



AAC Publications

Leaning Towers, The Pulpit, East Face

Canada, British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, Bugaboo Provincial Park

The Leaning Towers are a small group of granitic peaks in the heart of the Purcell Wilderness Conservatory in southeastern British Columbia. Over the course of 10 days in August, Ian Dusome and I aimed to climb the east face of the Pulpit, a subpeak of Hall Peak.

The beginning of August brought an unparalleled stretch of excellent weather to the East Kootenays. Early in the morning of August 3, Ian and I shouldered heavy packs and began the March along the Dewar Creek Trail into the Purcell wilderness. By that evening we had made it to a large boulder in the valley below the Leaning Towers, where, thankfully, the ropes, rack, and some camping gear we'd cached two weekends earlier were still hanging unscathed from the boulder. This time around, Ian and I were on our own and we spent all of the next gruelling day shuttling the gear through a jungle of Kootenay slide alder to a landing below Hall Peak.

This area has always captured my imagination. As a teenager growing up in Cranbrook (long before I had taken up climbing), I remember looking at this blank spot on the map, with no roads or trails—it was easy to wonder what was back there. Fast-forward to a few years ago, and that same curiosity was reignited, this time under the lens of climbing. Fortunately, Ian is a total crusher and always down for an adventure, so when the idea of visiting the Leaning Towers came up his response was “When do you want to go? I'll book the time off!”

On our third day we moved all of the climbing gear up to the base of the Pulpit. We then spent a few hours peering through binoculars, trying to decide on a plan of attack. The line up the white upper headwall seemed relatively straightforward—a long system of wide cracks split the wall vertically for nearly entire top half—but there were two very prominent obstacles. The large roof that caps the wall didn't appear to have an obvious solution, and a 20-meter blank section on the gray lower apron looked challenging if not impossible to protect without bolts. (We would later discover a line of bat-hook holes up the slab just left of where we ended up climbing, most likely from an initial foray onto the wall in 1975 by Joanna McComb and Joe Meyers. Their attempt ended about a third of the way up after a rope was chopped. They were part of a group that may have made the first ascent of the Pulpit, that same year, by the easier western slabs. Most of the formations in this group were climbed during a 1933 trip led by A.A. McCoubrey.)

The next day we spent several hours working on the blank slab. After I'd turned back at a small overlap, Ian took the sharp end and quested upward successfully, leaving a few small cams crammed into a flare under the overlap. I took the next pitch and climbed up into a beautiful stem corner, occasionally aiding when there was more gardening for gear placements than climbing. Our nut tools were sharp by the end of the trip.

We pushed a few more pitches up to the top of the gray apron and fixed more lines. On a rest day halfway through the trip, we hauled a portledge, a little food and some water, and the rest of the climbing gear up to the midpoint of the wall. The next day we climbed the fixed lines one more time, pulling them up with us to the portaledge.

Ian then started into the upper headwall, aiding through a short band of horrendous, water-deposited flakey material that coated the rock—this “crunchy” section of the pitch led into a bombay stem box that eventually narrowed to an offwidth at the beginning of the upper crack system. We swapped

leads at an awkward hanging belay, and I proceeded to climb (again with lots of aiding/excavating) a long pitch up the main corner system. This pitch culminated with a beautiful, slightly overhanging section of thin hand crack.

After a night in the portaledge, we returned to our high point and pushed up to just below the orange roof. Ian climbed an awesome pitch of offwidth into squeeze chimney up to the top of a large flake, and I backtracked into the main corner system before climbing through a series of bulges to just under the roof. After a little searching, we found a wide crack that worked its way through the huge, 45° roof; Ian aided this at C1, and I tried desperately to free it while following but had to resort to aiding on the gear he'd left. This topped us out just north of the summit of the Pupit, with only a short scramble to the top.

We rapped back down our line on nut anchors and slung horns to the portaledge and spent one more night, before rappelling down the remainder of the wall tired and dehydrated. Over the next three days we packed up camp and moved all of the gear back to the Dewar Creek trailhead.

In addition to the bat-hook holes, we found signs of a previous attempt (rappel tat up to our fourth pitch) that was possibly as new as summer 2016, but there were no signs of travel or retreat on the upper white headwall. During our climb, the followers were largely able to free everything (except for the upper roof), so we have hopes to return and climb the route free in single push. We called our route Preaching to the Choir (400m, 10 pitches, 5.11 C1).

Kevin Martin, Canada

Images



The first route up the Pulpit's east face started left of the snow patch and fired up the prow of the white headwall. Hall Peak is behind.



Photo-topo for Preaching to the Choir on the Pulpit



Climbing on Preaching to the Choir on the east face of the Pulpit.



Serious loads for the Leaning Towers.

Article Details

Author	Kevin Martin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	177
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions