



AAC Publications

Twins Tower, Blanchard-Cheesmond, second ascent

Canada, Canadian Rockies

Fewer than a handful of people I know have expressed interest in climbing Twins Tower. Not wanting to miss good conditions, thanks to a low snow year and hot summer, I went out on a limb and asked Josh Wharton. I was surprised when he said yes and immediately bought a plane ticket from Denver to Calgary. A high-pressure system settled into place as he stepped off the plane.

The next morning, September 9, we headed up the Icefield Parkway and hiked over Woolley Shoulder with light packs. We expected to find the food and fuel cache that Josh had left at the Lloyd McKay Hut in 2011. A friend had confirmed it was looking good two weeks earlier; tragically, though, the latest entry in the hut logbook, dated September 1, read, "Thanks for the grub, Josh." Only slim pickings remained. As Josh's note said he'd be back in 2012, we could hardly blame anybody but ourselves, and we accepted the fact that light and fast had just gotten lighter and faster! Our remaining food totaled 5,000 calories apiece.

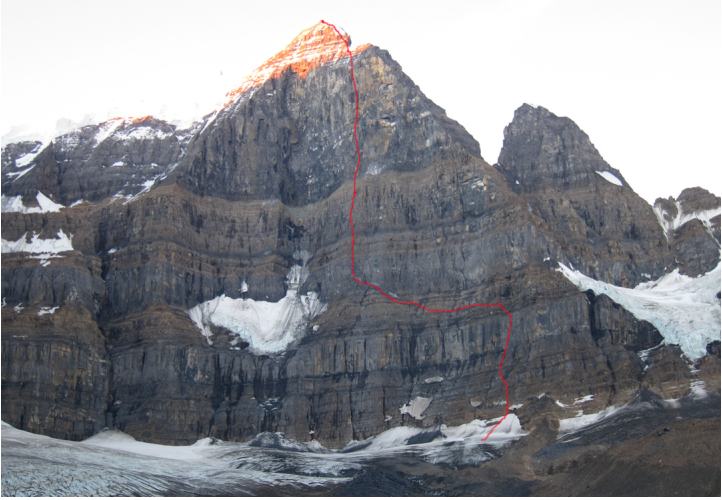
We left the hut at 5 a.m. on Sep 10, and by 10:30 a.m. we were on the first pitch of the Blanchard-Cheesmond route on the North Pillar (AAJ 1986). By the second pitch, Josh wasn't sure if he was psyched anymore. A lot of the climbing was chossy and the gear marginal, with just enough to keep us pushing upward. For the remainder of the climb we would be on the edge of our risk-tolerance levels. At 9 p.m. we found a bivy site on "Ice Ledge," just below the headwall. The headwall turned out to be impressively steep, and we began to haul the packs more than climb with them the following day. Fortunately the rock quality improved. Continuous crack systems, often connected by gymnastic face moves, led through vertical to overhanging terrain for 12 pitches before we bivied one pitch from the top of the wall.

The morning of Sep 12, we dispatched the final headwall pitch via a wild climax. Only 15m below the lower-angled summit ridge, we were forced to aid 4m up a knifeblade seam above a ledge (the only aid on the route for us, and possibly free at 5.12-). This gained a run-out jug traverse across the lip of an overhang. The rest of the route was fairly straightforward, and after traversing some cornices we reached the summit around 4 p.m. on September 13. We crossed the Columbia Icefield toward the Cromwell-Stutfield Col and bivied. On September 14 we rappelled and downclimbed for six hours, continued hiking, and reached the car at 3:30 p.m.

In hindsight, climbing Twins Tower was a great and satisfying experience for both of us. It would be hard to recommend to anyone unless you're looking for a huge physical and mental adventure. The conditions we found were absolutely perfect. Visibility was unlimited, freezing levels stayed above 3,500m the entire time, and there was virtually no natural rockfall. We found the rock generally dry. [Editor's note: Only three parties previously had climbed the 1,500m north side of Twins Tower: in 1974, 1985, and the winter of 2004. The first ascent of the North Pillar was made by Barry Blanchard and David Cheesmond in 1985 at a difficulty of 5.10 A2. Walsh and Wharton upped the ante by adding a variation start to the right of the original route and freeing all but a 4m section of the route and proposed a grade of 5.11b R/X A1.]

Jon Walsh, Canada

Images



The line taken by Jon Walsh and Josh Wharton on the Blanchard-Cheesmond.



Jon Walsh leading typical mixed terrain on Twins Tower.

Article Details

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