Dome with Snowpatch and Bugaboo spires behind. Photo: Tim Kemple

Skiy DeTray at the second bivy during the first ascent of Illusions of the Raven on the east face of Mooses Tooth. Photo: Alik Berg

Illusions of the Raven

Alik Berg

My body began to fold over backwards as the next wave of spindrift hit and took control over the situation. The seconds became lifetimes as the volume of snow increased, pinning me in place, filling my mouth with snow and making breathing impossible. My spine creaked with the strain. Was the prussic backup holding? Would the single nut in the rap anchor be able to hold the added load? The seconds ticked by. The incessant pounding of snow continued. I remained locked in its grip.

Finally, the pummelling diminished enough for a breath of air, and I struggled out of the churning river of snow. Desperate for a rap anchor, I searched the sheltered side of the gully. The pickings were slim and the best I could do was a single Pecker in a solid constriction.

As Skiy arrived, his disappointment was palpable: "Is there really nothing else?"

"Not without going back in there," I replied, pointing at the location of our belay on the way up, now engulfed in the continuous, violent excrement of the upper half of the mountain. "It's solid. Trust me."

He nodded grudgingly.

A few more rappels down the wide portion of the gully had us poised on a V-thread above the steeper constriction that had comprised the first belayed pitches of the route. At this point, the huge amount of snow flushing off the upper half of the mountain all had to squeeze through a steep gully no more than a couple of metres wide. Apparently, so did we. A quick look around revealed what we already knew: this was the only way down.

The continuous flow seemed to be no more than waist deep though, and the heavier vollies never lasted more than a minute or two. I laughed to myself at the absurdity of the situation and glanced at Skiy, lines of concern etched into his weather-beaten face.

"Well, best get this over with then." I cast off into the churning maelstrom.

A few hours later, the east face spat us unceremoniously onto the upper Buckskin Glacier. In a daze, I stripped off one sodden layer after another, and pulled on the down jacket I had been obsessively keeping dry all day. As I cowered below the hulking behemoth, slowly warming up, I couldn't help but wonder if I would be willing to go back.

WHEN SKIY DETRAY CASUALLY ASKED me join him on a new route on Mooses Tooth that spring, I reacted with skepticism that bordered on incredulity. I had thought about a trip to Alaska, but trying something this big hadn't even crossed my mind. No way was I ready for something like this. Hard winter climbing had only recently become something that wasn't just a constant battle between the terrifying insecurity of drytooling and the agonizingly slow pace that always seemed to go with it. What business did I have jumping right onto one of the most intimidating faces in Alaska?

As always, though, Skiy was confident and encouraging. After a productive week of climbing together in the Rockies, the deal was sealed and there was no turning back. Tickets were booked, plans made, gear purchased, and before I knew it, I was rocketing up the Alaskan Highway with the car jammed full of toys, so excited I could barely contain myself. Thirty-five-hundred kilometres of solo driving later, I recognized the first of many follies as I picked Skiy up at the Anchorage airport at the end of his somewhat more comfortable afternoon of travel from California.

In Anchorage, a call to Paul Roderick at Talkeetna Air Taxi confirmed that a previously forecasted storm had materialized and had dropped a reported three metres of snow on the Ruth Glacier. With more forecasted snow on the way, we decided to hang in Anchorage for a few more days to wait for better conditions. Luckily, our friends Maddog and Heide offered to let us stay in their basement, and for the next five days we occupied ourselves with Costco shopping, catching up with old friends and checking the weather forecast at least six times a day.

Finally, the weather cleared enough to fly, and

Alik Berg on the first pitch during the first attempt. Photo: Skiy DeTray

we decided to head in and see if conditions were as bad as we feared. We packed the Beaver with an outrageous amount of gear and food, including lawn chairs, board games and 20-plus kilograms of frozen raw meat. Might as well live in luxury if we don't have to carry anything, right?

The flight in revealed a stunningly beautiful and heavily snow-laden Alaska Range. After a quick fly-by of the east face of Mooses Tooth to check conditions, Paul set us down on the Buckskin Glacier a few kilometres down valley from the face. In a flurry of activity, we tossed our gear onto the glacier and before we knew it our little air taxi was disappearing into the distance. It turned the corner where the buckskin hooks south, plunging us into the immense stillness of our new home. The Mooses Tooth holds a commanding presence at the head of the valley and loomed over us as we began setting up our base camp. To say the mountain was intimidating would be an understatement, but it was also inspiring and beautiful. As much as I feared it, I was also undeniably drawn to it.

The next morning, we were treated to a spectacular series of solar-triggered avalanches down the lower half of our intended route. Though unsettling, these were hardly unexpected given the amount of new snow. We were quite content to postpone the inevitable by a few days to give the mountain a chance to shed its new skin. This also gave us time to tackle another unforeseen hurdle. Despite all our meticulous planning, we had each forgotten to pack exactly one item. Unfortunately, it was the same item for each of us. We found ourselves with three white-gas stoves and only one fuel pump—hardly ideal for melting snow for a month. On the flight in, we had noticed a group of skiers camped lower down on the glacier, thus

Alik Berg on the second headwall pitch (pitch 11). Photo: Skiy DeTray

commenced the three-hour walk of shame to see if we could scrounge an extra pump from the only other residents of the area. We caught the group just a couple of days before they were flying out and were relieved to find they had an extra pump that they didn't mind lending us until we returned to Anchorage.

Back in camp, in excellent weather, we studied the face in detail. Skiy had attempted the route the previous year with David Allfrey, and walked me through the lower sections as I peered through the spotting scope. The lower half of our intended route was shared with the existing routes Arctic Rage (Mahoney-Gilmore, 2004) and Bird of Prey (Lama-Ortner, 2013). This section is comprised of mostly easy snow with four or five pitches worth of ice and mixed climbing to where Bird of Prey, and our line, leaves Arctic Rage and heads left up some ice runnels and Skiy's previous high point. A pitch or so above last year's high point, a narrow fluted snow rib held promise for a potential bivy. A couple of pitches of steeper mixed climbing led to another more spacious bivy on a huge mushroom below the upper headwall. Here, Bird of Prey veered up and left towards the main weakness, but Skiy had pieced together a series of just-barely connecting features leading directly up through the steepest part of the wall. The headwall looked to hold at least 10 pitches of steep climbing, which we hoped would have some free climbable dry-tooling, but also expected would involve a fair bit of aid-climbing. Near the top of the headwall was an outrageous, house-sized snow feature that appeared to be pasted to an otherwise blank and overhanging wall—another bivy site, or just a bit of objective hazard that threatened the whole line? Tough to say from the glacier, but we hoped for the former. Above the "magic mushroom," four or five pitches of steep ice runnels led to the final 300-metre ice apron and the summit cornice.

Logistically, this was by far the most complex route I had ever considered. We would have to

Facing page: Alik Berg on pitch seven of Illusions of the Raven.
Photo: Skiy DeTray

Below: Skiy DeTary aid-climbs on pitch eight.
Photo: Alik Berg

pack everything needed for hard ice and mixed climbing *and* hard aid-climbing, as well as food and fuel for several days. The lower half of the route climbs a major funnel that would need to be climbed as quickly as possible. Good, stable conditions were a must, as were light packs. The upper headwall looked difficult enough that climbing through it in one day seemed unrealistically optimistic. With this in mind, Skiy had a pair of lightweight "bat hammocks" custom-made prior to the trip. These were essentially portaledges without the metal frame. Intended to be used with a Therm-a-Rest to give some lateral support, they weighed in at around a pound each. They had been made with flies as well, but they were a bit on the heavy side, thus left behind in the cull of all things deemed extraneous.

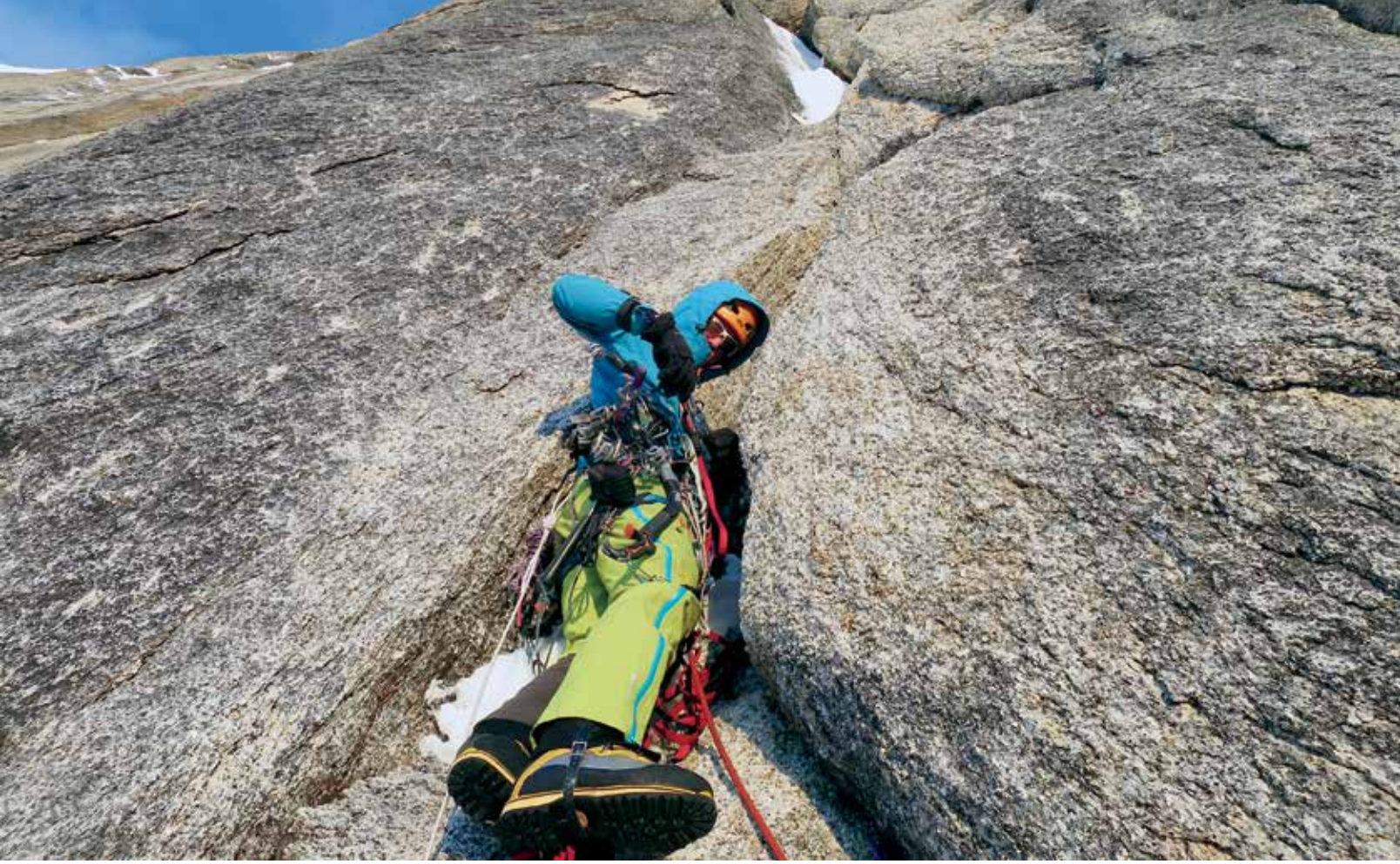
This cull inevitably extended to the rack, too. I watched with some dismay as it got smaller and smaller until it resembled something not much bigger than I would take on a cragging day at the Stanley Headwall. We did, however, agree to pack a very minimal bolt kit. A decision that wasn't made lightly, but one that made sense given the technical nature of the headwall. Six quarter-inch buttonheads and a couple of hangers seemed about right. I figured if the line required more drilling than that, we wouldn't be able to climb it alpine style anyhow.

After a couple of more clear days in our luxurious base camp, the daily avalanches stopped and we decided to do a quick recon mission to check snow conditions and investigate a possible alternate start up the "racing stripes" to the left of the initial pitches of Arctic Rage. We were pleased to find the bergschrund well bridged and the snow well settled, which came to me as a bit of a surprise, being from the Rockies. I made a brief attempt at the racing stripes but found mostly loose snow over 80-degree slabs without enough solid névé to coax me upwards. Another 100 metres of this somehow didn't appeal to me. We regrouped then decided to continue up easy snow as far as the first real pitch of Arctic Rage. Finding it well formed compared to Skiy's previous attempt, we deemed this to be the way forward and headed back to base camp with new-found confidence. Conditions were good and the weather was splitter.

That evening, we received our daily weather forecast. Comically, it was exactly the same as the last few days, calling for unsettled weather and new snow every day. The amusing part was that it had been perfect bluebird weather every day since we had arrived, with no precipitation whatsoever. This confirmed what we already new: weather forecasts are always bullshit, and analyzing them won't get you anywhere. Better to just go climbing.

We packed food and fuel for five lean days, and after a full day of rest and gluttony, found ourselves crossing the bergschrund just as the headwall caught the first rays of morning light. The initial pitches in the Arctic Rage gully were excellent—thin ice runnels with just enough rock gear to keep things reasonable and ice that was never fat enough to get boring. We simul-climbed a few hundred metres of steep snow and soon found ourselves below the pitch that had shut Skiy and David down the year before. Skiy, being a few years wiser than me, settled into the belay stance and handed me the rack, saying something like: "You'll like this pitch. It's just your style!" I charged up the 70-degree snow flutings ready for a fight. Halfway up the pitch, I found the mother of all snow-picket placements. I pounded it home with 20-plus hammer blows and felt like I had just clipped a bolt. For another 30 metres, I tunnelled upwards, delicately stemming between rotten flutings. Just as the rope came tight, I pulled onto a narrow snow arête and brought Skiy up.

Once again, we had found undeniably better conditions than the boys had been dealt the previous year and were starting to feel a little bit lucky. The snow rib that my pitch ended on was also the first decent bivy site we had seen all day, and it being late in the day, we busied ourselves chopping out a ledge for the Firstlight tent. A search for a suitable anchor, however, was fruitless, but somehow a couple of ex-big-wall climbers were able to convince themselves that a single "bomber" Birdbeak was adequate. Beak Camp was christened. Once zipped up in the tent, we quickly forgot our woes and were soon laughing off the day's toil. Sleep came easy.



Skiy DeTray leaves the hammock bivy on pitch 17. Photo: Alik Berg

We awoke early the next morning to new snow and blustery conditions, and hit the proverbial snooze alarm. A few hours later, I poked my head out of the tent again and was dismayed to see that it was not letting up and new snow was continuing to accumulate. We discussed the merits of continuing in clearly worsening weather and eventually decided to pull the plug. Leaving a stuff sack of food and fuel at the ledge, I started leading the raps on what would turn out to be one of the most taxing and thoroughly unpleasant days of rappelling I had experienced.

The following morning dawned clear, and, already forgetting how awful bailing in the storm had been, we began plotting another attempt. Yet again, the weather forecast called for the standard "light precip" for every coming day. Having now seen what light precipitation could look like, we yearned for a magic high-pressure window with seven days of splitter weather in the cards. Sadly, this was not to be, and we watched another couple of perfect cloudless days slip by as we recovered and waited for the new snow to sluff and settle.

At night in camp, I read Barry Blanchard's *The Calling*. Blanchard is a masterful storyteller, and his tales from exploits as a young alpinist were cause for both inspiration and introspection. Climbing, and especially alpinism, is an apprenticeship, one that can't be rushed, and I've always made every effort to take the time to learn this craft as carefully as possible. Slowly building up to big objectives and often coming away feeling slightly over-prepared. This time I was toeing the line, pushing my limits in a much bigger arena than I was used to. In Blanchard's stories, I saw childhood heroes of mine humanized and going through many of the same trials as I was. I watched as Kevin Doyle, Dave Cheesemond and Blanchard all tried harder than they ever had before; as they made mistakes, and were beaten back only to return harder and stronger. As the

saying goes, we are merely dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants.

Far too soon we were back at the bergschrund as another day dawned clear. With familiarity and slightly lighter packs, we cruised the lower pitches quickly and efficiently, reaching the beak bivy by mid-afternoon. We considered pushing on to the next possible bivy, only 100 metres higher at the base of the headwall proper, but decided against it. We wanted to start up the headwall as well rested as possible to minimize the chance of a hanging bivy. Instead, I fixed a short but technical mixed pitch above the bivy, and we settled in at a very civilized hour after a day that felt almost casual.

The next morning, Skiy started up a steep chimney system that we figured would get us to the next bivy. After a couple of hours of toil, he realized it dead-ended in overhanging snow mushrooms, so he began an intricate series of crack switches along tenuous thin seams. Free climbing was not happening and our pace slowed to a crawl, but Skiy's mastery of aid-climbing shone through, and he was able to just barely connect the features. A short pitch of dodgy loose mixed climbing had us on top of the giant mushroom and poised below the headwall.

It was immediately apparent that the headwall was steeper than we had anticipated and was going to be predominantly an aid-climbing challenge. Having each spent plenty of time climbing big walls in Yosemite this was not a problem, but the amount of time it would take was cause for concern. They say positive thinking goes a long way though, so ignoring the doubt, I jumped on the sharp end, took off my crampons and got into my top-steps.

Right away the climbing was loose, tedious and challenging. The cracks were often full of kitty litter and gravel, and most placements would require first raking the junk out of the crack to find something solid enough to accept a nut or cam. Nonetheless, we made good progress. Using short-fixing technique, we were able to climb two full pitches on the headwall before returning to the mushroom for the night, leaving our ropes fixed for a jump-start the next morning.

We settled into another comfortable bivy

feeling strong and confident about our chances. We had our work cut out for us the next day with more than 300 metres of steep, technical and loose granite to reach the magic mushroom—the next possible bivy site. A tall order if it was anything but dead easy, but seemingly doable taken a pitch at a time. Three a.m. came far too soon, and we opened up Café de Mooses Tooth, enjoying instant coffee and dehydrated eggs. Luckily, the company and the view from the patio were both fantastic and more than made up for the cuisine.

Back in the thick of it, Skiy led two more difficult pitches. One involved a short but very technical section through a house-of-cards of loose blocks and plates. Skiy gingerly balanced his way upwards from one junk placement to the next, at times equalizing multiple pieces to make something good enough for bodyweight—all this above a steep ramp strewn with numerous jagged spikes and flakes. Finally, after a couple of hours of intense focus, he was able to breathe a sigh of relief as he eased onto a solid Pecker.

I took over and continued questing up sustained A3+ ground with the difficulty stemming mainly from the abysmal rock quality. I remember at one point trying to place a small fingertip-sized cam, testing it, blowing out the rock, placing a slightly larger one, and repeating the process until I finally got a #2 Camalot to stick. For all its failings in terms of rock quality, the line did continue to brilliantly come together. Each corner I turned, another promising crack system would beckon me forward. Each time a crack ended, a hook traverse, tension traverse or a bit of free climbing would open the way forth. The drill stayed where it belonged, unused and forgotten in the bottom of the pack.

At dusk, I reached a small patch of snow we had noted from below as being perhaps 100 metres below the magic mushroom. The ledge that supported the snow patch was unfortunately only about the size of a deck of cards, but would

Skiy DeTray leads off the magic mushroom on pitch 20.
Photo: Alik Berg

Illusions of the Raven on the east face of Mooses Tooth. Photo: Alik Berg

at least provide us with much-needed water. As we brewed-up at the hanging belay, I encouraged Skiy to lead another block into the night, as I was eager to get to the mushroom, but too knackered to do it myself. Skiy wisely suggested we stop for a few hours to recharge the batteries. Given that we had carried the hammocks all this way, I figured why not.

The hammocks were, as predicted, incredibly uncomfortable. They were also incredibly hard to worm one's way into while maintaining balance and trying to stay on the Therm-a-Rest and in the sleeping bag. After thrashing around for a half an hour, I finally settled into an awkward position on my side, squashed against the wall with only my legs and hips in the sleeping bag. I spent the next three hours in the straightjacket fighting leg cramps and catching occasional whiffs of sleep. Skiy fared somewhat worse, as during the initial insertion-thrashing manoeuvres, the valve stem of his Therm-a-Rest was torn off and he spent the rest of the night, also only half in his sleeping bag, shivering.

At some point just before dawn, I looked over at Skiy and asked, "You had enough of this yet?"

"Yeah, let's get out of here!"

Despite the night's discomforts, we both felt surprisingly rejuvenated, and Skiy took the pointy end of the rope and dispatched another pitch of difficult aid-climbing. The highlight of the next pitch was a 15-metre tight V-slot with an intermittent flared and chossy seam in the back that only barely accepted gear. The slot eventually spat me out for a good-sized fall down the cheese grater, removing most of the hard-fought gear. I had the privilege of climbing most of this horrendous passage a second time. As I pulled the roof at the end of the slot, I was rewarded with the view of easier ground and the coveted mushroom not far beyond. A quick easier pitch brought us to this outrageous snow feature and flat ground for the first time in 33 hours.

It was now 4 p.m. and beginning to lightly snow. Not wanting to miss an opportunity to summit due to weather, we resisted the overwhelming urge to sleep, and rallied for what we figured would be a six- to eight-hour dash to the top. We left all the bivy gear and the majority of the rock rack, grabbed our three ice screws (we started with four but dropped one the first day) and headed off up the final ice runnels. Some of the best climbing of the route followed. A steeper corner with a strip of perfect alpine ice led us up to the upper apron of 70-degree ice. Pitch after pitch of unrelenting, calf-burning, hard glacial ice followed and we climbed into yet another brief Alaskan night. Fatigue was beginning to set in and everything began to slow down for us. Pitches took longer and longer. Luckily, the weather held and even began to clear as we found ourselves below the final cornice. A crevasse in the summit ice cap cleaved the cornice and provided passage. The exit pitch, though quite physical, was mercifully short-lived. After some tunnelling, we found ourselves at the top of the face on the broad summit plateau just as dawn was breaking after 27 belayed pitches of climbing.

The true summit winked at us just to the west, and perhaps an hour away over an easy ridge, but we were sufficiently strung out that we couldn't be bothered. If I had come here for something other than a deep personal experience, perhaps I would have continued, but for our purposes, this seemed like a pretty logical place to end our climb. We jokingly took a summit selfie with the summit over our shoulders in the background, and began preparing for the long descent ahead. This was slightly complicated by the fact that we had only one rappel device between the two of us, as the other one had mysteriously unclipped from a harness on the way up. In our slightly delirious sleep-deprived states, we stood at the top of a 1,500-metre face comically trying to remember how to make a carabiner brake. Eventually, we figured it out and went on our way, making numerous V-threads back to our gear cache at the top of the headwall.

Reaching the mushroom at around 9 a.m., we were in dire need of some sleep, but also low on food and keen to get off the face before any more weather came in. We decided to sleep for a few hours and head down the rest of the way once the sun was off the face. Setting an alarm for 1 p.m., I fell into an incredibly deep sleep and woke again feeling surprisingly rested.

The rest of the descent went quite smoothly, with only one stuck rope in 26 rappels. The sleep deprivation was taking its toll, however, and we both experienced vivid auditory and visual hallucinations. Strangely, we were both independently being visited by ravens and other birds as we made our way down. The birds were, of course, not really there, but their company was nonetheless appreciated. As we became more delusional and less functional, the descent began to drag on and on. Simple tasks became extremely challenging, and we took great care watching out for each other to avoid making any simple but disastrous mistakes. At some point, day became night, and at some point, it began to snow. Heavy spindrift began to pour down the gully as we made the last few raps, and I grew concerned with having a repeat scenario similar to the last time I had done these rappels. Mostly, I was too tired to worry about it and just kept plugging away.

We reached our skis on the glacier at around 7 a.m. in a whiteout. At this point, we had slept a total of five or six hours in the past 76 hours. We lay in the snow utterly exhausted, maniacal laughter bouncing off the walls of this spectacular cirque—elated, satisfied and very much alive.

Summary

Illusions of the Raven (VI 5.9 A4 WI4R, 1500m (ca. 400m new)), east face, Mooses Tooth, Alaska Range. FA: Alik Berg, Skiy DeTray, May 2-7, 2015.

About the Author

Alik Berg started climbing at age three, was benighted on Yamnuska in the Canadian Rockies for the first time at age six, and had climbed El Capitan in Yosemite a dozen times before finishing high school. He lives in Canmore, and in his free time, scales industrial structures to fund his climbing trips.

State of Wonder

Jasmin Caton

It may seem like an exaggeration to say that without the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy (PWC), I wouldn't be here today, but the truth is, in late September 1979, two adventurous spirits in their mid-20s went on a backpacking trip in the then newly formed PWC. I imagine them dressed in woolen plaid shirts, hand-knit sweaters and earth-toned corduroy pants, their tent tiny, their packs an awkward external-frame unit, their skin smooth and smiles huge. The route they chose for this excursion was the Earl Grey Pass Trail, which follows a historic First Nations trade and transportation route that links Kootenay Lake with the Rocky Mountain trench. These young hikers were my parents, and at the risk of subjecting you to too much information, it was during this trip in the PWC that my life, or some cellular precursor of it, began.

Block Tower and Wall Tower glow in the early morning sun.
Photo: Jasmin Caton

Inset: Jasmin Caton on the summit of Wall Tower.
Photo: Kate Rutherford

The PWC was established in 1974 and is touted as being one of the first examples of citizen action resulting in the conservation of an area of land in Canada. Art Twomey and John Bergenske were two men deeply dedicated to this cause, and among others, responsible for this successful preservation effort. They immigrated to Canada from the U.S.A. in 1969 and set up remote homesteads in the upper St. Mary's Valley near Kimberley, B.C. Both men were avid backcountry skiers and mountaineers, and their daily existence was deeply entwined with the mountains that surrounded them. Recognizing that industrial activities occurring in their backyard were threatening the future integrity of its beauty, biological diversity and wildness, they began to campaign for protection of a parcel of the Purcell Mountains, and due to an outpouring of citizen support for the cause, the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy Provincial Park came to be.

My awareness of the rugged terrain held within the PWC came about later than you might think, given that I was conceived within its boundaries and raised just two valleys to the west. As a child, my mountain time was spent in the Valhallas, the sub-range of the Selkirks that quite literally comprised my Hills, B.C., backyard. Adventures further afield came in the form of family hiking trips in the Rockies. In my 20s and early 30s, my obsession with rock climbing eventually drew me out of Squamish and into the Purcells, but my attentions did not stray to objectives beyond the boundaries of Bugaboo Provincial Park. The solid granite spires and landscape of shattered glaciers seemed to me an appealing island in a sea of frightening chossy summits that only true alpinists (as opposed to rock snobs like me) would hunger for. Now it seems crazy that once I had gained the necessary skills in alpine rock climbing, I lacked the imagination to pay attention to the potential that lay so close.

A combination of factors finally prompted my realization that the kind of adventure I was seeking in Greenland, the Waddington Range and the increasingly crowded spires of the Bugaboos might exist right in my backyard. On the very clearest of winter days, from the most easterly ridgelines at Valhalla Mountain Touring, the backcountry ski lodge where I spend my winters, two black teeth appear on the back line of peaks to the east. Any mountain feature that appears bare in the dead of winter must have a steep, smooth rock face, and when I recognized that those peaks were part of the Leaning Towers in the southwestern corner of the PWC, a seed was planted.

The seed was truly sprouted during a ski touring trip in the Jumbo Pass area shared with John Bergenske, one of the founding fathers of the PWC. Five of us shared John's giant white teepee and traipsed around the mountains for several days, gazing at vistas that were fated to transform from pristine and passable only with the most calculated and careful of mountain travel to ski-lift dotted and covered in people and moguls if the proposed Jumbo Glacier Resort was allowed to proceed. At the end of the trip, I was left with the feeling that I needed to connect more with my backyard, that even if the result was chossy rock, or no climbing at all, that the adventure and unknown outcome and getting to know nooks and crannies of places that intrigue me were worth the effort.

One of the trademarks of the PWC is that it is a non-mechanized area. Thus, if you are planning a climbing trip into the Leaning Towers, I will advise you that the six-packs of Pilsner and cotton lounging clothes, the speaker set and disco ball, the yoga mat and even the ironic (and purely for posing purposes) copy of *US* magazine will have to stay behind if the cams and ropes are going to make the cut. I knew I would have to find a partner for the journey who was up to the physical hardship of the approach and the varied technical demands of the climbs once we arrived, and would not mind a week of monastic mountain simplicity. I immediately contacted Kate Rutherford.

Kate and I forged our friendship during a three-week trip to Greenland, during which it rained all but five days. We spent day after day in a Mega-mid, chatting, reading, being comfortably quiet at times, and sharing deep conversation when the mood and/or adequate quantity of wine struck us. The routes we managed to climb on that trip were long and demanding with uncomfortable bivies and some less-than-favourable weather.

I left Greenland with a deep respect for Kate, her skills, her cheery yet realistic outlook on climbing and life, and her well of strength that almost seems at odds with her artistic grace.

Once I enlisted Kate and cobbled together a bit of beta on the approach, it became clear that to spend a week in the zone with the sizeable rack necessary to attempt a new route, we would need to buy some muscle power. Our human porter needed to be strong-backed, mountain savvy, comfortable negotiating rugged terrain with a heavy pack, and after depositing our gear at our base camp, be willing to make the return trip solo through 20 kilometres of grizzly country. Social media came to our aid, and before we knew it, we were at the Dewer Creek trailhead with the tall, dark-haired carpenter/ski guide, Stephen Senecal. He was shouldering his giant, tattered backpack that bulged with all of our food for a week. My smug thoughts about having it made and living the life, what with a strapping young man carrying my pack into the mountains, were violently wrung from my brain as I shouldered my own pack and realized that even with Stephen carrying the food, the next couple of days were going to be far from easy.

The warm-up leg is a rolling 12-kilometre stretch of horse trail leading to Dewar Creek hot springs and the Bugle Basin campsite. We stopped for a quick snack before starting the 600-metre climb up a steep avalanche path to Dewar Creek Pass, eschewing a soak in the springs, because tricking our muscles into relaxing seemed a tad cruel rather than soothing, considering what lay ahead. From the pass, we caught our first views of the Leaning Towers, with the impressive massif of Hall Peak in the foreground and the toothy tips of Wall and Block Tower poking out behind. The light was waning as we made camp on squishy beds of heather at the pass. The next morning, we descended down treacherous, damp slopes of wildflowers and hellebore until we could make a traverse into the high, rocky basin rimmed by

Kate Rutherford on pitch six of State of Wonder, Wall Tower. Photo: Jasmin Caton

Jasmin Caton on pitch four of The Slim Princess, Block Tower.
Photo: Kate Rutherford

Mount Twomey, Sharks Head Tower, Bivouac Tower and Hall Peak. As I traversed moraines under the dark face of Mount Twomey, I thought about the peak's namesake, Art Twomey, and the loss to the mountain community when he died in a helicopter accident in 1997. Art was an avid skier, climber, backcountry lodge operator and champion of the Purcell wilderness. His passion for both the preservation of wild places and for bringing people into the mountains to connect with nature is something that I identify with and hope to dedicate my own energy towards as my life as a guide, mountain adventurer and conservationist continues.

Most climbers who visit the Leaning Towers stop at Hall Peak, not needing to dedicate even more time and energy into hauling heavy climbing gear deeper into the mountains when a 350-metre wall of granite lies right before their eyes. I, however, had my heart set on crossing through the pass on the northeast side of Hall Peak to access Wall Tower and Block Tower. These features were appealing due to photos I had been shown of high-quality stone on their east faces, and the fact that they had been visited so infrequently. Additionally, Google Earth revealed an absolutely gorgeous-looking alpine tarn one kilometre below the toe of the glacier beneath the towers, which looked like it would provide heavenly camping.

By noon on our second day of the approach, after toiling up and over the second pass, finding a 3rd-class chimney feature to descend into the Wall-Block cirque and navigating the crest of a crumbling moraine feature, we finally made it to the shores of the emerald-blue tarn. The scene was even better than I could have imagined. A perfectly flat site of coarse white sand gave our tiny tent a home. A single flat waist-height boulder

provided a six-in-one furniture solution with its use as a kitchen counter, chair, dining-room table, gear-drying rack and easel for Kate's watercolour creations. Three bodies of water were within a stone's throw of our tent. A babbling brook fed straight from the toe of the glacier past our kitchen boulder, providing a ready source of water for drinking and cooking. A sandy-bottomed, shoulder-deep, lukewarm tarn became our open-air bath where we could rinse off the efforts of the climbing day. Just down a small rocky hill was the Google Earth-spied tarn, its waters bright and emerald under the sun, and a dark, swirling turquoise under threatening skies. Looking up valley, bright pink dots of alpine fireweed and little other vegetation led to the bare blue toe of the glacier, above which the granite walls of Wall Tower and Block Tower jutted skyward. Looking around as I dodged raindrops and set up camp, my heart swelled with gratitude for getting to be in this place and for the vision of the people who worked so hard to keep it pristine and sacred.

The next four days were spent in a blissful state of climbing, hiking, eating simple food, taking photos, making art (Kate), devouring books (me), and sharing a depth of conversation and camaraderie that often my daily existence doesn't leave time and space for.

On our first full day, we crawled up the glacier, and up the steep slopes of snow we found passage over the yawning moat at the base of the rock and ascended five steep pitches of 5.10 to gain the saddle between Wall and Block Tower. Initially, we hoped to keep going up the south ridge to the summit of Wall Tower; however, looking across at the arête revealed what appeared like steep bottoming seams and some serious aid-climbing potential. Instead, we opted for slabby scrambling up 4th- or low-5th-class slabs to the summit of Block Tower via the north ridge. We descended down the south ridge via a few rappels, finding some old tat and nuts from previous climbers. One stuck rope and a 50-metre free-hanging prussic under angry black skies kept things exciting, and just as we finished descending the glacier, the skies opened and we were soaked by the time we made it back to camp.

We named this route, which ascends the smallest line possible on the east face of the Wall and Block Tower massif, The Slim Princess (IV 5.10), also the title of a 1920s comedy film about a slim woman who stuffs her clothing with pillows to be considered beautiful in a society where obese women are prized. A far-fetched concept when you are a woman of today's society where beauty icons are angular and starved, and as a climber you are forced to face the plain fact that more weight is harder to pull up a cliff. No matter how much I have always wished I could be immune to cares of weight and body image, I have at times been haunted with a deep dissatisfaction with my physical self. In the mountains, where mirrors and skinny jeans are far away and a bikini seems like a preposterous concept when you can feel the water and the breeze on your skin, my body is simply a reflection of the beauty around me and I feel nothing but completely whole.

On our next day of climbing, we tackled the long sweeping Northwest Ridge route of Wall Tower (IV 5.7), first climbed in 1980. Dense, crispy black lichen made for weird friction on the low-angle crack climbing, and as Kate and I quite happily placed a cam here and there and pitched out the climbing, I thought of the late great Guy Edwards, who soloed the ridge on his trip to the Leaning Towers with Sean Isaac in 1997. I imagined Guy with his trademark look of mischievous glee in his eyes, smoothly padding his way up the ridge, impervious to the unsettling crumbling of lichen underfoot as a 150-metre drop straight to the glacier yawned on his left.

Our final day in the Leaning Towers came with the best weather forecast yet, and we chose to finally tackle our true dream route in the area: a line straight up the East Face of Wall Tower. The day went perfectly in the sense that we found a solution to each climbing challenge. Some five-star hand-crack climbing, some insecure face climbing and a pendulum, tip-toeing under flakes and gardening out microwave-sized clumps of moss, and some good old school chimney grovelling popped us out right at the summit of Wall Tower.

As a nod to Isaac and Edwards, who named their 1997 Block Tower route Trout Fishing

in America (V 5.10+ A3) after a book they had read on their trip, we named our route State of Wonder (V 5.11- C1) after an Ann Patchett novel that graced our trip. *State of Wonder* tells of a woman's wild adventure in the Amazon where she is researching an isolated tribe who found a botanical solution to the limited timespan of female fertility. As Kate and I are in our mid-30s, with many friends and climbing peers around us starting families, we often conversed about our own plans and dreams for futures with or without children. While climbing our new route, however, our state of wonder was brought to the true present. Hypothetical questions of when and if to bring more resource-hungry and lifestyle-altering children into the world were cast aside in the face of *which line of cracks should I follow,* or *will this cam stay in this flaring crack,* or *could anything be more beautiful than this moment.* I find this one of the most beautiful aspects of climbing mountains—that my thoughts and actions are distilled and calmed by the silence and grandeur of my surroundings, making my state of well being impervious to the demons of doubt and worry.

We made it back to camp thrilled at the fact that we had climbed our dream route on the last day. Even the 12 hours of continuous hiking with our huge packs to get out in time for Kate to catch her flight home only temporarily dampened our spirits. It was the best week in the mountains I have ever spent, leaving me with a deepened desire to find beautiful rock adventures off the beaten path and do what I can to make sure these places are permanently protected in the same way as the Leaning Towers.

Summary

State of Wonder (V 5.11- C1, 300m, 10 pitches), east face, Wall Tower, The Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Jasmin Caton, Kate Rutherford, July 18, 2016.

P1: 5.10, 30m. Start off the snow in a golden left-facing corner just right of the giant square wedged block. Climb the hand crack for 15 metres until the corner shuts down, and then pendulum five metres to the right to the next crack (might go free with a bolt). Climb an incipient crack with great face holds, but hard-to-find protection (crux). Belay on a small ledge below a V-shaped corner.

P2: 5.10+, 30m. Exciting face climbing and lay backing with no pro gets you established in the corner five metres above. Climb up and left over the roof, and continue to a cool belay ledge below the thin right-facing corner.

P3: C1, 20m. Clean aid up the thin right-facing corner and through the roof on the right side (maybe 5.12a with some cleaning of moss). Eventually step left and belay under a roof out left, standing on a wide crack.

P4: 5.9, 45m. Make slab moves into a left-facing corner followed by a steep 5.9 chimney/off-width then head right up flaky terrain. Belay to the right of a loose detached flake where there is suitable gear.

P5: 5.8, 30m. Go up the flakes, which is pretty easy but poor pro. Belay on small ledge with a nice #1 and #3 Camalot crack just below a big flake chimney.

P6: 5.10, 45m. Climb the chimney until it's possible to move left. An awesome V-slot with big fingers in the back leads to an easy wide section then world-class glory splitter thin hands. Belay below the left-leaning, thin-hand crack. Belay takes #1 and #2 Camalot.

P7: 5.11- C1, 20m. Climb the left-leaning thin hands to a left-traversing mossy finger crack (C1 or free at 5.11+ or 5.12-). Continue left past a big tooth flake and belay at the end of the finger crack in a chimney. We then climbed five metres of burly 5.10 corner to a nice ledge (or maybe climb the wide right side of tooth flake to the same ledge).

P8: 5.10+, 50m. Climb off the right side of the ledge to avoid loose blocks on the left. A #4 Camalot protects an awkward 5.10+ mantle onto a sloping ledge. Move up a wide chimney past several chockstones to belay on pile of stacked blocks.

P9: 5.10+, 50m. Follow chimney up to some hard off-width moves then continue past some good chockstones and some loose ones. Traverse right on slab with good feet to a finger crack. Step back left after a little roof/block and belay below some tall, loose blocks with small to mid-sized cams.

P10: 5.8, 55m. Climb up and over the loose blocks, and then traverse right across the slab for five metres to blocky fun 5.8. Finish with a nice fist crack to summit ridge. Belay 10 metres down and right of summit proper with hand-sized pieces under a large block.

Descent: Downclimb and rappel the obvious west ridge (staying skier's left) to the snowy col. Drop north down scree and 50-degree snow to the glacier below.

About the Author

Jasmin Caton is an ACMG ski and rock guide and the owner of Valhalla Mountain Touring. Her climbing exploits have included granite big walls in Greenland, the Waddington Range and the Vampire Spires. When not climbing, skiing and running around the mountains, she can be found strumming a guitar and swilling red wine in her birthday suit on the shores of Slocan Lake.

Jasmin Caton on pitch two of The Slim Princess, Block Tower.
Photo: Kate Rutherford

Deconstructing Jenga

Seventy-two hours of air travel and a five-hour snowmobile ride had deposited us in one of the most spectacular big-wall venues in the world, the Sam Ford Fiord on Baffin Island. The fjord rock formed 3.6 billion years ago but was buried, smashed, super-heated and re-exposed just 1.8 million years ago when it was carved by the massive glaciers of the Pleistocene era. Now, 1,200-metre vertical walls erupt straight from the meandering ocean inlets.

David Allfrey

David Allfrey heads out on the final pitch (A4) of Deconstructing Jenga in the middle of the arctic night. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

"The threat of polar bears is very real," Levi Palituq told us as we pulled away from the airport in Clyde River. Palituq, a quiet, crewcut Inuit is the local expert on the fjords and big walls on the east coast of Baffin Island. We would later find out that even in whiteout conditions, where the ground and sky fade into one, Palituq knew the way. "You're going to an extremely remote place where you won't see anyone, and it's very possible you will see a bear," he warned.

The next day, from a wooden sledge towed behind a snowmobile, Cheyne Lempe and I watched the terrain shift. The snowy hills of Clyde River grew into the massive and seemingly never-ending vertical walls of the Sam Ford Fiord.

Reaching our destination, we pulled the eight heavy haul bags from the sledges and onto the sea ice. Above us towered the 900-metre Great Cross Pillar. Across the fjord, the Polar Sun Spire stood in the shade, clouds spinning around the summit 1,400 metres above the sea ice.

Palituq and his partner pulled out a rifle and chambered a round then handed it to me. Cheyne had already said he wanted nothing to do with the gun. Our guides fired up their snowmobiles, waving but not looking back. We stood alone on the sea ice, exposed and isolated with the wind howling in our ears.

We were equals in our icy wonderland. We each had different roles to fill, and together we had a balanced energy. I cracked the whip, always eager to get on the wall, while Cheyne demanded an eight-hour sleep schedule. We found middle ground by sleeping for six hours, waking to my alarm, and then deciding whether we should sleep another two.

We quickly learned that the wind never stops blowing on the sea ice. We, however, had adopted the motto "climb every day" from our Polish big-wall heroes, Marek Raganowicz and Marcin Tomaszewski, whom we knew from Yosemite. So, despite the wind, we donned our layers, our balaclavas and our goggles and began the first

David Allfrey in the middle of the crux pitch (pitch 14) of Deconstructing Jenga. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

pitch on the Great Cross Pillar. Our perceptions of scale and distance were seriously askew in this land without any markers of height and distance. The initial cliff band was almost double the height we expected.

Our Baffin trip had started off rocky—a missed flight, a forgotten passport and the intensity of the Arctic weighing heavily on Cheyne (who, just a month earlier, had married his Yosemite love, Jessica Pemble). When I wasn't looking, he struggled to stay motivated, but when I was, he forced a constantly positive attitude that drove us. We decided that any suggestion or idea should always be met with positivity. "Now that's a great idea!" became our go-to line.

By the third day on the ice, we were ready to commit to the wall and leave the sea ice where we were exposed and neurotic about encountering polar bears. Every morning when nature called, we scanned the horizon for the black nose of the great white bear. We joked about carrying the rifle during our morning business.

On the fifth day, we finally left these fears behind and moved 350 metres up the wall to camp one, situated on a frozen-talus ledge the size of a football field.

The first pitch on the main wall foreshadowed what the route would entail—wide chimneys stuffed with loose rock and sand. The climbing was steep, and the rocks we pulled from these gaping clefts fell far from the wall, smashing the ledge below us.

Our route, which would be the fourth on the formation, followed a massive cleft between the central and right pillars of the Great Cross. Unlike the younger granite of Yosemite or Patagonia where you can jam continuous cracks, the older rock of Baffin Island typically fractures in discontinuous, broken crack systems.

Progress was steady and the higher we climbed, the better the rock became. Every day we jumared above camp and each led a full 60-metre pitch. When the rope went tight, we drilled an anchor

Cheyne Lempe on pitch 18 during the summit push late at night. Photo: David Allfrey

and changed leads. We repeated this process for four days, fixing 240 metres of rope, before we finally packed our camp and hauled our bags higher on the wall to camp two.

The day of hauling deposited us at a horrendous hanging belay. Looking up, we saw a perfect ledge just 30 metres away, so I donned the rack and squirmed into a difficult squeeze-chimney, heel-toe camming in my double boots, chicken-winging in two thick down jackets and finally belly-flopping onto the ledge. My feet stuck straight out from the wall while I lay on my stomach building an anchor and admiring the perfect new camp.

That night on the portaledge, we blasted Michael Franti tunes and devoured a big dinner. In the Arctic, food is your friend. When you feel cold, putting down several hundred calories of M&M'S and nuts stokes the internal fire.

Every day we took in over 5,000 calories, and could have eaten more. I shouldn't have been surprised when I woke late that night to find Cheyne quietly stuffing a handful of snacks into his mouth.

Above the Nighttime Nibbler Bivy, as we called our portaledge camp, the route dished out steep and difficult chimneys, tearing holes in our puffy arctic battle gear. On day eight, we finally escaped the loose and dangerous corner for safety in hard and exposed aid-climbing on the golden wall to the right. Casting off onto the perfect rock, I found small seams and difficult hooking that led right and finally into a long, airy and exposed crack.

The strong winds blew in a storm that day, so we climbed in a full blizzard, our fingers numb despite thick winter gloves. With temperatures of -30 C, we fixed our ropes and retreated to the shelter of the Nighttime Nibbler Bivy.

By the time we arrived, our fingers and toes were burning from the cold. We pulled off our boots and stuffed our feet into our -40 C sleeping bags, rubbing and flexing our toes to bring back the blood flow.

Our 4 a.m. alarm was drowned out by the wind ripping across the wall. Our camp sat in a small sheltered nook, spared from the worst of the storm, but when Cheyne opened the portaledge fly, we were hit by the coldest air I have ever felt. We agreed to settle in for a rest day.

By 9 a.m. the strong winds had pushed the blizzard through, leaving calm and sunny skies. We turned on music, made breakfast and prepared for another day. Little did we know that we were embarking on our summit push.

On our ninth day, as the sun dipped below the horizon to the north, we finished another 120 metres of wild and exposed climbing. The shadowy hours of night were the closest thing to darkness we saw at that latitude where the sun shines more than 20 hours a day in May. Now on a snowy ledge that cut the entire wall just below the final small headwall, we fixed the final static rope, lengthening the umbilical cord to our camp below. "Yeah, buddy!" yelled Cheyne, and he cast off for the top.

A blizzard pounded the distant walls far away to the south, creating surreal swirls of alpenglow. Across the fjord, the Polar Sun Spire briefly glowed in the sunlight then faded back into shadow. Above, Cheyne climbed through strange, bullet-hard bubbly rock with few crack systems. When I arrived at the belay, we were tired, but could finally see the top of the wall.

Around midnight, I free climbed left toward a pockmarked black corner and shifted to aid-climbing mode. The small beaks and daunting ledge below gave me déjà vu as I remembered the terrifying ledges perched below similarly hard climbing of the Reticent Wall on El Capitan. I focused on climbing, nailing, testing, weighting and moving on. Placements shifted and twisted, and my heart raced—beaks, hooks and, finally, a solid cam placement. I breathed and relaxed. Then, suddenly, I was standing on top of the Great Cross Pillar. The wall was gone and only a short hike remained to the highest point.

The early morning gold and pink light shone on an endless world of big walls and ocean fjords. When Cheyne arrived, we unroped, embraced and walked toward the true summit of the Great Cross Pillar.

David Allfrey takes in the immensity of the south face of Great Cross Pillar. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

Fox tracks crisscrossed the mountaintop and mouse droppings lay under every stone—there were signs of life everywhere in the barren landscape. We snapped photos and enjoyed the view. Then, exhausted, we descended. In just a few hours we were on the portaledge, bonked and arguing about pulling and coiling our ropes, a rare moment of discord that quickly turned to laugher as we filled our bellies with food and water.

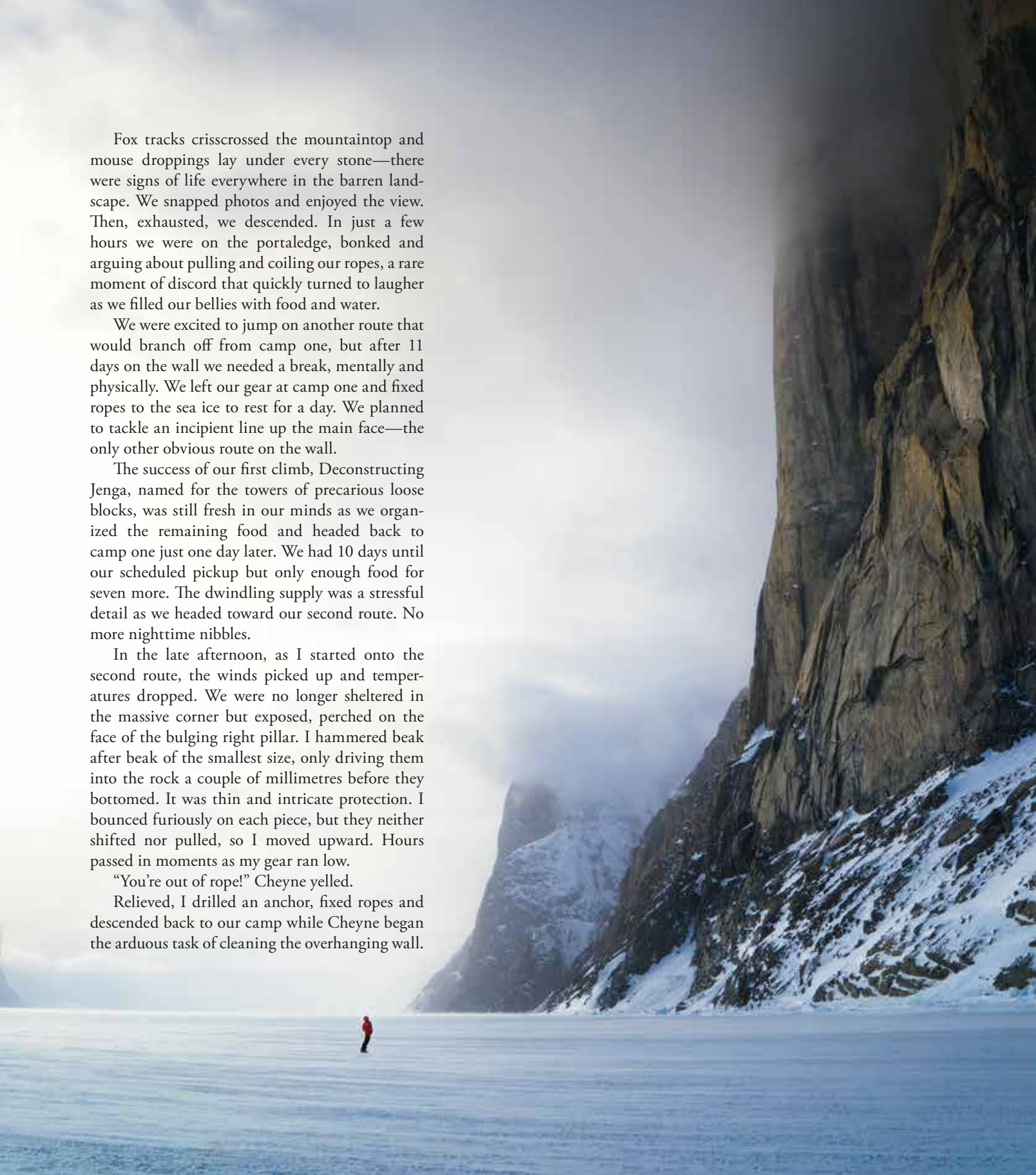
We were excited to jump on another route that would branch off from camp one, but after 11 days on the wall we needed a break, mentally and physically. We left our gear at camp one and fixed ropes to the sea ice to rest for a day. We planned to tackle an incipient line up the main face—the only other obvious route on the wall.

The success of our first climb, Deconstructing Jenga, named for the towers of precarious loose blocks, was still fresh in our minds as we organized the remaining food and headed back to camp one just one day later. We had 10 days until our scheduled pickup but only enough food for seven more. The dwindling supply was a stressful detail as we headed toward our second route. No more nighttime nibbles.

In the late afternoon, as I started onto the second route, the winds picked up and temperatures dropped. We were no longer sheltered in the massive corner but exposed, perched on the face of the bulging right pillar. I hammered beak after beak of the smallest size, only driving them into the rock a couple of millimetres before they bottomed. It was thin and intricate protection. I bounced furiously on each piece, but they neither shifted nor pulled, so I moved upward. Hours passed in moments as my gear ran low.

"You're out of rope!" Cheyne yelled.

Relieved, I drilled an anchor, fixed ropes and descended back to our camp while Cheyne began the arduous task of cleaning the overhanging wall.



The wind blew strongly and steadily as I set up the portaledge at camp one. The rope streamed across the face above since I forgot to tie them down. Cheyne had finished cleaning the pitch and was organizing the gear at the anchor above when I left the portaledge and ran under him to grab the rope. That was when he shouted, "Rock! Rock! ROCK!"

The block flew through the air, dislodged from slightly overhead. I tried to jump but never made it. The block struck my lower back just left of my spine. It drove me to the ground, but like an animal under attack, I gained my feet and ran.

Thirty feet later I slumped to the snow, lying on my side, breathing heavily. Wide eyed, I stared at nothing, unable to move my head, emotions numb as I thought through our emergency plan. A minute later Cheyne was at my side, panting, terror in his eyes. He had watched me, so he thought, die. He had seen the block strike and drive me to the ground. Lying there, I shivered for the first time on the entire trip.

Cheyne helped me onto the sleeping pads, pulled on the down pants and carefully tucked a sleeping bag around me. I needed to eat. I needed to drink. We needed to remain calm. We used a small tube from the drill kit as a straw and I sucked down a half litre of water. I could wiggle my toes but couldn't move my torso. Cheyne checked my back to find swelling had already begun and a large abrasion across the skin. I stuffed fear down deep inside.

I asked Cheyne to sit in front of me where I could see him without moving. Despite the pain, I felt calm and collected. Both Cheyne and I had worked for Yosemite Search and Rescue, and we knew what to do.

We were in an exposed position 350 metres up the wall, in a land where there was no chance of

Left: David Allfrey leads off pitch 10 on day five during the first ascent of Deconstructing Jenga. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

Right: David Allfrey rappels back to camp during a storm on Great Cross Pillar. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

rescue. I knew I wouldn't shake this off, but I also refused to believe my back was broken. Getting to the sea ice was the only option. I lay immobile on the snow, breathing deeply, while Cheyne jumped into hero mode—stress and exhaustion forgotten.

He quickly recovered the fixed ropes, filled a haulbag with the emergency essentials—sleeping bags, clothing, food, stoves and our medical kit—and helped me to my feet. Pain exploded through my body. Still, I knew I would make it. I had to make it.

Cheyne led the rappels with the heavy haulbag and 350 metres of rope hanging from his waist. He double-checked my harness, and we made sure I could control my own rappels. Then we began the painful process of moving down the wall. As Cheyne dropped into the first rappel, I glanced across the fjord at the golden light illuminating the Polar Sun Spire. I breathed in the cold arctic air and fought back tears. Our predicament was both terrifying and beautiful.

The next two and half days at base camp on the ice were for me a haze of sleeping, eating and reflecting on what had happened. Cheyne returned to camp one to collect all of the gear—a monumental task.

We made emotional phone calls home, and on the second night we reached Levi Palituq. I could

Deconstructing Jenga on the south face of Great Cross Pillar.
Photo: Cheyne Lempe

tell he was extremely concerned, but in his flat and emotionless tone he asked, "This is no reason to panic?" His intonation made me believe it was a statement. Despite having just spent his whole day on a snowmobile, he seemed unfazed at leaving within hours to pick us up.

In those two days at camp, it didn't matter whether I was broken or not. I was simply grateful to be alive. There were so many other possible outcomes. Had the rock struck my head, even with a helmet, I would surely have died. When I got home, a doctor took two rounds of X-rays and confirmed that nothing was broken.

While on the ice, Cheyne and I talked about the minor mistakes that led to the accident. He had been at the belay, emotionally drained and questioning the whole trip. His attention lapsed as he pulled the rope, dislodging the block that hit me. I should have warned him that I was moving below. In the mountains, little things compound; they build in an exponential way and disaster can quickly strike. A hand-sized scar on my lower back is all that is left of the accident, a visual reminder of how lucky I was and the important lessons we learned.

Summary

Deconstructing Jenga (VI A3+ 5.9+, 900m, 20 pitches), south face, Great Cross Pillar, Sam Ford Fiord, Baffin Island. FA: David Allfrey, Cheyne Lempe, May 8-16, 2015.

About the Author

David Allfrey is a rock climber living in Las Vegas, Nevada. He has climbed in Patagonia and Alaska, making a continuous push on the massive East Face of the Fitz Roy with Cheyne Lempe in 2013. In the summer of 2014, he and Alex Honnold climbed seven routes on Yosemite's El Capitan in seven days, setting four new speed records during the week.

David Allfrey leads out on one of the best pitches of his life during the attempt on another new route before rockfall seriously injured him. Photo: Cheyne Lempe

Mayan Smith-Gobat and Ines Papert high above the Franklin Glacier on the ridge that tops the Southwest Buttress on Mount Waddington.
Photo: Paul McSorley

A Wadd WEEKEND

Paul McSorley

"THIS IS TWO-TOOL COUNTRY!" I yelled down to my rope-mates as we moved together into one of the bergschrunds that guards the western flanks of Mount Waddington. I pumped in a screw from a stance on a delicate ice bridge, and my headlamp tilted skyward. Above rose a sickeningly decrepit overhang of snow that had us deeply barrelled. Creeping stealthily, so as not to wake this horrible dragon, my mind drifted to fallen mountain brother Craig Leuben, who had died on a similar feature in the North Cascades during a guides exam a few years back. After sneaking over the steep flank of the frozen tsunami, I ran out easy ground to a rock rib and belayed my partners up on a couple of cams and a Munter hitch. As the rope moved in, nausea crested in my throat, and I expelled the meager contents of my stomach onto the uncaring avalanche cone beneath my feet. Ah, the joys of alpine climbing.

The idea to climb Mount Waddington had originated several years ago with my friend Andrew Boyd. We wanted to try something new on the main peak. With Tony Richardson and Jason Kruk, we had driven to Bluff Lake intent on two distinct objectives. Tony and Jason quested into the range by truck, powerboat, raft and foot over the course of a week, battling bush, rain and gnarly ice. Andrew and I waited the same amount of time for a weather window good enough to get a helicopter lift into the zone. It never came. In the end, Jason and Tony came agonizingly close to topping out on the Southwest Buttress of Waddington's Northwest Summit, and had a grand adventure rafting out the Homathko to a fixed-wing pickup at Butte Inlet. Andrew and I never left the tarmac and drove home empty-handed.

This past summer, the Wadd once again topped my wish list, and with the arrival of my Bavarian friend Ines Papert and Kiwi sender Mayan Smith-Gobat, we seized a promising window in the forecast and made the 10-hour lap from Squamish up to Bluff Lake. This time, the skies split and we had just enough time to organize our kit before

The Southwest Buttress on Mount Waddington.
Photo: Paul McSorley

ace Whitesaddle Air pilot Les whisked us onto the otherworldly Dais glacier.

Though amazingly efficient, approaching the range by helicopter is miles less sporting than the style pioneered by Don and Phyllis Munday back in the 1920s. Starting in 1926, the Mundays made several multi-week forays into Waddington via Butte and Knight inlets. Ultimately, they were rewarded with the first ascent of the Northwest Summit of what was then know as Mystery Mountain. Their pioneering has left an alpine endowment that continues to inspire generations of Coast Mountain adventurers like Jason and Tony.

With the utmost respect for the pioneers, and those choosing deep commitment over convenience, my karma has no issues jumping in the whirly bird. I've done so much slogging over the years, the prospect of a heli-bump doesn't make me turn my nose up any more than a transcontinental plane ride. Besides, this new-age mode of travel into the Wadd gives real bang for your buck. Less walking equates to more climbing. Greg Child describes it thusly: "A Trango Tower-sized experience for the price of a 12-hour drive from Seattle and a $900 helicopter ride."

At 3:45 a.m., only nine hours after being dropped off, we wrestled ourselves from our mummies and choked down some fruit, oats and coffee, a medley that would not complete its journey through my GI track. By headlamp, we made our way to the base of the Southwest Buttress, the route Jason and Tony had come so close to completing. Once the vomit on my lips had dried, Ines looked me sternly in the eyes and said, "You vill let us know if it gets vorse, ya?" It didn't, and the next several hundred metres of my leads flowed quickly over slabs, choss, steep bulges and gullies,

Ines Papert starts the long, run-out crux pitch on the Southwest Buttress.
Photo: Paul McSorley

Sunrise from the top of pitch two during the first ascent of the Southwest Buttress of Mount Waddington with the shadow of the mountain visible on the horizon. Photo: Paul McSorley

bringing us to the headwall where it was time for the business.

Mayan was fired up, and she charged the sharp end like a boss, weaving and tacking her way through steep, spicy and cunning pitches. The rock quality was good, but like any alpine wall, there were always mischievous loose bits lurking throughout. It's always a gamble going into the mountains with new partners, so I was relieved that Mayan was so steady. She hadn't done much in the way of alpine climbing, but as a youth, her father, a Kiwi mountain guide, had mentored her in the ways of the hills. Like getting back on the bike after so many years away, she rode with a steady confidence that spurred our momentum up this hulking wall.

Ines took over just after the sun hit us and showed her rock prowess by crimping her way across a techno crux that barred passage to the upper mountain. Her run-out lead was desperate to follow with a pack on and brought home the fact that Ines is one of the best. Ines has long been a hero of mine, and though I have a mild distaste for competitions, her symbolic performance at the 2005 Ouray Ice comp, where she beat the field of women *and* men, epitomizes what I consider to be the essence of climbing: no matter venue, style or gender, on the perfect day, climbing is a vehicle through which we can manifest our ideal selves and find meaning in a place that previously had none. With the crux behind us, it was starting to feel like one of those days.

Once topped out on the main buttress, it was back into mountain mode, so we strapped on crampons and unsheathed the axes. A massive Patagonian-style, rime-ice mushroom hung above our heads, regularly shedding chunks of its icy skin. We traversed underneath it for a strung-out pitch of breathtaking simul-climbing across a 45-degree snow slope.

Ines Papert enjoys the first sun of the day around pitch 10. Photo: Paul McSorley

Conditions warmed to the point that we could finally remove our puffy layers. This was a mixed blessing—it was daytime warming that had rendered the rime ice dangerously unstable and forced Jason and Tony to bail. I deeked some mixed corners and climbed straightforward but snow-laden terrain, kicking steps in between rock outcrops. A climactic multi-pitch *au cheval* ridge led to a half-pipe *goulotte* that topped out on the summit slopes.

Our collective psyche was still strong, and with Ines out front, we ambled up the final few hundred metres of snow and ice to the Northwest Summit. Mountain tops are always amazing, but this one was a showstopper. Unlimited wilderness encircled us, and for that moment, we were deeply alone in the world with only hoots of stoke to punctuate the otherwise uncultured landscape.

The descent proved yet again that the tippy-top is only the halfway point. Onsighting the Angel Glacier added a few grey strands to my mop, and active seracs and some obligatory crevasse jumps negated the pleasure of downhill cruise control. One more 'schrund had to be negotiated to gain the West Ridge above the Dais Couloir. Darkness caught us just as energy levels were dropping into the red, so we bivied in a pathetic scree slope that welcomed us like a cardboard box in a skid-row alleyway.

Most of the night was sleepless thanks to a ravenous wind that compressed our bivy shelter until breathing became a challenge. We needed to crack the zipper, allowing precious oxygen into our little vacuum. A biting, grey dawn had us hustling out of the tent and down the Dais Couloir. On the glacier proper, an imbroglio of slots and 'scrhunds created by a persistently dry summer, slowed our momentum considerably. It took several more hours to navigate back to camp.

Emotionally and physically fried, we reached the tents and passed out for a few hours. A quick radio call to Les confirmed our pickup, and by around 6 p.m. we were sky-high again, cruising over the Tiedemann Glacier and back in no time to Bluff Lake. Mike King greeted us at his ranch, and we toasted our smash-'n-grab mission with Budweisers and a whole lot of laughter.

Summary

Southwest Buttress (ED1 5.11+ WI3, 800m), Northwest Summit, Mt. Waddington, Coast Mountains. FA: Paul McSorley, Ines Papert, Mayan Smith-Gobat, August 18-19, 2015.

About the Author

Paul McSorley's steady travel for work and climbing keep him from spending enough time in his home town of Squamish, B.C. He is an ACMG apprentice alpine guide, but mostly does television and movie rigging work these days. He looks forward to the time when he can chill out, raise some chickens and pigs, and tinker in the garden.

Victoria Falls on the trail to Lake Oesa. Watercolour painting by Donna Jo Massie

The Cultural Ranges

Losing Blue

Janet Fischer & Mark Olson

IT IS A CRISP MORNING IN the Lake O'Hara region of Yoho National Park. Two groups, climbers and scientists, collect their packs from the shuttle bus, grab a piece of carrot cake from Le Relais and head up the trail from the shoreline of Lake O'Hara towards Lake Oesa. When they reach Lake Oesa, the climbers bear to the east side of the lake where they will face a challenging scramble up a scree slope before arriving at The Alpine Club of Canada's hut at Abbot Pass. Meanwhile, the scientific team makes their way to the flat smooth rock near the lakeshore where they inflate their boat and prepare their equipment for another day of sampling in one of the most spectacular places on earth.

The brilliant blue of Lake Oesa is striking from both the climber and scientist's perspectives, and it is also highly dynamic. Changing from turquoise to sapphire from year to year (and sometimes within a single summer), the lake's colour is strongly influenced by characteristics of its catchment. For lakes like Oesa that have glaciers in their catchments, lake colour is largely determined by the quantity of glacial flour, or very fine mineral particles formed by the grinding of glaciers against bedrock, suspended in the water. These particles scatter light, and some of that light, particularly the blue and green wavelengths, reflects back to the human eye. Lakes containing very pure water with little glacial flour are a deeper, more translucent blue, like a sapphire, whereas lakes containing higher amounts of glacial flour appear more turquoise. Climbers who make repeated trips to the area can observe these changes in lake colour from their unique viewpoints on the peaks of Mount Lefroy and Mount Victoria.

For the past 10 years, our scientific team of faculty and undergraduate students from Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania, U.S.A., has been tracking changes in Lake Oesa by making detailed measurements of a set of physical, chemical and biological variables. We do not measure lake colour directly; instead, we quantify water transparency by measuring the penetration of different wavelengths of light through the water column. We have learned that the transparency of Oesa is more variable than other lakes in the Canadian Rockies. In our research, we represent transparency as the depth for which visible light levels are only one per cent of that at the surface. At its most transparent, there is more than one per cent of surface light reaching the lake's bottom at 39 metres, putting Lake Oesa on par with some of the clearest lakes in the world (a group that also includes Eiffel Lake in Larch Valley). At its least transparent, light levels may be reduced to one per cent of surface levels at a depth of only 12 metres.

Changes in water transparency in Lake Oesa are tightly linked to precipitation falling as snow during most of the year and as rain in the summer. Spring conditions are particularly important in determining how much glacial flour is delivered to the lake through snowmelt and avalanches. In 2012, for example, we observed a 4.2-fold decrease in transparency from the previous summer following a full snowpack avalanche that delivered a large amount of rock debris and glacial flour to the still-frozen lake surface. Reduced transparency persisted throughout the entire ice-free season. We have also documented changes in transparency

following extreme rain events. In September 2013, a fall rain event caused a washout along the eastern shore of Lake Oesa that decreased water transparency by 50 per cent from the preceding week (and also affected the trail to the Abbot Pass Hut).

One reason that Lake Oesa can have such high transparency is because there is very little vegetation in the catchment. Organic matter in the soils of vegetated catchments can wash into lakes during rainfall events, and then absorb incoming light to give lakes a greenish colour (or even brown in some cases). Ptarmigan and Baker Lakes in the Skoki area are nice examples of lakes with vegetated catchments. Since Lake Oesa's catchment is mostly barren rock, concentrations of organic matter in the lake are extremely low. Vegetation also plays an important role in stabilizing moraine soils. In catchments with little vegetation, snowmelt and rainfall events can mobilize large quantities of glacial flour and increase turbidity.

Mountain landscapes in many areas are undergoing marked transitions due to climate-driven glacial retreat and treeline advancement. Both of these changes are likely to affect water transparency and colour. Our results from Lake Oesa indicate that lakes will shift from turquoise to sapphire as glacial inputs are reduced. However, over an even longer time frame, the combination of reduced glacial input and increased inputs of organic matter from advancing vegetation in the catchment will cause some lakes to lose their radiant blue. These are issues of grave concern to climbers and scientists alike, and indeed all of those who are drawn to the aesthetic beauty of lakes in the Canadian Rockies.

The Snow Leopard

Paul Chamberlain

7:55 P.M. I AM HUDDLED IN my tent at 15,000 feet reading Hemingway's epic tale *The Snows of Kilimanjaro,* asking myself the question so many have asked before me: what was the leopard searching for at that altitude? None the wiser, I close my book, open the tent flap and peer into the night. It is snowing.

KILIMANJARO IS CROWNED WITH ICE, but it was created by fire. It was born millions of years ago when the earth's tectonic plates shifted and molten lava burst up from Vulcan's fiery furnace, leaving behind the highest mountain in Africa. If it had not been so, Claudius Ptolemaeus might have invented it. But that was not necessary—he learnt about the great mountain from a traveller named Diogenese, and Ptolemy was so intrigued by the idea that he put it on his map. From that moment on, the Mountains of the Moon, the source of the Nile and Kilimanjaro were tied together by a Gordion knot that took nearly 2,000 years to untie. The first attempt was described in the Chinese chronicles of the Ming Dynasty during the late Middle Ages, but nothing further was known about Kilimanjaro until the 16th century when a Spanish explorer named Fernandes de Encisco heard rumours about a "Mount Olympus" west of Mombasa. The mystery was finally unravelled in 1848 by a German missionary. Armed with a bible in one hand and an umbrella in the other, Johannes Rebmann was the first European to see the mountain, writing: "[A]bout 10 o'clock I fancied I saw a dazzling white cloud. My guide called the white which I saw merely 'Baridi', cold; it was perfectly clear to me, however, that it could be nothing else but snow."

10:25 P.M. I LOOK AT the luminescent hands on my watch. It is time to begin my final ascent to the summit. As I wiggle awkwardly out of my tent in my heavy parka, I notice the whole camp has come alive: ghostly figures grope about in the darkness like Nibelungs, flashlights pierce the snow flakes in confused patterns, and muffled voices rise

above the sound of the wind. Then there is the cold, a biting cold that chills my exposed skin like an arctic winter. The sound of thunder only serves to embellish the stage, turning the scene into an opera that gives me stage fright. For a brief moment I wonder if the show will be cancelled. Then I here a voice. It is a guide's voice. I fall into line with the dark figures all about me and, without hesitating, I begin to follow them into the blizzard.

IN THE EARLY DAYS NOBODY knew for certain what lay at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro. Ludwig Krapf was told by the local people that the summit was crowned with silver; it was guarded by fiery spirits; gunpowder would not fire; legs stiffened, and people died. He was even told the legend of a king who had sent his subjects up to examine the whiteness. Only one returned. Sabaya spoke of a huge door studded with iron spikes, but even though the door was open, he was too weak and frightened to enter, and descended the mountain with hands and feet so badly injured that he was crippled for the rest of his life. In 1858, British explorer Richard Burton heard similar tales while searching for the source of the Nile. Undaunted by these frightening stories, an ever-growing number of explorers set out in quest of Africa's Holy Grail. One of them was a Prussian adventurer named Karl Klaus Van der Decken. A wealthy Hanoverian aristocrat, Van der Decken made his first attempt to reach the summit in 1861—he failed. A year later he made another bold attempt, observing how the mountain was "[b]athed in a flood of rosy light, [and how] the cap that crowns the mountain's noble brow gleamed in the dazzling glory of the setting sun." Unfortunately, Van der Decken never reached the top, but he did confirm that there was snow. He was killed two years later by natives while exploring Mount Kenya. Fierce tribes, exotic wild animals and the age-old longing to find the source of the Nile only fuelled the desire of European adventurers to conquer Kilimanjaro.

2:45 A.M. I AM BREATHING with difficulty now. The snow has stopped. Tilting my head back I can see stars, and off to the east the moon is rising above the Indian Ocean, casting a yellow glow over the mountain. I am part of a column of figures trudging slowly, ever so slowly, up an icy slope, a slope that is getting ever steeper with each step—just as legend foretold. I continue to pull against gravity with a strength I know not how. Slowly, slowly, each tiny step requires me to stop and take a very deep breath, and at the end of each I force myself to gulp a little more air by tightening my lungs before taking another small step as the process begins all over again. Months of training have conditioned my body to withstand these rigours, yet it requires extraordinary effort to keep going. It is eerily silent. I begin to realize that my intense effort has reduced my life to a simple necessity—survival! Gone are all the complications that cluttered my former existence. All that matters now is my goal to reach the summit. I walk, I breathe, I focus.

But there is a problem. The temperature is now -20 C, and despite wearing two pairs of gloves my hands are hurting. It's as if my fingers are being squeezed in a vice, just as Sabaya foretold. My brain, too, is slowing down due to a lack of oxygen. The prospect of frostbite looms. I must do something. I place my metal poles together in one hand and force my other hand deep into the pocket of my parka. I clench my fist to conserve heat and drive away the pain. I will warm one hand at a time. It's awkward, but it works.

At last I am allowed to stop for a break. I gulp down cold water from the plastic bottle in my pack, and I am once again reminded how simple my needs have become—heat and water. The guide whispers softly. It's time to go. I continue my ascent, ever upwards, ever higher, but my body is telling me to turn back. I suddenly recall the leopard in Hemingway's story. Why didn't the leopard turn back? Myth, legend, fiction, it all blurs together in my mind now, but one voice above all calls out to me: keep going, keep going.

AND SO DID THE MEN who followed in Van der Decken's footsteps. In 1871, an English missionary named Charles New pushed himself to 4,400 metres and finally reached the snow line, writing euphorically in his diary: "[M]y eyes

rested upon snows at my feet! There it lay upon the rocks below me in shining masses, looking like newly washed and sleeping sheep! Hurrah!" It was over a decade before the next European ascended Kilimanjaro. This time it was an assault on the never before attempted north face by Joseph Thomson in 1883. A year later, in 1884, yet another Englishman named Harry Johnston set out to climb Kilimanjaro—this time on a zoological expedition. Like his predecessors he was unsuccessful, but he did claim to reach 4,950 metres.

The British and the Germans were not the only men attracted to Kilimanjaro. In 1887, a "jovial Hungarian aristocrat" named Count Samuel Teleki von Szek set out from Pangani with an Austro-Hungarian Naval officer. The expedition was armed with enough rifles, ammunition and porters to equip a small army. It was the most successful expedition to date with the Transylvanian Count having crossed the snow line and managing to reach 5,270 metres before turning back exhausted, his lips bleeding and a rushing noise in his head. It appears that the fiery spirits were once again unleashing their fury. After this valiant attempt, attention turned once more to the Germans.

In the same year that Teleki made his ambitious attempt to scale Kilimanjaro, the geographer Hans Meyer set out with Herr von Eberstein and climbed to 5,575 metres. The attempt was not a success due to deep snow, but it showed that a small expedition could achieve impressive results. Later that year, Hans Meyer made another assault on the mountain, this time in the company of an experienced alpine guide named Ludwig Purtscheller. After bivouacking near the summit for several days, the pair managed to reach the summit via a notch in the glacier. Stumbling jubilantly to the top, they named the peak "Kaiser Wilhelm Spitze." The fiery spirits had at last been defeated. Gazing into the icy crater of Kibo, Meyer saw "a spectacle of imposing majesty and unapproachable grandeur." It was October 6, 1889.

5:45A.M. IT IS ALMOST DAWN. A large wooden sign appears ahead of me now in the mist: Stella Point. I breathe a sigh of relief, but my guide, barely recognizable in a parka with his toque pulled low over his dark face, tells me it is still another 45 minutes to the top. As dawn creeps towards me on cat's feet, I stumble across the hard snow with a renewed sense of urgency. Everything is white: the snow is white, the sky is white, and even my breath is white. On and on I walk, asking myself if my ordeal will ever end. Finally, I spot a wooden structure in the mist in front of me—I've made it! With a sense of joy, I stumble, exhausted, onto Uhuru Peak, the highest point on Kilimanjaro, the roof of Africa. I am jubilant.

My enthusiasm is short-lived. There are pictures and shouts and more people begin appearing out of the ice-fog. My guide yells. He wants us to descend—what? The guide repeats his instructions. I follow the ghostly shapes, stumbling through the mist in the direction I have just come. My goal now in hand, I am elated, but my mind is confused. I am at 5,895 metres. My lungs are breathing less than half the air they normally would at sea level and I am on the threshold of the Death Zone, a place even the most experienced climbers cannot survive indefinitely without oxygen. I tell myself that I must go down.

As the sun rises and the mist begins to lift, the air becomes noticeably warmer. The sky, that only minutes earlier was obscured in fog, is now cobalt blue and the light is so bright I have to squint. The ice on the rocks begins to melt. All night I was fighting against gravity, but now gravity is tugging me down the mountain and my boots are slipping on the wet rocks, even my poles are of little use in balancing myself. I feel overwhelmed with exhaustion. I am warm now, and I want to sit down in the dazzling sunshine. I just want to sleep. I suddenly remember the leopard.

PEOPLE HAVE OFTEN ASKED IF there ever really was a dead leopard on Kilimanjaro. In 1926, a German missionary named Richard Reusch actually found the frozen carcass of a leopard near the summit. He named the location Rock Leopard Point. He wanted to cut off the head as a trophy, but the leopard's body was so badly decomposed that he removed an ear instead. His

amazing discovery was discussed later that year in the proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society. It would appear that Hemingway's literary artifice is based on fact.

9:45 A.M. I SENSE THAT the leopard is important. As I continue to stumble down the mountain, it occurs to me that the failure of the leopard to reach the summit seems to echo the disappointment Hemingway's hero feels when looking back over his career at the things he has failed to accomplish, but in recalling his achievements it is obvious that he has lived an extraordinary full life. The story is telling us that it is not the destination that matters in the end, it's the journey. Just because the leopard dies before reaching the top, it in no way detracts from the animal's nobility. To Hemingway, the leopard is a beautiful creature with a noble spirit—the same spirit that inspires human beings to achieve great heights. In the end, conquering Kilimanjaro is all about the will; I tell myself: it's mind over matter, and spirit over flesh. But Kilimanjaro is a metaphor for something bigger than a mountain. I sense the writer is trying to tell us that it is not achieving the summit that matters in the end—albeit no minor accomplishment—it's the spirit that draws us to the top that is important, it's that Nietzschian drive that makes us pursue our dreams to the ends of the earth, the consummation of a yearning that is not of this world—*Ngaje Ngai* (House of God, in Masai). It strikes me as highly significant that Hemingway never actually refers to the leopard in the story at all. It is felt.

I fall several times while descending the icy slope. A porter looking for stragglers finally grabs my arm, shakes me hard and helps me down the mountain towards the base camp, which I can see clearly now in the distance. I, too, feel as if I am dying. I have just completed the greatest marathon of my life. We walk together for what seems like an eternity. At last the man with no name lets go of my arm, and I stand awkwardly by myself. I am on my own for the last stretch. I stumble the final few yards back to base camp, looking desperately for my tent—I want the pain to stop, I want to lie down, I just want to sleep.

I find my tent. I open the flap, and I gaze one last time at the icy summit, trying to recall the words in Hemingway's epic story, the story that has inspired me, the story that I have never quite understood—until now: "…and there ahead, all he could see, as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that there was where he was going."

Mount Kilimanjaro from Karanga Camp.
Photo: Paul Chamberlain

The 7Cs of the Mountaineering Experience

Mary Benjamin & Dr. Michael Quinn

RECREATIONAL MOUNTAINEERING is a complex pursuit that continues to evolve with respect to demographics, participant numbers, methods, equipment and the nature of the desired experience. Mountaineering often occurs in parks and protected areas where agency managers are charged with the potentially conflicting dual mandate of protecting the natural environment and facilitating high-quality recreational experiences. Effective management of parks for mountaineering requires meaningful understanding of the users' motivations, expectations and behaviours; however, there is very little research on these experiential elements. Our research, undertaken as a part of the Master of Environmental Design degree at the University of Calgary, explored the mountaineering experience through content analysis of mountaineering literature and key informant (KI) interviews. We identified a set of critical factors that influence mountaineering participation and constitute optimal outcomes: The 7Cs of the Mountaineering Experience (7Cs). The 7Cs were developed as a means to assess how land management practices at selected mountaineering sites facilitate or hinder the mountaineering experience. In this paper, our aim is to describe the critical factors of the experience.

The mountaineering experience has been described as complex, multifaceted and paradoxical, often transcending the physical climb to reach profound levels of self-awareness and satisfaction (Ewert, 1994). While climbing, mountaineers may experience seemingly dissonant feelings (e.g., sense of control and vulnerability) and, as a result, their expectations, preferences and desires are complex. Reasons for participation go well beyond amusement or reward. The experience involves many elements, and the composition of each mountaineer's experience is unique and highly subjective.

> "Mountaineering is many things. It is climbing on ice, snow and rock, panoramic views and wilderness experience. For many, it is the fulfillment of childhood dreams; for others, an opportunity to grow in the face of difficulty. In the mountains await adventure and lifetime bonds with climbing partners. The challenge of mountaineering offers you a chance to learn about yourself outside the confines of the modern world" (S.M. Cox & K. Fulsaas, 2003).

In recent years, mountaineering has undergone considerable change, not only in participant numbers, methods and equipment, but also in climber's desires and expectations (Pomfret, 2006). It has been suggested that mountaineering has evolved into an intricate combination of techniques and values that are often in conflict with each other. These changes have altered mountaineers' relationships with their physical environment, and with resultant environmental, social and cultural impacts on the world's mountain environments and peoples.

Our research examined the experience of intermediate recreational mountaineers. Studies have shown that while beginner mountaineers are generally motivated by extrinsic factors, such as recognition and socialization, experienced, elite and expert mountaineers are motivated by more intrinsic factors, such as challenge and personal testing (Ewert, 1985). Beginner mountaineers are not always able to climb by themselves and often seek the instruction of a guide or mentor. Experts, meanwhile, can have a different perception of the balance between risk and reward, and they may "take calculated additional risks when they feel confident in their ability to manage those risks" (Llewellyn, Sanchez, Asghar, & Jones, 2008). It was assumed that the bulk of park and land managers would be more interested in the experience and behaviours of mountaineers who possess an intermediate skill set; by this we mean, they are

able to functionally climb by themselves and are working to improve their abilities, but their motivations have progressed to more intrinsic levels than those of the beginner.

Beyond levels of specialization, the interpretation of the mountaineering experience is also influenced by geographical region and cultural context. To examine these contexts, we chose the Canadian Mountain National Parks (i.e., the national parks of Banff, Jasper, Yoho, Kootenay, Mount Revelstoke, Glacier and Waterton Lakes), Cairngorms National Park in the Scottish Highlands, and a selection of popular climbing areas in the Swiss and French Alps as our study sites. A comparison of the desired user experiences in each of these areas allowed for a refined set of critical factors and a better understanding of the type of experience that should be managed for in the mountain parks.

Mountaineers are part of a unique community of recreationists, worthy of research attention due to the fragile, high-alpine environments in which they practice their sport. However, there is limited research on which to base an understanding of participants, specifically the key influences on their participation and/or the experience they seek (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005). Our aim was to explore the ways in which mountaineers describe their experiences in order to develop a framework that would help park managers to meet the needs of the users. We assumed that this information would also be useful to mountain guides, climbing clubs and outdoor educators in pursuit of high-quality, educational experiences for their clients, members and students.

Much of the literature on the mountaineering experience is found in popular works of non-fiction. The detailed documentation of one's trip is an attempt to reflect upon and share elements of participation, and is a key element of the mountaineering experience. We analyzed 36 of these works, along with 90 previously collected transcripts of Chic Scott's interviews with some of Canada's elite mountaineers, to determine the critical factors essential to the experience. A qualitative, emergent theme analysis was conducted on both sources of data and a list of key themes was developed: The 7Cs of the Mountaineering Experience. The 7Cs refer to factors that influence mountaineering participation, including desires, expectations and resulting benefits: Challenge, Control, Community, Context, Creative Opportunities, Catharsis and Chrysalis, each of which has a variety of components listed below its respective heading in Table 1.

Challenge

Challenge refers to the physical and mental demands of climbing. Mountaineers appear to be driven by a passion for difficulty and excitement in anticipation of hardship. They crave the sense of accomplishment achieved through the mastery of technical skills. It appears to be a very personal factor in the experience and its significance is based on the individual's skill level.

> "The demands of mountaineering—the physical and emotional struggles, the very real hazards—made it more than just a game. Climbing was like life itself, only it was cast in much sharper relief…" (Jon Krakauer, 1997).

Control

Control refers to a perceived control of one's destiny because of well-honed climbing skills and mountain literacy, whilst recreating in an uncontrollable environment. Despite the mountaineer's desire to pit his or her strengths and knowledge against the forces of the mountain, there is an attraction to the unknown and the uncertain outcomes of risky situations. This form of recreation requires serious commitment from its participants, who seem to be motivated by the potential for danger and death and equally by the sensation of flow and of being alive. The first juxtaposition of the experience is exemplified here with mountaineers' desire to be self-reliant yet vulnerable.

> "I love that element of risk that makes it urgent and deep. That really captures me. I need it to be deep, serious, life-threatening, intense—that clicks me in a little harder. It makes me focus. I like that directed effort" (Steph Davis, 2008).

Community

The third factor of the experience is Community, which is a motive for mountaineering participation due to the "fellowship of the rope" (Scott, 2011)—climbers are tied to their partners and are ultimately responsible for each other's lives. Bonds developed between mountaineering partners have been likened to those formed between military personnel—comradeship that cannot be rivalled.

> "A mountaineering relationship...is a very strong thing. Everything is laid bare. You know your partner's strengths and weaknesses, most of his hopes and ideals. You are both working at levels often close to the limit. It's a big responsibility to have another's life in your hand, or to trust yours completely to someone" (Dougal Haston, 1972).

Context

Context refers to the physical setting in which the recreation takes place and the mountaineers' connection to and interaction with that space. Context, unlike the six other Cs, is present in all positive and negative mountaineering experiences. It is evident that the mountaineers' interface with the elements is what attracts them. Simply viewing the mountains from afar, although enjoyable, is not as valuable as an interaction with them. The degree to which mountaineers interact with their complex environments seems to vary. While some climbers appreciate the minutia of the experience (e.g., the sounds of ice crunching beneath crampons), others focus on the broader perspective (e.g., the scenery and the grandeur of the landscape that surrounds them).

> "Without any doubt…the draw of the mountains is their simplicity. That fierce force of nature, where the wind howls around you and you struggle for breath and life itself; it is strangely irresistible to man. The simple sound of ice beneath your crampons, crunching as the teeth bite into the frozen surface. The raw beauty of being so high and so remote…seeing the greatest mountain range in the world sprawled beneath you. All of it inexplicably draws us to them" (Bear Grylls, 2000).

Creative Opportunities

One of the necessary components of adventure recreation is the ability to make decisions and think creatively with confidence, in the face of risk. The inspiration that is gleaned from discovering new places and actively choosing to take part in difficult experiences is an essential element of the experience. The imaginations of some mountaineers also appear to be stimulated by a historical connection to legendary climbers, their exploits and first ascents of celebrated routes.

> "For me, it wasn't actually about making the summit. Rather it was about choosing the struggle, choosing to overcome, choosing the hard route, and choosing discomfort over comfort" (T.A. Loeffler, 2008).

Catharsis

Despite the presence of risk, danger and occasionally fear, it would appear that mountaineers experience a sense of relief and relaxation while climbing. Just as one can experience an escape through meditation, so too can one feel a similar release, a sense of freedom and simplification from mountaineering (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Coupled with the solitude that the mountains can provide, these feelings produce the vital element of Catharsis.

> "And before I started to move I felt the familiar feeling that came when I was about to do something hard. A mental and physical relaxation, a loosening of the muscles so complete that even the face relaxes and the eyes widen…In that exquisite moment before the hard move, when one looks and understands, may lie an answer to the question why one climbs" (Gwen Moffat, 1961).

Chrysalis

In order to pupate into adulthood, a caterpillar must transform its body into a protective shell,

thus allowing it to rearrange its cellular makeup then emerge as a butterfly. The shell that houses this metamorphosis and redevelopment is called a chrysalis. In the context of the mountaineering experience, Chrysalis mimics the caterpillar's transformation, referring to the development of the mountaineer's spiritual and therapeutic connection to his or her recreation. It signifies the positive, life-affirming changes that the mountaineer undergoes and the resultant appreciation for the life-enhancing qualities of this activity. It is the most esoteric of the 7Cs in terms of its explicability to those who have not experienced it.

> "Faced with death, the mountaineer will try his hardest to survive and, if successful, will return to mountain after mountain, year after year, to dance the same weird jig along the very boundaries of life. You create the potential for death by going to the mountains and taking risks, and yet you do not want to die. It seems to make no sense. It makes no sense until you have stepped too close to the edge. Then you understand why you went there and perceive that you have enhanced your life, affirmed what it is to be alive by realizing what it could be like to die" (J. Simpson, 1993).

The narrative data showed that the 7Cs do not individually influence the mountaineering experience. Instead, they form an interconnected framework comprised of complementary (e.g., risk and exhilaration) and contradictory factors (e.g., solitude and camaraderie) (Fig. 1). Their paradoxical nature appears not to hinder the experience, but rather to support it.

In order to assess the validity of the 7Cs, KI interviews were with two categories of participants: 1) professionals and experts (i.e., mountain guides, parks and land managers, climbing club representatives and subject matter experts), and 2) intermediate mountaineers. An evaluative, manual content analysis was used to analyze the data.

Interview data validated the 7Cs and confirmed that a multidimensional synopsis of the optimal experience can provide park managers, mountain guides and outdoor educators with a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence participation. The 7Cs should not be ranked by importance, nor motivations for participation separated from their benefits. The KIs did not seem able to reconcile their conflicting desires exhibited in Figure 1, neither did they seem concerned about the dissonance. It appears that the experience is a suspension between the two ends of the continuum and is dependent on the individual to negotiate these tensions.

> "Mountaineers, with their long-term relationships with specific regions and peoples, complex motivations structuring their presence and activities, and lengthy history as a distinct cultural community…involve themselves as active participants in structuring mutually beneficial relationships with mountains and mountain peoples" (B.R. Johnston & T. Edwards, 1994).

Our research exposed that while the number of people participating in recreational mountaineering continues to increase (Pomfret, 2006), their expectations are evolving and expanding. Mountaineers are engaged physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and soulfully in their recreational pursuits. The 7Cs reveal that wilderness experience is key to their enjoyment of the sport. Their concern for the environment and desire to participate in a sustainable way is markedly enhanced by others' observation of environmental best practices. Additionally, the tight-knit social structure of the group that favours mentorship, self-policing and reflection encourages responsible recreation. While on expeditions, mountaineers disengage from the outside world and experience a protracted connection to their ever-changing environments. They yearn to experience the rhythms of their natural surroundings, to escape the monotony and chaos of daily life, to revel in the paradoxical complexities and simplicities of the mountains, and as a result, they develop a profound understanding of the virtues of time spent in the wilderness. Land managers, mountain

guides and outdoor educators need to be aware of these motivations and the resultant environmental impacts so that mountaineering sites can be better managed and the optimal experience provided.

We propose that mountaineers be understood as a unique recreational user group, deserving of serious attention. Through effective communication and engagement practices, mountaineers can become active stewards for our parks and protected areas. Their awareness of and relationship to the landscape, their comrades and themselves allow for both outward and introspective views of responsible practices, sustainable use and conservation. Their engagement as stewards for our mountains would not only serve to enhance their mountaineering experience and to positively contribute to the mountaineering community, but also protect and preserve the ecological integrity of mountaineering sites. With recreationists seen as active participants in their landscapes and engaged as such, there will be less conflict between park management and visitors, a greater mutual understanding of their respective responsibilities, motivations and expectations and the successful fulfillment of the once conflicting dual mandate.

CHALLENGE	CONTROL	COMMUNITY	CONTEXT	CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES	CATHARSIS	CHRYSALIS
• Mental and physical challenge	• Sense of control • Self-reliance • Independence • Lack of external rules and restrictions	• Friendships • Camaraderie • Sharing • Sense of community • Teamwork	• Wilderness experience • In touch with nature • Engaging with landscape • Environmental consideration	• Problem solving • Complexity • Decision-making • Learning process	• Mindlessness • Simplification	• Therapeutic • Spiritual connection • Emotional connection • Self-discovery
• Excitement • Exhilaration • Adventure • Adrenaline high • Fun • Happiness	• Experiencing the "unknown" • Vulnerability • Uncertainty	• Uniqueness	• Scenery • Beauty • Geography • Rhythms of the natural world	• Captures imagination • Induces passion • Stimulating	• Relief • Relaxation • Release • Escape	• Inspires confidence • Self-esteem • Sense of identification
• Physical act of climbing • Skill mastery • Technical difficulty	• Extreme focus • Engagement • Heightened awareness • Flow	• Elevation gain • Summit Fever • Tick lists	• Remoteness	• Discovery • Exploration • Travel new places	• Liberty • Freedom	• Affirmation and enhancement of life • "Truly living" • "Way of life"
• Accomplishment • Fulfillment • Reward	• Real consequences • Serious commitment • Danger • Risk • Mortality • Fear	• Recognition • Competition • Mentorship	• Peace • Tranquillity	• Historical connection • Mountaineering idols	• Solitude	
• Deprivation • Hardship • Primitiveness			• Variety			

Table 1: The 7Cs of the Mountaineering Experience (subdivided into six motivational groups)

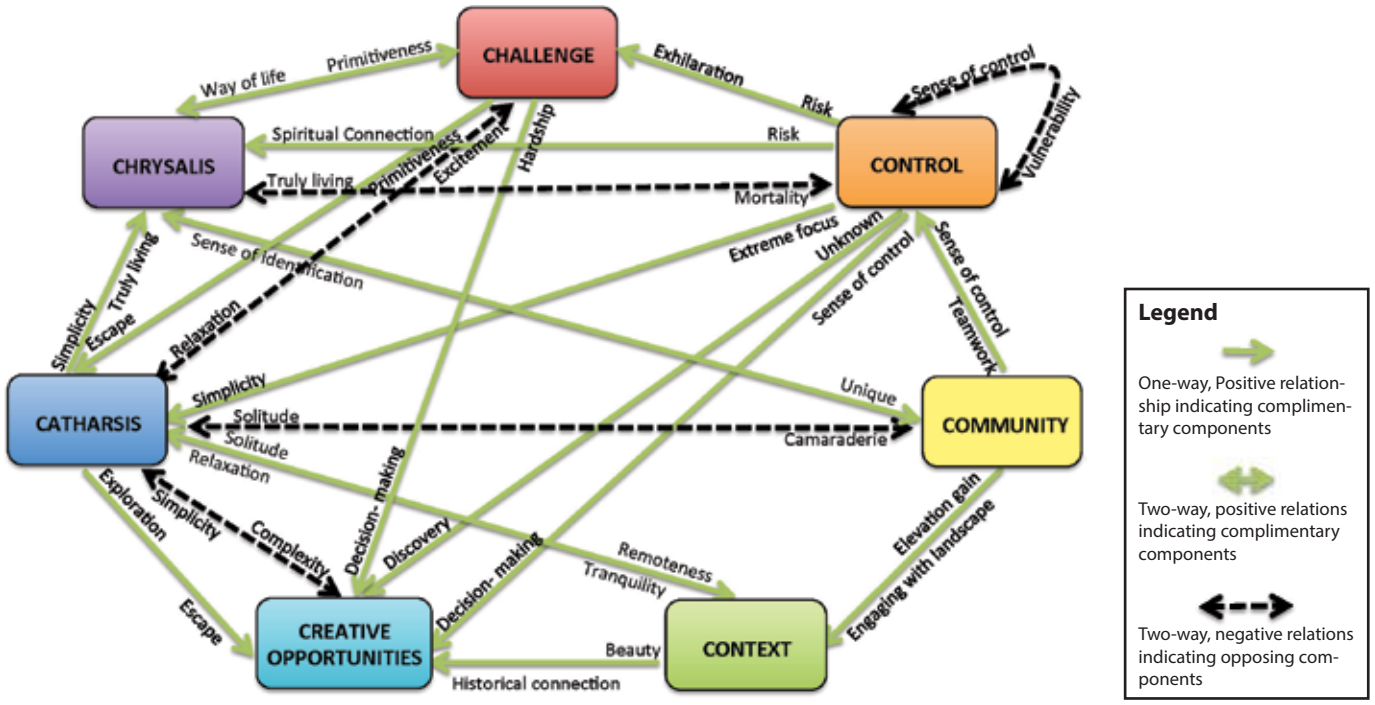


Figure 1: Complementary and Contradictory Components of the 7Cs

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The North

The Elusive Satisfaction of Completion

David Benton

IN THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN, there stood a proud, sheer buttress hundreds of metres tall whose upper reaches had never felt the chalky hand of a climber. The towering granite soared near the end of an icy, cold crooked finger of a lake that cut into the mountains. Just east of Devil's Hole Creek, Ark Mountain spread its buttresses from a craggy alpine plateau to the waters edge. At the highest point of the angled plateau was Solitaire Buttress. A stunning wall with a few brush strokes, a huge canvas of ancient alpine granite where the edges are sharp and the cracks are deep.

As with most infatuations, mine started with a photo. There was a big wall only 80 kilometres as the raven flies from my house in the Yukon, and it rattled me every time the weather was perfect. The photo from a mysterious Euro team's trip in 2006 was burned into my psyche where I climbed it a million times in my mind. The combination of the area's dark reputation for loose rock and lack of access helped to enshroud the possibility of attempts. However, after some years of travelling around the world for other rock, I finally borrowed my buddy Andy's snow machine for a late-March look for myself. Putting on about 150 kilometres in the snowy, icy wilderness, I sealed the plans for the slow-to-come summer ahead.

Beyond the usual assortment of wilderness wall gear, it was time to add two more pieces: a drill and a power boat. I've put in my time hand drilling so there was no guilt when the 36V Bosch showed up in the mail—only a smile and some holes in the boulders in my yard. For the bigger purchase, I talked to the trapper who worked the end of Lake Kusawa. I opted for a 16-foot beater aluminum with a newer 25 pony Yamaha. The *Kusawa Slayer* had about the same amount of character as my old Toyota truck and proved to be equally reliable.

Partnerships have always been decided by simple twists of fate, and this saga was no different. As with most first dates, I was over-packed and excited when I pulled up to George's house in Whitehorse. We had talked on the phone about expectations but had never climbed together before. I was early, but his canoe barrels and dry-bags were at the curb, and he ran out the door with a whole pizza in his hand.

Hopping into the front seat, he folded the pizza in half and started into his dinner, which was also the next day's breakfast. George's traditional Japanese upbringing enlightened me into blurring the strange meal-specific food boundaries that we seem to have in North America. For that and other reasons, Havarti soon became a strong contender for a food group on our trips together.

We spun out of town and charged west on the quiet Alaska Highway for about 45 minutes before turning south on a gravel road that winds along the clear blue Takhini River. Kusawa, at the north end, funnels naturally into the river a few kilometres from the end of the road. The wind was calm and so far only a whisper rippled the lake's surface. We backed the boat in and geared up. Safety George had a sweet drysuit for the numbing waters; I didn't. With a little fiddling, the outboard sputtered to life convincingly, and

George Kokuryo on pitch 18 of Reflection Ridge.
Photo: David Benton

we pulled on our goggles and charged.

With a healthy dose of trepidation, we worked our way 60 kilometres down the long, narrow lake. At times the water was glassy, and other times, fierce. On subsequent trips, we even got the loaded boat airborne. There's nothing like the scream of a propeller spinning free before landing in the trough of the next wave to keep your hand on the tiller. On that first approach, we fought a mellow chop while finally staring up at our objective. It was then that we decided on an exploratory climb up the ridge before committing to the impressive north wall, we would do it in a long day, or so we thought.

An active gully funnels past the north spire-like wall and feeds a debris cone that fans out to the edge of the lake. Huge house-sized boulders of an earlier shedding lay sleeping in the mature spruce forest at the waters edge. One such boulder lies half in the water, a slab of granite punctuated by two tiny white sand beaches on either side, marking our campsite, more often frequented by wolves, bear and moose.

That night with the boat pulled up and gear sorted, I was ready to crawl into my tent when I noticed that George was still furiously scurrying around the camp organizing. Like a busy bull-dozer moving dirt around, George pulled things from one bag and moved them to another. I began to wonder what I might have forgotten. I slithered into my vestibule anyways and soon learned that that's George, always busy, always organized and always champing at the bit.

Starting in the dark, we followed the creek bed up through the forest and onto the talus field. There were lots of rockers and gravelly slabs ready to send us flying. Aiming for the lowest rock on the buttress, we battled some pesky alder before pulling out the ropes. Later, the alder bash was avoided with a skill-testing first pitch up some angled cracks to access the ridge proper. Dust off lichen, wiggle an arm bar, punch in a fist jam, this alternate start deposited us at the beginning on pitch two, and was way better than alder.

The first day, we ran rope-stretching pitches up bulletproof slabs, grassy corners and blocky, flaking faces. At the top of pitch six, we found an idyllic grassy ledge, big enough to lie end to end for two. A tiny bonsai spruce tree guarded the lip where the ridge spilled over to the dark north wall. Backs to the granite behind us, we wiggled our toes over the edge and looked out to the now glassy lake reflecting a perfect Simpson's sky. The little fluffy cumulus floated across the lake and the precious northern sun warmed our souls.

Above the ledge, my nut tool and knuckles were taking a beating excavating small cam placements in a steep, grassy corner when the crack ended. Part of me was excited about that, but I knew full well that now I was into a different game. Pulling my drill out of my little pack, I braced myself for a more psychological finish to the pitch.

Bolting while free climbing is almost always exciting. At a less than ideal stance a way's up, I tried to relax my calves into the smear and apply just enough pressure to the drill while crimping an edge with my left hand. I always wonder what it would be like to fall with the bit half in. Would it break or would I end up in a pathetic one arm hang? Clipping a new bolt and moving on had both physical and mental appeal.

Another couple of pitches up and I was out of bolts in the middle of an unprotectable 150-metre headwall and kind of done for the day. I looked up longingly to the undulating stone, foreshortened and cryptic in its path of least resistance. Bringing up George, we left my red bail biner, realizing this was not a daytrip first ascent, and rapped down to camp.

Our palettes had been whetted, the rock was more than still unclimbed, but our introduction to Ark Mountain had been satisfying enough that I lamented not bringing some Scotch. George proudly held aloft a bottle of sparkling apple juice fresh from the lake. My vices are many but apparently George's are few and the refreshment was perfect.

Later in the summer, we headed down the lake again, soaking in the breathtaking scenery and waiting for our first view of the buttress. The plan of attack this time was different and scurrying up to the dreamy ledge at pitch six was fun, except for the loads. My calves screamed through the slabby cruxes under the weight of hardware and bivy supplies, but unbeknownst to us, there would be

plenty of time to chill on the ledge.

That evening, clouds rolled in and we hunkered down into our bivy bags after fruit cups, some sausage, Havarti and crackers. It rained hard all night, which kind of sucks in a bivy sack on a little ledge. We woke surrounded by a wafting damp greyness. At times we could see maybe a pitch above us at most. Being in position with lots of supplies, the decision was actually easy to stay put. Rationing was suddenly in effect as we settled into hibernation. Chatting about life, meditation and kids, we logged time into the bro-vestment account that transcends the climbing itself.

Opening my eyes at dawn, things didn't look much better. We had fixed lines to our previous high point in an evening weather window, so it made sense to at least head up to the dreaded red carabiner. Hanging scrunched in my harness in the rain, I was really annoyed with the forces of nature. When you have a family, you don't have the luxury of time, so trips are squeezed out of an already crazy life. I didn't have time for the clouds to piss all over my project.

The slab above was really wet, big and unknown. Accepting my fate, I pulled out the aiders and started to hook and drill in the rain, weaving a probable free path up the wall. At 50 metres, there was a break and reasonable stance for a belay. By this point, we had worked our way onto a shield of grey granite that, directly below us, dropped in a 10-metre overhang then plummeted another few hundred metres down the north wall. The exposure was awesome and exhilarating.

Traversing left to a single crack in the shield, we aided and jammed our way up a sweet but licheny-soaked 5.9 hand and finger crack in an outrageous position. Only another pitch later, again faced with unprotectable slab, we ran out of bolts. With a deep sigh, I tied some prayer flags to the same red biner. The season was over.

Schedules don't always jive, and George was really busy with his kid-less, good-job lifestyle. Sometimes I'm jealous, but that's a bit of a waste of energy. Anyhow, the point is that the next sortie to Ark Mountain was with a teacher/colleague/buddy, Kevin. An experienced alpinist, Kevin was totally keen for an adventure with an unknown outcome far off in the mountains. Although I think our most exciting moments were on the water.

George Kokuryo approaching Ark Mountain (centre). Photo: David Benton

My favourite moment was when after being trashed around on the plywood benches of the boat in the waves, Kevin assumed a prouder stance and held the bow lines like the reins of a bucking bronco. Unfortunately, at my feet, the rivets in the stern braces started blowing out followed by streams of water through the hull to add to the spray that was rapidly accumulating. The line between being in a boat and in the water was starting to blur. I thought we could make it to the beach before it was a really big swimming-type problem. We were both relieved to drag the boat up onto the sand and worry about fixing it later.

The approach was beginning to feel familiar, as were the lower pitches. I started noticing the subtle differences, month to month, over the short summer window. Alpine nesting birds hovered over the improbable terrain, their predators soared overhead. Sign of sheep and goat was always old, so perhaps this wasn't their summer hangout. Moving quickly to the belay ledge over the cool ancient granite felt like we were trying to climb into the sky.

It was hard to bivy early, but without knowing what was ahead it seemed like a prudent choice to be in a good position the next day. I know

David Benton on the final pitches of Reflection Ridge.
Photo: George Kokuryo

Kevin was in alpine mode and would happily have charged ahead. I'm also sure that Kevin never whines. We could have spent the night hanging in slings and he would humbly shiver and suffer. Kevin's humility shield was tough to crack. Over a cold dinner of, you guessed it, landjager and havarti on the ledge, I probed him for stories of his Rockies' youth. Stringing two people 60 metres apart isn't a recipe for communication, but sharing an open bivy on a wild and remote ridge certainly is.

The morning dawned overcast as we flaked out the rope and racked up. I was psyched since we easily redpointed the two pitches I had hooked, aided and bolted in the rain the previous year. The hardest was a moderate 5.10 sport pitch and the crack was as dreamy as I remembered. From the previous high point, Kevin and I cranked out four more 60-metre pitches over mellow terrain in short order. Short steep vertical sections kicked the grade up between stretches of 5.6 to 5.7 slab on the undulating ridge to some grassy ledges.

As seems to be the pattern, the rain drops started falling as I headed into the final headwall. Looking down, I saw Kevin silently huddled at the belay. Water streamed down the wall while there were at least three pitches of unprotectable face climbing above us. Tortured, we pulled the plug. Did three strikes mean I was out? Squeezing the icy water from the ropes into my crotch on the long descent, I had time to lament my failed efforts and ponder the ever-present question, what's the point?

A month after my third strike, George and I had another debacle of a trip exploring the north wall and some smaller crags. There were nights on portaledges, exploding bear spray canisters and some general malaise, but no summits. George got to learn how to shit on a ledge though, and I got more fodder for self doubt and psychological torture. At home, sitting on my deck, looking through the aspen to the mountains beyond, I could feel the soaring buttress taunting me and my silly human definitions of success and failure.

The following summer, as life is a complicated and ever-changing event, my decade-long life in the Yukon was about to end. My wife, Heather, and I are searchers and decided to make a move with our two kids to the south. The evacuation date was the end of June, a U-Haul was reserved and a storage unit in Comox Valley paid for. The plan ended there, but more importantly, since the ice goes out early June on Kusawa, this left me a very small window for a return to the Ark to hopefully wrap up the longest of the unfinished routes.

As soon as the lake opened, ever faithful George and I slipped the boat into the water one more time. After getting rained off so many times, I needed some insurance, and for me, the primary goal was to finish the Reflection Ridge route up Solitaire Buttress. One way to ensure success, I thought, was top down, not exactly the same flavour, but at least I wasn't going to end up bolting slab on lead in the rain.

A long scramble further down the lake got us to the other-worldly alpine plateau of Ark Mountain where the buttress was connected to the summit by a very narrow ridge with unreal exposure. The sun warmed us and inspired confidence, though pockets of precipitation seemed to be menacingly wandering around the mountains within view. For five rope-lengths, I rappelled, top-roped, added bolts where needed and worked a route out from my high point with Kevin on the grassy ledge. At the ledge, we pulled the ropes and had a snack.

Gnawing a pasty energy bar, I tracked the rain clouds and hoped I would at least get to redpoint my way to the top.

The steep slab was tricky but the climbing was reasonable. Facing the usual rope drag from poor runner usage, I crimped, jammed and smeared pitch by pitch. The crux ended up being another moderate 5.10 with a sneaky downclimb traverse near the belay. Clipping the top anchor, I felt a flood of release. It was done.

After the standard bro-hug and celebration, George casually mentioned that it was too bad we didn't have time to rap the 20 pitches to the ground and get the first ascent. That hadn't occurred to me; I actually felt like we already did have the first ascent. I had redpointed every pitch first try and the route was established from the bottom to top; a continuous redpoint seemed like a trivial detail in my eyes.

We chose to take different paths on our hike back to the tent. I think I wanted a goodbye moment with Ark Mountain, so I wandered up the undulating plateau to explore, reflect and see if there was a cairn on the true summit. Gazing down huge walls on other buttresses and at truck-sized chockstones wedged in giant shear gullies, I pondered our different perspectives. George was technically right, but I didn't want to admit it.

Being at odds with a climbing community is one thing, but when it's with a friend, the feeling is amplified. Why did I care, was it my ego, was it semantics? The name Reflection Ridge started to take on another meaning. At one point though, I backed it all up and asked myself why I wanted so badly to do it in the first place. The answer was that I wanted to forge a path up an unclimbed wall in my own backyard for others to enjoy and experience. I guess I wanted to leave a bit of a goodbye note to the Yukon and all the climbers and friends I had shared so many life-changing moments with in the previous decade. I wanted the challenge of making sure it would go all free at a moderate grade with good protection so that others could share in the same feeling of losing oneself to the sky over the 1,000-metre-long stretch of granite. That was achieved, so, rationally, I guess I'm satisfied.

At the true summit of the Ark, I stood looking south while a golden eagle cruised right over my head. The huge bird played on the thermals soaring around the summit before moving on to look for prey in the alpine nooks and crannies. I was moving south too, and I would leave the whatever ascent for whoever—my job was done and all those other routes are wide open. I'll give you the beta. It seems we will always have the satisfaction that we allow ourselves far outside the rules of ratings, grading and classifications.

Summary

Reflection Ridge (IV 5.10+, 1000m), Solitaire Buttress (north buttress), Ark Mountain (1935m), Boundary Ranges, Yukon. FA: David Benton, Kevin Embacher, George Kokuryo, June 16, 2014.

Reflection Ridge on Solitaire Buttress, Ark Mountain.
Photo: David Benton

Mount Malaspina

Camilo Rada

ON AUGUST 4, 2015, NATALIA MARTINEZ and I flew into the Seward Glacier in Kluane National Park, close to Mount St. Elias, as part of our Uncharted Project (previously climbing Cordillera de Sarmiento in 2012, Mount Sarmiento in 2013 and Aguilera Volcano in 2014). After traversing 12 kilometres, we established a base camp near the base of Mount Malaspina, the most prominent unclimbed mountain of North America, and no doubt one of the most attractive unclimbed summits of the continent. As far as we knew, it was seriously attempted only once, in 1976 by a Polish-Alaskan expedition via the west ridge (*AAJ, 1978*, pp. 542).

After three days exploring the heavily crevassed glacier flowing from Malaspina to Seward, we finally discarded every option through the glacier. We were forced to hug an edge of the glacier exposed to avalanches, but where avalanche debris filled the crevasses. Crossing that section in the early morning, we established a high camp near the north face of the mountain on August 9. We experienced bad weather and avalanche risk at the high camp, forcing us to abandon and never reoccupy the camp. Several areas of the high glacier basin near the wall seemed safe, yet seracs falling 1,000 metres straight from the top of the north face were capable of launching ice and snow projectiles over the area of our camp. We decided to abandon the camp after being hit by strong winds and heavy spray from a serac avalanche. We found a few TV-sized pieces of ice around camp with short tracks, suggesting that one of them landed just four metres away from our tent.

Once the weather improved, the summit push started from base camp on August 13 at

The north face of Mount Malaspina from base camp with the east ridge ascending from the col. Photo: Camilo Rada

12:40 a.m. After three hours, we reached the high camp deposit and continued towards the col between Mount Baird and Malaspina. The access to the col was extremely exposed to avalanches, rock and serac falls, therefore was done quickly at the hours before dawn. At 7 a.m., we started the climb towards the col, running diagonally under a hanging glacier. We climbed the first 300 metres of snow and ice (45 to 60 degrees) in simul-climbing mode. A small serac fall occurred nearby, which definitely got our attention.

Next we reached the easy col slopes with two pitches of 55- to 60-degree ice. After resting, we resumed climbing a 350-metre ramp leading to Malaspina's east shoulder. This section consisted of a very sustained slope that involved nine pitches on 60-degree snow and ice with a final cornice. We reached the shoulder (3,377 metres) shortly after midnight and built an igloo-like bivouac shelter surrounded by the breathtaking spectacle of northern lights.

The next day at 10 a.m., we continued towards the summit, covering easy snow slopes and few technical steps to overcome bergschrunds. After a false summit, we finally summitted at 2 p.m. with the GPS reading 3,756 metres. The view was dominated by the overwhelmingly large Malaspina Glacier, an extremely outstanding feature in the area. This was accompanied by views to Mount St. Elias to the west, the Logan massif to the north, and Vancouver, Augusta, Cook and Fairweather to the east.

The descent followed the same line and involved 15 rappels, half of them between low clouds, strong winds and heavy spindrift. We reached base camp at 8 a.m. on August 16 after 55 hours on the mountain.

Summary

East Ridge (TD AI2 55-65°, 1900 m), Mount Malaspina (3776m), St. Elias Range, Yukon. First ascent of the highest unclimbed peak in North America: Natalia Martinez, Camilo Rada, August 15, 2015.

Natalie Martinez approaches below Mount Malaspina's north face. Photo: Camilo Rada

Mount Wiesshorn

J. Mills

In April 2015, Carl Diehl, Eamonn Walsh and I had a fun trip to the Kluane Mountains in the Yukon with the support of the John Lauchlan Award and its sponsors. After a long but scenic drive and a week of waiting out bad weather at Kluane Lake, we flew on a ski plane onto a remote and possibly never-before visited glacier below Mount Wiesshorn near Mount Kennedy. The only information we had on the area was from looking at a few photos taken by Parks Canada staff from the air a couple of years earlier. The photos showed a number of appealing-looking strips of ice and mixed terrain on a big wall that makes up the north face of a subpeak of the Wiesshorn.

Carl Diehl on the north ridge of Mount Weisshorn. Photo: J. Mills

Once we arrived, we saw that although these potential lines did look like great climbing, we had drastically underestimated the level of overhead hazard. On our very first sunrise in the area, we found ourselves a few hundred feet up one of the only potential routes with minimal serac hazard, and what looked to be about 1,000 metres of cool ice runnels and mixed climbing above. Shortly after making a complex bergschrund crossing, the appearance of a blazing hot sun sent us scurrying back to camp to watch the wall for the day and see what happened. We soon realized that it was a very active place, and even after the sun went down, we could hear cornices, snow mushrooms and rock fall steadily crashing down the wall.

After a couple of days listening to the noisy wall, we decided to turn our attention to less steep but much safer lines. We ended up completing the first ascent of the 2,000-metre-high north ridge of the Wiesshorn, which was a beautiful snow ridge with some short bits of moderate mixed climbing. If it were almost anywhere else in the world, such an eye-catching and aesthetic ridge would be a classic. Most of the climb was straightforward, but a few short sections of easy mixed climbing and lots of steep snow combined with great exposure kept us engaged and focused as we raced to the summit and back. The incredible view from the top included glaciers and beautiful peaks as far as the eye could see, and even a glimpse of the ocean at Desolation Bay.

A few days later, we skied and scrambled up a small unnamed peak to the east of Mount Kennedy that was likely the first ascent of the mountain. Finally, we climbed a straightforward snow and glacier ice line on a tower-like peak on

the ridge to the east of Kennedy's east ridge. We nicknamed this feature Marilyn's Tit, for reasons which should be obvious to anyone who sees it. After another day enjoying the sunshine at our base camp on the snow, we decided to call for the ski plane. On the long flight out, we were again struck by the vastness and wild nature of Kluane, and of course there was no shortage of potential climbing routes visible all around.

Although we were disappointed that our planned climbs were too dangerous, it was still a great trip into one of the most beautiful and remote mountain areas we have ever been. The area would also make an incredible ski touring destination with countless unnamed peaks and glacier basins to explore.

Summary

North Ridge (IV 5.4), Mount Weisshorn (3,351m), St. Elias Range. FA: Carl Diehl, J. Mills, Eamonn Walsh, April 24, 2015.

Southeast Ridge (II, low 5th class, 250m), unnamed peak (2,850m) east of Mt. Kennedy, St. Elias Range. FA: Carl Diehl, J. Mills, Eamonn Walsh, April 29, 2015.

Acknowledgements

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The north ridge of Mount Weisshorn ascends the sun-shade line.
Photo: J. Mills

Asgard Ambitions

Michelle Kadatz

MY FROZEN FINGERS FUMBLED WITH THE rappel device as I released it from the soggy ropes. Pull red. Several tugs and the rope didn't move. Maybe we had it wrong? We pulled purple. The ropes still didn't budge. Anna prussicked the ropes through the hazardous gully hosting loose rocks and snow. Time didn't matter any more. There was no night, only shadows cast by the granite walls. Anna freed the ropes and returned to the rusty pin belay and we continued down. The home of the gods was awake; Asgard would make us fight.

ON JULY 9, WE HEADED TO Auyuittuq National Park on Baffin Island. The travelling proved challenging and we marooned twice due to appalling weather. This gave us an opportunity to experience the streets of Ottawa and Iqaluit. The contrast between the two cities was like night and day. Finally, our small plane left Iqaluit for Pangnirtung, where "every landing is an emergency landing." The planes were unable to land in Pangnirtung for several days, but thankfully ours was the first to touch down. The next day our outfitter, Peter Kilabuk, skillfully maneuvered icebergs while ferrying us up the fjord. Once he pulled away from shore, we were completely on our own.

The scale of the land deceived us as we walked up valley; everything was further than it appeared. The arctic tundra is void of most signs of life—we saw no wildlife, only the occasional bird and the constant humming of mosquitos. Numerous glacier-fed creek crossings tested our mental stamina, especially when the water would rise above our waists. We reached Summit Lake as storms rolled in behind us. While the wind wailed and biblical rain pounded the tent, we waited. When the weather window arrived, we schlepped big packs up the Caribou Glacier towards Mount Asgard. The glacier travel was decent for the most part, but heavily dependent on time of day. Later in the afternoons, the water began to flow, creating rivers and streams along the ice. We built an almost-flat camp on the central moraine of the Caribou, creating a tent pad from rocks and sand. The steep walls of the North and South Tower guarded the summit like a formidable fortress and provided exceptional views from our camp. The lower slabs were plastered in patches of snow remaining from winter. Thoughts of nervousness and doubt briefly entered my mind before going to sleep. We would attempt Asgard tomorrow.

There were specs of blood in the snow. With every footstep, there was penetration through the icy crust that led to waist-deep post-holing. Step by step, my bloody shins painfully marked the trail behind me. Suddenly in a moment of panic, I was sinking into the crevasse. My legs were dangling below me. I had been saved by my pack jamming against the back of the slot. My face buried in the snow, and I humbly swam forward. I cursed under my breath for being so stupid. That was too close. We gained the rock and scrambling soon turned into climbing. It was warm and it felt good to move. We navigated small patches of snow and ice that were becoming increasingly more difficult. As time passed, the snow turned into running water and soon all of the rock was wet. After a full 16 hours, we bailed from the lower flanks of Asgard, barely getting into any of the real climbing and having to make demoralizing rappels down the greasy wet slabs. We had come so far only to fail harshly. To make matters worse, we needed to take an extra rest day, which we spent hiking back to Summit Lake for more food.

On our second attempt, we left camp at two in the morning. The glacier travel was better this time, and we found a different path through the lower snowy sections, gaining the golden headwall for a sunny afternoon lunch break. The headwall was beautiful climbing with pitch after pitch of splitter cracks, but like everything on Baffin, there's a sting at the end. The crux pitch, a 5.11 squeeze chimney, was soaking wet. Anna lightly

tugged on a piece of fixed tat and it ripped out of the wall with a bunch of mud. The fresh line of bolts up the right-hand side of the squeeze offered protection. On the final pitch, I committed to the slimy wide climbing and clipped another rusted piton to protect the massive run-out while pawing the icicles in the back of the crack.

After two years of dreaming, we were on the summit of Asgard. Miles of mountain tops surrounded us, and we took some time to enjoy the view and rest. We were completely alone and hadn't seen another human for more than a week. Over the upper snow slope, the Penny Ice Cap sprawled to the north. Our time on the top was short lived as we initiated the descent. It started out fairly smoothly—finding the initial rappel was obvious and our ropes only got stuck a few times. Once we hit the notch between the North and South Towers, the difficulties increased. Soon the descent was taking longer than the climb. Most of the anchors were fairly suspect, so we had to back them up with fresh cord and the occasional nut. To save weight, we had decided to climb without an ice axe or crampons. As we stood contemplating the isothermal snowpack, a small slab cut loose and gained momentum as it avalanched over our intended path and thundered down the cliff below. The sight of this made the hair on the back of my neck rise. I no longer wanted to be in this place; it felt like a death trap. To safely traverse across the snow and avoid going over the edge, we continued rappelling the low-angle slope. Digging under the snow to find anchors, everything was wet and cold. We had been on the go for almost 24 hours when we reached easy terrain that led us back to base camp. A wave of relief washed over me as I began to let go of Asgard and starting thinking about the next objective.

Summary

Scott Route (V 5.11-), Mt. Asgard, Auyuittuq National Park, Baffin Island. Michelle Kadatz, Anna Smith, July 20, 2015.

South Buttress (IV 5.10), Mt. Loki, Auyuittuq National Park, Baffin Island. Michelle Kadatz, Anna Smith, July 24, 2015.

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Michelle Kadatz low on the South Buttress of Mount Loki.
Photo: Anna Smith

The Vampires

Pat Goodman

THIS WAS MY NINTH EXPEDITION TO the Ragged Range, while for Jessa and Q, it was their second. In July 2014, Jessa and I spent 18 days in the Vampire Peaks with the explicit goal of establishing the first route on the south face of Moraine Hill. The peak was first climbed via the 4th-class west rib in 1968 by Bill Buckingham and party. We had several unexpected hurdles, from negotiating deep snow and slush on the North Moraine Hill glacier (about five kilometres of crossing are required to gain access to the wall) to Jessa fighting the reality of solitude, of which she rallied and fought with determination while climbing. It was inspirational watching her take control of her mind and try hard. We also had very poor weather, which kept us tent bound except for one attempt that ended after four cold pitches in a snow storm. That trip was funded in part by the Copp-Dash Inspire Award. Q was with Jeremy Collins, Jeff Achey and me when we made the first free ascent of the Phoenix Wall via Phreenix in 2012 [*CAJ,* 2013, p. 38].

We were dropped off at Vampire Lake by Kluane Airways in mid-July 2015 with almost three weeks worth of provisions. The weather was for the most part, quite wet. It would rain for a few hours then dry up for a few hours like clockwork. We knew what route to try on Moraine—that was until the wall was running water from a big snow storm. Instead, we opted for a less splitter-looking line to the right that, in all honesty, was probably a better, more consistently steep rig than our 2014 attempt. This wall is more of an adventure value than that of high-quality free climbing. It has three neighbouring buttresses that top out on a separate, unclimbed spire, which, although shorter, looked to offer excellent splitters up golden granite.

We had a clear 27-hour window and sent Fighting Till Dawn in a very full day—22 hours tent to tent. After we sent Fighting we wanted try something a little less committing since the weather was fickle at best. About a week later,

another mostly clear 23-hour window arrived, in which we climbed Ramshackle Affair.

Ramshackle Affair was just that. I first saw this wall—one of three distinct sub-walls on the south face of the Phoenix massif—in 2006 with Hank Jones while we were exploring the area. He dubbed the wall Bela Lugosi in honour of the actor who portrayed the original Dracula.

From the ground, the wall looked steep with several distinct crack features jumping out at us. When we got up on the wall, many of those features were indeed steep, but they were also bottomed-out water groves. Time not being a commodity, I wandered around from crack to crack, ledge to ledge avoiding said grooves and eventually found clean cracks. We kind of went from one side of the wall at the base around to the other side. It was still a very fun outing and a pretty good route. This wall offers excellent free-climbing potential, especially if you have time to clean and bolt around the crack-less features. We descended via a 4th-class scramble to the west from the summit.

Summary

Fighting Till Dawn (V, 5.11- R, 460m), Dawn Mist Mountain (a.k.a. Moraine Hill), Vampire Peaks (Ragged Range), Logan Mountains, Northwest Territories. FA: Jessa Goebel, Pat Goodman, James Q Martin, July 19-20, 2015.

Ramshackle Affair (IV 5.11+ A.0, 330m), Bela Lugosi Wall, The Sundial, Mount Dracula. FA: Jessa Goebel, Pat Goodman, James Q Martin, July 26, 2015.

Facing page: Pat Goodman (leading) and Jessa Goebel on pitch four of Ramshackle Affair. Photo: James Q Martin

Top right: Ramshackle Affair on Bela Lugosi Wall, Mount Dracula. Photo: Pat Goodman

Bottom right: Fighting Till Dawn on Dawn Mist Mountain (a.k.a. Moraine Hill). Photo: Pat Goodman

Kingnait Adventures

Greg Horne

NOT HAVING BEEN BACK TO THE Cumberland Peninsula region of Baffin Island since 2003, it was time to immerse ourselves once again in this polar mountain landscape—one Arctic trip often leads to the next. Our 2003 traverse of the Seldom-Visited Icefield [*CAJ*, 2004, p. 12] gave us enough knowledge to focus on the valleys west of the icefield and east of Kingnait Fiord.

Leaving from the village of Pangnirtung on April 6, 2015 by snowmobile, we used the services of local outfitter Joavie Alivaktuk to transport us up Kingnait Fiord to near Kingnait Pass (180 metres). The 114-kilometre ride was 10 kilometres short of the pass due to not enough snow and ice to permit snowmobile travel on the river. The spring landscape was alarmingly lean for snow.

Louise Jarry on peak 1420 with peak 1850 in the background. Photo: Greg Horne

The morning after our first night on the land, we discovered polar bear tracks, not that recent, but a reminder of our ranking in the Arctic food chain. Two times more in the trip we would come across bear tracks, along with many tracks of Arctic fox.

The first few days tested our resolve to navigate around canyons, over sand flats and up slopes way too steep for heavy pulks. We headed east from the pass following upstream an unnamed river to near the toe of "Alice Glacier" (*CAJ,* 1975, p. 99; and glacier C 270 of area 46204, *Glacier Atlas of Canada*). After five days of skiing, we had our first views of the mountains we hoped to explore.

As a first day trip, a 1,582-metre glaciated peak west of camp was ascended on skis via the north-east glacier (glacier C 281 of area 46204) in five hours for a 1,000-metre elevation gain. Increasing winds, flat light and an icy glacier made the descent memorable only from a negative perspective.

Continuing south, a watershed divide (660 metres), "Salamander Pass" was crossed into the headwaters of "Kuugajuaq River" that eventually drains to Iqalugajut Fiord (misspelled Iqalujjuaq on topo maps). Camped at the toe of the ice (glacier B64 of area 46204), a glaciated dome "Sundog" (1,460 metres), named for the ice-crystal circular rainbow around the sun, was climbed alone by Greg on skis and crampons up its northeast slopes. Pass #7 crossed during our 2003 traverse was below and 3.5 kilometres to the south. The next day, April 16, a six-kilometre ski up the glacier (B 64) brought us to a 1,420-metre summit positioned deeper into the "Seldom-Visited Icefield."

Further south along the Kuugajuaq River, one more day-trip ascent was by crampons up the south slopes of "Mica Mountain"—the 1,653-metre high point of a 25-kilometre-long glaciated range on the

west side of the valley. Many rock outcrops shone with large mica crystals. A perfect weather day and views west towards Asgard, 70 kilometres away, prevailed. Two days later, we had made the high camp of our trip at 1,003 metres in a pass, taking us out of the Kuugajuaq valley. Just before this pass, we were undecided which of the two route options to take for different passes. As we stood there, a raven flew low over us from behind and headed, without wavering, towards the 1,003-metre col. It was obvious which way to go.

Skiing west down a glacial-fed drainage where we encountered several difficult canyons requiring bypasses, pulks were lowered down frozen waterfalls in a couple of spots. We had skied off our detailed paper maps, but luckily uploaded extra sheets on the iPhone with a jacket over the head. After the one storm day of the trip, and three days crashing and banging our pulks down a bouldery frozen whitewater gorge, Kingnait Fiord was reached two kilometres southwest of Qaiqsuk Point. Joavie returned by snowmobile to pick us up.

Summary

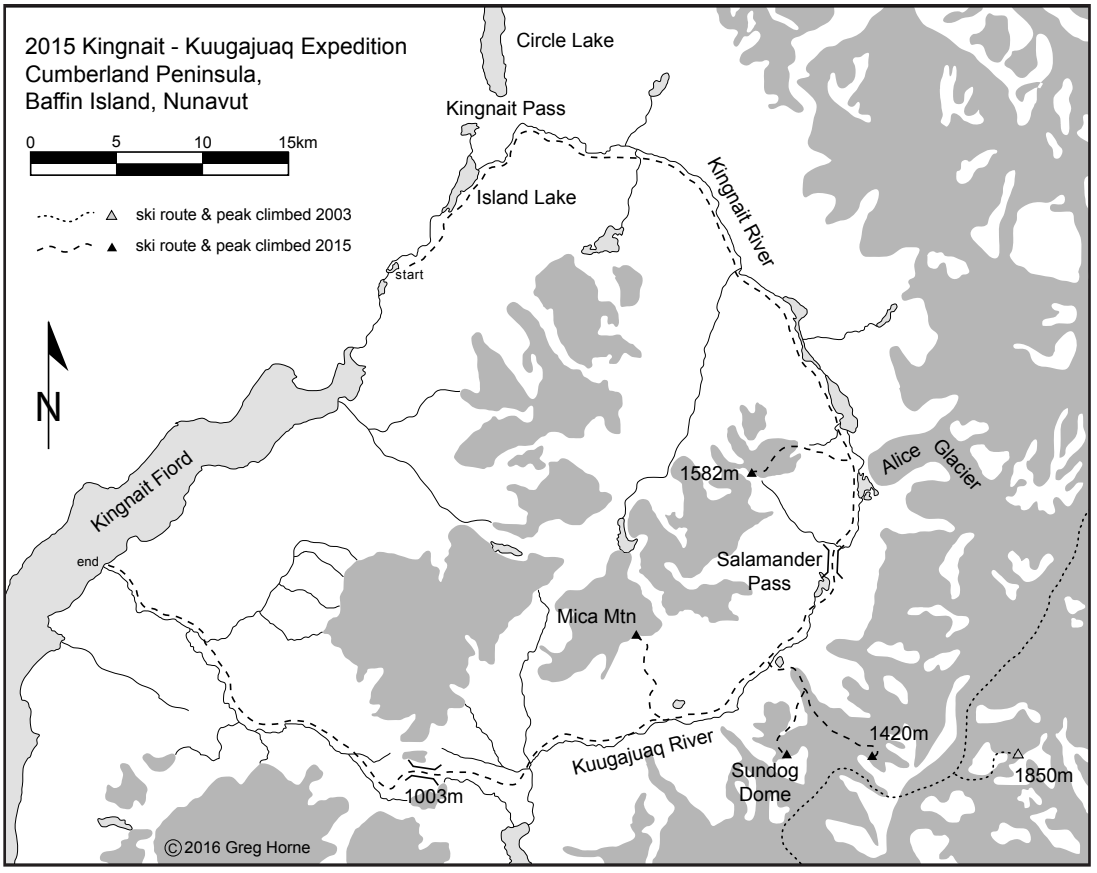
Four probable first ascents in the Kingnait Fiord area of Baffin Island by Greg Horne and Louise Jarry.

Unnamed (1582m, GR626529, 16-L/5) via northeast glacier, April 12, 2015.

Sundog Dome (1460m, GR645369,16-L/4) via northeast slopes, April 15, 2015.

Unnamed (1420m, GR693366, 16-L/4) via west/northwest glaciers, April 16, 2015.

Mica Mountain (1653m, GR559438, 16-L/4) via south slopes, April 18, 2015.



Raven's End

Megan Roth

I STAND THERE WAITING, EVERY MUSCLE and nerve on high alert. I'm watching Martin tediously make his way down, ice axe in tow. The only sound is that of which no one enjoys, the scraping of skis on frozen snow. As I wait, my own skis are biting only the smallest edge into the snow. Ali, to everyone's relief, made it down safely. Perhaps I'm glad I'm not him now watching us pick our way down this relentless face, hoping we won't make a mistake. A fall anywhere on the now-bulletproof snow would be difficult to arrest. I, too, am preoccupied concentrating on every turn, trying not to end up at the bottom via the express route.

PINNACLE PEAK, NESTLED ON THE CANADIAN side of the St. Elias Range, stands at a mere 3,714 metres. Relatively small compared to some of the giants around, what it lacks in size it makes up for in aesthetics. Its northeast face is a consistent 55-degree slope for more than 1,000 metres with a striking line down the middle of the pyramid-shaped peak. A line that would make any ski bum drool. Being the simple, predictable creatures that we are, that is exactly what happened while we were planning our spring trip. After relatively little deliberation, our sights were set. We were headed north crammed into Martin's tiny Ford Ranger with flip-down seats in the back. It is a long drive to the Yukon on flip-down seats.

Megan Roth tops out on the east face of Lowell Peak.
Photo: Martin Lefebvre

Within an hour of arriving at the airstrip on a bluebird day, we unloaded the truck, packed into the plane and before we knew it were standing on the flank of Pinnacle's north ridge. A stone's throw from where we were dropped off on the glacier became our home for the next nine days. The very recent memories of the cramped back seats all but faded, we revelled in the vast beauty and solitude that surrounded us.

High pressure had settled in for the foreseeable future. The weather at base camp was balmy enough to trade in the down booties for flip flops. It could almost pass for a beach vacation, without actually being a beach vacation. As the sun beat down on us, we slathered on sunscreen, set up tarps for shade and relaxed in the sun in T-shirts. Life was good; however, being that far north can be deceiving. While the sun bore down on each slope, only the most southerly aspects softened up, as we were soon to find out.

We reached the summit of Pinnacle on a sunny but slightly windy day. Our plan was to go up the easier west ridge and ski down the northeast face. Manoeuvring around some big holes at the bottom, we made our way up. Some steep snow slopes led to an interesting fin-like ridge at the top. Seven hours later we were there. Clicking into our skis we scooted off the top and found the entrance onto the face. Whatever concerns we may have had about avalanches and slough management soon diminished into a fleeting thought. Nothing on that face was going to budge, like a stubborn mule not willing to move. Ali dropped in first while Martin and

I waited. After a long while, we heard over the radio that he made it down safely, and in Ali's token calm voice, he suggested we get our axes out for the entire descent. As there was no concern for avalanches, Martin and I leap-frogged our way down.

Somewhere in the middle of the face, as we were jump turning, cursing, jump turning and cursing again, we both spotted two ravens as they flew past. These were the only birds we had seen all trip. Strange for being so high up and deep in the range, yet, there they were. Ravens, in mountain culture, have long been thought of as people who had died whilst playing amongst the peaks. Having been well prepared for tent days, we brought ample amounts of reading material. We all cycled through Ben Gadd's book *Raven's End*. Not that we are very superstitious, but then again maybe a little, we both got a little nervous. When we finally crossed over the bergschrund and made it to flatter ground, we brought up the fact that we had seen the birds. Ali never noticed them. Whether they were watching over us or were just a reminder of our mortality, no one knows.

The rest of our time in the range offered interesting climbs and fun descents. We completed a possible new route up Lowell Peak (3,500 metres) on its east face and a first descent via the same route. It was a straightforward boot-pack up the face to the ridge and a long, fun knife-edge ridge to the summit. The ski down was the best one of the whole trip on proper spring corn.

Pinnacle NW2, or as we called it, Redemption Ridge, is located between the main summit of Pinnacle Peak and Lowell Peak. It was another interesting ridge walk and an exciting steep descent on crunchy snow. The entire area offers so much for ski mountaineering. We skied almost every peak in sight from base camp. Although we did not get Pinnacle in prime condition, we had a great trip with good friends and there was enough glacial ice to keep our Scotch cold. Whoever gets to ski that line in good conditions will have the run of their life.

Summary

First ski descents of northeast face of Pinnacle Peak, east face of Lowell Peak and north ridge of Pinnacle NW2 (Redemption Ridge), St. Elias Range. FD: Ali Hogg, Martin Lefebvre, Megan Roth, May 11-19, 2015.

Megan Roth and Martin Lefebvre admire Pinnacle Peak (left) and Redemption Ridge. Photo: Ali Hogg

Polar Star

Michelle Brazier

POLAR STAR IS "[P]OSSIBLY THE BEST skiing couloir on earth and worth a trip to the area on its own. [It] defines perfect couloir skiing—long, narrow, turnable, steep, sheltered and stunning," writes Mark Synnott in his book *Baffin Island: Climbing Trekking & Skiing*. He was right. If I was going to undertake my very first expedition, I might as well tag a line from *50 Classic Ski Descents of North America*.

As with most adventures, this trip started as a mere idea. When I heard that my friend and professional photographer, Dan Evans, had a Baffin Island project in mind, I sent him a message asking for more information. He responded by sending me a link to an episode of *A Skier's Journey* by Doglotion, and after watching it with wide eyes and a dropped jaw, I told him I wanted in. After months of preparation and leaning on team members and Nunavut locals Patrick Bruce and William Hyndman, we made the journey to the great north. I went through four airports before arriving in Iqaluit, and we spent a couple of days in Nunavut's capital getting our bearings, gathering supplies and waiting for my lost ski bag to arrive. As you do the night before leaving for an Arctic expedition, Dan got drunk and wrote in the margins of our only topographical map: "Yep, we're doing it!" Thereafter, this became our battle cry.

Michelle Brazier and Dan Evans below Polar Star Couloir on Beluga Spire. Photo: Dan Evans

It took two more airports to arrive in Clyde River, and then we set off for Sam Ford Fiord. As I got jostled around like cargo in the turbulent and seal-blood-coated *qamutik*, I kept reminding myself, "I'm on vacation!" It was socked in as we emptied out of Revoir Pass onto the fjord, and we could barely make out the shapes of mountain peaks in the distance as we selected our drop-off location and first camp in a bay below Polar Sun Spire and Belvedere Ridge. I felt a minor sense of abandonment mixed with excitement as we waved goodbye to our drivers and started to set up camp. Yep, we're doing it!

The next morning was frigid without a cloud in sight, and it was then that we got a true scope of the vastness and magnitude of the place. We went on an exploratory mission to Beluga Spire, home of our prized objective. This was the first time Dan and I laid eyes on Polar Star, and it would be an understatement to say that the photos we saw of it prior to the trip simply did not do it justice. It was big, intimidating and absolutely beautiful.

We moved camp to the edge of Swiss Bay in order to session the Ford Wall. After warming up by skiing Pinto (or it might've been Escort) and Model T couloirs, each approximately 700 metres, Dan discovered that he had frostbite on his toes. We had come such a long way and had accomplished a fraction of the objectives list when this forced us to consider our possible exit strategy. For

the time being, Dan came up with a system for managing his frostbite, and we decided to go for it in case his condition worsened. After fending off a baby polar bear with a couple of rounds of flares, we moved across the fjord to the base of Beluga Spire. As the sun set on our new camp, a serac broke off the mountain about a kilometre away, leaving a hazy dust cloud on the ice and serving as a reminder that we were in unforgiving territory. Settling in for the night, I couldn't help but feel anxious. Are Dan's toes too much of a liability? Am I a good enough skier for this? Would the line actually go?

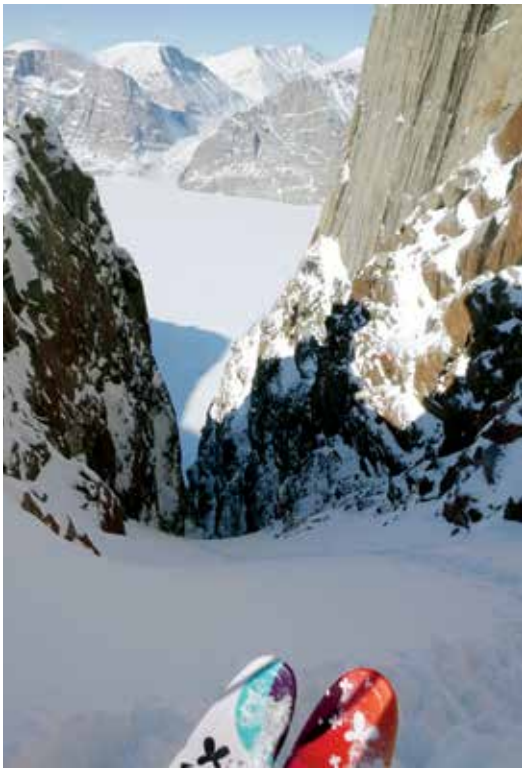
The next morning, after a hearty breakfast of bulletproof coffee and jazzed-up steal-cut oats, we walked the 200 metres from our camp to the base of Polar Star. From the mouth of the couloir, the line veered climber's right, so even with binoculars I couldn't tell what it looked like in the guts. There was only one way to find out. Feeling small, I gingerly made my way over the broken pack ice and started kicking steps up the fan. Any concerns I previously had were quickly overruled by feelings of excitement. It was a strange and unfamiliar experience to look at my watch and see altimeter numbers increase from zero.

Dan and I set a comfortable pace as we continued to climb up, swapping leads when one of us needed the break. Travel became quite difficult for the last 400 metres or so as we punched through unsupported, loose facets to reveal either rock or sheer ice. The sound of our ice axes hitting rock echoed against the giant walls of ancient granite as we weighted onto our crampons and fought hard to stay on top of the snow. There were some rather tense moments of front-pointing and wallowing in waist-deep snow as we took turns shouting, "Yep, we're doing it!" We managed to overcome the sufferfest and top out onto a beautiful col that overlooked unnamed peaks and the icefield from which the serac had fallen the night before. The sun was warm and bright as we sat perched on top of Polar Star. It had taken us five hours to boot-pack up 1,100 metres.

We spent about half an hour on top, soaking in the view, refueling, taking pictures and revelling in the moment. I was still reeling from the climb as I transitioned into ski mode. We clicked in, exchanged words of encouragement and an obligatory pole tap before dropping in. I was nervous, but after my first turn I heard myself say, "Oh yeah, I got this." At 45 to 50 degrees, it was the most exhilarating powder couloir skiing of my life. As the slough from our turns poured down the couloir, it created more powder for us to ski. We took turns leapfrogging and managing our slough, and even though my legs were on fire, I didn't want to stop because it was so much fun. We emptied out on to the sea ice with huge smiles and we exchanged high fives and fist pumps, slightly hysterical from what had just happened. Yep, we did it!

Acknowledgements

This expedition was made possible through a grant from the Jen Higgins Fund of The Alpine Club of Canada. We would also like to thank Helly Hansen Banff, MEC Expedition Support and Yamnuska Mountain Adventure's Backcountry Kitchen.



Michelle Brazier about to drop into the 1,100-metre Polar Star Couloir.
Photo: Michelle Brazier

Thunder Mountain

Eric Gilbertson

In the summer of 1965, Bill Buckingham and Lew Surdam visited the Southern Logan Mountains, making the first ascent of Mount Nirvana/Thunder Mountain, the highest mountain in the Northwest Territories. (The mountain's name is currently being officially changed to Thunder Mountain by the Canadian Government to reflect the local Deh Cho First Nation name.) While scouting for a possible ascent route, they first viewed the southwest face but decided "clearly any route here would be more of an undertaking than we were prepared for." (*AAJ*, 1966). They proceeded to hike to the north side and make the first ascent via the north face and north ridge.

The southwest face has been largely forgotten since then. There were no published pictures from Buckingham's trip, and the only description of the face in Buckingham's account was that it had "great exfoliated slabs." There was only documentation of one other climbing party seeing the face since 1965, and that was Pete Ford and Bob Howell in 1971 [*CAJ*, 1972, p. 37] from the next valley south and glimpsing just the upper section of the face.

Eric Gilbertson (leading) and Dave Custer on pitch two during an attempt on the southwest face of Thunder Mountain. Photo: Susan Ruff

However, researching topographic maps and Google Earth images revealed the face could be potentially 1,000 vertical metres of granite and more than a kilometre wide at the base. Could such a huge rock face on the tallest mountain in the territory really have gone ignored for so long? Perhaps—with the popularity of the Cirque of the Unclimbables and the Vampire Spires relatively close by to the north—this section of the Ragged Range was overlooked.

On June 28, 2015, Dave Custer, Susan Ruff and I helicoptered from Watson Lake to the edge of the small unnamed lake at the base of the southwest face of Thunder Mountain. After setting up camp, that afternoon Dave and I set out on a scouting mission to get the best possible photographs of the entire face so we could plan our attack. We scrambled up the crumbling northeast slopes to peak 2247 (GR686595) on the gargoyle ridge, and then proceeded along the ridge to peak 1998 (GR679604) before dropping back to our camp at the lake's edge.

The southwest face of Thunder Mountain was a complex system of gullies, arêtes and horizontal ledges. Large patches of snow hid stubbornly in the upper shaded recesses of the mountain, ensuring that the faces and gullies below would likely be wet from runoff. Slabs on the lower half of the face gave way to vertical, broken faces on the upper half. A curious system of horizontal ledges appeared to split the face across the middle. Studying our pictures in camp, we hatched a plan to gain the summit ridge just north of Peak 33 (2,581 metres, GR696599) by climbing a gully

system, and from there traverse north to the summit of Thunder Mountain.

The following morning, we scrambled to the base of the gully system, but rain developed and we retreated, caching our ropes and gear at the base. We stayed in camp all the next day waiting for a break in the weather. On July 1, we returned to our gear cache and began our ascent, trading leads for three pitches of moderate rock to the base of a 3rd-class ramp. The rock was initially hand-numbingly cold, but warmed up as the sun finally hit our climb.

Surprisingly, we were able to ascend the ramp unroped all the way to the ridge crest. We peered north along the ridge to Thunder Mountain with high hopes that we were almost there. However, we had misjudged how far away we actually were based on pictures only looking up at the mountain, and there was still a lot of terrain between us and the summit. Moreover, that terrain looked very technical. The ridge was like a sawtooth pattern, which would require many tough ascents and rappels, and was more than we were ready for.

We instead turned our gaze south, eyeing Peak 33 as a possible consolation prize. To our knowledge, the peak had no documented ascents and there appeared to be a climbable crack system on the north ridge. We descended back down the 3rd-class ramp several hundred feet, and then climbed diagonally back up and right for three pitches, following Dave's lead, to a flat area on the ridge.

From here Dave led up a fine crack pitch then a short final pitch to reach the small, airy summit. We were surprised to find a cairn carefully balanced on the top and a worn webbing rappel anchor leading off the northeast face to a glacier below. We estimated the anchor to be at least 20 years old, but later reviews of *AAJ* and *CAJ* journals show no documented ascents of this peak. We also consulted with Ragged Range historian Mike Fischesser, and he had no record of anyone attempting Peak 33.

We descended the same route of our ascent, and staggered back into camp at 2 a.m. for a tiring 19-hour day. Rain set in again that night and continued for the next three days, occasionally mixing with snow. As we would find out over the next month, sunny weather is hard to come by in the Ragged Range, and there's a good reason the moss is so thick on most of the rocks.

We spent the rainy days pouring over pictures of the face, trying to plan our next move. With what was turning out to be only one or two 18-hour weather windows per week, we had to be careful to choose the best possible route. By noon on July 4, the rain let up and we hiked to the base of a gully on the southwest face of Thunder Mountain for an attempt at a new route. A wet/mossy slab pitch led to a low-angle ramp, and then a large granite bowl. Five more pitches alternated between solid rock, waterfalls, snow ramps, a boulder tunnel and a horrendous wet chute. By 10 p.m. we reached the horizontal ledge system and it started to rain. We knew the rain could potentially last for days, so we began a long retreat back, reaching our base camp by 8 a.m. the next morning.

The next few rainy days provided us with much-needed resting and reading time. We washed clothes in the small lake and even took some lightning-fast swims in the frigid water. We also studied our pictures of the cliff, and realized the horizontal ledge system was likely continuous from our previous high point all the way to the base of our route up Peak 33.

Early on July 7, the weather dawned clear and we set off to explore this ledge system. Past the base of our route up Peak 33 the ledges were mostly 3rd and 4th class, with just a few narrow sections to belay and one short 5.6 pitch. We simul-climbed most of the ledge system and by midday reached a snow field just 15 metres above our previous high point from July 4. This traversing route was considerably longer distance-wise, but much faster and more pleasant. It would also offer a relatively safe retreat in the rain, with numerous sheltered overhangs.

Above the snowfield, Dave led four pitches up wet chimneys with tricky chockstones, until we were halted yet again by another rain storm. We retreated back across the ledge system and down to camp, but planned to return to this route. It looked like the chimneys and cracks provided a climbable route all the way to the summit.

The next four days were rainy, and I took the chance to do some scouting hikes in the area, scrambling up peak 2103 (GR668588) on July 11 and visiting the north cirque of Thunder Mountain, where two of the five documented ascents have been made. In the evening of July 12, the skies cleared again, and we returned to the ledge system. This time we brought bivy gear, and slept for a few hours on a nice wide area midway across the face.

The next morning, we climbed past our previous high point, past some wet cracks requiring aid. Dave led for seven pitches above the ledges, to within a rope-length of the ridge crest on a ramp trending diagonally to the right, when the rock suddenly turned chossy and unprotectable. A system of overhanging cracks directly above us looked like it continued to the summit, but it looked quite difficult with water oozing through from an unseen snow bank higher up. My GPS showed us to be around 2,600 metres, meaning we were probably only a couple of rope-lengths from the summit, but this was as high as we could safely get in those conditions.

Susan Ruff rappels the north ridge of Peak 33 with the east face of Thunder Mountain behind. Photo: Eric Gilbertson

We retreated yet again, reusing some rappel stations from previous retreats. It was late in the day by the time we reached our bivy site on the ledges, so we spent another night on the face before returning to camp the next morning in pouring rain.

As usual, the rain lasted the next few days, but Thunder Mountain allowed us one final weather window for a summit attempt. Based on our pictures, it looked like the aforementioned ledge system actually cut across the mountain all the way to the top of a gully further left on the face al the way across to the "slender needle" Buckingham and Surdam skirted on their first ascent climb. If we could reach the slender needle, perhaps we could repeat their ascent route of the north ridge and reach the summit.

Dave and I embarked a final time up the ledge system as the last rain squalls pulled away on the evening of July 16. Climbing through the night, we passed the large snowfield from our previous attempt and made it two more rope-lengths along the ledge by 5 a.m. As we rounded an arête in the middle of the face, however, a large section of the ledge in front of us was missing. It looked like it had fallen off the mountain, leaving just a blank face. Dave tried to scout above and below, but any passage would require some difficult and time-consuming climbing. We had assumed this ledge section would be easy and fast like the rest of the ledge system, and indeed our ascent plan depended on this to beat the next wave of rain predicted that afternoon. We reluctantly retreated again, reaching camp with a few hours to spare before the weather turned bad again.

We now had only two days left allotted for the southwest face, and with both days predicted to be rainy we began preparing for the next phase of the expedition. In between packing up and reorganizing gear, I managed to scramble up peak 2104 (GR658606) and peak 2102 (GR656600) on July 18. A brief window of clear skies on July 19, we all climbed several rock spires between peak 2523 (GR682630) and Thunder Mountain. A small cairn atop one spire led us to believe it was one of the "grotesque spires" climbed by Embick et al (*AAJ*, 1976).

Our plan was to rendezvous with another climbing party on July 20 on the east face of Thunder Mountain, to attempt the more standard climbing route pioneered by Bennett et al (*AAJ*, 1997). However, four days of solid rain prevented the helicopter from bringing the other party in, and the rendezvous plan was aborted. Over many hours of card games in camp and satellite texting with other members of the climbing party at Rabbit Kettle Lake, we decided on a new plan.

On July 23, the weather cleared enough for a helicopter to pick up Dave and Susan and transport them to the Cirque of the Unclimbables. They would go on to climb the Lotus Flower Tower. I decided to hike out solo to Hole in the Wall Lake, and from there take a float plane to Rabbit Kettle Lake and paddle out the Nahanni River with part of the other climbing team.

I loaded my pack with 10 days of food and overnight and glacier gear, and set off following in the footsteps of Buckingham and Surdam. I dropped briefly into the trees while rounding Gargoyle Ridge, passed by a deep shale canyon, and then was back above treeline. I had no particular plan beyond roughly following Buckingham's route to Hole in the Wall Valley and scrambling up interesting peaks I passed on the way.

The southwest face of Thunder Mountain:
(1) Peak 33
(2) attempts
Photo: Mike Fischesser

The West Coast

Adrift in a School of Rock

Jason Ammerlaan

THE OUTFLOW WINDS WERE HITTING us horizontally as we swooped over the Homathko River. One gust bigger than the rest tilted us off course and we were heading for the broccoli. A sea of green vegetable-shaped trees was going to end this trip early. Thankfully, Chuck's handiwork on a well-fashioned gravel strip worked its magic as we soared below the timber. The rush of departing town and being dropped off in a misty fjord, along with an exciting landing, had our heads spinning. Upon landing, we were greeted by Chuck Burchill, a homesteader to Bute Inlet and the steward of Homathko Camp. Shell-shocked with not too much to say, we shouldered our heavy loads and staggered off from Chuck's welcome quickly after landing.

THINKING OF MOUNTAIN OBJECTIVES TO climb in Western Canada does not take much imagination. With the highway views along the classic routes like the Duffy, the Parkway and the Pass, along with the plethora of guidebooks, media spray and campground banter, one can get overwhelmed with choice routes to explore. But just left of centre of these driving narratives runs the story of peaks less climbed or valleys less visited. It's not to do with the quality, length or difficulty of routes in these zones, but more to do with an imaginative geography that puts these places on a pedestal of difficulty, inaccessibility, expense and so forth. I first read about Mount Bute in the 2010 *CAJ* and was immediately turned on to the idea that there is a 1,900-metre granite cliff so close to home, but I was also overwhelmed by how difficult it appeared to get there.

Luke Neufeld leads easy terrain on the third tier of School of Rock. Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

FOUR DAYS FOUND US ESTABLISHED at the base of the wall trying to sleep before an alpine start. The rain had stopped and the ephemeral falls that pointed us to the weakness up the slabs had already disappeared. Early starts are always a bit blurry to me. I often look back on an alpine route wondering how I got through the initial slabs. It's a fine line between a dream and reality. My dream ended as soon as the wall steepened to vertical, and we were pulling up through dense clumps of conifers. Or perhaps that was just the nightmarish part of the dreamscape that was taking hold. Every dangling item attached to me was soon attached to the trees. Simul-climbing with Luke above and Nate below, I had rope twisted all around me. I felt like a salmon stuck in a gillnet. Luke led the way through, threading the rope wherever his body would fit. Eventually, we snuck away from the bush line and got established on some steeper terrain high on the lower buttress.

There were climbable lines everywhere above us. Great-looking seams and smears, but not a piece of gear for ages. Nate took the lead line from here and weaved his way down, around, and at some point up, to eventually crest us on the first ridge and some easier terrain. At last, we set our sights on the first real splitter of the day—a nice 5.8 hand crack led up the bottom of Steph-Annie Tower.

We spent our first night sitting atop the tower with the most beautiful view of the upper tiers of

Mount Bute. The first ascent party of School of Rock named the tower after their wives. With a wedding coming down the pipe, I couldn't help but think of my fiancée at home. And with two other dudes to share a single pad and ultralight blanket, I couldn't have missed her more. Once the sun set, we were at the full mercy of the mountain bivy. Some midnight trundling and tea drinking saw us through the night.

Day two started slowly. Without much sleep the two nights before, we ended up sleeping-in a bit once the sun came up. After an admirable dose of caffeine, we packed up and headed down the col below to some of the steeper southwest-facing rock we had spied the day before. Opting for the lower toe into the steep rock above, I slithered off into some good climbing. Each pitch brought me into another system as I dead-ended one and traversed into another. This continued for a couple of pitches until I just dead-ended full stop. Either I would keep on traversing back to the ridge or some serious moves had to be made. I looked down at my *compadres* and the choice was easy. I lowered off and sent Luke up to challenge the scary crux. After pawing at the thick black lichen, Luke found a way to stand up and pull around a slammed-shut shallow corner. A few moves higher, he let out the biggest goggle-eyed, high-pitched "Aieeee" that I've heard from him yet. Nate and I howled back in celebration. We knew it was happening.

Nathan Macdonald approaches the final summit ridge on School of Rock.
Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

We scrambled the ridge for a while once the angle lessened, and I took the reigns for another few pitches. The climbing was good with steep cracks and good protection until we found ourselves on the final bench. A bit more scrambling and a few mountainous pitches brought us to the big flat summit.

What a view. A dark obscured shadow of a mountain, likely Mount Gilbert, towered to the south. To the north, the Waddington massif dominated the skyline. To the northeast, the Chilcotin plateau stretched beyond the icecaps. And to the west, the mighty Homathko River stretched out into the head of Bute Inlet. To say that this place is surrounded by rugged wilderness is an understatement. It is a place of lore to early colonists, seasoned coastal loggers and mountain adventurers alike. Many conquests have been squashed by the ruggedness of the land.

In the mid-1800s, Alfred Waddington attempted a new route to the Chilcotin Plateau through Bute Inlet as a more direct route to access the goldfields of Barkerville. It would shave considerable time off of the Fraser Canyon route. His conquest was quickly abandoned with the resistance of the Chilcotin peoples sparking the infamous Bute Inlet Massacre. Later on, Bute Inlet was considered as the mainline for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Again, with a shorter distance to the interior and good coastal access it was, at least on paper, a good idea. However, the steepness of the coastal valleys, along with the lore of the massacre, drove their focus back to Vancouver and the Fraser Canyon route. Even recent industrial developments have proven unfeasible. After

three years of investigation, a network of hydro projects were deemed too expensive to construct in the area. And to boot, the zone boasts one of the largest swaths of uncut forests to be found in coastal B.C.

After a long, soulful digest, we swaggered back down the ridge we had climbed to the big bench below the headwall. The sky was burning auburn as we scrambled our way down the final bit of technical ground before Steph-Annie Tower. The elated feeling of climbing a big mountain and knowing that the hardship was over set in. But sometimes it's difficult to know if the hard work really is over till it's over.

We were grounded just above the snowfields at the base of the mid-buttress when we decided to pitch our second bivy. We huddled up with each other and gorged on all the extra food we had carried with us. The idea of hanging out for another day of climbing crossed our minds below the headwall, but the thought of another night sharing the blanket was unappealing. In the morning, we finished off the descent in an endless vertical forest and picked up our stash at the base of the wall. The rains started up as we took our first few steps away from the wall and held up for the whole next day. We were happy that we had decided to come down instead of sticking around for more.

We rested the next day by gorging on salmon berries and refining our machete-throwing technique. Our bear defence program was becoming well versed. The next morning, we saddled up and crossed a very swollen creek, which stands out as the crux of the approach, and then we drifted back down to Homathko Camp to arrive in the early afternoon. It was surreal to think back about our three-day approach, our time spent on the wall, our float down the river, the whole trip knotted itself into one short dream.

We lounged at the idyllic Homathko Camp for the afternoon and the next morning. Chuck filled us in on his story, and we exchanged a few of our own. He smirked when we told him about the creek crossing.

"It's not the grizzly bears that you need to worry about in these valleys" he said, "it's the mountain creeks that will get you out there."

We offered to help him out with any chores that may have needed a few extra hands.

"I've got a problem," he told us, "A bear keeps on eating my raspberries. I haven't had to shoot a bear in over 25 years, and I'm not about to shoot one over raspberries."

Then he asked us to help him build a live trap out of some scrap aluminium that he had. It turned out the scrap bits of aluminium came from the 10 metres of deck that he built for Dean Potter to jump from the summit of Mount Bute a few years ago, during the filming of *The Man Who*

Luke Neufeld leads up the final pitch before the summit plateau on Mount Bute.
Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

Can Fly [*CAJ,* 2012, p. 77]. Everything at Chuck's has a purpose, and has been repurposed at least a few times. He mills his own timber, machines the metal he needs, grows his own food and generates his own power. If it's broken, he's going to fix it.

During our lounging in camp, I read through the guestbook and was overwhelmed by the familiar names and the wild journeys that they had undertaken. From multi-day descents down the Homathko River (back to back class V rapids) to epic long ski traverses across icefields and multi-week ridge traverses in the alpine. I recognized a few trips through *Canadian Alpine Journal* articles, and others I had no knowledge of. They played under the radar of the media—soulful trips to the mountains that need not be shared beyond their closest mates. Most of all, it made me think back to when I first dreamt about going to Mount Bute. The pedestal had been dismantled, and I felt enlightened.

Chuck arranged a flight home for us through an old friend, and before we knew it, the dreamscape had shifted back to reality, and we were feasting on tasty Mags99 burritos and beer in Squamish. We would like to thank Chuck for being so helpful during the planning and executing of our trip, and we wish him and Sharon good health and fine company out at Homathko Camp.

Our trip lasted nine days. We freed School of Rock [*CAJ,* 2010, p. 50] over two days of climbing after walking up from Homathko Camp, at sea level, with heavy packs and light hearts.

Summary

First free ascent of School of Rock (V 5.12, 1900m), west face, Mt. Bute, Coast Mountains. FFA: Jason Ammerlaan, Nathan MacDonald, Luke Neufeld, July 2015.

A very foreshortened perspective of the 1,900-metre west face of Mount Bute.
Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

The Daily Universe

Tony McLane

THE DAILY PLANET ON THE SHERIFF'S Badge in Squamish is a classic four-pitch climb, among the Chief's best. Its natural climax through the large roofs, which begin at its end, was considered an unreasonable free climb for decades. I threw my ropes down the upper wall one day to investigate the scene. Noticing a moderate line leading above the roof prompted a scope from the lip. Peering down under the roof, a rising traverse of jugs planted a seed that kept me up at night. I couldn't go into town without looking at the wall. Had the first ascensionists of the Daily Planet somehow missed this promising line of holds? My optimism was fuelled by the knowledge that nobody had given this project close inspection.

I easily enlisted my friend Jorge Ackerman for a ground-up aid session through the roof. Jorge saddled up for the initial flaky free climbing with the power drill hanging on a gear loop. Three bolts and some aid and free moves took us to the loose, dirty lip which needed significant work from rappel.

After a few weeks of gardening, trundling, climbing and bolting, I laced up under the roof pitch on our continuous ascent. Jug hauling with good rests kept the steepness at a moderate grade. Jorge's next lead took him from our airy belay at the lip up a series of sharp flakes and positive in-cuts through vertical white rock, capped with a 5.9 jug-haul roof. By a remarkable coincidence, Jon Rigg, an aid soloist, was on the original aid line the same day. Two more pitches took us to Sasquatch Ledge and a finish on Angels Crest. It was had to believe where we had just come from while basking in the afternoon sun on the summit.

In the 1980s, Squamish climbing legends Perry Beckham and Peter Croft worked to create the Daily Planet. They stopped at a logical spot. Ironically, they were more than capable of pushing a line through the roof without increasing their route's grade well before Jorge and I were born. I don't think establishing The Daily Universe was a product of modern high standards, but rather a fresh take on a choice made from the past.

We placed 13 bolts over three pitches—10 from rappel and three on lead. Much thanks for the support from Martin Lopez Abad, Colin Moorhead, Jon Rigg, Kevin McLane, Chelsea Cobb, John Okerman and Ian Bennett.

Summary

The Daily Universe (5.12b, 17 pitches (5 new)), The Sheriff's Badge, The Stawamus Chief, Squamish. FA: Jorge Ackerman, Tony McLane, August 18, 2015.

The Daily Universe on the Sherrif's Badge of the Stawamus Chief in Squamish.
Photo: Kevin McLane

Smokies, Beer and Climbing Gear

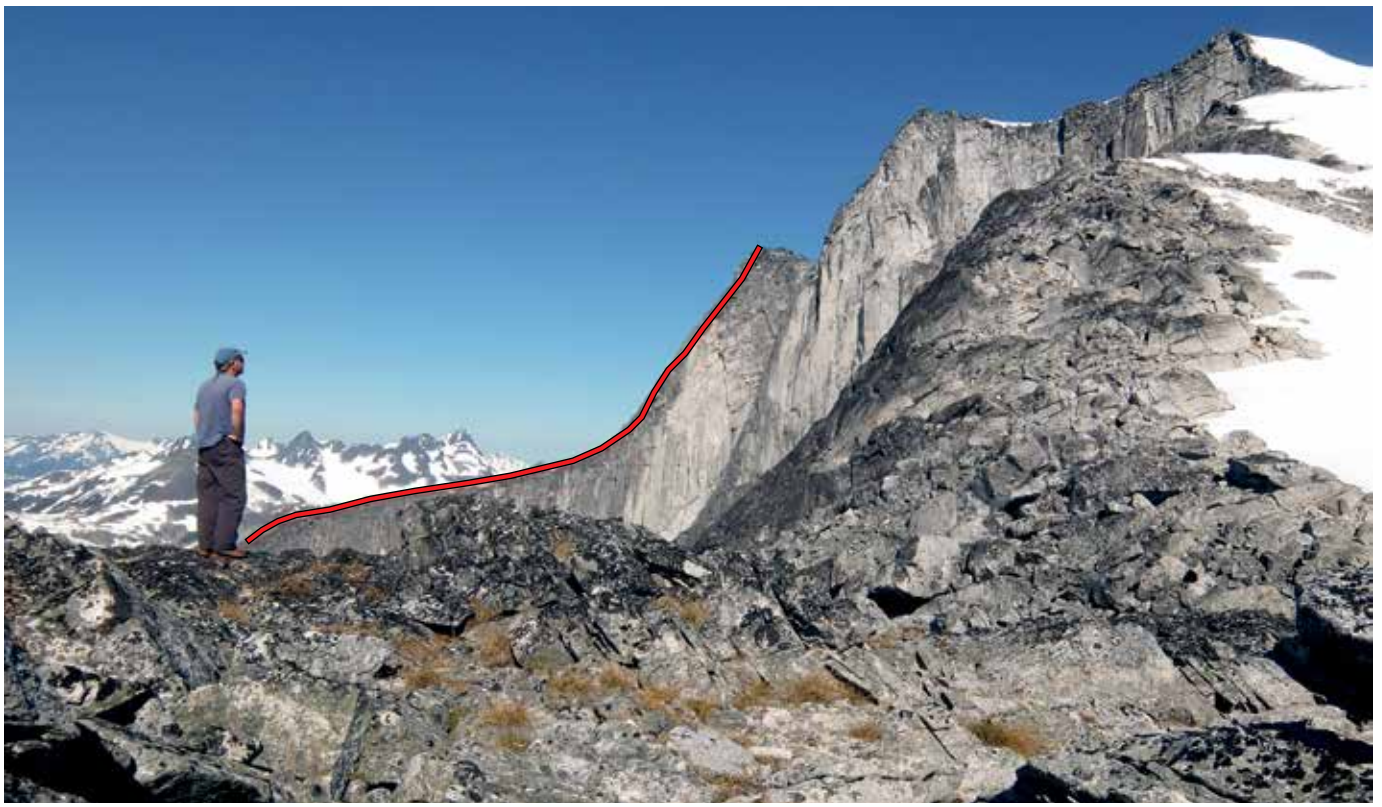
Grant McCartney

THE SOUTH-FACING ALPINE WALLS and ridges of Big Snow Mountain on the central coast of B.C., just south of Bella Coola, was our destination. Through photographs from Jia Condon's heli-skiing exploits, memories from John Howe's forestry days in the area and my own views from past ski tours had us all dreaming of the same prize—clean, solid, splitter alpine granite.

For me, the challenge of climbing a long, steep route in a remote setting seemed grandiose, maybe a little frightening, yet intriguing at the same time. Jia and I, among others, have been doing a number of new alpine routes around the Bella Coola valley in recent years, but this objective seemed different. I was expecting far more sustained difficulties on Big Snow. Crack, who climbs crack? We climb slab in the valley. Luckily, I was with two gurus who seemed quite relaxed around the idea.

After weeks of waffling over dates, weather and child-care options, occupying our time with paddling and fishing, the stars aligned, the sunny weather set in, and it was on. With great effort, we loaded the smokies, beer and climbing gear into the helicopter for the short flight to a camp at 1,070 metres on a central ridge below the summit. It was a heater, upper 30s in the valley, darn near perfect in the alpine. All we had to do was wander to the windward side of the ridge and it was like someone had turned on the air conditioning.

An extensive reconnaissance of the area didn't quite produce what we were hoping for. We found discontinuous, flared cracks—as in shut-down



John Howe scopes the Southwest Ridge on Big Snow Mountain. Photo: Jia Condon

seams shaped like bum cheeks—shooting up the wild fin of an east ridge. The prominent steep south face was a maze of long dihedrals so shut down not even moss grew in them, not to mention any relief on the face in the form of broken, stacked blocks of doom. However, among all of this doom, we were able to find what looked to be an aesthetic line up the south ridge of the west summit.

That night in camp was surreal. Bluebird turned to full moon, and a breeze kept the bugs at bay. Fried onions, smokies, beer and my wife's special brownies got consumed. We had a bird's-eye view of the route and gazed at it all evening. Sitting there looking at the snowfield crossing, the scramble onto and up the ridge, the climb to the summit and the descent back to camp made the scope of what we were about to embark on grow in my mind, and a bit of nervousness set in. I began to pace around camp, so much in fact, I might as well have paced my way to the base of the route that night, but I did not. My 10 centimetres of sleeping pad I received for father's day eventually beckoned me, and I slept.

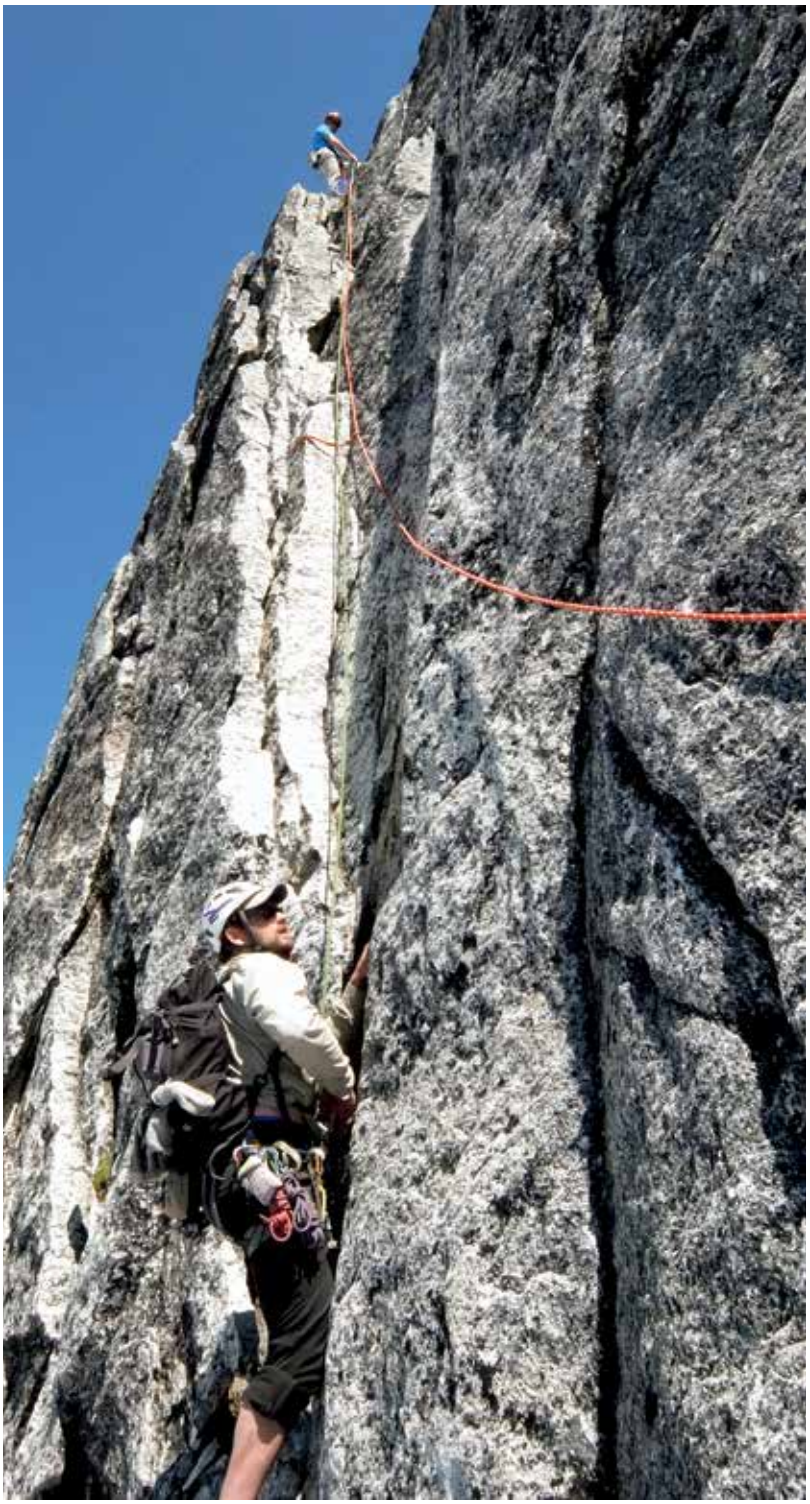
Relaxed by morning with the initial jitters gone, we were excited to get climbing. The weather was solid, and we had a chunk of 30-dollar organic elk salami. What else does a climbing party need? Making quick work of the snow, as the late day heat was causing slides, we easily gained the ridge and were harnessing up in a couple of hours. The climbing was fun—discontinuous cracks with technical difficulties up to 5.10 for eight pitches.

Summary

Southwest Ridge (5.10, 500m, 8 pitches), Big Snow Mountain, Coast Mountains. FA: Jia Condon, John Howe, Grant McCartney, June 20, 2014.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to MEC Expedition Support and Metolius Climbing.



John Howe belays Grant McCartney on pitch three of the Southwest Ridge of Big Snow Mountain.
Photo: Jia Condon

Touched by a Hummingbird

Ryan Van Horne

I SMILE AS THE BOW OF our canoe splits the still water of Buttle Lake. Much too soon we are on the other side, dragging the canoe up Phillips Creek and into the bush. The thought of the beautiful unclimbed southeast face of Mount McBride glowing in the morning sun, some 13 kilometres away, entices us to move quickly. As we wind our way up the trail towards Marble Meadows, we pass through beautiful open old-growth fir stands and over bluffs covered with a thick layer of moss. A few hours later, we make our way out of the forest and into the alpine where we are immediately greeted with fantastic views of the east face of the Golden Hinde and mini crystal-clear lakes to cool down in. A short time after passing the Wheaton hut, just before heading up onto Phillips ridge, we set camp next to a small waterfall. As the sun begins to drop behind Morrison Spire and the mountains are illuminated in the warm evening light, we talk about how unique and special this small pocket of alpine limestone is to Vancouver Island.

In the morning, after a quick breakfast and a warm cup of coffee, we head out. With light packs for the day, we feel good as we move quickly over the ancient limestone seabed, trying not to stop for too long to look at the thousands of fossils embedded in the rock we walk over. I'm feeling a little rushed. We still have about three kilometres to go, and we are not sure what the terrain will be like to traverse off the ridge and under the southeast face. But before long, we are off the ridge and well on our way under the face.

As we begin to head up the last large scree slope towards our chosen line, a couple of deer jet away. We are amazed on how fast they move across the steep boulder-strewn slope. After watching the deer run for at least a kilometre down to the valley

Touched by a Hummingbird on the southeast face of Mount McBride.
Photo: Ryan Van Horne

below, we make it to the base of the line. It's a little steeper then we had thought, but looks great.

Beginning in a perfect hand crack, the route then traverses right into an awesome corner and onto a nice little belay ledge. Marie-Lou eagerly follows as we make our way up 60-metre pitches of cracks, corners and a fantastic chimney. Now, just 20 metres from the summit ridge, we are faced with a vertical band of broken rock that runs the entire length of the face. I move left into a small chimney to prevent rock fall from hitting Marie-Lou. The protection is minimal as I make a few committing moves up to a small broken bulge. I hesitate for a minute, testing the scary holds. When I eventually go for it, the rock under my right foot tears off, sending a shower of debris down the face.

Now with some solid holds under my feet, I move over the broken band and onto the summit ridge. With a tight body belay, Marie-Lou joins me. Grinning from ear to ear, we walk onto the summit. Basking in the sun and looking over the Wolf River and the mountains beyond, we sit, talking about the climb and how great it feels to be exposed in the mountains.

With the climb behind us, we slowly make our way back to camp, taking all the time we want to examine the fossils and interesting limestone features on our way. On the third day, while we stop at a small lake for lunch, a hummingbird lands on my leg and has a little taste of my bar, and a minute later, it's back for seconds.

Summary

Touched by a Hummingbird (D 5.9, 260m), southeast face, Mt. McBride, FA: Marie-Lou Piché, Ryan Van Horne, July 2015.

The High Country

David Williams

IN THE SUMMER OF 2009, Terry Jarvis and I undertook a wonderful traverse through the interior coastal peaks east of the Gamsby and Kimsquit Rivers [*CAJ,* 2010, p. 106]. After pondering the maps, it looked as if another continuous traverse was possible a little further north. So in the afternoon of Sunday, July 12, 2015, Lake District Air, based out of Burns Lake, flew Denise Hart, Peter Celliers and me to a small sandy beach on the north shore of Nanika Lake (53° 50.8' N, 127° 32.9' W). On the first day, we shouldered our two-week loads of food and supplies up through forest northwest to near treeline and made camp in the heather (53° 51.1' N, 27° 34.2' W). We worked our way along the sidewall of a prominent canyon to the delightful broad and open col (53° 51.7' N, 127° 35.8' W) from where we descended into Nikun Creek.

As we headed back up into the high country, from near the head of Nikum Creek, we ran into a herd of goats. The following morning, we travelled southwest and descended again into the bush to the valley bottom that drains into both the Nanika and Morice lakes. An arduous climb southwest brought us to a broad expanse of extensive meadows (53° 48.9' N, 127° 44.1' W) from where we travelled west-southwest through meadows, and early the following day climbed peak 6800 (2,060 metres, 53° 46.4' N, 127° 48.6' W) via the northern glaciated slopes and northeast ridge. We then descended into the upper drainage of Morice Lake before ascending onto the main divide between the Kemano River and the Morice Lake and Atna River drainages. The next day we ascended peaks 7300 (2,212 metres, 53° 49.6' N, 127° 57.3' W) and 7500 (2,272 metres, 53° 50.1' N, 127° 57.7' W), the former by the southwest ridge and the latter via the south-southeast ridge.

Descending from peak 7500, we traversed northwest and dropped down into the lovely pass

(53° 53.6' N, 128° 2.2' W) covered in lupines and with marmots standing guard, between the Kemano and Atna Rivers. Our plan at this point was to spend the next day making what we thought would be the third ascent of Mount Atna. This was, however, not to be the case as we spent the next two days hunkered down, dealing with a flooding campsite and despairing at our bad luck with the weather.

After two days, we made a break and retreated the way we had come for a few hours before descending east from the glacial pass (53° 52.8' N, 128° 0.6' W), and dropped into the upper Atna River drainage and made our way to a pass (53° 53.5' N, 127° 56.7' W) of open bush festooned with numerous small lakes. From the pass, we spent the next few days travelling northeast through the high country, climbing peaks 6800 (2,060 metres, 53° 53.6' N, 127° 53.5' W) and 7100 (2,151 metres, 53° 55.0' N, 127° 50.2' W) along the way before descending down the long north-northwest ridge of peak 7100 to the broad, treed divide (53° 58.2' N, 127° 51.7' W) that is covered with small lakes. We travelled northeast along the divide before descending to the western shore of Atna Lake. Here, we spent the last night out marveling at the numerous wolf tracks on the sandy shore and the immensity of such a wild place.

Summary

Summer alpine traverse in the Kitimat Range of the Coast Mountains from Nanika Lake (53° 50.8' N, 127° 32.9' W) to Atna Lake (54° 1.0' N, 127° 49.2' W). Fourteen days, 103 km, 8,000m of elevation gain (including side trips to climb peaks). Peter Celliers, Denise Hart, David Williams, July 12-26, 2015.

Unnamed, and most likely unclimbed, spires above the Kemano River. Photo: David Williams

Vancouver Island Report 2015

Lindsay Elms

A LOT OF CLIMBERS (AND SKIERS) commented that winter 2015 was not normal for the Island. They said it was warmer than usual, the snow accumulation just didn't happen, and we had more days of sunshine and less rain. It got to the point where some were voicing whether any of the ascents should be called winter ascents. They just couldn't wrap their heads around a winter ascent of a peak without the typical snow conditions and cold temperatures. Yes, they knew the astrological definition of winter and the dates associated with that period, but they wanted to call them spring-like ascents. Individuals have the right to make that call if they want, but for the record, this report will call any ascents during the official winter period a winter ascent.

Anyway, conditions were such that access via logging roads and trails to many of the Island peaks in January and February and into March were easy due to the lack of snow. On the higher peaks there was accumulating snow, but not what we would consider the norm. Without the snow accumulation, the Island glaciers were receding faster than normal in the summer, and some of the routes that climbers rely on winter snowpack to aid the ascent were sketchy. If this trend continues, alternate routes will need to be found on some peaks. Also, in the Comox Valley, there was a lot of discussion about the iconic Comox Glacier (or Queneesh, as it is known to the K'ómok First Nations). This is an unusual feature since the glacier is the mountain. There is no mount or peak designation to the high point. What would the glacier (or mountain) be called if there was no glacier anymore—the Comox-Glacier-That-Once-Was? So, that said, a phenomenal number of peaks were climbed on the Island in winter 2015, and, continued on into the summer.

The new year kicked off with Darren Wilman, a strong climber from Campbell River, who has over the years been chipping away at climbing many of the known and lesser-known peaks on the Island, making a solo first winter ascent of Barad-dûr Mountain in the Province Range. Leaving Campbell River at 3 a.m., he drove towards Zeballos then ascended to the saddle between Mook Peak and Barad-dûr Mountain. He was familiar with the route as he had attempted it two years previous with three others but didn't reach the summit. This time he reached the summit and was back in Campbell River by 5 p.m.

On January 28, Ryan Van Horne and Marie-Lou Piché took advantage of a perfect little weather window and climbed a fantastic line on the east face of Sutton Peak. On the same day, further south, Laura Marie and Josh Overdijk climbed the southeast ridge of Triple Peak. Two days later, Brandon Hopkins and Kevin Hardy climbed the Northwest Peak of Triple Peak.

On February 14, Overdijk and Denis Ryan hiked up the N-20 off the Nomash Main with the intention of climbing Merlon Mountain. By early afternoon they were high on the mountain, and Josh decided to go for the summit on his own. He reached the central and main summits, making the first winter ascent of those two peaks, and then returned to camp, descending the next day. However, he was unaware that on the February 15, Darren Wilman was on his way up the N-20 to climb Rugged Mountain. Wilman day-tripped the mountain via the Walsh-Facer-Hutchinson route, completing its third winter ascent. Overdijk returned five days later with Peter Hartmann, and on the February 20, they climbed Ya'ai Peak via its south face and the following day Rugged Mountain. On the way down, they passed Garner Bergeron, Paul Rydeen and James Rhode on their way up to also climb Rugged Mountain. This gives an indication of the change in climatic condition. Rugged Mountain received its first winter ascent in 1992, and it wasn't until 2014 that it received its second winter ascent. Roll on to 2015 and within a week it received three more winter ascents. It just proves that climbers are weather watchers and

take advantage of conditions when presented with favourable situations.

On February 16, Danny O'Farrell and Francis Bruhwiler, in what they don't consider winter conditions, climbed The Centaur and Witch Hat (probable first winter ascents) after accessing the Mackenzie Range via Canoe Creek. Almost a week later, Stefan Gessinger and Shanda Lembcke completed the second winter ascent of Mount Harmston via Oshinow Lake, and on February 22, Haj Bains and Karsten Klawitter made the first winter ascent of the northwest ridge of Redwall Peak in the Mackenzie Range. The same day, Campbell River's Jon Stobart and Ryan Clark climbed Mount Russell (possible first winter ascent), and Chris Wood (solo) made the first winter ascent of Mount Septimus via the X Gully. On February 28, Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton made the first winter ascent of Mount Elliot. On the same day, Van Horne, Mike Shives and Michael Lock headed into Elkhorn Mountain and the next day, March 1, climbed the mountain's north face. It was a popular weekend as Richard Be and Mike Childs climbed Matchlee Mountain, and Neil Boreck, Roderick Laine and Trevor Hatelt skied into Mount Septimus but didn't summit. However, the most impressive ascent of the weekend was on Rambler Peak at the head of the Elk Valley. Josh Overdijk hiked into the old-growth hemlock grove on Saturday and set up camp. The next morning, he was up early heading for the North Buttress on Rambler. Conditions improved the higher he got, and when he topped out on the ridge, he could see Paul Rydeen, Ahren Rankin and James Rhodes on the main summit (second winter ascent). Overdijk wrote:

Danny O'Farrell on the probable first winter ascent of Centaur Peak. Photo: Francis Bruhwiler

> "After traversing the ridge I hoped to find the north face in good condition, but that was not the case. The lines were too thin at the bottom. I considered the ridge crest, but drytooling through powder snow is not what I was looking for. I choose the gully between the north ridge and north face. At that point, I figured maybe the hardest climbing was behind me, but it was not. The gully started with steep, thin ice runnels then a couple of gnarly vertical steps before the final corner led to an overhanging cornice that I managed to squeeze by with minimal tunneling. Up until this point, I had been filming much of the climb with my Go-pro, but during one of the tight sections, it broke off my helmet and flew into the abyss. After topping out on the Rambler névé, it was an easy snow gully to the summit. A total blizzard on the summit made it feel like proper winter, and I couldn't have been happier. Although I knew the way down, there were fresh tracks

leading to the lower gully, but from then on they were wiped out. I staggered back to camp completely knackered."

On into March and the ascents continued. In a 21-hour, round-trip push beginning on March 6, Chris Wood and Andreas Hinkkala made the first winter ascent of Nine Peaks. This was the last of the ACC Vancouver Island Section's Rick Eppler Island Qualifier's to get a winter ascent. Also, on March 6, Chris Jensen and Michael Loch started up the northeast ridge of Mount Bate, finishing on March 9 with a descent of Tlupana Ridge to their car. Along the way (16 kilometres of continuous alpine or subalpine terrain), they traversed Mount Bate, Mount Alava, Mount Grattan, The Thumb and Thumb Peak. On March 7, down near Oshinow Lake, Lindsay Elms, Valerie Wootton, Sandy Briggs, David Prothero, Doug Doering, Lisa Nothling and Raelene Webber made the first winter ascent of Mount Bueby. March 18 saw Ryan Van Horne and Mike Morris returning to Sutton Peak, putting another route up on the east face. Ten days later, on March 28, they were once again at the bottom of the face. Morris wrote:

"We approached in the morning under drizzly skies and very little wind. It was quite mild. I remember talking to Ryan about how we wanted there to be more wind, and how alive the mountains feel when it's storming. The higher we got on the mountain, the more the wind picked up and the snow fell. Eventually, we were looking at each other both thinking the same thing, well, I guess this is what we asked for. With a strong easterly wind picking up snow off the west side of the mountain, and dumping it down the east face in large spindrifts, we found ourselves questioning whether or not this was safe or too dangerous to continue. Some of these spindrifts were huge. Big enough to make us concerned at being pulled off. At the bottom of the face, the spindrifts accumulated and were funnelled into a single gully. This was the access onto the route. Higher up, this feature forked into several smaller gullies. Fortunately, our intended line had the least amount of snow coming down it, and we were quickly out of the way of the

The first winter ascent of Nine Peaks.
Photo: Andreas Hinkkala

biggest sloughs. The line was pretty much exactly what we were looking for. It wasn't too hard, but harder than we anticipated. We graded the route AI 3+ M4 and it was 300 metres long. There were two mixed sections, that with more snow would probably be filled in, but in the current condition were pretty strenuous. We descended in a total blizzard, which as we got lower turned to rain. We got back to the truck soaked through and thinking that the beers really didn't need to be in the creek. We were cold enough already."

On April 9, Adrian Surdu and Steve Janes climbed a route on the northeast face of Idsardi Mountain. They left the car at 8 a.m. and after an arduous approach over Crest Mountain, set up a base camp just below the summit at 7 p.m. After a quick meal, they hiked up to the summit of Idsardi and began descending the summit ridge to the east, searching for access to the hidden northeast face. Finding a line of trees to rap, they committed and arrived at the base of the route just as it got really dark at 8:30 p.m. After simul-soloing the first 100 metres, they belayed a short (five metres) vertical rock step off a manky rock anchor on the right of the gully, and also the final cornice at the top. They arrived back at their bivy at 11 p.m., and after a few celebratory sips of whiskey, and a puff or two, promptly past out.

May 12 saw Lindsay Elms and Valerie Wootton making the first ascent of Bryde Peak at the head of Spud Creek near Zeballos. They were back in the vicinity on May 19 with Brandon Hopkins and made the second ascent of the west ridge of Merlon Mountain. A week later, Elms and Wootton climbed Grilse Grind and made the first ascent of Memekay Peak near Stewart Lake at the head of the White River. On May 22, Darren Wilman and Paul Rydeen made the first ascent of Abco Mountain on the southeast corner of Strathcona Park and then traversed Holely Mountain, Mount Cotter, Penny Mountain and Noble Mountain to Mariner Mountain. During May 30 to 31, Van Horn and Morris returned once more to the east face of Sutton Peak and climbed another new line. It started on the first two pitches of Holy Horseshoes, and then traversed left to meet up with Sutton Express for one rope-length before splitting off to the right for a final pitch before hitting the North Ridge just a few metres north of the north summit. It was 350 metres of mostly mid-5th-class climbing with a few moves at 5.9 on pitch seven just before topping out.

In early June, Elms, Wootton, Rod Szasz, Matthew Lettington and Chris Ruttan received special permission from the Uchucklesaht First Nations to climb the highest peak on the ridge just north of the T'iitsk'in Paawats (Thunderbirds Nest) Protected Area. On June 11, they climbed Uchucklesaht Peak and its north summit. On June 30, Chris Wood started paddling his canoe up Oshinow Lake at 6:30 p.m. under a full moon then hiked up towards the Cliffe Glacier where he arrived at the summit of Mount Harmston via the southeast ridge just after sunrise. He arrived back at his vehicle at 3:30 p.m., completing the first one-day ascent of the mountain. Between July 27 and August 1, Elms, Wootton and Willie Scott made the second ascent of Abco Mountain, and also traversed Holely Mountain and Penny Mountain to Mariner Mountain.

On July 28, Van Horne and Piché hiked into Marble Meadows and traversed under the southeast face of Mount McBride, where they climbed four 60-metre pitches at 5.9 to a final 15-metre pitch of vertical broken rock to the summit ridge. They named the route Touched by a Hummingbird after a hummingbird landed twice on Van Horne's backpack [see p. 102].

Between July 19 and August 9, the Vancouver Island Section of the ACC held its annual summer camp for three weeks on a small lake in the Cyclone Peak area, located east of Lillooet Lake and west of the Stein Valley Niaka'pamux Heritage Park. There were 15 participants in week one and 13 participants in both weeks two and three. Weather ranged from hot and sunny to cooler with showers and heavy rain, and even snow. Peaks climbed included Cyclone Peak, Asherah Peak, Twin Two Peak, Snowspider Mountain and St. Jacobs Mountain, and several unnamed peaks and ridges.

On August 1, Stefan Gessinger and Shanda Lembcke climbed Mount Colonel Foster via Walsh's Foray (from the north), and the next day, further south in Strathcona Park, brothers John and Mike Waters completed the second traverse of Mount Septimus, Mount Rosseau, the Misthorns and Margaret Peak. This traverse (3.5 kilometres long) was first done by Darren Wilman, Paul Rydeen and Jim Tansky in 1999 when they climbed it in the opposite direction. In mid-August, Van Horne and Piché hiked into the Golden Hinde with heavy packs with the intention of climbing the east face. Unfortunately, by the time they stood at the base of the impressive face, it was noon and too late for the technical route, so instead they soloed the east ridge (first ascent) to the summit.

During the month of August, Elms made a number of first ascents. On the west side of Schoen Creek, he traversed a ridge (Perseid Ridge) from north to south, finishing at Harrison Lake. Along the way, he climbed seven unclimbed peaks: Taurus Peak, Aries Peak, Perseus Peak, Cassiopeia Peak, Camelopardalis Peak, and Auriga Peak Main and Northeast. A few days later near Victoria Peak, he made three more first ascents of Victoria East Peak, Twaddle Peak and White Gold Mountain, and then on August 22, with Lawrence Philippsen, made the first ascent of Emerald Peak North and South near the head of Sebalhal Creek. Elms continued by climbing Lone Wolf Mountain (third ascent) on September 13 in the remote southwest corner of Strathcona Park with Rod Szasz and Valerie Wootton. The next day, the three made first ascents of Two Wolf Mountain North and South and Akhami Peak (Japanese for wolf). Elms and Wootton attempted Lupus Spire, but were turned back by weather 60 metres from the summit of the last unclimbed peak in the area.

In early October, Chris Jensen and Roxy Ahmed made a light and fast trip into Iceberg Peak and Mount Celeste via the Carey Lakes, and there were several ascents of the Mackenzie Summit in the Mackenzie Range. In November, Phil Jackson, Matthew Lettington, Rick Marshall and Paul Cairney made a rare trip to the real Queens Peak. Finally, at the end of December, there was a spell of cold, clear weather that saw Ryan Van Horne, Marie-Lou Piché and Daniel Booy climb Mount Juliet on December 28, making probably what is the second winter ascent of another of those rarely climbed North Island peaks.

Switchback on the east face of Sutton Peak. Photo: Ryan Van Horne

The Interior

Reinhold Pussycat

Chris Weidner

FOR ME, A TRIP TO THE Bugaboos is like clicking the refresh button on my life's homepage. I feel connected to the place—the peaks and landscape are familiar. But the mountains don't care who I am. They're indifferent to the energy and love I've put into this dream of being there once again. It's a lesson in humility, and a reminder of how easy life is at home.

Simple luxuries—running water, a warm toilet seat, clean clothes—become abstract. Then, insignificant. Important stuff like holding my wife or laughing with friends gains exponential meaning. It's as if I'm bathed in clarity. Perhaps that's why I keep coming back.

Last summer, Bruce Miller and I made our fourth trip to the Bugaboos together since 2005. We shared one clear goal: to free climb Reinhold Pussycat, a 600-metre route we had established in 2006 on the west face of the Minaret. During the first ascent, we had freed all but one 40-metre pitch right in the middle, where we resorted to banging pins and pulling on gear. Later that trip we tried to free that section, but time and weather got the best of us.

We failed again in 2013 under cold, soggy conditions. This time we arrived by helicopter with loads of food and fuel, focused solely on the Pussycat.

During the first two weeks, we wrestled with where and how to free the crux section. Over the course of five different days, we deciphered a line of barely visible holds that linked crack systems.

Bruce Miller on pitch seven (5.12c) of Reinhold Pussycat. Photo: Chris Weidner

Two bolts protect this horizontal variation, called The Murder of the Impussible. The next pitch climbs a vertical seam with little to stand on and even less to grab. Both pitches feel like 5.12c.

August 26 dawned calm and clear. I should have felt relaxed being our sixth lap up the same chunk of rock, but I was more nervous than I can remember ever feeling on a climb. I think Bruce felt the same. The forecast called for cold and snow, and deep down we both knew this was our last chance of the year. The pressure was immense.

For the first time, the rock at the crux felt warm, too warm, even. Perspiration softened our fingertips, making the smallest holds feel slick. We knew the moves well, yet we hadn't led either hard pitch without falling.

Somehow, I calmed my nerves before the traverse and nailed it. Bruce did the same, but only after greasing off the half-pad edges several times and having to rest and restart the pitch. This took hours. After so much extra climbing, his successful effort was nothing short of heroic.

The second crux, a vertical seam with finicky footholds, went down first try for us both. We raced up the remaining 5.10+ and easier pitches—the last ones by headlamp—to the top of the Minaret. In the spirit of our first ascent 10 years ago, we continued to the summit of South Howser Tower via its east ridge.

We had forgotten to photocopy beta for the new rappel route, so we bumbled around on top for ages searching, shivering. After a few false starts, we settled for the old north face rappels. It's amazing how time can fly in the mountains—before we touched the glacier, there was light

again in the east. Back at camp, in the East Creek Basin, our watch told us the journey had taken 26 hours, 20 minutes.

Freeing Reinhold Pussycat was a 10-year process for Bruce and me. It challenged us in a way that, I think, made us better climbers. And perhaps—if even for just those moments of clarity—better people.

Summary

Reinhold Pussycat (V 5.12c, 13 pitches, 600m), The Minaret, south face of South Howser Tower, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FFA: Bruce Miller, Chris Weidner, August 26-27, 2015.

Chris Weidner redpoints pitch eight (5.12c) of Reinhold Pussycat. Photo: Bruce Miller

On the Rocks, Faaken

Jon Gullett

EVERY YEAR, THE TORONTO SECTION OF the ACC holds a summer mountaineering camp, and 2015 was no different. During the last week of July, Rafael Kolodiezjyck, Stefan Kloppenborg, 18 other Toronto Section members and I flew into Sorcerer Lodge in the heart of the Iconoclast group of the Selkirk Mountains near Golden, British Columbia. The 2015 camp was hosted by Tannis Dakin and Steve Conger, operators of Sorcerer Lodge. Sorcerer is surrounded by stunning peaks and glaciers, the largest of which is the 3,236-metre tall Iconoclast Mountain. Rafael, Stefan and I had hoped to climb Iconoclast during the week via the snow and ice of the North Face Direct route (PD+). The three of us were stoked to have a "long day," with the round trip from lodge to summit and back reportedly taking approximately 17 hours.

The week began with less-than-ideal weather with rain and low-level clouds for the first few days; however, the forecast predicted a clearing trend by Wednesday and sunny after that. We decided that if this held true, Thursday would be our day. On Tuesday, we chose to hike back towards Iconoclast and climb a smaller peak, locally known as the Isle of Skye. This would be a fun objective and also allow us to do some recon and scope out the approach to, and conditions of, the Iconoclast glacier, which was our planned approach for the north face. While crossing the outflow creek of Ventigo Lake south of Iconoclast Mountain, a beautiful couloir bisecting the mountain's steep south face, made several appearances through the drifting clouds. The couloir looked to be a stellar line and appeared to run directly up to the summit ridge. That evening back at the lodge, I enquired about the couloir with Steve, who was also the lodge custodian for the week. To my surprise he told us that it was unclimbed. I could hardly believe it. He said that over the years, many had talked about the line but none had tried it.

This conversation got me thinking and I started campaigning to Raf and Stefan to change our plans and try the couloir. The clincher came on Wednesday evening when someone else in camp had showed us a photo of the south face they had taken earlier that day. The photo clearly showed the snow in the couloir running virtually uninterrupted to the summit ridge. The route looked as though it would be primarily snow and ice with three short rock steps to bypass two bergschrunds lower down and a gap in the snow at approximately mid-height. It didn't take much convincing, after all we would likely be able to blast up the upper snow pitches and be on the summit ridge in no time. With that, the three of us decided to try for the first ascent. We packed our gear after dinner that evening and would be out the door at 3 a.m.

We awoke at 2 a.m. and in an hour were on our way under a brilliant starry sky. A nearly full moon helped light our way on the approach. We made good time and were racking up at the base of the route by 6 a.m. We brought three pickets, nine screws, four cams, six pitons and a single set of nuts. From the snow cone at the base of the couloir the line looked absolutely captivating and we were giddy with anticipation. We still couldn't believe it was unclimbed. Stefan jumped at the first block of leads as they were to contain the "short" rock sections, and I was happy to oblige. After all, he had the most trad-climbing experience, while I was the steep snow and ice guy. As we front-pointed up the frozen snow cone towards the first 'schrund, we all naively remarked about how short the cone appeared. Foreshortening always has a way of tricking you. Not only was the snow cone far bigger than it looked, but the bergschrund was equally enormous. Luckily, there was a solid bridge on the left side that gave us safe passage and allowed us to avoid climbing down into and out of the massive slot.

We were not as fortunate with the second 'schrund. Once inside of it, Stefan was able to find passage and decent gear in the rock on the left. This

led up to a really cool arching tunnel through the ice on the upper left side of the 'schrund, then back onto the rock, and eventually out onto the snow of the couloir proper. A short pitch of snow brought us to a third bergschrund that had not been visible from the base or in any of the photos we had seen. This slot was not as wide as the previous two, but was very deep with steeply overhanging walls. There was a bridge; however, it spanned the widest portion and was only 40 centimetres thick. We briefly contemplated trying to cross it, but by now the morning sun was beginning to flood into the couloir and the snow was becoming decidedly less frozen. So back out left onto the rock of the south face it was. This rock pitch brought us up and back out onto the snow once again, and now it was my turn on the sharp end. We decided to stay on the snow as much as possible but hug the left-hand side in order to place what little rock gear we had and protect the steepening and softening snow.

On the Rocks, Faaken, on the south face of Iconoclast Mountain. Photo: Rafael Kolodiezjyck

After a couple of pitches, we arrived at what we believed would be the crux—the rock step that we had seen from below. I climbed higher and thankfully was able to get a good piton in before I made the moves, which went at about M4 or M5. I built an anchor and began to bring the lads up. That's when we heard it. At first it sounded like a commercial jet flying low overhead. I looked up, but all I could see was empty cobalt blue sky. The roar was getting much louder, and as I looked up and right, I saw the slide—a loose, wet slide triggered by the increasing solar radiation. When Stefan and Raf joined me at the belay, we discussed our options. From our location, it was impossible to see exactly where the slide had occurred. Our original plan of climbing the snow in the upper portion of the couloir was out of the question. It was now around noon and the brilliant sunshine had turned the snow and what little ice there was into a bottomless isothermal mush. Our options were to retreat with our tail between our legs, or head up the rock of the south face direct instead. We agreed that climbing the rock above us—even with our limited amount of rock gear—was far more appealing than the potentially complicated combination of downclimbing and rappelling it would take to get us down. We committed upwards.

Stefan valiantly took the lead again and began weaving his way upward. One pitch rolled into the next as we inched our way up the face. Over the course of the afternoon, we witnessed three more wet avalanches pour down the centre of the couloir from the relative safety of the south face. Mid-afternoon we received a call on the radio from Steve back at the lodge. He had been checking our progress through his binoculars and was surprised that he hadn't seen us front-pointing our way up the snow in the upper couloir by now. We explained the snow conditions we had experienced

and informed him that we decided to "turn it into a rock climb instead." He wished us luck and said he would check back with us in a while. Although we appeared to be moving slowly, Stefan was doing an awesome job leading and route finding our way up the previously unclimbed face. This was particularly true given our modest amount of rock gear. We were now down to four pitons, thanks to my butter fingers. Another five pitches of 4th- and easy 5th-class climbing brought us to a steep snow field high on the face.

By that point, the sun had begun to sink behind the mountain and the snow was starting to firm back up. Around 6 p.m., Steve radioed back and said he could see us on the snow field through his binos. Over the course of the day, the scale of the face had proved to be quite deceiving and the ridge crest barely looked any closer. We took this opportunity to ask Steve approximately how many pitches he thought we were from the ridge. His answer of "six or seven" made it apparent that we would be topping out in the dark. In the fading light, we could see our intended line and a steep corner system that would put us on the ridge not far from the summit itself.

The final pitches would prove to be the steepest and most technical, and contained some of the loosest rock. We figured that the final pitches went at around 5.7, although after being on the move for nearly 20 hours, they felt harder. Finally, at around 11 p.m., Stefan built the last anchor and began to bring us up. Through the beam of my head lamp, I removed the final cam and joined Stefan and Raf on top of the ridge. Exhausted but happy, we high-fived and celebrated on our perch with the south face falling steeply into the night on one side, and the snow and ice of the north face disappearing into the darkness on the other. We quickly radioed back to the lodge to let our wives, and anyone else who was still awake, know we were safely off the south face, and that we would be on the summit soon.

Raf took the sharp end and led us up the final snow slopes to the summit proper. It was a couple of minutes past midnight when we reached the summit, and by now, the full moon was high in the sky. The sight of seemingly endless snow-capped peaks and ridges stretching out as far as the eye could see illuminated in the sliver, iridescent moonlight was spectacular, and I know it will be forever burned into our memories. We took a short break on top to soak in the views and eat, as we realised we hadn't eaten much more than a few handfuls of trail mix and some candies in the past 21 hours.

We then began our descent down the northwest ridge. Fortunately for us, another party from our camp had ascended the northwest ridge earlier that day, and we took full advantage of the few rap stations they had left behind. We reached the glacier a few hours later and were able to follow the previous party's tracks, which made route finding through the crevasses in our exhausted state much easier. We were at the toe of the glacier as the first rays of dawn lit the morning sky and bathed the surrounding peaks in a brilliant pink and orange alpenglow. We shed the rope, harnesses and crampons, and knew we would be back at the lodge in a couple of hours. My wife, Kim, and Raf's wife, Gosia, met us on the trail about 30 minutes from the lodge with hugs and congratulations. As soon as we saw their faces, we could tell that they were the only ones happier that we had safely climbed the route than we were. By 8 a.m. we were back in the lodge and enjoying a celebratory pint. After being on the move for nearly 29 hours, those were arguably the sweetest-tasting beers of the entire summer.

We called our route On the Rocks, Faaken. The name pays homage to the local tradition of naming the smaller peaks and ski descents in that area after whiskey (and Scotch, in particular). For those of you who don't know Rafael and are wondering about the word *faaken*, he insists (at least to his young daughters) that it's not a curse word, hence the spelling. I jokingly suggest that it must be an obscure Polish version of the Canadian phrase *eh*.

Summary

On the Rocks, Faaken (AD 5.7, 600m), south face, Iconoclast Mountain, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Jon Gullet, Stefan Kloppenborg, Rafael Kolodiezjyck, July 30-31, 2015.

It Is What It Is

Takeshi Tani

Toshiyuki Yamada heads into the upper crux on It Is What It Is on South Howser Tower. Photo: Takeshi Tani

BOTH THE BEST AND WORST PART of attempting new lines are actually the exact same thing: not having any information. When I try new routes, I am constantly asking myself, should we continue, should we retreat, will I be able to find a spot for protection or even an anchor? Yet, cleaning snow or ice out of the cracks and finding a good place for my tools or gear requires creativity, and that is what always excites me.

After a three-hour approach, Toshiyuki Yamada and I landed at the Kain Hut in the Bugaboos in mid-October. Initially, we had planned to attempt Infinite Patience on Mount Robson, but based on the weather forecast at the time and recent conditions of the area, we agreed to change the plan. I was so thrilled to be able to try the alpine climbing in the Bugaboos area in October, especially since the winter climbing season in Japan is usually December to March.

I was eager to climb The Big Hose (D+ 5.9 M5 WI4) on South Howser Tower, which was first climbed solo in June 1978 by Jon Krakauer of *Into Thin Air* fame. As we approached the Howser massif, we scoped an obvious ice line on the left side of the northeast face. It pulled at our eyes, sending our hearts into longing for a possible new route.

After climbing The Big Hose, we left our gear at the base of the face and returned to the Kain Hut. That night, we checked the guidebook. We figured that even though it was a very obvious line, it might actually not have been climbed before, but that detail didn't really matter to us. The fact was that the wall was beautiful and looked too tempting. We just wanted to try to climb the line, regardless.

We left the hut at 4 a.m. and retraced our steps back to the South Howser under darkness. After finding an aesthetic line through the bergschrund, I climbed an M4+ chimney for 60 metres, followed by a shorter ice pitch. I placed a combination of Tricams and nuts in a crack and brought Toshiyuki up underneath what looked to be the crux. The condition of the ice was bad. It seemed really thin, and the protection looked very poor for the first 10 metres. We spent almost 30 minutes at that spot discussing whether or not to continue. Finally, we decided to go for it.

Toshiyuki figured it out, finding the best route to get into the right-facing corner and the snowy ledge above. Above there, he easily made his way up after slotting some solid protection. Beyond the crux, we had a 60-metre M5 that led to the summit snow slope and one more pitch of easy climbing to the top. Upon returning home and doing some research, we discovered that we had, indeed, climbed a new route. This route was completed in alpine style and without any bolts; 14-hour return trip from hut to hut.

Summary

It Is What It Is (D+ M5 WI4R, 320m), northeast face, South Howser Tower, Bugaboos. FA: Takeshi Tani, Toshiyuki Yamada, October 16, 2015.

The northeast face of South Howser Tower:
(1) It Is What It Is
(2) Ethereal
(3) Perma Grin
(4) The Big Hose
Photo: Jen Olson

The Middle Child

Tim McAllister

PAT O'SULLIVAN AND I HIKED INTO the Bugaboos in early October 2015 to attempt a new ice route on South Howser Tower, but we felt the Bugaboo-Snowpatch Col was too dangerous to ascend with the unseasonably warm conditions. If it wasn't for the copper needles from the alpine larches carpeting the heather, it could easily have been early September.

Plan B unfolded as we went for a hike up onto the Crescent Glacier to scope a faint buttress on the north face of Son of Snowpatch Spire. Earlier in July, I was forced to hunker under a van-sized boulder, an attempt to stay dry in the slashing rain. From there, I had a perfect view of Son of Snowpatch and thought this buttress might have some potential.

A couple of pitches of 40-degree hard ice (we had technical crampons and Nomics) brought us to the moat where we assessed our options. Above, soared splitter white cracks that had freshly been revealed from the recent melting of thousands of years of glacial ice. We settled on an obvious line out left, one that looked most probable, that started with a traverse left into perfect finger locks. It seemed too good to be true as good gear and fun climbing unfolded. The crux was pulling into a superb shallow corner crack with grainy smears out right. Sharp finger locks to a small roof with solid

The Middle Child on Son of Snowpatch Spire. Photo: Tim McAllister

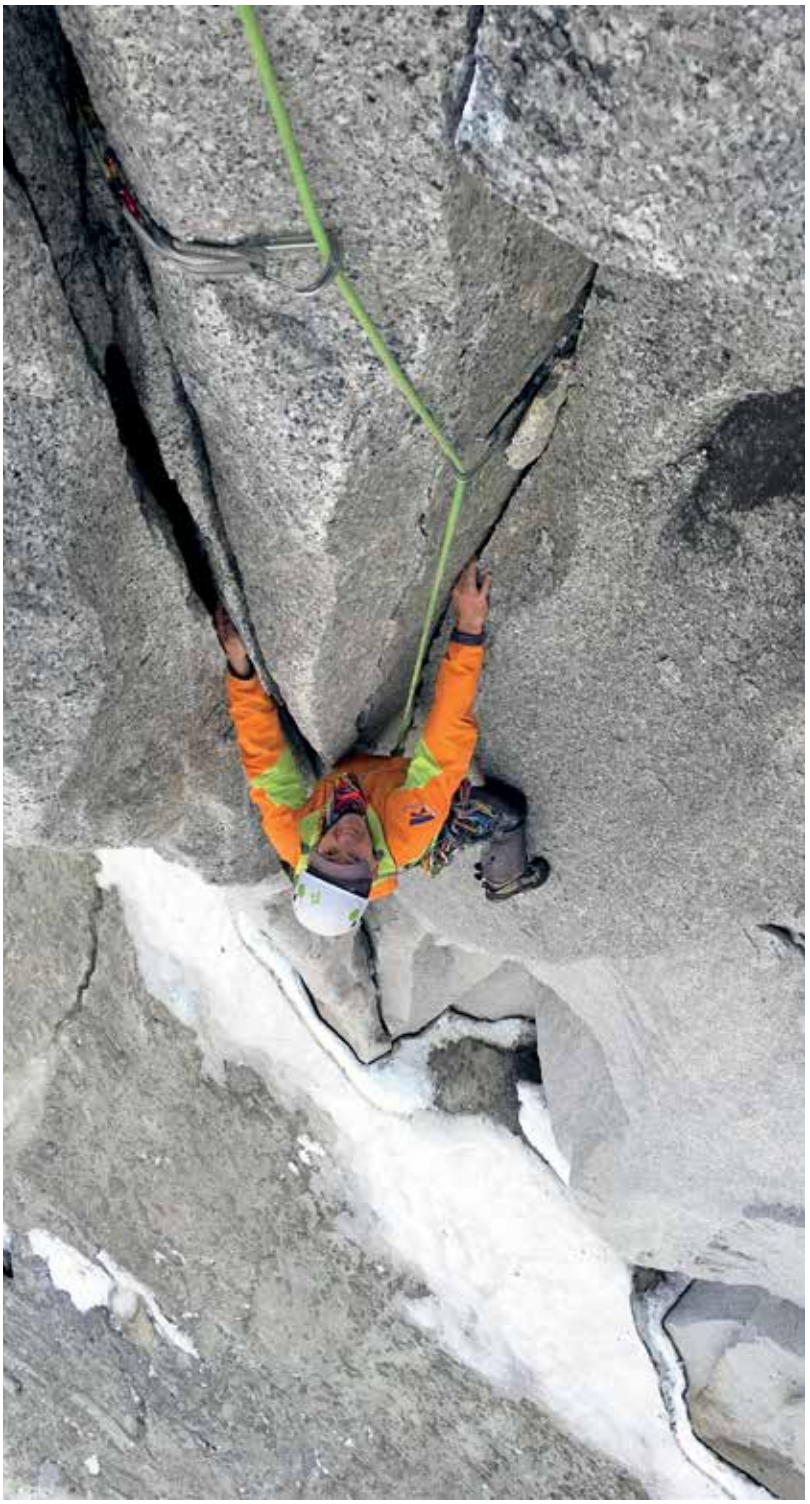
pro took me to a hanging belay. The second pitch followed splitter white granite up and left to where it made sense to change crack systems, ending at a belay below a right-arcing off-width. Slinging a chockstone, I hoped that the crack wasn't too wide for the #3 Camalot we had brought. It was, but luckily a thin eyebrow of a crack just above accepted some wires and allowed quick progress to an interesting couple of face moves pulling on marginal flakes. A large ledge greeted me, and I brought Pat up.

At times when climbing new terrain in the alpine, I find that the route finding is stressful and the fear of unplanned bivies or the evaluation of inefficient time usage constantly nags at me. That wasn't the case at all this time as the path beautifully and logically unfolded. We were having classic type-one fun, and we were the only people in the Bugaboos. It also helped that we could see the tarn-green roof of the hospitable Kain Hut. The next two pitches were less fun as they had a bit of snow and followed lower-angle terrain in a groove that brought us to a prow where a large block was slung. Sensing the summit was close, I cast off up and right to a big ledge below a short headwall. A ramp led to a steep layback where I guiltily plucked moss out of the crack to place gear and hand jams. A short off-width finished the final pitch, and I built an anchor by equalizing some large blocks. In short order, Pat and I scrambled the last 10 metres to the summit and savoured a peaceful few moments before setting the first rappel.

We built a single-rope rap line right of the route with some pins and fixed nuts (five to six 30- to 35-metre rappels). We called our route The Middle Child, because hundreds of climbers have walked right by ignoring this surprisingly fun line.

Summary

The Middle Child (5.11b, 300m, 8 pitches), north face, Son of Snowpatch Spire, Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains. FA: Tim McAllister, Pat O'Sullivan, October 2, 2015.



Pat O'Sullivan on the first pitch of The Middle Child. Photo: Tim McAllister

Hot Hot Heat

Stephen Senecal

THE LAST WEEK OF JUNE PROVED to be a hot one in the Kootenays. Daytimes highs in the 40s had us seeking shady alpine walls, and the Valhallas were calling. Kelsey drove up from Sandpoint, Idaho, and we motored up to the sandy bivy at the base of Gimli and setup our alpine shanty. Gimli is a 360-degree alpine provider, and we knew there was lots of potential for new lines on the east face. One established route exists there—Rumble in the Jungle (5.10, Shute-Croston)—and word is, it's an adventure.

We crossed our fingers, left the bolt kit at camp and motored up to the base with a double rack and handful of pins. My scissors emerged victorious on the ro-sham-bo toss, so I gallantly started up the glacier-polished slabs that signalled the beginning of our route. Only 15 metres up, sketching between thin cracks, pawing on crystal pebbles and wishing I was on top-rope, I looked over to see one of the famous Gimli goats edging up the slab 10 metres to my right. I swear I was climbing 5.9. Where did this damn goat come from looking all casual, licking lichen and batting his cute eyes at me?

The goat took off to find some salty morsels closer to camp and we carried on, changing corners and the odd short splitter. It was classic fun climbing up featured Valhalla rock, great cracks and flakes and chickenhead nubbins. We weren't the only ones beating the heat that day. As we progressed higher up the wall, whoops of joy and grunts of effort could be heard up valley. Two bright specks were visible on Valhalla Gold, a beautiful new 5.12 line on the south face of Gimli. It felt good to have some company, and we let out a Viking holler to cheer them through the crux.

Straightforward route finding had us at the top of pitch six and a bit stumped. The terrain gets steep and roofy and the cracks close up. I aimed for a line of short roofs and was quickly spat off and hanging on the rope wondering where next. A line of weakness and small ledges led left to a corner that led to the top-out. The rarely placed #5 cam went in a metre off the belay, and some airy and scary moves were made out left to rejoin a corner and easier ground to the top. We joined the top of the classic south-ridge route at the end of its last pitch, wandered the ridge for a few hundred metres and indulged in a beautiful summit lounge. Certainly a good way to beat the valley heat—cranking and laughing with friends in the alpine.

Summary

Forty in June (5.10c, 220m, 6 pitches), east face, Mt. Gimli, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: Kelsey Brasseur, Stephen Senecal, June 27, 2015.

Gear: Double rack to #2 Camalot plus one each #3 to #5. Gear belays. One stuck nut, but otherwise no fixed gear on the route.

P1: 5.8, 45m. Climb thin corner cracks to a ledge beside a tree (small gear).

P2: 5.7, 40m. Trend left over broken terrain into a right-facing corner. Belay 10 metres up the corner in small alcove at a good stance.

P3: 5.9, 35m. Continue up over tiered ledges and into a steep S-shaped crack that begins as fingers then widens to hands. Belay partway up the hand crack on a small ledge.

P4: 5.10a, 35m. Pull through a bulge above belay and gain a ledge. Traverse the ledge to the right below a steep white wall for 10 metres. Climb up blocky terrain to a nice layback crack, finishing on a big ledge belay.

P5: 5.10a, 20m. Climb a steep crack above through a few bulges, clipping a fixed nut on the way. Pull a final bulge onto a sloping ledge to belay.

P6: 5.10c, 20m. Head left from belay, hand traversing with poor feet. A #5 Camalot protects these opening moves. Mantel onto a small platform and head up the corner above. Traverse back right and pull through some steep sections to Gimli's south ridge.

Hot Hot Heat on the east face of Mount Gimli. Photo: Stephen Senecal

Welcome to Valhalla

David Lussier

SUMMER 2015 WAS HOT AND DRY in southeastern B.C., and the West Kootenay were no exceptions. There were several weeks in July and August where the valley daytime highs reached well into the high 30s. This contributed to a very active wildfire season—smoke was present in many valleys and local mountain areas. Escaping the heat for the cooler mountain air was refreshing and was the thing to do; however, the mosquitos seemed to think the same! The bug season in the mountains was extensive, even way up on alpine rock walls.

The combination of the heat and dry conditions had a big impact on the snow cover and rockfall frequency in the Valhallas. Many of the already-small pocket glaciers lost significant volume during the summer. Also, normally snow-covered areas became bare sooner, sometimes exposing unstable rocky terrain. A large rockfall on the north end of the west face of Gimli occurred during the first week of August. Luckily, the event happened at night and no one was involved. The segment of rock that fell was about 100 metres wide, 80 metres high and five to 15 metres thick. A 100-metre section of the Gimli Col trail was obliterated and will remain unstable for some time. Surprisingly, the only climbing route affected by this rockfall was the northwest ridge of Gimli (aka Strings of Diamonds). The first three pitches of the modern start to this popular moderate are now missing; however, the original start appears to be unaffected. This option begins at the Gimli Col and climbs the north side of the northwest ridge via two pitches of 5.7, a few metres left (east) of the ridge crest.

The Offerings on the southwest face of the Bastion on Asgard Peak. Photo: David Lussier

As part of the Valhalla guidebook project, I visited the area several times during the summer with various climbing friends and groups. Part of these visits were dedicated to documenting specific existing routes, as well as exploring new ones on various peaks, including Dag, Gimli, Asgard, Wolf's Ear, Prestly and Midgard. The guidebook is coming along and the tentative release date is for spring 2017.

The highlight for me was the complete north ridge of Little Dag. When viewed from Mulvey Basin, this route follows the entire northern skyline of the formation, tackling the large buttress that extends below the main north ridge of Little Dag. The lower buttress is split by a long vertical gully system, which in turn forms two separate shoulders. From the starting point to where it meets the original route, this direct start follows a line near the crest of the lower shoulder east of the gully feature. We started on a flat grassy ledge in the centre of a low-angled slabby wall about 100 metres east of the gully. The first 150 metres of vertical boasts a mixture of vegetated cracks on clean slabs and treed ledges with huckleberry bushes. There are many options here with some run-out sections; however, the climbing—or sliming, as we dubbed it—is mostly 5.6 to 5.7. Between 1,920 and 2,200 metres, the vegetation thins out and rock quality improves, offering slightly increased difficulties in the 5.7 to 5.8 range leading to a good bivy ledge at 2,200 metres.

Above the bivy, the ridge becomes more defined and features several steep towers. We climbed easy slabs on the east side of a steep overhanging tower for a few pitches. We gained the ridge proper at 2,300 metres below the second tower encountered. This is where the original route meets the ridge from the west side. Bypassing all the difficulties on the right side of the ridge crest, we continued along the original route to the summit. The positions, exposure and climbing are exceptional. The upper part of the route was first climbed in 1984 and rated 5.8; however, it will easily get a 5.9 grade by most modern alpine climbers.

The Huckleberry Start to the complete north ridge of Little Dag.
Photo: David Lussier

Summary

Huckleberry Start (TD+ 5.9, 950m (520m new)), complete north ridge, Little Dag. FA: Vince Hempsall, David Lussier, July 28-29, 2015.

West Ridge (AD- 5.6, 350m), Prestly Peak West (Main Summit). FRA: David Lussier, Douglas Noblet, July 23, 2015.

East Ridge (AD- 5.9, 100m,) Prestly Peak Centre. FA: David Lussier, Douglas Noblet, July 24, 2015.

Upper South Buttress (AD 5.9, 300m), Midgard Peak: FA: Steve Ogle, Cam Shute, Troy Swanson, August 16, 2015.

Vince Hempsall on pitch two of The Offerings, with Mount Gimli in the background.
Photo: David Lussier

Harvest Moon (D- 5.10, 200m), south face, East Wolf's Ear. FA: Vince Hempsall, David Lussier, June 26, 2015.

P1: 5.6, 40m. The route starts 15 metres left (west) of the route Just Henry. Climb left-trending slabby cracks to a sling anchor on a broad grassy ledge below a large roof.

P2: 5.7, 40m. Move right about 10 metres on the ledge and climb flakes and a shallow corner above, just right of large roof. Continue up trending left and belay on a slabby ledge beside a few loose blocks.

P3-4. 5.9, 65m. Continue along left-trending slabby cracks with sections of loose rocks to the base of the main corner on the upper south face.

P5: 5.10c, 30m. Climb the thin, beautiful right-facing corner, passing two fixed pitons to a good ledge above.

P6: 5.9, 40m. Continue up wide cracks and a short squeeze chimney on good rock to a nice ledge below final headwall.

P7: 5.8, 45m. There are a few very nice options from here. We climbed a series of left-trending, right-facing corners with good cracks leading to lower-angle terrain above and the summit.

The Offerings (D- 5.10d, 120m), southwest face, the Bastion, Asgard Peak. FA: Vince Hempsall, David Lussier, June 28, 2015.

P1: 5.10d, 35m. Climb the sustained left-facing corner, passing three overhangs with good cracks and gear. Belay on a sloping stance by a small tree.

P2: 5.8R, 30m. Step right around a steep wall and gain a slab. Climb gingerly with thin gear up and right on good chickenheads and sloping ledges to a thin left-slanting crack. Follow this crack with thin, run-out gear for 10 metres and continue laybacking on flakes to a belay stance in a shallow groove.

P3: 5.9, 30m. Continue up the wider crack above with layback flakes and chickenheads on good rock and gear to the base of the final left-facing corner.

P4: 5.10a, 30m. Climb the left-facing corner to the top of the Bastion. From here, follow the narrow crest of the Bastion for a 100 metres. Descend to the east and back to the base via the southeast slopes of Asgard.

2015 Stockdale GMC

Crystal Como

UNSURPRISINGLY, IT WAS another exciting GMC season with the Stockdale group being a new location. Situated just south of Bugaboo Provincial Park and north of Jumbo Pass, base camp was situated on a primarily east aspect near rock slabs, glaciers and snow slopes, at an elevation of 2,425 metres, becoming one of the highest GMC base camps to date. The location allowed access to several glaciated peaks, plus to a number of smaller objectives. Peaks of note in the Stockdale group are Eyebrow, Camp and Birthday. Birthday Peak has special significance due to the 1915 first ascent by A.H MacCarthy, E.L. MacCarthy and Conrad Kain.

Is it the variety of climbing, the amazing meals and the familiar faces that keep bringing people back for more? Maybe it's the exploration of a new area, the remoteness, or the history of the GMC? I could probably go on and on with the positive comments we received from everyone. It's quite clear that folks were having a great time up there. Stockdale was well attended with 144 participants over five weeks. This matches total participant numbers with 2010 Battle Brook. At least 30 per cent of folks who were at the 2015 camp have attended a GMC in the past, with the majority coming from B.C., Alberta and Ontario. In addition, it was great to see a variety of age groups represented, with 28 per cent being 35 years and younger, 44 per cent aged 35 to 60 years old, and 28 per cent over 60 years old.

The highest elevation objective of 2015 GMC was Eyebrow Peak (3,330 metres), providing basic glacier and snow travel with a spectacular ridge walk to its 11,001-foot summit—thus, joining the eleven-thousander group with a mere foot in height to spare. Camp Peak (3,075 metres), located approximately 2.5 kilometres east-northeast of Eyebrow Peak, was of the longer daytrips from base camp and involved complicated glacier and snow travel. Birthday Peak (3,187 metres), approximately two kilometres northwest of Eyebrow, was ascended via snow slopes on its south face. The three summits of Tricorn Peak (3,136 metres) provided straightforward 3rd-class scrambling northeast of base camp. Other outings included Double Vision (2,970 metres) and Nudge Wink (2,880 metres), both with basic snow and glacier approaches and rock ridges to their respective summits.

Contemplating Eyebrow Peak during the 2015 Stockdale GMC.
Photo: Zac Robinson

The Rockies

Tainted Love

Raphael Slawinski

NOVEMBER 2014. IAN WELSTED and I were gunning for The Hole, a natural arch in the middle of the north face of Mount Lawrence Grassi, a prominent yet obscure wall above Canmore [*CAJ*, 2015, p. 14]. We had missed the break leading up to it and instead found ourselves below The Gash. The thin ice dribbling out of the giant chimney looked innocent enough. It was only when I was halfway up the 20-metre flow, picks wobbling in shallow placements, that I began to think I might have strayed over the line separating scrambling from soloing. Pulling onto a steep snow ledge, I spied faded cord connecting two bolts— relics of previous attempts on The Gash. We hadn't come for The Gash. Tying into the rope, we took off on a rising traverse in search of The Hole.

December 2014. The Hole route ended up being fun in an alpine kind of way, but the sport climber in me was drawn to the project on the wall. A couple of weeks later, Ian and I, joined by the young Sam Eastman, slogged back up to The Gash. This time, instead of traversing away from the plumb line, we continued straight up. Waterworn rock, frozen moss, unconsolidated snow—and more old bolts. After a couple of pitches, they ran out. A slabby rock step, a short snowfield, and we entered the guts of The Gash. With Ian and Sam bundled up at the belay, I started up the overhanging back wall. Hooking frozen choss, hanging from tools, drilling bolts—an altogether too familiar anything-goes dance to get up the pitch.

Raphael Slawinski on the crux (pitch 5) of Tainted Love. Photo: Colin Simon

In the grey light of dawn, the wind washed over the bare scree on the ridge like a river. "Reminds me of the north side of Everest," Steve Swenson shouted into my ear. "Not so cold maybe, but feels cold with the wind." Ian, always more of an alpinist than a sport climber, declared himself uninterested in my newest construction project. Instead, I convinced Steve and Juan Henriquez that shivering for hours at a belay, while I aided and bolted, would be a fun way to spend a dark December day. I forgot to mention the belay would barely be sheltered from all the rocks I would trundle. After all, who would've expected the shattered, overhanging fault line that had become the crux pitch to have any loose rock?

Ian might've lost interest in The Gash, but he stoked my obsession with it. "Pete's from the UK, working at a climbing shop in town. He couldn't believe when I told him The Gash was unclimbed, and he's thinking of heading up to check it out." Once I got over feeling possessive about my project, Pete Holder and I made plans for Friday. The day was forecast to be cold, but I was leaving for Hawaii on Sunday and figured I would have plenty of time to warm up there. Racing fading daylight, I pulled on bolts to my previous high point. Then, with the terrain ahead merely vertical, I headed up, armed only with cams and pins. Standing below a rock outcrop in the snow gully above, I pulled up the drill and made an anchor. On the way down, I cleaned my rattly pins and drilled bolts. Next time, I wanted gear that would hold a fall.

January 2015. I fully intended to finish the job when I got back from Hawaii, but weather and

conditions conspired against me. Either it was too cold, too warm, too windy or the avalanche hazard was too high. And when stars finally lined up, I had lost my motivation for drytooling choss, preferring to carry it uphill (inside my backpack as training weight) for an upcoming expedition to Everest [see p. 162]. Spring, then summer, came and went. Once again mornings dawned frosty and powdered with fresh snow.

October 2015. It was becoming clear that redpoints of my latest Echo Canyon projects would have to await the following year and, hopefully, stronger fingers. Shivering for a purpose is one thing, but shivering just to squeeze in another day of rock climbing didn't appeal. My thoughts turned to unfinished business in The Gash. I considered finishing the job in an honest manner: climbing from the bottom, hauling up an optimistic rack of gear and a realistic drill, and getting up what appeared to be the last steep pitch. Truth is, the prospect of dragging all that junk up the route only to run out of daylight, or to find that the necessary ice wasn't there yet, was too depressing. Thus it was, I came over to the dark side. One sunny fall day, Wiktor Skupinski and I scrambled to within a stone's throw of the summit of Lawrence Grassi and dropped in to bolt the last overhanging pitch on rappel. On the bright side, the trundling, with no one below, was tremendous.

November 2015. "The route is rigged, and it just needs to be sent." I thought it more likely Juan would be interested if he knew it wasn't another aiding, bolting and standing-around mission. Colin Simon was also in the Rockies from Colorado, and we had talked about going climbing. "How about this project I need to finish? Sport-mixed in the alpine, should be good fun." They were both game. For once it was a mild, windless day. The snowpack in Miner's Gully and in the couloir below the route was also reassuringly solid. Perhaps I had earned a treat after all the blustery, snowy days spent working on the route. Now all that was left was to climb it.

A few hours later, all three of us stood tethered to the station below the crux corner. I eyed the largely decorative icicles dripping from the

Tainted Love ascends the gully and overhanging headwall to the obvious notch.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski

dihedral. "I haven't really tried the moves before, so first I'll just go up a few bolts to check out the holds," I said as Juan put me on belay.

"I'll buy you a beer if you send the pitch first try," he replied. Good point, I thought, might as well try. To my surprise, a few minutes later I was searching for a seam, an edge, anything to take a tool over the overlap where the wall kicked back to vertical. Blindly finding a hold, I released the bottom tool. If I fell off here, they would hear about it down in Canmore. But the hold was good. Slowly, carefully, I hooked and torqued my way up the last few metres. While I belayed my friends up, I strapped the headlamp to my helmet. We would be finishing the route properly—in the dark.

Summary

Tainted Love (WI3 M9, 320m), north face, Mount Lawrence Grassi. FA: Juan Henriquez, Colin Simon, Raphael Slawinski, November 28, 2015 (with previous assistance from Sam Eastman, Peter Holder, Wiktor Skupinski, Steve Swenson and Ian Welsted).

Gear: 15 draws, including some double-lengths, Camalots #0.3 to #1, stubby ice screws.

Approach: Park in the Goat Creek parking lot and hike up the backside of Ha Ling to the top of Miner's Gully. You can leave gear here for the descent. Drop down the gully to where it opens up, and then traverse to skier's right (east) to below the big gash in the north face of Mount Lawrence Grassi. Slog up the gully past a small ice step (buried later in the season) to the start of the route (two to three hours).

P1: WI3 M4, 40m. Climb low-angled ice to a snow ledge. If the ice is thin, some stubbies and cams may be reassuring. Pass a two-bolt rappel station on your left and drytool up a bolt-protected corner on the right. Two-bolt belay on the left wall.

P2: M5, 40m. Climb the left-facing corner above the belay (ignore a single bolt out left from an earlier attempt). A couple of steeper moves lead to an insecure exit. Slog up snow to a two-bolt station at the top of the gully above. This pitch is all bolt protected.

P3: M3R, 40m. Step down and right from the belay (#1 Camalot placement) and climb a short groove. Clip a fixed pin in the back of the groove and commit to easy but run-out moves left and up. Slog up a small snowfield to a deep cave and a two-bolt belay on the right wall.

P4: M7, 50m. Drytool a chossy corner on the left to a steep exit. From the small ledge above, continue up a short right-facing corner. Scramble past a two-bolt rappel station on your left and climb some thin ice on the left wall to a lower-angled ramp and a two-bolt belay. Some cam placements complement the bolt protection on this pitch.

P5: M9, 30m. Step right from the belay and enter an overhanging corner. Sustained drytooling with bad feet leads to easier terrain. Continue to a snow gully and a two-bolt station on the right. This pitch is all bolt protected.

P6: Scramble up snow and easy ice for 70 metres to a two-bolt station at the base of an overhanging corner.

P7: M6, 20m. Drytool up and right below the big roof. From the groove above, step right to a two-bolt belay on a small ledge. This pitch is all bolt protected.

P8: Scramble to the top (30 metres). A two-bolt station is on the right just below the lip, but will probably be buried in snow.

Descent: Since all stations are bolted, it's possible to rappel the route. However, it's probably faster (though not completely straightforward) to descend the backside with some rappelling and downclimbing. To do so, follow the ridge west to the top of a short step. Downclimb or rappel the step on the north side from a rock thread. Scramble down to the top of a chimney and rappel it from a bolt-and-pin station on skier's left (south). Continue scrambling down, paralleling the ridgeline, then drop down a broad gully to skier's left (south). There are a couple of rappel stations on the skier's left wall of the gully (fixed wires and rock threads). It's possible to scramble down this terrain, but it would be unpleasant if it's snow-covered and/or dark. From the scree slope below the last rappel, contour back up to the top of Miner's Gully, with one last bit of downclimbing just before the col.

Bucking Horse Rider

Paul McSorley

THE FIRST TIME I LAID EYES on Mount Louis, its staggering symmetry impregnated me with a deep malaise. I was 19 years old, fresh from the flatlands, and though I didn't have the requisite skills at the time, I knew I would have to go up there and climb that thing some day. This giant finger of limestone beckoned like a cowgirl at the barn dance. Over the next few seasons, I learned about Louis' lore. Benighted epics, near-miss lightning strikes and lost parties were standard fare on this monolith that was first ascended in 1916 by visionary Austrian mountain guide Conrad Kain.

By the time I got around to climbing Kain's namesake route, Louis was more familiar but no less intimidating. In the next several years, I made it up a variety of lines, and even endured a punishing 26-hour epic of my own, helping out Eric Dumerac, who had the crazy idea to rap bolt the sheer diamond-like east face of the mountain. A few pitches below the summit, Eric was drilling, and the bit violently twisted up in his shirt and shorted-out the battery pack. With a scanty rack and no backup drill, we rappelled the blankness beneath us, reaching valley bottom the following morning. A few years later, Sonnie Trotter and Tommy Caldwell would finish the project and establish the mountain's hardest line: The Shining, at 5.13b/c.

Paul McSorley and Tony McLane on pitch eight of Bucking Horse Rider. Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

I hadn't thought much about Louis in a while since moving to the West Coast, but by chance, I was recruited by two young guns, Tony McLane and Jason Ammerlaan, for a Canadian Rockies mission. With our plan A blanketed in fresh snow, I tossed out the idea of a new line I had spied on the north side of Louis that might just link up with the super classic Homage to the Spider, a route opened by another legend of Canadian climbing, Tim Auger.

Without much to go on, we borrowed some pins from a friend in Canmore, and started towards the mountain "Squamish style" (that is, at the crack of noon). Our leisurely approach found us at the base of the northeast face just around suppertime. We scrambled the approach slopes, roping up for a few exposed pitches. Excavating a bivy took no time, and we settled in for a show of stars that the Oscars could never match.

Alpenglow proved a powerful motivator, and with the coffee finished, we started up some moderate but run-out rock—standard issue in the Rockies. Toward the end of my block, the clouds rolled in and the rain globules began their staccato on our jackets. As I finished the pitch, a Corb Lund track turned on in my head: "He's a buckin' horse rider and he likes 'em a little wilder than most…."

That song neatly summed up our situation

on this forlorn mountainside, far from home, comfort and reason. The rain's cadence picked up to a gallop and I belayed the boys to my stance. Within minutes, an electric fork pronged the neighbouring peak, Mount Fifi, and only one Mississippi passed before the boom lashed the length of 40 Mile Creek below us.

It's easy to appeal to a higher power when things are out of your control, and for a second there on the lonely flanks of Mount Louis, I bowed my head, held tight on the ropes and handed over the reins. When Tony and Jason made it to the belay, we pulled out the bivy tarp and hunkered down. Morale was better under the fly, and within an hour, things were looking up.

The beauty of limestone is that not only does it dry quickly because of its porousness, but its texture makes it climbable even when wet. Jason started up the next block with his trademark positivity and got us up a couple of more pitches before we had to whip out the tarp again. The pulses of rain became weaker and we soon found ourselves below the crux pitch. Since it was Tony's birthday, the honour was all his.

Tony scrapped his way up the 5.11 enduro corner and pumped out within a couple of metres of the send. We all wanted a free ascent, but didn't want to be up on this giant lightning rod any longer than necessary, so we continued up a few more pitches to link with the infamous Medieval Alleyway at the top of Homage to the Spider.

Only a couple of more hours of scrambling and short pitches were needed to gain the shoulder just below the apex of the tower. Topping out on the summit was like high-fiving an old friend. I had been up there almost a dozen times and still never tired of taking a wild ride up the mountain that has daunted me since I first laid eyes on its shapely form.

Summary

Bucking Horse Rider (5.11a A0, 600m), northeast face of Mt. Louis. FA: Jason Ammerlaan, Tony McLane, Paul McSorley, July 19-20, 2015.

Paul McSorley on the first pitch of day two.
Photo: Jason Ammerlaan

Canoeing to Cuba

Maarten Van Haeren

"DO YOU WANT ANOTHER CUP OF COFFEE?" I asked my wife, as we watched the sun rise over the Bow Valley. The day before we had made our way up to the Castle Mountain hut on the Goat Plateau. Due to some unforeseen illness, we were not going to attempt our objective for the day, and were drinking coffees on the hut's western bench instead. Despite the long weekend, we had the hut to ourselves and enjoyed the solitude it offered. This particular bench offered a great view of Storm Mountain's northeast face as the sun rose to our left. Little did I know I would start my winter climbing season in the Canadian Rockies a short three months later, just across the valley.

J. Mills on pitch seven of Canoeing to Cuba. Photo: Maarten Van Haeren

After the release of David P. Jones' new alpine climbing guidebook (*Rockies Central*, 2015, Rocky Mountain Books), the colour photos and red lines had me compulsively flipping pages, looking for obvious lines remaining on the faces. After Yamada Toshiyuki and Takeshi Tani's new route on Storm Mountain [see p. 134] the previous spring, my interest had been piqued. They mentioned that they had plucked the low-hanging fruit, and spoke of climbing potential. Fortunately for me, J. Mills (my partner for the week) is a keen proponent of exploratory climbing and did not need any convincing. While I was finishing my work shift up in Nordegg, J. had scoped conditions from the road and found more ice on the upper face than usual. He had recently spent a long day above Moraine Lake with Ian Welsted, attempting a new route, but ultimately came down. Not one to shy away from the exploration either, Ian was quick to commit to a three-day adventure.

The approach trail follows a string of subalpine lakes, a well-beaten path that sees summer and winter use. We slowly gained height till an obvious re-entrant above Upper Twin Lake provides access to the base glacier of the northeast face. It looked awfully shady up there, so we rested in the sun by Upper Twin Lake before the scree bash. A relatively short hike further put us square below the base glacier. We quickly established our bivy site and hiked further to take in the northeast face. The most obvious, left-leaning gully on the wall leads to the 1989 route by Ken Wallator and Tom Thomas (V 5.9 A3, 500m), which stands unrepeated as of 2015. The team spent four days in winter on the face, battling steep rock with mixed and aid techniques on day two and three. A bold effort that would be a formidable ascent today, let alone 27 years ago. From the start of this gully, another feature leads up and right. Since we were intimidated by the steep rock of the

Wallator-Thomas route, we set our sights to this alternate gully that Chris Geisler and Raphael Slawinski previously soloed most of in 1999, but were turned around below the (unformed) crux pillar.

The next morning, we front-pointed up the glacier tongue and wove our way in and out of the crevasses we were moving through perpendicularly. We were pleasantly surprised to find Styrofoam névé in the lower gully, instead of the useless facets so common later in the season. Luckily, this névé stuck around throughout our day. After a short mixed step in the lower gully, we ended below a recently formed waterfall ice pitch. I gratefully took the lead for my first waterfall ice pitch of the winter season. Once beyond this, the mountain dictated we make a classic traverse right across a broad snow ledge. This put us below the final ice pitches and the most engaging climbing on the route. Once below the first, barely touching ice pitch, Ian racked up and set off towards the thin curtain. The way the ice and rock was shaped meant that Ian had to wrap around the pillar, starting on the left, move behind it then up and right. The initial thin moves required some piton craft (fixed pin), followed by marginal gear but good hooks behind blocky limestone. As Ian was emerging from behind the pillar, we could see his red coat shining through, giving us a good idea of exactly how thin this ice sheet was.

Once beyond the crux pitch, several pleasant and moderate ice and mixed pitches brought us to a final cornice and the scree slope on the southwest side. The mandatory summit visit was made, and we returned to our bags to start our descent down the North Ridge. *Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies* is decidedly vague regarding this descent, so we were happy to still have some daylight to work with. One quick rappel down the final headwall of the North Ridge saw us downclimbing and scrambling to an obvious steep wall further down the ridge. From here, we traversed and scrambled down scree ledges, touching down on the glacier just as the sun set. We retraced our tracks through the crevasses and returned to our camp after 13 hours on the go.

The route name was inspired by the fact that the second Trudeau entered office in Ottawa shortly before our climb. His father, the late Pierre Trudeau, led Canada from 1968 to 1984 as its prime minister (with one brief interruption). Before taking up office, Pierre Trudeau attempted to paddle to Cuba (starting in Key West, Florida) to meet with Fidel Castro, who was working in the plantation fields there. While Pierre never made it, we felt this attempt embodied the Canadian spirit of exploration and willingness to push the envelop despite naysayers. Since Trudeau Senior is widely regarded as a truly Canadian prime minister, we found this name appropriate given the recent changes to our federal politics.

This aspect of Storm Mountain holds more potential for climbing and exploration, and will hopefully see more attention throughout the next decade. A strong team might be able to make a repeat (and possibly free) ascent of the Wallator-Thomas, or start exploring some of the other lines available on this face. We hope this is an inspiration for others to pursue climbing in this wild place.

Summary

Canoeing to Cuba (IV, M6 WI5, 350m), northeast face, Storm Mountain. FA: J. Mills, Maarten Van Haeren, Ian Welsted, October 28, 2015.

The northeast face of Storm Mountain:
(1) Wallator-Thomas
(2) Canoeing to Cuba
(3) Kogarashi
Photo: Maarten Van Haeren

Kogarashi

Takeshi Tani

Last spring, my climbing partner and I spent a month alpine climbing in the Canadian Rockies, and we finished things off with a new route on the northeast face of Storm Mountain, which looms above the Trans Canada Highway at Castle Junction.

We had already had a very successful trip with both the north face of Mount Temple and The Wild Thing on Mount Chephren under our belts. Our original hope was Infinite Patience on the Emperor Face of Mount Robson, but the tight calendar and less-than-ideal weather forecast had us looking for something closer to the road. Storm Mountain looked great from the highway and offered the added bonus of only having one route on its imposing northeast face. It is impossible to not notice its intriguing gully lines when driving from Canmore to Lake Louise. While waiting for good weather for our Temple attempt, I skied in to check out the possibility of a new route on the face.

Toshiyuki Yamada on a fun ice pitch on Kogarashi. Photo: Takeshi Tani

On May 17 at 4 a.m., we left our camp at Lower Twin Lake and approached up to the amphitheatre-like face. Much snow and ice had melted since my last scouting mission, thus making conditions challenging.

At the base of the wall, while facing the mountain, we discussed options with each other. The prominent ice pillar in the middle gully that had initially enticed me was gone, and then, just as we were about to give up, we saw an interesting ice line on the right side of the face. There was barely enough ice in a wide gully. Despite the lack of gear, the actual climbing was comfortable and fun, with a maximum steepness of 80 to 85 degrees.

We had thought that the crux would be this middle ice portion, but it ended up being the loose Rockies' limestone above the ice pillar. After six hours of climbing, we finally broke through the tricky cornice to the ridge. Looking out from the top of Storm Mountain, the immense distances of the Canadian Rockies inspired us with the best potential for new lines and engaging adventures.

We thought that this obvious line might have already been climbed, due to its prominent location, but I couldn't find any record of a previous ascent. In my opinion, the Canadian Rockies are definitely the best place to alpine climb. So much unclimbed terrain with no people around. We named it Kogarashi, which means "a little storm" in Japanese, because it wasn't too difficult; in fact, it was the easiest and most natural-looking line on the wall.

Summary

Kogarashi (D WI4 5.6, 350m), northeast face, Storm Mountain (3191m). FA: Takeshi Tani, Toshiyuki Yamada, May 17, 2015.

Toshiyuki Yamada on the 5.6 pitch of Kogarashi. Photo: Takeshi Tani

From Howse to Skye

Nigel Watts

WHEN I FOUND OUT THAT MY daughter was getting married to Justin Howse, I decided we would celebrate together by climbing Howse Peak. The peak was named for Justin's great-great grandfather, Joseph Howse, who traversed Howse Pass in 1809 while working for the Hudson's Bay Company. Joseph Howse was an Englishman. I am Welsh! The rivalry between the English and Welsh is legendary, both during war and on the rugby pitch. Therefore, celebrating the English ancestry of a prominent fur trader hit a nerve. However, David Thompson (a Welshman) named the pass and peak in Joseph Howse's honour; so, echoing the words of Welsh comedian Max Boyce, that's close enough to Wales for me. Marco Delesalle—ACMG mountain guide (whose family has historical connections to the Canadian mountain community), and having been my guide in the mountains for the last 10 years—was the obvious choice to guide us on this adventure arranged for the first weekend of July 2015.

As I researched the climbing record of the peak before the trip, I came to understand the historical connections in terms of climbing, cultures, friendships and traditions, and how all these are intertwined in the past and present.

In 1978, Howse Pass was designated a National Historic Site of Canada. Culturally, its importance lies with the fact that the pass was an Aboriginal transportation corridor, allowing the Ktunaxa First Nation access to the buffalo herds on the Kootenay Plains to the east of the mountains. Early 19th-century fur traders establishing trading posts in the Columbia Valley also used the pass.

Howse Peak (3,290 metres), located along the Continental Divide and bounded on the east by Mistaya River and Blaeberry River to the west, is the highest peak in the Waputik Mountains in the Canadian Rockies. The peak rises majestically for over 1,000 metres above the aquamarine-blue waters of Chephren Lake. The peak's dramatic east face is home to a number of formidable Canadian Rockies alpine and mixed routes. Two notable test pieces are M16 (VI WI7+ A2, Backes-Blanchard-House, 1999) and Howse of Cards (VI M7, WI6X, Gadd-Mahoney-Semple, 2002). Besides these two climbs, there is the more traditional alpine Northeast Buttress route first climbed in 1967 by Ken Baker, Lloyd MacKay and Don Vockeroth, a major undertaking at the time. However, Howse Peak was first climbed from Howse Pass by J. Norman Collie (along with H.E.M. Stutfield, G. M. Weed, H. Wooley and Swiss alpine guide H. Kauffmann) on August 14, 1902. Collie was a respected British mountaineer by this time, having established many first ascents in the Cuillin on the Isle of Skye. In addition, he climbed extensively in the Lake District, as well as the Alps, Lofoten Islands Norway and the Himalayas. Today, many of Collie's routes in the UK are considered classic and are climbed regularly by climbers who are eager to follow in Collie's footsteps. Collie is also credited with 21 first ascents and has named more than 30 peaks in the Canadian Rockies.

Access to the western side of Howse Peak is either from Saskatchewan River Crossing, as approached by Collie, or by following the Blaeberry River from the south. Both ways, at some point, follow the fur traders' route established in 1807 by David Thompson and a North West Company Party. Today, this historic trail (although part of the Great Divide Trail) is not maintained beyond the Glacier Lake Trail, if coming from Saskatchewan River Crossing. From the south, Howse Pass can be accessed by following the Blaeberry River Forest Service Road, just north of Golden, to the Cairnes Creek Recreation Site. However, recent flooding and washouts have severely limited driving accessibility. The road is only open to the 11.5-kilometre mark, and is washed out completely at 19.1 kilometres, necessitating travel either on foot or mountain bike.

After Collie and his party had gained access to this side of the mountain, they established a camp at Howse Pass:

"On leaving Forbes Creek, we returned down the shingle flats to the Middle Fork, ascended the valley about a mile in the direction of Howse Pass and camped in a burnt wood beside a stream flowing from the western slopes of Howse Peak. In the meanwhile, the smoke in the air had increased, and it became evident that a forest fire had broken out somewhere along the Middle Fork."

In 1902, Collie used outfitters to establish a camp at Howse Pass. We decided on a more expedited method—helicopter. The choice of either a 26.8-kilometre hike from Saskatchewan River Crossing or a 40-plus-kilometre hike up the Blaeberry River FSR would have taken too much time. After landing outside the park boundary, we hiked into the valley below the west face of Howse Peak.

Our camp was set up on the rocky moraine below a headwall of the west face of Howse Peak, giving a good view to plot out a possible route to the summit. The west side, being the dip slope, is not as intimidating as its sister east face, and the routes are easier and much less technical in nature, although should not be underestimated, as we were to find out. Besides the route established by Collie in 1902, there are two other routes on the west side described in the *Rocky Mountains of Canada South* guidebook. In 1939, E. Feuz, Jr. with Miss K. Gardiner climbed the West Glacier, and in 1958, the South Face, which follows the central buttress, was climbed by P. A. Boswell, I. Keith, A. Mason and R. deRepentigny. The three descriptions are vague, and from our vantage point, two likely options presented themselves. The first aimed to gain the hanging glacier, which loomed above the headwall and stretched back to the summit of Howse Peak. If we could circumvent the headwall and reach the glacier, this would take us all the way to summit. The goal of the second

The west face glacier of Howse Peak with the line of ascent up the northwest ridge. Photo: Nigel Watts

was to, initially, access the glacier on climber's left then access the ridge via the distinctive notch on the skyline. Both looked equally feasible from our perspective in the valley bottom.

Writing about his ascent of Howse Peak, Collie stated:

"On August 14 we started at 6 a.m. for Howse Peak, steering eastward towards a long bare-backed ridge which abutted against the W. slopes of the peak and offered a tempting line of approach thereto. After a toilsome walk through burnt woods and fallen timber, which appeared to have been levelled by a great gale blowing from the direction of Howse Pass, we emerged above the treeline and were immediately enlightened as the locality of the new fire.… The walk up the ridge, however was not such a straightforward affair as had been expected, as about halfway up we were stopped by an intersecting line of precipices, which gave us considerable trouble and afforded Hans another opportunity of proving his skill as a rock climber. On gaining the E. end of the ridge we put on the rope and began the ascent of the long slopes of névé. We had not anticipated much entertainment from this part of the walk, nor were we mistaken. The higher slopes were sufficiently unbroken to be tedious, and the snow was soft, so that we were heartily glad to reach the heavily corniced summit at 2 o'clock."

In the early morning (4:30 a.m.) dark of July 4, 2015, we crossed the moraine below the western headwall of Howse Peak. This was Justin's first alpine start and a new experience for him. As dawn broke, we stopped at the edge of the hanging glacier to ready ourselves for glacier travel. We could look westward and see the sun's first red rays hitting the sides of Mounts Forbes and Outram. Standing there looking at the clear blue sky, I remembered Collie's words which portrayed a different scene, one that I was glad not to witness:

"We emerged above the treeline and were enlightened as to the locality of the new fire. About 10 miles to the N. volumes of smoke were pouring out of Glacier Lake Valley—a most unwelcome sight as a visit to that valley was next on our programme."

Once on the lower slopes of the glacier, we could view our options for our route to the summit. We eschewed the idea of the first option, the glaciated icy west face, which did not look inviting, and decided on the west-northwest rocky ridge. Angling leftwards across the glacier, we headed toward the obvious notch on the rocky skyline. At the notch, we shifted from glacier mode to short-roping. Our ascent up the northwest ridge, while not technically demanding, was physically and mentally challenging due to the dip slope of the mountain. Our initial access to the ridge from the glacier followed first a leftward-trending ledge system, covered in loose rocks, which led to a steep rock band split by a loose crumbling cleft/chimney. Above, we gingerly scrambled up sloping rock slabs covered with scree that was often frozen and mixed with ice. We eventually reached the knife-edge ridge after climbing two distinctive steep but short rock bands. Once on the ridge proper, we quickly attained height to reach the short but final summit icefield. By 9:30 a.m., we stood on top of Howse Peak. Upon reaching the summit, to celebrate the first known ascent of Howse Peak by a direct descendant of Joseph Howse, Justin performed a traditional offering, taught to him by an elder of the Blackfoot people. Given Justin's Metis heritage, this was the most fitting way to respect his European great-great grandfather and his Aboriginal ancestors. This offering also gave thanks to the mountain for a safe ascent and the coming descent.

From the summit the views were stunning. Westward, we could see over to the Conway Group, and to the south, Aiguille Peak, Midway Peak and Stairway Peak. Standing on the edge of the east face, we looked down on its dizzying heights to Chephren Lake more than 1,500 metres below and marvelled at the expertise of the alpinists who first climbed this face. Unfortunately, the summit register only contained a very soggy logbook and the names of previous climbers could not be discerned. Not wanting to descend the glaciated snow-covered west face, we retraced our route back to the valley bottom and our campsite. Our descent included two sections of abseiling along with downclimbing.

Over the centuries, the majestic Canadian

Rockies have witnessed human activity. First Nations, Metis, fur traders, and Europeans have brought their own unique cultures to this alpine arena. Throughout history, bonds between individuals have been kindled and grown. These connections have arisen, like new growth after forest fires, amongst new individuals at different times throughout history. First Nations and Metis travelled along Howse Pass, Joseph Howse himself crossed Howse Pass. British climbers in the early 1900s, with an alpine guide and local outfitters, climbed Howse Peak.

More than a hundred years after Collie, Marco Delesalle (mountain guide from Canmore), Justin Howse (direct descendant of Joseph Howse), and I summited Howse Peak, a contemporary group echoing history, friendship and culture of those gone before us. As I wandered around the moraine on which our tents were pitched, I thought of the people who walked the same boulder strewn ground. While Collie and his party in 1902 were probably the first Europeans to walk this moraine, perhaps Kootenay people wandered into this bowl when they travelled the ancient trail along Howse Pass. Unless hikers from the Howse Pass trail had made a diversion into this valley, we were, maybe the first people in this stunningly remote area for perhaps decades.

A few weeks later, I made my annual trip to Scotland to climb and hike with friends from high school. At 14 years old, we began climbing in the sandstone quarries lining the hillsides of the small South Wales mining community where we grew up. Over 40 years later, we still meet, working our way through the hundreds of Scottish Munroes.

On a blustery overcast day in August, we were camped opposite the famous Sligachan Hotel, a place rich in mountaineering folklore, below the famous Cuillins of Skye. Brooding, mist-covered and dark, the impressive pyramidal Sqùrr nan Gillean overlooks the Sligachan Hotel, and this peak was our objective for the day. Very unintentionally, I was once again following in the path of J. Norman Collie. Sqùrr nan Gillean is perhaps one of Cuillins finest peak, at 964 metres, and is one of the 11 Cuillin Munroes. Of the peak's three ridges, the Southeast Ridge, known as the Tourist Route, is a classic scramble and very popular amongst hikers and climbers, although the summit ridge turns back the more timid. In 1886, Collie visited Skye, and with the help of local guide John MacKenzie, climbed the easiest route (the Tourist Route) to the top of Sqùrr nan Gillean. This marked the start of Collie's fascination with the Cuillins and a lifelong friendship with John MacKenzie. Almost 130 years later, I scrambled with my boyhood friends to the top of Sqùrr nan Gillean, repeating Collie's climb. During our ascent, I thought back to the day I summited Howse Peak with Marco and Justin, and reflected on how lives, friendships and history become connected and intertwined.

The day after I had climbed to the summit of Sqùrr nan Gillean, I visited the old graveyard at the small village of Struan by Bracadale. Within the graveyard behind the small Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's chapel, which sits in the low valley of Balgown Burn, is the very humble and inconspicuous grave of boulders and a gabbro capstone that marks the resting place of J. Norman Collie. After climbing for many years in Skye, in 1939 Collie retreated to the Sligachan Hotel and spent a lonely existence there until dying on November 1, 1942, from pneumonia after falling into Storr Loch while fishing. Collie's friend, John MacKenzie, who predeceased him, rests in a grave behind.

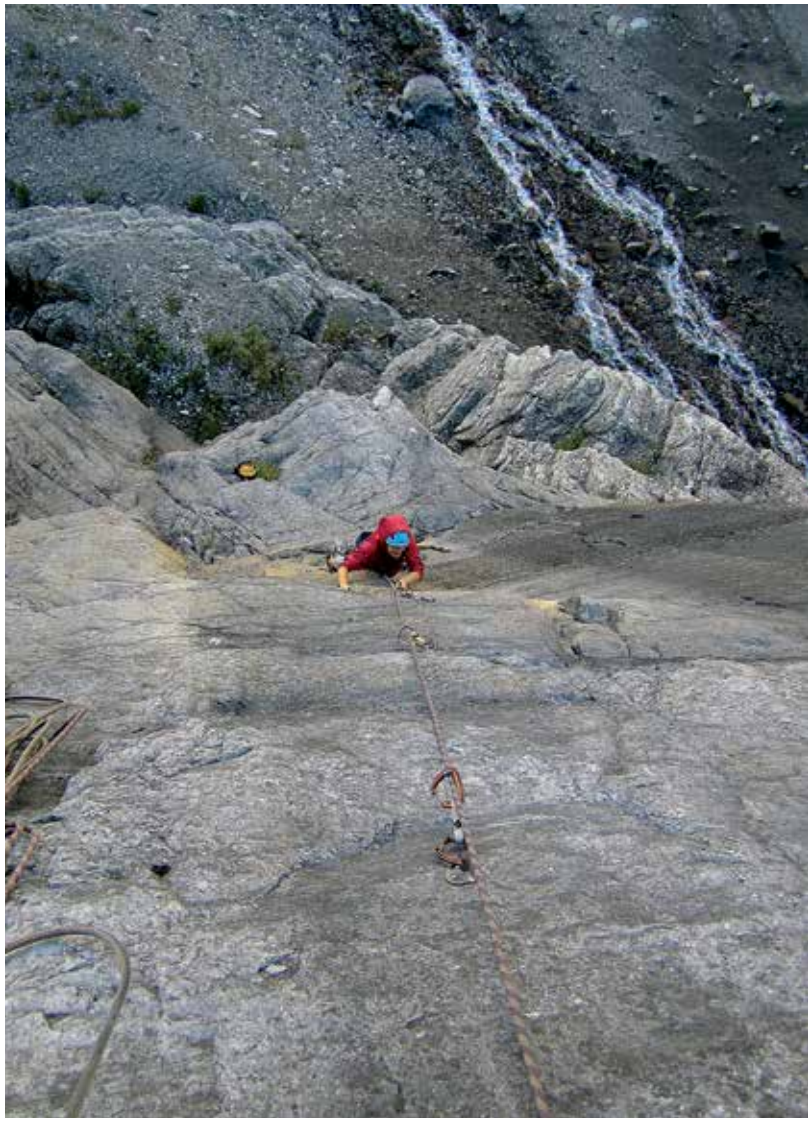
On a warm summer's day in Scotland, I was able to pay my respects to a pioneer to whom I felt connected after travelling the same routes, seeing the same sights and breathing the same air. Even though we are generations apart, almost like adding a new ancestor to a family tree, I feel my life is now forever linked to the history Collie made in the mountains, and I am delighted to share my experiences with old friends and welcome the companionship of the next generation as I continue my journeys.

Editor's note: This ascent of the northwest ridge of Howse Peak may be the first time that this ground has been climbed, but discussions with David P. Jones (author of *Rockies Central*) suggest that it has most likely been used in the past as a descent route.

Letting Go of My Archenemy

Jovan Simic

Joanne Tamlin on pitch three of Archenemy. Photo: Jovan Simic



CLIMBING HAS BEEN MY OUTLET FOR quite some time now, and like many other climbers, I enjoy the problem solving and focus that it demands. It allows me to happily live in the present moment despite my wondering mind. At the same time, it can become addictive, especially if you have an obsessive-compulsive personality like I do and cannot easily let go of things. I try to recognize this and not take my climbing too seriously, but rather, for what it is—another way for me to get away from everyday problems and share adventure and quality time with close friends. However, one climb, which we later appropriately named Archenemy, preoccupied the better part of my climbing life over the past four years.

Shortly after the birth of my twin girls, one of my closest friends, Erik Schnack, showed me a line he had previously scouted on the Stanley Headwall. Erik and I have been on many climbing adventures together, but this time we casually strolled up the valley catching up on life. I mostly needed someone to listen to me whine about sleep deprivation as a new parent. Erik's great sense of humour helped me laugh at my own predicament. It wasn't until we were standing under the famous Nemesis waterfall that I was able to escape my own bubble and realize that I had never been up this valley in the summer. The beauty of the surroundings immediately struck me as we started jugging up the line that Erik had previously fixed. Famous for its ice routes, I didn't expect the rock on Stanley Headwall to be of high quality, but the stone was impeccable and required little cleaning. Taking our casual pace to a whole new level while we were shooting the shit and having a few laughs, we managed to rappel down the potential route and try a few pitches on top-rope. Both of us were immediately addicted. Although climbing was a big part of it, I now realize that we were captivated by the holistic nature of that experience.

We returned a few times that first summer, and I quickly started to associate Archenemy with my new safe haven. Things went smoothly at first, but we were quickly reminded that we are in an alpine environment that requires one's full attention. A warm afternoon on the wall quickly turned cold and brought us to the brink of hypothermia when the wind picked up and started

spraying water from nearby Nemesis. That same day, Erik was grazed by a big block that got dislodged as we were pulling our ropes. What started off as my safe haven turned into a fight against a personified cliff.

As my climbing days became few and far between, I often opted to go back to Archenemy to satisfy my needs. I slowly grew obsessed with the climb, and even started bringing out my partner, Annie, on the days we could arrange for a babysitter. By the end of the second summer, we finished equipping the route and managed to free climb all but the first couple of metres of pitch four. Over the next couple of summers, the pattern would repeat. At the beginning of each season, I had to relearn the moves on a very sequencey pitch three, only to be shut down at the beginning of pitch four. The problem wasn't a matter of pulling harder or being stronger. I simply stopped enjoying the process, blinded by irrational drive to succeed on a self-imposed goal.

Last summer, I was ready to let go of my obsession with Archenemy, but not without one last visit. I shared a lot of memorable moments with close friends on that wall, and I wanted to leave it on a positive note. Days before moving to Nunavut, I walked up to Archenemy one last time with Matt Lucas. The mood was light, like during my early visits. Once again, I enjoyed my experience of being on the wall. I was no longer obsessed with my own expectations of the end result. Instead, I fully embraced every moment I spent there. Seeing Matt's eyes light up when we started climbing reminded me of my first experience being on the route. With positive energy, Matt managed to unlock the sequence on the fourth pitch, and I followed. It always amazes me what little fresh perspective can do, and how limited we are without it. Although we both fell on the third pitch, Matt later returned with his friend Regen and free climbed the route from the ground up. But, that's his story to tell. For me, Archenemy has been a great learning experience and I am now happy to let it go.

Summary

Archenemy (5.11d, 190m, 7 pitches), Stanley Headwall. FA: Erik Schnack, Jovan Simic, August 2014. FFA: Matt Lucas, Regen Waldman, September 2015.

The route is located 50 metres to the right of the Nemesis waterfall. It is entirely bolted. You need 14 quickdraws and a 70-metre rope if you plan to rappel the route. The pitches go at 5.7 (35m), 5.10d (15m), 5.11d (20m), 5.11d (32m), 5.11a (25m), 5.10b (30m) and 5.10.c (30m).

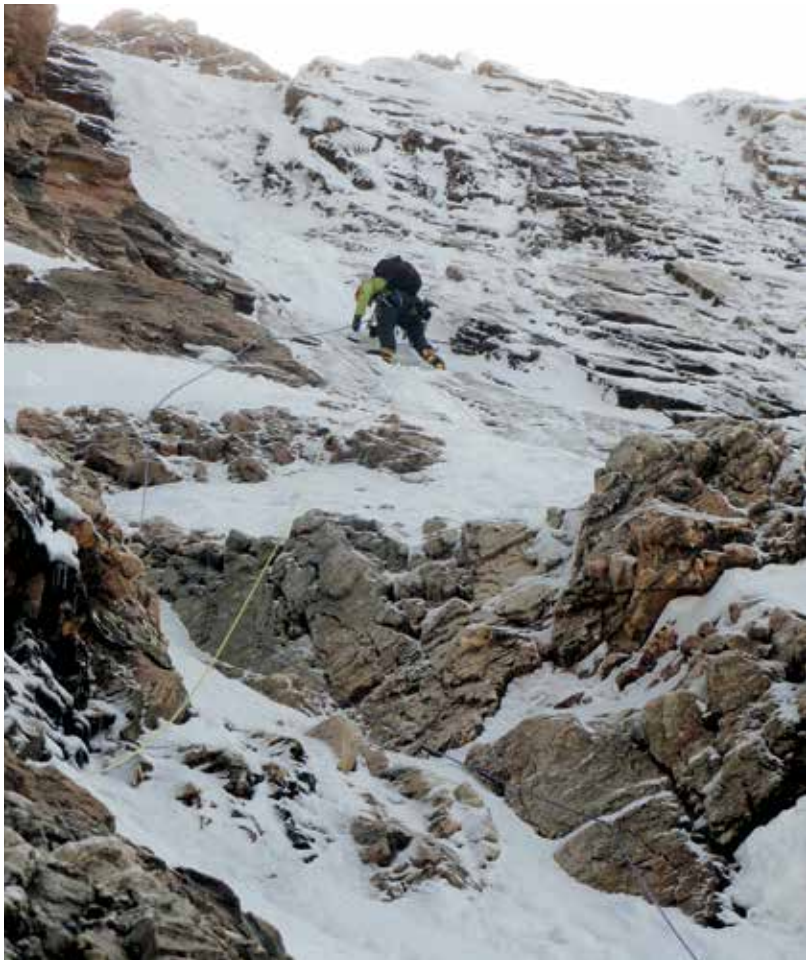
Archenemy to the right of the Nemesis waterfall on the Stanley Headwall. Photo: Jovan Simic

Mordor

Steven Kovalenko

MORDOR WOULD NOT BE MY FIRST Maury misery march. A seven-day 2014 effort on Mordor by Maury Perrault and Maarten van Haeren resulted in resounding failure. A 24-hour single-push attempt through deep snow ended low on Mount Hungabee's northwest face, and resulted in a harried epic bail (including an anxious emergency snow-cave session) through intense spindrift avalanches and sloughing. Beta acquired from these first attempts was vital to our success in 2015.

I was well adjusted to the level of expected slogging on an outing with Maury after a season of many outings and first ascents in his company. Walking the Lake O'Hara road in spring is a slog reserved for dedicated alpinists. Special energy-saving tactics are mandatory. Two days before the trip, I was informed that acquiring a toboggan was essential to the success of the trip. Kijiji to the rescue. Several rushed emails and hurried phone calls later, I was in possession of a great dirt-bag deal: three children's toboggans for $10.



Steven Kovalenko simul-climbs up thin mixed terrain on Mordor. Photo: Maurice Perrault

Spring of 2015 brought warm weather down in the valley leading to Lake O'Hara. I had already been rock climbing in the Bow Valley, and spring had sprung back in Calgary. We pulled into the Lake O'Hara parking lot at a reasonable hour of 9 a.m. and loaded the sleds. I looked like an amateur with my red plastic steed, cobbled together in a hurry and adorned with bungee cords. The road was hardpacked and icy for the first two kilometres, but Mother Nature's blessing of mild weather was my curse for most of the journey. Friction from the exposed gravel quickly overcame structural integrity of the bottom of my sled, and I was faced with the indignity of shouldering my pack while dragging an empty clattering toboggan. Higher up the road, we found snow again and precious energy was saved as the sleds proved their worth. Reaching the edge of the lake, we ditched our sleds and pushed on to base of the route on the first day.

"BOOM!" There is an old saying about old climbers being more afraid of things falling on them than the climbing itself. Full of youthful confidence after a successful ice season, my hubris was nearly the end of me. The source of the sound was not immediately apparent. Lots of things go boom in the Rockies. I was caught exposed, kicking steps up the snow cone, preparing our path for the morning of the ascent. Panic filled me as I

began to realize the foolishness of exposing myself to the overhead hazard of the entire northwest face. I dashed back to the safety of an overhang where we were stashing gear, tripping over myself in a rush and adding another large crampon hole to the growing collection on my soft-shell pants. I was surviving the learning curve one near miss at a time at the school of hard knocks. Continuous wet avalanches poured over the route starting at 4 p.m. We learned a valued lesson on the first day—speed is the only option on Mordor.

Returning to the hut, we spent the following day lounging, resting and distracting ourselves with hut custodial work. The wake-up call on May 10 came at 12 a.m. Coffee, oatmeal, go! Sleds were pulled across the lake to the base of the summer trail on the far side. Shouldering our packs, we snowshoed by headlamp on a bulletproof crust to Opabin Plateau. Travel was quick, and soon enough we reached our stashed packs and geared up. Despite minimal freeze recovery at the base of the route, the snow fan to the ice went quickly as we climbed through the deep runnel scoured by the previous days' wet avalanches. Climbing hard, squeaky snow is such a joy, one not often experienced in the Rockies.

In full simul-climb mode, the first two rambling WI3 ice pitches were dispatched and I reached a stance below a short dripping pillar. The first block of leads was mine. Doubts rushed in as the ice appeared to be on its last day of existence of the year. With encouragement from Maury, the pitch went quickly, and at the next stance, I soon discovered the steep WI4+ crux above from the previous year was flowing water. Two traversing 5.6 rock pitches brought us to the top of the missing pillar. Light broke and we pushed onwards in -5 C temperatures. Four rope-lengths of snowfield led to a thin WI3+ pitch with marginal gear. Maury quickly dispatched the next WI4 pitch in the narrows, and we were in simul-climb mode once again. The next five rope-lengths above the narrows were tense, exposed to the firing line of the northwest face. Each man

Maurice Perrault on the WI4 narrows pitch of Mordor.
Photo: Steven Kovalenko

worked his specialty to save precious time. Maury is not a man of girth, but he knows how to slog, and seems to take a single step for every step and a half of mine. His snow blocks went quickly. I was saddled with leading run-out thin ice and sketchy M4 rock, which felt straightforward after a winter of scratching around the Bow Valley. Sun had hit us for the last two to three pitches on the snow slopes, but then we angled up and right for two more shaded pitches to the ridge. The penultimate hard pitch was a steep narrow mixed chimney—M4 and awesome.

The last pitch to the ridge was the steepest snow of the route and required smashing through tortured gargoyles that were more air than snow. We topped out on a flat plateau on the ridge 16 hours after starting, just north of the sub peak at an elevation of 3,362 metres. Being covered in scary gargoyles that were mostly air, we gave the trepidations of the north ridge to the summit a pass and called our route complete. After the obligatory photo, the upper pitches were descended to a steep safe wall on the face where we melted snow on the stove and rested until solar affect diminished.

Crotch-deep post holing down the northwest face ensued around 5 p.m., with as much gear placed between us as possible. We rappelled into the dark gloaming of the night. The choss had thawed; making anchors was a challenge. The snow was mush, our rack diminished. Mordor vanished during the heat of the day. Fourteen hours after leaving the summit, our 30-hour push ended in a wasted stupor at the hut.

After an obligatory morning snooze, we repacked our soaking gear and prepared for the testing downhill slog back to the car. Heat of the early spring melted more than our route; the road was now more gravel than snow. My overloaded pack was shouldered with two soaking wet ropes, snowshoes and half the gear, bruising my hips and jarring my knees. A little red sled clattered uselessly behind me as I trudged back to the car, reflecting on the longest and most satisfying day of my young climbing career.

Summary

Mordor (V 5.6 M4 WI4, 1,400m), northwest face, Mt. Hungabee. FA: Steven Kovalenko, Maury Perrault, May 10-11, 2015.

Maurice Perrault tops out on Mordor.
Photo: Steven Kovalenko

Mordor on the northwest face of Mount Hungabee. Photo: Maarten van Haeren

The East

Betrayer of Hope

Bayard Russell

WE WERE OUT OF TIME and out of bolts as Sam Bendroth and I coiled our moist ropes. It was raining, we had just freed what would eventually be the crux pitch of a new route, and we knew we had a long way to go. I think on any long first ascent there has to be moments of doubt. Its just a lot to ask of a granite wall to have continuous passage of free climbing for 300 metres or more. In a light drizzle in September 2014, this is where we left our project on Blow Me Down on Newfoundland's rugged Southwest Coast.

I don't mind having a project drag out. I like to think about it, and over the next 11 months, I had plenty to think about. The upper portion of the cliff changes character immensely. From the steep slab of our lower pitches, it becomes a series of roofs, cracks and corners. Dividing them is a three-metre roof with an immense detached block hanging out of the base of the corner we hoped to climb. I came to call it "the cork." Although very steep, the upper 180 metres of the cliff are very featured. We guessed a way through would present itself, but the cork might be impossible to bypass. It seemed like it would come down to a couple of metres of detached granite.

Sam met me in Bangor, Maine, this past September, where my wife had dropped me off on our way back from our fifth wedding-anniversary weekend in Bar Harbor. Ten hours later, we were boarding a ferry in Cape Bretton Island, Nova Scotia. After another seven hours, and a good night's sleep, and we were on the island of Newfoundland—but still a day's journey from our destination. A doughnut and a quick cup of Tim Horton's coffee and we were off for another drive to the small town of Burgeo, three or four hours away at the end of the road.

We arrived just in time to watch the next ferry pull in and load all our gear onto a pallet to be boomed into the ship's hold. Five and a half hours and one stop later, we arrived in the tiny road-less outpost of Francois, Newfoundland, one of the most beautiful towns I've ever seen. It was about 6 p.m. as George Fudge pulled his fishing boat alongside the ferry and the boom dropped our pallet of gear aboard the *Royal Oak*. Without touching solid ground, we were again underway, this time to Devil's Bay, an hour away—home of one of the blow-me-downs, as a few of the cliffs in this area are called, this one a 350-metre sea cliff referred to by the locals as Jabo.

Unsettled maritime weather was the routine for the first week we were there: thick fog, quick episodes of clearing and bouts of intense wind. Nonetheless, we proceeded to fix ropes down from the top of the cliff, pitch by pitch, deciphering a free line that was independent and continuous until just above the midpoint roof that was home to that huge detached block.

I rappelled over the roof, and a quick glance at the cork was all I needed to know I didn't want to be anywhere near that refrigerator-sized chunk of seemingly unattached granite. Further reinforcing our need for a different way, the corner we had hoped to climb turned out to have no gear anyway. I swing like a pendulum back and forth

Sam Bendroth on pitch four of Betrayer of Hope.
Photo: Bayard Russell

across the face, my anchor more than 30 metres above me, looking for other options.

I hemmed and hawed and finally settled on an incredible line of holds, in a terrific position, traversing across above the lip of the roof. While the meat of the pitch looked great, to get there we would need to climb through a wet chimney simply marked on another party's topo as "NO!" Later that day, we bolted a connector pitch that following the line of weakness, across an incredibly steep slab that linked our previous high point to the bottom of our fixed ropes.

We jugged out 200 metres one last time, cleaning our ropes on the way and packing them back to base camp. That afternoon, we took five of them and fixed the traverse above the sea that accesses the base of the cliff.

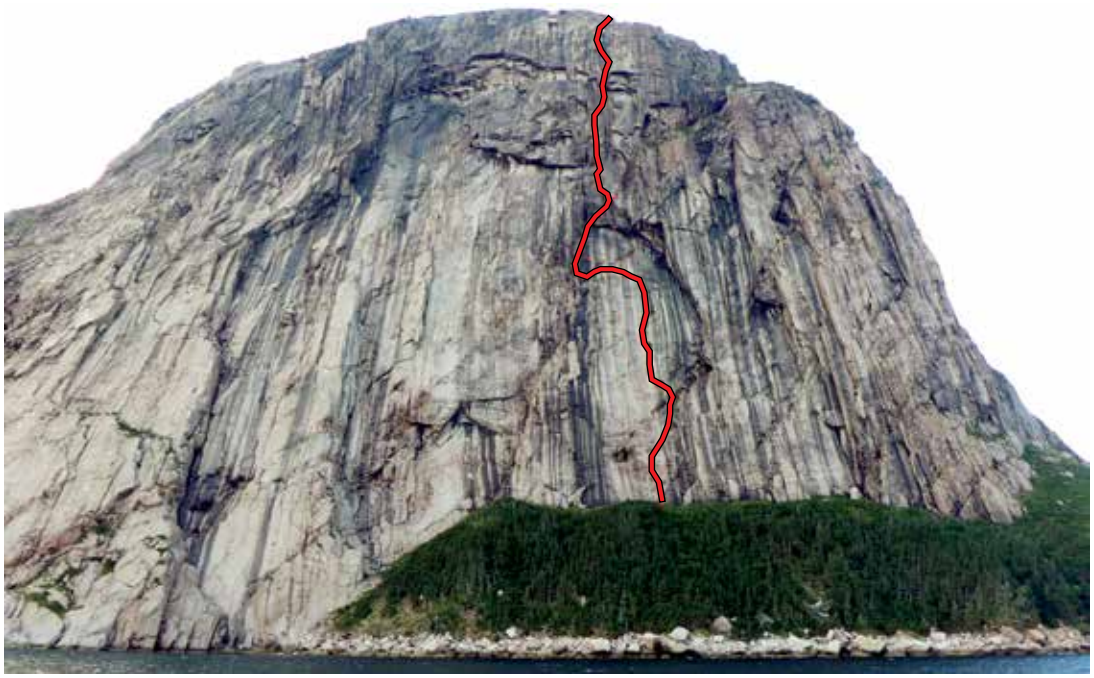
Our seventh day in Devil's Bay was beautiful, perfect climbing weather with blue skies, low humidity and comfortable in the sun. We started up from the ground, swinging leads, so psyched to just be climbing. The third pitch is a slippery 5.12 number that spat me off just a foot from the end of the crux. I stripped all the gear and lead it again, this time successfully.

After another pitch, we were on the blank slab, and it was desperate. I had top-roped all the moves the day we bolted it, but neither of us could make it happen all together. We would be feeling fine, carefully moving, and suddenly, we would be off and hanging on the rope. So I got sneaky. We cleaned the gear and started up the pitch one last time. After some 5.11 slab climbing, I fixed a nut and downclimbed, reaching a ledge system that brought us over to Chris Weidner and Justen Sjong's route, Lucipher's Lighthouse, for some 4th class. Sam followed, we hauled our mini haul bag sideways and exited their route by climbing some soaking-wet 5.9 to get back on our line. It wasn't pretty, but it worked.

Another six pitches of mostly, strenuous 5.11+ and we were topping out in the twilight while the sky over the island of Newfoundland offered up a pink sunset.

Summary

Betrayer of Hope (V 5.12a, 370m, 12 pitches), south face, Blow Me Down, Devil's Bay, Newfoundland. FA: Sam Bendroth, Bayard Russell, September 9, 2015.



Betrayer of Hope on the south face of Blow Me Down in Devil's Bay, Newfoundland.
Photo: Bayard Russell

Facing page: Sam Bendroth finishing pitch seven of Betrayer of Hope.
Photo: Bayard Russell

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

Will Mayo

CLIMBING THE WALL that became The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was an uncertain and far-fetched aspiration that continually occupied my mind for exactly one year. I found the line in March 2015 when Anna Pfaff and I had climbed Apocalypse Now [*CAJ*, 2015, p. 111]. That in itself was a difficult and committing line of three-dimensional ice and steep granite walls and corners, which lies on the right side of the Cholesterol Wall above Ten Mile Pond in the heart of Gros Morne National Park in northwestern Newfoundland.

The Lion was the king line that soared directly up the centre of the 200-metre face. The route took classic rock corners to a hanging icicle, and worked out a six-metre roof to a large shield of ice that led upward to huge bizarre three-dimensional structures of ice to reach the upper portion of the wall. The steep upper rock wall, which became the crux of the route, ascended a radically overhanging arch split with a pick-tip torque crack. It continued through a giant hollow flake system, which provided access to the most unique and magnificent feature of ice I have ever beheld, let alone climbed—a wide roof of ice, formed by routinely truncated icicles.

Over the course of three weeks, Ben Collett, Chelsea Rude and I pieced together this seemingly overwhelming stack of question marks, move by move, pitch by pitch. The crux upper wall demanded everything we had, physically and psychologically, to overcome the technical difficulties of the climbing—to puzzle out the protection while mitigating complex varieties of overhead hazards. The climbing is legitimately hard. On one attempt to send the crux sixth pitch, I took a 10-metre whipper onto two equalized pitons, not because a hold broke or because I slipped; I fell because I was pumped out of my mind. Then,

Will Mayo on pitch four of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Photo: Chelsea Rude

on what became my best day ever in the mountains, Chelsea and I took it to the top, in a glorious moment of succeeding on something that, beforehand, we had considered likely impossible.

As with all of Gros Morne National Park, there is no protection or anchor bolts employed on The Lion; it's completely trad. The traditional gear and ground-up method made this mixed climb, like its neighbour Apocalypse Now, all the more precious, all the more difficult and all the more a powerful experience. We did not murder the impossible, we met it head on, hand-to-hand, by fair means, and that, to me, made the challenge more interesting and adventuresome. We launched upward into the overhanging treacherous unknown with only our ingenuity, our skills and our courage as our resources. The challenge was nearly too great, but we persevered, overcame our fear, and finally stood atop the beast. That, to say the least, felt good.

By far, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was the high-water mark of my career, and the route of which I am proudest, and one, which I dare say, I will never supersede. It was my *magnum opus*, and the experience I had of climbing it remains climbing's greatest gift to me.

Summary

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (WI7+, M12 traditional), Cholesterol Wall, Ten Mile Pond, Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland. FA: Ben Collett, Will Mayo, Chelsea Rude, March 11, 2016.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe on Cholesterol Wall. Photo: Will Mayo

Torngat Mountains

Ross Cloutier & Angus Simpson

Exploratory scrambling in the Razorback Range, Torngat Mountains, Northern Labrador. Photo: Pat Morrow

EACH SUMMER, ON THE BANKS OF a beach where a river meets a sea, a small community is established on the edge of Torngat Mountains National Park in Northern Labrador. Inuit elders and youth from Nunatsiavut and Nunavik come together here with visitors, researchers and Parks Canada staff to share adventures and connect with their Inuit homeland. The Torngat Mountains are the only glaciated peaks on the Canadian mainland east of the Rockies and, while unknown to many, have quickly become another accessible Canadian mountain destination.

The Torngat Mountains are located on the Ungava Peninsula at the northern tip of Newfoundland and Labrador and eastern Quebec. This peninsula separates Ungava Bay from the Atlantic Ocean, and the extreme northern tip, Cape Chidley, is approximately 150 kilometres across Hudson Strait from Baffin Island.

In 2005, the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement and the Labrador Inuit Constitution came into effect and formed the Nunatsiavut Government. Nunatsiavut is one of four Inuit regions in Canada to achieve self-government, and although Nunatsiavut remains part of Newfoundland and Labrador, the government has authority over many central governance areas, including health, education, culture and language, and community matters. The land claim also resulted in the formation of one of Canada's newest parks in 2005, Torngat Mountains National Park, something Labrador Inuit lobbied hard for and see as a key economic driver for their future.

The Torngat Mountains National Park is an Inuit park in every way. It is the traditional homeland of Inuit from Labrador and Northern Quebec, and there are hundreds of historic and archaeological sites both inside and surrounding the park. It is also the first Canadian national park to be completely staffed by Inuit, which occurred in December 2015. The Torngat Mountains National Park is bordered on the Quebec side by Kuururjuaq National Park, a Quebec Nunavik Inuit park. Between the two parks, 14,461 square kilometres of the Torngat Mountains area is protected.

Climbing and Hiking in the Torngats

The highest point in the Torngat Mountains is Mount Caubvick/D'Iberville at 1,652 metres (5,420 feet). Generally, this peak is referred to as Mount Caubvick on the Labrador side and as D'Iberville in Quebec since it straddles the border between the two provinces. Mount Caubvick/D'Iberville is the highest point in Newfoundland and Labrador as well as Quebec, so an ascent of this peak tags two provincial high points at once.

Other high peaks include Torngarsoak Mountain at 1,595 metres (5,232 feet) and Cirque Mountain at 1,568 metres (5,144 feet). There are dozens of other peaks in the 1,200- to 1,500-metre elevation range. Remembering that all the valley bottoms are at sea level, this is significant elevation gain.

The ranges of the Torngat Mountains are separated by deep fjords and lakes surrounded by sheer rock walls. The fjords were produced by glaciation, and there are still 195 small glaciers in the Torngats. Most of these are small pocket glaciers tucked below big headwalls in north- and north-east-facing cirque valleys with associated tarns.

The rock in the Torngat Mountains is Precambrian gneiss and are amongst the oldest on earth. From a climber's perspective, however, the rock is extremely fractured and broken, and there are no solid rock faces anywhere in the Torngats, except for maybe some at the southwest arm of Saglek Fjord. The high peaks are accessed by long ridgelines (some are five to seven kilometres in length), which for the most part are not technical in nature. However, the Koroc Ridge (west ridge) on Caubvick/D'Iberville requires a 10-metre

An unnamed lake drains into the ocean during an exploratory ridge scramble in the Razorback Range, Torngat Mountains, Northern Labrador. Photo: Pat Morrow

rappel and 5.6 ascent (there was a fatality here in August 2003), and the Minaret Ridge (from the east and south) is a very exposed knife-edge ridge that also has a 5.6 move low down. Ropes are not required for most ridge routes but may be necessary on Caubvick/D'Iberville.

Inuit are a pragmatic people, spending their time where resources (food and materials) are most available, which is generally in the valley bottoms and along the coast. Yet, it is inconceivable to think that they would live in the Torngats for thousands of years without having scrambled up at least some of the major peaks. Some of the first recorded climbs by non-Inuit include:

Mount Caubvick/D'Iberville via Minaret Ridge by Christopher Goetze and Micahel Adler in 1973.
Mount Caubvick/D'Iberville via Koroc Ridge by Jack Bennet, Tom Bennet, Hope Bennet and Tony Daffern in 1997 (probable a first ascent).
Mount Torngasoak by Michael Adler, Virginia Adler, Steve Loutrel, Elizabeth Loutrel and Warren Hofstra in 1975.

While climbing in the Torngats is primarily limited to long ridge scrambles, there are numerous excellent extended backpacking routes within Torngat Mountains National Park. Parks Canada has a number of suggested itineraries developed and is in the process of developing a plan for the construction of a lodge within the park, along with a number of fixed-roof huts. This will form a one-of-a-kind arctic high-alpine trail system. When this hut system is completed (currently slated for 2017) the park will have an extraordinary and sought-after hiking system.

Winter Travel in the Torngats

Local Inuit regularly travel by snowmobile between Nain in Labrador and Kangiqsualujjuaq (George River) in Quebec. This mostly occurs in late spring, and there is potential for snowmobile-supported ski touring in the Torngats. Winter weather is windy, and as a consequence the snowpack tends to be irregular and wind blasted. Pockets in wind-loaded lee slopes can provide fun skiing, but avalanches are a possibility. In 2014, Jerry Kobalenko and Noah Nochasak skied from Nain to Kangiqsualujjuaq in 44 days.

Access to the Torngats

In 2005, Parks Canada organized a tent camp in the new park to begin studying management planning for the region. This early tent camp has since evolved into a substantial permanent facility at St. John's Harbour in Saglek Fjord. An arm of the Nunatsiavut Government, the Nunatsiavut Group of Companies, now operate the Torngat Mountains National Park Base Camp and Research Station from July to early September, and this facility has weekly Twin Otter flight access from Goose Bay and Nain, a commercial dining room, fixed-roof and tent accommodation, showers, boat access to the park, helicopter support, armed Inuit bear guards and a full-time medic. This has made the logistics of getting to the park completely attainable and affordable. The base camp can provide support for individuals or groups, and provides cultural and archaeological tours, backpacking, heli-hiking, boat tours, helicopter tours and general logistics. Permits for activities in the park are available from the Parks Canada office in Nain. The base camp and research station is a significant employer for Nunatsiavut and is an important piece of their economic development plan.

When to Visit

The best time for visiting the Torngat Mountains in the summer is from late June to early September. In the winter, late March and April are the best times.

Bear Hazard

There is a very high polar bear and black bear hazard in the region. The Davis Strait polar bear population is healthy and abundant in the Torngats. Coastal and valley-bottom travel has very high risk of interaction with polar bears, and Parks Canada highly recommends hiring an armed Inuit bear guard to accompany trips. Inland and higher-elevation trips have less chance of polar bear interaction but high risk of meeting

aggressive black bears. Being prepared for bears with the use of electric fences, Inuit bear guards, bear spray and a large number of bear bangers is necessary. There are many stories of human-bear interaction in the area. The most recent bear attack in the park was in 2013 when a hiker was dragged out of his tent by his head by a polar bear.

An Inuit Homeland

The Torngat Mountains are a special, mystical and culturally connected locale. They are also a cornerstone in the future economic development for the local Inuit population, both in Labrador and Quebec. While we southerners may look at the area as far away and remote, local residents look at it as home. This is a mountain Inuit culture. It is also an Inuit culture that has lived in these mountains for generations. In many ways these are the "Sherpa" of Canada—proud, intelligent, indigenous mountain dwellers with a long connection to their culture and landscape. To them, however, they are just at home.

With the only glaciated peaks east of the Rockies and an original mountain culture, the Torngat Mountains are part of the Canadian mountain community. This is what the Rockies were like in the mid-1800s—white-folk visitors entering a traditional homeland. The difference is that in the Torngats, future ownership is clear. This will remain Inuit lands. The Torngats are a special and unique place that all mountain dwellers should experience.

Sunset above Saglek Bay in the Razorback Range, Torngat Mountains, Northern Labrador. Photo: Pat Morrow

Big Thunder Wall

Patrick Martel

In 2003, work drew me to Thunder Bay, and the abundance of diabase mesas providing unlimited climbing potential drew me to the rock. My climbing forays had been limited to developed classic areas. Since then, I have had the opportunity to develop some stunning routes in an area of untapped potential.

At the time, there were a few adventurous climbers exploring new routes, but details of their exploits were hard to come by. There was also a small group of cliff developers who had built some great top-roping crags in the area, as well as some trad lines. The local ACC section was strong and provided (and continues to provide) good basic training and outings. This was a community ready to take the next step, from top-roping to sport climbing, and I quickly realized that, unless I chose to develop routes, I would be stuck repeating the same climbs over and over again. My interest in opening moderate, well-bolted climbs for my young family and local climbing community took hold.

Patrick Martel on Peter L'Feu on Big Thunder Wall. Photo: Jamie Funk

Our local sandstone crag, Pass Lake, had been developed as a top-roping area. With the help of a few friends, my first efforts were aimed at creating a variety of accessible sport climbs by adding bolts and anchors to the already-developed top-rope routes. Before long, I actually started to enjoy the work of cleaning and prepping new routes, almost as much as climbing. Having young kids, I initially concentrated my efforts on moderate routes. This significantly increased the popularity of that crag, and I was ready for a more stimulating challenge.

The local mesas have impressive 40- to 80-metre diabase cliffs. Most of them are perched above a band of horrible-quality shale. It's great once covered in ice, but the shale makes it difficult to access the upper rock layers. I had my eyes set on the Big Thunder Wall, located in the Lost Falls area, on the edge of the Fort William First Nation. It is a larger cliff with comparatively minimal shale base. It's a stunning 75-metre cliff characterized by a series of large square blocky roofs. This beautiful, barely touched wall kept nagging at me. I repeatedly sent pictures to my travelling and climbing partner, Socrate Badeau, who is a prolific route opener and cliff developer in Montreal. In the summer of 2014, he came to Thunder Bay with his family for two weeks. Our 2014 family vacation became a route-developing blow-out. We set ourselves the objective of cleaning several lines on the Big Thunder Wall. I am still not sure what the rest of our families did for those two weeks.

We had scouted two parallel multi-pitch lines that were away from what seemed to be a long, on-going aid-climbing project. We spent several days chatting side by side rapping from the top and then bolting the run-outs. This was dirty work, but also a hoot. Every evening we arrived home to our wives, grimy and unrecognizable, except for the contented smiles of two guys who had a great day together.

It's very satisfying to haul on a crow bar with a partner, yelling "one, two, three," and dropping

massive, unstable blocks of rocks from 70 metres high, watching them explode in the talus below. The fun was paired with the not-so pleasant feeling of having itchy lichen dust seep inside our shirts and underwear.

Rap-bolting large roofs requires time, effort and ingenuity. Fortunately, this was an unfrequented area, so there was little risk of injury to other climbers or passersby. Once our construction project was completed, our climbing project started. The routes turned out to be great quality, challenging and different from others in the area. As you gain height on the first pitch, you climb backwards over various steps of roof, standing over emptiness. We named the two first lines Vertige (5.12a) and Trepidations (5.11c). Socrate, as expected, flashed the first pitch of Vertige (5.12a) on lead and the second pitch on top-rope (5.12c) on the day that we completed bolting the route. I had to work the first pitch, and the second pitch's roof crack is my current nemesis.

Having set anchors at mid-cliff, we were able to explore other possibilities. At that point, I became obsessed with opening more lines on the wall, spending all the free time I could muster cleaning and bolting. Between my career and my young family, free time was scarce, so the Big Thunder Wall became a longer-term project. Hiking up with a pack full of tools was exhausting, so I cached most of my gear and only brought up batteries, new bolts and specific gear. This allowed me to progress more quickly through the muddy approach guarded by angry hordes of Northwestern Ontario mosquitos and black flies. Once high on the cliff, the breeze kept most of the blood-sucking insects at bay.

A beautiful right-facing dihedral through an intimidating roof became my next project. After what seemed like interminable cleaning of its three pitches, my wife, Stephanie, and I set out to climb them. We managed the first, very wet pitch on our first attempt. However, the smallest amount of lichen on the crimpy second pitch left the face slimy and un-leadable. Then we kept being thwarted by a series of annoying circumstances, from rapidly changing weather to Steph taking a fall on the first pitch roof-hanging in emptiness by one arm stuck in a wrist lock. We kept calling it a day without embarking on the second pitch. On our third attempt in September 2014, we figured we had it and would call it Take Three—three pitches and three attempts. Yet again, the second pitch was still slimy despite my cleaning efforts. Winter snuck in on us, and I finally managed to clean the second pitch in 2015. Then came again a long series of frustrating attempts: having to bail off mid-way for reasons unrelated to the difficulty of the climb or the fact that it was no longer dirty. In the end, the first free ascent of each pitch of Vertical Delight (final name) was completed with different partners. I opened a few more lines on the wall while the area quickly grew popular, and it created momentum in the local climbing community to open more new routes. The numbers of local climbers setting well-cleaned lines on that cliff and other new cliffs is growing. It is motivating to see the untapped potential in the area finally see some action.

Big Thunder Wall:
(1) Vertical Delight
(2) Peter L'Feu
(3) Trepidation
(4) Vertige
Photo: Patrick Martel

Foreign

Cory Hall Memorial Expedition

Max Fisher

BEFORE GETTING INTO THE STORY and events of the expedition, I would like to mention that this trip was inspired by the death of our good friend and climbing partner, Cory Hall, who was killed in a climbing accident in Peru [*CAJ,* 2015, p. 135]. In honour of Cory's contagious sense of adventure, we decided to team up and put together, in the best style possible, an adventure worthy of Cory Hall. This involved buying Royal Enfield motorcycles in Delhi, riding them to the India-Pakistan border, travelling by bus to the Karakorum, climbing in the mountains, travelling back to India to collect our bikes again, and working our way toward the Indian Garwhal for more climbing and biking before heading home. Here is the story.

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2015, JAMES Monypenny and I crossed the Wagha Border from India into Pakistan, and for the next month we travelled north into the Karakorum by motorbike, bus, jeep and foot to explore and climb in the Khane Valley.

I was excited to get out of India, but unsure of how I would feel in Pakistan. It wasn't long before I felt really comfortable. In Muslim culture, a guest is considered a gift from god, so as a foreigner you are treated very well. People often buy you food and help you hassle-free. This hospitality followed us throughout the country.

The Khane Valley is located approximately 1.5 hours up the Hushe River valley by jeep. Once there, you'll find exceptional hospitality and porters to help carry your food and gear up to base camp. You can even get a camp chef if you want.

Speaking with the locals, we learnt that we were only the eighth expedition ever to climb in the Khane Valley. There is so much in this area that remains unclimbed. We moved up the valley and established our base camp at 3,800 metres. This location has been used by previous expeditions and is known as Boulder Camp.

After we were settled in, we went exploring for potential objectives as well our main goal, Tangra Tower. Walking up the goat trail to the glacier, I was thinking, "Wow, this is so similar to Patagonia, but we're already higher than Fitzroy!" Laughing, I mentioned this to James since he and I climbed Fitzroy together a few years ago. We saw numerous objectives for alpine climbing during our exploration, and on approach to Tangra, saw several lines that could go up the 900-metre south face.

That night we were both excited to move higher into the valley and get an advanced base camp set up so we could climb. However, there was a different plan ahead that we had little control over. The next day James started feeling sick—eggy burps equals giardia. So, instead of moving up, James managed the sickness and I tried to stay busy bouldering and cooking good food. Then it snowed for three days and I was left to read, cook, drink maté and try not to go too stir crazy while waiting for the snow and giardia to go away. James recovered in a few days with antibiotics, but the snow persisted. Regardless, we organized food and gear and set up our advanced camp at around 4,200 metres at the base of the Khane Glacier.

Max Fisher during their attempt on Tangra Tower.
Photo: James Monypenny

Two days later, we set out for our first objective, Twin Peak II.

Twin Peak II cannot be seen from down in the valley as Meligo blocks the view. During our exploring adventure early on, it came into view and I wanted to climb it. The north face was covered in ice and snow and stood approximately 1,000 metres high. We set up a bivy camp and planned to start moving by 4 a.m. We began slogging through the knee-deep snow and gained 200 metres to the base of some friendly yet steep seracs.

We then climbed three long pitches of brittle 85-degree glacial ice to a small glacial plateau. We again slogged to an ice and snow ramp that lead us to the upper headwall. Climbing on precarious snow-covered rock and thin ice for a few hundred metres brought us to a beautiful 300-metre, 75-degree section of névé that we simul-climbed. At the top of the névé was another steep section then more precarious snow. Reaching 5,000 metres for the first time, I was feeling the effects. As we climbed the next few hundred metres, the sun started to set and our pace, mine especially, decreased. Around 200 metres from the summit, we decided to retreat, rappelling for several hours before staggering back to our bivy and falling asleep.

The next day was the first sun we had seen in five days. We slowly made our way back to base camp to eat and rest before heading back into the hills for an alpine capsule-style attempt on Tangra Tower's 900-metre south face. With our gear in place, we just needed the weather window.

After a nice day and a half of rest, we headed up to Tangra. We made our way to the base of the wall and got established just as the sun set. Being late September/early October, the nights were quite cold, and we decided to wait for the sun to climb. This slowed us down as we were only able to climb for around six hours each day.

We also underestimated how much fuel we would need, and this ultimately forced us to turn back before reaching the summit. After using the last of our fuel and getting worked by a squeeze chimney after 12 pitches of C2 5.10+, we opted to go down and return to Khane village for warm food and incredible Balti hospitality.

Acknowledgements

Huge thanks to MEC, LOWA Footwear, Mountain Equipment, Gore-Tex, V12 Outdoor, The Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council for their support.

Max Fisher starts up the first pitch on Twin Peak II in the Khane Valley, Pakistan. Photo: James Monypenny

Facing page: The south face of Tangra Tower and the line of the attempt. Photo: Max Fisher

Postcards from Everest

Raphael Slawinski

MARCH 2015. A HEAVY PACK DRAGGED at my shoulders. Well, there was no helping it. I headed upward, toward the distant white line of the summit ridge. Mud squelched as I stepped into a puddle. "I like your boots," a little girl piped up as she and her father passed me on their way down the trail. No wonder: big and orange, my 8,000-metre boots stood out like flames against the browns and greens of the forest floor. What was I doing anyway, wearing high-altitude boots on a hiking trail in the foothills west of Calgary on a balmy afternoon? Would you laugh if I said I was training for Everest?

If you had asked me a few months earlier if I harboured any aspirations to climb the highest mountain on the planet, my answer would have been a definite no. After all, I climbed for difficulty, adventure and beauty—not numbers.

IN 2013, ON K6 WEST in Pakistan, Ian Welsted and I climbed higher than either of us ever had before. Over four days, we front-pointed up endless icefields interrupted by overhanging steps. On the fifth morning, under a cloudless, dark-blue sky, we stepped onto a virgin 7,040-metre summit. K2, Broad Peak and Nanga Parbat floated in the hazy distance. In fact, before we settled on K6 West, we had briefly toyed with the idea of going to an eight-thousander. In the end, though, we decided we didn't have enough high-altitude experience for doing anything but a normal route—and we weren't interested in that.

Now, having tasted the thin air seven kilometres up, I couldn't help wondering how I would do a kilometre or so higher. When a friend mentioned his idea for a new route up Everest's northeast face, my ears pricked up. Maybe here was a way to experience the world above 8,000 metres, but to experience it in solitude, on untouched ground, with the light touch of alpine style.

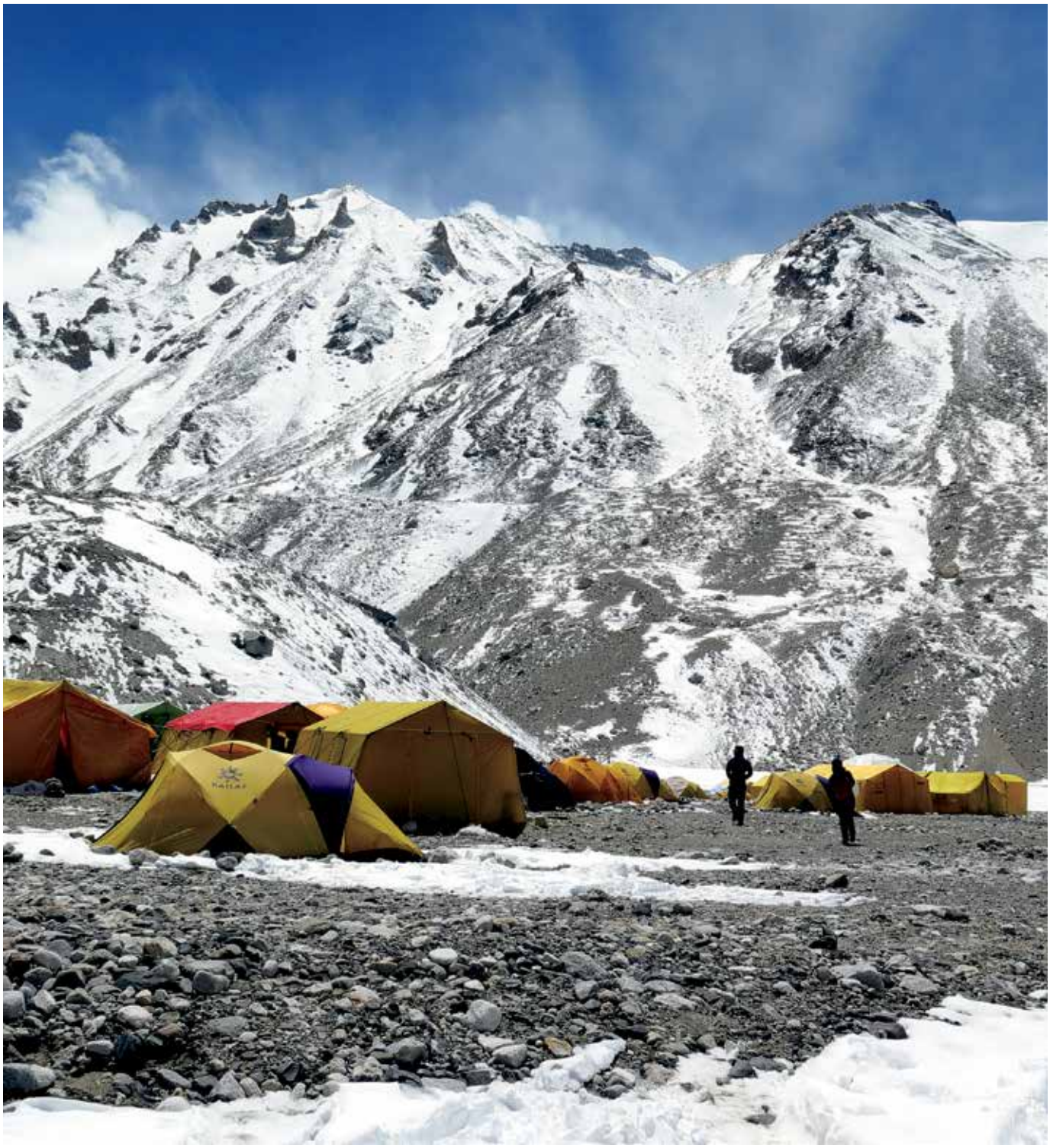
There would be three of us: Daniel Bartsch and David Gottler, two German alpinists vastly experienced at high altitude, and me, with a quarter century of alpinism behind me, but only one foray a rope-length above 7,000 metres. I couldn't do anything about my lack of altitude experience, but I could at least make sure I was in the best shape of my life. Thus began a winter of not much climbing, but a lot of hiking.

Straight from work I would drive west, into the sun setting over the Rockies. At the trailhead for Prairie Mountain, more of a forested bump than a mountain, I would fill my pack with rocks and set off up the trail. An hour later, on the bald crown of the hill, I would pull my hood on against the wind and briefly imagine myself in another and much higher wind-blasted place.

APRIL 16. I LOOKED UP from my laptop, distracted by a sound outside the yellow mess tent. It wasn't the Buddhist chant that had been playing all morning in the kitchen tent next door. No, it sounded like a four-wheel-drive truck bumping over the cobbles. What, here in Everest base camp at 5,100 metres? Well, yes. The days of trekking into Chinese Base Camp (CBC) are gone. They've been made obsolete by a dirt track winding its way up the Rongbuk valley on the north side of Everest, all the way to where it's blocked by moraines.

We had arrived at CBC the day before—a bare, windswept floodplain squeezed between 6,000-metre peaks. A small but growing city of brightly coloured dome tents was scattered over the plain. In spite of being in the depths of Tibet, the place felt strangely like home. It was the surrounding mountains—rubble piles of yellow and black rock—that looked as if they had been transplanted from the Rockies. What didn't look like the Rockies was the mountain rising at the head of the valley. I knew it towered nearly four kilometres

Chinese Base Camp on the north side of Everest.
Photo: Raphael Slawinski



above base camp, but this fact didn't help me grasp its outrageous size. More than anything, it was seeing the 7,500-metre-plus Changtse dwarfed by Everest behind that gave some sense of scale.

I felt elated, but also intimidated. Fortunately, it would be at least a month before we contemplated climbing to the top. Feeling lightheaded from getting up too quickly after dinner was all it took to remind us that we weren't even acclimatized to 5,000 metres, much less 8,000. Daniel, David and I had been here before. We knew it would take patient, dedicated effort to adapt to the thin air. This was why, for now, we tried to do as little as possible. Our bodies, which only six days ago had been sipping espressos in Kathmandu's touristy Thamel district, had enough to deal with as it was. Breathlessly slogging up the loose scree behind base camp could wait until the next day.

What about the day after next, and the day after that? After a day hike or two above base camp, we would pack for a couple of days and head up toward one of the nearby snow-covered peaks, which our map showed rose to 6,500 metres and higher. I looked forward to venturing off the well-trodden Everest expedition path. Once we had descended and rested in what by then would seem luxurious surroundings of CBC, we would pack up and head up the East Rongbuk Glacier. A 20-kilometre hike would take us to the much unfriendly surroundings of Advanced Base Camp (ABC). Rising above ABC was the northeast face, our ambition for this trip. We had already seen the top of it above intervening ridges, and excitedly identified ribs and couloirs that until then we had only seen in photographs. From ABC, for the first time, we would see the whole face with our own eyes. Our plan, so long in the realm of dreams, would take a giant step toward becoming reality.

APRIL 25. IT BEGAN AS a feeling of wrongness, like an avalanche silently rushing towards us. For a few moments, we sat motionless in the mess tent, the remains of couscous and salad still on the table, then hurried outside. The ground swayed like the deck of a ship. As the shaking intensified, I found it increasingly hard to keep my balance, thus sat down on the cobbles. Rocks crashed down the hillsides above base camp, disappearing harmlessly behind lateral moraines. Finally, after several long minutes, the ground became still once more. A few last stones rolled down.

The next 24 hours were full of rumours and aftershocks. While the stronger aftershocks were unmistakeable, we had a hard time telling the weaker ones from the pounding of our hearts. As for the rumours, some, like those of Sherpas buried by an avalanche below the north col, luckily proved to be false. Others, like those of avalanche deaths on the south side of the mountain, and of tragedy and destruction on a massive scale in and around Kathmandu, unfortunately turned out to be all-too true. It was a consolation that the families of climbing Sherpas and kitchen staff closest to us were unharmed. It was one of the few bright points in what was quickly becoming obvious was a major disaster.

A couple of days passed. Forty-eight hours earlier it had felt surreal to wobble on ground that rocked and swayed beneath our feet. Now it felt equally surreal to wake up in the morning and eat breakfast at the usual time, while, on the other side of the mountain that stood at the head of the valley, the body count kept rising. In our isolated base camp, we existed in a bubble of safety. The news reaching us from the outside world by email and text message seemed abstract. It was as if we were reading about the Nepal earthquake in Europe or North America, not less than a hundred kilometres away from the collapsed houses and avalanche debris.

We talked about what to do. Should we try to get to Kathmandu and help with the rescue and reconstruction? Or, without specialized skills, would we just be three more people who needed food, water and a roof over our heads? Anyway, the point was moot: the road to Kathmandu was blocked in many places by landslides. So, should we perhaps continue with our expedition? I had spent months training and organizing, as did Daniel and David. I found it hard to let go of dreams that had dominated my life since autumn. At the same time, I questioned my motivation. Would it be disrespectful to go climbing while large swaths of Nepal lay in ruins?

In the end, the decision wouldn't be ours to make. This was Everest, after all—a mountain draped in bureaucracy as much as in snow and ice. Chinese officials began appearing in base camp, each one bearing a more impressive title than the one before. "The mountain isn't closed, but the mountain is closed," they said. It was hard to know if they were being inscrutable or just badly translated. We couldn't tell if they were guided by considerations of respect for the dead, climbing safety or political expediency. Waves of anger swept over me; I wanted to be free to make my own decision. Then I would think about the tragedy unfolding in Nepal and calm down. We were alive. It was enough. It was more than enough.

MAY 1. ON OUR LAST day in base camp, a shining, cloudless day, I walked up the moraines toward the north face of Everest, still nearly 20 kilometres away. Over the past few days, base camp had grown quiet, as one expedition after another packed up and left. Here, among the granite rubble, solitude was complete, wind and water the only sounds. Everest, with its distant icefields and couloirs, shone in the bright noonday sun. After a few clear days, sun and wind had stripped away the last storm's snow, exposing bare ice. I imagined myself cramponing up this vast, empty expanse, calves and lungs burning. When almost a year ago I had decided to attempt Everest, I was drawn by its height and by its history, but not its aesthetics, finding it squat and graceless. But now, looking at this giant pyramid of black rock and dazzling white snow, with the ever-present plume of ice crystals blowing from the summit, I thought Everest not only impressive but also very beautiful. Maybe someday I'll go back and experience its harsh, hypoxic splendour.

David Gottler and Daniel Bartsch at approximately 5,900 metres on an acclimatization hike above base camp, with the Rongbuk Glacier and the north side of Mount Everest as the backdrop. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Soul Crushing

Martin Lefebvre

AS WITH ANY TRIP TO A remote location, a picture was all it took. Ali and I had been quite successful on our recent ski mountaineering trips in Canada and Alaska. We now had our eyes set on the biggest mountain range in the world—the Himalaya. All we needed was the right objective. In 2010, Kris Erickson snapped a photo of Mount Saipal's southwest face from a few valleys away while on a ski expedition to the Bajhang district in the Nepalese Himalaya. In an ESPN online article titled "Unskied Lines," there was the photo of the unclimbed southwest face caked in snow. A little Google Earth investigating revealed an uninterrupted 1,500-metre snow and ice face with a beautiful ridge climb to the summit. That was all the convincing we needed.

Mount Saipal (7,031 metres) is the second highest peak in far western Nepal after Mount Api (7,132 metres). It has seen a handful of ascents from its north side, which is accessed from the town of Simikot. After doing some homework on weather patterns and snowpack, we decided to try our luck for a fall post-monsoon ascent. Hoping the high peaks would have seen significant snowfall before the high winter winds set in. In order to complete our objective, we would have to be the first westerners to find a way into the southwest drainage in an area that has no infrastructure in place to support expeditions. Kris put us in touch with Jiban at Shangri-la Nepal Trek, who helped us wade through the political process of climbing in Nepal. We managed to piece a route to the base of the mountain using a few maps and Google Earth, which we shared with Jiban. The next crux was organizing the food. Due to the remoteness and poverty of the area, we would have to fly almost all of our food supply in from Canada without getting dinged too hard with extra baggage fees, plus hope it all made it to Kathmandu.

After months of training, planning, packing and repacking, it was finally time to step into the unknown. This would be my first trip to this part of the world. Lucky for me, Ali had three visits to Nepal under his belt, including a six-month stay in Kathmandu in his early twenties. Our plan was to be in Nepal for two months. We had one week in Kathmandu to get our paperwork in order, buy the last of our supplies and organize the final details with Jiban. Jiban was a great help and always took care of us through the final preparations of the trip, even though we were a small-budget expedition compared to what his company usually deals with. He was very excited about our project and even sent an extra trekking guide with us, no charge, in order to see if this region could be promoted for future trekking trips.

We enjoyed the culture shock as much as we could while staying with Ali's mother, who lives in Kathmandu. She took us to visit a local monk who prayed for our safe journey on the mountain and blessed us with a Khata, the traditional Buddhist scarf. One evening we even got permission to light candles around the Buddhist stupa of Boudhanath, the second largest stupa in the world and a World Heritage Site.

We met with Padam and Kumar, our trekking guides, to discuss our route to base camp. It became quickly apparent that they had no idea how to use topo maps and simply pointed at the town names they knew. Even so, we had what felt like a good route plan. The main unknowns were how we would cross the White River into Saipal's southwest drainage and what the trail would be like past the last village, if there even was one.

A few more days of packing (and repacking) saw us on the flight out of Kathmandu. The hour flight brought us one kilometre north of the Indian border to the small town of Dhangadhi. As soon as I stepped off the plane, I felt the crushing heat.

"I thought Kathmandu was hot!"

"This is India hot, bud!" Ali answered. We were 180 metres above sea level in the northern Indian plains. Only seven kilometres straight up to go, I thought to myself.

We joined Padam and Kumar in the parking lot, got in the jeep and hit the old dusty road, literally. That night over dinner with Padam and Kumar, we each talked a little bit about ourselves and the journey we were heading on.

"Why are you doing this?" Padam asked.

This is the same question that plagues all mountaineers at one point or another. We tried to explain in plain English that it was a great adventure, but he didn't seem too impressed with our answer. Kumar, who was about 10 years younger in his mid-30s, seemed a little more understanding.

After eating the last of his mutton, Padam looked at each of us and said "If we are to do this, from now on, we are family." We all nodded in agreement, understanding exactly what he meant.

Our destination on day two was the town of Chainpur. With a population of about 8,000, it was the last big town on our trip. We started seeing the possible cruxes that lay ahead the deeper we travelled into the mountains. The post-monsoon road washouts and landslides were becoming bigger and more frequent. After a few hours' drive and multiple washout crossings, we reached

Ali Hogg during an attempt to climb and ski the southwest face of Mount Saipal.
Photo: Martin Lefebvre

Chainpur. We carried loads to our little hotel across the beautiful Seti River where people were fishing and washing themselves and their clothes.

Once settled in, Padam and Kumar went looking for the porters while Ali and I walked around town, sticking out like two sore thumbs. We met our nine porters, and Padam explained to us how much they would cost per day. These men had never been porters before since no expeditions had come through here, but they knew the trails very well. The porters also knew they could charge a bit more since there was no one else to do the work, and they did, but what choice did we have? We were on a budget, and Padam decided we could save some time and money by doing another half day's jeep ride to the end of the road, and that the washouts were manageable. The next morning, in the rain, we loaded up two jeeps and started out on the rough roads.

It turned out the locals lied about how bad the washouts were, and we had to transfer the loads to other jeeps by carrying the gear across the swollen rivers on foot. What followed was the craziest 4x4ing I have ever experienced. These 20-year-old drivers with smokes hanging out their mouths and Indian tunes blasting on the speakers were making their pimped-out old Land Rovers do things I didn't think were possible. This was the first time I thought I might die on this trip—and I was loving it!

By some miracle nobody puked, and we made it to the end of the road to the village of Talkot. We were now at 1,500 metres, and it was finally time to start walking. After distributing the loads, we sent one porter home since Ali and I were carrying full loads, including the skis. If anybody was going to break a binding on the way, it had better be one of us.

We split the next few days of trekking according to which villages would have enough food to feed 12 people and a place for the porters to sleep. After three days of walking, we came to Kangarkot (2,200 metres), a village of only a few houses, where we would have our last home-cooked meal till our return. We had gotten used to being the main attraction in all the villages where we stopped. The tent was definitely a big hit, and it seemed like the whole village would show up to watch us put up our portable house. The skis also got a lot of attention even though the locals had never seen such a thing before. Once the purpose of skis was explained, everyone seemed to agree that it would be a fun pastime.

Kangarkot was the end of the known trails. Not even the porters knew what lay ahead the next morning. At this point, the different dialects between the locals and our team made for very vague information sharing. We had no way of knowing whether there would be a bridge across the White River or not. Although, they did confirm there was a rough trail headed into the higher valleys where shepherds brought their herds to spend the hot summer months, as well as pick medicinal plants they sold in Chinese markets.

It rained hard that night and kept sprinkling in the morning while we ate breakfast. After packing up, we headed into the jungle not knowing if this would be the last day of our expedition. The trail was rough, full of wet rock slabs and boulders, and overgrown with two-metre-high stinging nettle that showed no mercy. I was in awe at watching the porters plough through this terrain in sandals and sometimes even barefooted as if they were wearing light day packs. In my defence, the night's supper wasn't sitting so well, and having to leap from boulder to boulder with clenched butt cheeks while being just as afraid of twisting an ankle as ruining the only pair of pants I had was less than ideal. At least Ali was having a good chuckle. We looked like drunken pirates, and swore like them too, trying to weave our A-framed skis through the vine-like tree branches of this claustrophobic jungle.

We were soaked, muddy and tired, all the while wondering if this damn bridge even existed. Studying the map, we knew we were getting close to the Amla Ghar, the dirty river, which marked our drainage. After a few more minutes, the forest opened up and there was our bridge. The bridge consisted of a few moss-covered logs with large rocks in the centre—bomber, right? We crossed the so-called bridge one at a time and made it to the north side of the White River. That night we celebrated with a big fire to dry our bones. This,

combined with a great meal, raised everyone's spirits. We would be at base camp the next day.

We walked up the drainage the next morning. We passed the shepherds and their herds where they had spent the hot summer, piles of medicinal plants picked in the alpine meadows lay drying outside their camps. We got our first look at Mount Saipal at the end of the drainage, and the entire team was feeling the excitement of reaching our goal. After a half day's walk, we reached base camp and everyone's pack dropped to the ground with a great sigh of relief. We picked a spot right on the banks of the glacier-fed creek with a flat meadow for the tents. There was even some alder big enough to provide us with firewood. That night was cold, and we ended up sharing all our warm layers with the porters, who weren't equipped to face nighttime alpine temperatures. The next morning, we shook hands, hugged and said goodbye to Padam, Kumar and the porters as they left, eager to return to their homes. We arranged for three porters to return in about a month's time to help us carry the gear back out. Then, silence. Only Ali and I were left as we stood gazing at the valley we would call home for the next 30 days.

Over the following three days, we carried loads from base camp (3,750 metres) to camp one (4,300 metres). It was a relatively easy and beautiful eight-kilometre trek. We found a path skirting the lower glacier on high grassy moraines. Camp one was just as beautiful as the last, and we felt like we were making good progress. The next section of the route to high camp was going to prove much more challenging. We established a gear cache at 4,920 metres, wanding our route through the scree-covered glacier below the bottom of a steep snow and ice ramp that would be our access point to the upper glacial plateau.

The next day we did another carry to our cache and continued up the steep ice ramp. This feature would become known as the "Soul Crusher." We climbed the Soul Crusher and continued on a climber's left traverse through broken scree ledges with a few low-5th-class moves to the edge of the upper glacial plateau. Crampons and ice tools out, we climbed across a small gully to get from rock to ice. I swung onto the ice slope, which felt a lot harder than it should, but this was our first trip above 5,000 metres. I set up an anchor about 30 metres away. Ali followed, and I could tell he was having some trouble.

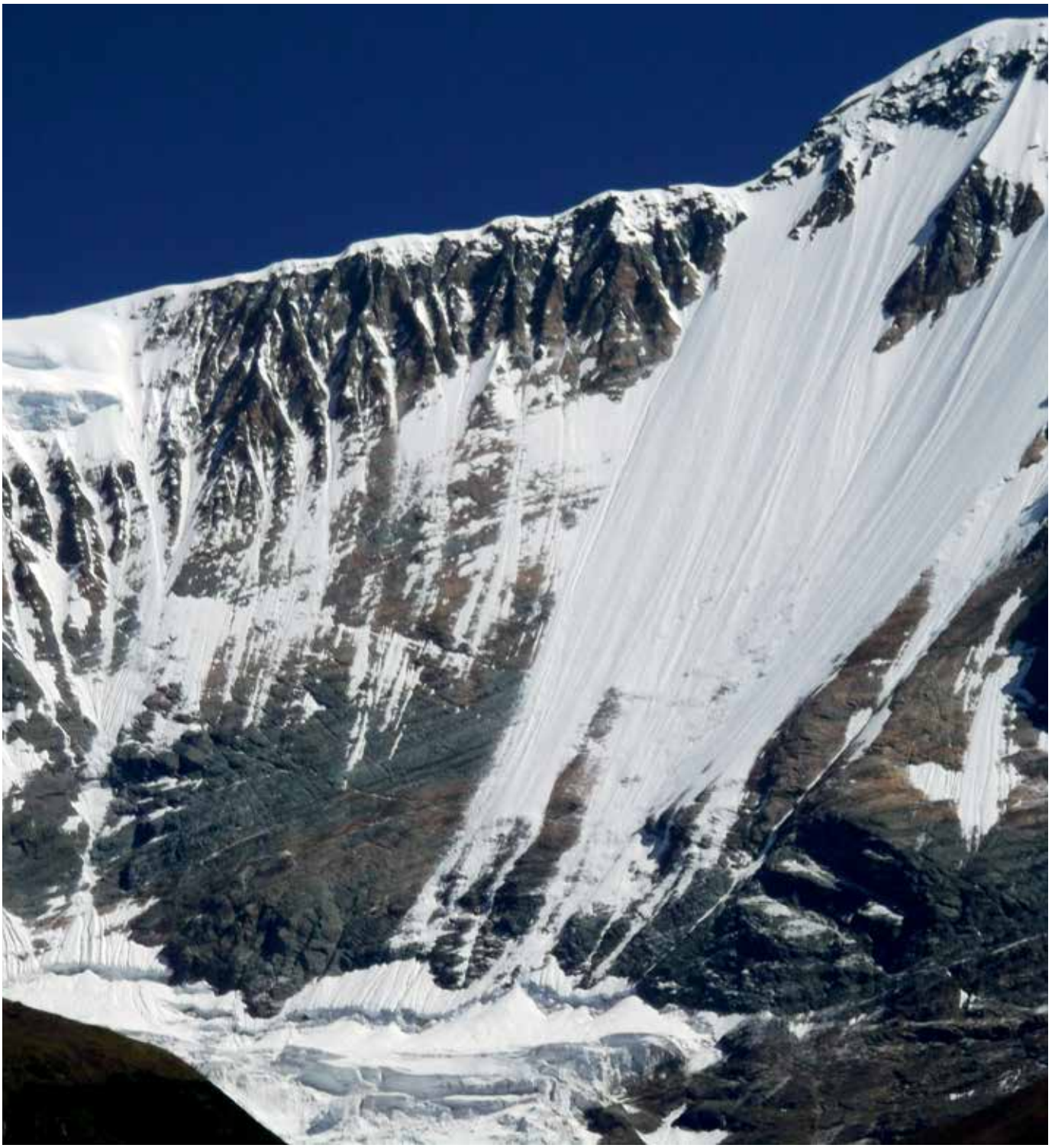
"This is hard!" he yelled. Phew, it's not just me, I told myself.

Ali clipped in to the anchor, and we soon realized we had painted ourselves into a corner. We were too high, so a V-thread rappel got us down to the plateau. Phew again, I thought, since I didn't want to reverse the ice slope we had just come across. Ali and I started walking on the upper plateau, which would become our high camp and give us access to the snow and ice face, and ultimately, the summit ridge.

The first thing we noticed is how little snow there was, maybe 20 centimetres on the glacier. The second was how much rockfall kept whizzing through the air and the lack of sheltered camp spots. We carved and dug out a spot as flat as we could for our tent. We chose the area with the least amount of peppered rocks on the glacier and away from the avalanche run-outs of the upper face. We set up camp two (5,450 metres), left as much gear as we could spare and headed back down. We returned to camp one after a 15-hour day, exhausted and happy that we had found a route to high camp.

We spent the next day resting, eating and soaking up the warmth of the sun while reading our books and making some sat phone calls to let everybody know we were OK. After our rest day we were back to work climbing between camp one and camp two. The trip up the Soul Crusher entailed about five kilometres in distance and 1,100 metres of elevation gain. It was exhausting, both physically and mentally. Picture precarious scrambling while trying to dodge rockfall with everything you carry on your back, while acclimatizing. At least most of it felt quite familiar being that Ali and I both live in the Canadian Rockies. During one of our descents from camp two, Ali yelled "Rock!" I ducked down as quick as I could. Ali looked at me wide-eyed like he had just seen a ghost and said the softball-size stone missed my head by a metre—too close.

On day 18, we climbed up the Soul Crusher



for what we hoped would be the last time. We were set for an attempt at the summit face. We had five days' worth of food and fuel with us and were feeling very well acclimatized. The next morning, we left for our first trip up the face to see how hard the bergschrund crossing would be and get an idea of snow conditions up to about 6,000 metres. We left with our skis on our backs in the hopes of getting our first Himalayan turns. We began our climb up the run-out fan of the upper face. I took the lead at the 'schrund. Even with the cold morning, we were greeted with almost constant rock showers. I got over the 'schrund with a few awkward moves and tucked in under a small roof for shelter. I yelled down to Ali to let him know I was going to keep climbing. I kept pushing upwards on a shallow snow and ice ramp where I reached another small alcove and built an anchor. Ali climbed the 60-metre pitch and joined me at the belay.

"I was getting pummelled with small rockfall down there," he said.

"Sorry that took me so long."

It was time to step onto the upper face and see what kind of snowpack we were dealing with. Ali pushed off from the belay and made his way onto the snowy face. He was moving very slowly, and I could tell he was having trouble finding good pro. After a 45-minute battle with only a few metres of height gain, he yelled "It's all bad out there!"

I could tell, but part of me was still hoping there was a way, so I decided to give it a go. I kicked one step and almost shit my pants, again! Every plunge of my tools or kick-step sounded like there was a marching-band drum following me up the mountain. I pushed a little higher, hoping the snowpack would become more secure. I would kick a step and look up immediately to see if the entire face wasn't coming down on me. I dug through the 30 to 40 centimetres of hard slab to try and get to the ice. I was greeted with a foot of depth hoar over soft crumbly ice. I looked up at the 10 steep football fields stacked above me. I knew very well what my options were: either keep climbing and take our chances with the snowpack, or turn back. If anything propagated above us, we would be goners. I could tell that Ali already knew what to do, plus the weather started to turn for the worst, so we decided to go down.

The southwest face of Mount Saipal in Far Western Nepal. Photo: Martin Lefebvre

We tucked back in our tent for some lunch just as the snow intensified. We sat in silence for a while, neither of us wanting to point out the big elephant in our tiny tent, although we both knew what the outcome of the next conversation would be. I, for one, didn't want to hear it.

"So, what do you think?" I finally asked.

Ali answered right away, "I think it's over."

We had a long, lengthy discussion about risk tolerance and how we couldn't let our intense commitment to this project cloud our judgment. The reality was that if this line was anywhere close to home, there was no way we would justify that snowpack. Just like that, it was over.

That night was probably the most frightening night I've had in the mountains. The snow kept falling and loose snow avalanches were pouring out of the gullies all around us. We had a constant fear that the next one might be big enough to hit our tent and send us flying down the 400-metre icefall below. Rocks were flying through the air like a town being bombarded with mortar shells. I tucked my head under my jackets and curled into my sleeping bag in the futile hope that a down helmet might protect me a bit more from the one with my name on it. We were pinned at camp two for 36 hours. Even after the storm tapered off, the avalanche danger was much too high to attempt a descent.

On the morning of day 21, we awoke to a clear and cold morning. During breakfast, we devised a plan to complete our descent in one go so that we wouldn't have to climb the Soul Crusher anymore. This was going to be possible by filling a large duffel (dubbed "The Pig"), carrying it to the top of a gully and hurling it down 400 metres to our gear cache at the moraines. We rigged the duffle up with cordelette and duct tape to try and keep it from exploding on its rough journey down. We approached the gully hauling The Pig to its runway. Ali was going to document the journey from

a good perch while I sent it flying. We watched with fingers crossed as it made its way down, getting massive air off a few diving boards. Just when I thought we were home free, The Pig exploded all over the slope.

Days went by ferrying loads back to base camp in perfect Scottish weather, a constant freezing mist that soaks you to the bone. One afternoon, Ali made a sat phone call to his mother in Kathmandu. She had visited the monk who blessed us and our trip prior to our departure on the same day we decided to retreat from high camp. He told her that we had just made a decision that saved our lives. Now, I'm not a religious man, but this information did make our defeat on the mountain easier to take. Pride can kill you out there and humility can help keep you alive, I told myself.

We were both extremely happy when the porters showed up. Not only did we have old friends to talk too, they even brought some local moonshine and a fresh cucumber that we devoured after a month of dehydrated food. Ali and I were both ready to begin our journey home the following day. Even wide-open mountain spaces can start to feel like they're closing in on you after a while. As vested as we were in this trip, it was only on the journey home that we came to realize the scope of what we had just undertaken, and how small the chance of success actually was.

Two days after we returned to Kathmandu, a huge storm hit Nepal. The cyclone moved up from India and laid over two metres of snow in 12 hours at alpine elevations during peak trekking season. Nepali guides, porters, international climbers and trekkers were all caught by surprise. At least 43 people died in Western Nepal due to exposure or avalanches. Ali and I stood helpless in the city as the body count kept rising in areas just east of where we had been. Had we still been on the mountain when this storm hit, I'm certain we would not be here today.

This area of Nepal has amazing potential for first ascents, and descents, and is still very new to expedition climbing, or even tourism. Drainages in proximity to Mount Saipal offer a sea of unclimbed peaks and routes ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 metres. Local trails, although rough at times, are available to access these remote areas that offer great base-camp opportunities. Being successful in these mountains demands a huge commitment on the part of the entire team, but if adventure off the beaten path in the Himalayas is what you seek, then success is guaranteed.

Martin Lefebvre leaves base camp with Mount Saipal at the head of the valley. Photo: Ali Hogg

2016 BMC Scottish Winter Meet

Ian Welsted

WHY, IN JANUARY, LEAVE THE WINTER climbing mecca of Canmore for the stodgy coires of the Scottish Highlands? The short answer: Scottish winter climbing offers the purest and most exhilarating, high-risk winter cragging I know. Raphael Slawinski and I were fortunate to attend the biannual British Mountaineering Council Winter Climbing Meet, representing The Alpine Club of Canada. We bid adieu to freezing temperatures and jetted to rainy Aviemore (the Banff of Scotland, replete with fat skis in windows on the main street). Just up the road, Glenmore Lodge, an ACC clubhouse-style facility, but with a well-attended pub, is home to the meet. For a solid introduction to the deservingly mythical experience of mixed climbing in Scotland, the experience can not be beaten.

What is it about the small cliffs, coires and mountains of Scotland that makes the climbing so outsized compared to the height of the crags? There are two primary factors: the weather and the local ethic. The meet is the perfect set-up to help on both accounts. By teaming a visitor with a British climber every day, local knowledge goes a long way. Even so, even the über-optimistic Simon Richardson, Mr. Scottishwinter.com himself, had to return on one early attempt, not having left the car. First tip I learned: have your boots and full Gore-Tex on in the car, as a visit to the trunk can be very unpleasant.

The weather is so atrocious that it is managing to put a dent in the staunchly traditional ethic against fixed protection. Hurricane Gertrude was blamed on the first soggy day for forcing us to the aesthetically unappealing Newtyle Quarry, home to fixed draws, drilled pockets and steep roofs. A new generation of hard routes are going up in the mountains because the locals have this bolted hole for training during the frequent storms. Interestingly, none of the locals seemed to consider these drilled routes as anything but practice for the real thing. Raphael did Canada proud when he onsighted an M11, though the locals in the know proclaimed it downgraded to 10. This hopscotching of grades (and the opaqueness of the grading system in general) was to become a running joke, as was the thorough wetting of all participants.

I was happy to be teamed with Ian Parnell, the editor of *Climb* magazine, as he has a healthy dislike for horizontal drytooling, a niche in climbing at which I am similarly useless. By the time we got into the proper hills, Ian was the man with 20 years of experience in Scotland. Better weather had us walking in to the Ben (Ben Nevis, highest peak in the country at 1,345 metres). When Ian mentioned Sioux Wall, I was overjoyed to get on his first ascent established 10 years earlier. In the evolution of difficulty in Scotland, the harder routes were initially done at smaller coires. Sioux Wall was a breakthrough climb as grade VIII on the Ben. It is the classic route of the grade on the mountain.

Ahead of us were Uisdean Hawthorne and Luka Strazar (Slovenia). Uisdean presented a slideshow one evening, charting his rise to being one of an eager group of young Scottish crushers. He had even visited Mount Alberta's north face twice last summer with his friend Tom Livingstone. Keen. Luka stopped me earlier in the meet and asked if I had been on K6, as he had spent time in the same valley and put up a wild-looking route on K7. Strong company, and the first ascensionist to boot. Sioux Wall was quintessential perfect moderate drytooling up cracks on an imposing 100-metre-high wall. Ian explained that it was a touchstone route for the grade. When he first ventured up the cracks, they were untouched, and required cleaning and checking, whereas now the hooks are well established. As a result, there was a fair amount of banter from the youngsters ahead about Ian's routes being soft for the grade. I think it is fair to say that given good weather and conditions, mid-graded Scottish climbs present reasonable challenges for Canadians.

Ian Welsted on Sioux Wall on Ben Nevis.
Photo: Ian Parnell

Ian paid me back for my jokes about his route at dinner by passing me on to Tom Livingstone. Tom is considerably younger and lankier than Ian and me. With dubious weather, we went with the conservative option and visited the Cairngorms, just up the road from the lodge. We began in the dark, venturing into winds that knocked us from our feet. Tom assured me with, "We don't usually start out in weather like this, but often end in it." Tom obviously wanted to crank up the game a little and started listing grade 10 climbs, but I was less assured. Gales, sheets of spindrift and soggy pants made me hesitate. I recalled I had told Ian I wanted to "be the Canadian who doesn't epic the winter meet," after stories of troubles of previous visitors. With visions of frozen fingers fiddling in micro-nuts into frozen parallel cracks, I opted for a step down in grades. Strangely, the glazed wide-flaring cracks of Hooker's Corner (VI, 7) felt more difficult to hand jam and off-width than the perfect slots of Sioux Wall. As consolation, I reminded myself that the day previous Raph hadn't made easy work of the nearby Vicar (VII, 8), hooking on tiny face edges and overlooking the slippery rimed up cracks so unfamiliar to Rockies climbers.

Back at the base of the 100-metre crag, Tom was getting amped for something more serious. After looking at the fall potential on the first pitch of The Gathering, I admitted I wouldn't be able to commit to it. If there had been bolts to clip, no problem. The difference of being able to lead in these conditions is one element that makes Scottish climbing so pure and ideal. It separates the leaders from the crowd. Tom did a fine job

with perfect technique, hanging in an awkward position and shaking out repeatedly as he fished in micro-nut after micro-nut before committing to a roof move above a slab landing. In Scotland, there is a lot more to the climb than the hardest move.

At the top of the second pitch, I topped out in the Cairngorm Crawl. On hands and knees, and ready to self-arrest, I gave a running belay, as there is no established station. To keep the adventure high, one is required to crawl across the flat plateau until one can body-belay behind rocks. Sitting in 100-mile-per-hour winds, I felt the full power of the Scottish winter situation. Tom said he had topped out in similar conditions once, and in spite of carrying the suggested compass and map, they missed the abseil point and spent the night walking in circles on the plateau to maintain warmth. When we later checked the weather, winds had topped out at 125 miles per hour a few hours after we topped out.

The story that will put it in perspective is Raphael's go on The Secret, originally given X, 10, now IX, 9 (or VIII, 8, according to some of the more rambunctious youngsters). Raph onsighted this much-hyped wonder in one pitch, as have a few other visitors recently. But the day was certainly not uneventful. Suffering from hypothermia after getting wet on the approach, Raph took an hour of aggressively hiking up and down the approach slope to warm up. After three hours on the climb, he topped out. Ian Parnell, belaying, was so frozen by this time that they beat a hasty retreat. In the melee, Raph realized his backpack, replete with a full set of cams, a camera, a SPOT locator and his goggles (required on almost all days), had been swept downslope and covered by constant avalanches. With this in mind, he suggested they rappel the approach gully, and 30 metres down he set off yet another slab.

Mind you, the conditions didn't shut down Canadian wonder-kid of Canadian alpinism, Marc-Andre Leclerc, for long. His visit has instantly gone done in lore. In one fine day, dubbed Super Tuesday, he soloed seven routes to the summit of the Ben. A second day, he added another slew of solos, also on the Ben. One would at first hear, "Is that guy on Point Five alone?" Then as word spread, it became, "That must be the guy who soloed Cerro Torre on Number 3." Finally, in a moment that proves he is still somewhat human, a crew stood by as a rope was lowered to him at a roof on the notorious chimney of Darth Vader. I feel fairly safe in saying the Ben had never seen such an impressive few days.

And to yet further attempt to explain Scottish winter climbing, in the three weeks of my visit, six people died climbing in the mountains and hills of Scotland. How the stakes can be so high, the people getting out in such large numbers, climbing committing technical routes of high consequence, all in weather that has to be seen to be believed, well, it has to be seen to be believed. It certainly makes for a full-sized adventure package among friendly, motivated locals, something I will gladly return to soon.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to The Alpine Club of Canada for making our visit to the British Mountaineering Council Meet possible, and to Becky McGovern and Nick Colton and to the BMC for a unique and wonderful, if wet, experience.

Marc-Andre Leclerc on his bold solo attempt of Darth Vader.
Photo: Paul McSorley

Solo on Standhart

Marc-Andre Leclerc

BY MARCH 2015, I WAS STARTING to feel that I could use a short break from alpine climbing. All of the long nights spent rappelling, the damp bivies and perpetually sore feet finally had me convinced that some time spent lazing around in Squamish could be beneficial to my overall well-being.

A trip to the Mediterranean was in order, and some time spent in the Verdon certainly did not hurt the morale either, but by July, I could sense that something was missing in my life, so I began making arrangements to visit the mountains.

I knew that the east face of Aguja Standhardt in Torres of Argentine Patagonia had a great-looking chimney line for a solo, and that in winter I would likely have the place to myself—impossible to resist! Tickets were booked, but not without difficulty, and by the second week of September, I was back in Chalten furiously trying to decipher weather maps and plan an ascent of Tomahawk to Exocet.

With my equipment already in the Torre Valley and a forecast for six days of high pressure, I headed out from town on the last day of the calendar winter. The following day, I climbed an icefall to beneath the south face of Pollone and spent the afternoon ski touring around the pass. The next day dawned as I was halfway up a sheet of névé plastered to Pollone's south wall—perfect Styrofoam and great fun. I had to turn around 30 metres short of the summit due to rime ice obscuring smooth rock.

Taking a rest day in the Torre valley under clear skies was mentally tough, but I knew it would help keep me energizes for Standhardt the following day. By 4 a.m. I was off and wandering up the well-frozen glacier, and at first light I could see that there was indeed some ice in the crux chimney of Tomahawk.

The first pitch was supposed to have some aid but I didn't find it. Up next, a steep ice chimney provided good entertainment for more than 70 metres. Although it had been my plan for the past two months to climb this line, it was exciting to be making the climb a reality as I slithered up delightful icy slots and over steep snowfields to the junction with the classic Exocet on the upper wall.

Exocet lived up to its reputation as a world-class line, and soon I was tunneling through a narrow gap in the final snow mushroom like an oversized rat. I emerged onto the summit of Aguja Standhardt and spent a few moments loitering about before rappelling back down the east face with my single 80-metre rope to arrive back on the glacier before dark. I retrieved my ski poles from the base and soon I was refuelling back at camp and marveling over my luck with timing and conditions. The route had been superb. I'd had the whole valley to myself as well, an unlikely prospect during the summer months. My only company was a set of eyes reflected back at me in the darkness, as I melted snow after the climb. I still don't know if they belonged to a puma or a resident fox.

Marc-Andre Leclerc on the summit of Aguja Standhart after soloing Tomahawk-Exocet. Photo: Marc-Andre Leclerc

The next day I was back in town enjoying the boulders and good friends. The weather gods granted me one more window, so I made enjoyable solos of La Voie de Benitiers on El Mocho and Rubio y Azul on Medialuna. Both were wonderful parting gifts from the Torres for my twenty-third birthday.

Yosemite Village felt awfully crowded the next week, but soon I was onto another all-consuming project on El Capitan—an entirely different story.

Summary

Tomahawk-Exocet (M5 WI5, 800m), Aguja Standhardt, Argentine Patagonia. First Solo Ascent: Marc-Andre Leclerc, September 24, 2015.

La Voie de Benitiers (5.10a A1 (5.12c), 400m), El Mocho, Argentine Patagonia. First Solo Ascent: Marc-Andre Leclerc, October 8, 2015.

Rubio y Azul (5.11, 400m), Medialuna, Argentine Patagonia. Solo Ascent: Marc-Andre Leclerc, October 9, 2015.

The Cerro Torre group. Photo: Marc-Andre Leclerc

Chasing the Kooshdakhaa

Max Fisher

DURING A SPELL OF EXCELLENT WEATHER from May 18 to 31, 2015, Erik Bonnett and I climbed two new routes in the southeastern Coast Mountains of Alaska/Northern British Columbia. The plan was to access the mountains by ski plane then depart under our own power via glaciers, slide alder bashing and class III and IV whitewater in packrafts.

Our first objective was to complete a route we attempted the previous year on Kooshdakhaa Spire [*CAJ*, 2015, p. 126]. We set out early and made quick work of the first five pitches (up to 5.10) that we had climbed the year before. On pitch six, we entered new terrain, climbing through a roof into a series of crack systems on the main buttress of the spire. We continued climbing until 11:30 p.m. on sustained 5.10 and 5.10+ rock before stopping on a small diving-board ledge to rehydrate and shiver for four to five hours before continuing. We climbed six full-value alpine pitches to the summit. When I say full value I mean excavating snow and ice from cracks to get gear that would stick, using the ice tool and rock shoe combo to make funky mixed moves and then pulling straight into steep finger and hand cracks, and repeat. Slow but fun, depending how you look at it.

Erik Bonnett on pitch six of Otter Water Boogie Man. Photo: Max Fisher

After honouring Cory Hall on the summit, by spreading some of his ashes, we spent the next few hours slogging through heavy wet snow back to our camp. After 37 hours on the go, we arrived back in camp happy with our achievement.

After a few days of chilling in camp under clear skies, we loaded our packs and rafts and trudged into Northern B.C. in search of other climbing objectives. We set up camp on some rock slabs at the west end of the massive ridgeline that sticks up through the glacier for 10-plus kilometres. In the middle of this ridge, we found our next climb across from Kooshdakhaa E4 (or Castle Greyskull, which was the name given by Dave Anderson and company on their expedition to this area in 2003). The 400-metre wall is lower angle than our previous climb but looked fun and worth a go, especially the upper headwall.

The next day, we set out early with interesting route finding on the lower run-out slabs. After three pitches of up to 5.10 we came to a large ledge. From there, we climbed up the middle of the main buttress (5.6 to 5.11-), aiming for what looked like a lightning-bolt-shaped feature to a beautiful final headwall pitch (5.9+). The climbing throughout this route is covered in black lichen, but for the most part, the rock is of pretty good quality.

We relaxed on the summit to take in the amazing view of Greyskull and the surrounding peaks before descending to the southeast. We did two rappels down to the glacier on the east side of the ridge and walked back to camp. We arrived back in camp after 16 hours on the go.

After relaxing in camp, we decided to make

our way to the river and start floating back to the front country. With a good snowpack, the travel was pretty easy down to the first of three lakes that make up the Nourse River watershed. This lake was mostly frozen so we continued to pull our rafts. After a quick portage and a short paddle across the second lake, we soon where paddling fun class II/III rapids until we came to a big horizon line in the river. We portaged around this series of massive un-runnable waterfalls to our camp for that night.

Over the course of the next few days, we encountered fantastic continuous whitewater that steepened from the previous day and offered continuous class III and III+ whitewater with some class IV and V that we walked around (this included two beautiful canyons that would be excellent to paddle in a kayak). As the gradient eased, we floated to Dyea, about 15 minutes from Skagway. This was the first full descent of the Nourse River.

Summary

Otter Water Boogie Man (V 5.11- A1, 600m), north face, Kooshdakhaa Spire, Coast Mountains, Alaska. FA: Erik Bonnett, Max Fisher, May 19-20, 2015.

Lichening Bolt Buttress (IV 5.11-, 400m), Coast Mountains, Northern B.C. FA: Erik Bonnett, Max Fisher, May 25, 2015.

Max Fisher on the last pitch of Lichening Bolt Buttress.
Photo: Erik Bonnett

Reviews

Ontario Climbing: Volume One, The Southern Escarpment

by Gus Alexandropoulos, Justin Dwyer, If It Bleeds We Can Kill It Productions (2016)

The nearest piece of wildness to the seven million people who live along the north shore of Lake Ontario is not one of the Canadian wilderness tropes of pine forest, canoe lake or tundra, but a mountain named Nemo. Nemo is Latin for nobody—Mount Nobody. Canadian novelist and literary Nobel laureate Alice Munro has called the mountain in question "this careless challenge in the ordinary landscape."

The history of recording climbing activity in the vicinity began in the 1960s and continued as practice for the mountains or the great rock climber's Everest—El Capitan. In the '80s, suburban kids who had nowhere else to go ushered in a chaotic, exuberant, improvisational period in which many hundreds of climbs were developed. The three editions of the first modern guidebooks to the escarpment I authored in the early 1980s were as much a diary of those times as usable sources. There is an excellent account of this period in this volume. The sense of rebellion and fun of those days continues in the scene and is reflected in the layout and imagery in Gus Alexandropoulos and Justin Dwyer's book, much of which is sourced from the '80s. For all of its useful information, you can't read through it without chuckling.

The third life of the area was as a credible sport-climbing venue. The two sport-era guidebooks by the quartet of Judy Barnes, Chris Oates, Tom Valis and Mark Bracken have been out of print for 10 years and so this volume is very timely. The names and grades of previously unrecorded climbs at popular areas (and perhaps this is the majority of all climbs) are revealed herein. Perhaps most importantly, this is the first guidebook to reflect great advances in guidebook production pioneered by Rockfax. There are colour photographs, maps and lines, as well as descriptions, taking much of the guesswork out of finding routes.

Alexandropoulos has been a major new-router, and is a hard sport climber. He has worked in the climbing industry most of his adult life and edited *Gripped* magazine. Dwyer is a guide. He is also a local climbing historian. They are both the guys everyone always asked about routes and grades before they even started writing this book, and thus are obvious and trustworthy sources for information.

If there is one aspect of this guidebook that some will find controversial, it is the inclusion of closed areas, albeit clearly marked as such in a manner approved by the Ontario Access Coalition. I, however, think it is important and allowable under the circumstances. The history of climbing guidebooks, especially to small, otherwise overlooked areas affirms Joan Didion's words: "A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his own image."

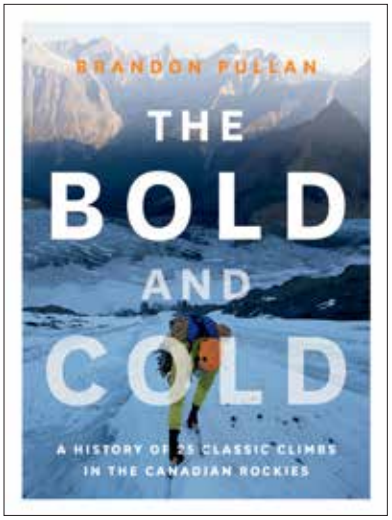
Many of the areas in question were first visited by climbers, who named them, cleaned up garbage thrown from the clifftop and, experience shows, looked after them in a way that those who closed them often did not. It is my opinion that observing crag closures may be compulsory, but uncritically respecting them in principle is optional.

In all, this is by far the best guidebook the area has ever had. I look forward to the second volume, which, I understand, will cover the higher quality, more famous outcrops of Lions Head, Metcalfe Rock, White Bluff and the Swamp.

—David Chaundy-Smart

The Bold and Cold: A History of 25 Classic Climbs in the Canadian Rockies

by Brandon Pullan, Rocky Mountain Books (2016)



The climbing community in the Rockies has been waiting for *The Bold and Cold* for quite some time now, in fact almost 30 years. What began in the 1980s as a project by two new Canadian immigrants, Swiss climber Urs Kallen and South African-born ringer Dave Cheesmond, has finally been completed by Brandon Pullan. Both Kallen and Cheesmond, upon arriving in the Rockies, were dismayed to discover that no comprehensive guidebook, or much information at all for that matter, existed on the great alpine climbs of the area. Sadly, before either could see the project to completion, Cheesmond died on Hummingbird Ridge on Mount Logan, and Kallen was left distraught, abandoning both climbing and the book for several years.

Pullan learned of the abandoned book decades later, and with encouragement from Kallen, decided to see it through. The end result, *The Bold and Cold,* was well worth the wait. Set slightly in the style of Roper and Steck's *50 Classic Climbs of North America* and Fred Beckey's *100 Favourite Climbs, The Bold and Cold* is a book of dreams, something to fawn over in the shoulder season, and it is a heady resource for aspiring climbers and armchair alpinists alike. The book is a collection of images, stories and accounts of the 25 top alpine climbs in the Rockies as told by first ascensionists and those who dared to repeat the routes as well. When Pullan expressed interest in the book, Kallen purportedly told him:

> Go climb these 25 routes and then you can write the book Dave and I never finished. The goal is to climb as well as Dave climbed. He was one of the best alpine climbers to have ever climbed in the Rockies. You can't change the routes or the order and you have to call it *The Bold and Cold.* Good luck.

The climbs included within are grouped by difficulty and gain severity as you move through the book, beginning with "the Shakedown Routes" and ending with "the Titans," the true triumphs of the region: Mount Alberta's North Face, Mount Assiniboine's East Face and North Pillar on North Twin. Well, you get the picture. Aside from being hugely informational and aspirational, the book is also chock full of great writing. Many seldom-told stories and lightly celebrated accounts have finally found their place together in one proud oversized volume. Barry Blanchard, John Lauchlan, Don Vockeroth and other Canadian alpine pioneers all make their mark here, as do eager foreign visitors such as Steve House, Ed Cooper, Chris Jones and Fred Beckey. Cutting-edge stories and snippets from modern mixed artists like Raphael Slawinski, Marc-Andre Leclerc, Jon Walsh and Nick Bullock are also included, bringing the volume up to the present day.

Taking a tremendous idea and running with it is not an easy thing to do, but Pullan, with inspiration from Kallen and the ever-reliable publishers at Rocky Mountain Books, has created a real keepsake. This is a genuine timeless work here. Its pages are something to admire and leaf through until the paper becomes dog-eared and wine stained for decades to come. It's a true modern classic, and it's wonderful to see someone take the same risks on paper as on the chossy altars of the Rockies themselves.

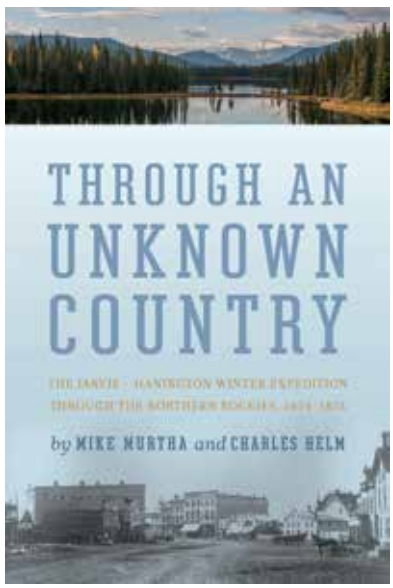
— Joanna Croston

Through an Unknown Country

by Mike Murtha and Charles Helm, Rocky Mountain Books (2015)

In january 1875, two men set out from Fort George (Prince George), British Columbia, in the dead of winter to explore the unknown country north of the Fraser River through the Rocky Mountains. Their urgent charge from Sandford Fleming, head of the Canadian Pacific Survey, was to find a northerly route through the Rockies for the future Canadian Pacific Railway. The Canadian Pacific Survey was established in 1871 and construction of the railway was a project critical to Canada's future as a nation. The railway was intended to be completed by 1881, but by 1875 the route had not yet been settled.

Through an Unknown Country is the latest work of Mike Murtha and Charles Helm on the exploration history of Canada's Northern Rocky Mountains. Helm is a physician in the resource community of Tumbler Ridge in the heart of the Northern Rockies and is the author of several books and journal articles on the area and its history. Mike Murtha was a planner with BC Parks in Prince George, where he took personal interest in researching the history of many of B.C.'s northern parks. Together, Murtha and Helm have written about historical explorations of the region, including Samuel Prescott Fay's 1914 trek through the Northern Rockies[1] and Prentiss Gray's 1927 exploration from the Peace to the Fraser[2]. There is a symmetry between their works on Fay and Jarvis in that the respective journeys intersect at present-day Jarvis Lakes.



The editors were stirred by three historical quotations to undertake the task of combining E. W. Jarvis' and C. F. Hanington's accounts of their epic journey. The first was in 1925 by a young school teacher in B.C.'s Peace region, Gerry Andrews (later to become Surveyor General of British Columbia) who noted the importance of this part of Canada's history to its citizens, especially to its young people. The second quote was by an apparently disillusioned Charles Hanington who remarked in a 1926 letter that his and Jarvis' 1875 exploration "…is of little value to modern people, who don't give a Damn for what has happened in the past." The third quote is by archivist, Douglas Brymner in his 1887 report to Canada's Parliament. Commenting on Jarvis' vivid but formal narrative and Hanington's unreserved personal account of their day-to-day experiences, he declared: "Both narratives should be read together."

Jarvis and Hanington left Fort George on January 14, 1875, after a week of below -40 C temperatures had sufficiently frozen the Fraser River for safe travel. The first part of the expedition included several native men recruited in Fort George, along with supplies for two months and 24 dogs in six sled trains. Hanington had earlier established a supply cache seven day's travel upriver, plus they had prearranged to buy salmon cached by a native man near the Bear (Bowron) River. For gear, each man had a pair of snowshoes, a pair of blankets, a light cotton sheet for a lean-to shelter (no tents) and several pairs of moccasins. For the next two months, they battled severe cold, difficult canyons, cold water immersions, heavy snowfall in-filling their tracks, a steady death toll among their working dogs, and near starvation as they neared Jasper House to find it deserted and devoid of supplies.

They first investigated the north fork (Herrick Creek) to its upper reaches below Mount Ovington[3] to ascertain that it was entirely unsuited for a railway. Retracing their steps, they ascended the south fork (McGregor River) and eventually took the north tributary branch (Jarvis Creek) up the summit (present day Jarvis Lakes in B.C.'s Kakwa Provincial Park). Passing below a beautiful pyramidal mountain resembling the Matterhorn, that is the northernmost peak over 10,000 feet in the Rockies, Jarvis records that they named it Mount Ida.

Jarvis had by now determined that a railway was infeasible by any proximate route through the

Rockies, but despite fear of death by starvation, they decided to push on to complete a through survey. One of the startling facts coming out of the narrative is that Jarvis and Hanington took turns counting paces for the entire journey as a measure of distance travelled. Anyone who has tried navigating with just a compass and paces for short distances will appreciate the enormity of just this one aspect.

Through an Unknown Country is suited to academic and lay readers, and both should be prepared for some initial hard work as the book opens with Jarvis' formal report which must be read alongside extensive end notes by the editors. The reader's early perseverance is soon rewarded, however, by Hanington's plain-spoken letters to his brother in chapter two.

Jarvis' and Hanington's treatment of First Nations team members in their respective narratives is typical of 19th-century mores, although by the end of the book the reader senses a deeper regard for their native companions than is at first evident in their writings. Jarvis emerges as a quiet, competent, thoughtful leader, but one who didn't share a lot of his thinking with his companions; and yet it is the stalwart Hanington who is key to Jarvis' life and death decision not to turn back at the "summit" (Jarvis Lakes). Thus both of them were instrumental in the ultimate prosecution of Sandford Fleming's orders. Gerry Andrews later recognized their achievement as "an epic of Canadian exploration," and Sandford Fleming in his 1889 paper to the Royal Society of Canada highlighted this as the most noteworthy of the many Canadian Pacific Survey expeditions.

— Mike Nash

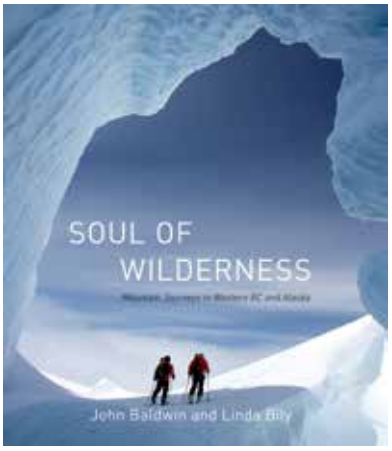
[1] *The Forgotten Explorer — Samuel Prescott Fay's 1914 Expedition to the Northern Rockies;* edited by Charles Helm and Mike Murtha; Rocky Mountain Books, 2009.

[2] *Early Exploration in the Neglected Mountains* by Charles Helm and Mike Murtha; *Canadian Alpine Journal,* 2004.

[3] *Kitchi-Kakwa Mountaineering from 1875 to the BCMC Sumer Camp – Ovington Creek Area, 1-8 August 1992* by Michael Feller, *B.C. Mountaineer,* Vol. 62 (1994).

Soul of Wilderness: Mountain Journeys in Western B.C. and Alaska

by John Baldwin and Linda Bily, Harbour Publishing (2015)



There has been an unfortunate yet understandable tendency within Canadian mountaineering literature and photography to front stage the Rockies and subordinate B.C. Coast Mountains to secondary status. There has also been the tendency to valourize rock jocks and first ascents (on evermore difficult and trying routes and pitches) and minimize a more artistic and contemplative yet equally competent approach to mountaineering. The sheer breakthrough beauty of *Soul of Wilderness* is that "mountain journeys in western B.C. and Alaska" are front staged and the "soul of the wilderness" rather than a simple literal approach to the mountains is the core of this burnished gold book—truly artists, mountaineers, contemplatives and photographers wed and knitted together in this keeper of a mountaineering classic.

The wordsmith of text and exquisite photographs evoke and draw the curious and keen reader into both the form and soul of the mountains. John Baldwin and Linda Bily should be heartily congratulated for a pure diamond of a book that, simply put, has no competitors and would be hard to surpass. It is truly the West Coast mountaineering book of 2015 to purchase, read and inwardly and meditatively digest. The expansive photographs, for the most part, cover treks on glaciers, high-alpine traverses and fine sloping snowfields. There are a few photographs that span the mountain seasons, but most of the visual delights in *Soul of Wilderness* have been on ski trips in western B.C. and Alaska.

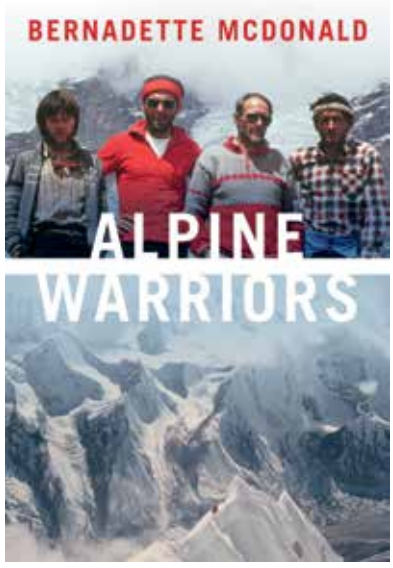
There are 10 chapters: 1) Footsteps in the Wilderness, 2) Wilderness at our Doorstep, 3) Where the Ridges Run Wild, 4) Whales and Icefields, 5) Gentle Wilderness, 6) Ski Wild, 7) Thirty Years on Ice, 8) Both Sides of the Stikine, 9) Touch the Wild, and 10) Soul of Wilderness. There is often a graphic and, at times, subtle transition from urban to rural to wilderness. Baldwin and Bily have tracked the trail well and made it abundantly clear why wildness is essential for a sane and centred soul—the soul of the wilderness is, in essence, oxygen for the human soul. Without such oxygen, our souls shrink, wither and, eventually, die.

The B.C. mountaineering community has a rich line and lineage. Dick Culbert took mountaineering to new levels in his creative years. John Clarke told yet a fuller tale and story. John Baldwin and Linda Bily very much stand on the solid and innovative shoulders of Culbert and Clarke, and *Soul of Wilderness: Mountain Journeys in Western B.C. and Alaska* amply illustrates why this is the indisputable case.

— Ron Dart

Alpine Warriors

by Bernadette McDonald, Rocky Mountain Books (2015)



Bernadette mcdonald is the author of nine mountaineering books. Her book on the rich history of Polish alpinists, *Freedom Climbers*, is a multiple award winner, having earned the Grand Prize at the Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival and the Boardman Tasker Prize in 2011. Her latest book, *Alpine Warriors*, another award winner, reveals more Eastern European climbing exploits; this time, however, it is the Slovenians who execute the impossible in the alpine realm. *Alpine Warriors* takes us into the heart of the Yugoslavian civil conflict and the hardcore Slovenian alpine climbing scene. Some familiar names like Tomo Česen, Mark Prezelj and Tomaž Humar appear and all their ferocious feats are illustrated in fine form; however, the true wealth of this book lies in learning more about the climbers who remained in the shadows, those virtually unknown in the North American climbing community.

The vivid picture painted by McDonald of an unwavering spirit of nationalism amongst the Slovenian people dominates the first part of the book. She illustrates the rite of passage for all Slovenians, whether climber or regular citizen, to make an ascent of the country's highest peak, Triglav. Similarly, one of the country's most preeminent mountaineers, Nejc Zaplotnik, wrote what is now considered a contemporary classic, *Pot* (The Way), which drove the ambitions of generations of Slovenian climbers to new heights. McDonald shares the guiding principles contained within the pages of *Pot* throughout the book, circling back every now and then to complete the story.

With a copy of *Pot* in their back pocket and the Julian Alps in their backyard, the Slovenian training ground bred, and continues to breed, some of the most respected and bold alpinists in the world. Through elaborate training regimes and state-supported expeditions abroad, Yugoslavian alpinists began making impressive climbs in the Himalaya as early as 1960. In the 1970s, they were ascending the eight-thousanders and by 1995, the highest peaks in the world had all been summited by Slovenian teams, and often by the most technically difficult lines imaginable. After the death of Tito in 1980, many of these extraordinary climbs were completed during tumultuous socio-political circumstances under tyrant Slobodan Milošević, as if the climbs themselves weren't challenging enough. Similar to their Polish climbing contemporaries, Slovenians sought not only summits but escape from oppression in their home country

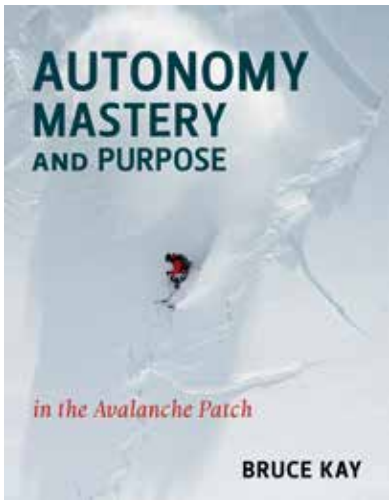
under hard times.

As with *Freedom Climbers*, *Alpine Warriors* masterfully intertwines politics and mountaineering. Impeccably researched, it is not only a brilliant book about mountaineering history, it is a historical record of an era whose intricate struggles seems distant and long past. The social turmoil irrevocably impacted the young spirited climbers of the day, forcing them to push the limits right up to the present and paving the way for up-and-comers such as Luka Lindič. *Alpine Warriors* is a book not to be missed and is simultaneously hard to put down.

—Joanna Croston

Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose in the Avalanche Patch

by Bruce Kay, self-published (2015)



It could be hard to believe for a group of people like us "cool mountain folk" that we are slaves to culture, but it seems to be true. We are a group who values freedom from the confining rules of the larger society, and we go to the mountains to find liberation. We even named our textbook after the deliverance we experience in the mountains, so how can we be shackled by anything? This is one of many compelling ideas in Bruce Kay's recent publication *Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose in the Avalanche Patch.* Kay has the courage to say outright "as much as we might think otherwise, our (mountain) culture often holds the levers of influence over us rather than the other way around." In this statement, he makes clear at least one of the unseen pressures on our decision making in the high-stakes game of backcountry skiing and riding—our culture.

Kay distils the work of other noted thinkers and academics and pours a "shot ski" filled with the latest research on intuition, bias, thinking, heuristics, culture and his own hard-won wealth of human observation as an avalanche professional. His work helps us to better understand human factors as they relate to avoiding pain-filled involvements with avalanches. He takes a diligent, unapologetic look at our behaviour and motivations for sometimes inappropriately dropping into consequential mountain terrain in winter. In doing so, he casts a steady illumination on a large part of the problem of avalanches— ourselves.

Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose is a refreshing antidote to the trance I see backcountry riders in. Kay holds up a mirror, and we can see the pinwheels swirling around in our eyes, providing us with a profound awareness of who we are and the issues we share. We place ourselves in the cast of his riveting stories, because he uses the fact that history repeats itself to profound affect. His remedy is a pragmatic and reasoned tool box for overcoming our flawed approach to our pursuit of powder, like how to use human behaviour to get the most benefit as opposed to focusing on the problems posed.

It is hard to know the meaning of consequence unless we have personally lived them, but where wisdom resides is to learn the lessons from others, or before the sting of profound ramification. Kay helps us with this task, and ultimately, if we would like to preserve our freedom from regulation, we will embrace and put into practice his message and take more responsibility out there for ourselves, because with responsibility comes the freedom we seek.

Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose is a must read and study for those who travel in avalanche terrain. Bruce Kay has taken a personal risk to be critical about what we are doing as a mountain community. His critique of us is purposeful, to help us all get better at what we do by seeking the book's title as expressed goals for how we operate in the high-risk environment of backcountry skiing and riding.

— Ken Wylie

Remembrances

Peter Solomon
1962 – 2015

Peter solomon became involved with the ACC Montreal Section in the early 1980s. Anne Gillespie had been section member from childhood, and their shared love for the mountains and the outdoors soon linked them together as life partners. The section was in turmoil after the accidental deaths of very significant Montreal Section people in 1984. Peter subsequently served as secretary then national representative before being the section chair from 1988 to 1990. His overwhelming passionate optimism as well as pragmatism helped considerably in the revival of the section and its activities. Although still in his 20s, he managed to combine these commitments with completing his medical studies—a tribute to his people and organizational skills. He eventually specialised as an anaesthesiologist.

A successful section camp in Rogers Pass in 1989 marked the return of the section to previous levels of activity. After 1990, Peter continued to serve as national representative. Peter and Anne subsequently climbed in Switzerland and successfully undertook the Annapurna circuit before setting up home in the Gatineau hills and raising their family. There, they devoted themselves to reviving the fortunes of a local Nordic ski club as well as introducing their two sons to mountaineering, travelling throughout the Americas. Peter rose to head his anaesthesiology department in Hull, Quebec; his colleagues found it hard to understand why someone so capable hid himself away with them. As with everything he did, it was on his own terms: he was where, with whom and doing what he wished.

He treated his long bouts with cancer with typical, forward-looking optimism, consulting widely with medical colleagues to further research. He will be long remembered for generously sharing his capability, love of life and community spirit.

—Tom Haslam-Jones

John Oliver Wheeler
1924 – 2015

The wheeler name is a legend in Canadian mountaineering. For a hundred years, the image of Arthur Oliver Wheeler has towered over the history and legend of The Alpine Club of Canada like a colossus.

It is often forgotten that his son, Edward Oliver Wheeler, was at least as accomplished. Under A.O.'s careful eye, E.O. attended ACC camps throughout his youth and soon became a fine climber and a competent guide. His reputation as a climber and map-maker was soon such that he was invited, along with George Leigh Mallory and others, to join the first British expedition to Everest in 1921. E.O. then went on to become the Surveyor General of India. Rising in reputation, E.O. Wheeler was knighted in 1943.

John Oliver Wheeler was born in the foothills of the Himalayas at Mussoorie, India, on December 19, 1924, three years after his father had returned from the first British Expedition to Mount Everest. He was too young to remember his first visit to Canada in 1926.

In January of 1933, Oliver and Dolly installed their son as a boarding student in Shawnigan Lake School on Vancouver Island, and then in August returned to India where Oliver continued his work with the survey. Though he seldom saw his parents, John Wheeler spent his summers with his grandfather climbing and hiking in the Rockies.

Having attended a number of ACC camps, he had also developed a fine reputation as mountaineer who had climbed with distinction in the company of the some of the very best of his day.

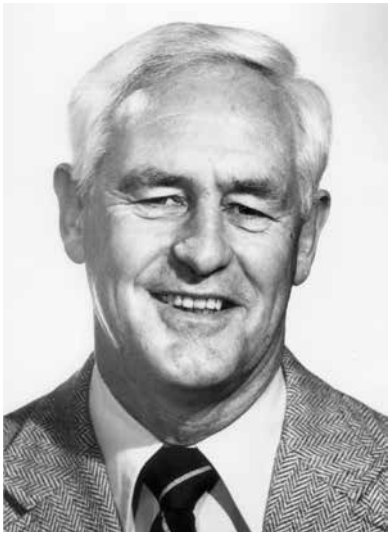
By the time he was 20, John Wheeler, like his father and grandfather, had already lived a full and accomplished life. But, this was only the beginning. John Oliver's mountaineering experiences led him to a refined appreciation not only for the beauty and danger of mountains, but for their nature, structure and development. His grandfather encouraged this interest to take up a profession in geology.

In the tradition of his great-grandfather, John Macoun, it was only logical that John should join the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC). John began studies in geological engineering—the best way in those days to learn the subject—at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 1943.

After graduating from UBC in Vancouver in 1947, John Oliver, or "J.O." as many of his friends called him, began working with the GSC. As the helicopter had not yet come into widespread use, geology in the late 1940s and early 1950s was still undertaken in the traditional manner. GSC field teams set out with packhorses and supplies and disappeared for weeks into remote and often very wild regions.

When John Wheeler led his first expedition to the Northern Selwyn Mountains, only a quarter of Canada had been properly surveyed and accurately mapped from a geological perspective. A great field for exploration lay open before him. However, as the Selwyn Mountains project in the Yukon and Northwest Territories clearly demonstrated, exploration and mapping in the middle of the 20th century could be just as demanding and difficult as it was two centuries earlier when the first explorers began following northern rivers inland from Hudson Bay.

John Wheeler spent 20 years mapping the geology of the mountainous regions of the southern Yukon and southeastern British Columbia. Wheeler's field studies would eventually cover an area of over 80,000 square kilometres in the Yukon, and big swaths of Rogers Pass, Big Bend and Lardeau watershed areas of southeastern B.C.



Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, John Oliver Wheeler started his career with a huge success and then continued to build on that success for the rest of his life. In 1967, Wheeler was appointed the Head of the Cordilleran and Pacific Margin Section of the GSC in Vancouver. Mirroring his father's meteoric rise through the ranks of the Survey of India, J.O. was appointed Chief of the Crustal Geology Division of the GSC in Ottawa in 1970. In 1973, John Wheeler became the Survey's Chief Geologist. Wheeler was 48, and on top of Canada's geological world.

In 1979, John Wheeler returned to Vancouver to work on the completion of the greatest geological map series ever created in Canada. When the Terrane Map of the Canadian Cordillera and the Tectonic Assemblage Map of the Canadian Cordillera were published in 1991, an era of Canadian history came to an end. The mountains of Canada were finally known.

John Wheeler had done for Canada what his father had done for India—he had defined the nature and character of the country's great hills. Canadians could at last be fully at home in their mountains. Three generations of surveyors had made them ours. Yet John Wheeler was hardly finished. The work he had done on the cordillera allowed him to see greater possibility in the larger work of generations of GSC geologists. What he wanted to create was the really big map, the geological map of Canada. It was a 20-year project that involved a large team that included his wife, Nora.

When the new Geological Map of Canada was

published in 1996, it marked the end of the pioneering era of geology in Canada. The surface of the country was now completely known. Indeed, it might well be described as the most extraordinary geological map ever created in this country.

The completion of the Geological Map of Canada in 1996 marked a huge triumph. In only 50 years, three-quarters of the surface geology of the second largest country in the world had been surveyed and mapped. J.O. was still not finished. With the Geological Map of Canada complete, Wheeler contributed his Canadian knowledge to the completion of the first comprehensive Geological Map of North America published in 2005.

The life of John Oliver Wheeler symbolizes the passion Canadians now have for their own mountains. His life and achievements are the embodiment of the physical strength, persistence of character and great love of place that make Canadians worthy of their spectacular mountains.

—Robert W. Sandford

Benoît Marion
1974 – 2015

Le 6 novembre 2016, mon ami Benoît Marion a perdu la vie dans un accident de route sur la 132, entre Matane et Rimouski (QC). Né le 20 septembre 1974, Boy Scout dans l'âme, il commença l'escalade à 19 ans dans la région de Québec. Très vite il entreprit une carrière de grimpeur remarquable. Il travailla comme vétérinaire, pathologiste, enseignant au cégep… Il était même sur le point de terminer un cours en radiologie. Mais avant tout, Ben était un chirurgien du mixte moderne.

Maître skieur des Chic-Chocs, Benoît, c'était un aventurier des temps modernes. Quelqu'un qui te prouve que la peur est seulement dans ta tête et pas dans la sienne. Tant de parois, tant de rivières, tant d'histoires de surf, et peut-être un peu trop de vélo. Il aimait les animaux au point d'en faire une carrière. Mais sa vraie job, n'était-ce pas l'aventure elle-même ?! Je ne suis pas capable de compter tous les jours à ses côtés à conquérir les murs aux quatre coins de la Belle Province, été comme hiver.

Ben, je pense à toutes les voies prestigieuses dont le Québec doit t'être reconnaissant. Mentionnons Double 7, la première voie québécoise cotée WI7 ; Mise à feu ; Copernic ; Le Monstre ; et j'en passe. La plupart de tes premières ascensions on fait peur même aux plus téméraires.

Je me rappelle des occasions où tu partais avec ta perceuse dans le dos et que nous, en second, notre boulot était de serrer les boulons des ancrages dans du grade M8+. Combien de piolets on a perdus ensemble, mon Ben? Gadgets, astuces, tu avais toujours de nouvelles idées pour vaincre l'impossible. Nos chambres d'hôtel se transformaient souvent en atelier d'usinage. Mur de glace mixte skidoo fissure off-width canot qui prend l'eau, on ne pensait qu'à ça. Ben, tu étais généreux et l'un des meilleurs instructeurs tout domaine confondu. Tu as laissé une trace d'histoire en faisant des premières ascensions sur plusieurs parois. Ne t'inquiète pas, mon vieux ; tu feras toujours partie de nos histoires. Au revoir, mon chum. Mes sympathies à la famille et aux proches. Tu vas me manquer.

— Damien Côté

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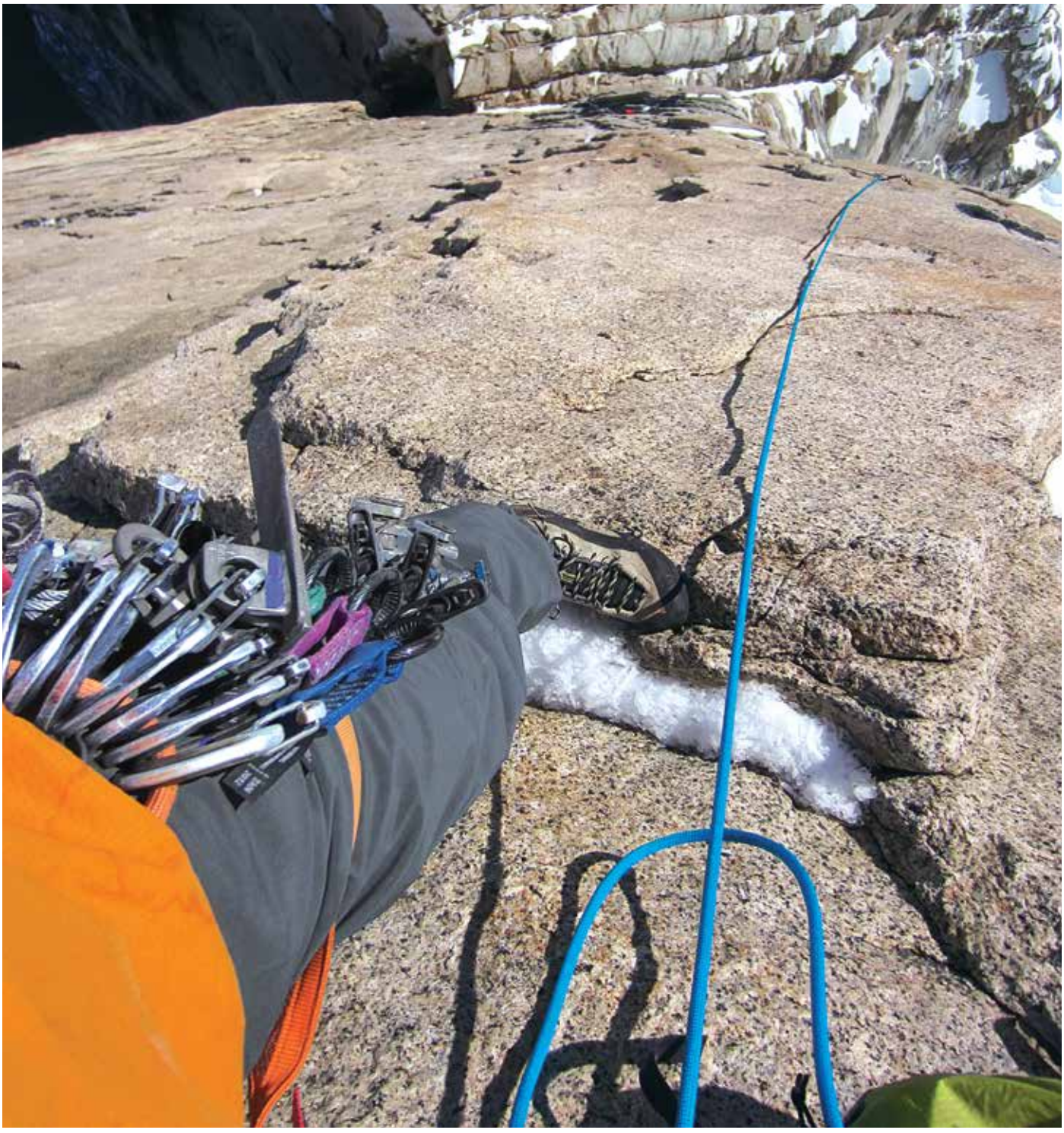

It's lonely at the top. It's lonely halfway to the top, too. Colin Haley pauses on his way to the summit of Punta Herron via Spigolo dei Bimbi before continuing on to finish his solo ascent of Torre Egger. **Colin Haley**

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