



## AAC Publications

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### **Mt. Phillips, North Spur**

Canada, Alberta, Canadian Rockies

The line of the North Spur (600m, IV) on Mt. Phillips (3,246m) in the Canadian Rockies. The high peak behind the left skyline is Whitehorn. Photo by John Scurlock

**Simon Richardson and I branched out to new-for-us ground when, in July, we turned off the Berg Lake trail at Emperor Falls and headed toward Mt. Phillips (3,246m). I had hiked the popular trail at least a dozen times in order to attempt and climb Robson.** But prior to Richardson showing me a photo of Mt. Phillips, I had scarcely known it existed. One new turn led us through the most astounding alpine meadows of wildflowers and on to the first ascent of the obvious north spur of Mt. Phillips. It was a lesson in how even a tiny change to our usual habits can yield a beautiful experience.

We approached up the Phillips Glacier, which is one valley west of the Hargreaves Glacier, named after Jack Hargreaves, the horse outfitter who claimed the second ascent of Robson in 1922, and who happened to be the great-grandfather of the quintessential Jasper local Dana Ruddy, who had hosted us for two days as we waited for a window. Dana was enthusiastic about our goal, as it seems numerous Jasperites have ski-toured on the glaciers below the face. With local knowledge of the approach, we were set.

At our bivy on the climbers' right flank of the Phillips Glacier, we woke at a very Richardson-esque midnight:30. (Who can argue with the logistical mind of such a successful first ascensionist?) By sun-up we were on the north spur, simul-climbing easy 5th-class ledges and loose steps, the rockfall from the shattered stone being serious enough to require judicious care. Starting on the right side of the rib up a slight gully, we then traversed out left to stay on the easy 5th-class face.

Hoping for spring-like conditions, we tried our luck with a snow gully on the left side of the rib. But any step in the isothermal snow resulted in large wet avalanches that flowed to the bottom of the face, so we quickly regained the spur crest. At one belay stance below a steepening in the spur at mid-height, I took an hour to smash the choss down enough to tie together a few knifeblades and a nut slotted into a manufactured spot for an anchor. (I threw in my tools for good measure.) A gully cut right to left through the slight headwall, to a snowy ledge and a melted out bowl running with a waterfall. From below, this section of the headwall had looked blank. But fortunately, some run-out but very easy isothermal snow scrambling led to a safe ledge on the north spur, where we were able to see the west ridge for the first time. About 200m of easy horizontal scrambling across a catwalk of choss pillars, and the summit was ours. It felt like a suitably Scottish affair as that night we huddled back at camp under a sudden thunderstorm, having capitalized on one of the few weather windows of the summer.

We called the route the North Spur and gave it a grade of IV. The climbing was never hard—really it was mostly 4th class. However, we always had the rope on, as the conditions made it feel as though an avalanche or rockfall easily could have caused us trouble. In terms of adventure and exploration the route was very worthwhile, and done with a good friend, even if it doesn't fit with the current era's interest in graded difficulty.

Simon was the key to the climb, even though I provided most of the lead climbing. He became the second stalwart of the Scottish Mountaineering Club to establish a new route on the peak, the first ascent (via a glacier on the south side) having fallen to Norman Collie, another proud SMC member, in 1910. One mountain north of Whitehorn, two north of Robson, and I'd never heard of it. Not very adventurous of me. Either that or one doesn't have to go far in the Rockies to find adventure.

– Ian Welsted, Canada

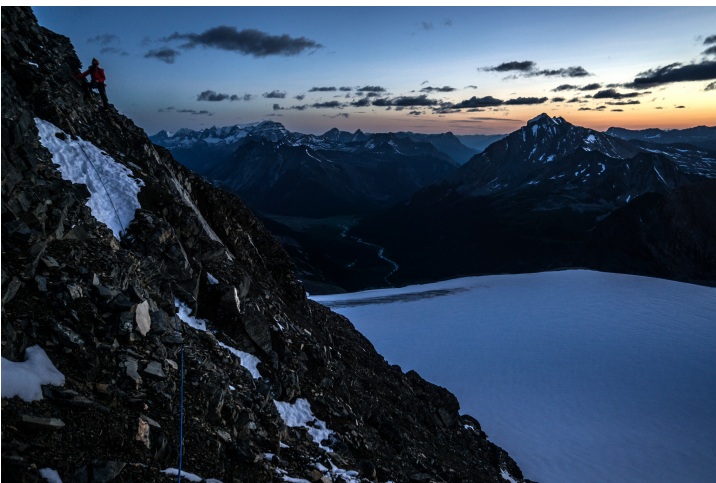
## Images



Simon Richardson enjoying the wildflower-rich approach to Mt. Phillips (3,246m), north of Mt. Robson, en route to his and Ian Welsted's first ascent of the North Spur (600m, IV).



Ian Welsted climbing run-out fourth-class terrain during his and Simon Richardson's first ascent of the North Spur (600m, IV) on Mt. Phillips (3,246m) in the Canadian Rockies.



Ian Welsted taking in the sunrise during his and Simon Richardson's first ascent of the North Spur (600m, IV) on Mt. Phillips (3,246m) in the Canadian Rockies.



Simon Richardson following Ian Welsted up steep scree during his and Ian Welsted's first ascent of the North Spur (600m, IV) on Mt. Phillips (3,246m).



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