



## AAC Publications

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### **The Saddlehorn (Shark's Fin), South Spur**

Canada, British Columbia, Coast Mountains

**Sometimes, very rarely, even with all of the mysteries intact, things go according to plan.** The story of the Saddlehorn is one of good old-fashioned fun and friendship. There is no epic tale to tell here. We had no brushes with death, no dicey bear encounters, and certainly no stories of terrifying choss. And that's just how we like it.

To the northwest of Shames Mountain ski area near Terrace lies a striking pyramid of granite known to locals as the Shark's Fin. If you look farther back into the unofficial history of the Coast Mountains, you will find that it is most commonly called the Saddlehorn (2,087m). Unlike the thousands of hidden gems between Squamish and Juneau, this one is no secret. When you look at the glorious 360° view from the top of the ski hill, this peak is easily the most striking feature. People have scrambled up the backside, and someone even skied off the summit on a day trip from Shames, apparently riding the line between the immaculate stone of the south face and the glaciated north face. Yet there were no known ascents of the south face, a "Beckey Line" very deserving of the dorsal-fin nickname.

Kris Pucci and Tim Russell live in the Prince Rupert and Terrace areas, and home for me is Hyder, Alaska, just a few hours away. So, the Saddlehorn represented quite the alluring objective for the summer. On July 23, Shayle Prins volunteered to take Kris and me upriver in his jet boat to stash a canoe, my packraft, and a case of beer along the Exstew River where the drainage from the Saddlehorn exits. The idea was to watch for the right weather window, fly in, and exit under human and hydro power.

Four days later, Kris, Tim, and I loaded up the LongRanger helicopter, with fellow climber Rogan Green behind the controls. A short hop from the Terrace airport to a landing west of the spire and we were suddenly seeing the rock up close. On the south side, we spotted a beautiful green heather ledge protected by a small roof two pitches up and decided to make that our base camp with three G7 Pods. The next day, we climbed three pitches above the ledges and established rappel anchors.

On day three, we reclinbed the pitches above our bivy and continued up the spur. Pitch after pitch of quality climbing unfolded as the three of us swapped leads. None of us could believe the features on this mountain: From extruding vertical fins akin to limestone tufas to huecos that were like mortar dugouts in the smooth wall, I had never seen anything like it before.

It was obvious that a tough, overhanging hand and finger crack stood between us and the easier pitches leading to the summit. There were easier (yet chossy) ways around the roof, but this was the line of choice. Shouldering his pack, Kris hesitated and then apparently levitated through the roof, making a very difficult crack in an outrageously exposed position look smooth as glass.

Fun and easy rope-stretcher pitches blended into simul-climbing until at last we were standing on the summit. The weather was so perfect that we spent hours on top, marveling at our surroundings. I could tell how much it meant to Tim and Kris as they excitedly pointed to climbs and ski descents they had done in every direction. I just felt lucky to be there with them and, more importantly, have them as friends.

The descent went off without a hitch and we settled back into our bivy for a final sunset. Although the bushwhack out was quite the sufferfest, there were just enough thumb-sized salmonberries to keep us going, knowing that cold beers and a campfire awaited us at the cache. One very long day traveling west and southwest brought us to the Exstew River, and we inflated our Pods on the gravel bar amid a barrage of mosquitoes.

After sleeping like stones, we awoke and hit the water just before noon, then casually floated the lazy river for 22km, beers in hand, until we reached the Skeena River and Tim's truck. In celebration, Pucci launched a naked gainer off the bridge into the icy-cold water, and then we all went out for ice cream in Terrace, where we found a collection of our friends hanging out under the hot summer sun. The first thing they said as we approached, half limping and sunburnt, was that we looked like we had just come back from a grand adventure. And indeed we had!

The south spur of the Saddlehorn is mostly 5.7 to 5.9 climbing, with an overhanging 5.10+ crux in a very exciting position. It is around 400m and can be done in 11 pitches (or eight with simul-climbing on the summit ridge). It is absolutely one of the finest routes in the region.

– Zach Clanton, USA

## Images



Tim Russell enjoying a beautiful sunset at the Saddlehorn hanging base camp.



Tim Russell following pitch four on the south spur of the Saddlehorn (ca 400m, 5.10+).



Tim Russell and Kris Pucci following pitch seven on the south spur of the Saddlehorn (400m, 5.10+).



The Saddlehorn (a.k.a. Shark's Fin, 2,087m), located near Terrace, British Columbia, showing the line of the south spur (ca 400m, 5.10+).

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