



AAC Publications

Squamish Update: Major New Routes and Crag, 2014–2016

Canada, British Columbia, Squamish

One thing that can be said about the Great White North's preeminent crag is that it's no longer a locals-only hang. Over the past decade the place has completely blown up. Where once we only saw clunkers rattle in from no farther than Oregon and Washington, we now host climbers from all over the world, many of whom hunker down in the lush coastal forest for months at a time, relaxing at the lakes and ripping it up on the rocks. It's safe to say that Squamish has truly come of age as one of the world's best climbing areas, and it just keep getting better every year.

With no shortage of stone and very few restrictions, new-routing has become rather fashionable. There are still plenty of unclimbed gems just waiting to be unearthed by those with a strong work ethic and an addiction to hard labor. Developing a new crag in this coastal rainforest environment means utilizing nearly every tool known to the common landscaper, including leaf blowers, chainsaws, car jacks, shovels, rakes, and the revered red-handled steel scrub brush.

Stuart Hughes on Queen Bee (5.13c) at Paradise Valley. Photo by Rich Wheeler

While new boulder problems and single and multi-pitch routes continue to pop up faster than teen acne, I'll stick to the meat of the matter. The following is a brief rundown of Squamish's most important new climbs and crags of the past two to three years, going from north to south. It is far from exhaustive.

About 20 km north of the town of Squamish, a spectacular new sport cliff has emerged above the Tenderfoot Fish Hatchery in Paradise Valley. This wall was actually discovered roughly 15 years ago by Andrew Boyd, et al, but nothing much came of it until the unusually dry winter of 2014–2015 when British expat Stewart Hughes visited. He bolted what was to become Queen Bee (5.13c), which follows the main weaknesses up the left side of the wall for an epic 35m. Beyond stoked, he showed it to another resident Brit, Tom Wright, who bolted an equally beautiful line up the right side of the wall. They each put in 40–50 tries throughout the summer, culminating with Hughes redpointing Queen Bee in August 2015 and Wright sending Spirit of the West (5.14a) in October. Soon after, Neil Dyer added an alternate finish to Queen Bee called Bee Side (5.13d). Not to be forgotten, Chris Singer put his engineering skills to the test developing a shorter wall to the left, where he added a number of fine routes, including the popular warm-up Fish Ladder (5.11b), as well as Steelhead (5.12b) and Humpies in Heat (5.12c). Development in the Paradise area continues.

In Squamish proper, a small army of dedicated hardmen (a.k.a. the Valleycliffe Climbing Club) continue to unveil new routes and walls amid the vast, complicated cliff network left of the Chief, known loosely as the Squaw massif. Of these, the two most prominent new crags are the Longhouse and the Top Shelf. With a steep hike and stiff blue-collar lines, these crags offer some of the very best single-pitch crack climbing in Squamish, with standout routes such as Trippet Out (5.13a) and Shapeshifter (5.11d). An excellent rundown of the climbs can be found at Colin Moorhead's blog, Squamish Climbing Source.

The Sheriff's Badge formation on the North Walls,
with (1) Daily Planet and (2) Daily Universe. Photo by Rich Wheeler

Of the many short multi-pitch walls being unearthed in the Squaw zone, the most impressive effort is easily the New Delhi Cliff. Here, Jason Green, Harry Young, and Peter Winter have produced several

routes in a unique position above the Mamquam River. Notable lines include Delhi Belly (5 pitches, 5.12b), The Ganges (5 pitches, 5.11c), and Road to Amritsar (6 pitches, 5.11c). All of these routes incorporate some amazing features and perfect stone. Perhaps what's most incredible, though, is the amount of logging, terracing, and cleaning that's occurred.

As always, the mighty Chief continues to yield stellar new routes, with several big lines going in each year. In August 2015, Tony McLane and Jorge Ackermann finally punched through the top of the Sheriff's Badge on the North Walls with their brilliant extension to the Daily Planet (4 pitches, 5.12a), which they dubbed Daily Universe (5 pitches, 5.12b). The full nine-pitch route traverses through overhanging blocks, corners, and cracks to breach the very apex of the Badge formation—a long-anticipated feat. More recently, Tony and his father, Kevin McLane, established the two-pitch Dragon Crack (2 pitches, 5.11d) immediately right of Borderline, which now offers a harder and more direct start to Daily Planet.

At the far left base of the North Walls, Danny Guestrin, John Rigg, and friends established Nanook (5 pitches, 5.11d) in an interesting and neglected zone of steep chimneys and cracks. They also climbed a nine-inch offwidth called High & Dry (5.9). Along with the older routes New Life (5.11b) and Tall Skinny People (5.10), this sector of the Chief is poised to become a mini destination crag in its own right.

In 2016, Sonnie Trotter returned to Squamish to make the coveted FFA of the steep, sweeping Prow Wall (8 pitches, 5.14a), directly across the South Gully from Squamish Buttress. Over the past three to four years the Prow has seen a ton of action and now stands as one of the most stacked "sky crags" on the Chief, with numerous hard routes including Gravity Bong and Teddy Bear's Picnic (both 5.13a). Trotter spent five days prepping and cleaning the central line, which was one of the Chief's "last great problems," thwarting numerous parties over two decades. The free Prow Wall now stands as the Chief's first multi-pitch 5.14.

Sonnie Trotter on the crux lead during the first free ascent of the Prow Wall (V 5.14a) on Stawamus Chief. Photo by Rich Wheeler

Another recent addition to the Prow (from 2014) is Colin Moorhead and Andre Ike's Written in Stone (8 pitches, 5.11d), which was the first route to breach the left side of Prow Wall. While belaying Trotter on his Prow Wall send, Tom Wright took note of the huge dike that runs between these two routes and returned a few days later to bolt and climb Written Into The Prow (5.12c), a high-quality link-up climbing some of the best pitches from both these routes.

On the sunny west face of the Chief, the two most notable big lines from the past couple of seasons are Sunset Strip and Labyrinth. Yet another Moorhead classic, Sunset Strip (12 pitches, 5.10d) is quite sustained and utilizes short sections of existing routes in the Western Dihedrals (The Gauntlet, Crap Crags, Millennium Falcon, Sticky Fingers), with about 70 percent new terrain. Meanwhile, on the Tantalus Wall, Labyrinth (5 pitches, 5.12c) was added by Marc-Andre Leclerc and Luke Neufeld. This incredibly technical route climbs elegant, thin dikes that are a unique hallmark of the Tantalus Wall.

Further south at Murrin Park, a whole raft of new routes and cliffs has sprouted in recent years. In the vicinity of Petrifying Wall, the most noteworthy being Altamont, Down Amongst the Cedars, and Rainbows and Unicorns—mostly authored by Chris Small. These three cliffs provide a thick new library of moderate mixed routes that, along with the harder routes at the Quercus cliff, have helped cement Murrin Park as one of Squamish's best cragging zones. It's worth emphasizing that Rainbows and Unicorns alone took Chris Small over 400 hours and nearly two years to develop!

Further up the highway, opposite Nightmare Rock, Paul McSorley and friends have developed a trio of small cliffs including Fjordguard, Nintendo, and the Golden Nugget. The first features six lines, including the unique sentry-box roof White Raven (5.12b). Nintendo is an old winter mixed crag with two new sport routes, and the Golden Nugget features an excellent 5.12b/c crack line called Hits from the Bong.

Finally, the many crags and boulders south of Murrin and across Vancouver's North Shore have been brought to light in a brand-new guidebook to *Vancouver Rock Climbing*, released early in 2016 by Rich Wheater (Quickdraw Publications). Close to Squamish, the most prominent new areas included are at Porteau Cove and Lions Bay. At Porteau, Shaun Bent has established three new sport crags: The Watchtower, First Contact, and the Lumberjack Wall. North of Lions Bay, Rich Wheater and Alex Quiring spent all of 2015 building nearly 25 routes at Tunnel Point, all between 5.11c and 5.13c.

– Rich Wheater, Canada

Images



Sonnie Trotter during the first free ascent of the Prow Wall (V 5.14a) on Stawamus Chief.



Stuart Hughes on Queen Bee (5.13c) at Paradise Valley, Squamish.



Tom Wright on Spirit of the West (5.14a), Paradise Valley, Squamish.



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