



## AAC Publications

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### **Arjuna Spires, Nakula Spire and Other Ascents**

Canada, British Columbia, Coast Mountains

**The town of Bella Coola rests in a deep, shadowed fjord along the central coast of British Columbia, amid the Great Bear Rainforest. Similar to Squamish, which is far to the south, Bella Coola is surrounded by 1,000m granite cliffs, many of which have rock climbing routes.** However, Bella Coola is much more famous as a heli-skiing and grizzly bear viewing destination, despite the incredible peaks all around, which are largely hidden by steep-sided valleys too arduous to climb.

Guiding heli-skiers throughout the area for many years, I've marveled at the climbing potential visible from a bird's-eye view, a potential one cannot see from the few roads that exist. Finally, in a culmination of years of desire to climb these mountains, mixed with a fatalistic shrug toward my bank account, I planned an exploratory trip with my brother Daniel.

In early August, we took a ten-minute flight southeast from the Bella Coola Airport and landed on a mellow glacier below Mt. Arjuna (2,787m, 52.27227, -126.26145), one of the few named peaks in the area. (Arjuna was first climbed in 1952, most likely by the obvious line of the northwest ridge.) We were equipped with haulbags, 200m of rope, 50 bolts, plenty of rack, food for a week, and other glamping essentials. During our time in the area, we did a number of first ascents up to 5.11, including a five-pitch route, Friends in High Places (5.11a), up an overhanging formation that we called Sahadeva Spire, at the east end of the Arjuna group. We did a number of single-pitch routes on the Bhima Buttress, alongside the Arjuna Glacier. We also climbed Mt. Arjuna by its northwest ridge. (Details of these climbs can be found at Mountain Project.) However, our new route running up the north side of a big spire just east of Arjuna was the highlight in many ways.

From camp just north of the spire, we hiked about an hour across the Arjuna Glacier, passing a few devious crevasses, to the toe of the north-facing arete. Armed with one battery for the drill, a dozen bolts, and one rope, we had the tools to instill extra confidence while not overequipping ourselves. We climbed in boots, smedging our way up clean, solid, whitish rock and then into furry, lichen-covered steps for the first 300m, with difficulties mostly in the 4th class to low-5th range. This lower ridge terminates at a headwall through which a quartz band diagonals up and right, connecting back to an arête/buttness above. Although festooned with loose rock along the ledge systems, the climbing itself was on solid quartzite, and we found bomber anchors throughout. Despite steeper terrain, the first couple of pitches on the headwall still only felt about 5.6.

Guessing at how best to diagonal right to the upper arête, we encountered a couple of steeper but cleaner pitches around 5.8 on very good rock, with enough protection to feel safe. Once below the upper arête, the angle eased off for a couple more pitches before rearing into the crux, climbing through a small notch. Above the crux, the summit was only a few short pitches away in low-5th-class terrain.

With time running out, we quickly downclimbed back to the top of the crux and from this point began bolting rappels. We supplemented bolts with fixed nuts to conserve resources, and with only one 70m climbing rope (plus a pull cord), each rappel felt a little risky, so the raps were mostly short to reduce the potential for a snagged rope end. Rather than diagonal back along the line of ascent, we rapped a bit more directly, so a couple of the bolted stations didn't align with our exact route up (however, the terrain is all very climbable). With only three bolts left, we downclimbed much of the last 300m of low 5th-class terrain, rapping off single bolts through steeper steps in the waning light. After 14 hours on

the go, we reached camp thrilled to have climbed such an amazing line at moderate difficulties.

We called the route Quartz Arête (600m on the rock buttress, 5.9), due to the large quantities of quartz crystals we passed. I called the tower Nakula Spire after one of Arjuna's four brothers. My hope is that continued development of climbing in the Bella Coola backcountry will encourage fellow adventure seekers to discover this untapped arena of unlimited alpine climbing potential.

— **Andrew Councill, Canada**

## Images



Mt. Arjuna and its neighbors from the north.



Nakula Spire (left) and Mt. Arjuna, with the northwest ridge (the probable line of the 1952 first ascent) highlighted.



The line of the Quartz Arête (5.9) on Nakula Spire. The route gains about 800m from the start of the steep glacier.



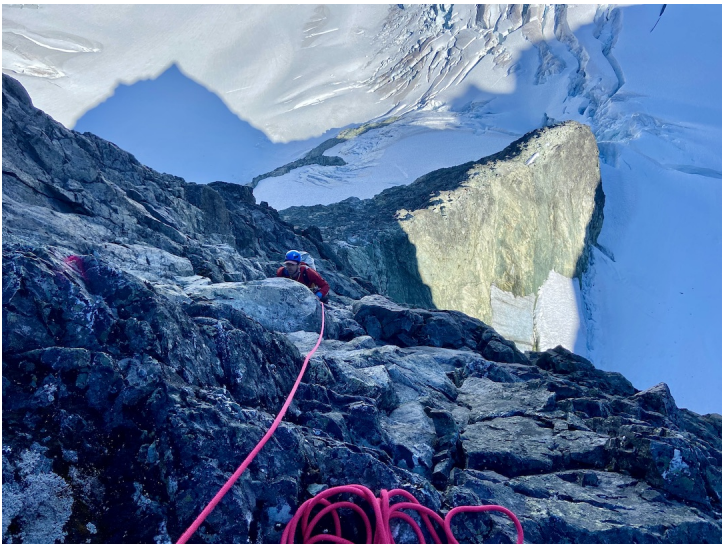
Daniel Councill working through crevasses to reach the base of Nakula Spire.



Looking toward the terrain ahead and the summit of Nakula Spire from about 150 meters up the Quartz Arête.



Daniel Councill starting the upper buttress of Nakula Spire.



Nearing the upper buttress of Nakula Spire during the first ascent of Quartz Arête (800m, 5.9).



Daniel Councill navigating the glacier during the descent after completing the first ascent of Nakula Spire.

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