Canadian Alpine Journal

2020

MEC

THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Murrin Park, Squamish BC

Patrons of the Journal

— PATRON —

MEC

www.mec.ca

— BENEFACTOR —

Marmot

www.marmot.com

— PARTNER —

Arc'Teryx – www.arcteryx.com

Patagonia – www.patagonia.com

— SUPPORTERS —

Banff Mountain Film & Book Festivals – www.banffmountainfestivals.ca

— FRIENDS —

The Eric Brooks Memorial Fund

Peter Muir, Winnipeg Section member

Roger Wallis, Toronto Section member

— CONTRIBUTING ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA SECTIONS —

Saskatchewan

Manitoba

Vancouver

Montréal

Ottawa

Thunder Bay

Yukon

Great Plains

Jasper/Hinton

Prince George

Vancouver Island

Whistler

Okanagan

Outaouais

Saint-Boniface

Squamish

The Canadian Alpine Journal

Volume 103, 2020

Features

Cover: Jon Walsh on an unfinished project in the Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains, B.C. Photo: Tim Banfield

Previous Page: A drone view of a south branch of the Trinity Glacier, Prince of Wales Icefield, Ellesmere Island, Nunavut. Photo: Greg Horne (see page 65)

Table of Contents: Ian Welsted on the summit of Mount Waddington after the first ascent of its Complete West Ridge, Coast Mountains, B.C. Photo: Simon Richardson (see page 44)

Back Cover: Max Fisher on pitch two of Island's Eye on Conuma Peak, Tlupana Range, Vancouver Island, B.C. Photo: Hunter Lee (see page 75)

Contents

The Canadian Alpine Journal, Volume 103, 2020

ISSN 0068-8207 — Copyright 2020 The Alpine Club of Canada

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

INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

The *Canadian Alpine Journal* welcomes contributions in English or French. Submissions can be made via email to **caj@alpineclubofcanada.ca**. For further information on submitting text and photos, please refer to the guidelines at **www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/CAJ**.
Submission deadline is February 1, 2021.

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

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

PRINTED IN CANADA

Editorial

A Fine Balance

"TWO THINGS THAT NEED to happen for the ACC every year: the GMC and the *CAJ*." These words were bestowed upon me by Executive Director Lawrence White when I took over editing the *Canadian Alpine Journal* (*CAJ*) more than a decade ago. I have since guided at two General Mountaineering Camps (GMC), and this is my 13th year as editor of the *CAJ*. Due to the coronavirus, sadly, this is the first time that the GMC has not taken place since its inception in 1906 at Yoho Pass. The ACC had to make the very difficult decision to cancel the 2020 Mount Mummery camp due to health-safety concerns with the threat of COVID-19.

As for the *CAJ*, in the past 113 years of publication only a handful of issues have been delayed, as a result of two world wars (1914, 1942, 1944), the Great Depression (1934) and several economic recessions (1921, 1926); however, each of these volumes were printed the following year as part of a dual issue.

Despite a loss of revenue from hut closures and course cancelations, the ACC was adamant that this year's *CAJ* must continue, as a grounding element in these times of uncertainty. Thus, you are holding the 2020 *Canadian Alpine Journal*, albeit a thinner collection due to budget cuts. Our regular readers will surely notice the missing Cultural Ranges section, which had to be omitted to reduce page count. In addition, the Remembrances that were sent in after the *CAJ*'s submission deadline will be moved to next year's publication.

Despite being slightly less in page count, this edition is much more in female energy. Half of the feature articles are written by women. Historically, alpine climbing has been a male-dominated pursuit, but there have always been female shining lights in Canadian mountaineering—from Lizzie Rummel to Sharon Wood to Karen McNeill—that help shift the spectrum. This year, Sarah Hueniken, Bronwyn Hodgins and Brette Harrington share their cutting-edge climbs that balance the gender scale. Sarah, an ACMG alpine guide from Canmore, attempts the three Phobia ice and mixed routes in a day. Bronwyn, the first Canadian woman to free El Capitan, establishes hard big-wall free climbs on Baffin Island. Brette, adopted Canadian and world-class alpinist, makes a first ascent on the east face of Mount Fay. In addition, Jo Bulmer and Heather Lightfoot, with financial assistance from the ACC Jen Higgins Grant for Young Women, tackle La Esfinge in Peru, while Pascale Marceau and her climbing partner make the first winter ascent of Mount Wood in the Yukon.

Female alpine role models are flourishing, and the ACC encourages Canadian women to continue adventuring and exploring with support of the Jen Higgins Grant for Young Women (January 31 application deadline) as well as the John Lauchlan Memorial Award (September 30 application deadline). Maybe next year all the feature articles will be written by women, and a third component could be added to the ACC's list of annual must-haves: a continued increase of female energy in the mountains.

—Sean Isaac

Everlasting Daylight

Bronwyn Hodgins

One hundred metres of perfect hand crack splits the golden granite wall. I jam my hands and feet into the rock, feeling the sharp crystals as they grip against the fabric of my thin leather gloves. Mountains stretch in every direction, more peaks coming into view as we climb further and further above the glacier. I feel a vastness about this place. I am awed by the sheer size of each feature that makes up this landscape—a stage for giants. We've been planning this trip for nearly a year, obsessively studying photos of this mountain.

The sky is bluebird. I can't believe where I am right now!

Thor Stewart on the summit of Mount Thor. Photo: Jacob Cook

Bronwyn Hodgins follows pitch seven of Never Laugh at Live Dragons on the South Tower of Mount Asgard.
Photo: Jacob Cook

ONLY one week earlier, our team of four had set sail in packrafts from the remote Inuit community of Pangnirtung, paddling 30 kilometres up the ocean fjord. We then hiked another 30 kilometres with insanely heavy packs, retrieved our food and gear cache—stashed by snowmobile in early spring—and continued up the Parade and Caribou glaciers to make high camp under Mount Asgard. Hustled by incredible weather, the next morning my husband, Jacob Cook, and I had set off with plans to repeat Jon Walsh and Chris Brazeau's south-face route on the South Tower of Mount Asgard [see *CAJ*, 2010, vol.93. p.81–83]. Approaching the face, however, we had spied a parallel system and changed course, giddy with excitement at the prospect of a new route.

HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN, we join a corner system and soon find ourselves under a dripping icy chimney. Instead of wedging his body into the vertical ice chasm, Jacob quests onto the airy face, crimping up the sparsely protectable clean rock. The rope comes tight at 60 metres, and I radio for him to put me on belay. I pull a bulge and look up—double ropes billow above me, no gear in sight.

"What the…?" I radio, "Where do I go!?"

I manage to follow the pitch, retracing Jacob's wandering line between thin features. Above, we rejoin the icy corner and begin squirming our way skyward. The everlasting daylight is deceiving; our cozy tent feels like a distant memory.

At exactly midnight, we mantle the final lip to stand on the flat summit of Asgard's South Tower. Shivering slightly, we both pull on our second puffy jackets. Despite the cold, there's not a breath of wind. We stand still. I imagine we've landed on another planet. Nothing lives here, only big flat boulders set off-kilter as if placed by a giant hand. We watch the arctic sun dip below the mountainous horizon, covering us in a purple dusk for a few minutes. Then the fiery golden ball rises again, casting a new light on our little flat planet, while the icy world far below remains in shadow. We later name our route Never Laugh at Live Dragons (5.11-, 600m), a quote from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. We felt like Bilbo Baggins, sneaking up on the deadly dragon Smaug and snatching our prized Arkenstone from under his nose. [Author's note: A week later, California climbers Thomas Bukowski and Brian Knowles repeated the route but stayed in the obvious chimney up high, avoiding the 5.11- R finish. The route is 5.10+ and sustained in the 5.9/5.10 range on excellent rock.]

Time to move! We have a long way to get down. As I start to rappel, I hear a faint shout and turn to see our teammates—Thor Stewart and Zack Goldberg-Poch—little orange ants nearing the summit of the North Tower. I smile and cheer back. Suddenly, everything feels a lot smaller, a lot less scary. In that moment, it's all just fun and games, hanging out in the mountains with my friends.

I BREATHE HEAVILY AS we race up the rock. I throw my hands and feet down wherever they land—no time to choose specific holds—and propel my body upwards, always chasing the tug of the rope, chasing Jacob, who charges on above me. I know how Jacob is feeling. He's ecstatic to be moving over rock, the comfortable familiarity of the granite masks all fears of the unpredictable melting landscape as we leave it further and further below us.

He climbs 60 metres, plugs a piece with a traction device to protect him if I should fall, and then charges on. Another 60 metres, another single piece

Jacob Cook at a hanging bivy on the Niv Mizzet Line. Photo: Bronwyn Hodgins

with a traction. My calves are burning. I'm starting to sweat through my merino wool. I feel like I'm midway through a foot race, not halfway up Mount Asgard. We're on the classic 1972 Scott-Hennek Route, a 1,000-metre line up the east buttress of the North Tower. Only four days ago we'd stood on the south summit, but we couldn't pass up the continuing splitter weather. We rage up the rock. Finally, Jacob stops to belay. I catch him and pause to gulp down some water, only to realize that I'd forgotten to refill at the base. I lead the next simul-block up to the steepening headwall. We start pitched climbing here, which feels like a snail's pace in comparison.

Jacob pulls onto a big ledge and stares up disheartened at yet another dripping chimney. I catch up and he has already filled his bottle. I fill mine too. Earlier in the day, I'd mentioned wanting to lead the upper chimney pitch, the technical crux of the route. I look up in dismay at water streaming down inside. Jacob offers to investigate a crack to our right, which turns out to be a sweet finger splitter. I follow, desperately stabbing between finger locks as I will my tired muscles to hold on. Then I start inching my way up the next pitch—an off-width. I get stumped at a short sopping roof until my arms fail and I slump onto the rope. Exhausted, I aid through the move and carry on to the top of the pitch.

At midnight we stand atop the North Tower under the brilliant glow of the full moon. Again it's totally calm, totally silent—and cold, colder than the other night. Once more we watch the beautiful sunset/sunrise before beginning the rappels. After 18 hours on the go, we stumble across the glacier into camp. We have Zack and Thor on the radio. We can see them, too, little orange specks on the summit of a previously unclimbed face directly across from our tents. We're discussing their descent.

I've known Zack and Thor since preschool in our hometown of Perth, Ontario. They are two of my closest friends. Coming on this trip, Thor had been climbing for about five years and Zack for only three. I'd introduced both of them to climbing and had brought them on their first multi-pitches. I can't help but feel a sense of pride seeing those guys put up a first ascent out here—it's rad! We invited them along because of their ability to endure and their unwavering and infectious positive attitudes.

For instance, at the start of the trip, Thor attached Viking horns to his helmet and never took them off, no matter how impractical. They call their new sub-peak "Mount Zacky" since Thor already has a big mountain on Baffin with his name.

They decide to rap the face, retracing the way they came. Jacob and I nervously look up at the huge swathe of granite. But we trust them. They'll be fine. We continue with bi-hourly check-ins as they descend. After 27 hours, the pair stagger wide-eyed into camp. Jacob gets out of our tent to greet them while I roll over and fall into a deep sleep. The midday sun shines brightly on our camp, and the tent is warm and cozy.

WE CHARGE DOWNSTREAM in our little red pack-raft. It's tough to see the line as we race along, dodging rocks and waves. I'm in the stern while Jacob kneels in the bow. The water is pumping! I keep track of where we are in the set, taking note as we zip past each landmark that I'd picked out from shore. I feel good—we're nailing the line. We sneak just left of the final obstacle, a big curling wave, and then beach ourselves on a gravel bar.

"Where are they," I ask myself. Thor and Zack had been right behind us, but now I can't see them. I start running up the gravel to see them whip around the bend.

"Woooo!" I cheer.

But then I notice that they're headed straight for the curling wave. Suddenly, the boat is upside down and they're swimming. I stop cheering and start running again. By the time I get there, they've scrambled onto the gravel bar, and Thor is reeling in the boat using the northern rescue system we'd pre-rigged. They're safe, and we aren't about to lose half our gear, but the water is frigid. I quickly help drain the raft, and then we all ferry across to the main shore. The two of them change into dry clothes. Everyone is in surprisingly high spirits because, of course, it is Thor and Zack after all.

For the next three weeks, we make our way downriver, running what we can of the glacial-fed whitewater and climbing various peaks along the way.

Bronwyn Hodgins follows splitter fingers on pitch eight of the Niv Mizzet Line. Photo: Jacob Cook

Bronwyn Hodgins paddles a flamingo through rapids on the Weasel River.
Photo: Jacob Cook

First stop is Mount Thor. We scramble and simul-climb all together, whooping and hollering up the wildly exposed South Ridge. Few words can describe standing on the summit, inches from what may be the tallest vertical drop in the world, watching Thor wield his mighty hammer (an otherwise unnecessary tool for this mission) and bellow to the godly heavens. It doesn't get much more epic than that. After some tense moments navigating several rappels in a complete whiteout in the early hours of the morning, we return to camp after 21 hours on the go. Further downstream, we attempt the 700-metre west face of Mount Tirokwa in big-wall style over three days as a team of four. We didn't get far.

"Rock!" I scream in horror as I accidentally dislodge a huge flake that crashes down the open corner toward Zack and Thor. The flake hits the wall just above them and explodes into a million pieces, showering them in dust. This is messed up. Holds are crumbling in my fingertips. We need to get off this mountain. A hundred metres up and we'd already core shot our haul line and dropped a G7 Pod and a camera. And now this! I'm apologizing like crazy as the pair catch up to me. Jacob is out of sight at an anchor above.

"Let's get up to Jacob, and then have a serious chat about our options."

My directness masks the rollercoaster of emotions going on inside. When we arrive at the anchor, Jacob has simultaneously come to the same conclusion. This isn't worth it. We bail.

After Tirokwa, we aren't in the mood for doing much of anything. We spend time reflecting. Why do we do these adventures? Where is our line drawn between acceptable and unacceptable risk? The sun is hot and dazzling. We make pan-fry pizza and play on some of the boulders scattered throughout our camp. We're feeling burnt out and scared, unsure if we want to climb any more big mountains, at least for the remainder of this trip.

Soon we're ready to move on. The rapids of the lower Weasel are super fun. We take our time enjoying the river, sometimes carrying back up and running a sweet set multiple times. We inflate our large alpine flamingo, Phillipa, and try riding her through the rolling waves, towed behind the packraft like a tube behind a motorboat. How absurd!

I wonder if I can solo her? I pull my PFD over my head and clip my quick-release tether to the flamingo—I don't want to lose her if I flip. I grab my paddle and push off into the current. Straddling the inflatable bird, I aim for the big waves in the centre. We continue downstream, letting the current carry us toward the ocean. As we come around the final bend, we're struck by the sight of Mount Ulu rising up next to the shimmering fjord. The group's psych instantly shifts, and we make camp with rejuvenated stoke.

In the morning, Jacob and I set off for the north face while Zack and Thor head for the south. Once in the small cirque, we pause on the receding glacier to stare up at the dark wall draped in shadow. My psych plummets. It looks loose and scary, but I point to the mountain just north of Ulu—west facing and glowing in the afternoon sun. A striking tower protrudes up the centre of the golden wall.

"I've never heard of it," Jacob states, "I think we should climb it."

That night we sleep on inflatable G7 Pods halfway up the unnamed tower. A laser crack rises from our free-hanging camp, splitting the immaculate headwall above as if a goblin's sword had sliced through the rock monolith like butter. We'd scoped the crack with binoculars from the glacier below, trying to guess what width it might be. We'd made a game of it. Dreamy hands? Gruelling off-width? Neither of us had guessed it right. Jacob starts up the pitch,

wedging his fingertips into the razor seam.

"How do you feel about 5.12 finger crack for breakfast?" he shouts down after building an anchor.

The climbing is much harder than anything we'd found so far this trip. It's like the numerous seasons in Yosemite had led us to this moment, this mission. The rock is superb—nothing loose, nothing to break off—allowing us to focus on the technical climbing.

I arrive at the anchor totally worked. The crack continues above us, and the wall steepens slightly—it's going to get harder before it gets easier. Jacob stands on the anchor and hammers in a beak before starting to climb. Higher, he fiddles in our smallest Totem cam and pulls up the rope to clip. Wooosh! His feet pop, and he comes sailing down next to me. Next go he falls one move further, sagging onto the tiny cam. He turns to me, "Do you have a brush?"

I have a strange moment where I feel I'm outside my body, looking down at the two of us, watching Jacob as he scrubs the rock. It feels almost comical to be in such a wild place faffing with the minutiae of hard free climbing. He adds little ticks in chalk as he works out a quick sequence before lowering.

"I give myself a 20 per cent chance of sending right now," he shrugs, takes a deep breath and pulls on.

Jacob dances up the wall, looking desperate yet precise. I encourage him, though I'm not sure he can hear me through his flow-state focus. I watch, vicariously feeling the strain in his body as he crimps and smears at the edges of the seam. Then he's into the fingerlocks, and then fingerlocks turn to ringlocks and eventually to thin hands. He's whooping now as he cruises on up a perfect hand crack.

"Breathe. It's a slab," I tell myself. A very steep slab. I have to trust my feet, give them the weight that my fingertips cannot hold. I make about five moves until I'm spat off. I pull on from there and fall almost instantly. I decide to yard on a few cams to get past the crux. With performance focus gone, I swing about between the pieces. I take the lead on the glory hand crack as we continue up this never-ending splitter.

Pangnirtung local Nate Dialla tries rock climbing near his hometown. Photo: Jacob Cook

I hear a faint shout and look across the cirque as two miniature silhouettes appear barely visible on the summit of Mount Ulu. It's Zack and Thor. For the next minute or so we cheer back and forth, the granite walls echoing and amplifying our joyful howls. My chest fills with overwhelming compassion and a deep contentment. As we stand there, all four of us, on our final summits of this wild journey, I know in my heart that I will remember this moment forever. Each pair descends separately through the night to our seaside camp, elated and utterly exhausted.

And just like that, the trip draws to a close. We inflate our rafts for a final time and push off towards the fjord, timing our departure so the tug of the falling tide sucks us out to sea, away from the mountains that have been our home. A deep dusk settles over us, and we can see the moon and even a few faint stars overhead. My arms perform the paddle stokes, but my exhausted mind wanders. I remember each summit like it was yesterday.

I look over at the other boat, to Thor and Zack chattering away. I pause my stroke just for a moment to look at Jacob in my stern. His eyes are glazed over, his arms on auto-pilot just like mine. I love him. I love being able to go on this adventure with my life partner. But I also know it's dangerous, and I don't know what I would do if I lost him. I shudder.

We turn the corner and the lights of Pangnirtung come into view—the finish line. Thor and Zack start bellowing an Irish sea shanty. I love these guys. They feel like family. We press on as daylight starts creeping back across the sky, but the sea is still dead calm. We glide though the water, each stroke bringing us closer to those distant lights.

In Pangnirtung, we have one final important mission. As part of our trip, we wanted to interact with the locals in a more meaningful way than simply transport and logistics. We put up posters around the town advertising a day of rock climbing for the Inuk youth. We established two new top-rope routes with bolted anchors on a big boulder about five minutes above the campground—Inuk, a 5.7 finger crack, and Quallunat, a 5.7 face climb. The following afternoon, 20 kids show up for some top-roping. They especially love wearing Thor's horns. Some of them even ask if they can do it again tomorrow. Sadly, we tell them we'll be flying home; however, we left the anchors in place and with a bit of information sharing we hope that future climbers to the area can get the kids out again.

Acknowledgements

This expedition received financial support from MEC/VIMFF Adventure Grant, Gino Watkins Memorial Fund, BMC Expedition Grant, RAB, Grade 7 Equipment and the Mount Everest Foundation.

Summary

Never Laugh at Live Dragons (V 5.11-, 600m), south face, South Tower, Mt. Asgard, Baffin Island. FA: Jacob Cook, Bronwyn Hodgins, July 9, 2019.

Polar Thievery (IV 5.11a, 400m), south face, North Tower, Mt. Asgard. Zack Goldberg-Poch, Thor Stewart, July 9, 2019.

Scott-Hennek Route variation (V 5.11+, 1000m), east buttress, North Tower, Mt. Asgard. FA: Jacob Cook, Bronwyn Hodgins, July 14, 2019.

Beach Vacation (5.10+, 600m), east face, "Mt. Zacky," sub-summit of Mt. Midgard. FA: Zack Goldberg-Poch, Thor Stewart, July 15, 2019.

South Ridge (IV 5.8, 1200m), Mt. Thor. Jacob Cook, Zack Goldberg-Poch, Bronwyn Hodgins, Thor Stewart, July 23, 2019.

The Niv Mizzet Line (V 5.13-, 400m), west face, "Magic Tower" (66.401833N, -66.587472W). FA: Jacob Cook, Bronwyn Hodgins, August 1–2, 2019.

The Beached Whale (V 5.10+ A1, 600m), south face, Ulu Peak. FA: Zack Goldberg-Poch, Thor Stewart, August 1–2, 2019.

About the Author

Bronwyn Hodgins, age 27, is best known for being the first Canadian female to free climb El Capitan, with her ascent of Freerider (5.13a) over five days in November 2018. Also an avid paddler, Bronwyn has guided long river trips across Canada, including a 52-day whitewater journey in Yukon in 2017. She recently became an ACMG apprentice rock guide and is looking forward to guiding climbing adventures around her hometown of Squamish, B.C.

Top left: Beach Vacation. Photo: Zack Goldberg-Poch

Top right: Never Laugh at Live Dragons. Photo: Jacob Cook

Bottom left: The Niv Mizzet Line. Photo: Jacob Cook

Bottom right: Beached Whale. Photo: Zack Goldberg-Poch

Sound of Silence

Brette Harrington

"Mountain climbing is like drinking a fine wine; it's not something to be had often, but when you do, it must be appreciated."

—*Luka Lindič*

Ines Papert climbs the lower ice tiers on day one during the first ascent of Sound of Silence. Photo: Luka Lindič

It was late morning on the final day of march. A stream of sun dappled through the curtains of my friends' home in Revelstoke, B.C. I rolled over in bed, tired from a late night of dancing, drinking and celebrating for Christina and Mike's wedding. I checked the weather forecast on my iPhone and my eyes widened. For weeks I had been patiently waiting for a high-pressure system, and it finally caught me off-guard on the one morning after I had been partying all night. Calm and clear skies were headed for the southern Canadian Rockies, so I picked up the phone to brainstorm climbing ideas with Ines Papert and Luka Lindič who were hanging out in Canmore. A few hours later I found myself driving east to prepare for a climb.

This was not the first time Ines and Luka had visited the Canadian Rockies. Ines, a German climber, has been a frequent visitor to the region over the many years of professional climbing, and Luka, from Slovenia, had been to the Valley of the Ten Peaks in the Canadian Rockies three years earlier with my boyfriend, Marc-André Leclerc, for his second trip. That April 2016, amongst the quiet winter wilderness of steep snowy walls, Luka and Marc-André established two new major alpine routes on the 3,245-metre Mount Tuzo and the 3,237-metre Mount Neptuak. Their trip was unequivocally successful, but one line had escaped their grasp—Mount Fay's east face.

The east face of Fay was first climbed in 1987 by Barry Blanchard, Dave Cheesmond and Carl Tobin. Stories of avalanches, snow-mushroom collapse and sleeping in snow caves has filled their climb with the lure of adventure. They battled with continuous snowstorms that pushed them into an unexpected three nights on the wall, eventually forcing them to flee from their original ambition up the direct upper east pillar and retreat to the more attainable north arête. Since then, the east face has gone unrepeated, and the direct finish has remained a desirable line for alpine climbers around the area. Many teams have been turned away by the fickle conditions. On a scouting mission of the east face, Canadian climber Mike Verwey witnessed a cornice break from the summit and pulverize the face. Ines and Luka had already waved the idea of the climb to their periphery after seeing massive spindrifts overtake the lower walls during their own first attempt.

on april 1, luka, ines and i ski toured up the 15 kilometres of snow-covered road to Consolation Lake. The mountains were coated in frosty white from weeks of harsh snowstorms, and they now glistened in the morning sun. Tied to our hips by ropes were sleds full of alpine climbing gear. The uncomfortable strain of the weight countered each glide of the ski with a tug and a jerk, but by the time we reached the base of the wall, my selective alpine memory had already stashed away the hardship of the approach so as not to dissuade me from future climbs. It was evening as we set up camp a few hundred metres from the wall. As we ate dinner, we watched spindrift avalanches shoot off the east face. On one hand, this was encouraging evidence that the face was cleaning itself off; on the other hand, it would be entirely disastrous to be caught in one of those flows the next day when we planned to be on the route. Nevertheless, we crawled into our sleeping bags and fell asleep.

The alarm rang just before 3 a.m. Stashing away our tents, skis, boots and poles, we started up through the dark. Nighttime climbing is something I have come to love, where the magnitude of what lays ahead is concealed by darkness, and only what enters the cone of light from my headlamp

Luka Lindič sends the crux M8 pitch on day one.
Photo: Ines Papert

becomes relevant. We waded through waist-deep powder on the approach to the base. For sake of efficiency, we moved unroped up the initial ramps, intending to climb above the lower wall by the time the morning sun touched it. Climbing through the dark, my senses ignited, aware of the unseen dangers the mountain may have awaiting us. My concentration narrowed. Just before entering into the main flow, we tied into the rope and started up the vertical tiers of W14 and W15. The shadow of night was quickly fading, and just as we had predicted, the spindrift began.

A heavy stream of powder snow had released from above and came rocketing down over the steep ice. It shot over my head, funnelling its way into my sleeves, collar and backpack. I tucked my face into my jacket and blindly swung my ice tools above my head. I could feel the teeth of the picks bite into the brittle curtain. Without sight, every move felt precarious. My face and hands stung from the cold, but I knew I had to keep climbing to escape the current. At last, I managed to find shelter behind a bend in the funnel where I met Ines who had done the same. As we waited for the avalanche to pass, we exchanged gestures that would similarly be shared between two people who had just been tossed into an icy pool, climbed out and were now drying off—disgruntled but carrying on.

Soon the avalanche subsided and we started back up again, simul-climbing through the gentle tiers of ice and snow. The sky was now glowing orange on the horizon, revealing the silhouettes of endless mountains. Below us, Consolation Valley lay smooth and white with the dark evergreen treeline oscillating up and down the rounded flanks of the adjacent mountains. At the far end of the valley were the white-striped couloirs of Quadra Mountain, and silent undertones of far-away avalanches resonated in the distance. To feel small would be an understatement. We were no more than microbes amongst these colossal peaks.

The ribbon of ice deposited into a large snow basin a few hundred metres below the safety of the

Brette Harrington works up a chimney on day two.
Photo: Luka Lindič

rock bands. Here the slope decreased to about 70 degrees—the point at which the first ascent party traversed rightward to the arête. Above us, Mount Fay's upper face towered high, but foreshortening made it difficult to judge how far we had to go. Four hundred metres? Six hundred metres?

We assumed we were somewhere near the middle of the mountain where the option of bailing would not be easy. The spindrift avalanches would be releasing down the face for the rest of the afternoon, and making snow anchors amidst them would be risky. But we were not interested in going down; instead we looked upward to a single smear of delaminated ice. Luka tapped his ice tools into the surface, but the rotted out ice crumbled beneath the picks. It would be near impossible to climb.

He rounded a corner to the left to find a roof protruding outward. A thin crack had formed at the point where the roof and side walls merged. It was overhanging but would take good gear. I studied it. If we could somehow climb though the overhang, we would gain access to the upper headwall. Luka started up by methodically torquing his tools into the crack above. His posture looked perfect—stretched out, graceful and calm—however, loose blocks were yet to be cleaned and invisible holds crept away from him above the roof. The rope came taut in my hands as he fell into the air. After a minute of pondering, he found what he was looking for, pulled back onto the rock and finished the pitch. From the anchor, Luka called down to us, "Are you two freezing?" This was his way of politely asking to try again.

Ines responded, "We're fine. Come down and try again." Luka lowered back down, took a moment to catch his breath, and then just as before, climbed up the crack, this time arriving at the anchor without a fall. Ines and I seconded the pitch, and we all agreed upon an M8 grade.

With one more pitch of technical M5, we entered into a series of snow ramps. We all rotated turns of leading through pitches of deep, sugary facets. On par with what I imagine swimming through quicksand would feel like, everything was endlessly sinking into the bottomless pit. Nearing the end of the ropes, I searched around for an anchor, but the sidewalls of the couloir were compact. I found only one timely solution, which was to hammer my ice tool into a thin seam for an anchor—a trick I had picked up from Marc-André throughout the years.

Brette Harrington climbs above the bivy on day two. Photo: Luka Lindič

DAYLIGHT WAS FADING FAST as we approached the final headwall, and we were still some unknown distance below the summit. We sought out a bivy ledge by digging through the sugary snow. Our best effort resulted in a tiny one-foot ledge of varying support. I lay half awake all night fearing that any unconscious movement could send my whole sleeping kit off the wall. I curled up on my side as the crumbling slope shed snow over me and my feet and knees hung off the edge.

We awoke to a dim sunrise around 8 a.m. The disheartening sky was veiled by a thin layer of cirrus clouds that hinted to an oncoming storm. Feeling somewhat rested, I tapped into my energy reserve and started up the first block of leads. While Luka and Ines packed up camp, I brushed the snow off my gear and began climbing. I pressed my legs outward to find opposition stemming between quartzite blocks. I gingerly placed the tiny metal frontpoints onto the walls so as not to scratch off the sheer rock. This fine line of boldness and uncertainty is stated well by Barry Blanchard from his account of the first ascent of the east face: "You dance along the line, ease from move to move, hope you don't come off but know you wouldn't be surprised if you did." Here, I would be as careful as possible not to misstep, but the uncertainty of each movement was fathomable.

By the time I reached a decent stance to build an anchor, our meagre single rack of cams had dwindled down to the final pitons. This is the curse of hard alpinism, where light and fast always results in some sort of miscalculation in planning.

We climbed on as the chimney system fed into more chimney systems, and around midday I passed the lead to Ines. With each pitch, the rock quality deteriorated, eventually turning into stacks

Luka Lindič, Brette Harrington and Ines Papert at the bivy on day two.
Photo: Ines Papert

of detached blocks stuck together by a flakey batter of yellowish mud. We scraped around with our ice tools, searching for any rock that would not break, and climbed as fast as possible. It was an unspoken rule that the followers would climb with interminable haste. We were in a rush to get to the top, racing against daylight and the encroaching storm. Still, the summit was farther away than it appeared, and snowflakes began to fall.

By early evening the storm had fully overtaken the mountain, and we were socked into a sea of grey clouds. Snowflakes accumulated on our jackets, backpacks and hoods. Ines lit a cigarette while belaying Luka, and I did crunches and leg lifts to stay warm. Luka was now just metres below the summit, confronted by a heavy cornice suspended between two rock towers. Through the haze of snowfall and diminishing light, we watched him climb from one tower to the next, and then disappear over the summit cornice. We heard nothing but silence as we called up to him. The ropes remained slack at the belay, but Ines and I started up with the assumption that he had us on belay. I arrived at the difficult tower traverse with a massive loop of slack hanging at my feet, and I began to wonder. To transfer from one tower to the next, the ensuing moves would be free hanging, and falling was not an option. Just before I was about to downclimb, the rope came taut on my harness. I sighed with relief and safely moved onto the second tower. Ines was right behind.

We pulled over the summit of Mount Fay around 7 p.m. but did not stop for long. Winds were howling and rime was forming everywhere. With hoods up and frozen smiles, we snapped a team photo and started downclimbing the south face.

It was around 10 p.m. when we reached the plateau of the Fay Glacier. The blizzard was fiercely cold as we trekked by way of GPS in search of the Neil Colgan Hut. Hours later we entered through the doors of this warm oasis. We were wind beaten

Sound of Silence on the east face of Mount Fay. Photo: Peter Hoang

and depleted but undeniably content. We would now sleep on soft cushions, dry out our wet clothing above the stove and rest our tired minds. For dinner, we rationed my leftover mashed potatoes from the night before for and fell into one of the deepest sleeps ever.

We named our line Sound of Silence in reference to the Simon and Garfunkel song. It is a name to which Marc-André Leclerc had dreamed of someday calling one of his lines, to accompany the solitary feeling of winter in the wilderness of the Canadian Rockies.

As we hiked out of the valley the following morning, our capsule of time had closed in. Soon our tracks would be covered by falling snow and all traces of our journey erased from the land. As quickly as it had appeared, our great adventure would silently disappear, leaving behind an unforgettable token in our memories.

Summary

Sound of Silence (VI M8 WI5, 1100m), east face, Mount Fay, Canadian Rockies. FA: Brette Harrington, Luka Lindič, Ines Papert, April 2–3, 2019.

About the Author

Brette Harrington is a professional climber and one of the world's leading female alpinists with first ascents around the globe. Born in Lake Tahoe, California, and climbing for the past 12 years, she divides her time between climbing expeditions, working with The North Face and spending quality time with family and friends.

6:43 a.m., April 16, 2019. Jess Roskelley and Hansjörg Auer approach the first difficult WI6 pitch on the east face of Howse Peak. Photo: David Lama

The Last Climb

John Roskelley

Hansjörg Auer, David Lama and Jess Roskelley died in a climbing accident on Howse Peak in the Canadian Rockies on April 16, 2019. The route of their ascent and subsequent tragedy was a mystery that slowly revealed itself as critically important information was gleaned from their cameras and equipment found at the base of the east face of Howse.

THE three men, all members of The North Face athlete team, arrived in Canmore, Alberta, the first week in April for a three-week trip to test a new proprietary waterproof fabric and a specially designed extreme clothing system. They had a number of difficult routes on their agenda and within a short period of time made speed ascents of Andromeda Strain, one of the Rockies' grand cours routes, and Nemesis, a 160-metre WI6 waterfall climb, in thin spring conditions.

While they were waiting out bad weather in Canmore, Jess called me numerous times to talk about their previous two climbs and one last objective, the east face of Howse Peak. On April 14, while at the climbing gym in Canmore, Jess asked me about the descent routes off the summit since I had climbed the Northeast Buttress route many years before. We concluded their ascent route, which we didn't discuss, would be the logical choice for descent.

Early on the morning of April 15, the three climbers drove from Canmore to the Waterfowl Lakes parking area, put on their skis and packs, and departed at 11 a.m. for the eight-kilometre ski to camp. Within one hour they were at Chephren Lake, and by 12:40 p.m. all three had reached their campsite at an elevation of 1,940 metres on the glacier below the east face. That evening, Hansjörg took several photos of small powder-snow avalanches that swept several gullies on the east face.

By 5:51 a.m. the next morning, April 16, in cold but clear weather, Hansjörg, on foot, and David and Jess, on skis, climbed the lower snow slopes below M16, a difficult mixed climb with only one previous ascent. David and Jess soon left their skis on a long snow traverse and proceeded to catch up to Hansjörg. A few minutes before 7 a.m., all three climbers reached the bottom of the first difficulty 330 metres above camp, a WI6 waterfall. Hansjörg grabbed the first lead and, after waiting out a spindrift avalanche that pummeled him for a short time, climbed the vertical frozen waterfall pitch in 15 minutes. Another 15 minutes saw the three climbers at the top of the pitch.

Whether seeking a new variation or finding the two routes above them—M16 and Howse of Cards—out of condition that late in the season, David traversed left along a snow band to a difficult right-to-left-leaning ramp. Jess followed, using a Petzl Micro Traxion, while David simultaneously belayed Hansjörg. They climbed approximately 80 metres up the ramp before David traversed left again at 8:36 a.m. along another horizontal snow band, in search of the upper waterfall pitches of the King Line—a name given by Steve House to an unclimbed mixed route left of M16. David led the WI6+ waterfall, and then Jess and Hansjörg quickly followed.

Once at the top of the waterfall and over the difficulties, they untied and stored the ropes in their packs. Fifty minutes later at 9:42 a.m., Hansjörg took a photo of David and Jess approaching the top of a long snow gully above the King Line waterfall. Faced with 450 metres of open and avalanche-prone snow slope above them and some short sections of mixed climbing, the three traversed left again at 9:57 a.m. to reach a snow rib at an elevation of 2,830 metres. This led them to a 30-metre-wide snow gully, the right-hand snow gully of a larger, moderately angled snow basin and gully system above

7:04 a.m., April 16, 2019. David Lama belays Hansjörg Auer on Howse Peak. Photo: Jess Roskelley

a waterfall route known as Life by the Drop.

Jess, ankle deep in sun-warmed snow, took the lead up the snow gully to reach the southwest ridge. At 11:02 a.m., Jess, leading with a single rope, led a difficult mixed pitch along the ridge. After over 300 metres of mixed climbing, the threesome reached the 3,295-metre summit prior to Hansjörg's first summit photo at 12:41 p.m. The sun was shining, but a few clouds were starting to move in. From one of the summit photos, the three used this time to hydrate, eat and relax.

A short time after Jess's summit photo taken at 12:44 p.m., the three climbers began their descent. Hansjörg continued to take a few photos as they made multiple rappels down the ridge. At 1:27 p.m., Hansjörg took the last photo found on any of the three cameras. The photo is of David at the bottom of their final rappel off the southwest ridge and back into the snow gully they had climbed on their way up. Their original ascent tracks can be seen reaching the ridge crest in the bottom right corner of the photo.

Evidence from the recovered climbers, their ropes and other equipment confirms that the climbers did not rope up after their final rappel into the gully. The three men had climbed this moderate snow-slope section unroped during their ascent. Jess mountaineer-coiled the two ropes around his neck and secured a smaller loop to one of his ice tools, and the three climbers plunge-stepped quickly down this slope of soft snow toward the traverse out of the basin that they were in to the smaller gully above the King Line.

The men's ropes held several clues to their last moments before the accident. After putting together all the rope taken off the climbers at the medical examiner's office in Calgary and the many cut segments I found on the avalanche cone left by the search and rescue team, I discovered the two 50-metre ropes had four overhand knots, two of which had loops. I put the ropes back together on the floor of a spare room and was able to determine where the knots were tied on the two ropes and what they were used for.

8:55 a.m., April 16, 2019. Jess Roskelley follows David Lama up the King Line waterfall. Photo: Hansjörg Auer

Two of the four knots were tied at the ends of the two ropes. At first, I thought these simple overhand knots were stopper knots for the bottom of their last rappel. This was a mistake on my part. The two knots were actually flat overhand knots that joined the two climbing ropes together for their rappels down the ridge.

The two overhand knots with the loops in the ropes proved to be more difficult to interpret as they were tied after the last rappel. The answer came to me early one morning in October.

Once all three climbers had rappelled into the snow gully and basin above Life by the Drop, they pulled the rappel lines, which landed at their feet in the soft afternoon snow. They had 160 vertical metres from the southwest ridge crest down to their exit out of the snow gully and onto the traverse back toward the other snow gully above the King Line and more rappels. They decided that taking in coils would be faster than untying them and stuffing them in their packs.

As the two ropes were pulled, Jess located the black midpoint marks in both ropes, and then tied an overhand knot that resulted in two 50-centimetre loops. He put his arm through the loops, threw them over his head, and then proceeded to coil the four strands of rope over his neck, a quick and efficient method of coiling the two ropes. Once coiled and hanging down his chest, Jess grabbed two of the loops, one from the green rope and one from the blue rope, tied a standard-sized overhand knot with a small loop, and then put it through the carabiner that was attached to the ferrule of one of his ice tools. This small overhand loop was approximately six metres from the large centre loop over his shoulder and head. According to one of his former climbing partners, Jess used this technique when carrying looped coils as a moveable anchor when he was unroped.

Hansjörg, David and Jess proceeded to descend the moderately angled snow slope unroped. There is every indication that the threesome intended to descend their ascent route: they knew where

11:03 a.m., April 16, 2019. Jess Roskelley leads a mixed pitch along the ridge to the summit. Photo: Hansjörg Auer

12:44 p.m., April 16, 2019. Jess Roskelley, Hansjörg Auer and David Lama (from left to right) on the summit of Howse Peak. Photo: Jess Roskelley

potential rappel anchors were; David and Jess's skis were left along the route; and Jess was convinced that the descent down any route they had climbed was the safest alternative. Conceivably, they may have decided to descend the entire snow basin to the top of Life by the Drop, but this is unlikely, based on the snow conditions and possibility of an avalanche in the massive basin they were in.

As they descended in the early afternoon sun, the snow slope above them or a large cornice broke loose before they were able to exit the gully toward the King Line. They most certainly heard the tell-tale collapse of snow or ice, turned and prepared for the inevitable force about to consume them.

The snapped-off piece of ferrule from one of Jess's ice tools and the mangled carabiner that was attached to it, both of which I found later, indicate that Jess had managed to slam his ice tool into the ice below the snow with significant effort before the full force of the slide hit him. He was overwhelmed by the force and immediately lost his grip on his tools. Six metres after being knocked from his stance, the full load of the avalanche came onto the two knots—the larger knot around his neck and shoulder and the small knot attached to the tool, which broke the ferrule and carabiner. When found later, the two overhand looped knots were pulled so tight it was as if they were welded of steel.

I have no doubt that both David and Hansjörg quickly planted their tools into the ice as well, but unlike Jess's broken tool and carabiner, there is no evidence that they were connected to their tools. In fact, neither David nor Hansjörg used leashes on this climb. I recovered both of Jess's tools, but none of David's and

only one of Hansjörg's, which was undamaged.

There is strong evidence that Jess had loop-coiled the two ropes around his neck and tied the two looped knots. Jess was found with many strands of the two ropes coiled around his torso and individual legs when he was recovered. At first, I thought that while on rappel Jess had stopped and wrapped the two strands around his left leg multiple times so he could free his hands. But they were not rappelling when they were hit by the avalanche. With numerous four-strand coils over his neck and draping his body, it is not hard to imagine how the multiple wraps around his legs and torso occurred as he tumbled in the avalanche, much like being in a washing machine.

When the men were recovered, none of them were connected to the ropes by the belay loop on their harnesses. The Parks Canada Visitor Safety team only cut rope that led to another climber or was frozen in the ice. Hansjörg does not appear to have had any rope wrapped around him at the accident scene. David had a few wraps and loops around him and one strand of blue rope through a locking carabiner that may or may not have been locked. Jess also had blue and green strands of rope through an unlocked carabiner attached to a gear loop on his harness and one strand through another carabiner, again attached to another gear loop. By their location on the harnesses, the ropes found through the carabiners on David and Jess were probably accidently inserted through the gates as they were flipped and tumbled in the avalanche.

All three climbers were swept down the snow basin and Life by the Drop and were found close together on the largest avalanche cone below that route.

That same day, just before 2 p.m., Quentin Roberts, an experienced alpinist living in Canmore, stopped his car along the Icefields Parkway on his way back from a climb further north to examine the routes on Howse Peak. As he and his partner stood looking at the east face, an avalanche, possibly from a cornice break, swept the basin above Life by the Drop and billowed onto the glacier area at the bottom of the face. They did not know Hansjörg, David and Jess were on the face at the time. Roberts ran to his car, got his camera and took a photo of the massive snow cloud forming at the bottom of the face. It was 1:58 p.m., 31 minutes after David was photographed releasing his rappel lines at the top of the snow gully.

Allison, Jess's wife, and Joyce, Jess's mother, spoke multiple times on the evening of April 16 and the morning of April 17. Jess always phoned in after a climb, and he had told Allison that they would be out that night. In fact, Jess had a Garmin inReach, and no matter where he was, he would have texted their position to Allison (I found the shattered Garmin inReach on the avalanche cone during my second trip to the accident site).

At 7:30 a.m. on April 17, I called the RCMP dispatch, which put me in touch with a Parks Canada Visitor Safety team member. I told him where the three climbers were and that we were concerned they hadn't checked in. They immediately drove to the Waterfowl Lakes parking lot to see if Jess's truck was still there. It was.

The Visitor Safety team was flown flown by helicopter that afternoon to the base of the east face. The weather had changed overnight and clouds blanketed the upper slopes of Howse Peak, limiting visibility to the bottom half of the face. As they flew toward the avalanche cones at the bottom of the face for the first time, rescuers could see a small dark shape on the snow but could not get close enough to identify it. On the second flight, a closer inspection of the east face was possible, and the helicopter was able to hover directly above at least one, possibly two, of the partially buried climbers halfway up the large avalanche cone below Life by the Drop.

Weather conditions were poor and Visitor Safety was unable to put a team on the ground. Worried about incoming weather and locating the buried climbers after the storm, they tossed two large fluorescent traffic cones and two avalanche beacons where the evidence was located, and then departed. Over the next two days, poor weather prevented any recovery efforts as a significant storm deposited 45 centimetres of snow with high wind and created extreme avalanche hazard.

On April 20, the weather was clear and sunny with hazardous avalanche conditions. The

helicopter pilot, along with Visitor Safety team members, flew up and down the face, over the summit and around the mountain looking for signs of survivors. No climber or equipment was seen after a careful and meticulous search. They then concentrated their efforts on locating the climbers on the avalanche cone where the initial sighting took place, but were now buried in additional avalanche debris.

The team was flown to a staging area below the face and out of avalanche danger. Using a 30-metre longline attached to the helicopter, one rescuer flew in on the line and remained clipped to it while probing likely areas on the avalanche cone. The pilot held the helicopter steady overhead with a 20-minute time limit, moving in step with the searcher while spotters closely watched the operation. An adjacent avalanche was timed and demonstrated a 30-second threshold for escape. After one attempt, the weather deteriorated and search operations were suspended for the day.

Again, on April 21, the weather was clear and calm. The rescuers returned to the accident site and, while connected to the longline below the helicopter, tried two more 20-minute cycles of probing to locate the climbers without success; however, this time the rescue team brought an avalanche search dog and handler. After exhausting their probing efforts, the decision was made for one more search attempt with the dog. The longline was extended to 45 metres, and then the pilot picked up the dog and her handler and slung them into the site. The handler let the dog, still attached to a tether, search a wider area, and after 25 minutes she located one of the climbers.

The dog and handler returned to staging, and rescuers returned to the accident site two at a time on the longline to dig and expose the climbers who were buried close together. Still clipped into the longline, the rescuers quickly cut the two 50-metre ropes in as many as 30 places to free the climbers from the ice and loops of rope that had wrapped primarily around David and Jess as they tumbled in the avalanche. The climbers were then clipped into the line with the rescuers and flown back to staging. At staging, the three climbers were carefully bundled and taken by helicopter to ambulances waiting at the highway.

Grant Statham, a Parks Canada Visitor Safety specialist, said he did not see any sign of an avalanche slab fracture line in the basin or gully during their reconnaissance on April 20, although after four days of wind and snow, a fracture line could have been filled in. In addition, the climbers were near the surface when they were first spotted on April 17, giving credibility to the theory of a cornice/small-slab avalanche.

In conclusion, the fact that the three climbers were found high on an avalanche cone directly below Life by the Drop proves they were swept to their death by a significant force of snow and ice in that short window of 31 minutes from the time they dropped into the gully and the photo-confirmed cornice/avalanche break before 2 p.m.

Knowing what happened to these three young men in the last moments of their lives doesn't bring them back into our arms, but the final story of their last climb gives some closure and peace of mind to their families, friends and loved ones.

Author's Note

The above report is based on the three climbers' photographic record, the equipment attached to them upon recovery, Grant Statham's detailed search and recovery information, and from three subsequent investigative trips I made to the accident scene.

Jess Roskelley's iPhone was found on him at the accident site. The iPhone provided exact time, altitude and GPS locations from each of his photos, which were transferred and located on Google Earth. The GPS coordinates showed they did a new route variation of M16 on the east face of Howse Peak and the time at which they summitted. On my second trip to the accident site on June 2, Tim Sanford, a good friend of Jess's, and I found David Lama's GoPro and Hansjörg Auer's camera, both with informative photos that filled in specific route details. Using Jess's iPhone as the control for time and location, I sequenced David and Hansjörg's photos with Jess's into a timeline, which enabled Grant Statham and Steve Holeczi,

two of the search and rescue and recovery personnel, to determine the route pitch by pitch that the three had climbed.

The equipment recovered off the climbers and found later at the accident site was insightful as to the overwhelming force that took their lives but initially left me with as many questions as answers as to what happened after the last photograph was taken. Since August 4, for over two months, more than 30 pieces of their two ropes lay stretched out on the floor of an empty room in my house while I tried to make sense of four knots they had tied in the ropes. Almost six months after the accident, the answers came to me, as I explain above.

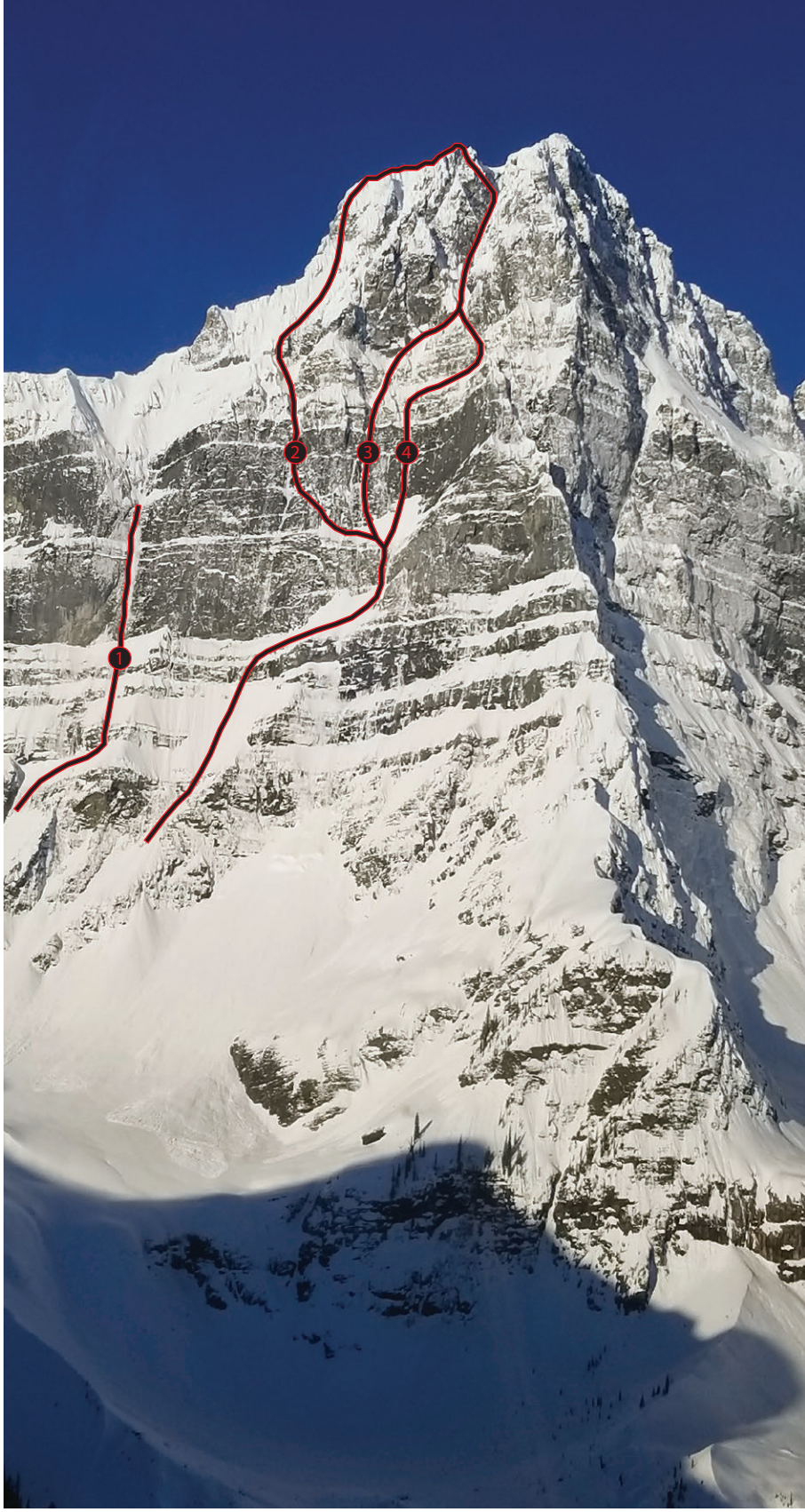
Hansjörg, David and Jess climbed the east face of Howse from their camp at the base to the summit—an altitude gain of 1,340 metres—in less than seven hours. Their ascent is a tribute to their strength, talent and tenacity. Their deaths prove that once again, though, the mountain passes final judgment on success or failure.

Summary

Auer-Lama-Roskelley a.k.a. The King Line (VI WI6+, 1340m), east face, Howse Peak, Canadian Rockies. FA: Hansjörg Auer, David Lama, Jess Roskelley, April 16, 2019.

About the Author

Hailing from Spokane, Washington, John Roskelley, father of Jess Roskelley, made the first ascent of many classic peaks in the Karakoram and Himalaya, including Great Trango Tower, Uli Biaho and Cholatse, to name a few. He has also summitted three 8,000ers, with a new route on K2 in 1978. As a photojournalist, John has written three adventure books and a guidebook on the full length of the Columbia River (which he has paddled in its entirety), and his photography has been on the cover of *National Geographic*.



The east face of Howse Peak:
(1) Life by the Drop
(2) King Line
(3) M16
(4) Howse of Cards
Photo: Grant Statham

Sarah Hueniken on pitch four of Nophobia, with Hydrophobia and Cryophobia visible to the right.
Photo: John Price

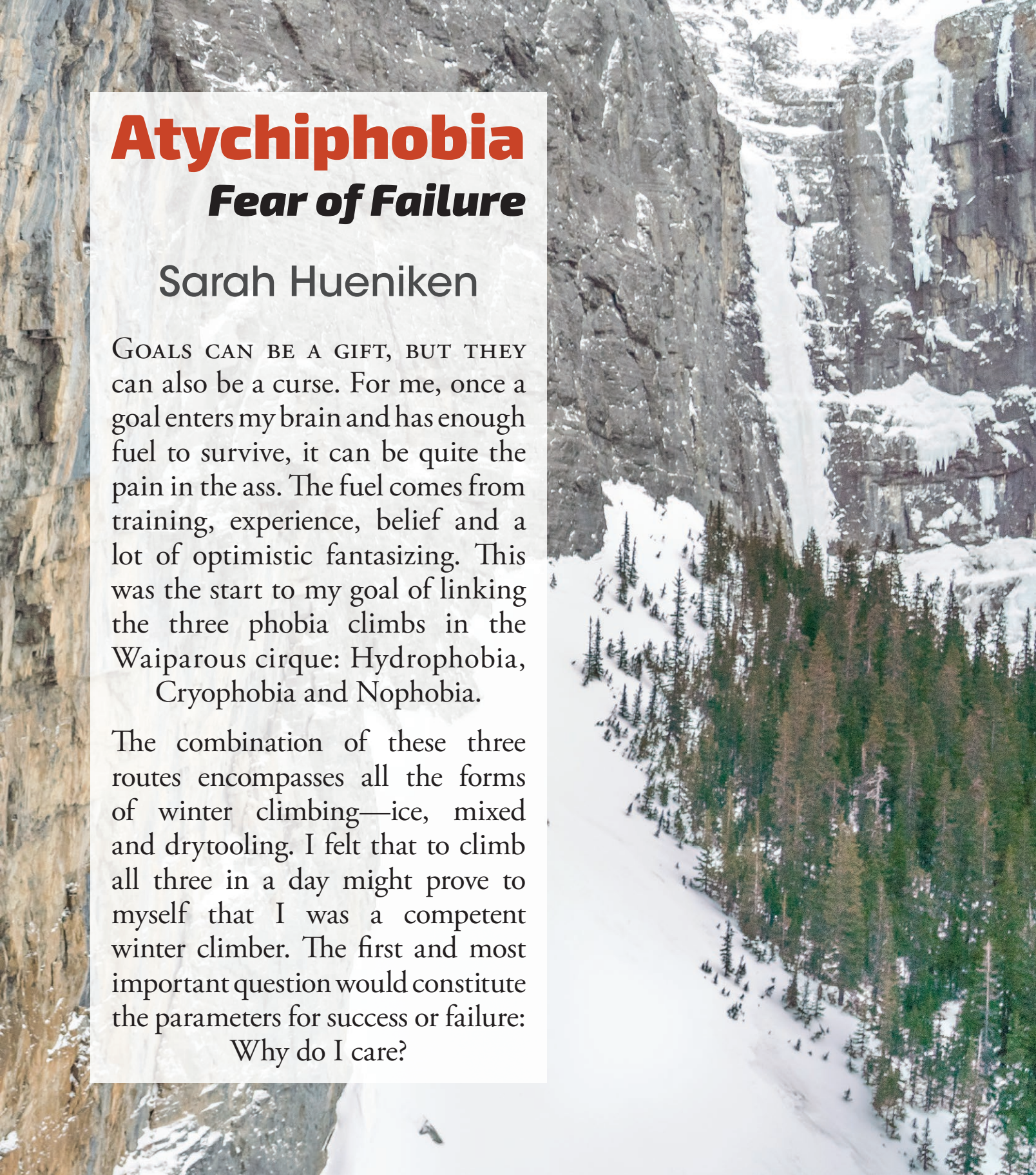
Atychiphobia

Fear of Failure

Sarah Hueniken

Goals can be a gift, but they can also be a curse. For me, once a goal enters my brain and has enough fuel to survive, it can be quite the pain in the ass. The fuel comes from training, experience, belief and a lot of optimistic fantasizing. This was the start to my goal of linking the three phobia climbs in the Waiparous cirque: Hydrophobia, Cryophobia and Nophobia.

The combination of these three routes encompasses all the forms of winter climbing—ice, mixed and drytooling. I felt that to climb all three in a day might prove to myself that I was a competent winter climber. The first and most important question would constitute the parameters for success or failure: Why do I care?



Sarah Hueniken on pitch four of Nophobia, belayed by Scott McKay. Photo: John Price

Last year was the worst year of my life. I lost my close friend of 15 years to an avalanche during a women's ice-climbing camp that I had organized. I responded to the scene after witnessing it from the car, and I spent the following days in the hospital with her grieving family. I have seen the worst that my passion for climbing and sharing it with others can reveal. After that day, I lost all confidence in my relationship with the mountains. Twenty-plus years of experience, judgement, efforts, trials, lessons and joy were erased from my memory. I felt like an untrusting hermit, with no place in a world I used to roam in with ease and strength. At some point along my journey towards recovery and healing, I recognized the lifesaving value of three hugely important things: compassion, community and resilience.

I learned that having compassion for myself was tragically difficult but critical, as well as receiving and accepting it from others. I needed support from my peers and community more than I ever had in my life, or the hermit would never resurface. And I was hopeful that my horrible experience could potentially make me a better person, instead of the angry, shameful and fearful one I was becoming. For all these reasons, I tapped back into a vague memory of a goal that I always thought would be a major test of myself.

ALL THREE OF THE PHOBIA ROUTES exist in a beautiful, difficult-to-reach valley in the remote Waiparous. Hydrophobia (fear of water), first climbed in 1986 by Frank Campbell and Karl Nagy, was the first route in that zone to be climbed. It has a reputation for offering a solid and challenging day out on pure ice and a name that speaks for itself in terms of its origin. Cryophobia (fear of cold) was put up by Sean Isaac and Shawn Huisman in 2001. The first ascent was a culmination of 10 days spread over two seasons to finally bolt then redpoint. It is now probably one of the most sought-after and rewarding mixed climbs in the Rockies, and possibly the world, with its seven pitches of vertical-to-overhanging solid rock and ice transitions that truly are the best of their grade. Finally, Nophobia (fear of not having a phobia) was established by Will Gadd, Will Mayo, John Freeman and Pat Delaney in 2013. The route was initiated in 2008 and required several trips and arduous efforts to build, due to its 50 metres of overhanging and less-than-immaculate rock. The route has only seen a handful of clean ascents and usually loses its final section of ice early in the season.

I had climbed all the routes before, but it had been years. I climbed Cryophobia in 2013 with Marco Delesalle, Nophobia in 2015 with Katie Bono, and Hydrophobia a few times for guiding and personal climbing. Doing all three in a day would be a solid goal after a year of minimal climbing and a severe lack of confidence.

Sarah Hueniken and Scott McKay on pitch three of Hydrophobia. Photo: John Price

Of course, the most ludicrous climbing goals also require optimistic and resilient partners. Luckily, I had this in Tiffany Carleton, who I quietly bounced the idea off and who willingly headed in there with me to figure out the best way to go around trying the mission. The first problem was that road access had recently changed in the Waiparous, and where we used to be able to get to with creative four wheeling, we now had to cover on foot. Our second problem after a two-hour drive and 2.5-hour ski was the mind-rattling loose rock on Nophobia. I battled my basophobia (fear of falling) and eventually managed to get the rope up the first pitch—well, almost. My unpracticed climbing brain felt shaky and fearful, and we resigned ourselves to top-roping the almost-ascended first pitch a couple of times, and then retraced our 4.5-hour journey back out with our tails between our legs. A full day was spent not sending a single pitch of a 16-pitch mission.

DAYS LATER, I MANAGED to convince my partner, Will Gadd, to come out to try Cryophobia. Problem number three reared its head that day as the valley expressed its propensity for swirling winds and spindrift. Ancraophobia (fear of wind) on my part resulted in us abandoning Cryophobia and once again on the first pitch of Nophobia, with our big boots and ice tools and a rack of unused screws. Once more I sessioned the first pitch, and this time in its entirety. Success! Two days, 6,000 calories, 10 hours of skiing, one pitch sent.

I went back two more times with Tiffany—once to attempt the second pitch of Nophobia only to get my ropes stuck, resulting in wasted time and energy spent ascending 60 metres of free-hanging ropes with cord and webbing. I was appreciative for my years of teaching this inefficient skill in self-rescue courses.

Another time we pulled sleds, thinking we would bravely camp and leave gear stashed in an effort to increase the efficiency and energy for future trips. After a heinous ski with heavy sleds and a rather cold sleepless night, with hours of melting snow for water and nightmares raised by my panophobia (fear of everything), we again dragged all of our gear back out the next day without even trying to climb. Obviously, my actions

were saying this is not going to happen. My brain, however, had already regained its optimism by the end of the ski out. Back in the truck, I was brainstorming my next return, again, of course, with the ropes and rack we just hauled out.

With only laps on the first pitch of Nophobia and two half-assed burns on the crux second pitch, I again convinced my amazing partner, Will, to ski in with me on a –28 C day. Sold as quality time together and a good calorie burn, he reluctantly but supportively made the journey with me. We brought another static rope to fix on Nophobia, and through aiding techniques in puffy pants and multiple layers, he helped fix the rope from the third to the fourth pitch, making it easier for me if I ever got that far again. True love at its finest.

So, by mid-January, when I had freed up time on my calendar to attempt the link-up, I had hardly climbed anything at all. I did, however, know the nine-hour total approach and return trip all too well. Problem number four then came into play—January cold snaps. Sadly, that week ended up being the worst one we would have all winter. Temperatures went down to –30 C and stayed there. There was no reprieve, and I knew it was impossible to do anything outside, so I stayed home and trained in the gym and chopped wood.

More promising temperatures revealed themselves for January 19 and 20, which was right when I had secured partners. At this point, this was my last try. After that, my winter was booked solid, and I likely wouldn't have any more time. I also realized that trying to do all the routes with one person climbing behind me would take too long. I needed a team, a team that was purely out there to help me achieve my goal. A hard ask but another test of my learnings from my past year.

Scott McKay, John Price, Heather Mosher, Tiffany and I headed out early on January 19. This time we went straight for Cryo. I knew I had to learn some of this route again if I was to be able to do all three in a day. I climbed the first four pitches with Scott jugging and cleaning, and then decided that was good enough and went over to Nophobia to gain confidence there. I had the first pitch dialed but struggled again on the second pitch with no send. By this point, I was having the most incredible muscle cramps

Nophobia, Hydrophobia and Cryophobia (from left to right). Photo: Tiffany Carleton

Sarah Hueniken and John Price on pitch five of Cryophobia. Photo: Alex Taylor

I've ever experienced. Everything was cramping: hamstrings, forearms, biceps, calves and even my toes. I couldn't hold onto my tools or lift my leg without freezing in place and looking like a clay Gumby that was stuck in tortuous positions. The day ended in laughter over the sad state of my body, and there was an obvious unspoken concern from the entire crew that I still was very far from being ready to complete this goal.

The next day was very hard. It was Laura Kos's memorial, another friend of ours who had died recently in an avalanche while skiing. We all went with somber emotions and the weight of knowing this environment that we find joy in can also take everything away. Community came together and shared in the sorrow and pain of another amazing soul gone far too early. That night, we armed our helmets with stickers that celebrated Laura's enthusiasm for life—Just Be Kos.

The next morning, we were out of the house at 3 a.m. I had slept a mere hour and was still feeling the emotional hangover from the day before. This was, however, my last foreseeable day to try, and as much as I wanted to succumb to atychiphobia (fear of failure) by not even getting out of bed, I knew I had a team of friends that I didn't want to let down.

We were the first to arrive in the Phobia Amphitheatre, which was no small feat as the warmer days got everyone quite excited to climb Cryophobia. We approached in record time, which unfortunately cost me serious blisters on my heels. I couldn't quite make this a good enough excuse to call it a day, but I considered it until I saw John feverishly getting ready. We started up Cryo by headlamp, with John jugging like a madman and shouting at me like an excited cheerleader squad. How could I not succeed with this determination on the other end of my rope? I topped out by 11 a.m. after leading the entire route clean, and together, we made a quick descent.

ON THE GROUND, I PICKED UP my Nophobia gear and post-holed over to the route, stuffing cold Safeway samosas into my mouth between heavy breaths and questioning my sanity. I sorted my gear and started up the first pitch with Scott belaying. Luckily, this was the one and only pitch I knew very well, and it gave me the perfect mental boost to start the climb. I reached the anchors and pulled my rope through; this way, Scott could keep belaying me from the ground as I started the steep second pitch. I had practiced doing hard circuits in the gym, where I would climb for eight minutes straight then give myself five minutes' rest. Repeated five times, I had simulated an ascent of Nophobia—in my head anyway. In reality, I still had not yet redpointed the crux pitch, and I wasn't sure how it would go. When I made it to the crux moves, I found myself in a tricky situation. My body weight pinched my hand between my tool and the rock, and I was left hanging endlessly from one arm, unable to match and shake out. Again, it was the cheering from John, shooting photos beside me, and Scott, belaying from below, that brought me back to the realization that I wasn't alone in this. It was a team effort, and I'd better do my part.

Eventually, I landed at the top of the second pitch, stoked to have persevered, and I started to believe I was having a good day. John gave me a

hug, Scott started to ascend the rope and the next three pitches found their flow in this incredible teamwork. Nothing came easily, but being surrounded by my buds and their great energy kept me focused and optimistic. I rapped on single strands to get down as quickly as possible and continued on my way to Hydro with Scott.

Walking to Hydrophobia, I found myself somewhat in disbelief, wondering how I was going to have the energy for a WI5 ice climb. Leading four more long pitches of ice was the last thing I felt like doing at this point. I didn't give myself time to mentally discuss my concern, and I certainly didn't verbalize it, but instead continued in robotic motion towards re-racking and choking down Clif Bloks and random cookie scraps. Muscle cramps were not an option anymore. It was about 4 p.m. when Scott and I exchanged fist bumps, and off we went. Ice climbing is relatively easy after hard mixed climbing, but it is still dangerous and real. I made sure to place more screws than I normally would and analyzed my every move with scrutiny.

After three long pitches, I was on a decent ledge, looking up at the 16th pitch of the day—the final pitch of the link-up. It looked easier than the previous pitches. I still didn't quite need to turn on my headlamp, and I was feeling tired but focused. Scott was jugging his way up to me when the crack of a sudden roar of water broke the silence of the encroaching dusk. I looked up, and the entire left side of Hydrophobia was cascading with water. Luckily, we were on the right side. Rooster tails of water were flowing and drenching the climb, and I was getting wet when the wind blew ever so slightly. I had never experienced anything like this before. Clearly, that is how the climb got its name. Without knowing enough about the situation, I yelled down to Scott to stop and build an anchor, and I rapped back to him as I cleaned my screws. We made a rapid descent, leaving gear behind in an effort to get off the ice as quickly as possible. The unknowns of what could happen to the ice, or what would happen to us if we got soaked while being far from help, was too great to finish the final pitch or the dream of the link-up.

When I returned to the ground, I burst into my own flood of tears and emotion. I wasn't upset that I couldn't or didn't finish. I was relieved it was done and that we were all safe. The tears came from an overwhelming sadness for Sonja. I felt the finale of this goal in that moment and knew that it would never bring her back. Nothing would. Despite my ability to return to the mountains and regain my confidence and trust, I would never be able to reverse time.

To climb all three routes in a day was the immediate goal, but the larger goal was to answer my curiosity of if it was possible for me. I've never been one to say I have or haven't done something, or that I'll get the route next time. I always disliked that sort of almost-is-good-enough mentality. Somehow with this one, though, it really was good enough for me, and in the end, that is who I did it for. I can't actually claim the trilogy, but it was a process worth my effort.

This day was a culmination of a year of learning and growth and seeing who I actually am as a result. It was a test of being able to ask for help when I needed it and trusting that my friends would be there for me. It was my own way to reconnect with Sonja and to learn to trust myself again, and to realize that I am capable in the mountains, maybe even more so, with the knowledge that only human fallibility can teach.

Summary

Phobia link-up attempt: Cryophobia (M8 WI5+, 7 pitches), Nophobia (M10+ WI3+, 5 pitches) and Hydrophobia (WI5+, 4 pitches), Waiparous, Canadian Rockies. Sarah Hueniken (with support from Tiffany Carleton, Will Gadd, Scott McKay, Heather Mosher, John Price and Alex Taylor), January 21, 2020.

About the Author

Living in Canmore, Alberta, Sarah is an ACMG alpine guide, and an instructor and examiner for the ACMG Training and Assessment Program. Sponsored by Arcteryx, Scarpa, Sterling Ropes and Onward Up, she has pursued climbing and guiding for more than 20 years in the Bow Valley.

Waddington End to End

Simon Richardson

"Whoa! Simon! Rock!"

I pulled myself tight against the rock and shut my eyes. Next instant I felt a powerful thump on my back and was deluged in spindrift. I was a little dazed when I opened my eyes a few seconds later. There was an empty crater in the snow beside me, and the air was full of huge floating snowflakes. It took me a while to realize that these were not snowflakes but feathers. The falling block had missed my torso but had ripped off the back of my duvet jacket. I stuffed it into my rucksack and set off up the pitch to join Ian above. ¶

Ian Welsted on the crest of the Complete West Ridge after exiting the Epaulette Glacier on day three. Photo: Simon Richardson

I first met Ian Welsted on the BMC International Winter Meet in Scotland in January 2016. The weather was typically Scottish with rapidly fluctuating temperatures, high winds and varying amounts of snow. Conditions were challenging, few routes were in nick, and just surviving on the hill was a challenge in itself. I was impressed by the Canadian contingent. Ian and Raphael Slawinski took all this in their stride and made some superb ascents. My already high assessment of Canadian alpinism was considerably enhanced.

Roll forward nearly two years to November 2017 when I was invited to the Banff Mountain Film Festival to receive a prize for a book I'd written about Scottish winter climbing. Ian was keen to reciprocate the hospitality of the Scottish meet and offered to take me climbing after the event. Needless to say, I jumped at the chance. My track record in the Canadian Rockies was limited to a handful of well-known routes, and climbing with Ian was too good an opportunity to miss. It was snowing heavily in town and winter was already in full swing, so we decided to attempt an unclimbed gully on the north flank of Storm Mountain.

Ian led the long fifth ice pitch up into a snow bowl full of unstable snow. Eager to find a good rock belay, he found a perfect crack, placed a nut, and then gave it a pull. Unexpectedly, this detached a TV-sized block that fell down the pitch. I was belayed a little to the side but, unfortunately, directly in the fall line, and my down jacket took the direct hit. When I arrived, grinning, 20 minutes later at the belay, Ian was overjoyed. When the block first dislodged, he thought it was going to kill me.

It was dark when reached the top of the 500-metre-high route, but to our surprise, we had come across a nut and couple of pegs in its upper half. Our unclimbed gully was not a new route after all, but the falling-block incident had an unexpected upside. Ian was impressed that I had wanted to continue up the route, which he incorrectly associated with toughness, determination and drive. In truth, it was nothing of the sort. I had just been lucky, very lucky. But our desire to complete the climb highlighted quiet confidence and a shared appetite for adventure and commitment. We agreed to climb together in the Coast Mountains at the earliest opportunity.

Roll forward another 18 months to spring 2019. I was feeling very nervous about our upcoming trip since I had picked up an injury and done little climbing for several months. Ian is far stronger, fitter and faster than me, so what on earth was I doing teaming up with a Piolets d'Or winner 12 years my junior. But my air tickets were bought, and Ian had carved out a chunk of time from his busy guiding schedule, so we were both committed.

Over the winter, we'd discussed objectives, and I'd come up with various options on attractive rarely visited peaks deep in the range, but Ian was not convinced.

Mount Waddington's Complete West Ridge. The line of ascent took the hanging ramp on the right side of the jagged crest. Photo: Simon Richardson

"Hey, Simon, I'd like to go somewhere big like Waddington rather than go rock climbing on obscure spires."

"Well, if it's Waddington you want, let's go for the complete west ridge," I suggested. "It's one of the biggest features in the range."

The central spine of the highest peak in the Coast Mountains should have been climbed years ago, but somehow, in the chase for more technical objectives, it had been overlooked. And there it was, Mount Waddington's upper west ridge marching boldly across a double-page spread in Don Serl's guidebook—a sharp 1500-metre-long pinnacled crest rising up to a fine snow arête and the summit plateau.

THE MUNDAYS' pioneering route up Waddington climbed the lower 3.5 kilometres of the west ridge to 3,300 metres, and then followed the natural line of weakness up the Angel Glacier to the Northwest Peak. It is a logical line and hugely committing for 1928. Unfortunately, the Mundays did not have the firepower to continue to the main summit, which had to wait until 1936 when Bill House and Fritz Wiessner summitted via the Southwest Face. This bold and committing undertaking was the most difficult alpine route in North America at the time and comparable with the advances being made in the European Alps on the Eiger and Grandes Jorasses.

Our plan was to traverse Waddington, starting from Fury Gap at its western end. We would follow the Munday route to the foot of the unclimbed upper west ridge, climb this and continue on to bag the False Summit (3,980 metres), Northwest Peak (4,000 metres) and the Summit Tower (4,019 metres) before descending the Bravo Glacier route to complete our 12-kilometre journey at the eastern extremity of the mountain at Rainy Knob.

We thought mid-July would be the optimum time for an attempt, but the weather was unsettled,

On day three, Ian Welsted traverses the steep and heavily loaded slope on the north side of the crest to gain the upper ramp that leads to the Northwest Peak. Photo: Simon Richardson

so we put our plans for the Coast Mountains on hold. Our first opportunity to climb anything challenging took place in late July when we made the first ascent of the north face of Mount Phillips (3,246 metres), which lies north of Mount Robson [see page 126].

Finally, two weeks later, the rain stopped, the clouds cleared and the weather was good enough for Waddington. Mike King dropped us off by helicopter at Fury Gap at 2,500 metres on August 3. We felt rather exposed to be deep in the heart of the Waddington Range with just light alpine packs, but with no further ado we set off up the snow slopes above towards Fireworks Peak—the first minor summit on the lower west ridge. The snow was knee-deep after days of storm, and it was slow going. Ian's famous trail-breaking power saved the day, and early that afternoon, a little after Herald Peak, I suggested we stop to bivouac.

"I'm not in the habit of stopping at 3 p.m. when there is good weather in the mountains," Ian countered.

It felt ridiculously early, but we were not going to make the start of the upper west ridge that evening, so there was no point in pushing too hard.

"We aren't going to climb the upper ridge tomorrow, so why not let it clean off another day, and this is a perfect camp spot."

This short conversation captured the spirit of our partnership. We were both working towards the same goal, and there was no hint of competition. Without doubt, Ian was the more powerful climber, but I had more experience climbing in the range, and together we made a strong team, each adding different components to the mix. Above all, we were completely relaxed but not in a casual, offhand way. Quite simply, we were at one with the mountain. The weather was good, we had plenty of food and fuel, and there was no wasted energy worrying about factors beyond our control. It was a good feeling.

The next day we traversed over the two Men At Arms summits and followed a spectacular corniced ridge over Bodyguard and Councillor peaks. The going continued to be tough in the deep snow, but we were hopeful that the upper ridge had been scoured by the westerly wind and that the sun would firm up the snow. Once again we had a leisurely mid-afternoon bivouac, but this time we were perfectly positioned near the start of the upper west ridge.

On day three we were up and away before daybreak. The Mundays' route drops down left for 100 metres to the Angel Glacier, but instead, we continued up steep snow and along a level section of ridge to where it rears up into the sharp, jagged granite crest. At the first glimmer of dawn, we stepped out right onto a hanging snow ramp that runs lower down and parallel to the crest on its south side. We had scrutinized photos for months wondering about this feature, but now was the moment of truth. Just how steep was the ramp, and would the snow be consolidated? The prospect of a kilometre-long sideways crab crawl in deep powder was too horrible to contemplate. But our patience tactic had paid off—the snow was beautifully firm, and even more surprisingly, the snow had formed a gentle scoop where it abutted the rock that provided a natural walkway. We scampered along, placing the occasional runner in the fractured granite and looking wryly at the succession of wildly contorted pinnacles covered in soft snow not far above our heads.

At the end of the ramp, a hidden gully led up onto the previously untrodden Epaulette Glacier that sits astride the central section of the ridge. We couldn't believe our luck that it had all gone so smoothly, but we were soon confronted with the sting in the tail. As we left the glacier, the ensuing snow ridge narrowed to a knife-edge draped in delicate cornices. I traversed *au cheval* along the wafer-thin crest and belayed by excavating a deep hole in the snow on the east side of the ridge.

"If you fall, fall to the left!" I helpfully called across to Ian.

Needless to say, Ian was precise and sure-footed, but our situation was precarious. There was no option other than to continue across the steep and heavily loaded slope on the north

Simon Richardson climbs the icy summit chimney on the Summit Tower on day four. Photo: Ian Welsted

side of the crest to gain the upper ramp leading to the Northwest Peak.

Ian made a long and committing traverse, manfully digging deep to find ice-screw runners, but the snow on my pitch was too deep for screws. I ploughed a sideways trench for 30 metres until a blind three-metre jump into a bergschrund brought us back into contact with more reasonable terrain. That afternoon we tagged the False Summit and Northwest Peak before descending The Stroll to gain the broad terrace below the main summit.

Day four was another beautiful day. Unlike Ian, I had climbed Waddington before and had reached the summit with Dave Hesleden during a storm in August 1997. It was our first visit to the Coast Mountains, and unsure of the route on the Summit Tower, Dave and I climbed the Wadd Hose, an icy couloir that leads up to the Notch where the more technical climbing up a series of icy chimneys begins. We pulled our hoods tight, pretended that we were climbing on a typical bad-weather day on Ben Nevis, and fought our way to the top through the maelstrom. In hindsight, it was quite an adventure, especially as we had only arrived in Canada three days before.

This time, Ian and I took the standard route along a rising traverse across the lower reaches of the Tooth to gain the Notch. Ian arrived there first and paused. The Summit Tower was still covered in winter rime, and chunks of ice that had been loosened by the sun were raining down.

"What do you think, Simon? It looks very dangerous to me."

We were sheltered in the Notch, but just metres away there was a continuous torrent of falling ice. Our momentum from the last four days vanished in an instant. Reaching the summit was important, but there was a strong temptation to think that since we had already climbed the mountain's west ridge, it was reasonable to descend. A little voice in the back of my head kept saying "Take the easy option, Simon. You've climbed the mountain before… Go down.." But I could see the fire in Ian's eyes. I knew he wanted to continue if it all possible, but clearly he wanted me to make the decision.

"Let's watch for a while," I said. "We're perfectly safe here."

There was no need to hurry. Patience, after all, had been the watchword all summer. We stared gloomily across to the Summit Tower, but the longer we looked, the little voice in my head began to devise a plan. If we could reach the chimneys, we might be sheltered from the barrage, and the summit may be possible after all.

Five minutes, stretched to 10, and then to 15. Suddenly my mind was made up. Without a word, I took the rack from Ian, and two minutes later I had scampered across the connecting ridge and was safely belayed in the shelter of the first giant chockstone. The ground above was sufficiently steep that the ice was now flying over my head beyond the line of the route. Game on!

We enjoyed four absorbing mixed pitches up the chimneys and moved quickly up the final open gully to the summit. It was a perfect cloudless day, and we took in the 360-degree panorama that looked along the spine of the Coast Mountains and west to the Pacific Ocean. Gleefully, we pointed out past successes. Nearby we admired the huge southern aspects of Combatant, Tiedemann and Asperity, with Mount Zeus, the crown of the Pantheons, standing behind. To the northwest, I could pick out the steep profile of Remote Mountain, with Monarch dominating the horizon. And in the other direction to the southeast, lost behind the maze of the Homathko Icefield, lay Mount Gilbert. Ian looked towards the Pacific and identified Bute and Knight inlets, which cut so deeply into the landscape that they are difficult to identify from above. Eventually, it was time to go, and slowly and carefully we made a series of rappels back to our bivouac tent.

Before the trip, Don Serl had warned me that descending the Bravo Glacier may be the crux of the whole route. We awoke at 3 a.m. and set off down steep *névé* slopes through the dawn to gain the Bravo Headwall. How things had changed in the intervening 22 years! Instead of deep snow flutings, it was now a broken rocky slope, and we carefully rapped down to the Bravo Glacier icefall.

We soon became lost in a maze of huge crevasses and serac walls. After an hour we reached an impasse and tried three different routes without success. We were resigned to re-exploring the first

The Complete West Ridge of Mount Waddington follows the right-hand skyline. Photo: John Scurlock

option when Ian spotted some faint footsteps in the distance on the lower glacier below. This gave us the incentive to force a way through, and soon we were following a wanded trail left by an American team several weeks before. Unfortunately, they had been unable to find a way up to the Bravo Headwall, but their tracks saved our day.

We reached Rainy Knob at 11 a.m. but were not ready to break the spell. We lounged on a huge flat slab of granite, drinking coffee and taking in the magnificence of the surroundings and enjoying the deep glow that comes when you achieve something that you have set out to do. Eventually, we reached for the radio and within minutes we heard the throb of the helicopter. Our adventure was complete.

Summary

Complete West Ridge (TD 5.7 M4), Mount Waddington (12-km traverse from Fury Gap to Rainy Knob), Waddington Range, Coast Mountains. FA: Simon Richardson, Ian Welsted, August 3–7, 2019.

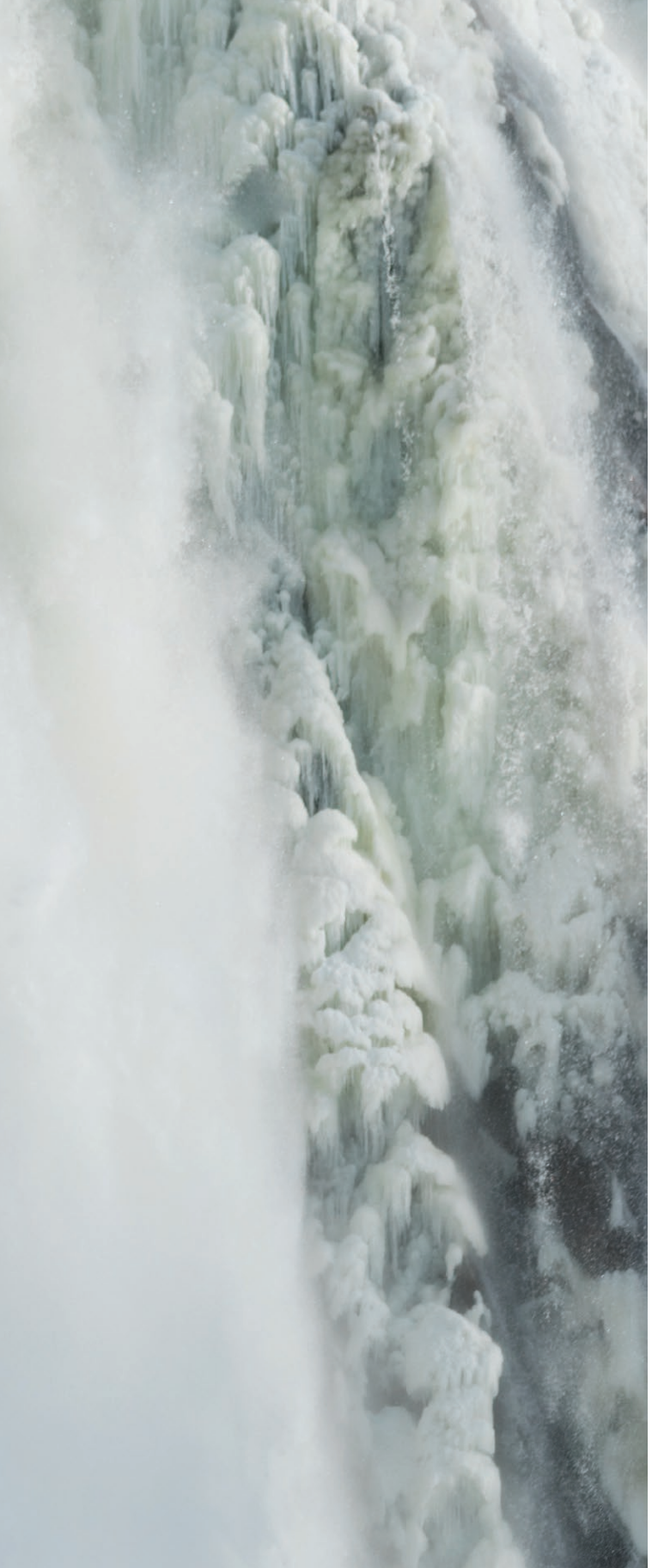
About the Author

Simon Richardson lives in Aberdeen, Scotland, and is the author of numerous Scottish winter-climbing guidebooks. He has added new routes to peaks all over the world from the Alps to the Himalayas and Greenland to South Georgia, and has made many visits to the mountains of Canada.

A Year Behind the Lens

Tim Banfield

February 2019: When visiting Quebec City to ice climb, I try to plan the final day with a flight that leaves in the afternoon. Flying out a little later allows for an early start and the opportunity to climb Montmorency Falls in the morning before heading to the airport. Jeff Mercier climbed Le Pilier de Crystal (WI4+) shortly after sunrise, followed by a mad dash to make our flights home.



The *Canadian Alpine Journal* is a year in review, therefore, my photo essay reflects the same. I was fortunate to have several amazing trips in 2019, leading to some of the best days I've ever had in the mountains. These photos were all captured in a single calendar year and are particularly meaningful to me.

I am often asked how I started in photography. It was a random combination of being medically released from the military and the financial crisis of 2009. Being jobless, I had lots of extra time to go climbing, so decided to start taking photos, hoping to get my foot in the industry door.

When I first started climbing in January 2004, I made the trip out west to Squamish, B.C., with a couple of close friends. We wanted to try and learn enough skills so that we wouldn't kill ourselves. We decided to hire a guide, John Furneaux, for a week of climbing. That summer, I saw photos of John in a couple of climbing magazines, but one particular shot stood out—the October 2004 cover of *Gripped*—of him climbing a perfect granite splitter high above a glacier on a beautiful day in the Waddington Range. The photographer was Paul Bride. I didn't know Paul at the time, but I thought that it was astounding that he was able to travel to all of these unique places to take photos. I figured that I'd never be good enough to be the climber in the pictures, but maybe one day I could be the one taking the photos.

Fast forward 15 years when I found a way to tag along on a trip with Quentin Roberts and Juho Knuuttila to Nepal to try the unclimbed north pillar of Tengkangpoche [see page 163]. I had never heard of the mountain before, but a quick Google search led me to find out that the high point on the wall was reached by John Furneaux along with Matt Maddaloni and Paul Bride in 2006. I found it interesting that 15 years after seeing Paul's shot of John, here I was going to try and document the same route.

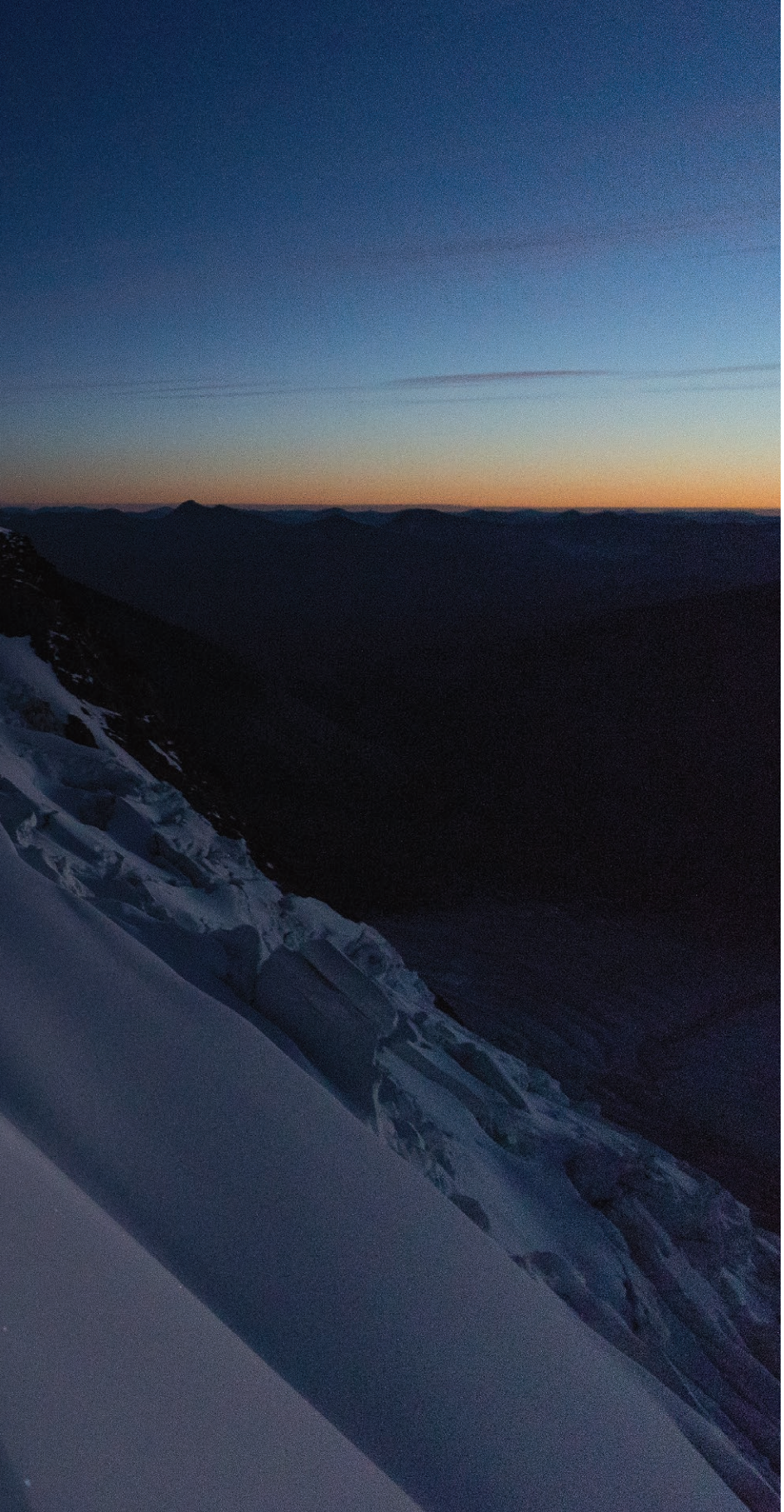
It has always been my goal to have my shots reflect what I saw that day through my lens. I want my images to be as close to what you would see with the naked eye—more journalistic than artistic. No enhanced post-produced shots. I pride myself on not putting the camera away when things get tough or when the weather gets bad. I feel these are the moments that fully convey the reasons why we head into the mountains. I hope my photography will inspire you to go climbing and to have similar experiences in your own life.

About the Photographer/Author

Tim Banfield started climbing in 2004 while attending the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario. His first published shot was in *Gripped* magazine in 2012. Since then, his work has appeared in numerous North American climbing magazines with 13 covers to his credit. When not shooting, Tim works as a realtor, splitting his time between Calgary and Canmore, Alberta.

August 2019: I wonder how many good photos happen simply from being in the right place at the right time. The night this photo was taken, I had woken up in East Creek in the Bugaboos and noticed that it was brighter than usual outside the tent. I realized that it was the northern lights illuminating the night sky, so I grabbed my camera and tripod to see what might materialize. Shortly thereafter, I was treated with one of the most amazing displays of northern lights I have seen, as pillars of purple and red danced above the spires.

August 2019: After Dexter Bateman sent The Shining (5.13+) on Mount Louis, we went back to shoot it in what turned out to be the last weather window in the Rockies for higher elevation routes before it snowed. Dexter had put two summers' worth of work into the send, and we were shooting the line for one of his sponsors. Just before we left the parking lot, I had a phone call from a real estate client, which led to selling a home while sitting in my belay seat 15 pitches off the deck. I suspect it was one of the more unique realtor offices from which to sell a house.



September 2019: A couple of days before this photo of Dane Steadman, I was sitting in a Calgary climbing gym when I overheard friends talking about heading to climb Mount Robson at the end of the week. I asked if I could tag along, and the following day I received a call saying the weather window had changed and to be ready for 4 p.m. that day. Thirty-six hours after asking to join them, we were waking up for an alpine start for the classic Kain Face.

October 2019: Despite sickness, waist-deep snow and a longer-than-usual monsoon season, Quentin Roberts and I attempted the Southwest Ridge of Cholatse (6,440 metres) as a warm-up acclimatization climb before the main event—the north pillar of Tengkangpoche (6,487 metres). We realized we had a low chance of making it, but I also recognized it was probably my only shot at a summit during that trip. After reaching approximately 6,100 metres, we accepted that the summit wasn't in the cards for us—to carry on would have been outside of our risk tolerance.


ARCTERYX

The North

Ivory Gulls and Nunataks

Greg Horne

"THIS IS A CREVASSE MINEFIELD!" yelled Louise. I was skiing out front in flat light, trying to pick the safest way ahead. Bumps of blue glacier ice were all around me. My ski tails would settle, leaving behind holes of blackness. Louise moved left to avoid one of my holes; Dave also stepped left into untracked snow. A yell from Dave warned us he was falling into a crevasse. Louise and I threw ourselves to the snow, bracing for the jerk on the rope. I looked over my shoulder to see Dave wind-milling his ski poles but still visible; then he was out of sight, just the baskets poking out of the crevasse. Then in horror, I see the baskets disappear and the 70-kilogram pulk slowly get sucked into the crevasse on top of Dave. Calling back to Dave there was no answer—the equivalent of two body weights were now pulling on Louise.

SIX DAYS EARLIER WE HEADED by chartered Twin Otter ski plane from Resolute Bay, Nunavut, to the Prince of Wales Icefield on Ellesmere Island's southeast coast. Winter cold had broken about a week earlier, giving us weather 10 degrees warmer than the norm. Our starting temperatures were more like what would be expected at the end of a month-long Arctic ski tour. The two-hour plane flight treated us to some amazing views: jagged coastal cliffs of Devon Island's Colin Archer Peninsula: the inky-blue open waters of Hells Gate polynya; and the frosting top of Sydkap Icecap, where we had skied across two years before [see *CAJ*, 2018, Vol.101, p.69].

Louise Jarry and Dave Critchley with the Inglefield Mountains behind. Photo: Greg Horne

Low cloud blanketed Ellesmere as we continued flying northeast. I spotted the tip of Bowman Island's pinnacle summit, and knew we were coming upon the Prince of Wales Icefield. Uncountable summits and ranges broke out of the clouds. Along the icefield's western edge, summits were broad and rounded, but that quickly changed to jagged, rocky and black in the harsh afternoon sunlight as we flew east. We crossed over several meltwater canyons on the glacier that were not filled in by winter drifting, some of which snaked east for 60 kilometres to empty into Baffin Bay.

Ken Borek's Twin Otter began descending from 2,700 metres—a sign that our flight was nearly over. We had given the flight crew the coordinates of our first to fifth choice of glacier landing spots. Circling over our first spot revealed more crevasses than expected, and nearer to the coast, the glaciers had gone completely stagnant, becoming giant horizontal mogul fields. As we flew by other chosen landing spots, seeing similar numbers of crevasses, we quickly had to radically alter our put-down point since fuel was going down and the dollar amount was shooting up. Moving 12 kilometres southwest, the crevasse situation greatly improved. The pilot proposed to land us on a broad ridge, but in a crazy noisy cabin, we hand signalled him, pointing to over a pass ahead. The plane made a downhill skimming test of the snow-covered glacier then circled a peak to land uphill, and finally made a U-turn back onto the landing track, ready for take off after unloading us 25 kilometres west-northwest of Cape Mouat (77° 39.709' N, 78° 42.252' W).

After several years of planning and attempts at fundraising, the wildlife research project of surveying the nesting sites of ivory gulls was happening. This rare endangered species prefers to nest on the sides of nunataks (rocky peaks surrounding glaciers) or barren rocky plateaus. The suspected reason is lack of predators for their eggs or chicks. The population numbers of the gull in northern Canada has dramatically declined in the last several decades. The last time a nest survey was completed on southeast Ellesmere Island was in 2009. Our trip would check on their nesting status a decade later.

Many nesting colony sites further south in the Manson Icefield had already been abandoned by 2009, so we decided to focus our survey efforts at sites that last supported nesting birds. All previous nesting surveys had been done by helicopter. We would ski site to site and use a spotting scope with a drone to check for and count birds.

The bad landing conditions forced us away from our preferred start of the ski trip and seven nunataks we hoped to check. At least none of these were occupied in 2009. We did the distance math and figured it would be a week to make a side trip to check them all out. A half-hour ski back up to the pass we had just crossed in the plane put us in position to scope for birds at a previously recorded nest site. None were seen. The view, however, from above the pass was out of this world. One mountain range after another spread out below us and away for 70 kilometres. Glaciers up to 25 kilometres wide at their terminus flowed towards the ocean. Shadowy folds in the ice marked glacier meltwater canyons intercepting our onward route. The scale of this Arctic landscape began to sink in.

A downhill start from the landing spot had us skiing at a reasonable pace, loaded with a month's worth of gear and supplies. Kicker skins were used, and we expected the switch to full skins as soon as we began uphill travel. As it turned out, kickers worked for the entire trip; the snow conditions were as perfect as could be wished for. After a couple of days, we reached our first major canyon-crossing on the glacier. As far as one could see to the left and right was a moat 10 to 15 metres deep and 20 to 40 metres wide, and often with a cornice on one or both sides. Nothing technically tricky, but each crossing would be a major time-consuming event of unloading 70-kilogram pulks, plus lowering and raising everything. We had brought two small drones along to survey the gull nest sites. These were launched to scout for easy crossing points of the canyons. Weaknesses were easily spotted from the air, thus savings hours per crossing.

Four days into the tour, we stopped to ski ascend peak 1 (1,450 metres, 77° 47.669' N, 79° 14.991' W) by its northwest ridge. Many lifetimes of peaks, ridges and passes, all unnamed, surrounded us in every direction. Returning to camp early, we packed and descended to the Wykeham Glacier. At 50 kilometres long, it is one of two substantial glaciers that flow into Talbot Inlet and produce thousands of icebergs. Beside camp on the Wykeham was a lake nearly a kilometre long and permanent enough to be shown on the 1:50,000 topo map. Interestingly, the lake had distinct ice-pressure ridges as seen on sea ice. Here the lake is being deformed by the glacier, pushing up jagged ridges of lake ice.

Another historic nesting site was checked as a daytrip using drone and spotting scope, but no birds were seen. As we skied back to camp, it was becoming obvious that the Wykeham Glacier was active enough that crevasses were visible in great numbers. It appeared that towards the middle of the glacier there were fewer. In flat light we continued up valley, looking for a route in the middle as crevasse-free as possible. Further ahead it appeared that a large crevasse field was bordered on its far side by a smooth corridor against the mountain slope. Aiming for the corridor as a way to shortcut our route, turning north led us to the crevasse minefield.

WITH LOUISE HOLDING THE LOAD, I tried jabbing my ski tails into the snow as pickets. Only 20 centimetres of snow covered the ice, so there was no chance of that working. I scraped away the snow and buried a full-length ice screw that squealed in protest on every turn. Though sharp and with an express handle, I needed the pick of the ice axe to

An unnamed, unclimbed 1,460-metre peak on the Trinity Glacier.
Photo: Greg Horne

make the screw turn. Probe and shovel in hand, I made my way back towards Louise, finding two more crevasses between us, narrow enough to ski across but wide enough to swallow me when not on skis.

Bracing myself for what disaster I might find down the hole made by Dave, I was happy to see his head a metre below the surface. The pulk was below him, lodged on an ice bridge. As it had slowly slid into the crevasse, Dave had time to see it coming and had moved slightly so as to only be dealt a grazing blow to his shoulder. With an ice screw placed into the crevasse wall, Dave had himself secured. I pulled up his skis and poles and built a snow anchor to take the load strain off Louise. Back on the surface, Dave and I tried

to Z-pulley the pulk out. No way! We just pulled the snow anchor out. The problem was attempting to raise a stiff pulk up and out when there was not enough space for the bottom end to swing up, plus the incredible extra load that created. And to make it worse, the pulk was upside down, so we were trying to drag it on its cover. The only way to get the pulk out was to shovel a ramp through the lip of the crevasse to create a lower-angle exit. And then with just sheer brute strength, without mechanical advantage, we wrestled it out.

The pros and cons of continuing forward or retreating ended up hinged on the devil you know verses the devil you don't. A half a dozen known holes were delicately re-crossed, and we moved back to the centre of the Wykeham in continued flat light. A major detour around the crevasse field would happen the next day.

The skies cleared during the night, and I heard our first sea gull fly over camp. Not an ivory gull but a glaucous gull (second largest gull in the world), one of the aerial predators known to target ivory's eggs or chicks. Sunny skies make travel in crevasse country a whole lot more reasonable. At times, we would have a visible crevasse bridge sag between each of us. There was no way to find a crevasse-free zone. We tried to keep them at right angles when crossing or moving forwards. If that could not be done, then it was back to the devil you know—ski a couple of metres away parallel to the sag, hoping smaller undetected slots were not under us. As we moved towards camp 7, we crossed a gentle divide, leaving behind the Wykeham and into the head of one of the south branches of the Trinity Glacier, the other iceberg generator discharging into Talbot Inlet.

Two more nest sites were checked, and still no ivory gulls. Our first snow bunting was heard, then seen, first perched on a boulder then flitting around us—a true arctic sign of spring. The Trinity Glacier was not crevasse friendly; in fact, it looked out of the question for our party of three—or maybe anyone. We flew several drone missions to scout ahead along several routes. Going down valley as we had planned was negative. Our next nest sites to check were only a two-day ski by going direct, if there had not been many hundreds of sagging bridges to cross. The only other option was an arcing detour west then north up and across the western icecap of the Prince of Wales Icefield that would take a week to arrive at the same place as the two-day direct route.

After three more days of skiing northwest, we made camp 10 at a 1,210-metre pass from which peak 2 (1,450 metres, 78° 3.948' N, 80° 1.516' W) and peak 3 (1,410 metres, 78° 2.722' N, 80° 4.599' W) were ski ascended. Descending into the head of another branch of the Trinity, the crevasse situation moderated. The higher we skied, the deeper the snowpack and the slower flowing the glaciers became. One evening just after lifting off the drone, its camera view showed we had coincidently set up camp right beside a kilometre-long crevasse, on which I had parked my pulk.

A week after beginning our detour, we finally arrived at the edge of the high plateau ready to descend to the final two nest sites. A ski ascent of peak 4 (1,580 metres, 78° 9.539' N, 79° 25.301' W) gave us a good sense of the terrain ahead; however, the fair weather had signs of change. Sure enough, the next several days had us stuck in camp, shovelling snow and playing cribbage in marathon sessions. Until this point, we had three overcast days that had still permitted travel. The inReach forecast predicted two days of a clear weather window followed by a week of cloud and snow. We needed a day and a bit to ski back across the icecap plateau to find a large crevasse-free landing zone for the ski plane. If we did not use this window to fly out, we risked a delayed pickup, which would lead to missed commercial flights south from Resolute. Reality set in, our time was over and many objectives would be left unfulfilled. A satellite phone call scheduled us a morning pickup on the last forecasted good flying day. On our final evening, we skied a series of tracks in different directions to help give the pilots better ground reference.

With no sound warning, the Twin Otter flew low over us just as a large high cloud placed a multi-square-kilometre shadow over camp and the chosen landing area. The plane circled and descended into the glacial basin to our north, out of sight. Silence followed. Were they waiting for

An unnamed, unclimbed 1,380-metre peak on the Prince of Wales Icefield. Photo: Greg Horne

the shadow to pass to then take off and fly back to us? After what seemed way too long, we heard the engines revving, and then silence and more revving. We thought they might be stuck in the soft snow from the storm of the past four days. Just as we were about ready to launch a drone to investigate, a shark fin appeared from down slope. The tail rudder materialized as the plane climbed its way up the glacier, plowing through deep snow. They had landed on the closest sunlit patch of glacier and all along had been taxiing many kilometres on their skis, weaving around crevasses while making their way up to our camp—simply amazing.

Once back in Resolute, we kept checking the weather on the Prince of Wales Icefield. If we stayed, we would have missed our flights south.

Acknowledgements

This expedition was supported by Arc'teryx, Campers Village, Canada Goose, DJI, Idea Wild, MEC, MultirotorHeli, NAIT, PGYTECH, PolarPro, Polar Supplies, Sea to Summit and Track 'n Trail.

Summary

Four first ascents in the Inglefield Mountains of the Prince of Wales Icefield, southeast Ellesmere Island (166kms travelled on skis). Dave Critchley, Greg Horne, Louise Jarry, May 14–June 6, 2019.

Le mont Wood

Pascale Marceau

Le 11 mars 2019, à 15 h 10 (HNP), mon partenaire Lonnie Dupre de Grand Marais (Minnesota) et moi avons atteint le sommet du mont Wood en dépit des conditions extrêmes : des vents violents, de la neige et un froid de –45 degrés C. Situé dans les montagnes St. Elias au cœur du parc national et réserve de parc national Kluane (Yukon, Canada), le mont Wood se classe au sixième rang au Canada pour sa hauteur de 4 842 m.

Le 4 mars, chacun à notre tour, nous prenons un tout petit avion bi-place depuis Burwash Landing en décollant du ranch personnel de notre pilote. Nous atterrissons sur le glacier Hodgson à 3 000 m, ce qui est très haut pour un Piper Super Cub. Tout de suite, nous skions jusqu'à 500 m en amont du site d'atterrissage pour installer notre camp au pied de la montagne.

Au sommet du mont Wood (4 860 mètres), Marceau et Dupre sont frappés par un vent rude atteignant 20 nœuds. Photo : Lonnie Dupre

Lors de cette expédition appuyée par la Société géographique royale du Canada, nous grimpons ensuite le versant est de la montagne pour établir un camp à 3 400 m d'altitude. Il faut consacrer trois voyages périlleux à l'ascension du passage le plus complexe de notre voie. Le camp 2, à une altitude de 3 800 m, est approvisionné après deux chargements.

La première tentative au sommet s'effectue le 10 mars. À seulement quelques heures de notre but, nous sommes déjoués par de forts vents et des rafales de neige.

Le matin du 11 mars, déçus et fatigués, nous nous préparons à descendre la montagne, anticipant de mauvaises conditions météorologiques. Cependant, vers 10 h la météo semble se stabiliser, et nous décidons donc de nous mettre en route vers le sommet. Grâce à de bonnes conditions de neige durcie, nous atteignons celui-ci après un peu plus de cinq heures. Nous entreprenons ensuite notre descente, en ramassant notre matériel au camp 2 et en se précipitant vers le camp 1, maintenant dans une course contre l'obscurité. Le lendemain, nous nous dirigeons prudemment vers le camp de base.

Nous avons coté notre parcours « Alaska grade III » en raison de ses nombreuses crevasses et des difficultés initiales qu'il faut surmonter pour atteindre le camp 1. La montée nous a pris un total de neuf jours. Cette ascension a été remarquable parce qu'elle marque la première ascension hivernale du mont Wood. De plus, je suis ainsi devenue la première femme à gravir une montagne subarctique majeure en hiver.

Le Subarctique est défini comme toute région entre 50 et 70 degrés de latitude, et pour être qualifiée d'hivernale, une ascension doit se dérouler entre le 21 décembre et le 19 mars. En outre, un sommet est considéré « majeur » selon une combinaison d'élévations verticales

L'éperon nord-est du mont Wood.
Photo : Pascale Marceau

et de proéminences topographiques. Dans le Subarctique, les pics « majeurs » les plus évidents incluent les monts Denali, Foraker et Hunter en Alaska ; les monts Logan, St. Elias, Lucania, King, Steele et Wood au Yukon ; le mont Belukha en Sibérie ; et Galdhøpiggen en Norvège. Après des recherches approfondies, nous nous sommes assurés qu'aucun de ces sommets n'ait été gravi avec succès en hiver par une femme.

Résumé

Première ascension hivernale du mont Wood (4842 m), Montagnes St. Elias, Yukon. PAH : Lonnie Dupre, Pascale Marceau, 11 mars 2019.

Proboscis

Sam Eastman

ON AUGUST 4, Ben Homer, Mathew Zaleski (my dad) and I left Finlayson Lake in the Yukon Territory. We then met a helicopter pilot in the Northwest Territories to bump us to the base camp for Mount Proboscis. Proboscis is the much bigger and steeper neighbour of the Lotus Flower Tower.

Most people walk to the Lotus base camp from the float plane drop-off at Glacier Lake, but Proboscis sits off in a separate valley that is tricky to access. From the information we could gather, the last party into the Proboscis base camp was about nine years ago. In 1963, it took Layton Kor, Royal Robbins, Jim McCarthy and Dick McCracken 15 days to walk into the valley below Proboscis. Being somewhat softer, we decided to spend all of our money on a helicopter flight. Thanks to the John Lauchlan Award for helping us with funding.

It was quite difficult to explain to the helicopter pilot that we didn't want to go assassinate goats with a huge rifle out the door of his bird like his typical clients. We wanted to be dropped off under a mountain that he had never heard of. After the short flight, we found the previously used base camp under giant boulders near a lake with bolts for hanging tarps and food.

When we first arrived, we had about five days of snow and rain, with one night of 10 centimetres of snow that actually stuck around. This set the tone of the trip. We had originally set out to try and free the 1995 Spanish Route. The issue was the Spanish route requires several rope lengths of lower slabs that were being constantly bombed by rocks from the substantial freeze-thaw cycle happening each day. Another issue was that the Spanish Route looked similar in difficulty to the 5.14 Dawn Wall on El Capitan in Yosemite, hence, unrealistic for us. All the other reasonable crack lines appeared to have been climbed. It is a gnarly stadium.

Todd Skinner, Paul Piana and Galen Rowell's 1992 The Great Canadian Knife had never seen a second ascent and looked wild. The Spanish brothers (Iker and Eneko Pou) tried to repeat it but were shut down, seemingly by the weather. It made it a bit more of an appealing prospect. The Knife follows a protruding arête feature that sticks 10 to 15 metres out from the wall—an aesthetic line, but also a seemingly safer one with less exposure to rock and ice fall. Every night, the top of the wall would freeze up with snow and ice, and then for the rest of the next day it would all fall off, so the Knife seemed like the best option for self-preservation.

When Skinner and Piana made the first free ascent, they spent two nights on the route and gave it a grade of VI 5.13b—that was certainly a bit intimidating. Plus, it's stacked at 5.13a, 5.12b/d (different topos give different grades), 5.12d, 5.13b and 5.12b. I ended up breaking a hold on the first 5.13 pitch, so now it's probably the crux. In most climbing publications, it's reported that the Knife is a giant sport route. In actuality, to give Skinner and Piana the credit they deserve, it's a bit of a run-out horror show. I counted approximately 10 bolts on the 60-metre crux pitch. It seems they didn't have enough bolts and would just drill holes for skyhooks to aid the wall, and then place the occasional piece of fixed pro.

Ben and I climbed all the crux pitches, while my dad spent the days hiking up steep talus slopes. Then we cleaned the cruxes and got them dialed for a redpoint attempt. Our plan was to rest and fire the first 15 pitches to the top of the knife feature, which actually has a huge ledge at the top. We planned to camp there, do the extra six to 10 rope lengths to the summit and descend the ridge, since the route can't be rapped after pitch 11.

The night after we had everything established to make our final push, the weather dropped to –5 C at 2,000 metres (our base camp), and

it snowed about 60 centimetres. We gave it an attempt in the storm, but the spindrift was relentless with both Ben and me getting hit with falling snow and rock.

Facing such hazards and the large amount of wet new snow, we pulled the gear we had on the crux pitches and sat in the tent to wait out the storm. We watched "Black Hawk Down" and "Apocalypse Now" on my phone for days straight. The forecast indicated that there was no clearing trend coming within the next time period. Since we were running out of time, we made the decision to abandon our attempt. We had used the brief weather windows to free climb the lower cruxes of the route, but we didn't get the weather we needed to take the climb to the top.

In the end, it was a helicopter-camping trip. We would like to thank the John Lauchlan Award for helping some ordinary people go on an extraordinary trip. We thought attempting the iconic Great Canadian Knife would be a fitting tribute to the memory of John Lauchlan. We returned home with a new appreciation of the difficulties of such a climb and of the greater-than-expected costs of accessing such remote mountains in Canada.

Acknowledgements

This expedition was supported by the John Lauchlan Award.

Summary

The Great Canadian Knife (VI 5.13b, 600m), southeast face, Mt. Proboscis, Cirque of the Unclimbables, Northwest Territories. Attempt: Sam Eastman, Ben Homer, August 2019.

Sam Eastman on pitch two (5.13a/b) of The Great Canadian Knife. Photo: Ben Homer

The West Coast

Conuma Arch

Hunter Lee

AFTER CLIMBING ANGEL'S CREST in Squamish in 2017, Chris Jensen and I were car camping on a logging road far away from the overflowing Mamquam River scene. We were soothing our sore toes and tired bodies with copious amounts of beer and reminiscing of epic outings from the past. The conversation drifted from repetition of past stories into a discussion about new routes to climb. Chris, who is much more mentally organized than me, immediately pulled out his phone and scrolled through his to-do list. Chris likes climbs that are off the beaten path, ones that leave you questioning your life choices while approaching them, but once you arrive, have you feeling elevated and rejuvenated by the surroundings and more than happy you sacrificed some skin and blood on the soul-sucking approach. One in particular stood out for its aesthetics and originality—to climb the Conuma Arch on Conuma Peak. Even though the evening festivities left my memory less capable than it was before, the thought of climbing the arch was firmly planted.

A few years had elapsed when Chris and I were pondering a trip in spring 2019. Without much discussion, we quickly set our objective, loaded our bags and ventured to the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island on route to the Conuma Arch.

Leaving the logging road high on Conuma's west flank, we first floated our way up the clearcut by bodysurfing over crisscrossed logs and branches before bashing our way through thick old-growth forest. With the short approach crux behind us, we continued up easier terrain, eventually arriving at a relaxing vantage below the arch. Content that we would make something happen the following day, we continued up, locating a small water tarn and setting up camp a short distance from the summit.

The following day, we rapped onto the top of the arch and enjoyed the gut-wrenching drops both sides provide. A nasty-looking off-width was an option on the north wall; we opted for the sure thing and explored the south aspect. Having no idea what sort of climbing possibilities or rock quality we would encounter, we packed in a light drill and some bolts. With a couple of bolts installed as an anchor, Chris rapped down and scoped out the climbing options. With a line of weakness leading to the apex of the arch, he gave advice on bolt spacing as I rapped down. Excited about the airy finish to the upper pitch, we rapped to a comfy belay directly below the looming arch above. With easy climbing and a multitude of cracks present, we quickly realized the second pitch would be a gear lead so shifted focus to the bottom pitch. Chris rapped in, and then climbed up from the snowy bottom and was glowing with excitement about the quality sequences the pitch served up.

Perhaps it was the atmosphere that stirred my nerves, or the fact that I hadn't rock or gym climbed in eight months. Either way, I was happy to see Chris take the rack and lead up the first pitch. With this beautiful 5.8 pitch below us, I ventured up the second pitch, plugging gear as needed through the moderate terrain. With the prized upper pitch waiting for us, Chris set off, and like Spider-Man climbing a building, he glued his body tightly to the face as he snaked his way up the airy 5.10a pitch. Riding an endorphin high, we pitched out the blocky exit off of the arch and arrived at the summit as the sun

Chris Jensen leads the first pitch of Needle's Eye, with Conuma Arch above. Photo: Hunter Lee

painted the sky as it set in the western horizon.

Stoked from the success of the first climb, I was keen on exploring alternate options, as were Ryan Van Horne and Max Fisher. Though we were nervous about the weather forecast, we rolled the dice and returned to Conuma Peak a few weeks later. This time we approached via the south ridge. With a short window in front of us, we dropped our overnight gear near a water source and quickly ascended the south ridge. With a moody day as the backdrop, we once again rapped onto the arch, this time keen on exploring its northern aspect. With an anchor freshly installed, Max rapped down and started cleaning the off-width Chris and I had spotted a few weeks prior.

After a little work, we quickly realized that we didn't have the time to fully clean the pitch or have the rack to protect it. Eager to get a climb in, we rapped the original route Chris and I had recently completed and climbed its first pitch before veering off towards fresh rock on the north side. Two more pitches led us back onto the arch proper, with the highlight of the day happening when a hold blew off, and taking me for a ride while leading the third pitch. Fortunately, Max's belay skills were sharp and the bomber #4 cam I had placed was near my feet, resulting in a short but exciting fall.

The arch is a unique feature; its historical and spiritual importance to local First Nations communities is prominent and continue to the modern day. A trip to Conuma Peak and its arch will deliver an authentic Island outing—logging roads, clearcuts and thick bush. For those looking to climb the arch, please contact the local Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations community to ask permission to access their traditional lands.

Summary

Needle's Eye (5.10a, 4 pitches, 110m), Conuma Peak, Tlupana Range, Vancouver Island. FA: Chris Jensen, Hunter Lee, May 29, 2019.

Island's Eye (5.10b, 4 pitches, 110m), Conuma Peak, Tlupana Range, Vancouver Island. FA: Max Fisher, Hunter Lee, Ryan Van Horne, June 9, 2019.

Needle's Eye on the west face of Conuma Peak. Island's Eye is hidden from view. Photo: Hunter Lee

Thunderbird

Ahren Rankin

THE HAIHTE RANGE is located near the small town of Zeballos on the west coast of Vancouver Island. An incredible series of precipitous rocky peaks surrounded by some of the more impressive lingering glacier features on the Island, the range is crowned by the aptly named Rugged Mountain (1,875 metres). On its northern aspect, Rugged only barely protrudes from the glacier a hundred metres; however, its south face drops dramatically for nearly 1,200 metres before reaching the valley floor.

Heavy logging in the mid-80s brought road access almost to the base of the wall, and the only two existing routes were established at that time. The Southwest Face Route (5.6, 670m) was first climbed by Sandy Briggs and Don Berryman in June 1987, and it ascends broken terrain on the right side of the face next to a waterfall. The Johnson-Newman Route (5.8, 500m) was climbed by Rick Johnson and Don Newman two years later in 1989. It ascends steeper ground to the left of the Southwest Face before joining it near the top where the difficulties ease off. Both these routes are adventurous undertakings, with minimal information and not the most obvious features to climb. Parties seldom follow the same route and grades of actual terrain climbed can vary.

In July 2017, my longtime climbing partner James Rode and I were in the area climbing some smaller peaks, and while looking at the staggering relief of the southwest face, I was reminded of a beautiful series of features on the far left side of the face that I had spotted on a winter trip years before. Corner and crack systems connected together to ascend the huge sweep of slabby rock leading to a sheer upper headwall. Our plans to climb the original route were washed out when poor weather moved in, but James returned a few weeks later and climbed it with another friend of ours, Garner Bergeron. It turns out Garner had eyed the same potential new route himself a few years previous, so the next Friday saw the three of us driving back up island to see what it had in store for us.

James Rode on pitch five of Thunderbird.
Photo: Ahren Rankin

Early morning light was golden on the upper face as we organized at the base of the route. With the initial 120 metres of approach slabs already below us, the first four pitches climb a long, leftward-trending series of cracks and corners (5.6, 5.6, low 5th, 5.6) that culminate in the delightful 5.7 fifth pitch, which climbs very nice cracks up through a small roof into a long groove to a spacious ledge. A steep wall and blank-looking face above made us traverse this large ledge 45 metres to the right to reach a more climbable feature (4th class). The next pitch stretched our 60-metre ropes to the max as James climbed up then back left to get back on the line of our route. I led a final

5.5 pitch up to the base of a dead-vertical headwall that cuts across the entire wall.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and having climbed 400 metres of new ground, we were happy to head down and return the next weekend. We had decided to establish the route as a more modern rock climb with bolted ring anchors for rappelling and protection bolts where absolutely necessary. Island basalt is amazing to climb on but can be difficult to protect with its mostly discontinuous cracks.

Despite a discouraging weather forecast, the following weekend saw us back. We didn't climb, but we re-clipped the access trails in the area, making the approach a much more pleasant affair. Next weekend we were back again, determined to make more progress. We re-climbed the initial eight pitches in short order and with overnight gear and plenty of hardware, we launched into the unknown. The stellar-looking corner pitch we had seen cutting through the headwall was quite moderate (5.8), ending on a large ledge where Garner belayed us up.

Above the headwall feature, the exposure became incredible as the previous eight slabby pitches disappeared below our feet. The next three pitches (5.7, 5.6, 5.6) followed a groove until it got steep and dirty, and then we stepped left to climb a variety of cracks until surmounting a final short vertical step where we found ourselves at the 12th belay. A short 4th-class pitch led to a huge heather-covered ledge where we could walk around. Down to climber's left, we found a spacious, flat ledge with a miraculous rivulet of water pouring out of the rock, even that late in the summer. We set out our sleeping bags, ate a well-deserved meal and, while listening to our music drift away on the wind, watched the sun set into the Pacific Ocean.

We climbed two more pitches the next morning—a low-5th-class ramp followed by some heather-covered ledges re-established us on the clean rock; then a wandering 5.8 pitch up a largely blank face that required several bolts to protect. When all three of us had reached the belay at the base of the towering headwall above, it was quietly obvious that it was time to head down. We were tired, our supplies were rapidly dwindling and the hardest climbing was right in front of us. We tossed our ropes and began the long descent.

Life happened, as it does, and it wasn't until August long weekend of 2019 that we returned to finish the deed. We climbed the 13 pitches to the bivy in leisurely fashion, enjoying the fruits of our labour from two years previous. Another stellar evening was spent on this amazing perch, basking in the sun, laughing, taking untold photos of the sickle moon that drifted in the night's sky. We made quick work of our last two established pitches the next morning, and after a quick break, Garner headed up into the amazing set of features that we had both seen and started dreaming of many years before.

A large right-facing corner led to a ledge, and then a hidden left-facing corner revealed itself with beautiful 5.8 climbing to a belay on a ridiculously exposed pinnacle, the valley bottom being about 1,000 metres below us now. James led an awkward-leaning corner above this, drilling a few bolts in steep, strenuous positions before finally getting an anchor in. Above this was the crux pitch—a slightly overhanging flake that didn't offer any natural protection options. With a set of alpine aiders I had brought for just such a purpose, I drilled a four-bolt ladder then stepped right and upward on ledges and drilled a few more bolts to reach a large alcove where I belayed. The lads climbed the pitch, calling it easy 5.10.

The large corner we expected to find here was, in fact, a huge chimney that cut into the mountain. Garner climbed the right-hand side of the chimney until he emerged onto the rock, which formed the right side of what looked like a corner from a distance. A few bolts were needed on this pitch as the crack we were hoping for was, in fact, almost a metre wide. James left yet another comfy belay to surmount the huge fin of rock above us, climbing first the inside face in some nice cracks before stepping over the crest of the fin to finish on the other side. This upper buttress and headwall we had been climbing for five pitches was, in fact, a huge blade of rock and nearly detached from the rest of the peak. It terminated to a true point, and James belayed us up on a sling that he had looped around the top.

Another steep pitch loomed above, and with the sun about to go down, I threw myself at it as fast as I could. It wandered a fair bit

Thunderbird on the southwest face of Rugged Mountain. Photo: Ahren Rankin

and required several bolts to bypass blank sections, but in the fading light, I placed the last anchor on the wall itself. Garner led one more pitch to the top, following a wide crack by the light of his headlamp. There was little celebration when we arrived as we immediately set about looking for somewhere to sleep. It was pitch dark, and we weren't sure exactly where we were in relation to the summit above us. We began engineering three passable spots on some sloping ledges, using rocks to build a reasonable home for the night. Lumpy and uncomfortably hard, I woke several times in the most contorted shapes imaginable. It was one of the best nights of my life.

The next day we woke with the sun, and after a small snack and tiny sip of our limited water supply, we blasted up to the summit, which the light revealed had been right above our heads in the night's gloom. It was my first time summitting Rugged Mountain, climbed via a 1,000-metre new route with the best of friends. It was a powerful and perfectly crystalline moment that will be forever etched upon my mind.

Only on Vancouver Island could a route of this scale and quality have still been waiting to see an ascent. Anywhere else it would have been climbed decades ago. I feel privileged to have been able to climb it and add to the unique climbing history of this amazing place I call home.

We eventually named our route Thunderbird, a mythological creature from First Nations lore, which often adorns the tops of totem poles on Vancouver Island.

Summary

Thunderbird (V 5.10, 1000m, 22 pitches), southwest face, Rugged Mountain, Haihte Range, Vancouver Island. FA: Garner Bergeron, Ahren Rankin, James Rode, August 3–4, 2019.

Two Towers Spire

Nick Baggaley

Mike Gallimore on pitch five of Tiedemann Face on Two Towers Spire. Photo: Nick Baggaley

I was having dinner with my dad in mid-June 2018 near my home in Banff when I got a phone call. Fully prepared to see who was calling but ignore it, I checked the screen and saw my friend Mike Gallimore's name. Knowing that he wouldn't call from Squamish just on a whim, I excused myself and picked up. Some of the first words I heard were "I'm going to the Waddington Range at the end of July…want to come?"

Needless to say, my decision didn't take much time at all. And a mere six weeks later, plus a bit of packing, planning and driving, we met up with two other Squamish friends, Shira Biner and Mike Gudaitis, by the hangar at White Saddle Air near the town of Tatla Lake in B.C. Despite the ever-present wildfire smoke hanging in the air, the flight the following morning revealed fantastical spires, tumbling glaciers and, finally, the bulk of Mount Waddington standing tall above the range.

Settling into the Plummer Hut took some effort. A large bivouac ring of boulders blocked the regular landing spot on the ridge, so a good deal of hauling up and over a bergschrund ensued. Once established in the hut, we divided into the two groups we'd be climbing in. Mike and I began preparing to descend to the Tiedemann Glacier and Waddington, and our friends prepared for a succession of small trips around the upper Tellot Glacier.

The less said of our attempt on the Bravo Glacier Route the better. Warm temperatures, slow travel and a near miss with serac fall chased us back to Rainy Knob, back across the Tiedemann and up again to the hut. We recuperated on Claw Peak and Dragontail Peak over the following few days, and then set our sights on a couple of the shorter spires between the hut and Photo Point.

The first line that caught our eye was a prominent corner system on the tallest spire across from the hut, finishing directly on one of the two summits. We walked over and down to the base, and I climbed the first pitch on good granite blocks to a wide slab at the base of the corner. Mike started up the corner but quickly ran into wet, decomposing choss that filled what turned out to be more of a garbage off-width than the clean corner we expected. Back on the slab, we spotted another crack that started about 10 metres up and headed straight to the ridge. This went better, and Mike used his British traditional experience with wrangling fiddly gear and pushed past the initial incipient breaks into the main widening crack. At the top of this, we made the north ridge of the tower, where a late start and possible weather nudged us to descend.

AFTER AN EVENING OF HANGING OUT at the hut with the professional crew who came in for a photo shoot, we were off again to scope out a line we saw while coming back up from the Tiedemann. After negotiating the moat with a bit of step cutting and chimneying, I gained a line of tiny edges that bypassed a large roof system protecting the toe of the buttress. Continuing up, Mike and I alternated leads past bulges, corners and cracks that wouldn't have appeared out of place in Squamish if not for the black lichen covering a lot of it. Four pitches up, we passed the cracked headwall with a bit of unexpected simul-climbing and gained the ridge. Seeing a tower was the true high point, Mike led across and up to a small block and to the realization that we'd just summitted one point on the same tower we had turned around on the previous day.

This conveniently meant we were able to use the same anchors for the descent, returning to the hut and our comfy beds. With our remaining days in the range, we climbed Serra 2 via the South Ridge, which definitely deserves its position as one of the classic longer routes in the range. We also explored the toe of the spires we'd been playing about on, climbing an impeccable hand-fist crack and checking out the steeper features on the hut side.

Given the overall quality of the granite and relative dearth of recorded climbs, we think the Plummer Hut area is ripe for further new routing, with the hut conveniently close for base camp.

Nick Baggaley and Mike Gallimore on the summit of Two Towers Spire. Photo: Jia Condon

Summary

Cemetery Gates (D 5.10c, 90m, 2 pitches), east face, Two Towers Spire (unofficial suggested name), unnamed spires near Plummer Hut, Waddington Range, Coast Mountains. FRA: Nick Baggaley, Mike Gallimore, August 2, 2018.

P1: 5.8, 30m. Climb the obvious blocky terrain just below the main corner, pulling one larger move near the top onto a large slab.

P2: 5.10c, 60m. Ignore the obvious corner (filled with loose choss) and link small features on the right wall to gain a ledge on top of a massive flake. From here, take the crack to the ridgeline, widening from fingers to off-width up higher.

Tiedemann Face (D- 5.9+, 250m), Two Towers Spire, Waddington Range, Coast Mountains. FRA: Nick Baggaley, Mike Gallimore, August 3, 2018.

P1: 5.8, 60m. Cross the moat and move onto a ramp of thin edges that lead left above the prominent overhangs. Continue mostly up and slightly left to belay at the base of a prominent right-facing corner.

P2: 5.7, 40m. Continue up the corner and face to the right and chimney behind a large, flaky block to a band of gritty ledges slightly less than halfway up the face.

P3: 5.9+, 50m. Traverse right on a blank face to reach a crack system that leads onto the headwall. Continue up to belay in one of a series of small ledges.

P4: 5.9+, 70m. Head up and slightly rightwards again up good but lichen-covered cracks to the ridgeline. Good rope management is essential here on this rope-stretching pitch.

P5: 5.7, 30m. Traverse right yet again from the belay past a couple of bigger moves onto the final summit block. Belay from either the notch between the summits or the top of the block itself.

Mount Sampson

Jason Sinnes

MOUNT SAMPSON IS SITUATED between Pemberton Valley and the upper Hurley River. At 2,811 metres, it is the highest point in the Thiassi Range and is located 41 kilometres northwest of Pemberton. It was first climbed in 1935 by Preston Tait and John and Ronald Ronayne.

While climbing the East Face of Sampson a few years ago, the east-facing wall on the north flank of Sampson caught my eye. I finally went back in June 2019 to have a look. I don't believe anyone had been over to that part of the mountain despite the north ridge being a nice-looking route, although infrequently done. The approach is a difficult bushwhack, which I'm sure is a deterrent.

After a bivy at the moraine, I climbed up the approach slabs to the right of the hanging glacier (same access for the north face). I headed up the hanging glacier valley for about 300 metres of gain, and then veered right up the face to the north peak of Sampson. I climbed up a snow gully and rock ribs just to the right of a prominent buttress. There was no difficult climbing, just a few moat crossings, and it was early season so no crevasse issues at the time. The face was great—just scrambling really, straight up for around 700 metres. It was a nice experience to not be roped up and to be by myself, free to focus completely on upward motion. I love this cardio type of climbing.

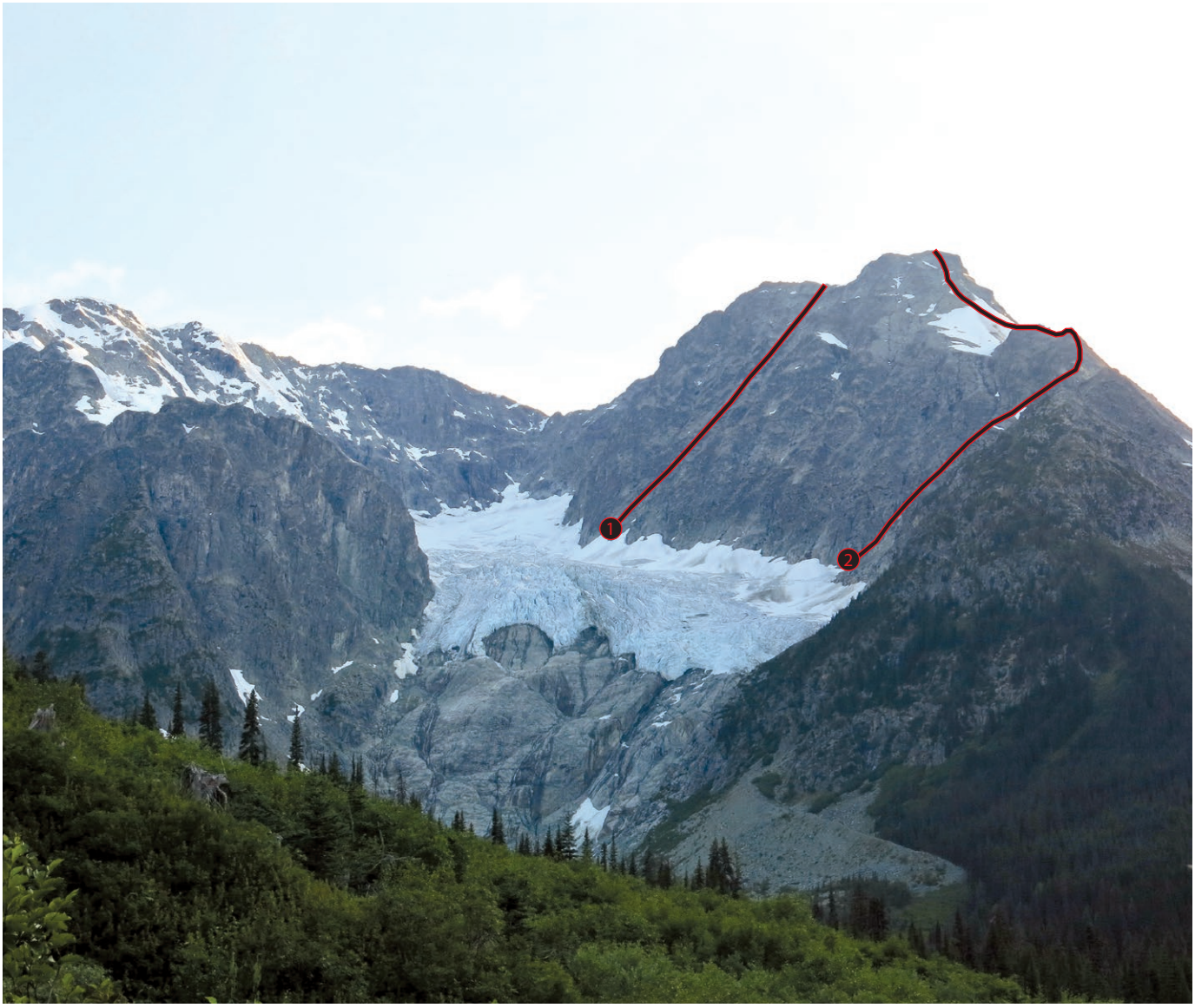
I reached the north summit at 9 a.m., which was four hours after leaving my bivy at 1,370 metres. I took in the views but reluctantly decided to not go for the true summit. Unfortunately, I had to work the next day, and traversing the long ridge ahead looked questionable.

Ultimately, I dropped down Delilah Creek to Pemberton Valley to make a traverse of the mountain from one valley to another. It took roughly six hours to drop down 2,440 metres to the Lillooet River FSR in heavy alder terrain. I made a few small mistakes, the first one being that I dropped down to the creek. I found myself following a raging creek bed, which ended up in me slipping and cracking a rib. When I hit the wet rock, I prayed my tailbone wasn't fractured. Luckily, it wasn't a huge mistake, and I was able hike out. I never respected John Clarke when I was younger. He is an inspiration to me now.

The adventure still felt incomplete, so in mid-July I went back. This time I wanted to follow the north ridge all the way to the true summit. I climbed to a bivy above the glacier-polished approach slab in the dark the evening before, and then starting at 5 a.m., I climbed straight up the large gully to the right of the glacier.

I ascended what I think is a beautiful line—four kilometres of untrodden ridgeline, nothing hard, just magical bliss. I honestly didn't know if I could do it. I pressed on, pinnacle by pinnacle, not knowing if I could get up and over each one. I found that place in my mind that a musician might experience—that creative spot I've rarely visited. Body and mind came together—no rope, only endless movements linked together. It's a good feeling to set yourself free; it takes courage.

Most of the route was scrambling, with a few 5.7 or 5.8 sections. The value in this climb was being out there alone and challenging the unknown, a dance beyond personal limits. I passed a few rock steps, the last one being the most important, which felt like 5.10. It rises out of an exposed gap with big drops to either side. I had to scramble down a little way to a gaping corner, which turned out to be soaked. As luck would have it, I saw some potential face moves up left of the ugly corner. As I made these moves, I felt grateful for all my days on the Chief to fall back on. Glad to have brought



Mount Sampson:
(1) East Face of North Peak
(2) Tradition and the Individual Talent
Photo: Jason Sinnes

my rock shoes, I made it through this delicate section.

After reaching the summit, I began the long seven-hour walk around the mountain to get back to my vehicle. I felt quite vulnerable during the final two hours. With nothing left in my tank, I was on the verge of vomiting every five minutes. In and out took me less than 24 hours total with around 22 kilometres of travel.

Summary

East Face (PD 5.6, 1220m), north peak (2651m), Mt. Sampson (2811m), Coast Mountains. FA: Jason Sinnes, June 1, 2019.

Tradition and the Individual Talent (AD 5.10, 1310m), north ridge, Mt. Sampson (2811m), Coast Mountains. FA: Jason Sinnes, July 26, 2019.

Metta

Gary McQuaid

BETWEEN THE SHAMES VALLEY SKI RESORT, near Terrace, B.C., and Mount Remo, lies a mountain whose west ridge is topped by large cornices overhanging its north flanks. It is appropriately dubbed by locals as Cornice Ridge. It is one of the relatively less popular peaks that attract backcountry skiers because its access starts at the ski resort's lodge instead of at the top of the lifts, resulting in much more treeline to ascend before accessing the alpine. However, due to the growing popularity of backcountry skiing in the region, ski tracks are becoming a common sight. One can ascend the long west ridge to gain the summit of Cornice Ridge to look down its steep east face and ski various lines on its northern and western slopes. My first view of the east face of Cornice Ridge was during a ski tour to the neighbouring summit of East Ridge (unofficial locals name for the peak). I was intrigued by the idea of a winter ascent of the face, but years later, upon viewing the mountain in the summer, I became interested in its potential for alpine rock routes.

In July 2019, I sat next to my tent on the summit of East Ridge and stared south across a steep valley at the east face of Cornice Ridge. The evening alpine glow added to the aesthetic appeal of the 400 vertical metres of 4th- and 5th-class broken granite slabs and steep ridges. The wall had an imposing feel to it but looked relatively easy to climb and numerous retreat features presented themselves. However, thunderstorms and time constraints removed any option to make an attempt at climbing the wall.

A few weeks later, I woke up early in my camper, which was parked at the Shames Mountain Ski Resort. As the crow flies east, the east face of Cornice Ridge was only 3.5 kilometres away, but such a direct approach would require steep and exceptionally thick bushwhacking. Instead, to reach my objective, I decided to take a longer, circuitous approach of approximately eight kilometres via the ski hill to reach the alpine and enjoy some gentle ridge trekking. Early that morning, I started hiking with a moderately weighted bag that consisted of a 65-metre six-millimetre rap line, a hammer, hand drill, a few quarter-inch bolts, harness, shoes and chalk—all the things to climb and make a retreat, if need be. My objective was to climb the sustained granite face at the south side of the wall, but because I (or anyone else I knew of) had never been on the wall, I wasn't sure of the rock quality or difficulty. Within a couple of hours, I hiked the ski hill and reached the top of a broad summit known by local backcountry skiers as the Dome (1,400 metres). I then turned south, descended a hundred metres to a wide saddle and ascended again to reach the smaller summit of East Ridge (1,500 metres). From there, I continued to move south by descending 130 metres to a steep saddle between East Ridge and the summit of Cornice Ridge (1,680 metres). At the base of the saddle, I turned east to descend another 200 metres on a steep 4th-class slope to reach the base of the east face of Cornice Ridge.

While traversing its base, the rock initially looked good, but as soon as I traversed my way to the south side to see my objective, the rock became chossy. By this time it was 9 a.m., so I sat for a little while to decide what I wanted to do. The decision was made easier when I noticed the prominent ridge coming out of the walls on the far south side. It wasn't as steep as what I wanted, but the rock looked safer and the route had the attributes of a classic line. I felt a little annoyed that I was overprepared for this kind of route. I certainly didn't need a rope, let alone bolts. Oh well, some would call it good training; I hate when people say that.

Time was moving on, so I decided to ascend the ridge. It started off with 4th-class rock that soon turned into interesting 5th-class climbing on

what felt like granite. I climbed a slopping arête and eventually ended up on a talus slope with some snow. After this I found myself in some more 5th-class terrain, which was enjoyable face climbing. The angle soon kicked back to 4th class, and I climbed this grade for a while on solid rock intermixed with patches of steep heather until I reached a prominent steep wall. I saw this section from afar and wasn't sure what I was getting into. From the base it looked steep and exposed. In case the climbing got a little interesting, I put on my rock shoes and chalk bag.

The first 10 metres was steep choss, which led to a prominent ledge. From there, I saw a bunch of options that seemed to lead through the rest of the buttress. They all looked like fun and steep cracks, but I could not see where the wall went, and I was worried about getting faced with having to pull over a sloppy lip onto steep and slippery heather. I observed this phenomenon lower on the route and was concerned about dealing with it on steeper terrain. No matter my concerns, having an idea where this buttress led was not in the cards, so I started to stem up an easy corner and hoped for the best. Soon the terrain began to overhang, but a beautiful hand crack presented itself to my left. It went blindly around a corner, but the full hand jams were a joy, so I continued. I rounded the exposed corner onto a slab that had a juggy hand rail to hold onto. I pulled over the rail and was back into 4th-class terrain, which eventually led me to the summit.

The climb took less than two hours, and I had so much fun that I was a little disappointed it was over. I descended the north ridge of Cornice Ridge, and then ascended the south ridge of East Ridge and descended that, and then ascended to the Dome. From there, I hiked to the top of the ski hill and descended to my camper, happy to be back and away from the horseflies.

This was an enjoyable moderate alpine route, and the long and beautiful alpine trek to get to it was a wonderful addition. Hiking across large granite slabs and large sections of heather with a 360-degree vista of coastal alpine views makes the hike worthwhile on its own. I look forward to hiking and climbing this circuit again. I named the route Metta, which means loving kindness in Pali, because throughout the climb I keep thinking of a gesture I witnessed a week prior from my teenage daughter. While waiting for our flight at the Vancouver airport, I watched her eagerly, without any prompting, run to help a lost and blind stranger.

Metta on East Ridge in the Kitimat Ranges. Photo: Gary McQuaid

Summary

Metta (5.7, 410m), east face, "Cornice Ridge," Kitimat Ranges, Coast Mountains. FA: Gary McQuaid, August 8, 2019.

Manchu Wok

Tony McLane

IN 2008, SQUAMISH HARD MAN Dan Tetzlaff and I made a comical botched attempt on the then virgin Chinese Puzzle Wall on a shoulder of South Illusion Peak, which is part of the Mount Rexford massif. A loose flake and a giant whipper onto an old rigid Friend stopped us short. I've been thinking of a rematch ever since.

Eight years later, from the east face of Slesse, I watched the headlamps of my friends Marc-André Leclerc and Brette Harrington as they worked to establish Hidden Dragon. Brette later came back with Caro North and Chris Kalman and opened the route that Dan and I had attempted, calling it Crouching Tiger.

After 11 years of wondering, I finally found myself back on the Puzzle—this time with Brette, who was hungry for more and knew the wall would provide. In early July, we started up steep terrain about 100 metres climber's right of the two established routes and began aid climbing, cleaning, free climbing and fixing ropes as we went. After a couple of moderate pitches, we found ourselves at the business—an overhanging dyke that took several hours of cleaning choss, bolting and working the moves before it was ready for an ascent.

On our fourth day working on the route, we jugged through the mist above a surreal sea of clouds, with Slesse visible in the distance. The final three pitches before traversing left at the end of the major difficulties to join the other routes (and, notably, the original rap line) went free and onsight. A steep roof crack (5.11) and an airy wide chimney (5.10) proved entertaining.

With the route primed, an iffy but somewhat optimistic weather window was motivation enough to hit the road from Squamish for a third time. Brette made an impressive push to join me, waking up at 3 a.m., flying to Seattle from Alaska, borrowing a truck, driving across the American-Canada border and up to the dirt road in the Nesakwatch River valley, and hiking up to the wall with me late in the evening.

A thick mist and light rain hung in the air as we hunkered under a semi-sheltered overhang for the night. Concerns over wet rock lingered and

Tony McLane seconds pitch five of Manchu Wok.
Photo: Brette Harrington

sleep came with difficulty. In the morning, we were still doubtful the route would dry quickly enough, as some of the upper pitches looked damp. But the opening moves looked reasonable, so the games began.

Brette took the powerful dyke pitch, which is also the signature feature of our line. I was fully expecting her to come off at the top, but she managed to stay on. With the business pitch in the bag, we were going to the summit. The remaining pitches went by quickly with the familiarity gained from the cleaning and climbing we'd done earlier, and they had dried sufficiently. We nearly blew the redpoint on the final scrappy pitch—a short, powerful Marc-André "5.10d"—but eventually we sat at the top, having both freed all 13 pitches, mainly in the 5.10+ to 5.11 range with one 5.12d pitch.

My time on the Puzzle was overwhelmingly filled with the energy of my friend Marc-André. Spending time with his family in Agassiz and climbing with his partner, Brette, in this valley where we'd shared time together produced a potent emotional release. His boundless energy and charisma touched me like no other. He would be pleased if you would visit this wonderful playground.

Summary

Manchu Wok (5.12d, 13 pitches), Chinese Puzzle Wall, South Illusion Peak, Mt. Rexford massif, Cascade Mountains. FA: Brette Harrington, Tony McLane, July 12, 2019.

Chinese Puzzle Wall:
(1) Hidden Dragon
(2) Crouching Tiger
(3) Manchu Wok
Photo: Drew Brayshaw

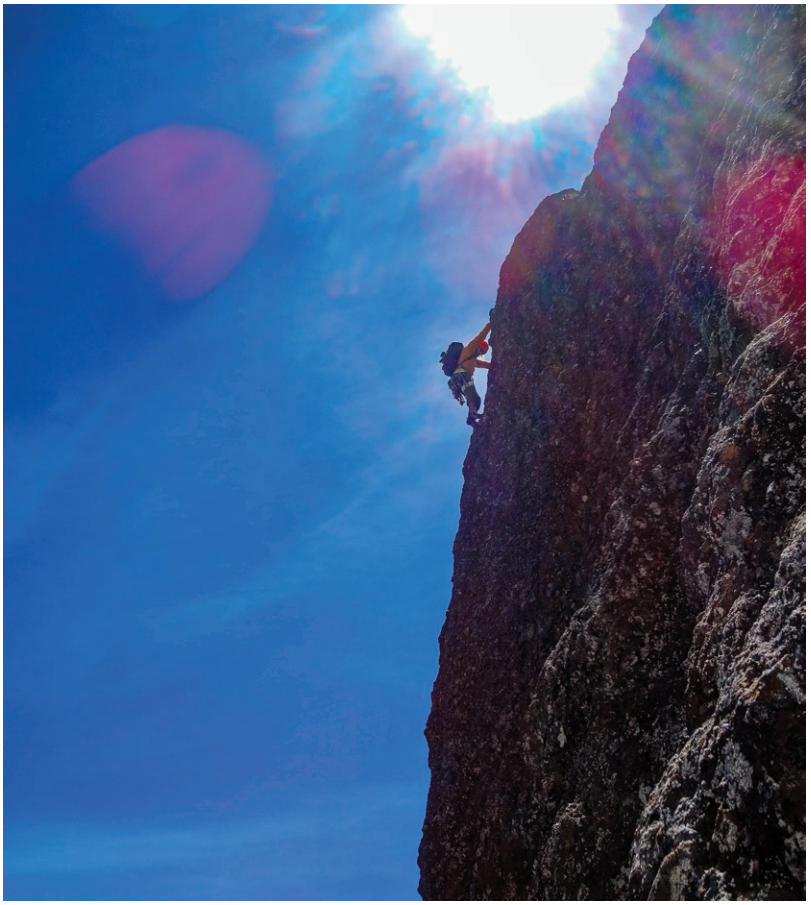
Bull Elk

Max Fisher

ELKHORN MOUNTAIN, located in the Elk River Mountain Range of Strathcona Provincial Park on Vancouver Island, is the second highest peak on the Island standing at 2,194 metres, and has a reputation for being loose and chossy. This is especially true of the northwest and west aspects of the mountain, but as I found out with my partner Mike Ford, the east face is a whole other story.

The east face of Elkhorn has seen a handful of climbs over the years. The first was Al Harrison's impressive solo effort from 1975, which climbs out of the East Glacier somewhere west of the east ridge. Harrison called the route 5.5 but is a reputed sandbagger. In 1985, Tim Rippel soloed the first ascent of the Northeast Face (5.7, 400m), which climbs east of the east ridge. Sometime in the 1980s, the legendary Greg Foweraker attempted to climb the full east ridge but didn't get far due to weather and a less-than-keen partner. In 1993, Philip Stone and Greg Shea established Into the Sadistic (5.10b, 500m), which started on the East Glacier between Harrison's route and the east ridge and ended at the upper part of the east ridge without summitting. In 2016, Stone returned with Ryan Van Horne and Hunter Lee to try to finish what Foweraker had started, climbing about 10 pitches left of the east ridge proper before pulling the plug at a steep notch and rappelling down Into the Sadistic. On June 15, 2019, Ryan Van Horne and I climbed a 550-metre line between Catwalk and Into the Sadistic that we named Horny Elk. In spite of strong suitors, the full 900-metre east ridge—the longest and most prominent line on that side of the mountain—still awaited a complete ascent.

Max Fisher up high on Horny Elk. Photo: Ryan Van Horne



On August 5 at 6:30 a.m., Mike Ford and I followed Al Harrison's footsteps, bushwhacking up the Cervus Creek jungle for five hours before finally popping out into the alpine and getting our first real view of the full east ridge. It looked huge, complex, intimidating and probably devoid of water, so we loaded our packs with four and a half litres and started climbing.

We began at the toe of the east ridge, approximately 400 metres below and climber's right of the East Glacier. The first six pitches of our climb followed a huge right-facing dihedral on beautiful compact stone with difficulties up to 5.9. The next few hundred metres of climbing flowed easily, gradually getting steeper, more exposed and aesthetic on good stone. Midway up the ridge, we found a steep headwall with a variety of crack features. We climbed the left-most crack, finding the terrain steep, positive and a bit heady. There was 500 metres of air under me as I pulled what turned out to be the 5.10 crux pitch.

The climbing continued to be fun and engaging for the rest of the day, mostly falling in the 5.8 to 5.9 range. We stopped climbing as the sun was leaving the sky around 9:15 p.m., laid out our little foam butt pads and light sleeping bags on a small vegetated ledge, and fell asleep.

We woke with the sunrise, heated the rest of our water for yerba mate, and watched the sun come up as we sipped. We headed out at about 6:30 a.m. The climbing on the upper 300 to 400 metres of the ridge was excellent. We linked tower to tower via chockstone steps, exposed and exciting downclimbs and steep enjoyable climbing with difficulties up to 5.9 on the ridge proper. We joined the Harrison Route a few pitches from the top, which led us to the central summit. After topping out, we walked over to the main summit, arriving at 10:15 a.m. We started our way down the infamously steep Elkhorn trail and were soon back to the road, our car and the cold beers that we had hidden in Cervus Creek.

This is the third time I have climbed Elkhorn. Each time has been by a different route. The Kings-Elkhorn Traverse was the first—a beautiful mixed alpine outing. The second was a new route on the east face with Ryan Van Horne, which we called Horny Elk (5.7 550m). Mike and I called the full east ridge Bull Elk, because it is the largest and most impressive feature on the mountain. I estimate that about 75 to 80 per cent of our route climbed new terrain. It was one of the best summer alpine missions I have been on in a while.

Summary

Horny Elk (5.7, 550m), east face, Elkhorn Mountain, Elk River Mountain Range, Vancouver Island. FA: Max Fischer, Ryan Van Horne, June 15, 2019.

Bull Elk (TD 5.10, 900m), east ridge, Elkhorn Mountain, Elk River Mountain Range, Vancouver Island. FA: Max Fisher, Mike Ford, August 5–6, 2019.

The east face of Elkhorn Mountain:
(1) Horny Elk
(2) Bull Elk
Photo: Ryan Van Horne

Threshold Extension

Ryan Van Horne

I LIE AWAKE WITH MY EYES closed, warm, wrapped in layers of down, my mind deep in thought replaying our climb from the day before. I roll over and open my eyes to a beautiful warm glow rising behind the coastal mountains off to the east. As the sun climbs over their summits, it fills our still bivy cave with light and motivation. It's time to move and figure out how to get down from last night's high point on the ridge.

Four days earlier, on my way home from a couple of months of working in the Alberta bush, I called Hunter Lee about the cold, clear high-pressure system forecasted for the coming days. We made a plan that he would come up island to Campbell River the night of February 3 and stay at my place. The next morning, we organized our gear and packed our bags for a four-day trip up the 12-kilometre-long Elk Valley to the beautiful 1,000-metre east face of Mount Colonel Foster.

On the evening of February 4, we were at our base camp at Foster Lake with a few hours of light to observe the mountain. We were both surprised on how little ice there was on the face. Two weeks earlier, Vancouver Island had a temperature inversion that had clearly been detrimental to alpine ice conditions. For a couple of different reasons, our first two objectives were out. Our attention was then drawn to a line I had never noticed before but had seen while on our approach. In the fading evening light, I climbed up the steep snow slope beneath the Colonel's north tower to try and get a clear view of the line. It looked as if it would go. Back at camp, the decision was made that we would set the alarm for 4:30 a.m. and try to climb before daylight to where the route became steep and more technical.

The next morning, after a night of anticipation, we were off by 6 a.m. We crossed the lake in knee-deep snow and up the 70-degree slope under the Northeast Buttress. As we turned off our headlamps, we pulled out the ropes and threw down rock-paper-scissors to see who would go first. Hunter won and was off, traversing through a steep gully that was being raked by a heavy flow of spindrift on the other side of the gully. He climbed an 80-degree unconsolidated snow slope with nothing for protection.

By the time I reached the belay, I was concerned about conditions and wondered if we could climb the technical sections higher up on the mountain in the shape that it was in. As I climbed away from the belay, conditions improved and I was happy having much better névé beneath my tools. By the end of the pitch, I knew we were on route and that the pre-dawn navigating had gone well. Hunter climbed a long moderate pitch that traversed across the lower Northeast Buttress and built a belay on the far-right side. It was just after noon. As I traversed around the corner, the main gully system that our route was following unfolded in front of me. It looked perfect, exactly what we were looking for.

Up until then, the climbing had not been harder than WI2+, but my pitch ended at the beginning of the steeper upper half of the mountain. As Hunter climbed away, he managed to find thick enough ice to just about not bottom out a stubby screw before heading into an 80-plus-degree narrow gully of névé. About 35 metres later, as he moved out of the gully and onto a small exposed snow slope, he got in his next piece of pro, one of our two pickets. At the end of the rope, he built a rock anchor.

For the rest of the day and well into the night, we swapped leads of the finest quality. Most pitches would only have one or two pieces of pro—the odd ice screw in an aerated ice bulge and maybe a well-placed picket. The Colonel is well known for its runouts, and we are both quite familiar with them—that day was no exception. With most of the rock being covered in a thin layer of verglas, rock pro was hard and slow to find and ice was sparse, but fortunately the climbing was never

harder than WI3+. An average pitch would have a few steps of WI3/3+ spaced between the steep gully of perfect WI2 névé. Most of the belays on the upper mountain were in the line of fire from spindrifts and numbingly cold.

Late in the day, I remembered looking across the Elk Valley to Mount Colwell and seeing the long shadow of the Colonel's six summits high on its slopes. I thought that would be real type-one-fun skiing those slopes in the sun with some good friends, as opposed to the type-two—or maybe even type three—fun we were engaged in.

That night, the terrain eased off, mostly to 65-degree névé with a short vertical step here and there. We were cold, even with all our clothes on, and moving slow. Usually we would solo or simul-climb terrain like this, but being tired forced us to climb 60 metres, pound in a picket and belay the other up. At around 11:30 p.m. at a belay just shy of the summit ridge, I suggested digging a bivy cave, but it was decided that I would climb one more pitch to the ridge in hopes of finding an easier bivy ledge.

Climbing to the ridge was not too steep but was soft and unconsolidated snow that crumbled and blew away under my weight. The ridge was knife-edge, and there was nowhere for a bivy. I chuckled to myself since I had not really enjoyed climbing that pitch and was even more displeased about having to downclimb it. Back at the belay on 60-degree slopes, we laughed about our decision to not to bring a shovel. For the next two hours, we took turns boiling water and digging our cave. We used my bowl, a picket and our ice tools. Progress was slow, but shortly after 2 a.m., we were in our bags and beginning to warm up after 20-plus hours on the go.

After a warm, restful sleep, we enjoyed a beautiful sunrise and a nice slow start to our day. The previous day's climb had gone slower than we had anticipated, and with a less-than-ideal forecast for the day, it was time to get down. I traversed out to the right to try and see a line of descent down to the col between the northeast and northwest

Hunter Lee midway up Threshold Extension.
Photo: Ryan Van Horne

peaks. I could see the col, but we would have to climb up and over the ridge and make our rappels from the west side of the mountain. I climbed a short exposed mixed section just past the previous night's high point to a rock horn for our first of two rappels down to the familiar col. Patrick David and I had bivouacked here five years earlier during our accent of In the Groove [see *CAJ*, 2014, vol.97, p.82]. From there, we would make another five rappels down a gully on the west side of the mountain. By 2:30 p.m. that afternoon, the ropes were coiled and on our backs as we made our way around the mountain towards the South Col. The snow from the col down to Foster Lake was sometimes up to my waist and of some of the nicest powder I had ever seen on the Island. It felt wrong to not be skiing such beautiful snow. By 6:00 p.m. our headlamps were on, and by 7:00 p.m. we were back at camp.

Around 10 a.m. the next morning, we said our goodbyes to the mountain and were on our way down the valley. A little later, as we passed the drainage that runs down from the col between Elkhorn and Colwell, I noticed a pair of tracks heading down the valley. Max Fisher had recently contacted me about climbing a line on the east face of Mount Colwell. They were surely his tracks. I was excited for him and wanted to know more about what he had done [see *CAJ*, 2019, vol.102, p.79]. Fortunately for me, I didn't have to wait long. As Hunter pulled up to my house, we were greeted by Max. Sweet Marie-Lou had a warm meal prepared for us, and with a little help from a couple of bottles of wine, we had a fantastic evening of sharing our love for the mountains.

Summary

Threshold Extension (TD+ WI3+, 14 pitches, 900m), east face, Mt. Colonel Foster, Strathcona Park, Vancouver Island. FA: Hunter Lee, Ryan Van Horne, February 5–6, 2019.

Threshold Extension on Mount Colonel Foster.
Photo: Ryan Van Horne

Vancouver Island Report

Lindsay Elms

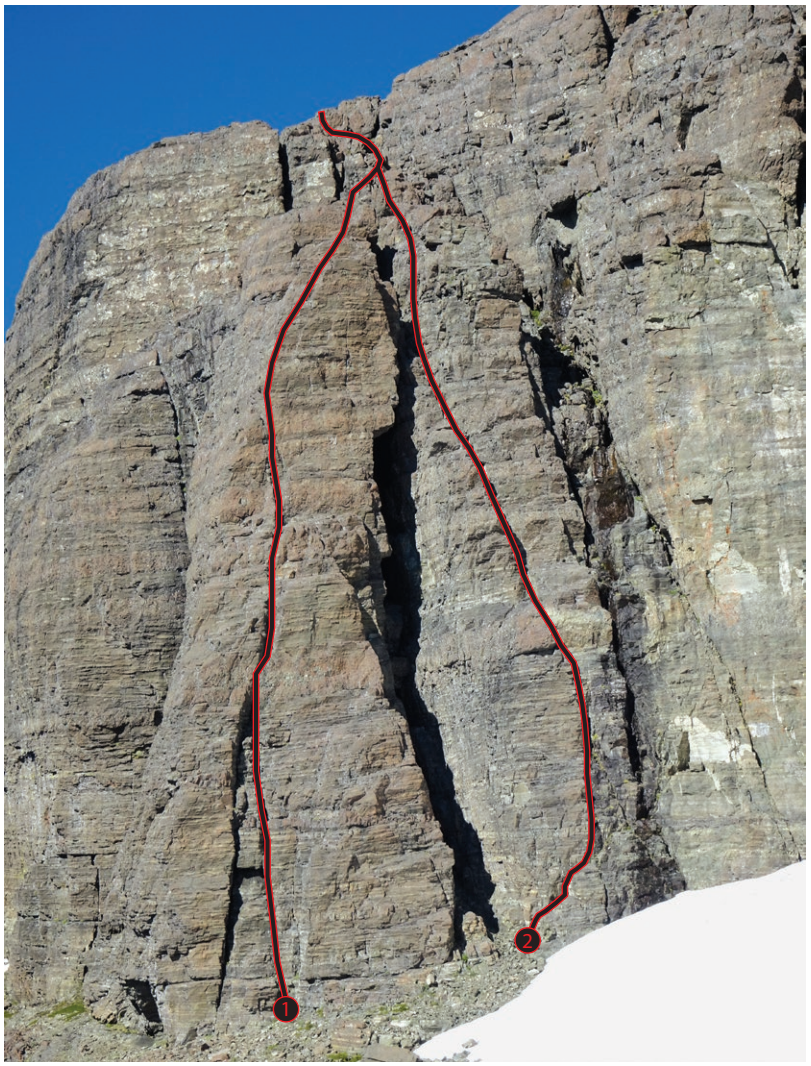
WHETHER IT IS CLIMATE CHANGE or just another of those warm winters we have been having in recent years on Vancouver Island, the winter of 2019 started off with very little snow and unusually warm temperatures; however, towards the end of January, an arctic outflow came through with cold temperatures, freezing the running water on the local walls into ice. For the third year in a row, Hunter Lee returned to Mount Arrowsmith to work on some of the ice routes to the right of the Beehive Wall. On January 16, Hunter was back again with Patrick David and climbed a new variation in the Soggy Moss corner, with Soggy Moss Variation (M5+R, 75m). The day before (January 15) but further west, Max Fisher and Mike Ford put a new route (AI3+, 350m) up the north face of the Mackenzie Summit in the wild Mackenzie Range. Three weeks later on February 5 and 6, Fisher and Ford made the first winter ascent of the east face of Elkhorn South Mountain via the Uber Couloir (TD+ A14+, 1400m) [see *CAJ*, 2019, vol.102, p.79] The same two days in February saw Hunter Lee and Ryan Van Horne climb a new route up the east face of Mount Colonel Foster. The route departs from Into the Groove on the lower flank of the Northeast and Northwest Peaks and weaves its way up high onto the shoulder of the Northeast Peak. They named their creation Threshold Extension (TD+ WI3+, 900m).

Matt Lettington and Phil Jackson made the first winter ascent of the non-technical and rarely climbed Mount Sir John to the west of Tsitika Bight on February 16, and two days later, Ryan Van Horne and Marie-Lou Piché climbed Happy Warrior (WI4, 45m) on Mount Myra. February also saw several parties climbing the ice on Constitution Hill. The ice doesn't form all that often because of the low elevation, but when it does, the routes up to 90 metres are very accessible.

For the last three to four decades, there has been talk of climbing Della Falls in winter. Many assumed it iced up, but no one ever ventured up the Drinkwater Valley, that is until this year when the mystery was finally solved, and it was good news. Yes, Della Falls does freeze! On February 23, local climber Chris Jensen picked up Will Gadd and Peter Hoang at the Victoria airport and drove to Great Central Lake [see *CAJ*, 2019, vol.102, p.102]. After an hour-long boat ride to the north end of the lake and a 14-kilometre slog up the Drinkwater Valley on snowshoes, they rounded a corner and saw the first real ice. Chris Jensen's eyes lit up and continued to glow as the temperature dropped to –10 C overnight. The next day, the three climbed a direct line up the centre of the falls (WI6, 440m). With the clear, cold temperatures holding, Jensen returned with locals Ryan Van Horne and Hunter Lee and climbed another route up the left side of the falls on March 9 (WI3+, 440m). It's what you might call a stella Della winter.

On the west side of Vancouver, overlooking Nootka Sound, is the iconic Conuma Peak—the Nootka Matterhorn, a mountain that the Spanish explorers in the late 1700s to the modern-day recreational boaters have used as a navigational feature. Conuma Peak is significant to the people of the Mowachaht First Nation. Their whale hunters went to Conuma Peak for spiritual purification and guidance. In the Spanish explorer Dionisio Galiano's journal, published in 1802, he wrote: "The corpses of the chiefs are borne up in pomp by common people, with continuous lamentation to the slopes or brow of the very high mountain...." An old archival photograph taken circa 1902 shows a picture of the mythical thunderbird and a whale beneath a wooden structure representing Conuma Peak at the grave of Chief Maquinna [see Lindsay Elms's book *Above the Bush*]. Conuma Peak's most striking feature, though, is a huge natural rock arch [see page 75]. On May 29, Chris Jensen and Hunter Lee hiked up to the gully under the arch and climbed the four-pitch Needle's Eye (5.10a). In June, Lee returned with Ryan Van Horne and Max Fischer, establishing a second route—Island's Eye (5.10b, 110m).

On June 11, Josh Overdijk and Peter Hartmann day-tripped a new route on the southwest spur of



The northwest face of Kings Peak:
(1) Wishbone Buttress
(2) In the Court of the Crimson King
Photo: Ahren Rankin

Elkhorn Mountain. The route followed the spur to a pronounced fin. Above that, they climbed through a 5.8 quartz roof to a ledge, a solid 5.8 corner crack for 25 metres, and then a 4th-class scramble to the summit.

Throughout June and July, Matt Lettington, Phil Jackson and others continued their ascents of some of the rarely climbed north Island peaks to the west of the Neurostis Inlet: Mount Wolfenden, Mount Carter, Mount Pickering, Mount Clark and Comstock Mountain. These were followed with ascents of, again rarely climbed, Santiago Mountain and Tahsis Mountain between Gold River and Tahsis.

Ahren Rankin, Garner Bergeron and James Rode returned to Kings Peak on June 15 and climbed a new route—Wishbone Buttress (5.10a, 110m, 4 pitches)—to the left of In the Court of the Crimson King. To the south of Kings Peak on the east face of Elkhorn Mountain, Max Fischer and Ryan Van Horne climbed a new route on the buttress between Catwalk and Into the Sadistic, establishing Horny Elk (5.7, 550m). Liam Gilchrist and Kurt Schluessel repeated Tuff Nanni (5.10) on Triple Peak's Northwest Tower on June 15, and on June 30, Peter Gilbert and Kyle Wamer repeated the Smurf Traverse—a route that traverses Triple Peak and the Northwest Tower.

In July, Evan DeVault and Daniel McKean traversed Mount Colonel Foster, clearing most of the old tat at the rappel stations along the route. Myles Thompson, Jamie Crucil and Melissa Meneghetti drove up to Port McNeill and made a rare ascent of Castle Mountain on July 21. The last-known ascent was likely in the early 1980s by Stu Crabbe and Peter Curtis. Max Fisher returned to the east side of Elkhorn Mountain with Mike Ford, and over two days made the first ascent of Bull Elk (TD+ 5.10, 900m), completing the full east ridge [see page 88]. Their new route may be very close to the route Into the Sadistic, which was established by Philip Stone and Greg Shea in 1993. On August 30, Lee and Van Horne climbed the north buttress on Slocomb Peak, a peak adjacent to the south col of Mount Colonel Foster.

Laurence Philippsen and I have continued exploring remote and obscure peaks in several areas of Vancouver Island. West of the Gold River/Woss forestry service road, we made first recorded ascents of Mount Sebalhal on May 31, Kla-anch Peak North and Northwest on June 8, and the main summit of Kla-anch Peak on August 17. Another area that we have made regular trips to was between Catherine Creek (off Tsitika River) and Kokish River. On June 25, we made the first recorded ascent of Catherine Peak (three kilometres south of Tsitika Mountain), Mount Kokish (two kilometres west of Catherine Peak) with Rob Heron on July 11, and Tsitika Mountain Southeast and Tsitika Mountain with Val Wootton on October 5. We day-tripped two of the summits of the Bonanza Range—Peak 1704 and Peak 1668—on August 25. On

August 19, Val Wootton and I climbed Fault Peak near Zeballos and Maynard Peak near Port McNeill on September 28. In early September, Rod Szasz joined Val and me to visit a remote part of the Pierce Range west of Muchalat Inlet, where we climbed Megin Peak and an outlier on September 2 and Talbot Peak the next day (all first recorded ascents).

However, the climb that received the most attention this year was a new route in the Haihte Range on the southwest face of Rugged Mountain [see page 77]. The route, established by Ahren Rankin, James Rode and Garner Bergeron, was initially started in August 2017 when they climbed the first seven pitches. Two weeks later they pushed an additional eight pitches, where they found a convenient bivy ledge. Two years elapsed before they were able to return. In August 2019, they climbed up to the bivy ledge armed to the teeth with gear. On the morning of August 4, they launched into the unknown and climbed seven more extremely exposed pitches. At the top of the route they found another bivy ledge and the next day summitted and descended the standard route. Eventually, after much careful deliberation, they named the route Thunderbird. The route received an incredible amount of attention on Facebook, and it wasn't too long before Stefan Gessinger, Evan DeVault and Curtis Lyon repeated it. Emboldened by these reports, Karsten Klawitter and Nick Levesque ventured up island at the end of September and were stoked to make the third ascent. Thunderbird (V 5.10, 1000m, 22 pitches) has bolted anchor stations on a number of pitches and some protection bolts on several sections.

After Klawitter's report on Facebook, where he talked about the amazing line up an absolutely wild face with outrageous exposure, John Waters commented: "Just goes to show what a few well-placed bolts will do. This line on Rugged Mountain has had more ascents in one summer than many routes on Mount Colonel Foster in 20 years."

This year, three climbers, Laurence Philippsen, Daniel McKean and Tyler Maclachlan, finished their Rick Eppler Island Qualifiers, and Ken Wong and George Butcher completed all 53 peaks to receive the Vancouver Island Charles Turner 6,000ers Award.

Again, the ACC Vancouver Island Section Kids and Youth Program had another successful year of trips. It began in January with two day trips to Mount Arrowsmith, which gave the kids a taste of winter trips to come. In mid-February, a procession of 24 members pulled pulks to the base of Mount Allan Brooks in Strathcona Park, with many of them building, for the first time, quinzhees to sleep in. The Kids Fest at Mount Cain was popular as they were able to secure the Sointula Lion's Club cabin for a weekend. In May, a large group journeyed to the hut on 5040 Mountain, learning snow skills that included lots of self-arrest practice. In July, Stefan Gessinger led a group up Mariner Mountain on a true sea-to-summit adventure. They started off in Tofino and took a water taxi to Bedwell Sound, where they then rode mountain bikes up the old logging road to Noble Creek. Next day they made the ridge and set up camp, from where the following day they summitted their goal. On the final day, they descended to the valley, biked back to the sound and water-taxied back to Tofino. In July, kids and parents enjoyed the second Family Week, part of the ACCVI Section Camp at Meditation Mountain east of Lillooet Lake. The last trip of the year included a joint effort by the ACCVI's Kids and Youth and the Warrior Youth (a group comprised from Ucluelet, Toquaht and Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations) at the official naming ceremony for the new club hut on 5040 Mountain. In a moving ceremony the hut was named His-imy-awi (Gather Together), an appropriate name to wrap up the year's alpine activities.

Ryan Van Horne on the north buttress on Slocomb Peak. Photo: Hunter Lee

The Interior

Punters in Paradise

Ruari Macfarlane

"DOESN'T LOOK IDEAL, DOES IT?" drawled Ralph, barely audible. Sometimes ignorance is bliss, but 80 millimetres of moisture with freezing levels below mountaintop just weren't realistic for my dream Rockies route (truth told, it was 1,200 metres of abominable choss—aesthetic, abominable choss). Jasper had been experiencing one of the wettest summers on record, and it looked like the hose would remain firmly aimed in our direction.

In the end, the one sunny region, deep in the borderlands of B.C., triumphed over soggy raft tramping. Kirk Mauthner responded with conviction to our equivocating questions on the Leaning Towers, a jewel of the quiet Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. "You should go!" he urged. So the following day found Ralph Burden and I setting off into a soft, warm August evening with a promise of huckleberries and hot springs. With an established friendship forged in dangerous situations, talk soon turned to the rough summer we'd both been experiencing—perhaps a bit too much quarter-life contemplation, as a friend puts it. It was cathartic for both of us to trade tales of unfulfilling jobs, bad breakups and the sense of time slipping through our fingers as the darkening sky turned darker still, heavy drops pecking at dry dirt.

Ten kilometres later, in the dark and pouring rain, things were not looking rosy when we stumbled. When we stumbled across the outfitters cabin and stepped onto the dry porch. It seemed more welcoming than setting up in the rain, so there we stayed. Mind you, we'd carried those beers along, so we did sally forth on a futile, muddy midnight search for the hot springs. The next morning, tendrils of cloud coiled off the mountain flanks, blue beginning to burn through. The forest smelled fresh, and it looked to be a beautiful day. The hot springs were obvious in daylight but our aspirations lay elsewhere.

We finally clawed out of the slide alder into strewn white granite blocks, laced with incredible matts of alpine aster and paintbrush. We wearily surveyed the tough route in our wake: pass, valley, waterfalls, slabs. We'd stumbled upon a recently cut and flagged route through the alders, but agreed to push harder during our exit for the treeline contour described by Kirk. But that lay an eon away at the distant end of a week's freedom. Late-day lassitude (and, perhaps, double racks, ropes and mountains of food) had us shrugging our packs off to camp in the first opportune basin, awkwardly close to the other two tents in the range. We guessed they'd felt much the same upon breaking treeline. That evening we met Ian Dusome and Steve Filion from Calgary, who had just begun a sustained effort to fit and free Ian's 2017 route Preaching to the Choir. This wild line runs plumb up the steep nose of the Pulpit, which hangs over the valley. Soon, we would all move our camps up to separate benches right under Hall Peak, central to the daily climbing. It was a pleasure to chat with these fellas every couple of days when our paths crossed, the range ours to absorb. Indications were that we were the only parties to intrude upon this enchanted corner of the hills for the entire summer.

Ralph Burden starts up the first pitch of Summer of Our Discontent. Photo: Ruari Macfarlane

During our rushed research, I'd been intimidated by the apparent grades and steepness of the handful of documented routes in the towers. Ralph pointed out that in modern days, it seemed only crushers had been venturing into the wilds of the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. The tales that they brought back bolstered the collective impression of forbiddingly steep walls. Pickings should be ripe for punters like us—overlooked moderates awaiting our attentions. And indeed, here stood as modest a buttress as we could have hoped for, unnamed and neglected. A quick scout above camp offered plenty of distraction in the play of water and light across slabs of flawless granite, while confirming cracks ran up the crest. The next morning, in clear sunlight, we walked up to the left-hand crack system and ran our ropes up 11 pitches of easy granite corner, crack and ridge, enjoying the sun and the movement. We were Punters in Paradise, and so is the route.

Gear was sometimes sparse, and on pitch four we wished we had stayed in the right of the two closely parallel corners, since some vegetated 5.9 in the left corner was unnecessarily exciting. Generally, though, the rock was great and the vibe mellow. Nine pitches gradually eased to scrambling before a short rap enabled us to continue across an easy sharp ridge, enjoying the sensational drop to the glacier to the left. From here, it was possible to gain the steep glacier to the right (crevassed), but instead we continued up two final easy pitches to the top of the spur—the best of the route, if initially run out. A glacier stroll and more 3rd class put us on top of Bivouac Peak via the north ridge (essentially the normal route on the peak), admiring the towers in profile. One isolated homestead peeking at us from afar, high above Kaslo, belied the remote reality of this range. Descent was made by retracing the skyline ridge across to Sharkshead Tower and down the nunatak and glacier of the 2014 East Face route [see *CAJ*, 2015, vol.98, p.91], bypassing the rock raps on adjacent snow with one short V-thread rap.

That night, something woke us. The world was alight. Peering blearily from the tent, our eyes met a phosphorescent landscape. Silver moonlight washed the entire bowl, setting white granite blazing, and gleamed off the wet rock slabs that rolled down to our tent from the south. It was one of the more incredible nightscapes of a lifetime. Steve mentioned later that he had never experienced nights as bright as amongst these towers, with pale walls refracting and concentrating beams. Running water, waving wildflowers, clouds that come and go. Luminescent nights, booming slabs of ice and rock resounding around granite amphitheatres. High Summer in the Columbia Mountains—brief, magical.

The next day we called a rest, which I spent like all the others—running around inspecting granite, playing rock critic. A solo walk up the glacier to the south gave a full frontal of the sheer east face of our Paradise Buttress, revealing steeper, more desperate and intermittent cracks than we sought. Beautiful, hard aid and free lines of the future probably exist there. In the afternoon, we bumped (staggered) our camp uphill to an extremely scenic and handy bench.

The Direct East Buttress of Hall Peak, established only five years ago, looked classic and climbed as such [see *CAJ*, 2015, vol.98, p.81]. We enjoyed a stellar day out on this beautiful, sweeping buttress. Route finding on the lower section was puzzling, and after surmounting the roof on pitch two, two more long pitches up and right on booming flakes deposited us at the base of a prominent scoop/gully that formed the right side of the lower buttress. Reviewing the first ascentionists' account, they seem to have hooked a left at a roof just below the gully, bringing them into nebulous route finding but on great rock. Not having this beta, we instead tiptoed up several pitches on the left of the steep gully on rather tenuous flake ends and between occasional cams. This was slightly easier (5.8) but lower quality than the original, which we rejoined at the gendarme notch. From there, the route was fantastic all the way to the summit, which was attained at 5 p.m. The descent affirmed that for current conditions we would get away with approach shoes and one set of the spikey stuff for our next summit route. To seal the deal on this warm evening, we pre-manufactured some bucket steps on the steeper snow slopes.

The next route name was a matter of great debate but became The Summer of Our Discontent. Don't let that put you off, though. The line caught our eye from day one for good reason. It follows obvious cracks before sloping into a house-sized, barrelling flare, which tunnels below the bulging gendarme on the East Buttress of Hall Peak. Not quite brimming with confidence, we went for a nudge, and to our lasting surprise, climbed it. It offered plenty of quality with varied crack climbing and a very nice 5.10+ free crux around a roof with a narrowing crack transitioning to stellar face climbing. However, it's somewhat marred by (clean) aid to gain and cross a wide, wet roof traverse on pitch six and a mix of French-free thrashing in the initial 10 metres of the gigantic flare that follows. As we weren't psyched to climb the upper buttress two days in a row, we rapped the face in four clean double-rope raps from the gendarme, gawking at splitter cracks the whole way down.

The glaciers are dying. The Purcells are no exception. Daily, we would wonder at the depth they now sat below the old high-tide lichen line. At every turn, polished rock ran a rope length or two off the glaciers to distinct lines of forbidding roofs, a reminder of what had been.

Another rest day, another afternoon sojourn. From the saddle south of Shark's Head, I descended to treeline for a beautiful nature walk, winding across granite slabs between spongy meadows. Bright green swathes of western larch lined the terrace below. The racket of the marmots was outrageous along that vast bench on the west side of the towers, their piercing whistles coming from all sides. The backside of the towers promises no mecca for rock climbers. Although it is granite, the formations appear to display a definite stratum, and the west side from Bivouac to the Pulpit has little in the way of continuous, protectable cracks. A couple of attractive but shorter potential free routes rose from the south gully of Shark's Head. We're talking steep, straight granite corners. However, this side of the southern end of

Ralph Burden seconds pitch 10 of Go Left Young Man.
Photo: Ruari Macfarlane

Punters in Paradise on Bivouac Peak. Photo: Ralph Burden

the range will probably be largely ignored by rock climbers who have already lugged heavy packs quite far enough.

We have this thing—OK, maybe I have this thing—where chilling doesn't mesh with climbing, so we figured this trip might be time for an exception. To finish, we wanted to establish a short route, and then walk out to Bugal Basin. On the final day, we would enjoy a leisurely morning soak in the springs before strolling back to the car with a half day for our respective journeys home. Fast forward to day seven, however, and the talk for the final climb was no longer the attractive mid-length corner we'd been eyeing. Instead, it was a long, diagonal slash that split the tall, scooping wall between Hall Peak and The Pulpit, the subject of our speculation all week. We had an ace weather team on dial, both Adam and Dylan sending fresh forecasts via inReach. On the topic of weather, it appeared we were in for some on the final night. On the balance, we decided to go big rather than just go home. As usual, we'd run it out on the getting-home-refreshed-for-work front.

Another spectacular dawn, colour radiating across the heavens, found me tiptoeing along a knife-edge rim of snow to the one seam splitting the smooth lower walls. A couple of pins led to micro placements and perfect 5.10 all the way up through a tricky overlap to one of our previous rap anchors. Pitch one finished with a thin free traverse to a belay below a burly looking stembox. The route continued, occasionally desperate, usually classic and always (after the glacier-scoured first pitch) with a great deal of crack cleaning, trading

dirt for gear and jams. In all, we wore close to a centimetre off my trusty axe pick this trip.

It was well into the afternoon when we hit the great transverse ledge that runs across the face. The upper scoop frowned steeper above, and our rap line from Summer of Our Discontent was a quick scramble away. Resisting common sense, we kept questing under gathering clouds and gusts. A suspect belay below the first major roof led to a pitch of reluctant aid. After turning the roof, a fantastic long dihedral ensued. The pitches were short as I burned up the rack on clean aid. The smooth corner would be hard enough, but with dirt filling the entire crack, digging out jams on lead was desperate work. We transitioned back to free climbing as we drew further above the roof, but larger roofs towards our horizon promised very hard climbing and more snail's-pace aid. It would really benefit from further cleaning of the cracks to go free at 5.11 or 5.12.

A step left onto an unexpected ledge offered a trip into the deep unknown. We took it. An exposed traverse led far left, and then some exciting moves gained long less-vegetated corner and crack systems. We belayed a rope length up the left of these, and then sallied forth into a squeeze chimney above, which looked like a show stopper—so close to the top. A desperate thrash worked for the squeeze, but above, there awaited only a nasty off-width, that gaped up out of sight. Under gunned, it was left again, straining and trembling up rolling slabs. To stay in the upper

Southeast face of Hall Peak:
(1) Go Left Young Man
(2) Summer of Our Discontent
Photo: Ralph Burden

An unclimbed wall in the Leaning Towers.
Photo: Ruari Macfarlane

dihedral through the large roofs would also be a worthy challenge and a more aesthetic variation. It was with overwhelming relief that I beached myself onto the Pulpit-Hall col at 60 metres—relief, except for the low ceiling of black cloud scudding our way from the west.

Ralph pressed ahead. We simuled across a ledge under the foreboding, slower chimneys directly above the slash to join the easy exit chimneys of the east buttress route to the right. As the rain began and the lichen turned slick, we switched to short pitching, summitting inside dim cloud and Scotch mist at 9 p.m. We had known that we were asking for an epic by pushing on. Now we were getting it. We simul-climbed down the slippery north ridge as the light failed.

Needless to relate, our descent down the rappels and glacier in dark, cold rain and our push all the way out and back toward home the following day was somewhat on the rugged side. We did make time, however, for a victory soak and beer in those perfect hot springs, although pulling boots back on for the final 10 kilometres to the car felt a bit rude after that. It was but a warm-up for the final rude adjustment—the return from a focused and simple existence in one of the more beautiful places that we have climbed.

Summary

Punters in Paradise (5.7, 11 pitches), Paradise Buttress, Bivouac Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Ralph Burden, Ruari Macfarlane, August 18, 2019.

Summer of Our Discontent (5.10 C1, 220m, 7 pitches), southeast face, Hall Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Ralph Burden, Ruari Macfarlane, August 21, 2019.

Go Left Young Man (IV 5.10 C1, 400m), southeast face, Hall Peak, Leaning Towers, Purcell Mountains. FA: Ralph Burden, Ruari Macfarlane, August 23, 2019.

Delusion Dweller

David Lussier

Bill's Dome is located 1.5 kilometres east of the Drinnan Pass trailhead in the southwest corner of Valhalla Provincial Park. When viewed from the west, its dome-shaped summit displays a deceivingly large, slabby west-facing wall. Delusion Dweller was established from the ground up in good style over four different attempts that spanned four years. The route was built while searching for the easiest possible and most natural line up this imposing wall. Other route options exist, but they are likely more difficult. All anchors were equipped with two bolts. Due to the nature of the compact gneiss rock, bolt protection was necessary on most pitches. Despite being easy access and providing sections of quality climbing with stunning views, it has run-out sections in the 5.8 range, challenging route finding, hard slab climbing and a variety of rock quality. Overall, it is a worthy route with well-protected cruxes; however, it is not a classic but more of a test piece. The route name relates to a particular optical illusion that occurs when climbing the route—the actual colour of the rock varies depending on where you are looking at it from. Bill's Dome is the unofficial name that we gave to the formation as a tribute to trapper Bill Drinnan who roamed the headwaters of Hoder Creek more than a hundred years ago.

Bill's Dome is an alpine-rock formation and subject to all things related to such an environment. The best time to climb the route is from mid-July to late September. The route is often wet early in the season due to lingering snow patches. Cornices along the summit ridge have also been noted earlier in the season. The access is similar

Steve Ogle gains the pancake flake on pitch six of Delusion Dweller. Photo: David Lussier

Delusion Dweller on the west face of Bill's Dome. Photo: David Lussier

to the increasingly popular route Slabadabadoo on the nearby Drinnan Slab. To reach the trailhead by vehicle, turn off Highway 6 at either Passmore or Slocan City. Follow the BC Parks signage for Drinnan Pass trailhead via a good gravel road for about 44 kilometres. The final two kilometres are rough, and SUV-type vehicles with four-wheel drive are recommended. The Drinnan Pass trailhead elevation is at 1,615 metres and is approximately two hours from Nelson or one hour from Slocan City.

The approach takes only about an hour from the parking lot. It begins by following the Drinnan Pass trail for about 1.5 kilometres. After walking up for 30 to 35 minutes, the trail will emerge into a large, open talus field immediately below Drinnan Slab. From there, scramble directly up above the trail for about 50 metres then make a long ascending traverse in a southerly direction, away from Drinnan Slab and towards the base of Bill's Dome's west face. Travel is initially through a talus field then eventually through a short-lived alder section and finally rock slabs. The route begins at the base of a large diagonal right-trending crack system that defines the lower right side of the wall.

It is possible to rappel the route with two 60-metre ropes. There are no chains or ring bolts on these anchors, so adding anchor material (webbing or cord) may be required. It is also possible to walk off; however, this option is involved and convoluted. To walk off from the summit of Bill's Dome, follow the steep and undulating ridge in a northerly direction for about 500 metres, passing a few deep cols along the ridge. There are a few 20- to 30-metre rappels required. The best route back to the starting point is from the third col encountered along the ridgeline, before the steeper south side of Drinnan Peak. From there, walk down in a westerly direction about 50 vertical metres to a point where it is possible to traverse right (northwest) along a sloping grassy/rocky ledge system for about 150 metres. From the end of this weakness, walk straight down steep grass and talus slopes back to the Drinnan Pass Trail and follow it out. It takes roughly two to two and a half hours to descend to the trail with another 30 minutes back to the parking lot. Snow-covered ground is likely in early season.

Summary

Delusion Dweller (D+ 5.10d/11a, 500m, 13-14 pitches), west face, Bill's Dome, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: David Lussier, Steve Ogle, August 28, 2019.

Gear: Two ropes, 12 draws (including six alpine draws), wired nuts and two sets of cams from #0.2 to #2 Camalot (#3 Camalot useful but not necessary).

Scramble up the wide, right-trending diagonal crack/chimney system (4th and low-5th class) for about 100 metres to a sloping ledge where the crack system makes a seven-metre horizontal jog to the right. This is a good spot for a transition to roped climbing, about 10 metres below where the slab steepens.

P1: 5.7, 45m (all gear). From the right-hand side of the sloping ledge, continue up the crack system, which becomes a right-facing corner (often wet) to a large chockstone. Step left onto a ledge and anchor.

P2: 5.10a, 30m (four bolts and gear). A steeper pitch with overlaps and down-sloping holds. Gain the first bolt five metres above the belay. Stem and mantle past this then continue up compact slab past three more bolts. The

anchor is located 10 metres up and slightly left above fourth bolt.

P3: 5.5, 60m (all gear). Step left a few metres then climb up, trending a tad to the left on easier slabs. Follow loose, right-facing flakes initially and more compact slabs beyond. The anchor is at full 60-metre length in a rust-coloured sloping dish.

P4: 5.8, 55m (one bolt and gear). A generally run-out pitch with interesting micro route finding. Climb straight up on compact slabs with green lichen then follow a short, shallow corner to a broken section with red rock at 35 metres. Climb the broken section weaving back and forth through overlaps to more compact slabs above, passing one bolt to gain a ledge with the anchor five metres right of a two-metre-high conifer.

P5: 5.10a, 50m (three bolts, one piton and gear). Step right a few metres then climb up a short, compact section. Continue up and left on easier sloping ledges to crest an overlap then trend right following weaknesses to a bolt on more compact slabs at about 30 metres. Climb past this thin, bolted section to a piton and weave past two more bolts on tenuous slabs to an anchor in a shallow orange dish.

P6: 5.10a, 35m (three bolts and gear). A steeper pitch with a bit of everything. Step left for about five metres then climb up compact slabs and a vertical seam past two bolts toward the steep wall above. Gain a left-trending blocky ramp that leads to a short, steep wall protected by one bolt (5.10a). Continue up more easily for a short distance to an intimidating layback flake. Gingerly pull through this (wild!), and place gear as high as possible in this flake before laybacking positively (5.10a) to a narrow belay stance and anchor above.

P7: 5.10d/11a, 30m (four bolts and gear). Traverse right across the exposed sloping ledge for five metres then climb up past three bolts with increasing difficulty. After clipping the third bolt, traverse left on easier ground about 10 metres until directly below the final bolt. Gaining this bolt is run out (5.8) and is best done from out left. Belay on a narrow stance above the last bolt.

P8: 5.10d, 40m (seven bolts and gear). Traverse right across thin, exposed slab, passing one bolt to a short section of overhanging, loose flakes. Clip a bolt above the flakes and power up and right on increasingly better rock, passing two more bolts. From the fourth bolt, traverse right five metres then go up to a fifth bolt before continuing up and left on easier ground past two more bolts and eventually a good belay ledge.

P9: 5.6, 40m (one bolt and gear). The whatever pitch! Step left a metre then climb straight up on easier but dirty and loose terrain, eventually passing one bolt and aiming for the left-hand side of a wide, grassy ledge with a series of large subalpine firs. Note: Though appealing, this ledge does not offer a feasible early walk-off option.

P10: 5.8, 35m (three bolts and gear). Climb straight up on easier broken terrain with some loose blocks, passing two bolts and aiming for a steeper section of layback crack. Continue up and right past one more bolt to the left-hand side of a ledge system below an overhanging wall. The anchor is at eye level below a small black roof.

P11: 5.10a, 30m (one bolt and gear). Step left and climb unlikely solid features (exposed) with decent gear up and left towards a right-facing flake at 10 metres. Move around to the left side of the flake, passing one bolt and leading to exciting climbing on more right-facing flakes directly above. Eventually trend left to a small stance and the anchor.

P12: 5.10d, 40m (two bolts and gear). Step left and climb toward two bolts up and left. A long reach rightwards past the second bolt (5.10d) leads to good jugs and easier climbing. Continue more directly up a to narrow ledge with a small pine tree then up and right past a detached block, aiming for the right-hand side of a narrow roof system. Continue up to belay on a good sloping ledge just right of a small conifer.

P13: 5.7, 60m (one bolt and gear). Traverse left (past the tree) for about seven metres to the top of a block then climb straight up on compact slab past one bolt. Continue up on easier but loose ground past a few steps and ledge, trending left and eventually wrapping right to a belay beside a small pine tree at the 60-metre mark.

P14: 4th class, 60m. Scramble up, trending left to the summit ridge. From there, walk left to the summit.

Mission to Mars

Tim Emmett

2020 marked the 10-year anniversary of discovering ice climbing at Helmcken Falls with the legendary Will Gadd. Five new routes later, including the first ascent to the top of the cave with Slovenian ice master Klemen Premrl, I knew there was still potential to do something really cool.

Prior to this, I had spent two winters away from ice and mixed climbing while I focused on hard sport climbing on a quest to climb French 9a. I was being coached by Christian Core, the multiple Bouldering World Cup champion and first person to climb a V16 boulder problem. Christian taught me a lot, and I wanted to apply this new knowledge to training for winter climbing to see where it would take me.

Helmcken Falls is the perfect place to test yourself, both physically and mentally. Many people have climbed there but few have reached the top of any of the routes. If you want to succeed you have to train for weeks, usually months, to stand a chance. It is no joke.

There are two people I call when I'm thinking of a mission to Helmcken—Will Gadd and Klemen Premrl. I met both Will and Klem at the 2000 Ice Climbing World Cup in Austria and have learnt a lot from both of them over the years. These two are professionals who don't mess about. Klem and I have climbed many new routes together at Helmcken. The Slovenian way of climbing is meticulous, with decades of history of gnarly first ascents around the world. Every winter, Klem and I contact each other with ideas of where we can travel internationally for ice or mixed climbing. We often spend much time debating about new locations and ideas, but as soon as Helmcken Falls is mentioned, the excitement levels elevate, and we both know that we have to go there one more time. There is nothing else quite like it anywhere in the world. It is totally unique.

This year I had a training venue that was so much better than anything I've had before. Klem was training on the same crags that he has been on for 20 years and knew exactly where his form was. We often shared training ideas and protocols. It was great to have Klem to bounce ideas off and compare progression. The week before we left for the trip, Klem was on fire and in the best shape of his life. He was doing multiple laps on some of the Slovenian test pieces—wearing a weight vest! I was experimenting with multiple one-arm hangs from a tool with a 22-kilogram weight vest for 20 seconds each go. Another goal of mine was to climb without my feet for 10 minutes on an overhanging wall and roof.

Walking into the cave this year was another new experience. Although the location is always the same, the conditions are always different. To be able to climb without getting drenched from the spray, you have to wait until the cone has grown high enough to block the main flow from soaking the area where you want to climb. Late January or early February is usually the green light; however, this year the cone was very wide and flat. This created vast amounts of ice on the left side of the cave and the right was getting drenched and was unclimbable when we arrived. Four days later, the cone had changed somehow and the right side was now protected from the spray. I find it fascinating how quickly this can happen. Being the fourth highest-volume waterfall in North America, the ice can grow so fast it can look like its on a time lapse.

The ice at the start of most of the potential climbing was so thick that getting onto it and climbing up it with any form of safety was out of the question. In previous years, Klem and I had broken off many of the daggers, and we knew how fragile these monsters were. When you have a curtain that is 15 metres wide and several metres thick, the whole lot is likely to go at once if it breaks.

After spending a decade navigating risk in the base-jumping and wing-suit world, in my opinion,

climbing at Helmcken Falls demands a high level of respect, and making good choices to limit the risk is crucial for longevity. It's not the same as going to your average drytooling or mixed climbing crag. Not only are there thousands of daggers suspended from the ceiling, sometimes the weight of the ice is so much that it carves the rock off the roof like a collapsing glacier, tearing the wall down with it. A few years ago, Chris Geisler spent a day bolting a new line. The next day he went back to continue the pitch to find the entire route lying on the ice at the bottom—ice, rock and bolts!

Klem and I found one section where it looked like it might be possible to climb. A thin, delaminated dagger was suspended close enough to the base that you could get onto it—carefully. The whole thing was detached from the wall, with water pouring between the rock and ice. This led to a rock section with a good hook where you had to swing and jump to get back on the ice. Precarious climbing up fragile delaminated ice led past several bolts until the ice became thinner and the angle increased. Some very tenuous moves on alarmingly thin ice—sometime less than 10-millimetres thick—led to hanging tentacles with some amazingly thick, soft spray ice and an excellent rest.

After this, the route's steepness increased again and headed out across a roof with a lay-backing feature and good placements. This led to a final roof and thin placements up to the belay of Nadurra Durra—the WI12 that we established the week before—at a natural rest below a final roof. Klem and I climbed to this anchor, and in doing so, knew that we had more in the tank for the obvious challenge to go across the next roof, which was steeper yet. I bolted past this and to the end of the ice, which seemed like the logical finish.

We spent the next few days accompanied with climber and film director Jon Glassberg, who had come to capture the action. Klem and I took numerous falls on the last section of the climb. The penultimate move was a deep lock-off and throw for a small rock edge that you can't see. On my last go, I tried twice to stick this move but was unable to. As a last resort, I decided to try a figure four, the first on the climb, and with this was able to reach the hold and continue to the top.

Tim Emmett on Mission to Mars. Photo: Klemen Premrl

The next day, Klem, eager to get the ascent, failed to locate the hold three times in row. Thinking that he was not going to make it, he let out a Slovenian war cry and gave it everything he had. His pick stuck and he clipped the chains. Climbs of this nature are always better when climbed together with the person you have shared the journey with. I was elated that Klem and I both sent.

Mission to Mars is primarily a bolt-protected ice climb with only three moves on rock. It overhangs 30 metres in its 40-metre length.

Summary

Mission to Mars (WI13, 40m), Helmcken Falls, Wells Gray Provincial Park, Cariboo Mountains. FA: Tim Emmett, Klemen Premrl, February 9, 2020.

Kootenay Canaleta

David Lussier

NEW ROUTING IN THE MOUNTAINS has been a passion of mine for more than 20 years. This passion has gown to be nearly as exciting as it is to climb established routes. The adventure, the puzzle, the unknown and the feeling of accomplishment are among the stimulating factors. I have always felt it important to make sure that my passion did not become an obsession. I feel the latter has the potential to govern one's life, which is unhealthy and potentially riskier. That said, even at the passion level, it is still riskier to venture into the unknown and climb new routes than it is to follow a known established one. The following is an account of a stimulating new route established based on these principles in the fall of 2019.

The appeal for this line started in November 1996 when Tom Dool and I went to Mulvey Basin for an adventurous early winter ski-touring weekend. It had snowed up high a fair amount in October; however, there was very little snow below treeline, making it possible to drive an SUV all the way to the regular trailhead at 1,700 metres. We skied in with all our winter camping paraphernalia. It was a beautiful, cold day with clear skies. There was just enough snow in the alpine to gingerly ski on planar lee terrain. We skied in the headwaters of Mulvey Basin and bagged a ski descent of the regular east face route on Asgard Peak.

We saw the Valhalla Range from a very different lens that weekend. The beautiful alpine rock walls were just as stunning, but the early season snow cover on the nearby north-facing walls revealed ample winter mixed-climbing potential. There seemed to be endless options in the shady gully features, spanning from Mount Dag on the left all the way to Gimli on the right. The north face of Gimli was of particular interest; it had some great-looking continuous ice and snow features that made it very desirable for a winter climb. The centre of the upper face was bisected by a deep couloir that led down into a series of interesting mixed corners interspersed by short, steep steps in an appealing line that spanned right down to the little pocket glacier below. We left that weekend with the realization that winter alpinism was possible here, and in fact, desirable.

Years passed, and I visited Mulvey Basin during summer months for alpine rock climbing countless times. Every time I got a chance to glimpse Gimli's north face, it would bring me back to that moment, that realization. Some mountain features have a way to lure opportunistic climbers more than others. This feature did just that. Every fall since then, I would scheme a plan with friends to make an attempt. It was difficult for all the elements to align: partners, avalanche conditions, weather and time off. There was also the unknown factor of being unable to drive up the road to inspect the route from the comfort of a vehicle. Instead, you had to go right up to the base to know if it was in condition. Most new routes have a high degree of uncertainty, I guess. Perhaps being located in the southern portion of an intermountain snow climate made it more challenging to evaluate from afar.

IN FALL 2019, everything finally lined up for a serious attempt. It required two attempts over a one-week period to complete the route. We had a couple of early season snow dumps up high; however, it had been 10 days since the last storm, and temperatures in the alpine were below freezing. It felt like we had the perfect mix of early season weather conditions and a lineup of potential partners for a solid attempt. The first attempt was made on Halloween as a day trip from Nelson with Stephen Senecal. The lure of doing it light and fast as a day trip without knowing the conditions worked against us on this attempt. Snow conditions were very similar to the ones we encountered back in 1996. Getting to the trailhead with an SUV equipped with good snow tires made it easy.

Jen Olson on pitch three of Kootenay Canaleta. Photo: David Lussier

Of note, a winter attempt would require skinning (or snowmobiling) up an additional 13 kilometres along the road, gaining 1,000 metres of elevation to access the parking lot. There was only 30 centimetres of snow at the trailhead, but the depth increased quickly with elevation to about a metre at treeline. From the trailhead, we skinned up five kilometres along the summer trail with 850 metres of elevation gain to the Gimli col. There was just enough snow to skin on the trail and not enough coverage to venture off trail below treeline. We left all the touring gear at the col and continued on foot from there.

From the col, we did a 30-metre rappel over a rock band down the north side onto the snow slope below. We dug a satisfactory hasty pit before pulling our ropes, and then walked diagonally, losing about 100 metres in elevation,

Kootenay Canaleta on the north face of Mount Gimli.
Photo: Douglas Noblet

across the steep snow slope in a north-easterly direction to gain the small pocket glacier below the north face. We got to the base of the route later than anticipated but were quite pleased with what we could see. The first pitch looked really good—a beautiful 30-metre WI4 tucked in the back of a chimney feature right off the glacier. We proceeded to climb this on good protectable ice, stemming occasionally to the nearby rock wall on the left. Following this, a 20-metre right-hand traverse across a 50-degree mixed ledge system led to a piton belay at the base of a thin-looking ice flow that overlies 75-degree rock slabs.

I started tackling the thin ice of pitch two. It was already past noon, and we knew we had a lot of unknown terrain beyond. Also, the ice was thin, the gear sparse and daylight hours limited. After trying a few different options in mounting uncertainty, I decided to bail and downclimb back to the belay. Stephen and I rapped off and slowly made our way back to the trailhead and eventually

home in Nelson. I couldn't help but think that with a bit more time and a few more stubbies I would have committed to the pitch. Self critique was building on the walk out, but I was already scheming a comeback. We had learned a lot about the route on our attempt, so we had to return with a better strategy.

The second attempt and successful ascent was done with Jen Olson about a week later, since Stephen was unable to join. The weather had generally been favourable between the two attempts. Jen and I decided to try it over a two-day period and bivouac near the route before our attempt. This proved to be quite an important piece in our success. We headed out the day before with all the gear, drove to the parking lot, skied in and camped near the regular summer campsite for the south ridge of Gimli. The next morning, we got up at 4 a.m., made a quick breakfast and headed off towards the climb. The approach was just as slow going, but this time we had fresh legs and some knowledge of what to expect. Confidence was high.

We arrived to the base at around 6:30 a.m., and I offered the first pitch to Jen. We were back near the previous highpoint in no time, and it was my lead. It felt really good to be back there with more stubbies and no time pressure to tackle the pitch. I immersed myself into the task at hand and climbed through the thin ice smear for 25 metres, occasionally finding small gear, to the next sloping ledge system. What a relief it was to have climbed that section with confidence. A short traverse left lead to the beginning of the main weakness, which appeared to continue all the way to the summit plateau.

From there onwards, Jen and I swung leads while following the gully feature. We enjoyed all sorts of interesting mixed climbing, primarily involving snow up to 55 degrees and multiple rock steps in the M3 range. Snow and avalanche conditions were solid, and the gully was becoming progressively more defined with elevation. We encountered a very nice WI3 goulotte on pitch six, which happened to be the spot where Jen dropped her iPhone that contained all the good photos she had taken thus far.

Getting past the right-hand side of a steep chockstone in the deepening gully on pitch seven was the crux rock pitch at M5. The last two pitches along the final couloir to the summit plateau were mainly steep snow in the 45- to 55-degree range.

After reaching the summit plateau on top of the couloir, we celebrated briefly then started our descent. We opted to reverse the process and rappel the route. We managed to do half of the descent in daylight but had to do the rest in the dark, thanks to the short November days. When we arrived back at the base, we looked for Jen's iPhone but couldn't find it. We retraced our steps back up and over the Gimli col, and after switching back to ski gear, skied back to our camp after 16 hours of non-stop travel. We then packed our overnight gear and started skiing out via the summer trail, in the dark, of course. At around 2,000 metres, we strapped the skis on the pack and walked out along the summer trail back to the vehicle, tired but very happy. We feasted on celebratory chips, beer and kombucha as we drove down the snowy road back to Nelson.

It wasn't until the following days that the realization started to hit home for me. On top of accomplishing a great climb with a good friend, I had completed a long-time project. The route name Kootenay Canaleta was actually Jen's idea. It reminded her of a smaller version of Supercanaleta on Fitzroy in Patagonia but without the international traffic. I thought this was very fitting. Of historical note, most of this climb was surprisingly used as a rappel route during an ACC camp after making an ascent of the north ridge in the summer of 1977 [see *CAJ*, 1978, vol. 61: p.103]. We saw some of their pitons and slings on the way up and actually used one of their anchors to rappel from during our descent.

Summary

Kootenay Canaleta (D+ WI4 M5, 350m), north face, Mt. Gimli, Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains. FA: David Lussier, Jen Olson, November 6, 2019.

Westfall GMC

David Dornian

AFTER MOST TRIPS TO THE MOUNTAINS, back at home in the entryway to your house or on your garage floor or wherever, you dump out your pack and bags, you toe the little pile of laundry gear, and you wonder why you carry all that crap along in the first place. I never use half of it. This is usually followed by a bit of speculation about the wisdom of sneaking your unworn underwear back in the drawer. You decide to stay in the same shorts you've been wearing while you water the house plants.

That's after most trips. But, every once in a while…

Coming down from the Westfall GMC at the end of July 2019, I found I used every article of clothing I had packed, plus some base layers I had purchased from ACC stores up at the camp. Additionally, I had worn out two maps and a pair of gloves, lent my second pair of boots, drained the battery on my radio and used the spare for a couple of days, filled my notebook, depleted the first aid kit and soaked all my accident report forms. I had put a few nicks in the blade of my multi-tool, stuck a crampon point through a can of parking-lot beer that was in my duffel, and it seemed that whatever didn't smell like mildew mostly smelled of me. It had been two weeks, I suppose. Still.

Chucky Gerard and the setup crew put in the GMC base camp for 2019 during the first week of July in a per-usual orientation just above tree-line, near the head of a drainage south of Houston Creek. Our helicopter staging moved around a bit with the weather and runoff but mostly happened from approximately the 50-kilometre marker on the McMurdo Creek FSR. If you are from away, this is up the Spillimacheen, south of Golden, B.C., and north of the Bugaboos.

Weather during early July setup was comparatively hideous, and so were the first three climbing weeks with participants. But with weather instability came occasional opportunity, and enthusiasm was high enough among staff and participants. We were out almost daily despite the damp. Eventually, one party or another found a way to everywhere, and we managed to stand on all the prominences in the area, even while occasionally being turned around or rerouted. To the north, we could scramble through the col between Wrong Peak and Vistamount to access the glacier and snow climbs on the east sides of Mount Goodrich and Big Green Peak. We could climb two aspects on Wrong and a prominence on the southwest ridge of Vistamount (which we referred to as "Wright") via their east and west ridges, respectively. Vistamount itself favoured a scrambling approach through cliff bands and across talus to access the summit from directly above base camp—popular in iffy weather. To the west, there was a mild glacier approach that was good for snow schools. It also provided access to an interesting (especially in the rain) couloir descending from a sub-peak 600 metres south of Wrong that we referred to as "Erratum."

South of base camp were the three Ledge peaks. Each could be accessed serially or individually by contouring around to their south aspects over a shoulder on their east end. Further around that cirque were the less-visited Martini and Thomas, with access hampered by lower quality rock and/or cornice buildups.

Rough walking and meadow hiking from the GMC base camp and past the previous year's BMC site (still easy to find a year later) in the cirque to the southeast led straightforwardly to "Gobi Pass," a popular bad-weather or rest-day walk. Parties could turn left from the pass to climb more technically onto Thumb Spire, or simply scramble to a bump on the rising ridge for a chance at some views. Unfortunately, guiding ratio requirements, distance and often-evil conditions conspired to thwart most actual summit intentions in that direction.

Camp infrastructure took more of beating than most summers, as winds and rain tore up our dining, storage and tea tents early on, and

the structures sported improvised tie-downs and tarp flys for the remaining weeks at the site. Kyle Chartrand went out one howling night during week two, tore apart the useless gear-drying rack for its wood, and worked in the raging creek to construct a second bridge to participants' sleeping tents, just as our first stepping-stone bridge disappeared under the rising waters. His hands were so cold and cramped that we had to help him undo the zippers on his shell when he finally came inside. Still, he didn't seem to have a problem curling them around a glass of whiskey afterward.

We built cairns. We survived bear encounters. You can go figure it out yourself some summer. It's one of the good places on earth.

Summary

GMC base camp was located at 476200E 5638300N and ~2000m with 208 participants total. Peaks climbed: Vistamount, Wrong Peak, Ledges (all three summits), "Kitchen Envy," "Wright," Martini, "Erratum," "Pinky Finger," Hanover and Goodrich.

ACMG mountain guide Tom Wolfe with Anna Milino and Guillaume Gontier on southwest ridge of Vistamount. Photo: Alex Popov

The Rockies

Primordial Soup

Niall Hamill

IN THE SUMMER OF 2019, I spent about a dozen days up at Peyto Tower, climbing on its beautiful and steep southeast face. Ryan Richardson was my main sidekick, as we both find the wall has exactly what we are looking for—amazing stone, nearly endless potential for free routes, zero crowds and relative ease of access from Canmore. Note that relative ease of access is a subjective statement, as most people who know about the wall are justifiably put off by the 900 metres of elevation one must hike to reach its base.

In early June, Ryan and I spent a couple of days hiking loads to the base of the face. We initially climbed the existing pitches of Prairie Gold [see *CAJ*, 2019, vol.102, p.144-145], which is the only known route that ascends the less solid limestone on the lower half of the wall. The Marra-Richardson and The Prow both gain the upper quartzite by traversing in higher up on ledge systems. Ryan had the idea to equip a newly bolted slab variation to avoid the least solid pitches of that route.

The prominent ledge above pitch three of Prairie Gold is what we dubbed "Summer Camp Ledge." From here, we had our sights on a few different lines that would navigate unclimbed terrain on the upper wall. The lower wall is fun in its own way but more of a formality to access the 200 or so metres of solid golden quartzite above. We decided that after a marginal bivy under a siltarp on the ledge with light intermittent showers, we would employ wall-climbing tactics so that we could be comfortable and better rested for the hard climbing above. I sourced a 1980s A5 bunk-style two-person portaledge with a rain fly for 80 bucks from a friend, which I brought on our next trip to the wall. The ledge would be there when we needed to hide from rain or snow (of which there was plenty), enjoy a coffee/smoke break (plenty of those too), or sneak in a nap. When I was a kid, building forts for sleepovers was pretty much the pinnacle of friendship. Now, as an adult, I am glad that I can still enjoy this process.

On our first day of the season climbing above Summer Camp Ledge, Ryan had equipped a boulder-y-looking corner next to the Prairie Gold corner with a bolt and pin and established another long and wandering 5.10 pitch above, reaching a part of the wall I dubbed The Nexus. I call it that because there are numerous converging crack systems there in a sort of amphitheatre created by a huge smooth wall on the left and overhanging pinnacles above. Dead centre in this web of cracks is a beautiful open-book stemming seam and roof that I tried to free the summer prior during our ascent of Prairie Gold, but I couldn't piece it together in the one hour that I had given it, and with time dwindling, I let my partner Grant Stewart lead us out to the more obvious weakness instead. Both options end up at the same belay anchor. This summer, I hoped to free the harder variation and end on a wild-looking chimney crack that formed the top of the wall left of the Prairie Gold finish. I could see water peeling off sideways into the wind, coming from some bit of snowmelt above a roof higher up. I hoped the wall would be dry soon.

Niall Hamill on the common pitch three (5.11c) of Prairie Gold. Photo: Adam Gearing

Weather had turned to rubbish for two weeks with tons of rain, and then, magic! With only a small window before Canada Day, the forecasted sun and good temperatures meant the wall might be dry. I was scrambling to find a partner when Ryan had to work. He had generously offered that I could climb it without him if someone else was up for joining me. A friend recommended Cory Rogans, a young local climber who was getting after it. I was pleased when he quickly responded and enthusiastically agreed to join me on a blind date to climb the line.

"Are you at the top yet?" Cory shouted at me from the belay down and out of sight. The wind stole his words away, and snow crystals materialized from rain in the frigid gusts. For better or for worse, my bull-headed attitude had gotten us this far, and I wasn't about to bail so close to the top. What had begun as a mild Canada Day had become a serious windstorm in the late afternoon, and black clouds threatened our position. At Summer Camp Ledge we were on schedule, in high spirits and the weather was holding up. We traded burns on the crux corner pitch off the ledge, and I managed it second go, and then two pitches higher I had taken some extra time trying to free the direct corner, but the crux hold—a small sloping dish that was being dripped on from under the roof—spit me off a half a dozen times. I raged through the moves over and over, but eventually, to keep us moving, I gave up and went out right again, the same way Grant had gone on Prairie Gold. It was here that the wind really picked up, and we realized the day was getting on.

As the rain bit into my face, I regretted having cleaned the lost arrow piton that Grant had carefully placed on lead, looking back at a serious run-out off the foot ledge of the belay. With only a couple of wobbly small cams in a flare that wouldn't hold a small fall, I was thankful that the moves were only 5.9+ slab. I kept a cool head, finding shelter and good gear in the perfect splitter that continues to the belay. I looked back at Cory and took a photo that really captured the atmosphere that day—Cory huddled into his jacket in the swirling mist and snow. I ended the day by linking two very adventurous pitches together to reach the top of the open-book corner that I had intended to finish on. It was wet and tedious climbing in a soaking-wet chimney. Despite feeling mentally spent, I had to fight with everything I had left in me. Two lowers got me back to Cory's belay. It was already very late for Cory to follow. We needed to get down. We named this new route Gravity's Rainbow after one of the most mind-bending books I have ever been swept up in. It currently goes at 5.12a R. I might add that although R ratings tend to keep most people at bay, and adding a handful of bolts would do away with that rating, I don't feel that this line, or any line on Peyto, needs to be tamed for the masses.

Adding to the adventure, we got a rope terribly stuck on an overhung rappel, and after rigging a Z-pulley to try and free it, we ended up cutting our losses and rapping back to Summer Ledge Camp on two shorter lines. We grabbed an extra rope that we had stashed at our camp and made our way to the base of the wall without consequence, albeit behind schedule, hiking down in the rain by headlamp.

WEATHER HAD TAKEN A TURN for the better, so Ryan and I headed up the Icefields Parkway with enough food and fuel for a few days. This time, we'd see it through together, especially since Ryan had missed out on the send of Gravity's Rainbow. We had similar aspirations this time—the orange corner. A huge prow of stone proudly offsets the rest of the wall, creating a right-facing corner—deep orange and streaked with black stripes. The first time we had scoped the wall, we commented on how we would like to climb it one day.

With the drill hanging from my harness, I started up an incipient flake and placed two bolts. The flake became a corner seam with good but spaced gear, which led to a belay ledge. Ryan took off from there, boldly climbing away from the protection he had placed in a corner out onto a slab with small edges. He placed two bolts from free stances, and deciding that we wouldn't need the drill up higher, we rapped back to the ledge to rest.

The next morning, I freed the first pitch we had aided the day before at 5.11+, and Ryan led the next pitch up past the two bolts in the slab.

Ryan Richardson on pitch four of Primordial Soup. Photo: Niall Hamill

Gaining the corner, Ryan found that the corner itself was solid and mostly dry, but he encountered a six- to seven-metre section that was caked with centuries-old dry mud that had funnelled down the corner. He had to scrape away the caked mud to find holds and gear placements.

I took the next pitch, which began with perfect fingers through a bulge. Ryan led another pitch and set a belay just below the big, beautiful roof at the top of the corner. I believe the roof crack would go at 5.11+ when dry, but it was pouring with water—way too much water to free it. I led out left onto a hanging slab to avoid the wetness, finding exciting 5.9+ climbing with sparse gear. Bulletproof rock and good holds kept me moving. Back right towards the crack up higher, it was dry again. Ryan led a final 5.10+ pitch, which began in splitter tight hands, like something at Indian Creek but in the most unexpected location. We called this excellent line Primordial Soup, and the

climbing is very unique in how splitter it is for the Rockies. I would recommend trying the line in a dry spell of the summer in hopes that a future party might find conditions dry enough to free the wide-hands roof that we had to skirt around.

WITH A COUPLE OF MEMORABLE LINES completed, Ryan and I shifted gears and traded ideas for the next line. We figured that with the short season for this wall and work obligations, we might only have time to complete one more line before summer came to an end. So far, we had gone for obvious lines that seemed guaranteed successes for our fitness levels and ability. What we really wanted, though, was to see what the steeper climbing would be like beyond the orange corner in the centre of the wall. From Summer Camp Ledge, we could look across and down to a huge rubble-strewn ledge that, to our knowledge, no human had set foot on before. Right off the ledge, an amazing roof extends out and cuts a huge horizontal line across the wall. We knew that the tactic of going ground up to that ledge would require some of the sketchy and loose crack climbing the lower wall is known for, so unless the climbing above it was free-able for us and worth our time, we didn't want to bother with it. We figured an innocent rappel on a fixed line down to the ledge would be a good bet since we could then try and climb from the ledge, and if the climbing was good, we could come back the next season to climb the lower wall into what we would establish on the upper wall. It is not the purest form of ground-up climbing, but given the circumstances, we decided to go for it.

With one full-length rappel on a fixed line and another half rope of via-ferrata rigged across the ledge, Ryan and I were able to unclip and walk across the broad ledge to inspect the big roof above us for our preferred line. We felt like kids in a candy store. This was some of the best-looking stone we had seen in the Rockies—light grey-beige quartzite with a sort of shine to it, not unlike the quality of quartzite you find at Lake Louise. We immediately honed in on the left-hand side of the roof where an obvious line of features looked climbable. I let Ryan take over on aid duty here, and soon he had established an anchor and was zipping down the fixed line over the roof. I rope-soloed while Ryan continued up into the next pitch, self-belaying and using a mixture of free and aid to push the rope higher. Ryan whipped a couple of times and finagled in some fixed gear. I cleaned, added a couple of bolts and ticked holds below him. I was at the anchor again after a successful top-rope burn when I heard Ryan let out a shriek. I looked up just in time to see him taking another whipper in his aiders on the pitch above. We chuckled together at the absurdity of our chosen hobby.

Ryan asked if I wanted to take a lead burn now that he had welded in enough fixed pro to make it more inviting. I was a little intimidated by the slabby off-vertical climbing that looked a little adventurous and thin right from the belay. Ryan assured me that it wouldn't be as full on as it looked and encouraged me to go for it. With Ryan feeding me beta from the belay as well as the fixed gear he had placed on aid, I managed to scrape through the crux and past his last pro onto some easier but headier face climbing, where gear was well spaced albeit in solid notches and pods. Dusting the fine quartz sand from the bed of a perfect oval-shaped hueco to place a bomber #4 Camelot is just one of a thousand moments that make the climbing on Peyto Tower so memorable. The rock is very unique, gear placements unlikely and the movement thought-provoking. I reached a perfect anchor stance and tagged up the drill to bolt the anchor. We called it a day.

The evening was spent up in the portaledge, admiring the red-orange hues of the setting sun over Mount Chephren. Nestled into our little pod of comfort in the sky, life couldn't get much better.

The next morning, we slept in until we felt like climbing. A couple of strong coffees later, I racked up sometime around noon. We zipped down the fixed line and took one more Micro-Traxion burn on the roof pitch. I felt like it was time, and although Ryan hadn't yet climbed it clean, he hesitantly agreed to belay me for my first lead burn. Throwing my shirt down in the scorching sun at a no-hands rest, I managed to fire both cruxes on the roof pitch and whooped with joy as I clipped the anchor. Ryan followed below me, and I encouraged him from the belay as he freed

it on top-rope. We agreed that the pitch was solid 5.12. The next pitch was also mine to lead, and I climbed through the technical and heady face moves beyond the last fixed pro, thinking that the climbing was really brilliant. The next pitch above that was Ryan's, and we had dubbed it The Split Pillar of Peyto. It ended up being an amazing pitch of solid 5.10 crack climbing and nearly stretched the rope to its end. Ryan did an awesome job of onsighting it. Another long and fairly moderate pitch of crack climbing led us to the base of a short roof crack. It looked like the final challenge between us and the top, and Ryan racked up for it.

After getting some gear in below the roof, he slumped onto the rope and offered me the lead, noticeably tired at the tail end of our three-day mission. I happily pulled the rope and went for the alpine pink-point, clipping the gear Ryan had placed below the crux. I pulled the roof, mantled into a handrail and could see a crack system out left that we had spied from below, figuring it was the key to the summit. What perplexed me, though, was the serious lack of good holds between me and the crack, only two body lengths away. Without any visible weaknesses for gear between me and the crack, I tried three different sequences, reversing each time on the thin holds back to the good rest above the roof before finally committing. Just barely, I was able to send this tricky little traverse into a perfect #3 splitter. A bolt here would really tame the nature of the pitch, but I wouldn't want to rob others of the experience I had up there, where mind and body were equally challenged by another pitch of "Peyto 5.11+."

One easy chimney pitch got us to the top, and we pounded in the first of several nut and pin anchors to get us back to the ledge. We cleaned our via ferrata line, jugged back to Summer Camp Ledge and enjoyed happy hour sitting in the portaledge in perfect weather. With only half a litre of water each to get us back to the water source halfway down the approach gully, I threw rationale to the wind and enjoyed a generous serving of the cheap Scotch I had stowed away in the haul bag for this occasion. Once again, the sun set in its fiery colours over Mount Chephren as Ryan and I reflected fondly on a summer well spent.

The southeast face of Peyto Tower:
(1) Prairie Gold
(2) Gravity's Rainbow
(3) Primordial Soup
(4) Bengal Spice Indirect
Photo: Grant Statham

Summary

Gravity's Rainbow (5.12a R, 285m), southeast face, Peyto Tower, Canadian Rockies. FA: Niall Hamill, Cory Rogans, July 1, 2019.

Primordial Soup (5.11c, 275m), southeast face, Peyto Tower, Canadian Rockies. FA: Niall Hamill, Ryan Richardson, July 13, 2019.

Bengal Spice Indirect (5.12c, 300m), southeast face, Peyto Tower, Canadian Rockies. FA: Niall Hamill, Ryan Richardson, August 20, 2019.

The East Chimney

Grant Stewart

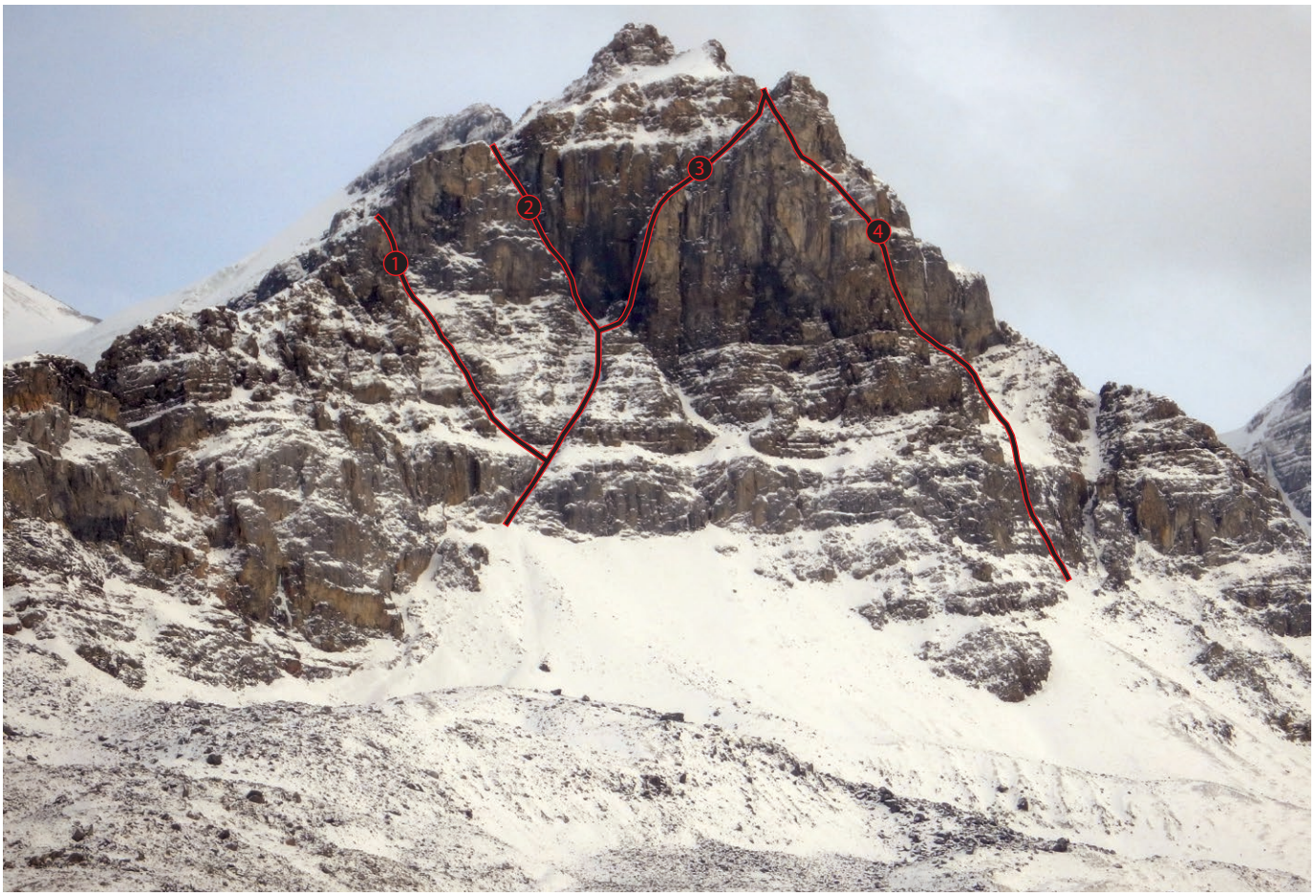
Ryan Patteson on pitch three of The East Chimney. Photo: Grant Stewart

RYAN PATTESON AND I were just wrapping up the quintessential Rockies alpine ritual of taking a moonlit facet tromp to find the Andromeda Strain horrifically out of condition when we spotted some ice. Up on the A-A Buttress of Athabasca, there appeared to be a thin line of ice that offered passage over a low rock barrier into a snow field and possibly up onto the rocky buttress above. We knew there were three established lines on the formation: The West Chimney (Slawinski-Takeda, 2003); The Abdominal Drain (Isaac-Huisman, 2004); and The McKibbin Route (Pullan-Vonk, 2013). After some discussion, we decided that the ice did not lead to any of those established routes, therefore, could be an unclimbed line. With the object of previous desire now in the background, we took another classic Rockies approach and traversed snow slopes to the base of the ice.

Ryan took the first pitch, tip-toeing up funky thin ice and firing in stubbies. After paying out a full 60 metres of rope, I heard a yell, and Ryan brought me up to a comfy belay off screws. Coming up to the belay I could tell he was stoked. Above us was a fat vein of blue ice gleaming in the dawn light. Getting perfect sticks, I climbed the ice up through pouring spindrift to a rock anchor at the base of a small snowfield. Further above loomed the triangular headwall of rock between us and The West Chimney. It looked much steeper than anticipated, but we pounded up the snowfield anyway and decided to take a cheeky peek around its right side.

Around the corner, we found a tight couloir angling up and left behind the steep terrain. After about a hundred metres, the couloir ended abruptly in a largely vertical rock wall. Unsure of whether there was a feasible line up it, we climbed to its base, which revealed a perfect crack arcing up through the rock and into a chimney. With his picks set in the crack, Ryan stepped off the snow and climbed for 30 metres before disappearing into the chimney. Going at an engaging M5 with phenomenal pick-torqueing placements and good gear, this pitch made for a classic piece of limestone drytooling. I led another long pitch of chimney climbing with a deke left at a massive chockstone to pop out in the continuation of the couloir, which we followed to the top out of The West Chimney.

Having daylight to spare and finding stable snow



The A-A Buttress of Mount Athabasca:
(1) The McKibbin Route
(2) The Abdominal Drain
(3) The West Chimney
(4) The East Chimney
Photo: Grant Stewart

conditions, we decided to continue to the top of the buttress by traversing rightward on snow-covered slabs and up an icy chimney. We traversed off the formation, descending skier's right and waded down snow-loaded slopes to the Athabasca's North Glacier. Some glacier-travel shenanigans negotiating thin snow bridges gave way to moraines, and soon we found ourselves back at the car. When plan B ends up being a great new route in one of the most travelled areas in a range, you know you're climbing in the Canadian Rockies.

Summary

The East Chimney (M5 WI4, 300m), A-A Buttress, Mt. Athabasca, Columbia Icefield. FA: Grant Stewart, Ryan Patteson, October 12, 2019.

P1: WI3, 60m. Climb a smear of ice to a small snowfield and belay off screws at the start of the second pitch (stubby ice screws are useful). P2: WI4, 30m. Climb a fat vein of WI4 ice up to a rock anchor in a crack on the left. Continue up a rising rightward traverse on a snow slope for 100 metres around the rock buttress and up into the couloir until you run into a large, steep rock wall. P3: M5, 45m. Starting from the far right-hand side of the rock wall, follow the amazing left-trending crack system up into the chimney. Belay on a rock anchor. Some loose rock but good gear. P4: M4, 50m. Climb up then traverse left to avoid an overhanging chockstone. Continue up on mixed ground until you reach the upper couloir. Belay from a rock anchor on the left. Continue to the top of the couloir.

Peuterey Integrale of Choss

Ian Welsted

ALIK BERG IS THE BEST UNHERALDED alpinist in Canada but was suffering from sore elbows, so he texted me, looking to get out on something easy. He was quite distraught when on our first day on the complete north ridge of the North Twin, I talked him into walking around the first steep towers on the ridge. I had to guide Edith Cavell in five days' time, and I figured we would waste time climbing towers that obviously led only to rappels back onto the ridge. And I had told Alik not to bring the rock shoes (light is right, right?). I'm old and don't like climbing hard, and I wanted to get on to the bigger towers further along the way. So for the purists in the crowd, the complete ascent of the complete north ridge of North Twin still awaits.

A day of quite arduous approaching—all side-hilling on the same side of the foot—led us to the base of the ridge with the impression of a wispy, airy traverse to come. Alik was desperately looking everywhere for a solution to the rock quality at the first bivy. This was to become a theme for the next five days.

Alik Berg starts up the Waterman route on Son of Twin, with Mount Alberta in the background. Photo: Ian Welsted

WE SKIPPED THE FIRST steep towers by traversing to the west on easy scree-walking slopes. I don't care about climbing for climbing's sake and would rather just get the process underway efficiently, which I was attempting to do while scraping my blue foamy against the first actual climbing on the four-kilometre ridge. Those two towers remain unclimbed, so Alik is going to go back with a stronger partner.

By the end of the second day, we were hiding from the wind and the rainy-looking clouds, ready to go and look for any trace left by Waterman on his first ascent of the Son of Twin. If the Son of Twin was anywhere other than in the Canadian Rockies, it would be a major objective in its own right. The face, that is. The ridge is a very moderate undertaking. We didn't find any evidence of the first ascent. Alik likes to take the direct line. I figure Waterman might have taken the easier gully just on the west side of the ridge, which looked like an excellent winter outing with a two-day approach.

At the top of Son of Twin, Alik generously demonstrated his complete insensitivity to exposure by walking out onto a stool-sized pedestal in order to get a better view of perhaps the biggest unclimbed rock face in the range. He then continued the impressive demonstration of fearlessness by leading the raps into the abyss to the col between Son of Twin and Twins Tower. At that point, I was honestly attempting to think of a passable reason

Peuterey Integrale of Choss follows the right-hand skyline over Son of Twin and Twins Tower to the summit of North Twin in the clouds.
Photo: Ian Welsted

to give for bailing. I just wasn't that eager to take my second trip up the Abrons Route.

The col is truly not that friendly a place to hang out, though now there is a nice bivy wall for the next party. It is, after all, the Standhardt Col of the Rockies, as Alik pointed out when we were camped next to the Cerro Torre of our range.

The Abrons more or less goes wherever you take it, and Alik, being adventurous, figured we would check out some new ground. About a hundred metres from the shoulder we were wishing we had taken the same line Brandon Pullan and I did almost a decade ago. With melting snow, we couldn't climb the thin ice lines we had seen a few days earlier, and we couldn't climb wet slab, so we were forced onto whatever featured rock rib we could find. It always works out because it is practically scrambling, as long as you don't slip, since there is really no proper protection.

BY 2 P.M. ON THURSDAY, I was figuring we would have a short walk out on Friday, perfect for my day of guiding Cavell on Saturday. We were at the familiar shoulder where in 2012 Brandon and I had begun our easy traverse above the infamous north face. I told Alik to just head straight across on the obvious ledge system, but when I swung around the arête and onto the north side, I was terrified to be greeted by a large snow-covered face. Hidden under the wet summer snow was grey ice for our two ice screws, while most of the rock protection was obscured. On my recent trip to Mount Waddington only a month earlier [see page 45], I noted that unprotected snow climbing is my least favourite kind of climbing. Simul-climbing snow-covered grey ice with two pieces per 60-metre rope length is in the running too. On a positive note, we did summit Twins Tower just as it got dark, walked to the east side of Stutfield by 2 a.m. and hit the mud flats of the Stutfield cirque by 3 p.m. on the Friday. The weather on Saturday was too topsy-turvy to guide Cavell, so I climbed Roche de Perdrix and rock climbed at Hidden Valley with Keith from Reno, in what was best described as a cold sauna. I am now planning my retirement to Penticton to be a sport climber, while Alik is still the most bad-ass alpinist in the range, even with wonky elbows.

Summary

Peuterey Integrale of Choss (V 5.7, 1300m), complete north ridge, North Twin, Canadian Rockies. FA: Alik Berg, Ian Welsted, August 26–30, 2019.

Little Fluffy Clouds

Raphael Slawinski

TAKE ONE. From a distance, the ice blobs looked inviting—the featureless rock between them, less so. I wonder if we're wasting our time, I thought, as Seth and I ploughed a ski track through facetted snow, the straps of packs—loaded down with ropes, cams, pins and a drill—pulling at our shoulders. Given enough time and bolts, you can get up anything, but we didn't want what Steve DeMaio calls "a science project." We wanted a line, something we could walk up to and (mostly) just climb. Unfortunately, the limestone, shining grey and yellow in the morning light, looked depressingly blank. But another thing Steve says is that you've just got to rub your nose in it. And sure enough, as we got closer, switchbacking up the slope below the cliff through patches of kinnikinnick and drifts of wind-crusted snow, as if by magic, cracks and corners appeared.

Seth quickly dispatched the first pitch, a curtain of sun-baked ice, and I started up the second. A horizontal shuffle across a van-sized flake and another ice blob and I started up steeper rock, aiming for a big left-facing corner. After a few moves, with no gear between me and the ice ledge below, I looked around for a piton crack. That one's just a blind seam, that one's behind a loose flake, but this one looks promising. I slotted in a knifeblade and gingerly started hammering. Ping! Following a graceful parabolic arc, the pin disappeared from view. I vainly tried a few more cracks but, in the end, gave in and pulled up the drill. Several bolts and some pique-torquing in a corner crack later, I pulled over the overhanging lip of the next ice blob onto a comfortable ledge.

We climbed one more pitch to reach another ice blob before the drill battery and daylight started to fade. Happy that the day hadn't turned out to be a waste of time after all, we headed down. First though, we sorted the gear and left the ropes and rack hanging from an ice tool hooked over a rock edge. With light packs, we skied back to the car while the stars came out over the frozen bog, and Venus and the crescent moon set over Devil's Head.

TAKE TWO. The packs were lighter when we came back a few days later. Following our old track along a cutline, through a short stretch of bush and onto an open streambed, we made good time and arrived at the base of the rock together with the sun. But our satisfaction was short-lived. As we took down the stashed gear, we saw sharp tooth marks on the handles of my ice tools. Worse, our rope was chewed right through. A wave of disappointment washed over me since our climbing day was over before it had begun. But wait! As we uncoiled the rope, we saw the rats had merely wanted to scare us and had only bitten off a two-metre section. We could climb after all.

It didn't take us long to reclimb the first three pitches, and we were still in the sun as I started up the fourth. Unfortunately, it looked to be the science project we'd been hoping to avoid. Wherever I dared, I tried to climb between bolt placements to avoid putting up an aid ladder but didn't manage to place even a token piece of gear. A couple of hours later, having touched the final ice curtain but still somewhat disheartened, I lowered back to the now shady belay. My spirits rose a bit as I belayed Seth on the freshly bolted pitch and saw that at least it appeared to be climbable. As the song goes, you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find you get what you need.

TAKE THREE. Two days later we were back, with Maia rounding out the team. On our previous goes, we had enjoyed temperatures that were unseasonably warm for January, belaying bare-handed and climbing in base layers. Now, however, February had arrived with cold weather, wind and snow. White devils danced across the gravel flats on the valley bottom, and a cold wind drove plumes of powder from surrounding ridges. At least the base of the cliff was somewhat sheltered from the gusts.

The sunbaked ice on pitch one, the now much-less-chossy corner on pitch two and the groove connecting two ice blobs on pitch three

went easily enough. The fourth pitch remained the big unknown. Just a few metres from the belay on pitch four, I was already struggling to keep my fingers warm as I repeatedly locked off and searched for a good edge. It was tempting to commit to one of the bad ones and go for it, but I also knew this kind of scratching demanded patience. Maia and Seth, bundled up at the belay, were probably less impressed with my slow, methodical progress.

Then it was my turn to try to stay warm as clouds of spindrift enveloped me while I brought my partners up. If one of them had said that conditions were too miserable to climb the last pitch, that we should just head down, I wouldn't have argued. But they didn't. A few more long reaches, balancing across a foot ledge with the blank wall above trying to push me off, gained cold, brittle ice that cracked and groaned as I repeatedly swung into it. I tried to keep my eyelids from freezing shut while I drilled a V-thread where the ice backed off into snow-covered scree. Now just a few rappels remained before we could run down to our skis and get warm again.

Seth Keena-Levin on the first pitch of Fluffy Little Clouds. Photo: Raphael Slawinski

Summary

Little Fluffy Clouds (M7 WI4, 155m), Johnson Creek, Waiparous. FA: Seth Keena-Levin, Maia Schumacher, Raphael Slawinski, February 2, 2020.

Approach: This spectacular route is found at the mouth of the Johnson Creek drainage, before Caroline and Marion falls. If formed, the ice blobs and final curtain will be obvious on the sunny side of the valley. Park as for all Waiparous routes on the north side of Waiparous Creek. Approach as for Hydrophobia to the bog then veer right onto a cutline. From where the cutline ends, 10 minutes of bushwhacking deposits you on the cobbles of Johnson Creek. Walk up the creek until below the route, and then hike up through open forest and scree to the base. In heavy snow years, skis may be useful (1.5 to two hours total).

Gear: 70-metre ropes, double set of Camalots from #0.2 to #0.4, Camalots #3, #4 and #5 (optional), a few medium Stoppers, eight quickdraws, six alpine draws, five to six ice screws.

P1: WI3+, 30m. Steepening ice leads to a ledge. Traverse right to a single-bolt belay that can be backed up with a #5 Camalot behind the flake on the right.

P2: M5+, 40m. Traverse right across the flake to an ice blob. From the right edge of the ice blob, climb rock past three bolts to a left-facing corner. Climb the corner past another bolt to the left edge of a bigger ice blob and a two-bolt belay on top of the blob. Small cams and nuts needed on this pitch but not higher, so this gear can be left at the belay. Long slings are helpful.

P3: M4+, 20m. Move right from the belay and climb past four bolts to an easy wide crack that leads to a two-bolt belay on top of a small ice blob. #3 and #4 Camalots are useful on this pitch.

P4: M7, 30m. Tricky drytooling leads to easier but more committing climbing. Another tricky section leads to a two-bolt anchor on a small ledge. This pitch is all bolted, but a #3 Camalot may be comforting.

P5: M5 WI4, 35m. Some long reaches lead to the right end of a foot ledge. Shuffle left along the ledge to the hanging curtain. Snag the ice and climb it to where it backs off into snow. Belay from ice. This pitch is all bolted and only requires screws.

Descent: Rappel the route from the top of pitches five, four and two. Pitches five, four and three can be rappelled with a single 70-metre rope. Rappelling from the top of pitch five requires back clipping some of the bolts on the pitch. Rappelling straight down from the top of pitch two requires two 70-metres ropes. With 60-metres ropes, rappel to the top of pitch one and make another rappel from the single bolt there.

Mount Phillips

Ian Welsted

Ian Welsted on the North Spur of Mount Phillips. Photo: Simon Richardson

WE SAT AT DANA RUDDY'S dinner table, noting how rare it was to have three people together who had climbed the Emperor Ridge on separate occasions. I had been telling Simon Richardson's story inaccurately when I introduced him, saying that he hadn't summitted Robson due to a storm on a prior visit to the Rockies. Of course he had, as befits a Scot with a thousand first ascents to his name. We were in Jasper to attempt an unclimbed Canadian Rockies north face.

Could we have made it to the beautiful flowered bench above the Berg Lake trail without Dana's local beta? His great-grandfather, Jack Hargreaves, did the second ascent of Robson. To say that Dana is the dark horse of Canadian Rockies climbing of the last decade is to wildly understate his knowledge of the range. If Jesse Milner, Robson Valley local and former park ranger, hadn't passed on his tips for the day-long approach, the walk wouldn't have felt so fresh as we traipsed through the wildflowers a mere four hours from the parking lot. Apart from that, learning the lore of the area and appreciating the sharing spirit of the Jasper locals is half the fun.

THE OTHER KEY to the adventure was obviously Simon, past president of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, whose track record of long adventurous outings in the mountains is incredibly impressive. How else do you find a huge unclimbed line on Mont Blanc in 2018?

When Simon showed up at the Calgary airport with a photo from John Scurlock, I had no clue where Mount Phillips was, but Dana and Jesse certainly did. And they said they had both longingly looked at its north face. This was just fine with Simon, because as he put it, "I've always wanted to climb a north face in the Rockies and to do a first ascent in the Rockies." So off we set with four days of food during the first good weather window of summer 2019 to help Simon kill two birds with one stone.

We whistled at imaginary grizzlies as we approached the Phillips Glacier and camped just to the west of the Hargreaves Glacier at 2,400 metres. Waking at a very Richardson-esque 12:30 a.m. (I negotiated the extra half hour), we took two and a half hours to approach the north

The North Spur of Mount Phillips. Photo: John Scurlock

spur, which unfortunately was quickly revealed to face the rising sun. Simul-climbing the lower easy ground was key to getting up high before the snow turned completely to isothermal mush. Our weather window was about to mark the end of the spring cycle, and I was certainly glad to regain the spur at half height, even if it did take me the better part of an hour to create an anchor.

Slithery slush avalanches would entrain more snow on the face whenever a rock was dropped, and large wet-snow avalanches would appear on the glacial bench below. Gullies that promised easy climbing would have been perfect in colder spring temperatures. Instead, it was bare hands on rock once back on the spur. I couldn't complain.

Simon is wise enough in the mountains to tilt things in his favour. "How often am I going to be back here, really, so why rush?" he offered. So we had light bivy gear and could have made this gravelly shoulder a hundred metres below the summit our camp spot if we had run into slower climbing.

All that was left was a cat-walk ridge to the top with stupendous views over the wonderful wilderness to the north. Now that I have seen the views, I am curious to look at a map to determine what we were faced with. Suffice to say that the Swift Current Glacier and beyond are impressively wild terrain.

By strange coincidence, the first ascent of Mount Phillips was made by Norman Collie, one of the great pioneering climbers of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, so now Phillips has two first ascents by stalwarts of the SMC.

Summary

North Spur (TD 5.5 M3, 600m), north face, Mt. Phillips, Canadian Rockies. FA: Simon Richardson, Ian Welsted, July 22, 2019.

Eye of the Storm

Maarten van Haeren

"DID WE MAKE IT INTO THE ALPINE?" I asked Ethan, as we topped out on a nondescript bump on the east ridge of Storm Mountain. The question of whether or not our route qualified as an alpine climb had become a running joke. Starting hundreds of metres below treeline and lacking a real summit, it hardly fit the description. While alpine climbing has always had an aura of mystique, (mis)use of the term in our modern era leaves me puzzled. Are we climbing to laud our accomplishments, claiming to go alpine climbing when we're essentially going to the crag? Or do we climb to experience these environments with our friends on the few rare days when conditions line up? Does it require definition, or is it all just climbing? Certainly, it is climbing, so here follows an account of a near-alpine climb. Tucked against the Great Divide, it features good rock and ice on an under-appreciated mountain in Banff National Park.

Ethan Berman starts up pitch six of Eye of the Storm. Photo: Maarten van Haeren

DESPITE OUR FRIEND Ian Welsted broadly sharing the existence of this line, hidden in plain sight, only one other party had ventured up. My personal history with Storm Mountain (and Ian Welsted) marked some of my first alpine climbing in the Canadian Rockies. In 2015, together with J. Mills, we opened Canoeing to Cuba on the main northeast face of the mountain [see *CAJ*, 2016, vol.99, p.132]. Each having independently spied the new-route potential, they graciously let a greenhorn join their team. Back then, we grew intimidated by our initial plan (attempting the second ascent of the Wallator-Thomas Route) and opted for the logical line up the main face. Even then I realized the multi-faceted, craggy bulk of the Storm Mountain massif held many more potential lines. Ethan Berman and I had only met at social gatherings around Canmore but had never shared a rope. A good forecast and equally good vibes found us hiking into Upper Twin Lake to try a route several hundred metres right of The French Connection.

The day had started out on a broken trail to the base of the climb, an unlikely event in the Canadian Rockies for any mountain route, especially considering the route had remained unclimbed. Quietly thanking our friend Max Fisher for previously breaking trail (and spilling the beans on the first few pitches), we racked up in the dark. Starting up my block, the second pitch was surprisingly non-alpine. It was good waterfall ice with stemming off the quartzite, all in the dark. A small roof at 30 metres looked intimidating, but

quality cams were close at hand. The narrow gully above provided easy but very enjoyable climbing. When Ethan arrived at the second belay, the sun had risen across the Bow Valley.

Taking the reins, Ethan led several pitches of snow and ice until we stood below the second ice strip. Ethan picked a quality line up quartzite to gain the ice strip. Like the rest of the route so far, this pitch was moderate and well protected. After 70 metres, he belayed in the alcove at the top of the ice with no obvious line continuing above. A low-angled snowy chimney provided the only option, placing us on a broad ledge that ran the width of the face. The ledge offered a nice break to decide on our route, allowing my gaze to drift horizontally instead of vertically.

"I'm sure I could make it over to that easier ridge," I said, trying to ignore the obvious corner line above.

"If you want, we could try the line above. Worst-case scenario, we waste a bit of time rappelling down if it doesn't work out," replied Ethan.

"That looks way above my pay grade," I offered, looking up from below the boulder.

Fortunately, it was the right choice to try the corner above. The steep quartzite hid many of the useable features in the corner, which proved to be a 100-metre stem-fest with a brief crux. Since the corner was formed by two separate geological depositions, the two walls had distinctly different rock types—horizontal grey edges on the left with blocky yellow rock on the right. These two pitches were by far the most enjoyable climbing on the route. Low on the second corner pitch we left a gold Hex behind but brought everything else with us.

After exiting the corner, the true northeast face of Storm Mountain came into view. Ethan took over for two more pitches, leading us to a bump in the east ridge. This was certainly our highpoint—the windy ridge and surrounding scree were devoid of trees. It must be alpine climbing! One short rappel had us join the descent to Lower Twin Lake (the southern lake). We can certainly recommend staying high and trending skier's left, or risk similar vertical bushwhacking (and its inevitable reverse) as we did.

Waking up to snow the next morning, the lower ice strip was a continuous stream of spindrift avalanches—although not in the alpine, alpine-y all the same. A few days later, the storm had deposited 50 centimetres of fresh snow. Getting to share beautiful mountain routes with friends is one of the joys of climbing. Some technical alpine routes in the Canadian Rockies are in condition for a few days a year, or not at all. I've found this makes climbing these routes together even more special. Perhaps no further labels are required.

Maarten van Haeren on pitch nine of Eye of the Storm. Photo: Ethan Berman

Summary

Eye of the Storm (IV M6 WI5, 700m), east face, Storm Mountain, Canadian Rockies. FA: Ethan Berman, Maarten van Haeren, October 16, 2019.

Canmore Swingers Party

Niall Hamill

FEBRUARY 13, 2019, PITCH SIX. Fetching a medium knifeblade from my harness, I probed the tip of it along the seam in front of me, but anywhere the seam looked promising, it bottomed out. My crampon points were stemmed out on either side of the snowy, water-worn groove, sustaining enough body tension to swap hands on my ice tool, shake out and try to place the pin several times—mildly exhausting, to say the least. Having explored what was within reach, I placed the pin the best I could and climbed onward with resolve to not weight it. The pitch had become crumblier and devoid of good cracks than the terrain below and remained steep enough that I had to be mindful of every movement.

A little higher, I excavated a dirty notch for a finger-sized cam, and although it, too, looked far from bomber, I was now within reach of the next ledge. I felt a bit sick about the gear I was climbing past; the last actual good piece was an angle piton that I had welded in some 10 metres below. I quieted my mind of doubt and scratched my tool in the snowed-up kitty litter of the ledge until it found purchase. "So much snow today," I thought. The new snow was obscuring the features of the rock. It was the token sketchy Rockies' mantle digging around in choss for a decent hook. Stepping my feet higher, I mantled up on the ledge, but just as I bumped my foot up, both tools popped and I started to fall.

Taking a big gear-ripping whipper is not something to be proud of when you are climbing new terrain in winter, especially when the terrain is comprised of exfoliating limestone of varying quality. Luckily, we were not on a very large or remote face but on a medium-sized one just above Canmore, climbing a line visible from every coffee shop in town.

Having ripped both the knifeblade and the cam, I came to rest on the ropes—their eight-millimetre diameter stretching to their full extent. White noise blasted my senses and adrenaline pumped through me. I looked over at my partner Ethan Berman. He was just left of me at the belay, yelling nonsense, but as my senses sharpened again and the white noise subsided, I realized that he was demanding me to secure my headlamp, which was now dangling precariously from my helmet. My world came into focus like waking from a bad dream, except reality now felt like the bad dream. I had clearly taken quite a fall—more than 20 metres. My shoulder had impacted the wall and was in a lot of pain, but a quick check over the rest of my body revealed that I was otherwise fine and able. Through fits of stuttering, I apologized profusely to Ethan, who was now going to have to help a brother out. We communicated briefly on the phone with parks personnel and were offered a rescue, but we felt confident in our ability to get down. Ethan pre-rigged my rappel device at every anchor, and then led each rappel and provided a firefighter belay from below in case I should fail to slow myself down. After the final rappel, he shouldered the extra backpack to make the descent easier for me, and as we hiked down together, I cursed myself for underestimating the unclimbed choss.

Ethan helped calm me down. His rational and collected attitude was really helpful all the way back to the car, which was parked at Quarry Lake. My shoulder was in a ton of pain, and I knew I needed an X-ray, but first we stopped at 7-Eleven for pizza, as we had worked up quite a hunger. After scarfing down the entire pizza while chuckling over the absurdity of the situation, Ethan drove us to the hospital, where an X-ray would reveal a fractured scapula. Luckily it was just a hairline fracture with no real soft tissue damage to the shoulder. My arm was put in a sling for three weeks, and then another three weeks of rest, physiotherapy exercises and developing a stronger sense of patience. Times like this certainly test your patience, and the ultimate questions came up in mind over and over again: Why pursue this dirty and dangerous pastime? Why not go clip bolts or go skiing? Why pursue some obscure overlooked fissure in the side of a crumbling face

above town when there are far sexier established lines elsewhere to gain mileage on?

Near the end of my recovery, I attended a slideshow with the theme of climbing rescues and told my little story to a packed room at Canmore Brewing Company. Much of the core climbing community was there. I did my best to express how shameful I felt about the whipper and make light of the story, even though it was not a world-class attempt or a really major epic. I was asked the same question from a number of people: Are you going to finish the route? I didn't know how to respond. I was still very much an injured unit, and the easiest thing to do was to try and pass the unfinished route off to someone else before the face would inevitably melt out in spring.

Initially, I contacted the usual suspects, offering a case of beer if they could take it to the top and get my abandoned gear back for me. After all, who doesn't like a project that is 80 per cent finished? They could even clip the gear I left fixed on the scary pitch; it would be a cake walk. Even Ian Welsted and Raphael Slawinski, who had PhDs in choss wrangling and had climbed the other two mixed lines on the same face, wouldn't go for the dangled carrot.

"You should finish it yourself," Raphael responded.

In retrospect, I have to thank these guys for not taking me up on my offer, as that would have been the easy way out. Local climbers will tell you that if you can see a face from a coffee shop in town then it falls into the classification of "Canmonix." I personally know only about half a dozen people who have successfully climbed in winter conditions on these faces, and although the faces are not world-class in size or difficulty, the lack of established terrain, abundance of faceted snow and crumbling rock, lack of water ice, and storied history make even the most hardened individual question their sanity for pursuing new lines on them.

The first real attempt on the north face of Mount Lawrence Grassi was in the mid-2000s. Sean Isaac, Rob Owens and Kevin Dyck had attempted this

Ethan Berman on pitch five of Canmore Swingers Party during the first attempt. Photo: Niall Hamill

line to the base of pitch four and abandoned it. The initial three pitches had some bolts added by another unknown party and were eventually utilized in the free ascent of Tainted Love in 2015 by Raphael Slawinski, Juan Henriquez and Simon Colin [see *CAJ*, 2016, vol.99, p.127–129]. The first complete winter route up the face, though, was established the year before in December 2014. The Hole (Raphael Slawinski, David Lussier, J. Mills and Ian Welsted) climbs mixed terrain on the right side of the face [see *CAJ*, 2014, vol.98, p.14–19].

I had spent a lot of time staring at this face from my bedroom window, from my walk to work, from the climbing gym, from the coffee shop. I was constantly inspired, filled with a sense of possibility while spying possible lines through my binoculars. Now, injured and feeling the doldrums of inactivity, the face mocked me from my local haunts. I no longer felt as though I was choosing to pluck a line at my whim but that a line had plucked me—and deposited me in a dark place. At times, I wondered if I would ever go back up there. I doubted myself and my abilities and questioned what business I had being there in the first place. I felt unsatisfied, but that feeling came from my inability to let go of the idea of perfection. I observed my ego for what it was and found a sense of humility. With a greater sense of humility, patience was exercised and inspiration was reborn. I started to look at the face again with optimism and imagination.

Finally, the shoulder felt good again, and I clocked a handful of days on the sharp end sport climbing up at Echo Canyon through April. The sun, dry rock and friendly company re-stoked my flame for climbing. As I peered over at the still-frozen north face of Lawrence Grassi from sunny Grotto Mountain, I knew then that it had to be done. Even the dagger below the headwall, which we had dubbed the Canmonix Sit-Start, was still there, so I rallied up a partner. Ethan was back on the coast, so I enlisted my visiting American friend Ryan Richardson, selling him on the "five-star mixed line."

MAY 3, 2019. Ryan and I had eschewed the alpine starts of winter and in mid-morning drove to Quarry Lake below the face. In the parking lot, we bumped into fellow Canmonix enthusiast Adam Campbell, who was gearing up for a day of peak bagging on skis with his friend. Always a positive and genuine force of energy, Adam offered us his encouragement to send, and it helped ease the lingering doubts I still had about the heady climbing ahead.

Hiking through the busy park, we passed dog walkers, mountain bikers and wedding photographers. Curious glances were directed our way. I felt as though this was an authentic Canmonix experience—crossing paths with people of all kinds, our day-to-day lives imbued with the true romance of the mountains.

A few hundred metres up the approach, we met the snowline and joined ski tracks from the fan of Miners Gully, eventually arriving at the base of the direct-start dagger. Deciding that the dagger-to-curtain option looked too sketchy after the recent heatwave had melted out most of it, we slogged around it and began up the first few pitches that are shared with Tainted Love. The first pitch is graded a mere WI3 M4, but it certainly felt full on, stemming a gearless groove with a centimetre of grey ice pasted to the back of it. The possibility for a safe fall was totally out of the question. After the ice, the climbing is straightforward, bolt-protected drytooling for another pitch and a half. After these pitches, the route veers to the right up a buttress split by a prominent chimney. This is where the dirty fun of Canmore Swingers Party begins. The feature offers natural protection along the way, and sometimes just enough, through a variety of cracks.

I HAD GIVEN THE MONEY PITCH to Ryan, the selling point of the route for his needed partnership. The pitch is an undeniably fun and well-protected M6+ chimney/groove that narrowed to fist jams through a crux bulge. Ryan gave some effort and onsighted the pitch, and the cumulative energy was high as I met him at the belay. I followed up with a pitch of wandering M6, the rock quality and protection questionable in places, keeping the focus level high. The psychological crux pitch above was now my lead, and I had been afforded plenty of time to ponder my experience with it. Now, armed with a bigger rack and the knowledge of what lay ahead, I clipped a few cams right off the belay that had been left on the day of the fall.

"Going for the pink-point, eh?" Ryan joked from the belay.

I climbed through a crux bulge and above the mid-pitch snow patch then clipped the angle piton that had caught my fall. It was without a doubt bomber and reminded me that the age-old piton craft is still key for new-routing in the Rockies. I am certainly no expert at piton placing, but here I had been good enough. Further up, I equalized two Totems—modern cams that are more trustworthy than Camalots in flaring placements—which I clipped with a Screamer draw in case I blew the exit moves from the groove again. I exited the groove without incident and trudged up another section of snow to a stance below the next section of rock. Here, a fridge-sized obelisk of grey rock offered the perfect sling anchor for the final pitch. The satisfaction I felt at that moment couldn't have come from anything else.

Ryan arrived at the belay as the sun began to set. I handed him the rack, and he took off on the final pitch—a solid band of smoky-grey stippled limestone cut by a 5.9 off-width corner. He bumped our solitary #4 Camalot then hooked and mantled over a giant chockstone. The rope then slowed to a creep from my belay device for an hour as Ryan tunnelled up through a steep ledge of unsupportive, chest-deep snow to surmount a final rock step. I hunkered down in the dark as constant, wet spindrift poured over me.

Ryan completed the pitch and put me on belay. I climbed as quick as I could and joined him at the anchor, both of us damp to our base layers from the snow and exertion. In the darkness, our headlamps shone over a short snow ramp that led to a cornice right above us. Reasoning against tunnelling into the late spring cornice, especially as the true summit would be of no significance to the route, we pounded in a couple of pins and made quick work of the rappels, relishing in our little success before a civilized two-hour plod back to town.

A couple of months later, I was relaxing in a hot spring at White Swan Provincial Park with a beer in my hand. My girlfriend and I were sharing a campsite with her housemates from Canmore, a married couple about 10 years older than us. The women were sitting across from the men, having their own conversation. Somehow the subject of climbing, and specifically mixed climbing, came up in discussion between the husband and me, and we realized we had climbed with some of the same people. I mentioned my bad accident in the winter and made casual reference to the name of the route. All of a sudden and very seriously, the guy looked at me dead in the eyes and said, "I didn't know you were one of us."

I laughed, and said, "Yeah, I guess so," thinking he was talking about some kind of climbing kinship. He winked and cast his gaze across the pool, and I realized he definitely wasn't talking about climbing.

Niall Hamill on pitch six of Canmore Swingers Party during the successful ascent. Photo: Ryan Richardson

The north face of Mount Lawrence Grassi:
(1) Tainted Love
(2) Canmore Swingers Party
(3) The Hole
(4) Canmonix Sit Start
Photo: Will Skea

Summary
Canmore Swingers Party (M6+R 5.9 WI3, 300m), north face, Mt. Lawrence Grassi, Canadian Rockies, FA: Niall Hamill, Ryan Richardson, May 3, 2019.

Rack: 14 slings, two Screamers, single rack from #0.2 to #4 Camalot, doubles #0.5 to #2, single set offset wires, pitons (long KB, short LA), ice screws (including stubbies).

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 the 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, traversing right to the next gully feature. Follow this (easy but run out) to a stance with fixed wires left by the Isaac-Owens-Dyck attempt.

P4: M6+, 40m. Steep moves off the belay with good gear and hooks lead to a fixed angle. A second crux comes higher through a steep bulge with a fixed red wire. Follow the groove to a bolted stance.

P5: M6, 40m. Follow the groove as it traverses left above the belay. Be wary of the rock here as it slightly deteriorates. Follow the groove to a sheltered belay stance out left below a steep bulge of loose blocks with a fixed pin, wire and pecker.

P6: M6R, 40m. Step down and right of the belay and back into the groove. The first of two cruxes is better protected than the second. Be mindful of gear placements and save at least one Screamer for the runout above the snow patch. A fridge-shaped boulder provides an anchor.

P7: 5.9 M5, 50m. Climb the left-facing off-width at 5.9 (#4 Camalot and chockstone) or drytool around it. A steep snow ledge separates the second step of the pitch. Find a fixed two-piton anchor above.

Mount Saskatchewan Errata

David P. Jones

IN MY RECENTLY PUBLISHED GUIDEBOOK *Rockies West*, I unfortunately confused two routes on Mount Saskatchewan. The East Ridge route climbed in 1981 is a very distinct route from the Southeast Face route that I climbed in 2014, as shown in the guidebook, pages 261–263.

In 1981, Andre Kerkovius and Ken Parker approached camp from the Alexandra River Fire Road, directly up and over the saddle on the long southeast ridge. The campsite at GR973721 can be reached using an approach up Cleopatra Creek as described in *Rockies West.*

From a camp at the head of Cleopatra Creek, they gained the saddle on the southeast ridge, and then scrambled a short chimney. The ridge walk turned into easy scrambling over blocky terrain, until the first of a series of tall pillars. Near the base of the first pillar, they dropped through a hole behind a large chockstone into a gully on the west side of the ridge and descended slightly to gain a broad traverse ledge (well above the scree below). After 20 minutes of hiking westward along the ledge, it ended at a deep notch in the ridge, marking the end of the pillars. From the notch, they gained the ridge by way of a gully 15 to 20 metres to the climber's left of the notch. The gully was subject to rockfall. At the top of the 60-metre gully, a rubbly ledge was used to traverse back to the ridge crest, which was climbed on fairly solid rock and snow-filled gullies to the summit.

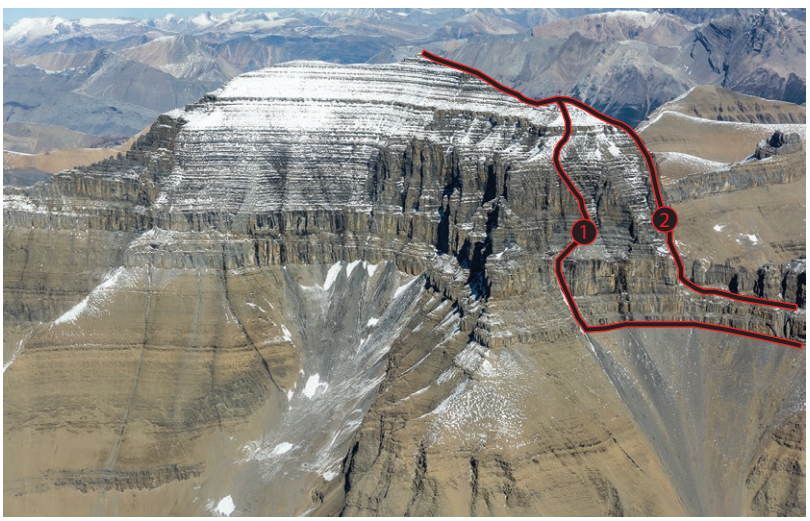
To descend, they followed the south face route down. All difficulties on the descent were avoided by traversing to skier's right until the correct gullies became apparent. The rappel gully from an earlier party (marked by an old sling) was downclimbed. A final traverse around the top of the scree delivered them back to camp.

IN 2014, WE APPROACHED as for the Southeast Ridge to the base of the blocky scrambling terrain described in the East Ridge route above. We contoured left (south and west) along the base of the cliffs at about 2,800 metres for 45 to 60 minutes to a couloir (well past the obvious notch in the walls above), which may be snow-filled. We then climbed up the shallow couloir to where it steepened and narrowed to a chimney. The chimney was stemmed to ledges on the left side until we were able to traverse right to a shallow rock ridge, which was less exposed to rockfall. The rock rib above was ascended for two pitches, and then we made an ascending traverse right across scree ledges and short rock steps towards a gully. A short crack (5.6) led to a good ledge, climbing right up to a protruding nose of rock in the gully, and then round the nose before heading back left and climbing easy ledges towards the summit ridge. We followed the east ridge to the summit.

We used a small selection of wired rocks and cams to a #3 Camalot. Descent was made by downclimbing and two rappels to return to the base of the route, culminating in a 14-hour round-trip camp to camp.

Summary

Southeast Face (AD 5.6), Mt. Saskatchewan. FA: Paul Allen, Carl Diedrich, David P. Jones, Fred Thiessen, August 5–6, 2014.



The south face of Mount Saskatchewan: (1) Southeast Face (2) East Ridge
Photo: David P. Jones

Rockies Report

Ian Welsted

THE 2019 SPRING SEASON in the Rockies began with a tremendous first ascent before quickly passing into tragedy that would bring world attention. At the start of April, Brette Harrington, Luka Lindič and Ines Papert climbed the direct east face of Mount Fay as The Sound of Silence (M8, WI5, 1100m) [see page 16]. This is the much contemplated direct finish to the 1984 east face line by Barry Blanchard, Dave Cheesmond and Carl Tobin. Where the original line skipped the final headwall, this year's team tackled some very steep, loose rock in heavy spindrift over two days. The route was dedicated to Marc-André Leclerc, who had intended to climb it previously with members of the team.

Two weeks later, the world climbing community was rocked by the news that we had lost three of the world's best alpinists [see page 27]. Hansjörg Auer, David Lama and Jess Roskelley were caught in an avalanche on descent from a new variation, which will forever overshadow their climb done in shockingly fast time on the east face of Howse Peak. This accident highlights the risk of the infamous Rockies snowpack.

Dylan Cunningham follows the second pitch of Ménage à Trois. Photo: Kevin Rohn

Two weeks yet later again, with an improved snowpack, Niall Hamill returned with Ryan Richardson to a project on Mount Lawrence Grassi, directly above the town of Canmore [see page 130]. Two and a half months earlier, Hamill had taken a gear-popping whipper from the route, fracturing his scapula and highlighting the other challenges to Rockies alpine climbing—loose rock and bad gear. The resulting Canmore Swingers Party adds a third route to the alpine-town crag.

Rock climbing kicked into gear in June. Kevin Rohn climbed new routes on two of the buttresses of Mount Rundle above Canmore. With Alik Berg, he climbed Coaches Corner (5.10-, 350m), following the right hand of three prominent corners on the east face of the fifth buttress. A few days later, this time with Dylan Cunningham, he did the first ascent of the Southeast Shoulder of the fourth buttress (5.10-, 350m) by following an obvious weakness to a halfway ledge, and then taking one of many options on unusually good rock. Also on Rundle, Patrick Delaney finished Supernova (5.11, 13 pitches) with Magda Kosior and help from Erik Schnack and Brent Peters. This partially bolted route starts just right of the classic Reprobate on EEOR.

Between June and August, Niall Hamill with partners Ryan Richardson and Cory Rogans spent many days on Peyto Tower, establishing three new rock routes to add to the previous year's Prairie Gold, offering an alpine crag of rare density and quality [see page 115].

An unusually wet summer prevented much action in the high alpine. In July, Simon Richardson and I climbed the moderate North Spur of Mount Phillips [see page 126]. In September, Alik Berg and I traversed the North Twin ridgeline, and on the way, completed the second ascent of the Son of Twin [see page 122]. A few days later, Alik Berg and Quentin Roberts

climbed the east ridge of Synge Peak (5.8, 600m). This is the ridge that faces the Icefields Parkway, on the mountain just south of Howse Peak, and is approached via Cirque Lake. Not satisfied, in the same month, Berg climbed the moderate north couloir of Mount Outram (WI3, 500m) with Maarten van Haeren.

When October came, the Rockies were at their finest with perfect alpine mixed conditions—frozen rock with plentiful new ice lines and no snow to speak of. The first ascents were to come quick and plenty. Niall Hamill and Patrick Maguire kicked things off with Tourist Trap (5.8 WI3, 500m). Starting directly from the shore of the famous Moraine Lake, this obvious line had partially been climbed by Dave Edgar and Jen Adolph. A compelling moderate, it was immediately repeated by numerous parties once it hit the Internet. In October, Grant Stewart and Ryan Patteson established the East Chimney (M5 WI4, 300m) on the A-A Buttress of Mount Athabasca, adding the fourth mixed route on this mini alpine crag [see page 120].

On the ice front, Justin Ward and Luke Harrison climbed Devil with an Angel's Face (M6 WI4, 80m) on the Ship's Prow to the right of the thin-ice classic Little Bobby Onsight. Quinn Turner and Ryan Keen climbed Candlewax (WI4 M4, 120m), 50 metres right of Candlestick Maker in the Ghost.

In a hanging valley to the north of Cirrus Mountain, Dylan Cunningham, Michele Pratt and Kiff Alcocer climbed two routes—Push-Up Bra (WI5, 110m) and Boisterous (M4 WI4, 110m)—in memory to Anna Smith who was one of the first ascensionists of The Marriage Proposal, which is in the same valley. Dylan states there is another ice line further up the valley, making for an added venue with a good concentration of ice lines.

Kevin Rohn made two trips to the east face of Boom Mountain. With Carl Dowse, he climbed the south-most gully through easy ground to end on a WI3 pitch, and then with Dylan Cunningham he

Patrick Maguire on the first ascent of Tourist Trap above Moraine Lake. Photo: Niall Hamill

climbed I Can't Believe a Chicken Fried This Rice (M5 WI4, 325m) on good quartzite to two-thirds height on the mountain. Dylan states that there remains the opportunity to take the line to the summit, along with two other similar gullies to the north.

Maarten van Haeren and Ethan Berman added a mixed line to the lower north spur of Storm Mountain, to the right of The French Connection and Extended Mix. Eye of the Storm (M6 WI5, 700m) climbed through thin ice and a 60-metre quartzite corner to the ridge below the East Ridge of Storm Mountain [see page 128]. This makes three longer mixed climbs in very close proximity. On the same day in the Stanley valley across from the headwall, Bruno-Pierre Couture and Jordan Farquharson climbed Darwin Arch (5.4 WI3, 470m) through moderate ground and steps above the tree island, finishing at a spectacular rock arch. In photos on the Internet there appears to be more mixed climbing potential in the immediate area.

Kris Irwin, Sebastian Taborszky and Doug Hollinger walked five kilometres up the regular hiker's trail on the north side of Mount Bourgeau to a 140-metre M4+ WI3. They have yet to name the route as they are planning to return to add a direct start.

Across from Scar Tissue in Storm Creek, Ruari Macfarlane and Doug Hollinger climbed Solid Airity (M5 WI3, 65m). On the last day of the epic month, Jasmin Fauteux, Niall Hamill and Quentin Roberts climbed the fittingly celebrated Halloweiners (WI5 M6, 70m), also on the sunny side of Storm Creek just downstream from the previous climb. The next day, Raphael Slawinski and Jen Olson added a direct start to the first pitch at M6. Taylor Sullivan, Gerry Dumouchel and Naoise Ó Muircheartaigh found a moderate ice and mixed line—Sick Day (WI3+ M2, 5 pitches)—above and between Arnica and Vista lakes on the north side of Storm Mountain.

On October 30, the usual suspects Kevin Rohn, Dylan Cunningham and Quentin Roberts teamed up for Ménage à Trois (M4 WI4, 190m) on an obvious large ice flow 100 metres left of Guinevere in the Protection Valley. A week later, in the same valley between Mon Ami and Wicked Witch of the West, they climbed Roommate Romance (M5 WI4, 280m) up a gash and ice goulottes onto an upper pillar. Also in Protection Valley, Kris Irwin and Mike Stuart discovered an amazing chimney system lined with ice on the lower west face of Castle Mountain across the valley from the classic Superlight. Superdark (M5, 195m) was done in seven pitches and was descended by walking off due to constrictions and chockstones in the chimney that would make rappelling problematic. It was quickly repeated and is bound to be a unique classic. Again, the concentration of new routes has created a world-class mixed and ice venue with over a dozen routes in a relatively avalanche-safe area. Protection Valley now makes a very good alternative to the snowier Stanley Headwall and Storm Creek Headwall.

November provided a bit of a breather—perhaps the protagonists were tired. Willis Brown and Seth Timpano climbed two mixed pitches in Protection to the left of the ice route Paradis Perdu, joining the ice at mid height. And finally, later in the month, Raphael Slawinski was involved in two new lines at the Storm Creek Headwall. To the left of Buddha Nature are three discontinuous ice strips. The Sphynx (WI5 M7+, 125m) was completed with Niall Hamill, who had started up it independently, and to the left is Banana Peel (WI5 M6, 110m), done with Juan Henriquez and Maia Schumacher.

This amazing spree of early winter new routes goes to show what is possible in the Rockies when conditions are favourable. A low snowpack together with a wet summer resulted in prime conditions. It also shows that it is imperative to wait for good conditions, but when they come, many routes can be climbed, often in areas of high concentration and quality.

Kris Irwin on pitch three of Superdark in Protection Valley. Photo: Mike Stuart

The East

The Land of Kluskap

Greg Hughes

WE PUSHED OFF THE SEA BOTTOM with our paddle blades and launched our vessel into the gently rolling Chignecto Bay. After much preparation, I was both excited and apprehensive to finally begin the kayaking portion of our expedition to Cape Chignecto Provincial Park in Nova Scotia. Our plan for the first day was to paddle the coastline on the western shore from Spicer's Cove to Big Bald Rock Brook. The total paddling distance of 15 kilometres made me shudder as I hadn't been in a kayak for more than 10 years. The bay is known for having strong currents associated with the highest tides in the world, not to mention my biggest concern—wind. Sharing a wide-beamed double kayak with my climbing partner Luc Gallant, the craft felt very stable. We cruised out to the channel, taking advantage of the current generated by the falling tide.

WITHIN HALF AN HOUR OF LAUNCHING, we passed the rock formation known as the Three Sisters. These are 20-metre-high spires of volcanic rock that jut out of the water like torpedoes ready to be launched to the moon. The Mi'kmaw, the Indigenous people who have inhabited this land for more than 11,000 years, have developed complex stories and legends about these rock formations. This oral history provides a glimpse at the Mi'kmaq culture as it has been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. According to Mi'kmaw legend, Kluskap was the first *l'nu*, the embodiment of the Creator in the physical form. Kluskap is said to have had three sisters who delighted in tormenting him. They were shapeshifters, possessing the ability to take on the form of other animals. One day while Kluskap was hunting a moose, they turned themselves into wolves and chased the animal from the land into the bay. When Kluskap discovered what they had done, he became furious and responded by turning them to stone. They remain to this day, standing next to the cliffs, towering over Chignecto Bay near Eatonville Harbour.

Not long after passing by the Three Sisters, the waters calmed and our cadence increased. The largest coastal ice formations on the western coast of the park soon came into view. This is where the kayaks became indispensable. Our vantage point was perfect, and we were able to plan out the next three climbing days based on our scouting of the coastline. There were at least five impressive formations that sparked our interest. All looked to be about 90 metres in height and ranging in difficulty of what we thought was between WI4 to WI6. After landing at Big Bald Rock Brook, we used the high-tide window to transition to climbing, setting up camp and organizing gear. Craig Norris was along to provide expedition support and film the climbing. His help in these areas was critical to the expedition.

Despite the limited amount of time, we were able to climb one route on the first day. It was a two-pitch WI4+ that began with a steep curtain, transitioned to a long angling traverse and finished through a wild umbrella roof, a very common feature along this section of the park. That evening, we agreed the plan for day two should be to tackle the best route we had seen while paddling. It was

Luc Gallant (leading) and Greg Hughes on the first ascent of Mui'n. Photo: Craig Norris

a large complex formation of ice umbrellas and structures that looked like pipes cut lengthwise on varying angles and stacked on top of each other. It was located in an amphitheatre about 30 metres wide, poised one pitch off the shoreline. There were three distinct lines of ice in the amphitheatre connected by a low-angled bowl of ice at the bottom. This spilled over to a 25-metre curtain that flowed down to the beach. It could be climbed from the ground up, but not until the tide had substantially receded, as there were pinch points north and south preventing access from the shore.

We rappelled down the amphitheatre to the bowl, and then to the beach. Luc racked up for the first pitch, a stout WI4+ that proved more difficult than first thought, with running water and chandelier ice providing some challenge. I followed up to the belay and got ready to lead the second pitch. I gazed up at the wild formations and did my best to mentally prepare. The first 20 metres of straightforward steep ice allowed me to focus and be ready for the crux section. As I entered the umbrellas, I became mesmerized by the beauty of the formations and revelled in the movement through three-dimensional climbing. The afternoon light poured through the complex arrangement of ice that seemed like a vertical maze. I searched for a way through while finding protection in the most critical places. Just when I needed it most, I had the opportunity for a solid ice screw. As I exited the last of the wild features and climbed through the lower-angled ice to the top, a mix of emotions followed. I was sorry it was over but relieved that the delicate structures held and allowed me passage.

Luc Gallant on the first ascent of Pot'p. Photo: Craig Norris

I belayed Luc up, and after a brief celebration we remembered that Craig was still on the ground and our tide window was rapidly closing. We descended to the shoreline and climbed back out, this time in a party of three, with Luc taking the line on the right to get us back to the top. As the sun was setting, we looked across to the other side of the amphitheatre. The third and final line of ice beckoned, but we were out of time. This one would have to wait for another day.

The longest, consistently steep line on the western coast lay about an hour's walk from our cabin. Our descent to the base of the ice was complicated. We walked down 3rd- and 4th-class terrain to a short cliff just north of the route. Typical for the area, the 3rd-class terrain was choked with dense underbrush that slowed our progress. Fortunately, we had some time to kill as the water was still lapping at the base of the climb when we descended the last 30 metres to the shoreline.

A few minutes later, the tide had receded enough to allow me to find a spot to drop the ropes and belay. The left side of the route was more intact, so Luc began there, and then transitioned right to ice with better protection. The climb faced due north, and the ice gave the expected feedback. There were no one-swing sticks today. It was colder as a front was moving in and the winds were up. I drew comfort in the puffy jacket that I had pulled

from the bottom of my pack. Luc climbed the first pitch, and then put me on belay. I followed on sustained WI5+ climbing, and the 40 metres of vertical climbing took me from chilled to pleasantly warm. We quickly regrouped at the belay, and Luc finished the climb by leading the second pitch with his usual style—flowing over the ice like he was a part of it.

Craig captured some of the best imagery of the trip as Luc completed the second pitch. The rope came tight on me, and I knew it was time for me to move. I took down the anchor and climbed up to meet Luc. After checking our watches, we knew we still had enough time in our tide window to complete another route, so we rappelled back down to the beach and moved quickly to the last line in the cluster we had spotted on day one. It was much more moderate than the last, so we were able to complete it in the amount of daylight we had left. We topped out just as the sun set over the bay. Another beautiful route to complete a perfect day of climbing.

Craig's photos embody the climbing experience unique to this area, and on our walk back to the cabin, they helped me realize the connection to the land and its history. As we discussed possible route names, it occurred to me that this connection was important. How could we assign arbitrary names of our own design to these stunningly beautiful formations on land that did not belong to us? We are guests and should pay homage to the Indigenous people who were here long before us. There was something different and special about this area. The Mi'kmaw history had already provided us with names: Kluskap, the first *l'nu*; Mui'n the bear; Lentuk the deer; Tqoqwej the wildcat; and Put'p, Kluskap's companion, the whale, who carried him across the ocean. Hopefully this will contribute in some small way to keeping the stories and culture of the Mi'kmaw people alive and well.

Greg Hughes (leading) and Luc Gallant on the first ascent of Kluskap. Photo: Craig Norris

Summary

Tqoqwej (WI4+, 85m), Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, Nova Scotia. FA: Luc Gallant, Greg Hughes, March 2, 2019.

Kluskap (WI6, 80m), Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, Nova Scotia: FA: Luc Gallant, Greg Hughes, March 3, 2019.

Pot'p (WI4+, 85m), Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, Nova Scotia. FA: Luc Gallant, Greg Hughes, March 3, 2019.

Lentuk (WI4, 75m), Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, Nova Scotia. FA: Luc Gallant, Greg Hughes, March 4, 2019.

Mui'n (WI5+, 80m), Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, Nova Scotia. FA: Luc Gallant, Greg Hughes, March 4, 2019.

Le Pèlerin

Jean-Philippe Bélanger

CETTE VOIE A ÉTÉ NOMMÉE en l'honneur de notre septième périple annuel dans la grande région de la Côte-Nord. D'abord, en février 2016, la ligne a été aperçue pour la première fois depuis un train sur le rivage de la rivière Moisie. Lorsque ce train nous transportait tous vers le fameux M51 de la Rivière-Nipissis, nous avons entrevu deux chemins de gel d'une grande esthétique. Il était donc très clair que ce « nouveau secteur » mériterait nos efforts lors d'une saison ultérieure.

Un an plus tard, Charles et moi, accompagnés de Maarten van Haeren, planifions une expédition vers ce secteur. Suivant les conseils de notre bon ami Michel Séguin, nous remontons la rivière Moisie de nouveau vers le nord, mais cette fois-ci à motoneige à partir de Sept-Îles. Les traîneaux sont chargés : tente prospecteur, poêle à bois, essence pour le retour, et ainsi de suite. Malheureusement, cette tentative échouera péniblement, puisque les voies s'avèreront inexistantes à cause de mauvaises conditions.

Le Pèlerin
Photo : Charles Roberge

Au cours des hivers suivants, le projet devint moins prioritaire en raison de l'incertitude sur les conditions et de la difficulté d'obtenir des informations.

Les choses ont changé rapidement en février 2020 lorsque nous avons vu passer sur les réseaux sociaux une photo du secteur prise par Simon Migneault, un grimpeur de la région, que nous remercions au passage. Notre vieux projet est redevenu prioritaire !

Au cours des hivers précédents, la géographie du Québec nous avait grandement forcés à nous adapter, car pour continuer à découvrir de nouvelles cascades d'un calibre intéressant, certaines aptitudes en motoneige hors-piste et en cartographie GPS étaient devenues essentielles. Nous avions donc rafraîchi nos connaissances des cartes de la rivière Moisie, et ce, toujours avec l'aide précieuse de notre ami local. Cette fois-ci, une visite de reconnaissance était de mise pour vérifier les conditions de l'approche de 35 kilomètres et des voies afin d'éviter les erreurs du passé.

C'est donc par un beau soleil et un bon –30°degrés C que nous partons pour cette reconnaissance en motoneige le 21 février dernier. Le trajet en forêt se déroule bien malgré les 15 derniers kilomètres sur la rivière, puisqu'il n'y a aucune trace sur la neige. L'approche se termine par une montée de deux kilomètres en neige profonde le long du lit d'un petit ruisseau. Après 30 minutes de raquette, nous apercevons les deux voies. Elles sont tellement splendides que nous en sommes heureux! Enfin, nous commençons réellement à y croire.

Le lendemain matin, la température est parfaite : –5° degrés C et grand soleil. Le Pèlerin se trouve au centre d'un promontoire rocheux où se trouve un magnifique dièdre rempli de glace. Pour accéder au dièdre, une première longueur facile derrière une grande écaille de roche permet de rejoindre la glace. La longueur

suivante est pour moi : une veine de glace raide découpée au couteau et assez étroite au fond de ce dièdre rocheux. J'ai étiré la longueur jusqu'à 60 mètres pour atteindre la vire centrale et construit le relais bien à l'abri (WI4+, 60 m). La troisième longueur est pour Charles, et il s'agit du passage clé, qui est une des plus belles longueurs de glace variée que nous ayons grimpée : 55 mètres en 5+. Plus technique que physique, elle est de toute beauté, se protège très bien et, avec les conditions qui sont en notre faveur, se révèle mémorable.

De retour au pied, nous portons notre attention sur la voie qui se trouve dans l'amphithéâtre à environ 100 mètres à gauche du Pèlerin. Un couloir de neige y donne accès. La longueur suivante me donne froid dans le dos, et elle est pour moi : 60 mètres verticaux ou surplombant, le tout en choux-fleurs géants, colonnettes et crottes de glace. Arrivé à la base de cette longueur, je m'équipe rapidement et je repars sans trop me donner le temps de rationaliser ma position, pour éviter de changer d'idée !

Après 25 mètres très délicats avec très peu de protection fiable, et devant un passage dans lequel la possibilité d'une chute est bien réelle, je prends la décision d'abandonner. L'Orpailleur, nom préalable que nous avons donné à ce monstre, devra malheureusement attendre. Il y a au moins deux lignes en glace très difficiles qui sont à ouvrir dans cette cathédrale hivernale.

Ce dont je retiens du 22 février est que nos passions méritent patience et persévérance. La région de la Côte-Nord offre un potentiel quasi illimité pour ceux et celles qui oseront investir du temps et de l'énergie et accepteront les échecs comme les réussites.

Résumé

Le Pèlerin (WI5+, 160 m), Rive ouest de la rivière Moisie, Québec. PA : Jean-Philippe Bélanger, Charles Roberge, 22 février 2020.

Jean-Philippe Bélanger dans la longueur du dièdre du Pèlerin. Photo : Charles Roberge

Foreign

Ardang

Bryce Brown

IN AUTUMN 2019, my wife, Sunny Twelker, and I spent three weeks in Nepal's remote Limi valley and completed the first known ascent of Ardang (6,034 metres). As it often goes, the journey was so much more than the summit: the very best mule-men and local cook; trekking 120 kilometres without seeing another tourist; meeting the local elders to ask permission to climb their sacred mountain; getting invited as guests of honour to traditional Buddhist weddings; finding a natural hot spring at base camp; exploring multiple possible routes up the mountain; summit views of sacred Mount Kailas; and finally, a death-defying Jeep ride back to civilization.

Our original plan had been to head back to the Khumbu for some unfinished business on Cholatse [see *CAJ*, 2017, vol.100, p.169], but we found the area to be increasingly overwhelmed with tourism and more commercialized. Local Ang Tsering Lama would be joining us this year, and he suggested an exploratory trip to the Humla District in the far northwest of Nepal instead. A small trip with only three climbers in a virtually untouched area seemed like a perfect alternative to the crowded Khumbu valley.

The Limi Valley lies within the Humla District in Nepal's far northwest corner on the border of Tibet. It is considered a restricted area, and all foreigners need a special trekking or climbing permit to visit. Limi is one of the least explored areas of Nepal Himalaya, seeing only a handful of trekkers (and even fewer climbers) annually. We found some limited information on previous exploration in the Humla area, the most informative being Julian Freeman-Attwood's review of the area in the 2019 *American Alpine Journal*. There are dozens of 6,000-metre peaks and countless challenging 5,000-metre peaks, most of which are unclimbed. In 2014, the Nepalese government opened 104 new peaks for climbing, including several in Humla, and eliminated the need for a permit for summits below 5,800 metres.

When we arrived at the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation in Kathmandu, we had a short list, but we didn't have a specific peak in mind to climb. We were handed a copy of Mountaineering in Nepal: *Facts and Figures 2019* that contained an appendix with open peaks and another with unclimbed ones. Some cross-referencing left us with the only unclimbed open peak in the area—Ardang, also known as Chyoro Ri (6,034 metres, 44R 559826E 3341008N). We filed the paperwork, paid for the permit and had a briefing with a liaison officer to discuss our plans. We had no photos, only the elevation, a basic trekking map and Google Earth to plan the approach and get some idea of the mountain's major features—but, we were on our way.

THE JOURNEY INTO HUMLA from Kathmandu starts by flying on a jet to the Indian border town of Nepalgunj, and then on to the capital of Simikot (2,910 metres). This flight is on a small propeller plane to a short runway right in the middle of the village. There is no road connecting the rest of Nepal to Simikot (the closest road is 86 kilometres away), so the alternative would be to walk several days of lowland undulating foothills. However, there are two newly constructed

Sunny Twelker near the top of the rock band on summit day during the first ascent of Ardang. Photo: Bryce Brown

Sunny Twelker approaches the northeast face of Ardang.
Photo: Bryce Brown

rough roads from Tibet, one starting at the Tibetan border town of Hilsa, located 95 kilometres to the west, and another from the Lapcha Pass, 90 kilometres to the north. This has led to an influx of cheap Chinese goods, which have undoubtedly improved the life of locals, but has also led to a disappointing amount of trash, mostly RaRa noodle wrappers and pop bottles.

When we landed in Simikot on October 25, we were met at the airstrip by local operator Nima Lama of Sun Valley Resort. He had arranged the majority of our basic food and fuel, so we only needed to bring a few treats and dehydrated mountain meals. Supplies were basic, given Simikot's isolation, so our dinners mainly consisted of *dhal baht* (rice and stewed lentils) supplemented with cabbage, cauliflower and potatoes. Breakfast and lunch was flour for chapati and eggs. Thankfully, we also had peanut butter. To take care of feeding the crew, Nima arranged for a young cook, Dipok, to trek with us. To carry all of our food, kerosene, and camping and climbing gear he hired two mule drivers—Molam and Rupsing—along with their seven mules.

After two days of organizing supplies and packing in Simikot, our little six-person party hit the road for the five-day 75-kilometre trek northwest to base camp. The trek started quite low at 2,850 metres in the dry foothills and climbed steeply over three successively higher passes—Chhubong Lagna at 3,850 metres, Sechi La at 4,530 metres and finally, Nyalu La, topping out at 5,001 metres—which was perfect for acclimatization. For better or for worse, the centuries-old trails have recently been replaced by rough roads, which are basically dug into the hillside with an excavator without much apparent forethought to engineering or retaining walls. Most of our trek was along these new roads, making life much easier for the mules but much dustier for us. The upside to the road was that occasionally a vehicle would come along and offer a lift. The bone-jarring ride of hanging on in a trailer behind a farm tractor sure beat another 800 metres of dusty switchbacks, and the exhaust may also have helped simulate an even higher altitude for acclimatization.

When we finally reached the high pass of Nyalu La, we were treated to the first views of the southern aspect of Ardang. We had read about a previous attempt on the south face by French guide Paulo Grobel in 2013; however, by 2017, British mountaineers Emily Ward and Mark Bielby found the face to be completely dry and very chossy with a broken glacier below. Based on their report and Google Earth exploration, we had already decided to trek around to the north side and start near the summer settlement of Tholing (4,152 metres).

Crossing Nyalu La pass, we dropped into the desolate Limi Valley. Other than the rough road and the occasional summer herder's camp (*kharka*), there were no settlements until the northern Takchhe Khola valley. Unlike more

developed trekking areas in Nepal, this valley sees very few tourists, which made it quite a privilege to visit. Molan and Rupsing kept the mule train rolling for the five-day trek with more than 4,300 metres of elevation gain and 3,100 metres of loss. As we learned, mules have a tendency to try and return home at night, which led to a few entertaining headlamp hide-and-seek games for the boys.

ONE OF THE CRUXES of climbing a new mountain is deciding where to start. We weren't sure what the northern side of Ardang would look like, but we knew there would be more snow and hoped that would offer better climbing. Based on topography, we decided to first explore the Ning Khola drainage on the northeast aspect of the mountain. On October 31, we settled into a base camp just across the river from Tholing, beside a local yak herder's camp. He was taking his turn tending about a hundred yak that belonged to the nearby village of Dzang (or Jang) a few kilometres away. Every morning he would release the yak up the dead-end valley, and every evening he'd round them up off the hillsides and back into their pasture. Unfortunately, Ang Tsering flared up an old knee injury on the trek, so he was not able to climb with us but stayed on as support at base camp. The boys relaxed, and Sunny and I spent a few days exploring up the drainage up to about 5,200 metres, looking for a potential route. We found some options, but there was lots of moraine and steep loose rock that would have to be negotiated to reach the final snow and ice cap. In the meantime, word reached nearby Jang that foreigners were there to climb. Village representatives visited base camp to tell us that their mountain was considered sacred, and we were not allowed to climb it. We did not want to dishonour local wishes, so we visited the village elders. We were welcomed into their traditional Tibetan-style home with an afternoon of drinking butter tea and *chang* (fermented grains). Luckily, Ang Tsering spoke decent Tibetan, and we were able to engage in some negotiating. We found out that the valley we had been exploring had been the site of several recent yak kills by snow leopards, which obviously concerned them—and us! Apparently, there were also some rare rock formations up the valley that previous foreigners had been very interested in. When we explained that we were not there to take any rocks and were willing to abandon the valley, we seemed to assuage their concerns. They granted us permission to climb providing we pay a "local tax" of about US $150 and a camping fee to support their community. We were more than happy to have our money stay in the village rather than get lost in the bureaucracy of the government in Kathmandu.

We were asked to climb on the northwest aspect above the village instead, which was one of the options we had previously considered as a plausible and interesting route. We moved base camp closer to the village to an area called Tato Pani (hot water), so named for the natural hot spring there (44R 559566E 3345764N). It turns out that the water

Sunny Twelker rappels the rock band after summitting Ardang. Photo: Bryce Brown

temperature was a perfect 38 C, and the villagers had built a concrete tub that could be filled for a soak. They even sold us some imported Chinese Lhasa beer to go with the tub. We wondered if we would ever get up on the mountain with the hot tub and beers available daily at base camp.

The elders in Jang also invited us to join two weddings that were happening over the next week. We were welcomed as guests of honour, ushered to the head table, and served endless beer, *chang* and whiskey. Many locals came over to say hello and practice their English. Their original Tibetan culture has remained in isolation in their small pocket of the Himalaya, which has preserved the traditional Bön (pre-Buddhism) practices. The formal wear and jewelry was gorgeous, especially for the women. Their brightly coloured tops were draped with a cape of intricately embroidered mountain-goat skin and complimented with giant gold earrings and *dablams* (jewel-box necklaces) inset with turquoise and other valuable local stones. They were quite welcoming of photos, and they shared many giggles over the digital display on my camera. We spent several days involved in the traditional multi-day wedding ceremonies, and we stumbled back to our base camp well after dark more than once. It was an honour to be able to witness this small gem of preserved, ancient Tibetan customs.

With the blessing of the locals (and slightly hung over), we finally were able to start climbing. Our chosen route involved an approach up a moraine valley to a large snow ramp that led to a col then up a rocky ridge to the summit snowcap. We made our first acclimatization carry to sleep above 5,000 metres near the base of the snow ramp. The route was dry, making the moraines relatively straightforward in sneakers. After receiving nearly a metre of snow, the lower boulder field was much more work on our second trip with big packs. On November 11, we bumped Camp 1 up to a protected spot below the right side of the snow ramp (5,200 metres, 44R 560091E 3342338N) and took in some gorgeous sunset views looking out over the Takchhe Khola.

We had worried that the snow ramp could be difficult if it was deep and unconsolidated, and indeed we found it to be waist to chest deep in some areas. With only the two of us with big packs at high altitude, it was very slow going. The favoured technique was to dig with our hands until we could get on the surface with our knees, compact with our knees until we could get our feet under, and then stomp it down. Repeat ad nauseam. We only managed 450 metres of vertical gain above Camp 1 in a full day's work. We also were concerned about avalanche risk on the lee-loaded 35-degree slopes, so we carefully picked our way through the right side, trying to stay close to the safety of the lower-angled edges and rock walls. We established Camp 2 at 5,650 metres just below the right edge of the col (44R 559732E 3341625N). Again we had amazing sunset views, this time looking northwest to the Nalakankar Himal, including the southwest aspects of Gurla Mandhata I (7,694 metres), the highest peak in the range and the 34th highest peak in the world. On the horizon directly north, we could see the sacred Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar.

On November 13, we headed out early for the summit. It was only 450 metres of gain from high camp, but it was exhausting trail-breaking in deep snow and route finding through the loose rocky cliff band to reach the upper snowcap. We spent a lot of time trying to get views of this section from lower down, speculating about how difficult it might be. We knew it would be the crux and brought a variety of gear in preparation. Luckily, it turned out to be very reasonable and mostly low angle (approximately 40 degrees) with only one 50-metre steeper mixed section that required a few pieces of protection (M4 AI3).

The upper snowfield was passable with some further wallowing, which we were well accustomed to at this point. After climbing a final steep snow ridge, we found a small cap of loose rock leading to the summit, which required some delicate mixed climbing for 10 metres, and then we were on the top. Although the climbing had not been that technically demanding, the effort of all the unknowns and exploration sunk in as we absorbed the breathtaking views of the expansive Tibetan plateau and the hundreds of unnamed peaks on the northern edge of the Himalaya. We felt incredibly privileged to be there in that moment and gave our respect to the sacred mountain by hanging prayer flags, burning incense and throwing blessed rice.

We retraced our steps, rappelling a few pitches

on the rock band, and reached high camp again just as it was getting dark. We were exhausted from the day and still needed to find the energy to melt snow and cook dinner. Overnight, another storm rolled through and erased our hard-won uptrack, necessitating the digging of another trench on our way down. The lower boulder field, which was dry on the first carry, now had calf- to knee-deep snow hiding all the leg-breaking (or human-engulfing) holes and made carrying large packs very treacherous. Thoughts of the hot spring and beers at base camp kept us motivated and steadily moving downward. At the base of the moraine valley, just above base camp, we saw an orange tent. We went to investigate and found Emily and Mark, the British mountaineers from 2017, who were attempting Ardang again. We chatted about the route for a while, wished them luck and continued down, arriving back in base camp to a great meal prepared by Depok and a few celebratory beers in the hot tub.

One solid night's rest at base camp and we were on the move again, starting the three-day trek west to the Tibet border town of Hilsa. It was a stunning hike down the Takchhe Khola, along steep cliffsides that plunged hundreds of metres to the river below. We passed through several ancient villages, including Halji, which hosts a thousand-year-old monastery. The rough road has been pushed through most of the way and only a one-day walk through steep cliffs remains. Once complete, it will definitely change the way of life in this valley for future generations.

When we arrived in Hilsa, thanks to Ang Tsering's language skills, we were able to hire a local Jeep and driver back to Simikot. Just outside Hilsa, we had already stopped to change a flat tire. To be fair, the old tire was used well beyond its best-before date and had the metal cords showing through the worn-out tread. At least they got every last kilometre out of the rubber as possible. The 12-hour 95-kilometre ride was pretty nerve-wracking, driving down the single-track loose road that was bulldozed out of the steep hillside. Jeeps are still quite a novelty for most, and it seemed everyone wanted a ride. At one point, we had nine people and all our gear jammed into the little Jeep designed for five. Our driver looked to be all of 16 years old, and he seemed to love racing along the narrow road while blasting his Nepali hip-hop and texting on his cell phone whenever he had a signal. There were definitely a few times I had my eyes shut and was whispering prayers to anyone who would listen. We arrived in Simikot after dark and enjoyed local Khukari Rum and warm showers. The next morning, we loaded into the small propellor plane bound for Nepalgunj and on to civilization.

Sunny Twelker and Bryce Brown on the summit of Ardang.
Photo: Bryce Brown

AS I WRITE THIS NOW, settling back into real life, we reflect on the trip we had and are overcome with what a grand adventure it truly was, a difficult thing to appreciate at the time with all the distractions of basic daily survival. The trip was full of emotional ups and downs, suffering and reward. We wish we had been able to slow down and enjoy it all to the fullest, a good reminder to be present and live in the moment. Thank you to everyone who helped us reach the summit, especially Ang Tsering Lama for the exploration idea and co-ordination of all the trekking and climbing logistics, the boys, Molam, Rupsing and Depok, and Nima Lama, our local agent in Simikot. Also, a special thanks to Chris Tomer for spot-on forecasting of the brief summit window. It is certainly a trip we will never forget.

Summary

North Face (M4 AI3), Ardang (6,034 metres), Himalaya, Humla District, Nepal. FA: Bryce Brown, Sunny Twelker, November 11–14, 2019.

La Esfinge

Jo Bulmer

THE SOUND OF FALLING woke me up—falling rocks, falling snow and the vertiginous sensation that often accompanies an abrupt awakening. I lay still, cocooned in my sleeping bag, waiting for my heart rate to slow and my mind to piece together the sensory input and remind myself of where I was. I was high in the mountain range of the Cordillera Blanca. My climbing partner Heather was tucked into her sleeping bag beside me, waiting for the beep of an alarm to rouse us into action. Despite 10 days of climbing and hiking at altitude, my lungs still hadn't adjusted to the thin air. If I hadn't been awoken by the sounds of the mountains, I would have surely been startled awake by my own breathing.

We had come to this remote and beautiful place hoping to climb a 950-metre granite monolith aptly called La Esfinge (or The Sphinx), topping out at 5,325 metres above sea level. We had a one-month window in which we ambitiously intended to climb both the classic line up the face and a 5.12+ line beside it, as well as establish a Biffy Bag system for park users. Upon our arrival in Peru, the weather had been cold and unseasonably stormy up in the mountains, necessitating a 10-day delay before we could even get up close to our planned objective. We had approached to the base camp the day before. It was a dizzying steep hike with biting winds whipping down from the surrounding mountains, leaving us fumbling for zippers and pulling our jackets closer. As we trekked higher, we had caught our first glimpse of La Esfinge—a striking wall of golden granite surrounded by jagged snow-drenched peaks. She was breathtaking.

Our original intention was to jump straight into our proposed objective, a 5.12+ line named Cruz Del Sur, but I was nursing some injuries, and during our acclimatization time, we had run into numerous climbers who had regaled us with tales of climbers getting lost on the wall for days, unable to rappel and forced to shiver through the night on small ledges. I was nervous. Heather is a strong climber, but her experience in the mountains is limited. This was my first mountain trip where I was undoubtedly the more experienced partner. After discussing our options, we decided to start with a one-day ascent of the 1985 Original Route (5.10d/11a), which is about 18 to 22 pitches, depending on variations.

I had woken only moments before the alarm and busied myself with boiling water as Heather stirred beside me, pulling on layers of clothing and double checking the rack. You could feel the anticipation quietly buzzing in the tent.

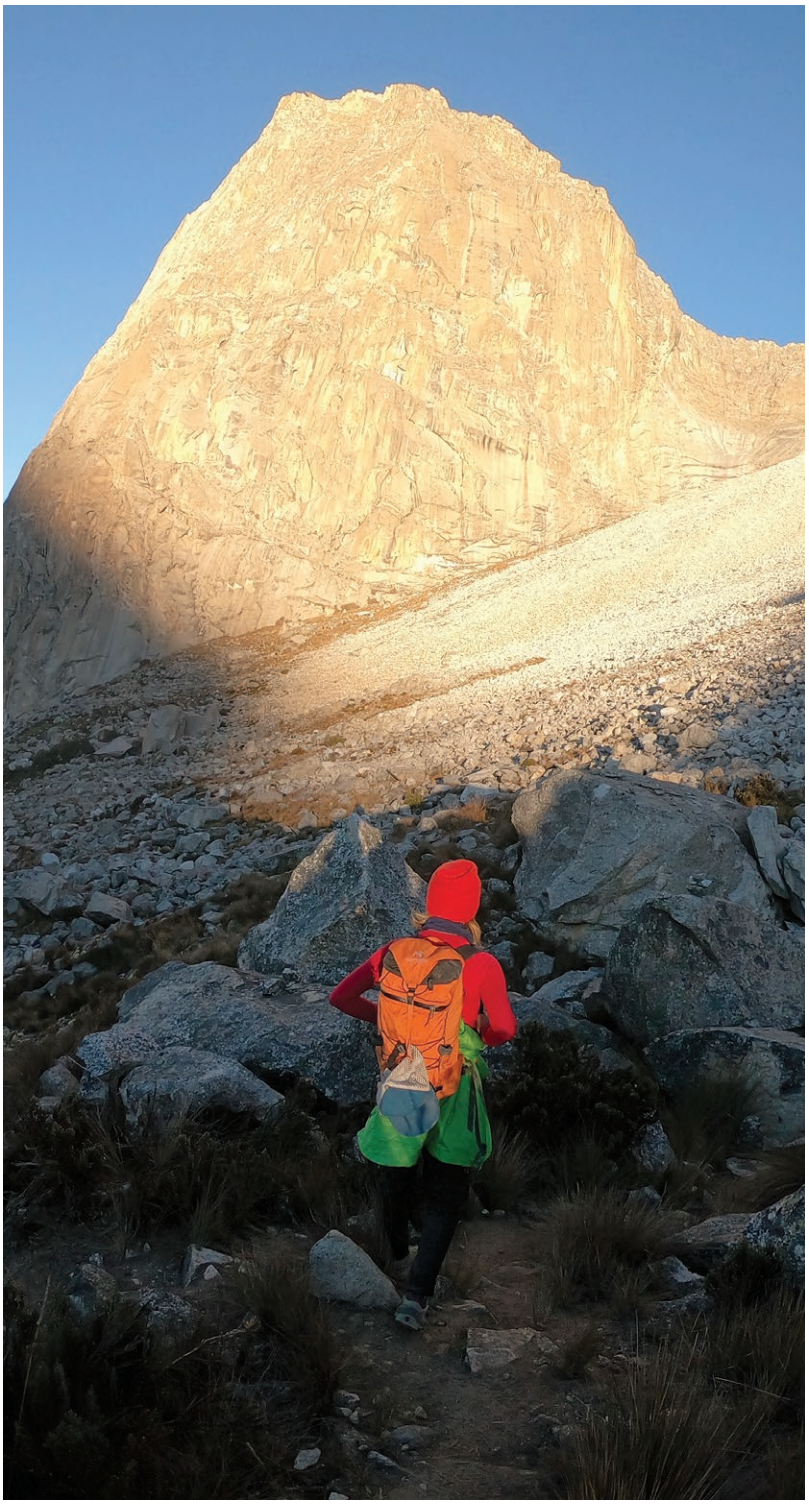
After a somewhat casual approach across a labyrinth of talus and boulders, we were on the wall and climbing by 7 a.m. Heather took the first lead since she is the faster climber and we needed to set a decent pace if we wanted to avoid the fabled benighting that seemed so common on this face. The granite was perfect, and climbing in an amphitheatre of 6,000-metre peaks was incredible. Everywhere we looked were corniced ridgelines, monstrous glaciers, pointy summits and vast snowfields. As we worked our way up, the sun began to warm the wall, defrosting our fingers and providing what was to be the only few hours of sun we would feel.

We climbed in blocks, only pausing to switch out when a break was needed. The crux was between pitches five and seven and consisted of crack systems that weaved their way under and over a series of small roofs. The climbing was surprisingly burly for the grade, and the snot-slick granite feet left me feeling more and more insecure as I traversed out under the roof systems, climbing faster than I normally would in an effort to quiet the unease that always seems to sit a little higher in the throat when I am in a remote area.

The climbing went quickly, and the movement was grin-inducing. Laser-cut cracks, small chimneys, dihedrals and burly roof encounters led us to the large ledge known as Repisa de la Flores at

the top of pitch nine. It was around 11:30 a.m., and we were ahead of schedule, but the sun was moving fast and it looked like things were about to get significantly less pleasant. The upper half of the wall, though not as difficult, had a fearsome reputation for parties getting lost, and with no option to rappel after pitch nine, we had to trust our route-finding skills. I was more comfortable with the wandering alpine terrain, so I led through the next section, trying to follow a vague right-trending corner system that had appeared far more obvious when looking up from below. We lost the sun a little after 1 p.m., and though the rock remained great, the cold was impossible to ignore. The movement felt stilted climbing in layers of puffy jackets and wearing socks in climbing shoes, and my energy levels began to dip. We continued to make our way upwards, generally climbing a full 70-metre rope length before stopping to build belays. The long pitches meant that in addition to the cold, I was battling rope drag that forced me to use my whole body weight to keep the rope from pulling me off the slippery stone. Around pitch 17, I was struggling. The previous few pitches had been convoluted, and I had started placing less and less gear in order to lessen the rope drag. My mind felt sluggish, I knew my decision making was becoming questionable, and the cold was exhausting. Heather joined me at the belay, smiling despite the cold and making her usual light-hearted comments. It was clear that her morale was in a better place than mine. She graciously took over the lead, and chatting happily, took off up the near-perfect granite.

At around 4 p.m., we could see the summit nearing. Heather perked up, high on the adrenaline of any 25-year-old on their first alpine adventure. We hustled up the last few pitches into the welcoming summit sunshine. We sat on top of the summit, nibbling the last of a Clif Bar and taking in the dramatic panorama of ice-capped peaks. After 10 minutes of de-thawing, it was time to find our line of descent. Three double-rope rappels led to a hike-off down a steep slab and some scree sliding before



Jo Bulmer approaches La Esfinge.
Photo: Heather Lightfoot

Jo Bulmer on pitch three of Cruz del Sur.
Photo: Heather Lightfoot

joining back up with the main approach trail.

We stumbled into base camp by 8:30 p.m. and were met with warm tea and hugs from a group of friendly Ecuadorians. We huddled around, sharing stories and route beta until we could no longer fight the cold and retired to the promise of warmth from our sleeping bags—hungry, freezing and tired but fulfilled and buzzing with adventure.

AFTER A FEW DAYS' REST and a somewhat unsuccessful trip into the climbing area of Antacocha, we restocked, repacked and headed back into La Esfinge. The rock quality and overall beauty of the mountain range was hard to resist, and we were excited to try our hand at some of the more difficult climbing. This time we had our eyes on our original objective, the hardest free line on the wall—Cruz Del Sur, a 16-pitch route of engaging granite face climbing on natural protection located left of the Original Route. The climb was originally graded at 5.13a, but general consensus puts it at 5.12b.

We were able to connect with two parties who had previously climbed the route. One party had taken three days on the wall; another had fixed the crux pitches to make the route in a day. Our experience on the Original Route was enough to know that sleeping on the wall was not an option for us. Even with warm sleeping bags, the nights were too cold, and with the added wind exposure,

a shiver bivy was not something that we were willing to take on. In terms of climbing speed, we are pretty aware that it was not our strength, but going quickly seemed like the only option, so we decided to go for it in a day.

On our first attempt, we retreated after the first pitch due to dizziness and lack of breath. The altitude meant a sleepless night, and the two-hour hike to the base of the wall felt like a marathon. After a quick discussion, we retreated back to base camp for a long evening of watching the headlamps of other climbers bob in the dark, zigzagging their way across the upper pitches of the Original Route.

The next day brought hot weather, causing the mountains to crumble. Our nightly soundtrack was loud enough to have us jump out of our tent on a few occasions to ensure that we weren't in the path of trundling boulders.

On the following day, we returned to the wall and were again met with brilliant climbing: seamed-out dihedrals; technical face climbing; and interlacing crack systems that took us up the first five pitches (including the crux pitches). Polished granite and hard climbing between spaced gear meant that our usual pace came to a sluggish crawl as we worked out the moves and tackled the heady runouts. It became evident that we would need to fix the lower crux pitches to have any hope of climbing the route in a day, but as the shade began to creep down to our position on the wall, we made the call to back off.

The hike back to base camp felt long. Though we had climbed well and made good decisions, it was hard not to be disappointed. The climbing felt well within our ability, but the cold was limiting our options.

Later that evening, as we scarfed our way through our chocolate rations, the disappointment began to ebb as we reflected on our day. We felt grateful for a partnership that allowed us to make decisions that weren't compromised by pride or ego.

THE OTHER ASPECT OF OUR TRIP was to focus on some of the water contamination issues facing the area. La Esfinge base camp was an idyllic grassy spot situated beside a small runoff stream, which served as the only water source, yet also appeared to serve as the base-camp washroom. The more we spoke with local guides, climbers and service providers, the more we became aware of the scale of the problem. In relation to the trekking routes and more popular base camps, La Esfinge actually seemed pretty clean and respectfully used.

In many popular areas, there was a serious disconnect between users of the park and the local population who relied on the booming adventure tourism industry but were concerned with the current waste-management situation. Though our intention had been to build a Biffy Bag dispensary at La Esfinge base camp, after talking to locals and spending time up at the base, it didn't seem that this would be the smartest use of our resources. Instead we met with local organizations, cafes and hostels that had a strong trekking and climbing client base and who were active in promoting leave-no-trace ethics. We discussed what they felt would be the best way to distribute the bags. In conjunction with these organizations and businesses, we put up posters to draw people's attention to this issue and notify them where they would be able to request free Biffy Bags for their trips into the mountains. While this was by no means an ideal solution, it seemed the most realistic. Even though we felt that many visitors may not be receptive to using Biffy Bags, at least seeing the posters may open dialogue and make people think about their current mountain ethics. The organizations and businesses that offer free Biffy Bags are: La Casa de Zarela, Californian Cafe, Cafe Andino (courtesy of the American Alpine Club), The Lazy Horse Inn and Casa De Guias.

Acknowledgements

This trip was supported by the Alpine Club of Canada's Jen Higgins Grant for Young Women.

Summary

Original Route (V 5.10d/11a, 950m), east face, La Esfinge, Cordillera Blanca, Peru. One-day ascent: Jo Bulmer, Heather Lightfoot, July 30, 2019.

Cruz del Sur (VI 5.12b, 800m), east face, La Esfinge, Cordillera Blanca, Peru. Attempt: Jo Bulmer, Heather Lightfoot, August 7, 2019.

The Ibiza Club Weapon

Luke Dean

At the beginning of December 2019, Tyson Martino, Nathan Hart, Ethan Somji, Sam Tucker and I left Calgary for Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Our objective was to bolt and free climb a new route on a striking prow formation called La Popa. We were driving two terribly unreliable vehicles—a 1997 Ford F150 and a 2003 Dodge Caravan. Whether or not both vehicles would make it to Mexico was a steady source of anxiety for the whole team. That said, the worry was warranted, because neither vehicle made it to our point B in one piece. The drive took five days. We drove as fast as our vehicles would let us, and when we stopped, it was only to pee, sleep in a parking lot or go to the UFO Museum in Roswell, New Mexico. Every night we were booted out of our chosen parking lot, there were far too many close calls with wildlife, and over the course of the 40-hour drive, both vehicles sustained damage that would cost more than $1,000 to fix. It was truly the most stressful week I have ever endured on a road trip.

On December 5, we crossed the border into Mexico, drove to Monterrey for groceries, and then onward to La Ciénega de González. Cienega is a tiny town just outside of El Salto Canyon. Our initial plan was to use this town as a home base for when we were not working on the wall. Cienega is a small place with only a few stores and taco stands and a population of about 275 people. We planned to go back and forth to La Popa, because the actual

Nathan Hart aids pitch three of The Ibiza Club Weapon.
Photo: Luke Dean

nearest town to our objective, Los Remotos, has a population of only 31 and very few amenities. Our idea was that good food, water, cragging and friends would be a lot more accessible if we stayed in El Salto between wall missions.

However, upon arrival in La Ciénega de González, neither of our vehicles were roadworthy. The truck was making a concerning knocking sound, the brakes provided zero stopping capability, there was an exhaust leak, and we had already spent a lot of money on a new radiator in Salt Lake City. Within the last hundred kilometres of the drive, one of the suspension coils totally exploded on the van. It was in two pieces when we checked it out at our campsite in El Salto. All along we were hoping that the uncertainty of our mission would end with the repair of our radiator in Utah, but the dilemmas didn't stop. We were in Mexico, but our objective was still a few hours drive from our current location, and numerous back-and-forth commutes would be necessary. Without a working vehicle to make it from El Salto to La Popa even once, we were forced to re-evaluate.

La Ciénega de González neighbours the well-known sport climbing area of El Salto. We knew there was climbing there, and we knew there were untouched big walls too. Of all the places we could have ended up unable to leave, we were very fortunate it was there. After a few days of checking out the cragging, the team took a hike through the El Salto Canyon. We hadn't walked past the known crags yet. We explored a few of the walls that we saw along the way. Some character-building bushwhacking was required to make it to the base of any of the unclimbed walls. Once out of the creek bed, all of the hiking was through very dense cacti and extremely frustrating. We lost most battles to the vicious jungle. Eventually we came around a bend to discover a 250-metre cliff that was steep, streaked, covered in tufas and closer to the creek bed than anything we'd come across thus far. Finding this wall was an enormous upheave of our spirits and morale. The decision to not pursue our initial objective was a very disappointing one to make. However, selecting this wall as our plan B was easy and unanimous. Tyson, Nathan and I touched base with a local route developer to learn that the wall was unclimbed and that a new line would be a welcome addition. After a couple of days of preparation and marching gear to the base, we left the ground for the first time on what would become The Ibiza Club Weapon. Over the next 13 days, we established the line entirely ground up, bolting every pitch on lead. We used several aiding tactics to gain ground. Very few sections of the entire 250-metre wall were freed during the bolting process, and hardly any of the bolts went in from free positions—the climbing was just too consistently difficult. We knew that overall the line looked challenging. That was what we wanted. That was why we chose this cliff. We did not realize, however, just how consistently stacked our route would end up being. We placed the last bolt of the seven-pitch route on Christmas Eve, after almost a solid two weeks of work. Our first day to climb on the route was a perfectly timed present on Christmas morning.

During this time, we were dealing with a local mechanic. The decision was made to try and have the van repaired. The suspension was the only real problem. It took about two weeks of hounding the mechanic for him to actually finish the job. The reason for the rush was because he parked Sam's van across a driveway, blocking two other vehicles in, and then took the wheel off. There was some tension building around the position of the van and how it was preventing two other parties from using their vehicles. At long last, the van was finished. It felt absolutely crucial to go into town and get groceries the next day. We had been surviving on corner-store food for our first two weeks in Mexico. The diet was typically tuna and mustard on bread for at least two meals a day. The day following our van's repair, Sam and I planned to drive into town, against the advice of many. La Ciénega de González is at the top of a very steep, narrow, winding road that traverses in switchbacks across a cliff. It's about 35 kilometres long but takes over an hour to drive in either direction. It's truly a mountain road that is paved at a grade that would not be legal in Canada or the United States. We were advised against driving down that day because it was pouring rain and there was water running down the road.

"Let's just take it slow. We'll be fine, man," Sam said. I was totally on board. All we could think about was good food, and this mission was for all five of us.

We had made it about 15 minutes of the way down when Sam crashed his van into the rail that was guarding the drop off on one side. We were pinballed to the other side of the road where we hit the cliff. The van was dumping all kinds of fluids, and the bumper was barely hanging on. We just sat there and looked at each other for a second. We were both stunned but mostly in disbelief of just how ironic this was. We didn't say much; we just pulled the van off the road as best we could and stuck our thumbs out to hitch a ride back up to town. We got a ride up in the back of a pickup truck. Riding back there in that weather was actually a more horrifying experience than our car accident. When we got back to the camp, Sam broke the news to everyone. Nobody was mad, just sorry. We thought maybe if we could get the bumper out of the way of the wheel then we could drive it back up and have the mechanic tell us what he thought. The next day, with much better weather, Sam and I hopped into the back of another pickup that was heading down the hill. We didn't get out of the truck until we were all the way at the bottom of the hill. We didn't get out because we never passed the van. It was gone. We just sort of sat there as we drove past the empty pullout where the van had been. Nobody knows what happened to it. Did someone drive it away? Did they fix it first, and then steal it? Did it get towed down that hill? Overnight? Nothing made sense. Now it's a cold case.

AFTER A FEW DAYS OF CLIMBING on the route, it was apparent that one pitch was significantly more difficult than the rest. Although the other technical pitches—most of which are hard 5.13—are not to be overlooked, it was apparent that the real make or break of freeing the route was going to be the steep and enduring fifth pitch. Pitch five clocks in at 5.14b. It's a relentless pitch with multiple hard boulder problems and one poor rest, culminating with one very large foot-cutting throw to a slopey pinch. This move follows 30 metres of hard climbing and is very low percentage. Over the next few weeks, everyone on the team was up on the wall trying all of the pitches and belaying Sam as he worked out the intricacies of pitch five. It took several days for him to link from the belay to the slam dunk at the top. The final jump move would be where he fell from on countless attempts after that. Nathan was the first to send the second pitch, which is 40 metres of sustained slab, achieving a solid 5.13 grade. Tyson and I both put up worthy fights on the fourth pitch, a dead-vertical 5.13+. Ethan unlocked several downgrade-worthy sequences that we all used to make impossible-feeling pitches settle in at the grades they are now. The experience of having our own wall to piece together was special.

Eventually, weeks after the redpointing process began, Sam climbed the fifth pitch without falling. There were one or two more days of rehearsal on the wall, and on the morning of January 22, 2020, Sam set off on his first redpoint attempt of our route. With the rest of the team supporting, he climbed pitches one through four clean and on lead, and then Sam and I spent a night on our portaledge at the pitch-five belay. We made good time climbing through the first four pitches and sat on the ledge from about 1 p.m. onward. The boredom provoked the creation of a large rope swing, and we spent hours swinging out over the canyon. I forgot my food, so we split Sam's container of pasta. Luckily, we had a huge bag of candy that heavily exceeded our pasta ration, or else we would have been starving. The next morning, I belayed Sam as he brushed the holds and warmed up. I lowered him down, and the next time he left the ledge would be the most important burn of his trip. We were prepared to spend as many nights as we needed to make a continuous ascent, but it really mattered to Sam that his first attempt on pitch five was as good as he could make it. It was obvious that he was feeling very nervous. Climbing almost an entire pitch only to fall at the last difficult move does not lend itself to a high volume of attempts per day. Our departure date was exactly one week away, and this also played into the pressure Sam felt. We had filmed just about everything that we were doing on this trip, but just before we were going to put someone in a position to film this attempt, Sam requested that he would prefer to not have a camera rolling while he went for it. He said that cameras make him more nervous, and he really wanted to just climb this pitch without any added pressure. Sam proceeded to redpoint pitch five. I think for all of us that was the real summit of the climb. Everything depended

on this one pitch, and when it was over, we all felt extremely relieved. We hollered, yelled and woo-hoo'd, and a few other climbers who came to watch from the ground joined the celebration. That was the moment when it felt like we had a real route and no longer a project. I supported him as he redpointed the remaining two pitches, with his only fall being at the last few moves at the top of pitch seven, which he then lowered after finding better beta and sent clean to conclude the first free ascent of The Ibiza Club Weapon. The route breaks down into seven pitches, which weigh in at 13b, 13b, 12b, 13d, 14b, 12b and 13a. The lower pitches are vertical and very technical, and the upper pitches change in character to steep and pumpy climbing on excellent rock and some very large tufa features. There is potential for more test pieces of similar difficulty and quality, with the upper headwall holding potential for more hard and excellent routes, or perhaps variations to our line. The rock quality on the lower third of the wall is not quite as good but can be bolted and climbed safely with some cleaning. The sport and multi-pitch climbing in El Salto is a very worthy endeavour for anyone looking to spend the winter high in the mountains on some excellent limestone.

THE TRUCK STOPPED STARTING, so we had a new starter motor replaced. The truck also stopped stopping, so we had the mechanic work on the brakes. His resources were limited. He would show up to our campsite on an old motorcycle with a few tools, and then leave and come back again with a few more. The language barrier was also a hindrance. Most of our interactions with him looked like a game of Pictionary. We would try to draw the parts and issues on paper. He would draw his solution, and jot down a number of pesos he wanted as payment. For the entire second half of the trip, he was fixing one issue after another so that we could leave by February 1. On February 2, the truck was ready. We had to stop a few times on the hill due to smoking brakes, but aside from that, it was a relatively uneventful journey home. Some new tires in El Paso gave us a bit more confidence as we pushed further north, and a couple of nights spent touring buffets on the Las Vegas strip felt rejuvenating after all of the mustard and tuna sandwiches.

Sam Tucker on pitch five of The Ibiza Club Weapon.
Photo: Luke Dean

On February 9, we made it home. On March 11, Sam sold the truck for $500.

Summary

The Ibiza Club Weapon (5.14b, 7 pitches), El Salto, Mexico. FA: Luke Dean, Nathan Hart, Tyson Martino, Ethan Somji, Sam Tucker. FFA: Sam Tucker, January 22–23, 2020.

Aegir

Charlie Long

I first heard about climbing in Torsukattak Fjord from Ben Ditto in regards to a trip he took in 2010 aboard *Dodo's Delight*. "If you have a boat, you can just choose whatever looks good," he told me. Naturally, when the opportunity to sail on the *SY Sofie* from Nuuk to Iceland presented itself this past spring, I enthusiastically joined the team.

On July 13, 2019, after several months of planning with Albert Bjørnerem and Sondre Misund, the skippers of the *Sofie*, Andreas Widlund, Rune Harejo Jensen and I flew to Nuuk. Nuuk is Greenland's capital and largest city, located on the southwest coast of the country. The waterfront is a colourful collection of houses and buildings, with the imposing peak of Sermitsiaq Mountain towering above it.

We spent a day provisioning and studying the weather forecasts and charts. We chose to sail north instead of sitting in Nuuk for a week while the wind blasted from the south. Sailing up wide fjords, giant walls surrounded us as we navigated around occasional sea ice to an anchorage at Igdlúnguaq. The forecast claimed we had a five-hour window of fair weather before a likely rain event. Andreas, Rune and I jumped in the skiff and motored to a landing on shore to take advantage of the opportunity. We climbed and descended a probable new route on an unnamed 1,250-metre peak near Qajuuttaa that we called Blod på Tann (5.8, 450m). In Norwegian, *blod på tann* means blood on the tooth, which seemed apt. This first taste of Greenland left us champing at the bit. We made it back to the boat completely soaked.

Charlie Long solos the exposed gendarme ridge on pitch nine of Å Dæven.
Photo: Andreas Widlund

When the winds turned in our favour, we set sail south and crossed to Nanortiliuk. After four days at sea, we landed for a half day of provisioning and visiting the tourist information office. When we set sail in the afternoon, we were escorted by a number of pilot whales and had good winds all the way to the beginning of Prins Christian Sund. There were a few hours of darkness each night, and we had to stay vigilant looking for growlers—an iceberg that barely breaks the surface of the water. Looking up from the fjord, I imagined that the dark walls would look like soaring cracks and golden granite the following day. In the morning, we made an inspection of the north end of Torsukkattak Fjord and were dropped off on the west side of the fjord in the same drainage that I believe the 2010 team entered from. We chose a route that looked like it would be a good introduction to the area and set our alarms for 4 a.m.

The route we followed was the most obvious splitter that touched the bottom of the 280-metre wall and went all the way to the top in five pitches. We climbed onsight up a spur that gates the greater cirque that we were able to see for the first time. The terrain was broken, but the rock stayed good and the angle eased with ledge-y climbing up to 5.9 for three rope-stretching pitches. At that stage, we took the ropes off for a few pitches of choose-your-own-adventure climbing. I chose a splitter hand crack high on the arête. The lichen-covered slab after the crack was less

appealing but not hard. To my surprise, there was no big ledge but rather a series of gendarmes on a knife-blade arête. Evaluating my options, I realized I had the big pack full of all the jackets that we weren't wearing, because we were getting scorched by the sun, while Rune and Andreas had the ropes and the rack. Thankfully the ridge was solid, and the pitch was one of the most memorable ones of my career. Andreas, who had scrambled around the top of the arête with Rune, snapped some remarkable photos of the knife-blade arête. A 40-metre pitch of easy but very exposed climbing led to the top of the gendarme ridge followed by a very long pitch to the top of the tower. We were on top of our first real route together as a team in Greenland and staring straight at our next objective—Peak 1303.

We descended our route via a col on the west side of the mountain, all the while inspecting the northeast ridge of Peak 1303 as well as we could. It looked to me like a shorter, harder version of the classic Becky-Chouinard on the South Howser Tower in the Bugaboos. An arête rose from an easily approached shelf to a remarkable hole in the ridge. We spotted a number of crack options, some steeper and cleaner than others. I was pretty sure it would go. During the next four days of bad weather, we studied photos we had taken and prepared ourselves to return to Peak 1303.

Alarms went off again at 4 a.m. It was completely still out, except for the sound of the water draining from the glacier down the long, wide slabs to the fjord. The approach from our bivy was gentle, and we arrived at the base of the route in half an hour. I led the first block of two pitches. We followed the most obvious crack features, staying on the north side of the ridge past the remarkable hole. The first three pitches flowed together as a fun, aesthetic 5.9 with the odd move of 5.10. The fjord was completely flat, creating an incredible reflection on the water. From there, the angle of the mountain kicks up and the climbing turned steep and demanding. Rune broke a hold on the sixth pitch and whipped unexpectedly. Meanwhile, the still morning was turning into a very windy day. Snow was falling on neighbouring peaks, and we wore every layer we had. On top of the arête, we met with the headwall—the biggest question mark we had noted from the ground. The headwall turned out to be much better than expected with vertical to overhanging rock via a continuous crack, which would go in three long pitches. I aided seven or eight metres on micro-nuts and C3s on the eighth pitch, which Rune followed free, suggesting a grade of 5.12b.

Charlie Long on pitch 10 of Å Dæven.
Photo: Andreas Widlund

The headwall topped out on a pre-summit ledge with one more rope-stretching pitch of steep and absolutely splitter crack climbing. A pair of duelling off-widths took us to the summit of Peak 1303. We topped out, completely chapped by the wind and minds blown by the adventure we were experiencing. It was the biggest new route any of us had climbed.

We descended via the east ridge. The wind had

Ægir on Peak 1303 in Torssukatak Fjord. Photo: Andreas Widlund

blown our sleeping bags away, but we found them without too much problem. We moved camp and sheltered under my yellow tarp next to a small ice patch. Dehydrated and starving, Drytech beef stew and crushed potato chips never tasted so good as the wind raged. In the morning, we ran down the slabs to the fjord and the awaiting *Sofie*, exhausted from our 19-hour push the day before. We boarded the boat in high winds. Bow in, *Sofie* picked us off the edge of the fjord—a very impressive move by the skipper, who did not want to use the skiff due its motor not functioning. We motored to Narsaq Kujalleq, the buggiest town we visited in Greenland.

With the beginning of August approaching, we began to feel the time crunch of our departure for crossing to Iceland, so we quickly ventured back out, this time to the opposite side of the fjord. We approached the most obvious line on the mountain. The sun was bright and the heat was intense as we shuttled the gear to the base and gorged on the snow from seasonal snow patches. We bouldered some and made notes on the route. Only two days after our last mission, we were back in business with a new objective. At 4 a.m. the alarm went off, and we started the stove. At 6 a.m., we were at the base of the route.

Andreas had the first block of leads. Steep and wild off-width cracks started the route, and small roofs and hand cracks continued higher up. We found rap anchors for the first five pitches up to the obvious halfway ledge. After three and a half more pitches of probable new climbing, we ran out of cracks to protect, and lacking the mental psyche to go for it without the safety of a drill and a bolt, we turned around. The two 80-metre climbing ropes we brought made the steep rappels go quickly with only one major snag. This was a classic line in the area, and it had definitely been previously climbed at least twice as we found the rappel anchors had been backed up once already. We couldn't find any information on this route in the Nanortiliuk tourist information office, so at the time we called it the Lundeklubben of Torsukkatak, named after a classic three-pitch 5.10 in Lofoten we thought it was similar to, only the Torsukkatak version being much, much better; however, since our return, we have discerned that it was most likely climbed by a UK and Irish team in 2005.

Acknowledgements

The whole climbing team is immensely grateful to have had this adventure and thankful for ÆGIR expeditions undertaking this voyage with the *Sofie* from Ålesund to Ålesund. This trip was supported by Grade 7 Equipment, Varri AS, and Suunto Norge, providers of high-quality equipment and service.

Summary

Blod på Tann (III 5.8, 450m), northwest face, unnamed peak (64.230403° N, 50.878629° W), Igdlúnguaq, Greenland. FA: Rune Harejo Jensen, Charlie Long, Andreas Widlund, July 16, 2019.

Å Dæven (IV 5.11a, 1000m), southeast face, unnamed peak (60.081789° N, 44.518867° W), Torssukatak Fjord, Greenland. FA: Rune Harejo Jensen, Charlie Long, Andreas Widlund, July 24, 2019.

Ægir (IV 5.11c C1, 600m), northeast ridge, Peak 1303 (60.075020° N, 44.61194444° W), Torssukatak Fjord, Greenland. FA: Rune Harejo Jensen, Charlie Long, Andreas Widlund, July 30, 2019.

Tengkangpoche

Quentin Roberts

TUCKED AWAY IN THE UPPER KHUMBU region of Nepal, the north pillar of Tengkangpoche rises for more than 2,000 metres from its base to its 6,487-metre summit. The Impossible Pillar, as it has been dubbed, has been attempted several times over the years, but none with a huge amount of success. Juho Knuuttila, Tim Banfield and I were lucky to be supported by the John Lauchlan Award for a trip to make an attempt. It would not have been possible without that support, and we are very grateful.

Juho, Tim and I flew to Nepal in September 2019. We acclimatized on Mount Cholatse before making our way to Thame where we would base ourselves for the attempt. We climbed from October 11 to 16 and were able to make a new high point on the route. Despite this, we were about 100 vertical metres from the top of the pillar, and 500 metres from the summit, when we were turned around. Our attempt stood on the shoulders of fellow Canadians Matt Maddaloni, John Furneaux and Paul Bride, who had obtained the previous high point in 2006.

FURNEAUX, MADDALONI AND BRIDE made their attempt in capsule style, spending 14 days on the wall. They recommended going lighter, so we did. Much lighter. We made the first alpine-style attempt, taking food for seven days, a small tent, pitons, a double rack, a single rope

Quentin Roberts one third of the way up the headwall on Tengkangpoche. Photo: Juho Knuuttila

and a six-millimetre tag line. We didn't take a portaledge or bolts, a method that proved effective for us. We got within 30 metres of the 2006 high point on our second day on the route and were at our highest camp on the fourth day.

Team sickness and a very late monsoon meant that we only had one window of good weather to attempt the route. We had initially hoped that Tim would be able to join us to help with the complexities of the Himalayan big wall and to document the experience, but for efficiency's sake, Juho and I decided that we would have the best chance of success as a team of two. Although saddened by this, Tim not only agreed but also gave me his new sleeping bag, which I promptly destroyed. Tim then decided to run the Three Passes loop. The loop is 125 kilometres long and crosses three passes, all of which are over 5,300 metres. People usually take 20 or more days; it took Tim 30 hours.

Our first day on the pillar, Juho and I climbed from 4,400 to 5,400 metres. We used a ramp system on the northwest side to gain ice systems on the lower slabs. The climbing was straightforward, albeit occasionally run out, but never harder than M6 in the Rockies. We reached the headwall on our second day and fixed the pitch above, 30 metres below the 2006 high point. The terrain above the 2006 high point was harder and more sustained than anything beforehand, and we were forced to slow down.

THE CLIMBING ON THE HEADWALL followed a shallow corner system with incipient cracks, and it took all the tricks in the toolbox. I occasionally deviated from the corner system using my rock shoes to navigate small edges on the compact stone. At one point, I was stuck at a roof with no gear. I climbed into it then down again three times before committing to the moves—a heel hook and powerful lock-off between two small edges and a sloper. As I pulled the roof, I looked down to see the rope running in giant loops between desperately placed pins and stuffed-in cams. Further below I could see the string of knifeblades in the aid seam at the start of the pitch. There's a certain power that you get when you've got Chomolungma (Everest) and Makalu to cheer you on. I built the belay as fast as I could and put my boots back on to let my toes thaw.

We climbed like this on the headwall—pitch after pitch after pitch. I'd lead and haul my bag, and Juho would jug with the heavier pack. Eventually darkness came, and we were still in vertical terrain—no ledges, no seats, no comfort. Now it was way too cold to use rock shoes, and the slightly lower-angled terrain meant that spindrift ice was stuck to the cracks. We kept on climbing through the dark. After two more pitches, I found a small blob of snow in an alcove. We were both exhausted and had no clue how much longer we had to go to surmount the headwall, so we decided to dig a scoop in the snow and stuff our butts inside.

The roof of the alcove pushed my torso into my knees, yet the relief that came from being still for the first time in 20 hours far outweighed my discomfort. Juho made water as I slung my forehead with some cord and let it hang. The relentless spindrift found its way into our bivy bags and froze our boot-covered toes. With cramping muscles, we emptied the bag only for it to fill up again. As the hours passed, the moon shadows morphed deliriously into a frozen sunrise. We roused ourselves through the spindrift, and Juho took the rack and climbed into the deluge.

We were relieved to find that the terrain above was notably easier. Well-protected mixed climbing on ice runnels provided proper fun. Juho made quick work of it and I followed, joyfully enjoying the only two hours of sunlight to grace the pillar every day. Those two pitches took us to the snow ledge at the foot of the last 200 metres of vertical terrain. We set up camp below the upper wall and decided to rest for the remainder of the day and the next. Above the upper wall, we would have another 400 vertical metres of complex (not to mention scary) ridge climbing to the summit. It felt like we were close, but there was still so much uncertainty ahead.

The ensuing pitches were the hardest of all. It was demoralizing, and the climbing was especially taxing on the mind. The ice we had

The still-unclimbed north pillar of Tengkangpoche. Photo: Quentin Roberts

hoped to climb was snow pasted to the rock like windslab, and underneath it was blank stone. The compact snow was climbable as long as it didn't break, but it broke easily, and when it did, the whole section of slab slid in giant plates—potentially catastrophic if our weight had been on it. It felt risky to climb on this terrain, and eventually it became too much. We were turned around by an unprotectable and featureless section of rock that was covered in blobs of snow. We were only 20 metres from a ramp system that we had hoped to gain. Bolts could have solved the issue, but we wanted to climb the line in pure style, or not at all.

It would be truly spectacular to climb a wall of this scale and difficulty, leaving no trace of one's passage. It would also be disappointing to see such a beautiful feature marred by bolts due to the weakness of the climber. I was excited to return this year and attempt to finish the upper pillar via a different feature. Sadly, the coronavirus has delayed my plans to return to Tengkangpoche for now, but I am extremely motivated to return in 2021.

Acknowledgements

This expedition was supported by the John Lauchlan Award.

Taking the Taku by Storm

Derek Field

Derek Field on the second pitch of The Mouse Trap. Photo: Giselle Field

IN JULY 2019, Giselle Field, Dave Spies, Joey Jarrell and I (the sole Canadian) used an American Alpine Club grant to partially support a nine-day expedition to the Juneau Icefield. None of us had ever been to Alaska before, and we were entranced with the quintessential Alaskan alpine scenery of vast glaciers pierced by jagged teeth of granite. I found myself drawn in particular to the Taku Range, thanks to wondrous reports by John Kelley and Brette Harrington. I can still hear the excitement in Brette's voice as she described the place to me over the phone. It sounded exactly like the Alaska I dreamed of but never knew was so accessible. I was sold on it, and thankfully my wife and friends were, too.

On July 14, after two days of plodding around rainy Juneau, we were flown to the west side of the Taku Range by Northstar Trekking Helicopters. The four of us dug out a fine base camp in the cirque between Taku Towers and Emperor Peak, where we spent most of the following seven days encapsulated inside an omnipresent mist, mostly playing board games, reading books and tending to our ever-melting campsites. Still, we went out climbing every chance we had.

Giselle and I ventured out into the fog on July 15 to climb the northernmost and smallest of the three main summits of the Dukes massif. In 2014, this 150-metre tower of psychedelic-looking migmatite was attempted by John Kelley, who thought it to be unclimbed. Giselle and I chose to ascend a series of corners on the southwest face. Our route, which we called the Candy Cornwall (II 5.9, 4 pitches, 150m), was very much a geologic puzzle connecting veins and dykes of solid granite in a sea of metamorphic choss. We found no evidence of prior ascent on the pointy summit and named it the "Duchess" (1,905 metres).

Over the next few days, we took advantage of sporadic weather windows to survey the remainder of the range's west side before attempting a few modest lines. On July 19, Giselle and I completed a full ascent of the west arête of the highest peak between Taku Towers and Cathedral Peak. Throughout the expedition we referred to it as "Humpback Peak" (1,936 metres), as it does not seem have a name on any map or publication. After climbing the

lower, steeper part of the arête via four pitches (up to 5.9), we simul-climbed and belayed short stretches (5.6 R) along the upper arête, which was wonderfully narrow. We called our route Humpback Arête (III 5.9, 7 pitches, 290m).

On July 20, it rained lightly all day, so Giselle and I chose an easy-looking line and were rewarded with one of the most spectacular scrambles of our lives: the West Arête (III 5.7 50°, 335m) of the north summit of Cathedral Peak. A textbook arête by definition, this pencil-thin ribbon of gneiss, sculpted perfectly on both sides by the active icefield, soars gracefully toward the peak's dwindling icecap. Easy névé brought us to the summit (1,950 metres), which has no record of prior ascent. The route was a delight and a real prize for us. It's funny to think that, had the weather been better during our expedition, we would have almost certainly overlooked this classic line in favour of larger walls.

On July 21, the last day of our trip, good weather finally arrived. Giselle and I attempted the steep west pillar of the dome-like formation immediately south of the highest Taku Tower. We informally named this feature "Taku Dome." Two pitches of splitters abruptly devolved into munge cracks and run-out slabs. We each took a huge lead fall—mine due to dislodging a refrigerator block that miraculously missed the rope and the belay—but saw no reason to retreat. We chose to press onward until at last we dead-ended ourselves six metres below the top of the pillar. After four pitches up to 5.10a, we cut our losses and rappelled. Our route is appropriately named The Mouse Trap (II 5.10a, 170m).

The West Arête of Cathedral Peak. Photo: Dave Spies

Candy Cornwall on the southwest face of Duchess.
Photo: Derek Field

When we returned to base camp around midnight, with a line of orange light still in the western sky, we learned that Dave and Joey had succeeded on their route, Stoned Virgins (III 5.10d, 275m), which had evidently proven to be quite a bit of work. This impressive line tackles thin cracks on the steep wall to the right of Humpback Arête, offering 100 metres of independent climbing before merging with Humpback Arête.

The following day, we stepped out of the helicopter in Juneau, feeling content with our trip. The ride down from the icefield was like flying through a glaciology textbook, and, on top of that, we nearly went crazy thinking of all the stuff we could have climbed if the weather throughout our expedition had been as amicable as it was at that moment. In spite of subpar weather, we managed to have a fun time and walk away with an amazing experience that changed our friendship forever.

Summary

Candy Cornwall (II 5.9, 4 pitches, 150m), southwest face, "Duchess" (1905m), Taku Range, Juneau Icefield, Alaska. FA: Derek Field, Giselle Field, July 15, 2019.

Humpback Arête (III 5.9, 7 pitches, 290m), west arête, "Humpback Peak" (1936m), Taku Range, Juneau Icefield, Alaska. FA: Derek Field, Giselle Field, July 19, 2019.

West Arête (III 5.7 50°, 335m), north summit, Cathedral Peak, Taku Range, Juneau Icefield, Alaska. FA: Derek Field, Giselle Field, July 20, 2019.

The Mouse Trap (II 5.10a, 170m), west pillar, "Taku Dome," Taku Range, Juneau Icefield, Alaska. FA: Derek Field, Giselle Field, July 21, 2019.

Baiyansi

Dane Schellenberg

I WAKE UP IN DARKNESS, and it takes me a while to process where I am. Dreams linger in my mind. A dim circle of orange light starts to glow in a corner of the darkness, the first rays of sunrise highlighting the small entrance to the cave where my partner Ryder and I have bivied for the night. I shimmy out of my dusty, old sleeping bag and walk unroped over to the mouth of the cave. Just outside there is a small patch of yellow grass, and then the precipice that leads down the 400-plus vertical metres of rock we have climbed to reach our cave bivy—our cozy little big-wall bedroom.

WE HAD ALREADY PUSHED the route up 13 pitches by this time and were now poised for a summit push of Baiyansi, a first ascent of the wall that had occupied our minds for almost two years. This was the day that we had endlessly discussed and looked forward to all summer long while we climbed and trained in Squamish.

Ryder Stroud, my climbing partner and old friend, and I both live more than half of the year in the southwestern province of Yunnan, China. Yunnan forms the Eastern Himalayas and borders China's Tibetan autonomous region and three Southeast Asian countries. I live in a village in the Dali region in a home made of stone, wood and mud brick, a traditional yuànzi, or courtyard house of the Bai ethnic group. Ryder has lived for many years in his converted van, and he is almost certainly the first van-dwelling dirtbag climber in China. Yunnan is by far China's most ethnically and biologically diverse region, a distinction made possible due to the frontier province's rugged terrain of enormous mountains, near-inaccessible valleys and dense forests. Western Yunnan is also blessed with incredible variation in its geology, and the region is quickly becoming China's best area for rock climbing, owing in no small part to the growing fame of the sandstone splitters of Liming.

We had first driven out in Ryder's converted house-van the previous winter to look at the cliff, based on a photo a local friend had shown us. We took what he had said with a large grain of salt as he told us of an area comprised of tall granite walls. Every local rock climber knew that Yunnan did not have any granite.

At best, we expected to find a 200-metre-tall limestone or gneiss wall, as this was not only what the rock looked like in the photo but also the predominant rock types in this part of western

Dane Schellenberg follows pitch two (5.10c) of Allegory of the Caves. Photo: Ryder Stroud

Yunnan. Instead, we found a strange kind of granitic rock—that we later identified as porphyritic granite—and a massively intimidating cliff that continuously defied our estimates and expectations.

Baiyansi, which translates to The Temple of the White Cliff, is located between the already internationally famous sandstone crack climbing area of Liming and Yunnan's newest sport-climbing mecca of Shigu, a long valley of limestone walls that tower up to 700 metres. Both Shigu and Liming already had hundreds of developed pitches of rock climbing, but just 20 minutes beyond the classic routes of Shigu, the granitic monolith of Baiyansi was visible from the road. The unexpected is often found just around the bend in this part of the world.

During winter 2018, we made our first attempt to get up to the base of the wall. The concrete road that the mountain was visible from quickly gave way to narrow rocky village roads, and then to completely washed-out and abandoned former logging roads that had been dug into the mud and clay on the steep hillsides that lead up through the forests of twisted and gnarled Yunnan pine. Ryder's overloaded and well-travelled *mianbaoche* (bread-loaf van) came close many times to tipping over the eroding edges of the mud road and rolling down into the dark valleys we wove precipitously above. To fortify our courage and commitment, we blasted the soundtrack to the video-game series *Halo* as we held our breath and drove up what we started referring to as Death Road.

We pushed the van as high as she would go, which just happened to be a slightly open pullout that was a short walk from a clear, flowing spring of mountain water. This spring runs all year long and would end up being indispensable in the development of climbing at Baiyansi. The pullout became the van camp where we would start and end each day.

From here, a gruelling hour-long slog up trail systems used by local goat herders and foragers of the Naxi, Lisu and Bai ethnic groups eventually gave way to giant old-growth oak trees and massive groves of pink, red and purple azaleas and rhododendrons. The cliff rose above us. Swallows swirled high in the air beside their nests, which hung on the sheer white rock of the main wall. The headwall was vertical to overhanging and layered with gigantic roof systems. It was much taller than we had expected it to be. We estimated it to be around 400 metres of vertical to overhanging terrain. We were not prepared for this.

A full day was spent walking the length of the main wall and excitedly pointing out all the amazing possible lines that could be free climbed; however, we felt that we were not yet ready to tackle the proudest of the natural lines the mountain offered. We decided to warm up by choosing the easiest, shortest line we could find that had a logical conclusion. After some discussion, we settled on a line up a slab that we figured would end up being around four pitches long. I had spent a summer putting up new multi-pitch, ground-up routes in the alpine granite range of Keketuohai in the Altai Mountains of the northern Xinjiang province. That summer was my first real foray into lead bolting from stances, a technique I learned out of desperation and a fanatical drive to link long blank sections of rock between cracks. Now I felt confident that with my newly honed skills, we would race up the black lichen-covered slab we were determined to climb.

The first day of actual rock climbing at Baiyansi was nightmarish. Instead of the positive crimps that I was used to finding on slabs, the climbing was mostly on insecure slopers and pinches. Comfortable stances from which to place bolts were not as abundant as I had expected. Baiyansi does not have many crack systems. The wall is dotted with hardy dug-in rose of Jericho plants that we would need to rip out of pockets in the rock. Sometimes we would risk a fall by tearing the rose of Jericho out of its deeply rooted home to reveal a useful new jug to pull on. Other times we would get some fiddly horizontal cam placement. Usually, though, we just got a mouthful of dirt.

We quickly discovered that Baiyansi was destined to be a relatively adventurous mixed bolt- and trad-climbing area. Gear placements were highly questionable and few and far between. Expansion bolts were placed during run outs between trustworthy cam placements. A rigid ethic of lead bolting from stances was established early on—no hooks or aid bolts. Climbing in China is, for the most part, rap-bolted sport climbing on limestone cliffs. Ryder and I had long lamented the trend

toward a lack of commitment in the development of climbing in China. We wanted our contribution to be a step in the opposite direction.

We climbed and pushed the route as high as we could each day while we had light. Sunset meant hours of rappelling by headlamp in the cold, windy blackness, and then a 45-minute hike through the forest back down to the van to cook a simple meal before giving into cumulative exhaustion and passing out. This became our daily grind, and we carried on in near isolation. There was no one else to see our daily failures and triumphs, or the misadventures that led up to them: gear-ripping pendulum falls with a hammer and power drill clipped to our side and scraping down the cliff; multiple near misses due to enormous falling rocks; questing way out into the unknown above dubious protection, and then realizing the battery was dead on the power drill.

DURING THIS TIME, we had the area almost entirely to ourselves when we were up there living out of Ryder's van in our freezing cold valley below the wall. Occasionally, we ran into local Naxi pastoralists herding their goats through the forests or some intrepid Bai women who had hiked up from the lower villages to pick rare and valuable edible mushrooms and medicinal plants. One time, after finishing our rappel back down to the ground well past midnight, we saw a light in the forest. We cautiously called out and approached the light. A lone hunter from one of the villages was in search for game. His (very illegal) rifle was from the Cultural Revolution period at the latest, and it was held together with cello tape and metal wire. We chatted for a while in the heavy darkness, and through his broken Mandarin and thick local accent, we ascertained that he was hunting rabbits and giant flying squirrels. The hills in this area are home to the golden-haired and otherworldly Yunnan snub-nosed monkey and a small population of Asiatic black bears, both of which are endangered. Laws are hard to enforce in the parts of Yunnan that are populated by the historically recalcitrant hill tribes, and poaching is common. In the remote village markets, endangered animal limbs are sold as charms to ward off danger. We hoped that the hunter in the dark was telling us the truth about what he was there for, but in the end, he was the one with the gun.

Three separate trips and many months and adventures later, our little warm-up route was finished. It's Just a Ride ending up being 12 pitches and 350 metres long. The line we had initially guessed would be all easy 5.7 climbing ended up containing multiple sustained 5.10 pitches. It topped out on one of the lower shoulders below the summit of the main wall. A foundation was laid. The route was finished, but it did not reach the summit of the mountain.

WORD SPREAD FAST among the small Chinese climbing community. It's Just a Ride saw a handful of ascents that year, and stories of long, emotional days began to spread. The balancey and abstruse style of climbing seemed to upset many 5.12 limestone sport climbers. A clear distinction arose in the experience of those who climbed the route. Some North American climbers repeated the route and confirmed the grade. A few local traditional climbers, seemingly unaccustomed to the spirit of adventure climbing, called it a nightmare for the 5.10 climber.

In fall 2018, we returned for the summit. Our objective was the unbroken open corner that snaked up directly through the middle of the main wall. We had planned and schemed for months, discussing strategies for improved efficiency and safety. While walking beside the base of the wall, we stumbled upon something we had somehow completely missed the previous year. We discovered the crumbling ruins of an ancient temple that was built long ago against the side of the mountain—the original Temple of the White Cliff. Massive trees, centuries old, grew from within the space bordered by the stone walls of what was once a place of divinity and reverence. We had spoken with an old Naxi woman who had told us of a temple in the forest that generations ago had been the goal of a sacred pilgrimage in the region. It was obvious from the fire pits and gathered wood that goat herders had been sheltering themselves and camping in the ruins. With the exception of this place, there were essentially no other flat spaces to pitch a tent anywhere along the wall. We decided to make this our new base camp and eliminate the two hours

Ryder Stroud stoked to discover Baiyansi's summit shrine.
Photo: Dane Schellenberg

of daily hiking we had endured the previous year. Some searching revealed a much closer spring only a 20-minute walk from our new temple camp.

We made an attempt at reaching the corner system but were turned back by the soaking wet moss and loose vegetation covering the initial slab. A particularly torrential summer monsoon season had drenched the sections of wall we had planned to climb. We compromised and settled on a line that would eventually lead to a massive seemingly connected system of caves high on the wall. The first five metres off the ground were already harder than the most difficult sections we had encountered on It's Just a Ride. The coal-black face was nearly vertical, and route finding proved challenging in the maze of dead ends and hidden holds. The pitches became progressively harder as we pushed through the complex and often dicey terrain. Pitch three, a sustained and boulder-y 5.10d, started with a dyno above a ledge that led into cryptic moves high above micro-cams. On pitch four, I placed gear and jammed through a crack formed by a six-metre-long stone pillar. The pillar culminated in a long flake, which I pulled on only to feel the whole thing separate and move away from the wall. After shoving gear deep into a more trustworthy crack higher up, I lowered down, cleaned the lower cams, and then lightly pushed on the small tower of stone to send it crashing down to crush the branches of the oaks below.

By pitch nine, we had already climbed past two of the large caves high on the wall. The route was free at 5.11c up to this point, and as the angle of the cliff relented, we felt that the bulk of the difficulties were likely over. Unfortunately, our responsibilities in the real world were calling us, and our time at Baiyansi had run out for the year. Ryder and I flew to North America and spent the summer months working and climbing in Squamish and dreaming about being back in the wilds of Yunnan.

When the long, dreary rainy season of the Eastern Himalayas finally ended and we were able to return to Baiyansi, we were accompanied by three friends who had come with the goal of opening up their own route on the mountain. A spirit of camaraderie was born while cooking evening meals and

passing around the bottles of gin and maple-syrup whiskey we had hauled up to the temple ruins. Liu Xinwu, a local biologist and fellow climbing dirtbag, had come with two American climbers, Woody Jacobson and Kit Kercheval, to try and establish a line going up a free-standing tower that loomed more than 300 metres above the forest.

Ryder and I pushed our route higher each day. We spent a freezing cold night bivying on an exposed ledge but managed to add multiple pitches in one push. By pitch 13, we had spotted what looked like a comfortable cave that we could use as a bivy to shelter us from the chill of the howling night winds. Our plan was to take a full day just to climb up to this cave and load it with sleeping bags, sleeping mats and some food and water. We would then rappel back down and bring another load of equipment with us the next day to be fully stocked and prepared for a final push on the wall. The route was too wandering and angular to haul bags in a conventional way, so we climbed up the dozen steep pitches of the route, each of us weighed down with a massive pack. Our sleeping rolls and down jackets protruded from the sides of our packs like wings as we struggled to pull on the tiny holds. It was one of the hardest days we had experienced on the wall, and the thought of repeating this feat again the next day was close to unthinkable. We reached the cave in the pitch black and made the call to spend the night and commit to the summit push the following morning. The inside of the cave seemed to radiate heat that the mountain had soaked up from the sun's rays during the day. We ate instant noodles and Snickers bars and passed out in the dust.

When the morning light hit us, a sense of urgency came with it, and we quickly mobilized for the final pitches of the route. We didn't have many bolts left and ran the rope out much further between gear than we had previously been willing to do. After several more pitches of wandering climbing and a bush bash along a forested rim leading up to the final pitch of rock, we finished along a narrow trail on the summit ridge just metres away from the actual pinnacle of the mountain. Tibetan prayer flags, torn and faded, hung from scraggly trees and clapped in the wind. A small stone shrine had been erected and filled with white porcelain Buddhist figurines.

Allegory of the Caves on the south face of Baiyansi.
Photo: Dane Schellenberg

From the summit of Baiyansi, we could see the glaciated peaks of Haba Mountain (5,396 metres) and Yulong Mountain (5,596 metres) in the distance. A faint trail maintained by locals weaved down the steep forest, running down the backside of the mountain. Ryder had planned on bringing his approach shoes on the second day of gear hauling to the cave. He painfully hiked down the entire way in climbing shoes. We arrived in the temple base camp well after dark and celebrated with a massive meal, which we downed with the last of the liquor we had.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVES has yet to see a second ascent. We consider it a contender for the line of least resistance up the wall. The hard routes remain unattempted. Baiyansi is massive and awaiting further development. We have not even walked the entire way along the base of the wall.

Summary

The Allegory of the Caves (IV 5.11c, 540m, 17 pitches), south face, Baiyansi, Hengduan Mountains, China. FA: Dane Schellenberg, Ryder Stroud, December 5–6, 2019.

Remembrances

Ken Wallator
1967–2019

Ken wallator was a complicated alpha-grizzly legend of a human. He hurled his formidable bulk claws-first at the mountains and bars of his home range around Jasper for all his 35-year career until his death, in the wild, at 52. Dave Marra, a frequent climbing partner to Ken, said, "Ken was a hero to me, an iconic figure, a mix of urban myths and legend, and then you meet him. Actually, you didn't really meet him, you just met a blur of a glazed-over, piton-banging limestone Viking. He smoked and he drank and he was an asshole at times, but I got to climb with, and deeply respect, him."

Prolific Jasper climber Dana Ruddy said, "People talk about Conrad Kain, but here the Ken Wallator stories are just as important. He was a legend. In Jasper he was one of the first climbers who was a true dirtbag. He lived for climbing and the lifestyle. He called himself a pirate all the time, and he had a pirate persona. He was looked down upon by some of the older generation because he was more self-taught, but he was a true explorer."

Ken grew up fast and hard in Jasper, a small town with a big party scene. We lived three doors apart, and in high school we started climbing together, drinking and criminally looking for excitement. Our initial climbs, with swami belts, hexes and hip belays, are some of the best and most exciting memories of my life. The memories of catching his 200-pound frame on a hip belay are less good, but complaining was lost on Ken. One warmish day in high school, we ran endless laps on the 30-metre Queen in Maligne Canyon with our ice tools, and then turned around and climbed a new route up an overhanging 5.10 crack with Ken belaying off an ice screw then following the pitch in his ice-climbing boots.

Ken Purcell climbed extensively with Ken over his career and said, "Ken always loved the idea of a new route. Why do one that had already been done? I loved climbing with Ken because he wouldn't ever give up. He would just push and push and push. He was up for rapping down three hours in the dark."

Purcell and Wallator were once chased out of the mountains by a bear that was after the salmon in their packs, then their canoe sank on the paddle home, but Purcell said, "There was two feet of snow, but we got a fire going and made it out eventually." Ken lived for trips like that, pure adventure.

As sport climbing and training took off, Ken said, "Fuck Lycra" and put everything into alpine climbing—the wilder and more remote the better. He went from our high-school climbs to being one of the best young alpinists in North America in less than five years because he climbed with absolute devotion and intensity on ice, rock and aid, often solo and in remote areas. The sheer quantity and intensity of his often solo aid and alpine climbing may never be fully known as he wasn't one to write articles about his accomplishments, he'd deride those who did. He once chased Mark Twight, who he saw as a poser, down Banff Avenue.

Although Ken climbed prolifically for his entire life, his best climbing years were in the mid-80s to mid-90s. In 1988, while only 21, with Charles "Chic" Scott and Tim Friesen, Ken climbed a wild new alpine route over five days on the remote south face of the Yukon's Mount McArthur, which noted climber Joe Josephson described in the *CAJ* as "certainly the most proud line on the face." Immediately after that climb, according to Chic, "Wallator and Friesen climbed the east ridge of Mount Logan in a remarkable six-day effort."

Also in 1988, Ken put up a huge new route on the west face of Roche Miette near Jasper with Rick Costea at the classic 5.9 A2 grade, and then later freed it. In the same year, Wallator and Tom Thomas climbed a still-unrepeated masterpiece straight up

the centre of Storm Mountain's northeast face over four days, again in brutal winter. He climbed Mount Assiniboine in winter with Barry Blanchard in a day from the hut to the summit, and then skied out.

In the winter of 1989, Ken headed into the remote Mount Clemenceau but derided air support as cheating, so he, along with frequent partner Tom Thomas and Gil McCormick, skied in for six days, spent six days climbing a wild new route on the north face and another four or so days skiing out that reportedly involved substituting acid for the missing food. Gil said about the climb in a book titled *Dangerous Faith*, "We pushed the envelope on that climb." They soloed much of the face, and Gil said, "That was pretty cool, climbing side by side. That was my most exciting climb. I never felt so alive."

While 1988 and 1989 were fantastic climbing years for Ken, the death of his girlfriend and partner, Heidi Schaeffer, on the remote Mount Belanger was a brutal hit. On a short December day in 1988, Ken and Heidi climbed Mount Belanger together and were then unroped on a cornice near the top when it broke. Ken jumped to safety, but Heidi fell 500 metres down the face. She survived the fall but died as Ken carried her on his back toward the hut. Some in the community blamed him for the death, and it haunted him for the rest of his life.

Also in 1988, one of Ken's closest friends and partner, Tom Thomas, died in a solo accident. More tragedy haunted Ken in 1989 when he and Rick Costea climbed the classic Slipstream and met another party on the route. One of the other team members fell through the cornice on top of the route, and they could hear his cries in the night but were unable to reach him or recover his body. Any one of these events were monumental, and while Ken was legendary for carrying packs no one else could lift, the weight on his mind was heavy.

That load and the other demons he carried made him known for being unsettled and sometimes violent. He was banned from Jasper's Astoria Bar before he was legally old enough to drink there, but he'd always find a way back in, and a fight often ensued. Marra said, "I watched him take down seven bouncers, and then grab a jug of beer and walk out." Ken could be frightening, a personality trait he later used as an "enforcer" in what he called the "underworld," but every one of Ken's partners first spoke of his joy and love for being out in the mountains. Harvey Struss, who climbed extensively with Ken, including putting up the unrepeated and very bold Task Master on Roche Miette in 1995, said, "Ken didn't fit into society. But when you got him in the mountains he was fantastic. Good sense of humour, just a really solid guy who knew where to go. He was fun and good and could just laugh and have a great time. You could really trust him."

Ken didn't write much publicly about his climbing, but in his brief description of freeing the West Face of Roche Miette with Kevin Christakos, he wrote, "The first time Rick and I came here a beautiful golden eagle careened about us at the base of the face. Being very superstitious, I took this to be a good omen. This time it was a herd of mountain sheep searching around for the alpine plants for their daily food. I know why I live here in Jasper: The untouched wilderness and animal spirits that dwell in this place left alone by man's greed for timber and mineral rights for economic growth."

One season, Ken and Harvey were working a new route up the compact limestone near the famous ice climbs of the Weeping Wall. They'd fixed four pitches, and Ken went back up solo to push the hard aid climbing but took a massive whipper. The epic fall ended brutally on a large ledge with a broken back, smashed ribs and a collapsed lung. He crawled across the ledge and started the descent, including jumaring up a section that Harvey said "was hard for me even healthy." Ken battled down to the base of the route, and then crawled out through the talus for hours, convinced he'd die if he stopped. He managed to get into his truck and start driving toward Jasper then called Harvey from the first payphone along the way, about an hour from town.

"Harvey, I'm all fucked up, man. Come get me. Don't call the wardens. I'll keep driving for as long as I can but keep an eye out for me in the ditch." Harvey called the wardens and the ambulance, and then he raced out too. They found Ken idling along the middle of the road, slumped over the steering wheel. "He told me he knew he was fucked when he couldn't even roll a joint on the

drive." Ken spent weeks in the hospital, and his back bothered him for the rest of his life.

On Andromeda's Photo Finish, Ken was climbing with Kevin Christakos and took a 200-foot- plus whipper while burrowing out the cornice on top. Kevin said, "Ken went by me in a swan dive, broke two Salewas [ice screws], and we both ended up hanging on one bent Snarg above us. He even bent the belay screw. He hit hard and was a bloody mess, but we finished the route." On the way into Mount Diadem's Humble Horse with Lisa Paulson, he completely crushed his thumb under the weight of the cable car's pulley, but, again, finished the route anyhow.

Ken's brother, Calvin Wallator, and his friends all talk about Ken's hard work ethic and skills. He hated formalities such as trade tickets, but he was a respected mason, welder, roofer, concrete former, carpenter, and for many years—some while under house arrest for his involvement with the underworld—an exceptional builder of log homes. The brutal industrial work left scars on his body in addition to the likely and definitely untreated PTSD from the death of Heidi. His climbing increasingly became solo, as did his epic forays and climbs into remote valleys. He would often go under a huge pack or with a canoe for a week or longer, and you could tell he was a happy man being wild.

In the last few months of Ken's life, he moved out of his home ranges around Jasper and lived loose in the Bow Valley to try and get a new start. He worked on our house, emptied our fridge and regularly went solo aid climbing. Like many of Ken's numerous solo routes, we'll never know what he truly climbed, but there are hundreds of his pitons on remote faces across the Rockies. Our last day of climbing was on Amadeus, a classic mixed route in Kananaskis. Although 52 years old and with a rolled-over odometer of wear on his body, he still moved with a master's economy of motion and deep understanding that I've only witnessed a couple of times in my life. In the end, he was drawn back to the Jasper/Hinton area and did what some of the toughest climbers in the world couldn't—end his own life. I know that Ken's memory and life will live on in his routes and with his partners, but when I look into the mountains they seem a little poorer without Ken Wallator, the last grizzly pirate on the land.

—Will Gadd

Sonja Findlater
1971–2019

I watched Sonja struggle to fight back tears. Emotions procured from years of working tirelessly to finish her PhD culminated in this one moment of defending her thesis. Completing this was far more than the letters in front of her name; it meant freedom to finally spend more time with the people and the places she loved, in the mountains with her husband and her family and friends. I remember her pausing, smiling, and then apologizing and confidently moving on, sharing what has been described as one of the best defence talks her examiner had seen. Her moment of emotion before her talk, along with her ability to acknowledge it and continue on with what she worked so hard to prepare for, to me, says so much about the fortitude and humility of our friend.

It's impossible to forget meeting Sonja Findlater. Not because of her vibrant and infectious smile, or her extremely welcoming and positive nature, but because of how she made you feel. This is the common thread with anyone who had the privilege of sharing a rope with her, a car ride, a classroom, a meal, a walk or a conversation. She had a sincere and remarkable ability to make you feel special. Sonja gave everything in her life full attention—full commitment and awareness, full passion and heart. She wouldn't let you be just a person she met, you were right away her friend, someone

she cared about and was interested in. She made you feel important because to her you were, which explains the countless number of people around the world who miss her so much.

Incredibly tenacious and self-driven, Sonja accomplished more in her day than most would attempt in a week. In the bustle of growing up on a farm in Red Deer with her two sisters, Sonja developed a strong work ethic and a passion for the outdoors as well as an extraordinarily cheerful early morning demeanor. Her mentor and kindred brother, Syl, inspired her interest in climbing back on the farm, which she continued to foster into a full-grown passion with her husband, Ian. Together, they ski toured, biked, hiked and tried ice climbing for the first time, instantly falling in love with it. Sonja devoted a great deal of her time to the Central Alberta Section of the Alpine Club of Canada, encouraging others to get outside and try climbing and hiking. She worked for years as an accomplished occupational therapist when she decided to embark on her master's degree. This, in classic Sonja style, led to her PhD in neuroscience, all while still making countless trips into the mountains to fill and recharge her soul with adventure and comradery. The three-hour distance from her desk to the Rockies was like a jaunt to the corner store in Sonja's world, and it's quite possible that no one in Red Deer ever ventured into the mountains as many days as she did. Rock, ice, alpine, skiing and hiking, Sonja didn't pass up an opportunity, and if one didn't exist, she would happily create it.

More than 13 years ago, Sonja was a participant on a course that Kirsten Knechtel and I were running. She had signed up because she was a perpetual learner. She already had most of the skills we were teaching, but she always believed there was more to learn. She was humble. She was curious. A quick friendship was built, and before I knew it, Sonja was helping us create more courses, rounding up more and more amazing women. She wanted to become a camp manager, and everything about that role described Sonja—prepared, organized, thorough. Then she brought the extra Sonja ingredients: thoughtfulness, caring, cheery at unforeseeable hours of the morning, perceptive of people's needs, fun, compassionate, hardworking and endlessly willing to help out. The one thing Sonja didn't have a great deal of was experience in cooking. As her husband, Ian, said to me, if Sonja could eat dinner as a pill, she would, just to not waste any time preparing and eating. Her lack of cooking experience did not deter her one bit, and soon, everyone was attending the courses because they could feast on her fabulous meals. The beautiful mountain scenery and climbing were secondary bonuses.

Sonja was an athlete. She could jump out of the car after a week of working hard on her PhD and stomp up to the Kain Hut in the Bugaboos with a pack that was at least half her body weight, all the while helping others with far lighter packs. She climbed a ton of hard, vertical ice climbs. She taught herself how to skate ski. She would come into town and humour me on a mountain-bike ride or a walk, despite being an ex-adventure-race podium finisher. It didn't matter what she was doing, as long as she was outside, in the mountains and with a friend.

Never one to seek the spotlight, Sonja liked to listen versus talk. She liked to cheer and encourage others versus stand out and shout, "Watch me!" She would let you figure out the answer even if she knew it well before, because to her, teamwork and comradery were always the priority. Relationships and bonds. Common goals. The process.

I know there won't be a moment in life that I won't remember Sonja through. That isn't because of how lucky I was to spend so much time with her, but more because how impactful every moment spent with her was. If you were with Sonja, you were in the moment because that is where she aimed to live. She was present in her life in a way that the rest of us continually grasp towards.

Sonja not only finished her PhD in neuroscience, she completed her PhD in this journey we call life, living genuinely and fully as an example of the person she wanted to be. Sonja, you are missed every day by so many. Thank you for all that you taught us, the joy you brought us and the smiley faces we continue to see when we most need one.

—Sarah Hueniken

Reviews

Rising: Becoming the First Canadian Woman to Summit Everest

by Sharon Wood (Douglas & McIntyre, 2019)

IT WAS A CLIMB LIKE NO OTHER. A team of 12, plus their cook, journeyed to Tibet to climb the world's tallest mountain. They set their sights high—to climb Everest not by the well-travelled (already at that time in 1986) south-side route by which thousands have now reached the summit, but by the rarely climbed West Ridge. No fewer than eight of the 13 men who had previously attempted the mountain via this route had died trying.

And when this proficient team of Canadians succeeded by climbing a new route from the Rongbuk Glacier via the west shoulder and Hornbein Couloir—establishing a challenging and demanding route that remains unrepeated—they made history. But, they did so not only by climbing their unique route, or because they ferried their own loads above base camp without Sherpa support, but because one of their team members, Canmore's Sharon Wood, was the first North American woman to summit Everest, and the first woman to do so from the Tibetan side.

The unwavering—but not always entirely smooth—teamwork, combined with the intense level of personal commitment essential to succeed on such a bold and dangerous undertaking, is a central theme throughout Wood's long-awaited memoir, *Rising: Becoming the First Canadian Woman to Summit Everest.*

The first rule of memoir is that the author needs to have a compelling story to share. Check. Wood proves that in the first few pages, and then continually. Not only an unparalleled equal to her male climbing partners, swapping leads, sharing decisions and carrying the same weight, even as a teen she pushed boundaries with drugs and petty crimes, right through to parenthood when she co-founded a unique new school.

Another essential element of a good memoir is the author's bravery and willingness to share not only her thoughts and feelings during her moments of triumph, but her darkest moments and lowest weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Check, again. This, too, Wood accomplishes early in the book, describing the substantial emotional strain, when, with only about 40 people in the entire base-camp area of the mountain, she comes boot-to-boot with her former boyfriend, who has accompanied his new girlfriend to a different base camp from where she, from the U.S., also hopes to become the first North American woman to stand on that coveted summit. And if living for months in the thin Himalayan air, lugging heavy packs up gruelling terrain all while trying to stay healthy and strong enough to be part of the ultimate summit push wasn't challenging enough, Wood rose under these trying circumstances. And, in writing that scene so sensitively, she rises again.

Grace. It's a quality that must be earned, just like climbing to Earth's highest point carrying one's own gear and leading up vertical cliffs above 8,000 metres to set the rope necessary for a safe descent, all at the brink of exhaustion. As she did through her climbing career, Wood also exhibits honesty as she unflinchingly yet delicately reveals herself on the pages as a strong, competent, imperfect person who grows through experiences shared with exemplary teammates.

This element is key to the story, because she admits her success thrust her alone into the spotlight. Writing of how she spent the next three decades learning to balance her fame, her need for privacy, her love and responsibilities toward her family, and her conflicted feelings about her speaking career, she succeeds in painting that main character in her life, Everest, as both blessing and burden, and ultimately as mentor and companion.

But it's through facing and embracing such challenges that Wood shines, as a climber and a writer. Her every sentence is precisely constructed, but with sureness and competence and never stiff or forced, just as her every foot and hand placement had to be on her solo climb of Tocllaraju in the Peruvian Andes via the steep, technical West Face, which she painstakingly—and unbelievably—downclimbed after realizing her plan to walk off was too dangerous and she didn't have enough rope to rappel. That sweaty-palm-inducing scene alone earns her a place among the most compelling climbing memoirs.

Her skillful use of dialogue though, combined with her development of teammates' characters is exceptional. Add to that, from a 2019 perspective, it's refreshing to follow the team on the long and taxing ascent via an unfamiliar route. It's captivating to become immersed in the isolation of the uncrowded mountain with teammates communicating by radio between camps, and the inescapable periods of silence. It's uncomfortable to read of her waking up in a tent inside a crevasse shoved full of snow, shrinking the cave smaller, and to learn this dangerous discomfort is her happy place. It's compelling to read of the hazy exhaustion of mind and body she experienced from the minute she left the tent on summit day, knowing she had to and could really only look after herself as she and her teammate Dwayne Congdon pushed themselves beyond their limits. It's exciting to read her authentic voice and her strong, polished storytelling skills. And it's delightful to read an author who celebrates knowing she hasn't got all the answers, only a willingness and fearlessness to seek and embrace the exploration.

—Lynn Martel

Paul Preuss: Lord of the Abyss

by David Smart (Rocky Mountain Books, 2019)

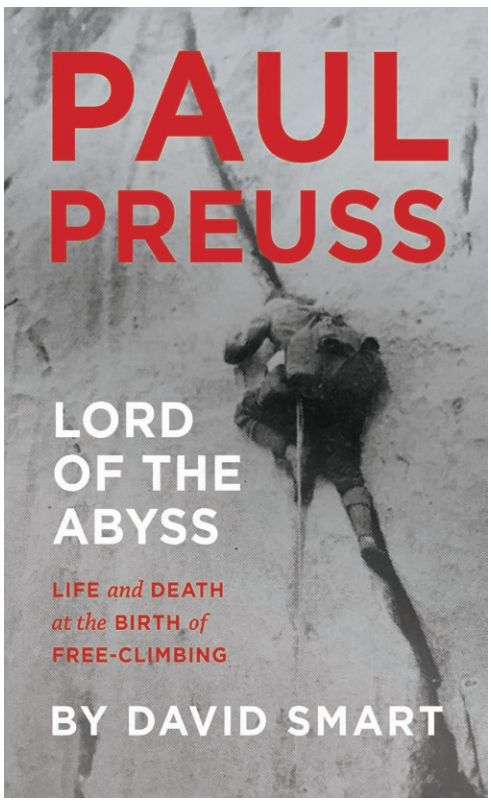
During his life, Joseph Campbell wrote extensively about heroes, their journeys and the mythmaking that surrounds them. There were some merits to his position on the patterns he saw, describing how many significant narratives (from religious to literary) have an archetypal "hero story" as their foundation. There are hero stories, suggested Campbell, "…because that's what's worth writing about." But critics of Campbell have argued that he was ethnocentric and doggedly tried to force fit everything into this one story.

I'm not a scholar of Campbell, but all of this had me thinking about how we often write and share stories about the leading figures in the history of climbing. We have a strong impulse for myths and legends in our sport. But there can be a problem when we see everything of note—achievements, firsts, learnings, even death—as a form of classical hero trajectory. And from a mountain literature point of view, doing so has unfortunately led to some very predictable and uninspired writing.

Fortunately for us, this is not the case with *Paul Preuss: Lord of the Abyss*, the latest book by David Smart. Preuss was an Austrian climber born in 1886 who was known for his bold ascents but also his overall philosophy on climbing and just what purity of style meant. He was behind some of the most visionary climbs of the day, many of them solo, and also was a catalyst for the debates around climbing ethics that reverberate to this day. Preuss published numerous papers and filled concert halls with his presentations. He believed climbers should eschew any artificial aids except in emergency; he even advocated for downclimbing. But he was known for being an avid learner, a good partner and guide, he valued and looked up

to mentors, and celebrated climbing in all it could be. In Preuss's adventures, I am reminded of the line from a poem by Rilke where he says, "Nearby is the country they call life. You will know it by its seriousness." In the decades after his unfortunate death in 1913 while attempting to solo the Mandlkogel, Preuss retains an air of mysterious power, with select climbers of each generation speaking of his story like a whisper brought forth as the definitive point to any conversation on style.

Simply following Preuss's life, as a climber, could itself make for a pretty interesting biography. And it would be all too easy to create a larger-than-life mural, where even meaningless events receive *ex post facto* hyperbole. But *Paul Preuss: Lord of the Abyss* is not hagiography. Smart has done his research and has sorted and contextualized myth and history into their proper forms; he steers clear of the many biases that colour this territory for authors of lesser skill. In writing this book, Smart said that a big challenge was "… getting behind the invented memories and stories. His historiographers included both myth-makers and those who wanted to do something better."



What makes this book really stand out is the care with which Smart also explores the other aspects in and around his subject. We see the political and intellectual Austria and Europe that shaped youths like Preuss, and the excitement of the turn of the century that led to adventure and ambition. We also see the sad realities of ethnonationalism and anti-Semitism. Preuss was a Jew who converted to Christianity. People were applying social Darwinism to individuals, races and even nations in order to support views on superiority. The effects were profound and led to some of the darkest chapters in history.

Smart said, "We're losing touch with where climbing came from, forgetting real things that happened, like the anti-Semitism Preuss suffered." So we get the fullest picture here, how Preuss is a man with challenges in his own life, fully wrestling with identity and culture, and we see how he continually recreated himself on many levels.

This is an excellent book that covers a lot of ground. It was shortlisted for both the 2019 Banff Mountain Book Award for Mountain Literature and the 2019 Boardman Tasker Award.

Joseph Campbell said that the hero's journey always ends with some form of treasure that is brought back. Preuss taught the world a lot about purity of style and a bold philosophy of climbing; the ripples from the rock he tossed into that pond are still being felt, and will even more so with this book. But in this case, it is Smart himself who has also gone on a wonderful journey—passionately sleuthing obscure materials in Austria, Germany and Italy, and doing countless hours of research. All pulled together with real writer's craft, and story, to bring us the treasure that is *Paul Preuss: Lord of the Abyss*. Smart's gift to us has been knowledge, sense-making, and celebration, and the most complete and readable story of Preuss and his time.

—Jon Popowich

NEW NUCLEI FL Jacket

Windproof. Warm. Packable.
Built for what's to come.

ARC'TERYX

arcteryx.com

Index

A playful exploratory mission that turned into a multipitch endeavor and rappelling into the dark. Jasmin Caton framing her love for the Kootenays on a formation she calls the Jumbo Arch. **Steve Ogle**

patagonia®

ISSN 0068-8207

$29.95 CAN

00103

9 770068 820001