



AAC Publications

Canadian Rockies, summary

Canada, Canadian Rockies

Big alpine ascents in the Canadian Rockies are few and far between. A variety of reasons for this undeniable fact have been suggested: bad rock, remoteness, poor forecasts. There may even be some merit to all of them. But I believe the real reason is both simpler and more complex: There simply aren't that many people, locals or visitors, who are into hard alpine climbing in what is a demanding but unglamorous mountain range. So, when a half-dozen harder mountain routes get done, it makes for a banner season. 2012 was one such year.

Josh Wharton kicked things off with an incredible sending spree in May. In the space of a week he climbed three routes, an ascent of any of which would make most alpinists' season. Together with Chris Alstrin he made a rare (possibly the seventh) ascent of the hard classic the Wild Thing (VI WI4 M7) on the northeast face of Mt. Chephren (3,307m). After only a day's rest, taking advantage of the continuing high pressure, he followed that up with the second ascent to the summit of the much tried Infinite Patience (VI WI4 M5) on the Emperor Face of Mt. Robson (3,954m) with Jon Walsh. After just another day's rest he finished off the week with a rare winter-conditions ascent (possibly the second) of the Greenwood-Locke route (V M6) on the north face of Mt. Temple (3,543m) with Dylan Johnson and Mikey Schaefer.

Early summer is generally not conducive to alpine climbing in the Canadian Rockies, with masses of isothermal snow still smothering the peaks. But after a wet start to the summer, August and September more than made up for it, with week after week of perfect blue skies. It was prime weather for the mountains over Woolley Shoulder, one of the epicenters of hard alpine climbing in the range. The second half of the summer saw some interesting activity on the peaks there. The north face of Twins Tower (3,627m) is arguably the biggest, baddest wall in the Canadian Rockies. The north face was first brought to climbers' attention by the ascent of a neighboring feature, the northwest ridge (Abrons-Carman-Millikan, 1965). In August, Brandon Pullan and Ian Welsted made what was likely only the second ascent of the technically moderate but very remote Abrons Route (V 5.6). Around the same time, on neighboring Mt. Alberta (3,619m), Joe Mills and Raphael Slawinski put in a strong effort on the south ridge (5.10+). However, they did not summit, and descended upon joining the Japanese Route (V 5.6).

The big news from Woolley Shoulder came in early September, when Jason Kruk and Joshua Lavigne not only made the second ascent of the crux portion of the Anderson-House route (VI WI5+ M8, 2008) on the north face of Mt. Alberta, but also added a difficult direct finish to the climb. Although they climbed during the last days of calendar summer, conditions were already more conducive to mixed rather than rock climbing. Starting at the bottom of the face, they climbed snow and ice until reaching the upper headwall. On the headwall, they joined the Anderson-House and climbed multiple pitches of M7, which gained the prominent WI5 ice pillar in the center of the face. [A point of aid was used after ripping a pin from the first ascent in a fall.] Above, they reached an enormous cave at half-height on the headwall, which they explored deep into the mountain before bivouacking. The following day, they climbed directly out the left side of the cave. Steep, thin, and sustained drytooling continued directly up the headwall for many pitches (M7+), often through loose rock with inadequate gear. The difficulties only subsided when they reached glacier ice near the summit ridge and simul-climbed to the summit (1,000m, WI5 M7+). They descended the Japanese route.

Other parties also took advantage of the same wonderful high pressure to make noteworthy ascents.

In mid-September Ian Welsted teamed up with the veteran Jim Elzinga to make the first ascent of the Elzinga-Welsted route (IV 5.6 WI3 M4) on the remote Mt. King George (3,422m) [see report below]. Cirrus Mtn. (3,270m) is best known for the ice climb Polar Circus on its south side, but last September Maurice Perreault and Robb Schnell added Cloud Nine (IV WI2 M5) to the north face of the peak. The route proved instantly popular, at times attracting multiple parties in a single day. On the repeat front, Mills and Slawinski made the third ascent to the summit of Infinite Patience on Mt. Robson.

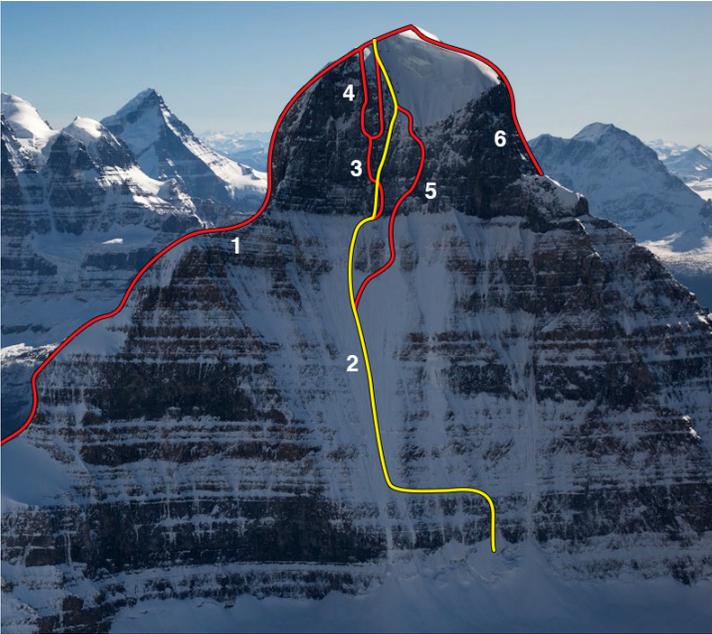
The 2012-13 winter season was remarkable for what seemed like a revival of interest in “big” M-routes. After being established more than 10 years ago, multi-pitch test-pieces like the Real Big Drip (200m, WI6 M7) and Cryophobia (200m, WI5+ M8) saw only sporadic traffic. This winter, however, established them firmly as hard classics, with many successful ascents. Even the route Rocketman (350m, WI5 M7), arguably the biggest and most alpine of the M-routes, saw what was likely its first winter ascent by Alex Hollaus and Gery Unterasinger.

A number of noteworthy new M-routes also went up. Across from Cryophobia a dedicated crew, comprised of Pat Delaney, John Freeman, Will Mayo, and Will Gadd, put up Nophobia (5 pitches, M11) up a wildly overhanging wall. The route is a contender for the hardest multi-pitch M-route in the Canadian Rockies. The iconic Stanley Headwall also saw some new-route activity, with the highlight being the God Delusion (175m, WI5+ M8+) by Slawinski and partners, essentially a direct start to the previous season’s Man Yoga (250m, WI5 M8).

Every winter the mile-high south face of Mt. Wilson becomes adorned with enticing daggers and smears. While the ones pouring over the lower rock bands have already been largely explored, higher up on the peak there is no shortage of unclimbed ice. Two new mixed routes were established last season nearly halfway up the face. Jon Simms and Unterasinger climbed Dancing With Chaos (2 pitches, WI5) to establish the spectacular Cythonna (2 pitches, WI5 M7) above, while Slawinski and Jerome Yerly slogged up the five-pitch Hypertension (WI5 M9) to establish Engel (85m, WI5+ M8).

Raphael Slawinski

Images



Mt. Alberta, north face. (1) Swigert-Tenney, 1985. (2) Lowe-Glidden, 1972. (3) Anderson-House, 2008. (4) Kruk-Lavigne, 2012. (5) Brazeau-Walsh, 2006. (6) Blanchard-Elzinga, 1990 (arises from other side to gain northwest ridge). [All route lines are approximate.]

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