



AAC Publications

North Howser Tower, West Face, Voodoo Chile

Canada, British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, Bugaboos

On August 3, the day before Alik Berg and I climbed All Along the Watchtower (900m, 5.12-) on North Howser Tower, we spent some time scoping the west face. Traditionally, to get to the start of all the routes on the west face, you have to do several abseils. However, Alik had spotted a line a few years back that began on the ridge where these abseils start; the ridge sticks out westward, about 400m above the base of Howser's west face. We spent some time looking at the possibilities. Not only would the new line avoid the committing rappels to the very bottom of the west face, it would be shorter as a result. The splitters on golden granite high on the buttress made us agree it would be worth a look.

After a superb day on All Along the Watchtower, we rested in glorious sunshine at our East Creek campsite, only to spend the next four days of our trip in the tent, avoiding the weather. Fortunately, we had some whiskey, and when it was finished, we hiked out.

On Saturday, August 15, at 5 p.m., I phoned Alik from Hope, B.C., two hours east of Vancouver. There was another weather window on the way, and I had a bit of free time. We decided that if I packed and left in an hour, I could do most of the eight-hour drive that night, meet Alik and walk in the next day, and climb on the last day of the good weather.

Tired from the previous night's drive, we needed a lot of rest breaks during the six-hour walk to East Creek in blistering heat. Not feeling as fresh as we would have liked, we packed our bags and set alarms for 5 a.m. on the 17th, wishing we could take a rest day. Fortunately, the cracks we were aiming for turned out to be mega. The buttress we climbed doesn't have any other routes, and our line is the rightmost on North Howser's west face. We did 11 pitches. The first half of the route had a hard switch from one crack to another and a pumpy layback pitch, where, at 30m, Alik impressively hung around and scraped the holds clean; the second half of this pitch rewarded us with double hand cracks on golden granite. The 5.11+ crux of the route came on the top headwall.

In total, it took 19 hours (East Creek to East Creek), but that included a few bits of time-consuming route-finding. The most significant one involved me climbing a wide crack until it got too steep and wide, where, with no number 6 Camalot, I made the decision to come down and find an alternative.

Our route led directly to North Howser's summit. We named it Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+). With a few points of aid, it would go at 5.10, making it a great option for climbers wanting to climb the North Howser Tower who don't quite feel up to the longer routes.

The next day, as the weather began to turn, I packed up camp while Alik, who had lost at rock-paper-scissors, went back to get the axes and crampons we had left at the base of our route. Thanks to him for the good company, vision, and the hard leads.

— Uisdean Hawthorn, Scotland

Images



Alik Berg leading the first pitch on the first ascent of Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+) on the North Howser Tower.



Alik Berg looking for the correct way on pitch four of Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+). He ended up coming back to the belay and heading straight up.



Alik Berg starting up the crux pitch eight on Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+) on the west face of North Howser Tower.



Photo-topo of the new route Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+) on the right side of the west face of North Howser Tower.



Uisdean Hawthorn seconding golden splitters on pitch four of Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+).



Uisdean Hawthorn seconding the easy double hand crack at the top of the crux pitch of Voodoo Chile (500m, 5.11+).

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