



## Vancouver Island: Significant Ascents from 2016 to Early 2019

Canada, British Columbia, Vancouver Island

**THE RUGGED MOUNTAINS of Vancouver Island have seen much activity, from new rock routes to major ice lines and first winter ascents. The following is a summary of significant developments in the last few years.**

In May 2016, Ryan Van Horne and Marie-Lou Piché visited the southeast face of Kings Peak (2,061m), located in Strathcona Provincial Park, and climbed a new line on one of the many southeast buttresses. Their route was 500m of mostly 4th- to mid-5th-class, with a few sections of 5.9, to where it meets the east couloir shortly after joining the east ridge. The full outing took three days to complete.

Routes from 2016 and 2017 on Kings Peak, Mt. Colonel Foster, and Victoria Peak (left to right:

Also in May, Danny O'Farrell joined forces with Chris Jensen and established the Owinmitisaht Ha'houlthee Ridge over a period of three days on Mariner Mountain (1,771m). They headed up the Bedwell Trail past Noble Creek and started up the eastern ridge, finding lots of 3rd- and 4th-class terrain with some sections up to 5.6. After 600m of rock, they traversed along the ridge and eventually followed the south face to the summit.

On June 28, Van Horne soloed a new route on Mt. Colonel Foster (2,135m). He set up camp on the mountain's south col and the following day traversed under the west face and completed a new route to the summit ridge. The 400m route was mostly low 5th class with a few short steps of 5.8. The only other known routes in this area are the South Gullies (600m, low 5th class and AI2, Horbury-Slocumb 1936), which led from the south col to the top of the southwest summit.

Another notable ascent of Mt. Colonel Foster was made on July 24. After climbing to the north col, Garner Bergeron, Hunter Lee, and Philip Stone traversed around to the mountain's west side and made the first ascent of the northwest arête. After 100m of 4th-class scrambling, they climbed 16 pitches up to 5.9 on mostly excellent rock. They joined the well-established summit traverse and descended by the normal route, making ten rappels down the northeast side.

The following summer, on August 10, 2017, Karsten Klawitter and Hunter Lee climbed a new route to the right of the west ridge of Victoria Peak (2,163m). The first six pitches involved climbing up to 5.10a, and on the seventh pitch they had to aid through an overhang. Once up the face, they crossed the west ridge route (800m, 5.8) and climbed a new finish on the upper headwall. After three pitches up to 5.9, they made an airy traverse and climbed one more section of steep rock before reaching the summit. They named the route Summit or Plummet (600m, 13 pitches, 5.10a A1).

Two weeks later, on August 27, Lee and Van Horne climbed a new route on the east face of Colonel Foster. Their route branches off from Cataract (1,350m, 5.8, Homer-Stone, 1988) after soloing up the low 5th-class approach ramp. Rather than make that route's rappel along the waterfall, they climbed the arête directly above Cataract Falls, left of the original line. After seven pitches up to 5.10a, they found themselves on the upper glacier. They called the route Exposure Arête.

That winter got off to a good start when, on December 22, 2017, Van Horne, Lee, and Mal Nicol

climbed a new route on the northeast face of Mt. Harmston (2,009m). This was probably the second winter ascent of Harmston (the first was on December 29, 2014, by Aaron Smythe and John Waters, via the southeast ridge). The 2017 team encountered thin ice on the lower section of the mountain, but once on the upper face conditions improved. To gain the summit ridge they had to “body saw” through a cornice. Once on the ridge they simul-climbed to the summit. They called the route Northern Lights (700m, WI3+ M3 TD-).

Northern Lights on the northeast face of Mt. Harmston. Photo by Hunter Lee

On March 10, 2018, Chris Jensen, Lee, and Van Horne climbed a new mixed route up the north face of Elkhorn Mountain (2,194m), taking a direct line to the summit. Their route joined Winter Needle (200m, 5.7 AI4, Pierce-Walker, 1996) toward the summit. They descended the northwest ridge, arriving at their camp 15 hours after setting off. They named the route Threading the Needle (310m, D+ WI4 M3).

On July 17, Lee and Van Horne climbed a new route on the south face of Mt. Grattan (1,607m) in the Alava Bate Sanctuary area. The route consisted of 10 pitches up to 5.9 for 500m. The only other known routes on the peak are on the east and west ridges.

There were a few significant winter ascents at the beginning of 2019. On February 5 and 6, Max Fisher and Mike Ford climbed a prominent couloir on the east face of Elkhorn Mountain South (a.k.a. Mt. Colwell, 1,989m), completing the first winter ascent and second overall ascent of the biggest mountain wall on Vancouver Island. (The first route up the face was Elk Well (1,250m, IV 5.8), climbed in August 2013 by Michael Loch, Mike Morris, Mike Shives, and Ryan Van Horne.) The 2019 line had previously been dubbed the Uber Couloir, and the climbers thought the name should stay. It was climbed in 36 hours car-to-car (1,400m, TD+ AI4+).

During that same weather window on February 5 and 6, Lee and Van Horne climbed another new route up the east face of Mt. Colonel Foster. The route departs from Into the Groove on the lower flank and weaves high onto the shoulder of the northeast peak. Conditions on the lower-angle terrain were good, yet steeper sections were marginal as the ice was heavily aerated and thin. Fortunately the climbing was never too difficult (WI3+). In all, they climbed 14 pitches of ice, sn’ice, and steep snow to reach the upper ridge, only to find themselves on a knife-edge with no bivouac site. Van Horne was forced to downclimb some 20m to the belay, where the two dug a snow cave in the wee hours of the morning and settled in for a few hours. After a stunning sunrise, they re-climbed the 20m to the upper ridge and rappelled to the notch between the northeast and northwest peaks, from which they downclimbed and rappelled the mountain’s west side. They named the route Threshold Extension (900m, TD+ V WI3+).

At 440m, Della Falls in Strathcona Provincial Park is one of Canada’s tallest waterfalls. In late February, Will Gadd, Peter Hoang, and Chris Jensen climbed the frozen waterfall for its first ascent. To access the line, they took a boat to the northwest end of Grand Central Lake and then they hiked 14km in showshoes to the base. They climbed seven pitches up to WI6.

– Information for this report came from Lindsay Elms, Hunter Lee, and various published sources.

## Images



Hunter Lee outside the bivy cave during the ascent of Threshold Extension (900m, TD+ V WI3+) on the east face of Mt. Colonel Foster.



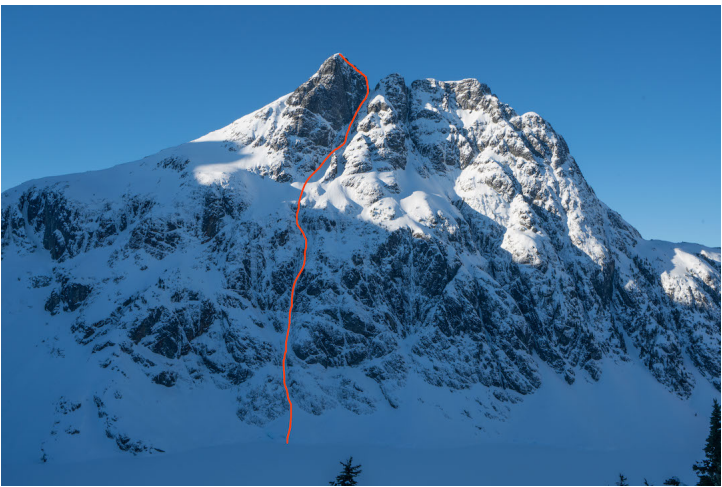
Hunter Lee climbing pitch five of Threshold Extension (700m, TD+ V WI3+) on the east face of Colonel Foster.



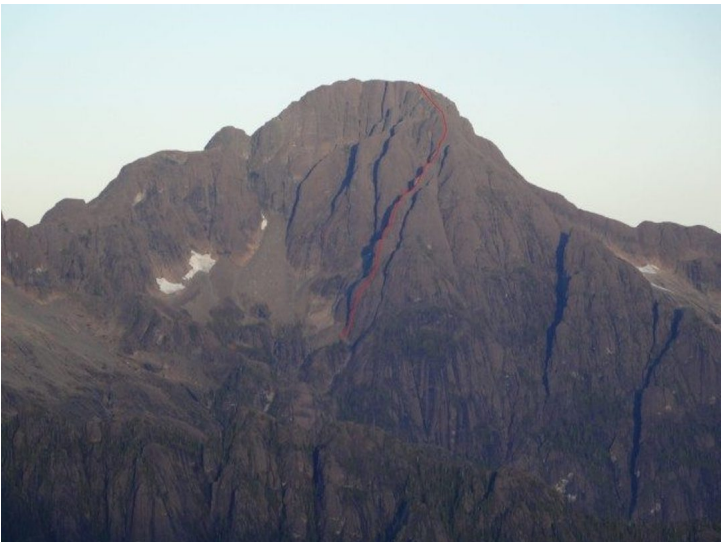
Ryan Van Horne finishing the third pitch on the south face of Mt. Grattan. The prominent peak in the background is Mt. Alava.



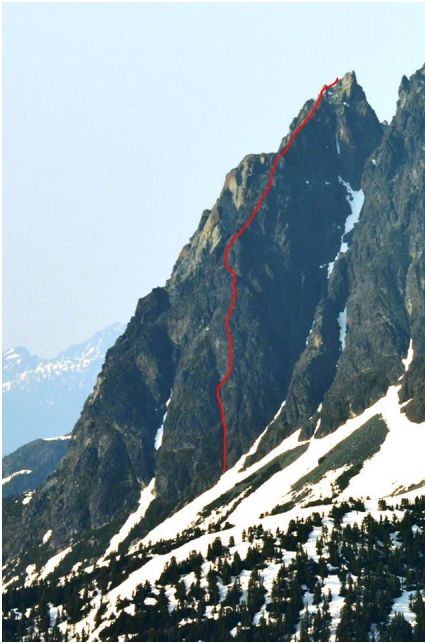
Malcolm Nicol climbing on Northern Lights on Mt. Harmston.



The line of Northern Lights on the northeast face of Mt. Harmston.



The 2016 line up the southeast face of Kings Peak.



The northwest arête of Mt. Colonel Foster.



The Uber Couloir on Elkhorn Mountain South.



Climbing on the Uber Couloir on Elkhorn Mountain South (a.k.a. Mt. Colwell).



Summit or Plummet (13 pitches, 5.10 A1) on Victoria Peak's northwest side.

## Article Details

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