



## AAC Publications

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### Let the Progression Continue!

Freeing the Tom Egan Memorial Route in the Bugaboos

**I first visited the Bugaboos in 2008 with under-the-radar alpine legend Chris Brazeau.** Braz, a low-key, wide-smiling local, knew all the tricks to help an alpine climbing neophyte like myself. After driving up the bumpy logging road for about an hour, he wrapped his car in chicken wire to protect it from porcupines and stashed a few barley beverages to chill in the creek while we were in the mountains. I was giddy with excitement. I'd heard about the fabled Bugaboos since I was a kid. And now, at age 21, I was finally going to hike into the cirque of mint granite spires.

After a few hours of trudging, the humid Kootenay forest gave way to a rocky moraine, and the east face of Snowpatch Spire came into view. I was blown away. The beautiful, sheer pane of granite was laced with corner systems, and a creamy dollop of snow—its namesake—perched on the left side of the face. Once we got a bit closer to the face, a striking, barely perceptible thin crack splitting the diamond-shaped headwall on the right side of the face caught my eye.

“What’s that!?” I exclaimed.

“The Tom Egan Memorial Route,” Braz replied. “Old Daryl Hatten FA.”

Squamish, my home climbing area, is rife with Daryl Hatten legends. He was an aid-climbing master and could party harder than anyone else, according to local lore. The Pan Wall on the Chief is home to a handful of bold, incipient Hatten testpieces. He had established the Tom Egan Memorial Route with John Simpson in 1978. Tom Egan was a friend of theirs that had passed away in a small-plane crash. Braz and I climbed a few stellar lines on that trip and cemented the idea of one day attempting the Tom Egan.

I got my chance to see the route up close two years later, with visiting Brit climber Hazel Findlay. Hazel and I climbed the Power of Lard, a classic 5.12, and then pendulumed into the Tom Egan Memorial Route. We rappelled down the line with mouths agape. A laser-cut splitter ran the entire length of the face, barely big enough for fingers.

Two years later, in 2012, I returned to attempt the line in earnest with my longtime pal Matt Segal. It soon became apparent that the first 30 feet of the splitter would not go free. Matt and I spent the first month of that summer swinging around the face, looking for a feasible line into the crack. Near the end of the trip, Matt found what we were looking for: a crescent line of crimpers, the smallest we could possibly hold, leading into the Tom Egan from the neighboring route Sweet Sylvania to the left. After slamming in six bolts on the 40-foot traverse, and beefing up the old aid belays, it became apparent that we had a mega-hard project to sink our teeth into. The work had only begun.

The next two summers—2013 and 2014—Matt and I essentially wrote off July and August as Tom Egan time. We'd hike in with giant packs and set up at Applebee Campground for the duration. The first splitter crack pitch—though perhaps as hard as the Cobra Crack (5.14) in Squamish—wasn't the most difficult lead. It was the face traverse, by then dubbed the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch (5.14), that gave us the most trouble. Never before had we both been so rudely and unpredictably chucked off a wall. This was cryptic, subtle, gently overhanging granite trickery at its finest. Those were trying summers. By the end of August we'd shoulder our toppling packs and trudge down the trail with

sliced fingers, utterly burnt out and empty-handed.

In the summer of 2015, things started to come together. I got a job helping a wild, charismatic tree trimmer in West Vancouver named Steeno. I'd spend the days heaving rounds of wood, then exile myself to a dusty corner of the climbing gym and dangle with weights strapped to my harness. This combination actually duplicated big-wall free climbing quite well: a huge amount of manual labor interspersed with intense bits of climbing.

As soon as Matt and I arrived in the Bugaboos we quickly matched the previous year's high point. I managed to free the Blood on the Crack pitch (5.14-), and both of us were consistently one-falling the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch—a big improvement. Hiking across the glacier toward Snowpatch for the umpteenth time, I had Bob Dylan queued up on my iPod: "Any day now, any day now, I shall be released."

In mid-August I got very lucky and barely managed to free the Drunken Dawn Wall, putting Matt in an uncomfortable, unenviable position. He now had to climb it as well. As he is a few inches shorter than me, a few of the moves on the pitch were savagely hard for him. Watching Matt, I was almost in tears, witnessing him put in some of the most fierce, gritty efforts I've ever seen. When he came up short, the tension that evening on the portaledge was palpable.

Over the next few days I climbed the remaining difficult crack pitches—5.14-, 5.13, and 5.13- R—and rappelled each evening to the portaledge, fingers crossed that Matt would send the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch. Alas, it was not to be. With a storm threatening, we rocketed up the fixed lines, intent on finishing the route before the rains began. Above the final headwall pitch, I led leftward, up very wandering, choose-your-own-adventure style alpine rock climbing to gain the Yellow Tower and the ridgeline of Snowpatch Spire, not the true summit itself. This is where Daryl and John had finished their climb, and given the dark clouds enveloping the Howser Towers in the distance, this is where we chose to descend as well. We rigged the rappels and threw our ropes down the Sunshine Route raps, just as the storm began in earnest.

On the descent we got hit with savage hail and terrifying thunder. We arrived back at camp soaked and frazzled, but otherwise safe, thanking the Bugaboo spirits profusely for allowing us safe passage. Our friend Ian Welsted had left us a bottle of Ballantine's Scotch. After a few swigs I passed out, unable to comprehend the long saga that was now complete.

Looking toward the future, perhaps someone, someday, will link all the pitches on the Tom Egan headwall, ledge to ledge, in one 80-meter, 5.15 pitch. We broke up our climb using the old aid belays, none of which could remotely be called no-hands stances. As always, the style can be improved upon. Let the progression continue!

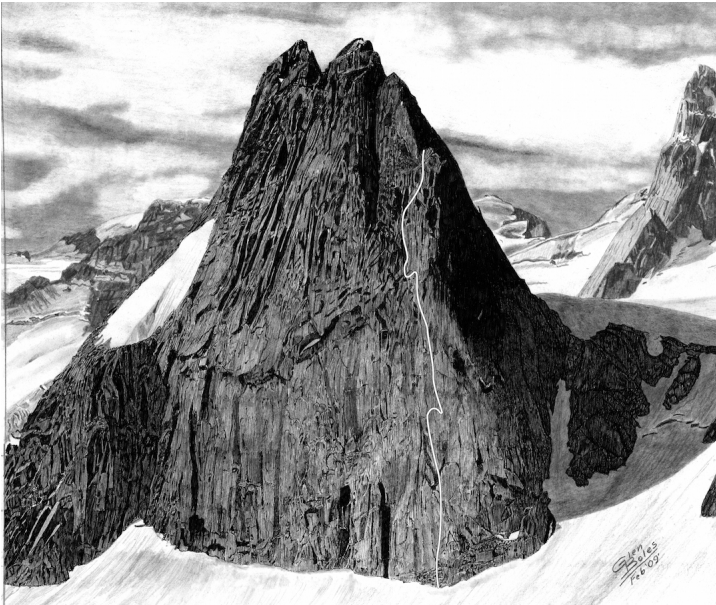
**Summary:** The first free ascent of the Tom Egan Memorial Route (Hatten-Simpson, 1978) on the east face of Snowpatch Spire (13 pitches, V 5.14) in the Bugaboos, Purcell Mountains of British Columbia, Canada, August 11–14, 2015, by Matt Segal and Will Stanhope. Stanhope freed the entire climb in a ground-up push, with Segal free climbing all but the crux section of 5.14 face climbing.

**About the Author:** Will Stanhope is based out of Squamish, British Columbia. He notes that, "For the last few years my main focus has been free climbing big walls. Trying your absolute best, thousands of feet off the ground, surrounded by beauty, is as good as it gets." He plans to support Matt Segal in 2016 on an attempt to complete his own free climb of the Tom Egan Memorial Route.

## Images



Will Stanhope climbs the Blood on the Crack pitch (5.14-) while Matt Segal belays from the portaledge below.



The east face of Snowpatch Spire. The free Tom Egan Memorial Route approximately follows the white line shown, up the steep wall on the right side of the face for 13 pitches, with two pitches of 5.13 and two pitches of 5.14 climbing.



Matt Segal bears down on the small crimps of the Drunken Dawn Wall pitch (5.14), a face climbing variation that made the free route possible.



Will Stanhope ascends a sustained, flaring 5.13 crack high on the route

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