



AAC Publications

North Howser Tower, Rat Race

Canada, British Columbia, Purcell Mountains, Bugaboos

The yellow line shows the first six pitches of Spicy Red Beans and Rice (Greene-Tague, 1997). Above the bivy ledge is Rat Race (red line, LaRocque-Pelletti, 2024). Photo: Alex Buisse

On September 2, Ryan LaRocque and I tied in below the west face of North Howser Tower (3,411m).

We had rappelled into the cirque below the face intent on exploring the left side of the headwall, which has a laminar aspect to its geology: plaques of immaculate granite stacked in such a perfect planar nature that each layer's edge seems to allow passage for incredible corner climbing. After some research, it appeared there was a corner system that hadn't been explored, seemingly because the Bugaboos guidebook had described this feature as the line of Spicy Red Beans and Rice (Greene-Tague, 1997); this was rectified in the second edition, revealing that the relatively obvious plumb line was, in fact, unclimbed.

After a late summer storm, the lower apron of the magnificent face was gushing with water, and we opted to climb the first six pitches of Spicy Red Beans and Rice to reach a decent bivy ledge that separates the lower-angle apron from the steep upper headwall. At sunrise, we started up one more pitch of Spicy Red Beans off the bivy ledge before deviating to the right halfway up the pitch to reach our dihedral.

Our route then stayed roughly 20m to 30m to the right of Spicy Red Beans all the way. The cracks, although mossy in places and still seeping a touch from recent snowfall, gave incredible, punchy free climbing between good stances, along with bouts of cleaning cracks with a nut tool. The textured Bugaboo granite never let us down, and where the corner slammed shut, sharp face holds and snaking fissures would arc across the face and back into the dihedral, allowing us to continue our quest skyward.

The stone cleaned up the higher we ascended, and the second-to-last pitch proved truly extraordinary, making it hard to believe that no one had laid hands to this stellar igneous architecture. A mirror copy of the final dihedral on Young Warrior (Harkness-Russel, 2006), the perfect open-book corner was split by a laser-cut finger-to-hands crack for a full rope length. Jackpot.

We climbed ten independent pitches before reaching the lower-angle north ridge of North Howser, where we intersected with past lines and continued to the summit. Snowpatch and Bugaboo spires basked in burning amber hues as a red sun dipped west past this stunning part of the Purcell Mountains.

We named our route—or variation—Rat Race (800m, 5.11+ A1) after the rodents that chewed into our lead line, helmets, packs, and cams at every bivy cave and ledge between the car park and the top of the mountain, proving they are the true locals of this alpine climbing paradise, and that we are just fleeting visitors.

—Sebastian Pelletti, IFMGA guide, Canada

Images



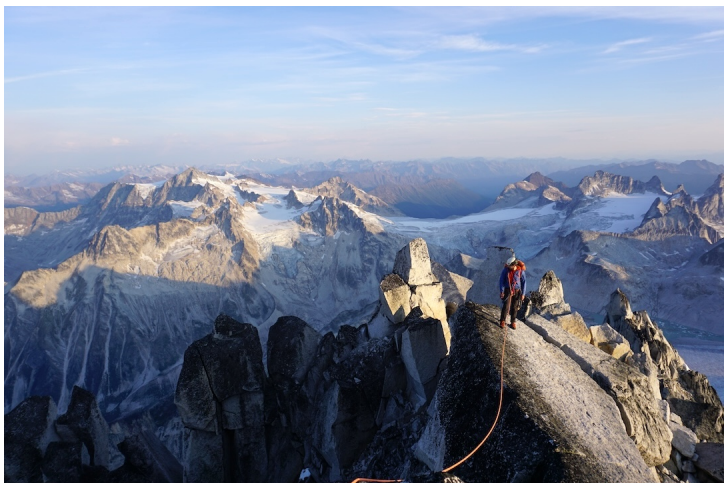
Ryan LaRocque leading on pitch 11 of Rat Race (800m, 5.11+ A1) on the west face of North Howser Tower.



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The bivy ledge around halfway up the west face of North Howser Tower during the first ascent of Rat Race (800m, 5.11+ A1).



Ryan LaRocque following a pitch near the summit of North Howser Tower at sunset.



Ryan LaRocque on the second to last dihedral pitch of Rat Race (800m, 5.11+ A1) on the west face of North Howser Tower.

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