



AAC Publications

The Rockies: A Year in Review

Canada, Alberta, Canadian Rockies

Note: Some of the climbs highlighted in this summary are described in more detail elsewhere on this site. Follow the links for additional information and photos from these climbs.

The spring season in the Rockies began with a tremendous first ascent, before quickly passing into tragedy that would capture the world's attention for all the wrong reasons. At the start of April, Brette Harrington, Luka Lindič, and Ines Papert climbed the direct east face of Mt. Fay: The Sound of Silence (1,100m, WI5 M8). This is the much-contemplated direct finish to the east face climb in 1984 by Barry Blanchard, Dave Cheesmond, and Carl Tobin. Where the original line bypassed the final headwall, this year's team headed straight up over two days, including some very steep and loose rock, with heavy spindrift. The route was dedicated to Marc-André Leclerc, who had intended to climb it with Lindic.

Two weeks later, the climbing community was rocked by the news that Hansjörg Auer, David Lama, and Jess Roskelley were caught in an avalanche on Howse Peak during their descent from a significant new variation to M-16 (Backes-Blanchard-House, 2000). The accident, which highlights the risks of the infamous Rockies snowpack, will forever overshadow their climb, which was done in a shockingly fast time.

After another two weeks, with an improved snowpack, Niall Hamill returned with Ryan Richardson to a project on the north face of Mt. Lawrence Grassi, directly above the town of Canmore, and completed Canmore Swingers Party (300m, WI3 M6+ R), two and a half months after taking a gear-popping whipper from the route and fracturing his scapula. "A little older now, a little wiser," as Hamill wrote in his full report, the two completed the third 300m line up this accessible alpine "town crag."

New routes on the numbered buttresses of Mt. Rundle, above Canmore. Photo by Kevin Rohn
In June, with rock climbing season kicking into gear, Kevin Rohn opened two new routes on the numbered buttresses of Mt. Rundle, also above Canmore. With Alik Berg, he climbed Coaches Corner (350m, 5.10-) following the right-hand of three prominent corners on the east face of the Fifth Buttress. A few days later, this time with Dylan Cunningham, he did the first ascent of the Southeast Shoulder of the Fourth Buttress (350m, 5.10-), following an obvious weakness to a halfway ledge and then taking one of many options on unusually good rock. Also on Rundle, Patrick Delaney and Magda Kosior finished Supernova (13/14 pitches, 5.11), with help from Hans Erik Schnack and Brent Peters. This partly bolted route starts just right of the classic Reprobate on East End of Rundle (EEOR).

An unusually wet summer prevented much action in the high alpine. I climbed the north spur of Mt. Phillips with Simon Richardson in July and the complete north ridge of the Twins group with Alik Berg in September. Also in September, Berg and Quentin Lindfield-Roberts climbed the east ridge of Synge Peak (600m, 5.8). This is the ridge facing the Icefields Parkway on the mountain just south of Howse Peak, and is approached via Cirque Lake. Not satiated, Berg, in the same month, climbed the moderate north couloir of Mt. Outram (500m, WI3 50°) with Maarten Van Haeren.

When October came, the Rockies were at their finest, with perfect alpine mixed conditions, frozen rock with plentiful new ice lines, and no snow to speak of. Hamill kicked things off with Tourist Trap (500m, 5.8 WI3). Starting directly from the left-hand shore of Moraine Lake, this obvious line had been partially climbed by Jen Adolph and Dave Edgar. A compelling moderate, it was immediately repeated by numerous parties. On October 12, Grant Stewart teamed with Ryan Patteson for the East

Chimney (4 pitches, M5 WI3) on the west buttress of Mt. Athabasca, to climber's right of the system that contains the classic Slawinski-Takeda and others, adding another moderate to this alpine crag.

On the ice front, Luke Harrison and Justin Ward climbed Devil With an Angel's Face (80m, M6 WI4) on the Ship's Prow, above Canmore, to the right of the thin-ice classic Little Bobby Onsight. Quinn Turner and Ryan Keen climbed Candlewax (120m, WI4 M4), about 50m right of Candlestick Maker in the Ghost Valley.

In a hanging valley north of Cirrus Mountain (home to Polar Circus), up the Icefields Parkway, Kiff Alcocer, Dylan Cunningham, and Michele Pratt climbed two routes in memory of Anna Smith, who had done the first ascent of the Proposal in the same valley with Jim Elzinga; she died in October 2016 during an expedition to the Indian Himalaya. The trio established Push-Up Bra (110m, WI5) and Boisterous (110m, M4 WI4). Cunningham states there is another ice line to be done farther up the valley.

Kevin Rohn made two trips to the east face of Boom Mountain, above Highway 93. With Carl Dowse he climbed the south-most gully through easy ground to end on a WI3 pitch, then with Dylan Cunningham he climbed I Can't Believe a Chicken Fried This Rice (325m, WI4 M5) on good quartzite to two-thirds height on the mountain. Cunningham said that the opportunity to take the line to the summit—along with two similar gullies to the north—remains.

Across the highway on Storm Mountain, Ethan Berman and Van Haeren added Eye of the Storm (700m, M6, WI5), which climbs through thin ice and a 60m quartzite corner to the lower north spur of Storm Mountain, to the right of the French Connection and Extended Mix. On the same day, upslope and on the opposite side of the valley from the Stanley Headwall, Bruno-Pierre Couture and Jordan Farquharson climbed Darwin Arch (470m, WI3 5.4), finishing at a spectacular rock arch. In photos there appears to be more mixed climbing potential in the immediate area.

Local guides Kris Irwin and Sebastian Taborszky, along with Doug Hollinger, walked 5km up the regular hiker's trail on the north side of Mt. Bourgeau to climb a 140-meter M4+ WI3. At press time, they had yet to name the route as they were planning to return to add a direct start.

Across from Scar Tissue in Storm Creek, Hollinger and Ruari Macfarlane climbed Solid Airity (65m, M5 WI3). Just downstream from Airity, on the sunny side of Storm Creek, Jasmin Fauteux, Hamill, and Lindfield-Roberts celebrated the last day of the month with Halloweiners (70m, WI5 M6). The next day, Raphael Slawinski and Jen Olsen added a direct start to the first pitch of that route at M6.

Taylor Sullivan, Gerry Dumouchel, and Naoise Ó Muircheartaigh found a moderate ice and mixed line, Sick Day (5 pitches, WI3+, M2) above and between Arnica and Vista Lakes on the north side of Storm Mountain.

With the end of the month in sight, the race was on, and the pace of new routing did not slow. On October 30, usual suspects Dylan Cunningham, Kevin Rohn, and Lindfield-Roberts teamed for Menage à Trois (190m, M4 WI4) on the obvious large ice flow 100m left of Guinevere in the Protection Valley. A week later, they climbed Roommate Romance (280m, WI4 M5) in the same valley, up a gash and ice goulottes onto an upper pillar, beginning halfway between Mon Ami and Wicked Witch of the West.

An overview of the main lines on Storm Creek Headwall in Banff National Park. Photo by Raphael Slawinski

In November, also in Protection Valley, Kris Irwin and Mike Stuart discovered an amazing narrow chimney system lined with ice on the lower west face of Castle Mountain. Across from the classic Superlight, Superdark (195m, M5) was done in seven pitches and descended by a walk-off by the eastern slabs that would be dangerous with any accumulated snow. It was quickly repeated and is bound to be considered a unique classic. In November, Willis Brown and Seth Timpano climbed two

mixed pitches to the left of the ice route Paradis Perdu in Protection Valley, joining the ice at mid-height. The concentration of new routes has created a world-class mixed and ice venue in the Protection Valley, with over a dozen routes in a relatively avalanche-safe area, making for a very good alternative to the snowier Stanley and Storm valleys.

Later in November, Raphael Slawinski was involved in two new lines at the Storm Creek Headwall, taking advantage of three discontinuous ice strips left of Buddha Nature. The Sphinx (125m, WI5 M7+) was completed with Hamill, who had started up it independently. To the left again is Banana Peel (110m, WI5 M6), which Slawinski climbed with Juan Henriquez and Maia Shumacher.

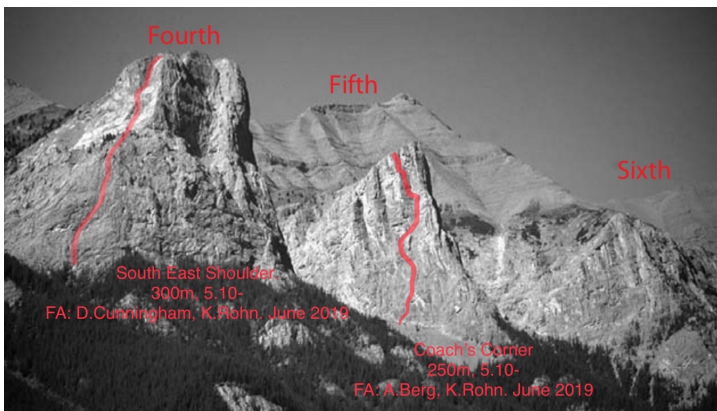
This amazing spree of early winter new routes goes to show what is possible in the Rockies when conditions are favorable. A low snowpack, together with a wet summer, resulted in prime conditions. It also shows that it is imperative to wait for good conditions—but that when they come many routes can be climbed, often in areas of high concentration and quality.

– Ian Welsted, Canada

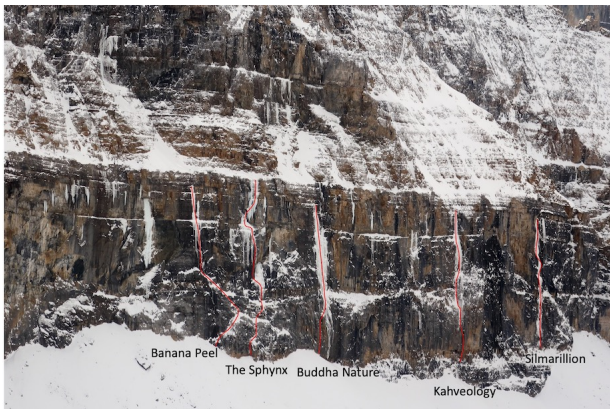
Images



The west buttress of Mt. Athabasca in Jasper National Park. The East Chimney route (4 pitches, M5 WI3), as climbed by Grant Stewart and Ryan Patterson in October 2019, is in red, and the classic Slawinski-Takeda in green.



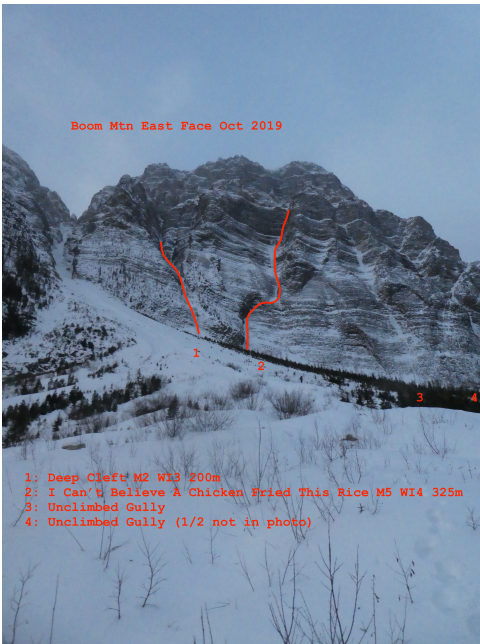
New routes on the numbered butresses of Mt. Rundle, above Canmore.



An overview of the main lines on Storm Creek Headwall in Banff National Park. Some linkups and variations not pictured.



The route Superdark (195m, M5) in Protection Valley, climbed by Kris Irwin and Mike Stuart in 2019.



2019's new routes on the east face of Boom Mountain in the Bow Mountains of Banff National Park.



Routes on the left-hand side of Protection Valley in Banff National Park.



Routes on the right-hand side of Protection Valley in Banff National Park.

Article Details

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