



AAC Publications

Storm Mountain, Northeast Face, Canoeing To Cuba

Canada, Canadian Rockies

“Travel a thousand miles by train and you are a brute; pedal five hundred on a bicycle and you remain basically a bourgeois; paddle a hundred in a canoe and you are already a child of nature,” said Pierre Elliot Trudeau, a past prime minister of Canada. It was October, and the times were changing in Canada. A 10-year reign by Canada’s Conservative Party and their fear-based policies had ended after a resounding victory by Justin Trudeau, son of the revered elder Trudeau. The mountains were dry. Things were headed in the right direction.

In mid-October, Jay Mills and I spent one day approaching and then a day and a night getting high above Moraine Lake (featured on the old \$20 bill) on an unclimbed route. The road into the Valley of the Ten Peaks was closed, so we rode our bikes in 10km. There were only three alpine routes on the side of the valley that interested us, and the most recent one had been established 30 years earlier. That’s why alpine climbing in Canada is amazing: You don’t have to go anywhere obscure to find first ascents. In the end, we didn’t make it up our objective, but for a backyard adventure it couldn’t be beaten. There is nothing more Canadian than a trip into nature, no matter how brief. But contemporary climbers have made communing with the natural world a lesser priority. One of my friends recently challenged each of her “sport mixed” climbing friends to try establishing a new “non-sport” route this winter.

In 1988—just down-range from Jay’s and my objective—Ken Wallator and Tom Thomas were getting chased around by the park wardens for pirate camping, so they figured they might as well spend time up in the mountains, and they completed the first ascent of Storm Mountain’s northeast face over four days. The route they completed grew to mythical proportions, partly due to Ken’s widely reputed **hard-man abilities**. [Editor’s note: In 2010, Wallator offered a free rope to anyone able to repeat the 1988 northeast face route. As of 2015, the route is unrepeated.] **By this point, I’d talked about going for a look-see for five years.** This was during the same time period that my friends and I waited, wishing, for a change back to a more Canadian attitude in our national politics. We’d managed to get rid of the might-as-well-be-Texan politicians in Alberta. Maybe we could get up Ken’s route, too? Jay and I decided to head out for another multi-day mission, this time to Storm Mountain, partly for the joy of camping out and reconnecting with nature. Maarten van Haeren would join us. He works in a wilderness center for addiction recovery, helping troubled young men find solace in nature.

As Jay chatted with our new team member, Maarten, about whether Alaska or Chamonix was better, I interceded, “Come on. Look at where we are. **We’ve got it the best.** Where else do you have the entire trail to yourself as soon as you step off the highway?” It was October 28 and Jay, Maarten, and I just managed to climb a new route up the center of the northeast face of Storm Mountain (3,191m) in 13 hours camp to camp. We didn’t revisit the fierce-looking Thomas-Wallator route. Instead we shocked ourselves with how easy it was to get up this face we’d all looked at for so long. It was obvious we’d created an insurmountable problem in our minds, rather than just going for a look. We faced our doubts in the same way we voted the fear mongers out of power.

“Can I name it Canoeing to Cuba, after Pierre Trudeau? You know, he tried to canoe from Florida to Cuba to visit Castro. He worked in the cane fields there when he spent a year traveling the world when he was young,” I recounted. “Sounds like a pretty Canadian thing to do,” commented Jay—Canoeing to Cuba (350m, WI5 M6).

[Editor's note: In 1999, Raphael Slawinski and Chris Geisler made it to the fifth, crux pitch of the nine-pitch Canoeing to Cuba; however, the ice pillar climbed by Mills, Van Haeren, and Welsted in 2015 was not present on the earlier attempt. The northeast face of Storm Mountain now has three routes, from the left to right: Northeast Face (Thomas-Wallator, 1988), Canoeing to Cuba (Mills-van Haeren-Welsted, 2015), and **Kogarashi (Tani-Toshiyuki, 2015).**]

– Ian Welsted, Canada

Images



Having left the glacier below the northeast side of Storm Mountain, the team climbs the initial approach pitches in the gully beneath a large hanging chockstone.



Looking up the northeast face of Storm Mountain from the glacier. Canoeing to Cuba takes the central gully. Kogarashi (Tani-Toshiyuki, 2015) is located in the system to the right, and the Northeast Face (Thomas-Wallator, 1988) in a system to the left.



Looking up the approach pitches of Canoeing to Cuba.



Ian Welsted leads the fifth pitch ice pillar (WI5 M6), the crux of Canoeing to Cuba.



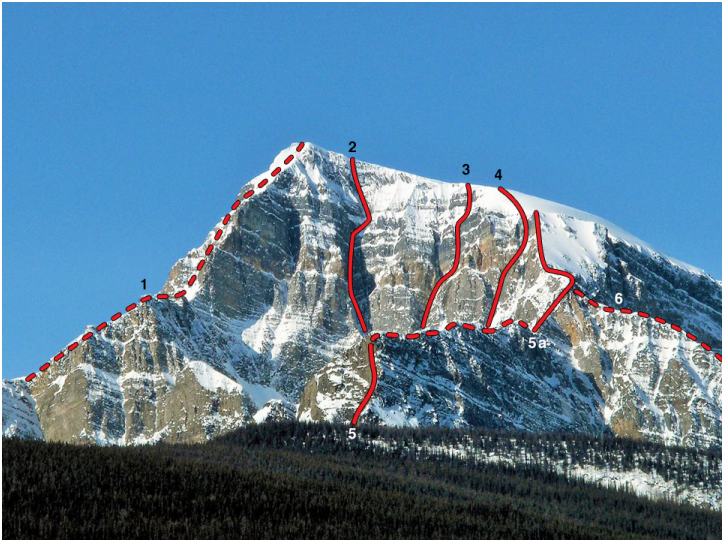
Jay Mills leads an ice pillar (WI4) on pitch seven of Canoeing to Cuba.



Maarten Van Haeren starts up the ice of pitch two (WI3) of Canoeing to Cuba.



Making a rightward traverse on pitch three of Canoeing to Cuba.



The northeast side of Storm Mountain showing: (1) East Ridge (Boles-Greenwood, 1961). (2) Northeast Face (Thomas-Wallator, 1988). (3) Canoeing to Cuba (Mills–Van Haeren–Welsted, 2015). (4) Kogarashi (Tani-Toshiyuki, 2015). (5) Northeast Spur (Greenwood-Lofthouse, 1958). (5a) The col from where the climbers descended back to the glacier beneath the northeast face. (6) North Spur Variant (Kruszyna-Whipple, 1963). Note that many of these routes start lower than the route lines indicate, as they are obscured by a foreground ridge or out of frame.

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