



AAC Publications

Fighting Till Dawn

Canada, Northwest Territories, Logan Mountains, Vampire Peaks

I'm a very big fan of solitude. In the Vampire Peaks, there's no hype, no circus of other climbers racing to the base of cliffs. Even the remote Cirque of the Unclimbables, near the Vampire Peaks, sees some 70 people a year, mostly gunning for Lotus Flower Tower. In the Vamps, chances are you won't see another soul.

This was my ninth expedition to the Ragged Range in Nahanni National Park and the second for both Jessa Goebel and James Q Martin. In 2014, Jessa and I attempted the first ascent of the south face of Dawn Mist Mountain (a.k.a. Moraine Hill), and Q was with Jeff Achey, Jeremy Collins, and me when we made the first free ascent of the Phoenix Wall, via Phreenix (VI 5.11, AAJ 2013).

Last summer, Kluane Airways dropped us at Vampire Lake in mid-July with 18 days of provisions. The weather, for the most part, was quite wet; it would rain for a few hours then dry up for a few hours, like clockwork. We had one clear 27-hour window and a mostly clear 23-hour window, during which we sent our two new routes.

Moraine Hill was first climbed in 1968, via the fourth-class west rib, by Bill Buckingham and party. He named the peak Dawn Mist Mountain during his very successful expedition to the area, during which they named most of the prominent spires in the Vamps and climbed them by the way of least resistance.

Jessa and I had faced several unexpected hurdles in 2014, from deep snow and slush on the North Moraine Hill Glacier, which must be crossed for several miles to reach the wall, to Jessa fighting the reality of this remote area's extreme solitude. She rallied, though, and fought with determination while climbing—it was inspirational watching her take control of her mind and try HARD! We also had shit weather that kept us tent-bound except for one attempt that ended after four cold pitches in a snowstorm.

So, this time we thought we knew what route to try on Moraine—until we got there and found the wall running with water after a big snowstorm. We opted for a line to the right that looked less "splitter" but, in all honesty, was probably a better, more consistently steep rig than our 2014 attempt. The cruxes were more about staying calm while free climbing with wet shoes and numb fingers than any particular sequence. (A dab of fresh snow crowded many of the lesser-angled features on the wall.) That said, pitch four was pretty feisty—we had to do a big iron-cross, backhand move left from a fingery flake (wet, bad feet) into the base of a slightly overhanging, stem-box corner—one of those features in which you jam your shoulders and wiggle around until you can get your feet under you. My fingers were about as sensitive as chopsticks, but I reckon that section was solid 5.11. Most of the pitches had some sort of wide (5.10ish) funkiness to overcome.

I led the entire route, free and on sight, with no bolts. Jessa followed with only one fall, while Q ascended a rope I fixed as we went, in order to capture the action. We reached the summit around 11:30 p.m. as the sun was beginning to set. The sky was on fire—possibly the most stunning display of colors I will ever witness. It was Jessa's first big, remote summit, and she was glowing with delight—she seemed nearly unable to comprehend what was happening. Those kinds of moments are fleeting and few people ever get to experience them. To be a part of that, to help her accomplish that,

and to witness her struggle and success, especially after getting skunked the previous year, was a high point of my life.

We rapped a series of lower-angled gullies left of our ascent route to our 2014 high point, then down the anchors from that attempt—nine raps in all—and returned to the tent 22 hours after leaving.

The south face of Dawn Mist has more adventure value than high-quality free climbing, but three shorter (500–1,000'), neighboring buttresses that top out on a separate, unclimbed spire look to offer excellent splitters up golden granite.

After this climb, we wanted try something a little less committing, since the weather was fickle at best. I first saw the wall holding our second new route in 2006, while Hank Jones and I were exploring the area. This feature is one of three distinct sub-walls flanking the southern aspect of the massive granite formation known as the Sundial (a.k.a. Mt. Dracula), whose northeast aspect hosts the Phoenix. Hank dubbed the wall Bela Lugosi, in honor of the actor who portrayed the original Dracula.

From the ground the wall looks steep and several distinct crack features jump right out. But we soon found these were bottomed-out water grooves. Time not being a commodity, I wandered from crack to crack, ledge to ledge, avoiding the grooves and trying to find clean cracks. We eventually traversed from the right side of the wall to the left, but it was a very fun outing and a pretty good route. This wall offers excellent free climbing potential, especially if you have time to clean and work around the crackless features. We descended via a fourth-class scramble to the west, going 16 hours tent to tent.

Our 2015 trip was sponsored by Parks Canada in exchange for historical, logistical, and climbing information I'm providing. Parks Canada is working with the Alpine Club of Canada to build a website that will cover climbing throughout Nahanni National Park. Can you imagine our National Park Service sponsoring climbing trips? Me neither. No wonder I love climbing up here so much.

Summary: Two new routes in the Vampire Peaks (Ragged Range), a sub-range of the Logan Mountains in the Northwest Territories, by Jessa Goebel, Pat Goodman, and James Q Martin (all USA). Fighting Till Dawn (460m, V 5.11- R) was the first ascent of the south face of Dawn Mist Mountain (Moraine Hill) and second ascent of the peak, on July 19–20, 2015. Ramshackle Affair (330m, IV 5.11+ A0) was the first ascent of the Bela Lugosi Wall, on July 26, 2015.

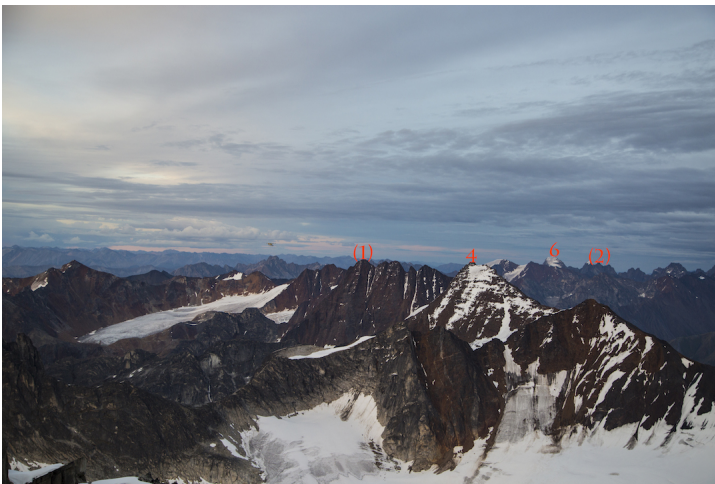
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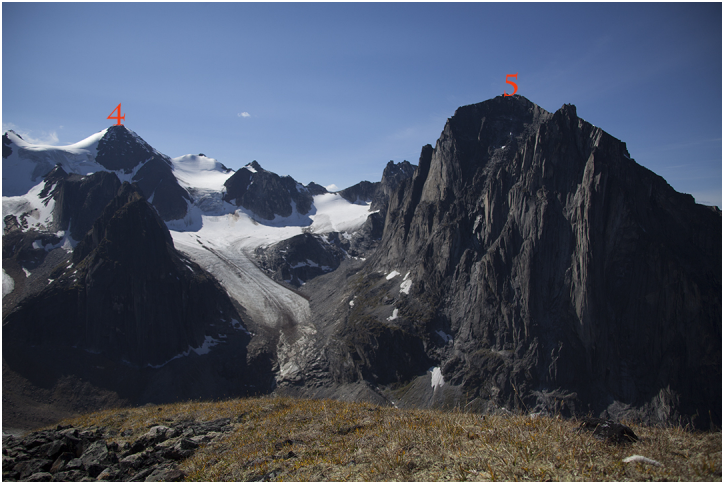
Vampire Peaks overview map.



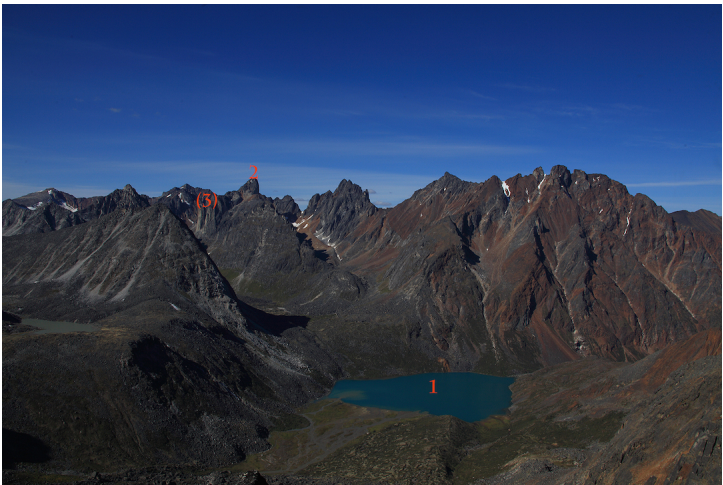
Looking northwest from the summit of Red Pyramid to (1) Vampire Lake (a.k.a. Gentian Lake). (2) Mt. Appler (Eppler). (3 in brackets) Vampire Spires. (3) Moraine Hill (a.k.a. Dawn Mist Mountain). (4) Mt. Mulholland (a.k.a. Mastiff Peak). (5) The Phoenix (a.k.a. The Sundial, Mt. Dracula).



Looking southeast from the summit of Moraine Hill to (1) The Red Pyramid, (2) Lotus Flower Tower, (4) Mt. Mulholland (a.k.a. Mastiff Peak), and (6) Mt. Sir James MacBrien.



5 Looking south towards the Phoenix (5) and Mt. Mulhulland (4).



6 Looking west toward (2) Mt. Appler (Eppler) and (3) the Vampire Spires.



The south side of Moraine Hill (Dawn Mist Mountain) showing Fighting Till Dawn (red), the 2014 attempt (blue), and the upper descent route from Fighting Till Dawn (green). The buttresses to the right are unclimbed.



Pat Goodman (leading) and Jessa Goebel on pitch four of Ramshackle Affair.



Pat Goodman leading pitch four of Fighting Till Dawn.



Fresh snow on the ledges as Jessa Goebel follows a pitch on Fighting Till Dawn.



A passing plane tilts its wings to the climbers on the summit of Moraine Hill around midnight.



After 23 hours on the go, the climbers shuffle across the glacier toward high camp.



The Bela Wall with Ramshackle Affair (2015) in red and the fourth-class descent route in green.

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