



AAC Publications

Mt. Forbes, East Face

Canada, Alberta, Canadian Rockies

“Hey Q! Time to do this!” These were the muffled words that woke me from Alik’s splayed-out sleeping bag. I looked over through bleary eyes. He was propped up against the wheel of his Pontiac Vibe, stove roaring and coffee in hand. It was October 1 and Alik Berg and I were on the gravel of the Saskatchewan River Crossing parking lot in Banff National Park. We were riding the tail end of a huge system of good weather—there were two days left. It was a warm window, but we hoped that Mt. Forbes (3,612m) was high enough that the ice we hoped to climb wouldn’t have fallen apart yet. [Forbes is the seventh-highest peak in the Canadian Rockies and the highest entirely within the boundaries of Banff National Park.] **I took the coffee Alik handed me and swallowed my reservations about the 27km approach to a face that might well be out of condition.**

The bush travel was smooth. We made our way southwest toward Glacier Lake and on through the river flats, before turning south toward the Mons Glacier. We interrupted a grizzly feasting on the last wildflowers of the season. It was October, but it felt like late summer, and I was enjoying the last warmth before the impending eight-month Alberta freeze. At the tongue of the Mons Glacier, we wrapped back east toward the glacier below the north face of Mt. Forbes. We pitched our tent on a rock outcrop above the glacier’s tarn. The water glistened as the sun kissed the highest summits goodnight. Our objective, the unclimbed east face, was still out of sight.

Alik had climbed a new route on Mt. Outram (2,461m) with Maarten van Haeren exactly one year earlier. From that mountain, they had seen various possibilities for our line of ascent. We knew it was warmer this year, but we had heard good news from our friends Uisdean Hawthorn and Ethan Berman, on their way down from Mt. Robson after climbing frozen terrain on the Emperor Face. We kept our fingers crossed that it was only warm in the valley but would be cold and frozen up high on Forbes—we hoped and hoped as we fell asleep with our sleeping bags wide open!

The next morning, we crunched our way up the north glacier, over the northeast shoulder, and down to the base of the east face, gaining around 800m and losing around 200m in the process. Moon shadows had danced on the ice as we worked our way up the glacier with no need for headlamps. As we crested the shoulder, the first rays of sunlight were curving over the horizon and bathing the east face in a soft alpenglow. The mountain was already running with water, and the rising force of the sun would only make this worse. We decided to traverse the length of the wall in search of climbable ice. What little we found was delaminated and collapsing, but we did find an easy snow ramp that brought us to an ice gully tucked away out of the sun. We couldn’t see where it went, nor had we planned to climb in that area, but we hoped it would get us high enough to find usable ice.

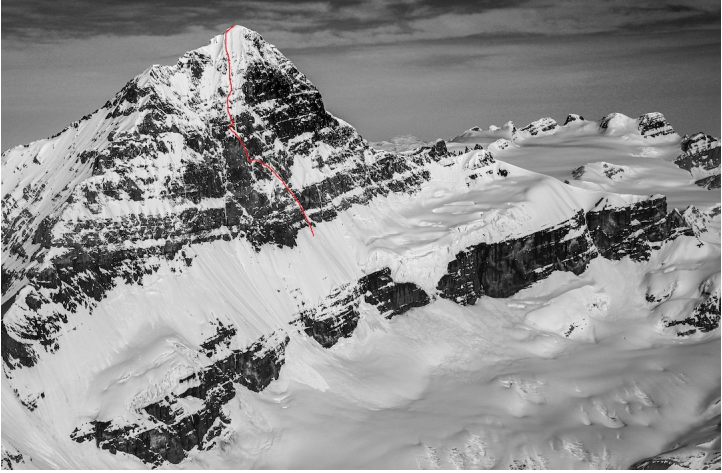
We never really did find that good ice, but it wasn't too hard to find our way around each consecutive obstacle. The climbing was technical throughout but never overly difficult (700m, M4 WI3), and we climbed the route in short simul pitches from sheltered spot to sheltered spot. The conditions were perfect in every way aside from the temperature. I’ll always carry a memory of Alik tearing through the steep, unfrozen summit shale with gloves on for excavation while wearing a T-shirt in the baking sun.

We descended the northwest side of the mountain as the sun sank behind the Columbia Icefield. Darkness fell as we got back to the tent, dumped our packs, and wriggled out of our harnesses. As we settled back into camp, clouds obscured the stars and the rare calm that is only found this far from humankind moved in around us. We embraced what felt like the last of the summer. In the morning,

blowing sleet pushed us back along the many kilometers to the road, and we drove home fulfilled by three truly special days in the mountains.

– **Quentin Lindfield Roberts, Canada**

Images



The Berg-Roberts route on the east face of Mt. Forbes.



Sunset on the Lyell group from camp before the first ascent of the east face of Mt. Forbes.



Alik Berg working his way up to the base of Mt. Forbes at sunrise.



Alik Berg climbing the initial snow ramps on the east face of Mt. Forbes (700m, M4 WI3).



Alik Berg descending from the summit of Mt. Forbes with views to the northwest.

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