



## AAC Publications

---

### **Mt. Macdonald, Little Face, Position of Comfort**

Canada, British Columbia, Selkirk Mountains

**High above the Trans-Canada Highway, in the Rogers Pass area, Mt. Macdonald (2,883m) holds a commanding view.** The peak is comprised mostly of quartzite, and just like its neighbors, it boasts long, clean ridgelines of solid (enough) rock for kilometers. What makes MacDonald unique is a particularly steep and sustained face of golden rock. This wall is ironically known as the Little Face. A 500m to 600m wall that sits below the true summit of the peak, it was first climbed by the visionary Waterman Route (600m, 5.8 A3, 1974). The Waterman cousins had a different way of looking at the mountains than most anyone else during their era. John Waterman is, of course, best remembered for his solo ascent of the southeast spur of Mt. Hunter in 1978, which took him 145 days, and for going missing while attempting a solo ascent of Denali's east buttress.

The Little Face is flanked by two buttresses that end in ridges: On the left is Colin Moorhead and Jon Walsh's Prime Rib (500m, 5.11b, 2003), and to the right is Short Ribs (5.10 A1), established in 2009 by BJ Cummings and Doug Sproul. (At least one additional route has been climbed more recently on this buttress.) To the left of the Little Face is the North Pillar of Mt. MacDonald, climbed by Bruce Kay and Jon Walsh in 2005. Five years later, Walsh returned with Jeff Relph to add a direct finish: North Pillar Direct (1,000m, 5.11c A0).

On August 4 and 5, 2016, Tony McLane and I established a new line on the Little Face, which we dubbed the Position of Comfort (510m, 5.11+ A2). Our route ascends an obvious line of weakness through the lower tier of the face to reach a large ledge with a perfect bivy cave. From the ledge it tackles the steepest section of rock all the way to the ridgeline that connects to the summit of Little Macdonald, and eventually to the northwest ridge of Mt. Macdonald.

Ryan Thorpe and I had established the initial four pitches the week prior to my ascent with Tony. After traveling back home to Squamish, I teamed up with Tony and returned to finish the new line in alpine style over three days. The first evening, following the approach, we slept at the base of the route. We began climbing early the next day, leaving our boots in a cave after the initial four pitches, having decided we probably wouldn't be going all the way to the top of the mountain. Tony had the bright idea of bringing our socks along, "just in case of an unplanned bivy," This proved to be a wise decision. Just a few pitches from the top, with daylight fading, we knew we were close. After so much hard climbing, it seemed our best chance to finish the route on this trip would be to shiver it out and finish the final pitches in the morning.

Overall, we freed the majority of the route's 13 pitches, with three pitches requiring short sections of aid (KBs, LAs, Peckers, and some thin cams). The real crux of the route came in finding the line of weakness and connecting features. The steep quartzite was difficult to read, and the corner systems were inconsistent.

We placed two bolts for an anchor on top of pitch 10 but did not place any protection bolts. We did not summit Mt. Macdonald after cresting the ridge, as climbing the wall was our goal and our appetite was sated after spending a cold night shivering together in the position of comfort on a small ledge.

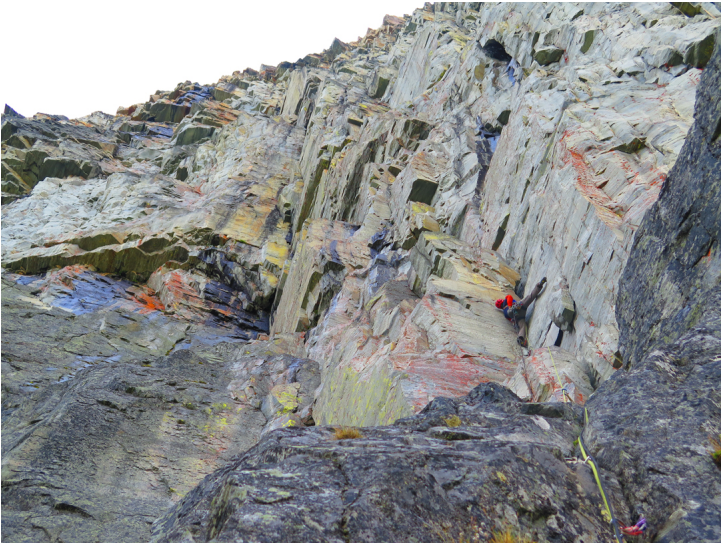
After reaching the subsummit of Little Face, we made three 60m raps to join up with a partial line that Ben Dorsey and Harry van Oort are working on. We finished our raps down their anchor stations to the base, picking up our boots along the way. [Editor's note: The incomplete line, which lies to the left of

Position of Comfort and to the right of the 1974 Waterman route, is called the Blind Watchmaker and is 5.11d A0 to its high point, six pitches up. Shortly after the first ascent of Position of Comfort, Dorsey and van Oort returned to their line and, seeking an easier finish, ended up joining Position of Comfort and following that route to the top, finding the first ascensionists' chalk along the way and aiding the same sections that Ammerlaan and McLane did. They called their linkup Exit Through the Gift Shop.]

**Despite a relatively short and easy approach, the Little Face has received very little attention from climbers. It sits proudly above the busiest highway in the country, along the route for most climbers traveling in to the Bugaboos, so it's a wonder that more climbers haven't ventured up this interesting section of rock.**

Jason Ammerlaan, Canada

## Images



Tony McLane on pitch six of Position of Comfort, at the start of the steep, golden quartzite on Mt. MacDonald's Little Face.



Tony McLane weaving left and right to find the weaknesses on pitch ten of Position of Comfort on Mt. MacDonald.



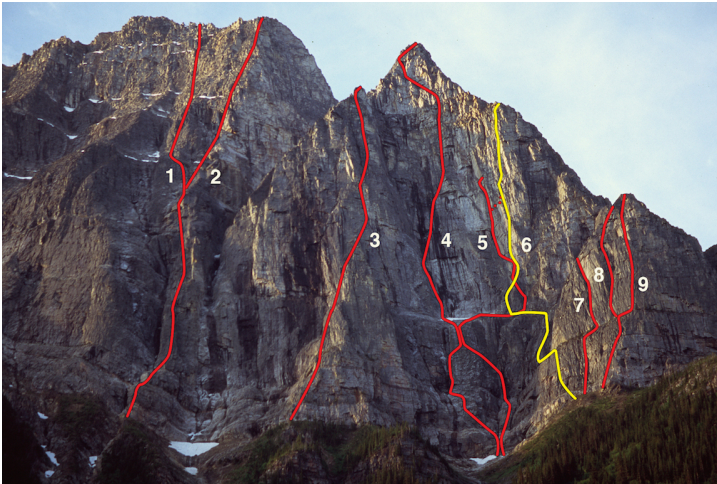
The approximate line of ascent of Position of Comfort (2016) on Mt. MacDonald.



The obligatory summit (ridge) shot of Jason Ammerlaan (left) and Tony McLane.



Harry van Oort on a 5.11c pitch near the high point of the uncompleted Blind Watchmaker route on Little Face.



The North Pillar and Little Face of Mt. MacDonal (2,883m), showing approximate location of known routes. The North Pillar is ca 1,000m high, and the Little Face is 500m to 600m. (1) North Pillar (Kay-Walsh, 2005). (2) North Pillar Direct (Relph-Walsh, 2010). (3) Prime Rib (Moorhead-Walsh, 2003). (4) Waterman Route (Waterman-Waterman, 1974). (5) The Blind Watchmaker (Dorsey-Van Oort; incomplete line shown, as of 2016; dotted line shows 2016 connection to Position of Comfort). (6) Position of Comfort (Ammerlaan-McLane, 2016). (7) Dorsey-Mackaness, 2015 (the climbers found older pitons on this line). (8) Haley-Schaefer, 2014 (climbed during off-route attempt on Primal Rib; the climbers continued up the northwest ridge to MacDonal's summit). (9) Short Ribs (Cummings-Sproul, 2009).

## Article Details

Author	Jason Ammerlaan
Publication	AAJ
Volume	59
Issue	91
Page	0
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions