



AAC Publications

Snowpatch Spire, South Howser Tower, North Howser Tower, and other summits, new routes and first free ascents

Canada, British Columbia, Bugaboo Provincial Park

Jonathan Schaffer and I had an incredible three-week trip to the Bugaboos this past summer. Experienced but young, our plan was simple: climb new routes on as many big walls as possible. Jonny and I hiked into the park July 17 carrying back-breaking loads, the prelude to many crack-of-noon starts, abundant slimy groveling, blisters on our palms from thousands of hand jams, and the discovery of many immaculate, unclimbed features in the range. We also experienced a few inadvertent glissades and close encounters with storms. All of these details characterize what we would describe as a successful trip. We spent a total of five days shuttling gear and enjoyed generally favorable conditions

We spent our first few days trying to complete mostly free routes on Snowpatch Spire. After a relaxed morning on our first day, we decided to try the Beach. We left camp at 10 a.m., and by the time we reached the west face of Snowpatch Spire the weather looked grim. Traversing over the immense south face provided excellent exposure and made us yearn for bigger walls. We climbed the clean offwidth and hand cracks capped by a roof for the route's first free ascent (IV 5.11-).

The following day, after another 10 a.m. start, we attempted to free Tam Tam Boom Boom Pili Pili (IV 5.11+), which follows an immaculate dihedral high on the west face of Snowpatch Spire. Lacking gear and time for continued redpoint attempts, we were able to traverse right to another corner system, a fun pitch that may have been climbed before, and into the Beckey-Rowell (IV 5.10+). Later in the trip Jean-Pierre "Pee-wee" Ouellet informed us that he had freed Tam Tam with many pins and sliders a dozen years prior.

After a rest day, we left camp hoping to attempt a new route on the north face of Snowpatch Spire. However, as we wandered across the Crescent Glacier, we noticed the east face basking in sunlight. We couldn't resist its allure, and so at the last second (11 a.m.) decided to explore this sunny face. We climbed the first pitch of Labyrinth (V 5.12) then branched right, following a long, ever-steepening hand and finger crack to a nice ledge. On the third pitch we climbed a bouldery, pin-protected arête leading to thin face climbing above. Due to lack of time, neither of us pulled off a clean ascent of this pitch, but it will likely go free at 5.12+. Another powerful fingercrack led us to the ledge where the Parker-Bradshaw and Sunshine Wall meet. From here, we angled up and right via steep and sometimes frightening offwidthing to the top of the Tom Egan Wall and returned to camp before dark. We don't feel we climbed enough new terrain to claim this as a new route, but we're providing a name and grade as incentive for others to return and enjoy the quality climbing of this link-up: Cherchez La Femme (V 5.12 A0) contains incredible, hard climbing on stunning features and in a stunning setting.

We moved our base camp to East Creek Basin on July 24 during a complete whiteout. The forecast was not inspiring for the following five days, but we awoke to blue skies on our first morning. After a casual morning in the sunshine, we started up broken terrain on the northwest face of Crossed Fish Peak, which had only seen one ascent. After 1,000' of weaving up broken lower terrain and a short traverse below a small waterfall, we reached the steep, gray wall that had looked impressive from camp. Unfortunately, this face is the result of a relatively recent rockfall event. Unlike the small flakes that characterize most of the loose granite in the Bugaboos, we found the features on this wall to be much larger and more precarious. The dihedral that perfectly splits the wall looked improbably blank upon closer inspection. We chose a right-facing dihedral to the left instead, which turned into a

splitter crack, only to disappear halfway up the headwall. Unwilling to give up, Jonny traversed left around an arête and proceeded to utilize creative gear placements on thin and extremely lichenized terrain for an hour-long lead. This pitch involved a short pendulum (5.11 A0) that was followed free at 5.12-. From here, we climbed through wet and mossy terrain in a black gash to the summit. Our new route, Red Fish, Blue Fish (IV+ 5.11 C2) will never become a classic, but it afforded us a grand adventure, taking all that we could muster to summit and descend.

We spent most of the following day waiting out a hailstorm, but eventually climbed a variation to Crack of Noon (III 5.10) on the north summit of East Peak. After a day shuttling more food to East Creek Basin, we were stormed off a new-route attempt on Wide Awake Tower. Jonny and I soon found ourselves alone in the valley. We had no source for weather reports, but the skies appeared stable for two days, so we set our sights on the west face of North Howser Tower, the main objective of our expedition.

On July 30 we succeeded with our first alpine start of the trip, leaving camp at 3:45 a.m. At 6 a.m. we began simul-climbing the opening dihedral of the Shooting Gallery to the Seventh Rifle gully. Upon reaching the upper headwall, we climbed a series of cracks and shallow corner systems between Real Mescalito and Young Men on Fire. The climbing varied from sustained face climbing on dikes and sills to technical stemming and straight-in jamming. After one "breakthrough" pitch, which bypassed a section of blank roofs, we continued up 10 very long pitches to reach the summit ridge. We scrambled to the south summit by 6 p.m., completing Doogie Howser (VI 5.11+) free and onsight in a 12-hour push.

After a much-needed rest day, Jonny and I returned to the route we had started on Wide Awake Tower, a nearly 1,500' wall littered with steep and clean lines, but with only two established routes. Leaving camp at 1 p.m., we began climbing just right of Wild Fire. The first pitch climbed a strenuous stem-box to a roof followed by splitter cracks. The second pitch's "moss-width" forced Jonny to implement his entire gardening repertoire to send. We then joined Wild Fire for one pitch before trying a difficult face traverse out right from a bolted belay. Unable to free this section, we tensioned to the arête (potentially 5.12+/5.13), where we climbed a very thin, technical, and dirty dihedral (5.12 A1). The next two pitches were clean, splitter finger and hand cracks in a hanging dihedral. After a wildly exposed, moonlit summit pitch, we finished Midnight Marauders (V 5.12 A1), and returned to camp at 3:30 a.m. This route stands out as one of the best and most difficult we accomplished on our trip, and we would encourage others to return and try freeing it.

After a rest day, we headed back to the Pigeon Feathers Group to explore potential new routes on some smaller features. Loose scrambling, two splitter offwidth pitches, and a very thin finger crack define our route Two Birds, One Stone (III 5.12+ A0) on what we are calling Owl Tower. Our route could easily be turned into a short, moderate outing by avoiding the upper flare and finger crack, and instead continuing up a clean dihedral that parallels the second pitch.

With our psych and stamina waning, and no amount of tape able to prevent our hands or fingers from bleeding, we motivated for our final objective, an unclimbed chimney system splitting the northwest face of South Howser Tower, which Jonny had spotted on the cover of the guidebook before our arrival. At an impressively reasonable hour we traversed below the Beckey-Chouinard to the base of the route. We started in the main feature but were soon discouraged by a mossy squeeze chimney with loose flakes. We were able to bypass this section to the right via clean flakes and a steep finger crack from which, luckily, we were able to squeeze our way back into the main feature. The climbing ranged from clean corners to sopping chimneys full of microbial mat communities, leading directly to the summit. Our new route Compassion Club (V 5.11+) provided a perfect finale to our stint in the Bugaboos.

We placed a total of six pins, left a couple of lengths of cordelette, and used no bolts on our five new routes. Jonny and I would like to thank the AAC's Mountaineering Fellowship Award for helping fund our expedition.

Timothy Gibson, AAC

Images



Gibson follows an immaculate corner on Compassion Club.



A long corner on Compassion Club.



Groveling on Compassion Club.



Clean climbing on the Crack of Noon variation on East Peak.



Gibson leading a steep corner on Midnight Marauders.



Starting up Midnight Marauders.



Gibson climbing delicately on Doogie Howser.



Gibson following through a sea of granite on Doogie Howser.



The crux traverse on Red Fish, Blue Fish.



Looking down the crux of Tam Tam Boom Boom Pili Pili on Snowpatch Spire, which was freed using Lowe ball nuts by Jean-Pierre Ouellet almost a decade prior. Lacking the gear, the duo joined the Beckey-Rowell to the summit.



5.11 offwidth on Two Birds One Stone, a new route on Owl Tower.



Owl Tower is identified by the red arrow.



North Howser Tower, showing approximate locations of: (1) Real Mescalito (Johnston-Lavigne, 2007). (2) Doogie Howser (Gibson-Schaffer, 2012). (3) Young Men on Fire (Gore-Hollinger, 1994).



Doogie Howser is the line drawn in blue.



South Howser Tower. Compassion Club (left) climbs a massive chimney system; it was climbed free and onsight in a day. The Wandering Direct (right, approximate) links features across the northwest face before joining the Beckey-Chouinard.



The key chimney traverse low down on Compassion Club.



Schaffer, packed for bear.



Schaffer jamming a steep corner on Midnight Marauders.



Schaffer following on Doogie Howser.



Schaffer bringing up the rope, high on Doogie Howser, the first new route to be climbed free and onsight up North Howser Tower's west face, not to mention in a blazing fast 12 hours.



Schaffer and Gibson on the summit of North Howser Tower.



Schaffer on the road to East Creek Basin.



Jamming a corner on Red Fish, Blue Fish.



Steep climbing on Red Fish, Blue Fish.



Crossed Fish Peak, showing the new route Red Fish, Blue Fish.



Cherchez La Femme, a new link-up of routes on the east face of Snowpatch Spire, which may climb some new terrain as well.



Wide Awake Tower, showing the new route Midnight Marauders. The only other route on this steep wall is Wild Fire (Isaac-Maddaloni, 2003), which climbs mostly left of the new route, though the exact line is unknown.

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