



AAC Publications

Big Climbs in Squamish, 2017–2019

Canada, British Columbia, Squamish Area

Drew Marshall climbs a 5.10c pitch on Deep Impact (5 pitches, 5.11a) on the Shanny's Dog Wall. Photo by Danny Guestrin

New route development continued to be very popular in Squamish and the surrounding Sea to Sky corridor during 2017–2019, proceeding at a frenetic pace similar to the 2014–2016 period described in the 2017 AAJ.

Local first ascensionists (a.k.a. “Scrubbers”), armed with a staggering array of tools and vertical landscaping techniques (as well as hard labor, time, and determination) uncovered numerous treasures hidden under the coastal B.C. rainforest vegetation to produce an estimated 500 new pitches. This report highlights a small portion of these—a handful of the most notable developments and trends occurring in the thriving Squamish scene.

At Cheakamus Canyon, 24km north of Squamish, four new sport crags (Electric Avenue, Rock of Ages, the Substation, and the Monastery), all in close proximity to one another, have nearly doubled the previous number of climbs at this popular area. Amid the mostly single-pitch routes at Electric Avenue is Frontside 180—a family-friendly 10-pitch 5.8 sport route co-developed most notably by Toby Foord-Kelcey and his son Leo, along with Tess Egan, Jason Robinson, and their son Tye (age 7); this long moderate has rapidly become one of the most popular routes in the Squamish region. The Monastery has become a new testing ground with numerous difficult, steep climbs. Closer to Squamish, at Alice Lake Provincial Park, Evan Stevens resurrected several early '90s Jack Fieldhouse routes at Debeck's Hill and added others to create a sizable sport crag.

David Ellison following the stacked corners on pitch seven (5.12a) of the new climb Borealis. Photo: Colin Moorhead

On the Stawamus Chief itself, the pace of development has slowed compared with the early 2010s. The increasing popularity of hiking, bouldering, and climbing in the forest beneath the walls makes the scrubbing and cleaning of loose blocks necessary to new routing highly problematic (that is, potentially dangerous to anyone below). Despite these limitations, some of the most dedicated Squamish scrubbers continue to find ways to establish high-quality lines. In 2019, Colin Moorhead, for example, did most of the development on Borealis (5 pitches, 5.12a) at night. Borealis starts off the Astro Ledge and extends from what remains of the Calling (5.12a) after a massive 2015 rockfall. When linked with Alaska Highway (5.11d), this route produces a 14-pitch masterpiece said to be one of the most sustained routes on the Chief.

Elsewhere in the North Walls, Stu Smith established Trad Climbing Goof: an eight-pitch excursion up the Manitou Wall featuring four 5.13 and three 5.12- pitches—the climb was seven years off and on in the making before being completed in 2019. The Chief also saw its first new aid line in a long time in 2017, with Danny Guestrin, Jon Rigg, and Chris Trull's Pantera (V A3+ 5.10).

On the Apron, Kris Wild endured days of torrential rain over three consecutive winters while excavating two very popular moderate multipitch routes: Long Time, No See (10 pitches, 5.9, 2017) and Read Between the Lines (5 pitches, 5.10a, 2019). Long Time, No See follows the formerly heavily vegetated left buttress of the Apron adjacent to Calculus Crack. Read Between the Lines (5.10a) climbs previously vegetated splitter hand cracks directly adjacent to the classic moderate Snake, incorporating portions of a long-buried Anders Ourom route called Trivia. Further south, in the Bulleheads zone, Harry Young quarried out the vegetated lower aid pitches of Third Abortion and Bulleheads Central to create two sustained 5.11 classics in 2017. These efforts also revealed a

splitter finger crack called Mystic Fingers (2 pitches, 5.11d).

Locals Tony McLane and Jacob Cook have been particularly active on the Chief. In 2017, Cook and McLane opened a unique 5.12d on the Sheriff's Badge called Badge to the Bone, which starts at the third-pitch anchors of Daily Planet and traverses right for four pitches through super-steep terrain. In the same area, also in 2017, they opened Inner Space, a three-pitch 5.12c variation finish to the Daily Universe, continuing through some roofs up high. And in 2019, Drew Marshall joined Cook (with some help prepping the route from McLane) for Inner Fire (5 pitches, 5.12d), a highly technical slab adventure bolted on lead up a number of small traversing dikes departing from Bellygood Ledge.

A look at some of the recent routes on the New Delhi Cliff in Squamish. Photo by Chris Small
Continued exploration of the Slhanny massif, the Olesen Creek watershed, and the region between Shannon Falls and Murrin Park has led to a number of new crags and routes. In 2018, Danny Guestrin, et al, rescrubbed the 60m splitter hand crack of Halley's Comet (5.10c, Marks-Turley, 1983) on the Slhanny's Dog Wall, adding an approach pitch as well. In 2019, Guestrin, Brent Goodman, Stephen Molguard, and Kaylan Worsnop returned to add an additional five pitches of splitter goodness above Halley's Comet to create the five-star Deep Impact (5 pitches, 5.11a). The Valleycliffe Climbing Club (Jason Green, Colin Moorhead, Peter Winter, and Harry Young) continued development at New Delhi Cliff, producing two new lines: Komagata Maru (4 pitches, 5.12a, Green-Moorhead, 2018) and La Princess (7 pitches, 5.12d, Green-Baills, 2018). In the upper Olsen Creek drainage, Young developed Golden Gate (2019), a collection of six three-pitch routes—all 5.10. On Olesen Creek Wall itself, Moorhead and Joel Faubert completed Castle Greyskull (5 pitches, 5.12b, 2017), a steep line right next to Wire Crack.

Further south, adjacent to Gonzales Creek, David Brayden, Drew Marshall, and friends established two new areas: Gonzales Creek Wall and Gonzales Heights. The former had seen previous development in the 1980s by Carl Austrom and Robin Barley with their route Snakes and Ladders (5.11a), but likely the presence of lower-hanging fruit elsewhere deterred additional development. In 2016-'17, Brayden established 10 routes, including two four-pitch lines: Candyland (5.10+) and Roll the Dice (5.12+). Over 2018 and 2019, Brayden opened the upslope route Watch It Burn (4 pitches, 5.10c) while Drew Marshall and friends developed hard trad lines on the steep splitter cracks of the adjacent bluffs, which they called Isengard. Standout climbs at Isengard include Bat Rat (5.12-), the White Wizard (5.12+), and the Cracks of Doom (5.10+).

At Murrin Park and the surrounding area, several new moderate crags were constructed by two main actors: The Commune and Pensioners Crag (by Peder Ourom) and the Reacharound Annex, Cereal Killers, Marc-André's Wall, and Splitsville (all of which I developed, and which took an estimated 900 hours of labor over 1.5 years). The best of these offerings (in my humble opinion) is Splitsville—a long wall of splitter cracks of varying difficulty, which also hosts Squamish's first adaptive free first ascent, Adrienne Wheaton's five-star One Thumb Up (5.7). And while we're talking about adaptive ascents, it would be remiss not to mention the first adaptive ascent of the Sherriff's Badge by Wayne Willoughby, Kieran Brownie, and Luke Cormier in 2019.

Some of these climbs are part of a land package that will be transferred to the Squamish First Nation pursuant to federal reconciliation efforts and local industrial and infrastructure development. The package includes Petrifying Wall and Up Among the Firs. It is not known if the transfer will affect access to recreational climbing areas. There is ongoing discussion within the community about collaborative efforts to maintain some level of climbing access while respecting the Squamish First Nation's land use priorities. Climbers can assist by practicing a strict Leave No Trace ethic and engaging in respectful discourse to learn more about the process. Respect for the land and for everyone involved will be crucial.

Finally, there has even been a rash of new alpine and ice climbs over the past three years, especially during the winter of 2017–2018, when the polar vortex visited the south coast of B.C. to produce ice conditions not seen in recent memory, leading some locals to joke how Squamish had become

“Squamonix.” In February 2018, Ledge Mountain in the Sky Pilot group finally saw the second winter ascent of its north face by Brette Harrington and Marc-André Leclerc, some 47 years after the first winter ascent by Arnold Shives and Glenn Woodsworth. In 2018, on Mt. Habbrich, Jason Ammerlaan and Alistair Davis established Life on Mars (180m, WI3). Also in 2018, on the bluffs above the Papoose, Jia Condon, Paul McSorely, and Tony Richardson climbed Eagle Eye (100m, WI5). And in 2019, Josh Lavigne and Paul McSorley climbed the Mother of the Wind (250m, M5 WI6) on the lower Zodiac Wall.

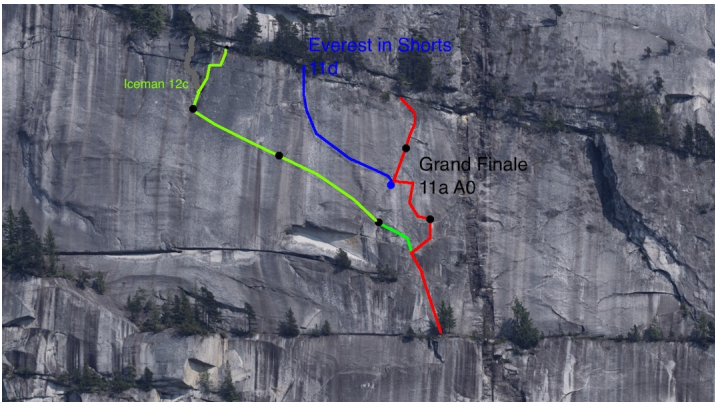
The “ultimate” prize of the last few ice seasons was the Ultimate Ultimate Everything—the first bottom to top all-ice ascent of the Chief, following the popular summer route called the Ultimate Everything, by Condon, Jason Kruk, McSorley, and Richardson, in January 2017. Within a week of the first ascent, this line received a “tandem solo,” linked up with the Dream, by Leclerc and Luka Lindic.

– Chris Small, Canada

Images



The route line for Inner Fire (5 pitches, 5.12d), a highly technical slab adventure following a number of small traversing dikes departing from Bellygood Ledge on the Stawamus Chief.



Three new routes above Bellygood Ledge on the Stawamus Chief.



New routes on the Sheriff's Badge on the Stawamus Chief.



Drew Marshall climbs a 5.10c pitch on Deep Impact (5 pitches, 5.11a) on the Slhanny's Dog Wall.



David Ellison following the stacked corners on pitch seven (5.12a) of the new climb Borealis.



Jacob Cook leading steep terrain on Badge to the Bone (5.12d), an unusual addition to the Sheriff's Badge that mostly traverses for four pitches.



A look at some of the recent routes on the New Delhi Cliff in Squamish.

Article Details

Author	Chris Small
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions