



AAC Publications

Block Tower, Slim Princess; Wall Tower, State of Wonder

Canada, British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, Leaning Towers

The Leaning Towers are 50 miles south of the Bugaboos in the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. They're practically an untouched part of the world, and the quality of the granite and wilderness setting were the main allures for Jasmin Caton and me.

On July 11, Jasmin and I, along with help from Stephen Stenecal, struck out with heavy packs for the two-day approach. After passing hot springs and talus, we found a winding trail through thick rhododendron. Many moraines later, we stood below Hall Peak, steep and spectacular, home to a handful of routes. We continued up and over the right shoulder of Hall to the basin below Wall Peak. The skies were dark with intermittent rain, which inspired a recon outing. Many of the towers here start with a smooth, crack-less slab that is capped by a sharp, square-cut roof about a hundred feet above the snow. The easiest passage up the unclimbed east face of Wall Tower seemed to start up a weakness between Block and Wall towers.

On our first day of good weather, we climbed this weakness in five pitches to the col between the towers. Here, we were intimidated by the terrible dark sky and steep wall, so we headed up to the easier summit of Block Tower before rappelling into a storm. It was a great adventure with all kinds of cracks—fingers, hands, offwidths—and perfect gray granite. We called the route Slim Princess (250m, 5.10).

After a few more rainy days, we rallied through the cold and damp to climb what we hoped would be our descent route from Wall Tower, the northwest ridge (300m, 5.7, Campbell-Jones-Palmer-Roxburgh, 1980), which follows the ridgeline above the steep east face. Our days were growing fewer and we pleaded with the weather gods. Our last day of eight was supposed to be rain-free. We read books, made art, and packed for a new route up the east face of Wall Tower, aiming for a striking black pillar leading to the summit.

We stepped off the glacier, heading up and left of the slabby nose of the wall, and found perfect golden hand jams. A pendulum, wild roofs, finger cracks, and world-class thin-hand cracks led us to a brutal, dirty crux pitch. Traversing back left under a truck-size boulder and into the chimneys of the black pillar was scary (and I recommend future parties quest straight up.) A handful of beautiful chimney pitches led us to the sunny summit. Golden light led the rappels; we were happy with our good fortune in this big granite paradise—State of Wonder (300m, 5.11- C1).

Kate Rutherford, USA

Images



Jasmin Caton on the approach to Wall Tower (right) and Block Tower (left).



Block Tower (left) and Wall Tower. (1) Slim Princess, continuing up the ridge to Block Tower's summit. (2) State of Wonder. Both routes climbed in 2015.



Block Tower (left) and Wall Tower. (Blue) Slim Princess, continuing up the ridge to Block Tower's summit. (Red) State of Wonder. Both routes climbed in 2015.

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