



AAC Publications

Split Mountain, Isengard; Madeline Wall, Kids in the Haul

Canada, British Columbia, Coast Mountains

The northeast face of Split Mountain, near Terrace, B.C., presents an outrageous prow of granite rising out of the mist from a deep, narrow chasm. (This formation is just south of the Skeena River at 54°22'19.00"N, 128°59'37.57"W.) Nick Black, Gary McQuaid, and Tim Russell worked out an approach and established the initial pitches on this feature in 2013 and 2014. The following year, Tyler McDivitt and I joined Tim for an attempt to climb the prow over eight days in capsule style. We found steep rock, splitter cracks, frozen fingers, and high adventure, but were forced to retreat from high on the wall by a storm.

In August 2016, Tim and I made our way back to Split Mountain. Gary and Laurent Janssen helped carry gear and climb the first two pitches to find us a bivy site safe from rockfall, before they returned to Terrace. That night we lay in our portaledge and stared up at the sky, a torn strip of star-strewn fabric hemmed in by the jagged walls around us. We spent the next day retracing our previous route up the wall through steep, splitter crack systems linked by tricky face traverses.

On the third day we faced the two technical cruxes of the route. Tim led a 50m blockbuster 5.11+ pitch that followed magically appearing edges into a pinched-shut technical corner before pulling into a steep fist crack. I got a wild 5.11 pitch of classic burly crack climbing up a tight-hands splitter in the back of a smooth-sided overhanging corner.

That night we were finally high enough on the wall to receive a forecast via our InReach device—it called for a storm. The next day we left the portaledge behind and committed to the top, climbing past our 2015 high point into steep, uncertain terrain. Tim led the final, bold pitch of run-out slab up to a 5.10+ roof before pulling a dicey mantel over the lip of the wall onto the flat summit of Split Mountain just as the daylight died on August 10 around 9:30 p.m.

Ten minutes after we topped out the wall for its first ascent, the brief high-pressure system we had enjoyed—so rare in this part of the world—slammed shut. We found ourselves in the lashing rain of a cold West Coast storm. An epic descent of stuck ropes and shivering found us back at our portaledge camp, soaked to the bone, at 2:30 a.m. When morning broke, we experienced the sensation of floating on a sea of fog as the skies cleared and we continued our descent to the ground.

We named the route Isengard (450m, 5.11+ A1) after the fortress from *The Lord of the Rings*, as we felt it captured the hostile nature of the wall and the wild, primordial feel of the area. We largely free climbed the route, including full pitches up to 5.11+. We did use aid on some pitches when expedient, when cleaning was necessary, and, in the case of pitch 13's welded corner, when protection was not available. All aid was clean, but future parties may want a few pitons to protect some of the free climbing and four 1/4-inch bolt hangers for pitch eight. We used a power drill to place nine protection bolts and bolted all belay anchors with the exception of pitch six. Isengard has some amazing pitches on it, and it is a route worth repeating for those seeking wild, remote climbing.

– Grant Stewart, Canada

Kids in the Haul, Madeline Wall

One week before completing Isengard, Grant Stewart and Tim Russell teamed up with Laurent Janssen and Gary McQuaid to finish a multiyear effort on a 700m route up a big south face near the junction of Madeline Creek and the Ecstall River, a tributary of the Skeena River (**53°59'22.8"N, 129°48'10.2"W**). They called their route Kids in the Haul (VI 5.10 A1), and the cliff the Madeline Wall. The route topped out the wall but not the mountain, due to the amount of jungle bushwhacking that would have required. According to Stewart, "The route presented good climbing on generally amazing rock. However, it is of an adventurous nature due to runouts and a number of vegetated pitches, making for some spicy root-pulling moves." The full story of this ascent is in the 2017 **Canadian Alpine Journal**.

Images



Grant Stewart jamming white granite on a new route, Isengard (450m, 5.11+ A1), near Terrace B.C.



The route line for Isengard (450m, 5.11+ A1), near Terrace, B.C.



Tim Russell getting a stem on the crux pitch of Isengard (450m, 5.11+ A1), near Terrace B.C.



Grant Stewart pulling onto the top of a new route near Terrace, B.C.: Isengard (450m, 5.11+ A1).



The Madeline Wall and the line of Kids in the Haul (700m, VI 5.10 A1).

Article Details

Author	Grant Stewart
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions