



AAC Publications

North Twin, Full North Ridge

Canada, Alberta, Canadian Rockies, Icefields Parkway

ANYONE WHO WALKS over Woolley Shoulder—the pass that accesses the big mountains of what Bow Valley locals call the Black Hole—is rewarded with a fine view. To the north is Mt. Alberta, and to the south Stutfield Peak. But the climber's eye is drawn inexorably to the west. There lies Twins Tower—whose shadowy north aspect is the most stark of all the mythical north faces of the range—and the jagged summit of Son of Twin off its north shoulder, with the smooth, glaciated North Twin higher still and just to the south. The complete north ridge of North Twin tags the three high points, dominating the view from Woolley Shoulder and beckoning climbers with an obvious and aesthetic line.

The complete traverse has been talked up by locals at least as far back as 2000, when I moved to the area. Many have compared it to the Peuterey Ridge of Mont Blanc in the Alps—jokingly, primarily, as the rock quality on Twin is notoriously bad, and the famed Alpine ridge is much more accessible and trafficked. In spite of all the talk, the only actual attempt on the complete ridge that I know of is Dave Cheesmond and Sean Dougherty's effort in 1985, and they didn't make it far. Undoubtedly, most have been discouraged due to the poor rock quality. Also, most who *would* be interested have probably been drawn to the bigger prizes on either side—the north face of Alberta or the north face of Twins Tower.

On Monday, August 26, Alik Berg and I spent a day approaching over Woolley Shoulder with the full north ridge as our goal. The next day we began soloing up the ridgeline before arriving at two roughly 100m towers that Alik was eager to climb. I had alpine guiding work booked for Saturday and was keen to complete this climb as rapidly as possible, in the hope of getting a day off between the two outings, so I convinced Alik to walk around the towers. This was difficult for Alik, but eventually he capitulated. So, a pure ascent of the “full full” north ridge of North Twin yet remains.

We camped that night below the start of the technical climbing on Son of Twin in windy, threatening weather. Son of Twin had only one documented previous ascent, via the northwest ridge, reached from a pocket glacier below the face, by Al Spero and Dane Waterman in 1979. We intended to follow their route but saw no signs of previous passage on our line. The climbing included 5.7 on cracks with loose blocks, followed by run-out easy climbing on an arête. From the top, Alik led approximately six rappels into the col between the Son of Twin and Twins Tower. We arrived at the col just at dark and settled in for the night.

Our fourth day started by rapping down the ice gully from the col, as we had to gain low-angled ledges on the northwest face of Twins Tower in order to link into the first and most moderate route up this aspect, climbed by Hank L. Abrons, Peter Carman, and Rick Millikan on July 17–18, 1965. Brandon Pullan and I had made the second known ascent of this route in 2014. Instead of taking the far left gully that Brandon and I climbed, Alik and I chose blockier terrain to the right, due to unclimbable melting snow in the gully. We ran into a few run-out pitches with approximately 100m to go the top shoulder, but eventually found enough marginal protection to make the climbing reasonable.

From the shoulder, Alik had to lead a traverse above the north face over wet, snow-covered terrain where protection was difficult to find, partly due to our ice rack of only two screws. By slightly after sunset we had topped out on the Twins Tower. We descended the south ridge to a snowy col and then walked uphill in darkness to the summit of the North Twin. Soaked by the wet snow conditions,

we chose to continue moving, walking down to the north side of Stutfield Peak, and finally camping on a shaley rock slope among glaciers at 2 a.m.

The next day, our fifth, we descended the Cromwell-Stutfield col, which proved to be more technical than we had hoped. (Having spoken to others who have followed this descent, it seems we were not the first to find it tricky.) By 4 p.m. on Friday we had crossed the Sunwapta River a few kilometers south of where we had started five days earlier.

Overall, the climb is more a challenge of mental and physical endurance than a technical one. The climbing is never of a hard grade, and in spite of marginal rock quality, none of the individual pitches is X- or even R-rated if one is adept at knifeblade placement. The climb begins at 2,400m on the north end of the ridge, at a shale slope, and takes in the summit of Son of Twin (3,260m), Twins Tower (3,627m), and North Twin (3,731m).

While ours was the first integral traverse of the 4km ridge, it's hard to say how much new ground we covered. It seems to me we probably climbed a different version on the northwest ridge of the Son of Twin than Waterman and Spero, and our version of the line up Twins Tower probably took us onto new ground. I think our line on the lower ridge was likely covered by Cheesmond and Dougherty. In the Rockies we often do not differentiate when we diverge from the existing line, as the existing lines are so inexact. At least, most of us don't. Some do, but I'm not naming names.

– Ian Welsted, Canada

Summary: The first ascent of Peuterey Integrale of Choss (1,300m-plus, V 5.7), the complete north ridge of North Twin, by Alik Berg and Ian Welsted, August 26–30, 2019.

Images



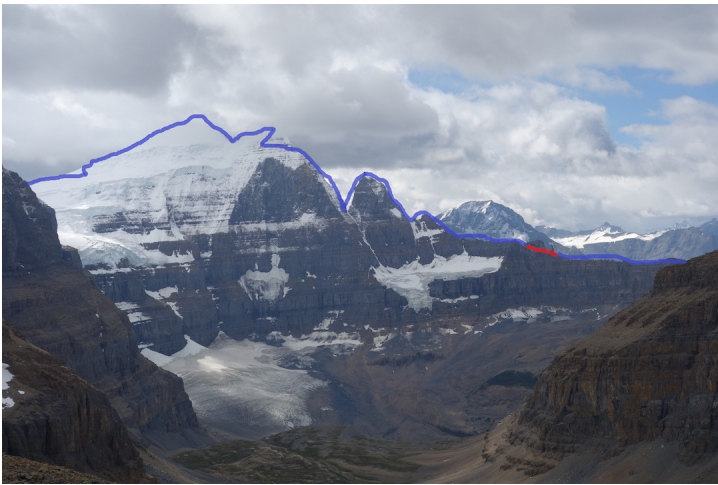
Ian Welsted 150 meters below the shoulder of the Twins Tower, leading on crumbly rock during the first full ascent of the north ridge of North Twin.



The two towers low on the north ridge that Berg and Welsted bypassed with scree hiking, leaving something for the true purists to tackle.



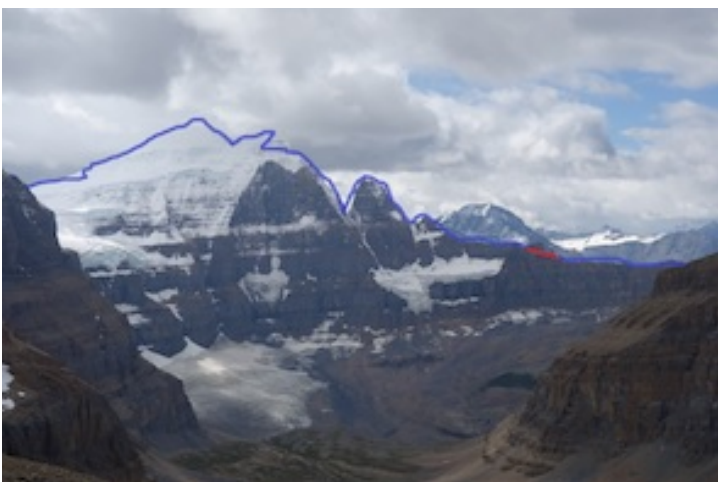
Alik Berg below the lower north ridge of North Twin, with Twins Tower reaching into the clouds behind.



The full north ridge of North Twin as seen from Woolley Shoulder.



Alik Berg approaching the start of the full north ridge of North Twin, passing over Son of Twin and Twins Tower. Berg and Ian Welsted's route is visible in blue—the red line marks a spot where they traversed easy terrain off the ridge to avoid two rock towers.



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