



AAC Publications

New Routes in Daniels River Valley and Nearby Areas

Canada, British Columbia, Coast Mountains, Pacific Ranges

IT WAS A BUSY SEASON in the Coast Mountains outside of the city of Powell River, northwest of Squamish. With good weather in the late spring and early fall, a number of new routes were established in this burgeoning center for Pacific Northwest big-wall climbing (see feature articles in AAJ 2018).

In the Daniels River Valley, which only saw its first two climbs in 2017, teams succeeded on three new routes. In late June, Travis Foster, Drew Leiterman, John McMahon, and Elliot Vercoe made a valiant effort on the northeast face of the Super Unknown, a few hundred meters left of the only route on the formation, Sacred Stone (1,200m, VI 5.11, Guilbault-Landeck, 2017). June was a drenching month along the South Coast, and the team received rain on four of eight days on the wall and eventually bailed. Vercoe returned to Australia, and McMahon to Cranbrook, and then, in mid-August, Foster and Leiterman returned with better weather to complete the sardonically named Vercoe-McMahon Memorial Route, a.k.a. Dude Wall (1,020m, VI 5.11 A2).

In mid-July, Matt Burbach and Leif Solberg made the first ascent of a formation just east of Super Unknown called the Penguin, via Ego vs. Mosquito (900m, 5.9+ C1). Burbach and Solberg climbed the route in a single push—the Daniels' first Grade IV. They suggested a grade of J10 be added to the difficulties. "So much climbing was in vertical jungle," Solberg explained, "that a rock grade can't really be given for it. Our 'J' rating is similar to that of the Yosemite decimal system—for J10, think 5.10."

Meanwhile, Colin Landeck and Josh Schuh were busy attempting a new route that shares close proximity with the first ten pitches of Sacred Stone before branching left into corner systems on the right side of a large prow. They were stymied by a lack of gear, however, and had to retreat.

After a resupply in town (including quite a few more Metolius blue finger-size cams), Landeck and Schuh returned with Burbach, Mike DeNicola, and Max Merkin. DeNicola joined Landeck and Schuh to finish the aforementioned line—Super Unknown's second complete route—over five days. The Prow (1,200m, VI 5.10 A1) begins roughly 200m left of Sacred Stone (also left of Landeck and Schuh's first attempt) and takes a plumb line up the buttress dividing Super Unknown's northeast and northwest faces. "Once cleaned," Landeck said, "this will be an incredible route, topping out the amphitheater roofs, perhaps the only 'truly hard' climbing on the whole formation." Meanwhile, Burbach and Merkin began a new line aiming toward the headwall of Super Unknown's northeast face, starting at the base of the Prow and angling left toward the Vercoe-McMahon Memorial. They found difficulties up to A2+ and 5.8+ before bailing due to bad weather.

It wasn't just the Daniels that saw action. In early August, Zoe Manson and I climbed a 600m alpine dome called the Gem on the southern tip of the relatively popular South Powell Divideridge hike, which extends for 20km from roughly Amon Rudh in the Eldred Valley southward to the aforementioned dome (and, curiously enough, has nothing to do with the Powell River). The Rob Richards Memorial Route (600m, IV5.10) follows a plumb line, utilizing a 280m crack system up the middle of the southwest face. Rob Richards, our friend and mentor, died from a sudden heart attack in June at age 55. He was a prominent first ascensionist and historian of rock climbing in the Powell River area.

Further north, Zoe and I made the first ascent of a remote alpine spire we named Rogue Tower via its south face (300m, 5.10 C1), along the seldom-visited Montrose Divide, which rises between Montrose

Creek and the Toba River. Our climb was the first ascent of the peak, one of many unclimbed formations in a cirque of granite towers unvisited by climbers beforehand. (The only record we could find of any party previously exploring the Montrose Divide was a trip by John Clarke in 1984.) The approach took two days of sailing with our friends Captain Evan Lockhart, Andrew Lee, and Max Merkin, followed by 40km of logging roads—fortuitously expedited with the help of our buddy Rob Richards' old logging crew, the only other humans in hundreds of square miles—and finally a 1,500m fourth-class gully to reach base camp.

Back around Powell River, Manson, Merkin, and I nabbed the first ascent of a formation I had spotted while out ridge-walking the previous year. The Lady, as we call this big rock, is located in a tributary subalpine valley branching off the southwestern edge of the North Powell Divide, which continues from the Gem dome to Toba Inlet. We summited the southwest face on August 18 via Lady Wall (550m, V 5.10 C3). Every pitch of the route revealed memorable moderate crack climbing, with one crux pitch high up requiring ten hours of delicate aiding on my part. "This is the steepest thing I've juggled since Leaning F\$%@ing Tower!" Max gasped upon reaching the anchor after space juggling for 40m. Lady Wall is accessed via a two-day ridge walk beginning on the Amon Rudh climbers' trail in the Eldred River Valley.

For the past 30 years, to talk about Powell River big-wall climbing meant only one thing: the Eldred Valley. Yet here we are at the end of this report, having barely made mention of that easily accessed big-wall paradise. It would seem the current trend in the South Coast is toward bigger, more remote adventures. But with the Eldred hardly tapped out—and with many new efforts beginning there last year—it would not surprise me if a whirlwind of new routing occurs on the more accessible walls in 2019.

– **Evan Guilbault**, Canada, with information from Travis Foster, Colin Landeck, Drew Leiterman, and Leif Solberg

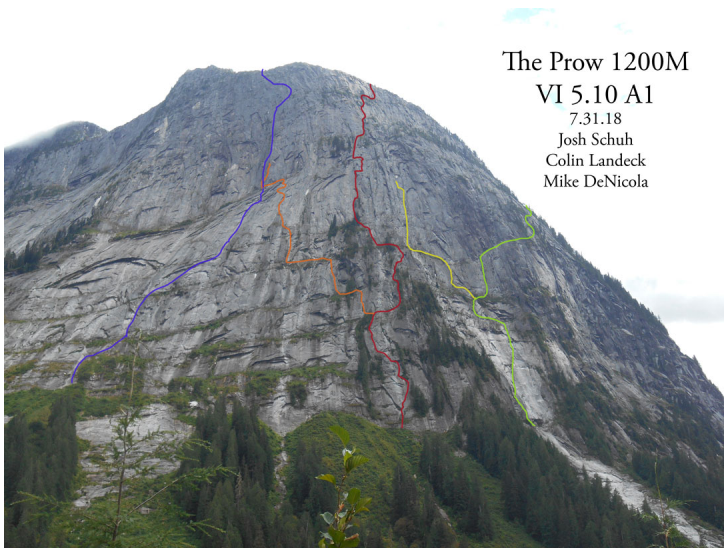
Images



Josh Landeck continues upward after a pendulum on pitch 19 on the Prow (1,200m, VI 5.10 A1) of Super Unknown.

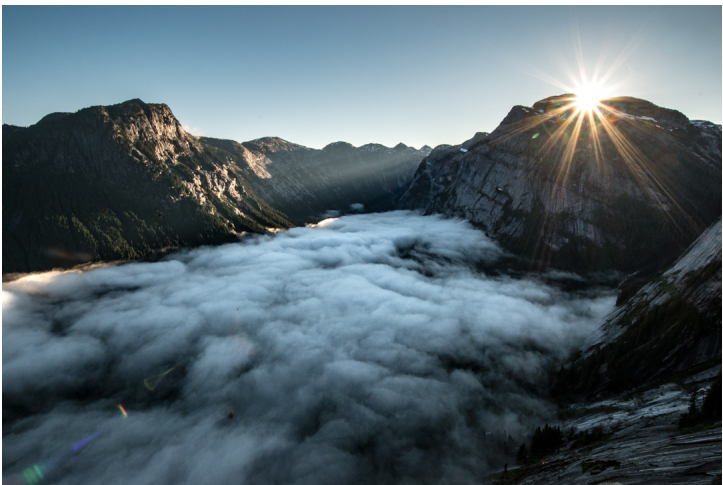


The route line for Ego vs. Mosquito (900m, 5.9+ C1) on the north face of the Penguin. Ascent line in red, descent in blue. This formation is just to the east of the larger Super Unknown wall.



The Prow 1200M
VI 5.10 A1
7.31.18
Josh Schuh
Colin Landeck
Mike DeNicola

The north side of the Super Unknown formation, showing all known routes and attempts to date. Blue line: Vercoe-McMahon Memorial Route, a.k.a. Dude Wall (1,020m, VI 5.11 A2, Foster-Leiterman-McMahon-Vercoe, 2018). Orange line: Unfinished attempt (Burbach-Merkin, 2018). Red line: The Prow (1,200m, VI 5.10 A1, DeNicola-Landeck-Schuh, 2018). Yellow line: Unfinished attempt (Landeck-Schuh, 2018). Green line: Sacred Stone (1,200m, VI 5.10 A1, Landeck-Guilbault, 2017).



An inversion in the Daniels River Valley as the sun rises over the Red Alert Wall, which was first climbed in 2017.



Travis Foster looking down from the ledge atop pitch 16 on the Vercoe-McMahon Memorial Route, a.k.a. Dude Wall (1,020m, VI 5.11 A2) during the first ascent.



Travis Foster finding splitters on pitch eight of the Vercoe-McMahon Memorial Route, a.k.a. Dude Wall (1,020m, VI 5.11 A2) during the first ascent.



Travis Foster taking in the view from the summit of Super Unknown after a week-long push for the first ascent of the Vercoe-McMahon Memorial Route, a.k.a. Dude Wall (1,020m, VI 5.11 A2). The impressive cliff in the background is the Red Alert Wall, first climbed in 2017 (Jungle is Massive, 1,290m, VI 5.10 C2, Foster-Leiterman).



The Delirium Corner on Lady Wall.



The south face of Rogue Tower, showing the line of the first ascent.



Zoe Manson on the summit ridge of Rogue Tower, looking southwest toward Mt. Denman.



The line of Rob Richards Memorial Route on the southwest face of the Gem Wall.



Evan Guilbault, Zoe Manson, and Max Merkin (left to right), with the first ascent of the southwest face of the Lady (550m, V 5.10 C3) shown behind.



New BC Walls

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