



AAC Publications

Mt. Slesse, Heart of Darkness

Canada, Coast Mountains

Dylan Johnson and I drove to Mt. Slesse on March 6, 2015, hoping to climb the oft-attempted but unclimbed Heart of Darkness on Slesse's north side. The Heart of Darkness is a very obvious feature: a giant gash that goes straight up between the Northeast Buttress and North Rib. It had been attempted by a lot of the local hard core since the early 1980s, including Dylan, Peder Ourum, Perry Beckham, Greg Child, Joe Buszowski, Guy Edwards, John Millar, Roger Strong, and Jeremy Frimer. The route had been a serious hope of mine since 2005.

Hiking into the basin below Slesse's east face on March 7, it was obvious that conditions were exceptionally good. With little snow, the approach was easy for a "winter" ascent. On March 8 our alarm malfunctioned and we didn't leave our tent until first light. We had a bit of trail breaking on our way up to the route, but nothing in comparison to a normal winter. Dylan crossed the bergschrund just after 8 a.m. and we started simul-climbing up the couloir.

The Heart of Darkness has three distinct sections: a lower couloir, a steep crux midway, and an upper couloir. We simul-climbed both couloir sections, which had difficulties to about AI3/4. In the middle crux section, the excellent conditions gave us a huge advantage. During Dylan's attempt with Roger Strong, a few years prior, Roger led a pitch of M6 R where I was able to climb an 80m pitch of straightforward AI4. This pitch brought us above any party's previous high point. From there, I led a short traverse with a mix of aid and free climbing. We were both blown away by how casually we had negotiated the crux—and it wasn't too scary.

From the top of the gully, I had always imagined difficult mixed climbing up the North Rib to reach the summit. However, at the upper col we were delighted to find the route entirely free of snow and ice. Dylan led these last four pitches barehanded in the afternoon sun. What a combination: plentiful ice in the shady, north-facing couloir, followed by dry, sun-warmed rock! We reached the summit about nine hours after starting.

Our descent went very smoothly, with just two short rappels near the summit and a bunch of downclimbing. Once on flatter terrain, we enjoyed a quick névé scamper with amazing views. Before long we were back at our tent, and a couple of hours later reached the trailhead. Alpine climbing is often about timing, and in this instance ours was perfect.

– Colin Haley, USA

Images



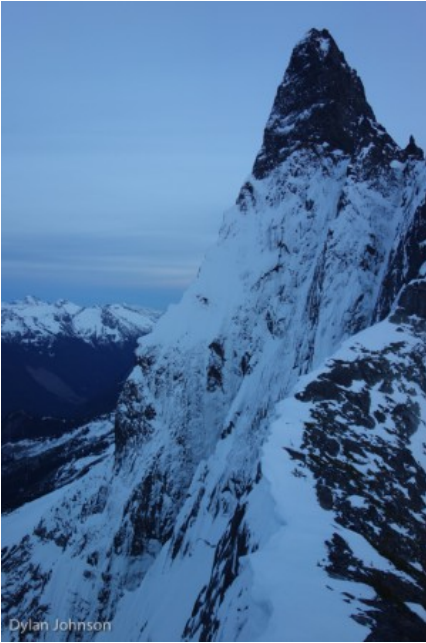
Colin Haley and Dylan Johnson's bivy in the basin below Mt. Slesse, with the mountain in perfect conditions.



Colin Haley starts up 80m of AI4 in the crux portion of Heart of Darkness.



Colin Haley seconding on the upper North Rib after completing the Heart of Darkness.



Mt. Slesse as seen from the descent.



Mt. Slesse in winter. The Heart of Darkness climbs the prominent gash in the center.

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