



AAC Publications

Snowpatch Spire, Beckey-Mather Route, First Free Ascent

Canada, British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, Bugaboos

After more than 20 seasons in the Bugaboos, I wasn't quite sure how much energy I had to devote to my beloved backyard spires. Injuries held me back in 2017 from climbing anywhere near my limit, which in turn pulled in the reins on my enthusiasm. But thanks to my uber-psyched girlfriend, Michelle Kadatz, we found ourselves camped at Applebee in late July as usual. A change in the forecast meant that our first plan, attempting a line known as Under Fire on the North Howser, wasn't a good idea. So we looked a little farther left than usual on the east face of Snowpatch and began to check out the original 1959 line up the face by the legendary Fred Beckey and Hank Mather.

Amazingly, this route had somehow escaped the free climbing fiesta the rest of the east face had received in the last couple of decades. At least the commitment levels were low, especially as we'd just be "investigating" the lower pitches. It turned out they were quite dirty, but totally free climbable and incredibly good. We cleaned heaps of wet moss with nut tools on the way up, and after just three pitches of climbing and prepping, a fast-approaching storm forced our retreat.

The following weekend I was back with Tim Banfield, and we climbed the first four pitches, bolted three stations (one of the first four was already bolted), and gave it a quick scrub with wire brushes on the way down. The slime left over from the previous week was now dry and brushed off easily. Craig McGee met us that night, and he and I climbed from glacier to summit, rappelled the west face, and made it back to camp in about 14 hours, via the Bugaboo-Snowpatch col, for the route's first free ascent.

We used a left variation on pitches three to five, ascending a long right-facing corner to rejoin the line in the guidebook at the roof. This exceptionally fun variation had clearly been climbed before, as there were rusty pitons and a couple of old bolts on it. We thought the route as a whole was superb, especially the steep five pitches at the start. The crux is low, and the pitches check in at 11+, 12-, 10-, 10+, and 10, followed by another eight rope lengths of fun 5.7–5.9 choose-your-own-adventure terrain. Word quickly spread, and the "new" Beckey-Mather received another five or six ascents before the season was done, confirming the quality and the grades. The route is a significantly easier free climb than anything else on the east face of Snowpatch.

– Jon Walsh, Canada

Images



Jon Walsh on the second pitch of the Beckey-Mather Route on the east face of Snowpatch Spire in the Bugaboos, right off the belay.



Jon Walsh approaching the 5.12a crux of the Beckey-Mather Route on the east face of Snowpatch Spire in the Bugaboos.



Craig McGee on the first pitch (5.11c) of the Beckey-Mather Route on the east face of Snowpatch Spire in the Bugaboos.



The line of the Beckey-Mather Route on the East Face of Snowpatch Spire in the Bugaboos.

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