



## AAC Publications

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### **The Minaret, Retinal Circus, First Free Ascent**

Canada, British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, Bugaboos

**The Minaret is a gorgeous prow shaped like a rocket ship that leans against the south side of South Howser Tower.** Despite having made many trips to the Bugaboos, I'd never climbed on it. In August, Maury Birdwell, Leo Houlding, Jesse Huey, and I ponied up some loonies for a heli and set up a deluxe base camp a five-minute walk away from the Minaret.

Early in the trip we spied some impressive headwall splitters, and guidebook sleuthing revealed the line to be Retinal Circus, a 600m 5.11 A2 climbed by Aaron Martin and Zack Smith in 2001 (AAJ 2002). On our first two attempts we made incremental progress, sussing out sequences and figuring out the best path for free climbing. Down low, slammed-shut corners necessitated some crafty, wandering face climbing. "Wish we had brought double ropes, mate," remarked Leo. The Brits love their double ropes. Note to future ascensionists: They definitely wouldn't hurt.

On our third attempt in two weeks (we took breaks from the project to climb other routes), we cracked the code and arrived at the centerpiece of the route: the much-ogled headwall splitters. One false start dead-ended me in the middle of nowhere. I rapped and tried a crack to the left, and this time the dots connected. I imagine those cracks had likely only been climbed once before, but they were absolutely immaculate.

By dusk we were on top of the Minaret and beginning a slightly tense descent along Doubting the Millennium, to climber's right of Retinal Circus, using Leo's 4mm tag line to pull down our main rope. It's hard to put much faith in a rope that skinny, but it worked out OK. Around midnight we scampered back to camp, cracked a Kokanee each, and toasted a stellar day.

– Will Stanhope, Canada

## Images



Leo Houlding following the 5.12- upper splitter pitch of Retinal Circus on the Minaret.



The Minaret, showing the line followed for the first free ascent of Retinal Circus (600m, 5.12+). The climbers likely deviated from the original 2001 route several times in search of free climbing terrain. Just left of this formation is the classic Beckey-Chouinard Route on South Howser Tower.

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