



AAC Publications

Mt. Temple, Northwest Buttress

Canada, Alberta, Canadian Rockies

The Northwest Buttress line (1,200m, 5.11-) on Mt. Temple. Photo by Dane Steadman.

In mid-September, I drove up to Canmore from my home in Wyoming, intent on a month of fall alpine climbing. The summer had been unusually hot, but I figured it wouldn't be long before temperatures plummeted, snow began to accumulate, and the great north faces of the Rockies would come into condition. But by early October, after two weeks of rock climbing in the Bow Valley and along the Icefields Parkway, it was clear the elusive fall alpine window was not on schedule. On October 7, with a forecast of high pressure and warm temperatures, my friend Ryan Richardson and I drove up to Lake Louise with a vague plan to attempt whatever looked best on the north face of Mt. Temple (3,544m).

Our options included the Greenwood-Locke (1,364m, 5.8 A2 or 5.10+, 1966), the Icarus Buttress (1,000m, 5.11-, Slawinski-Walsh, 2008), and an unclimbed buttress on the western edge of the face that my friend Kiff Alcocer had tried years earlier and suggested we check out. Upon seeing the face looking distressingly dry for October, we quickly ruled out routes that would put us in any of the dangerous-looking couloirs on the lower face. I was keen on the northwest buttress, but Ryan was concerned by a section of very steep, very loose-looking rock on the lower buttress. Once I offered to lead that section, he was in.

Ryan Richardson leading a pitch near the top of the lower buttress on the Northwest Buttress (1,200m, 5.11-) on Mt. Temple. Photo by Dane Steadman.

An early start saw us simul-climbing the low-angled start of the buttress by headlamp, and by the time it was light enough to see we were near the base of the steep, loose section we had seen from below. I took the lead and led two run-out pitches (5.9+ and 5.10-) on dubious quartzite edges to where the rock began to improve. A long simul block up excellent quartzite cracks brought us to the headwall of the lower buttress, where Ryan and I swung leads through generally enjoyable chimneys to reach the long, horizontal ridge that separates the lower buttress from the upper, and where the rock changes from quartzite to limestone.

After a break at the base of the upper buttress, Ryan led a spectacular pitch starting on the west side of the crest before crossing over back onto the north face via an excellent 5.10+ splitter. From there a loose pitch led to an easier stretch of ridge and what we hoped was the final obstacle before the top of the wall. As the sun set, Ryan started up an unpleasant corner of foul, black limestone. I had to jump to avoid a large plate of rock he knocked down, and as darkness took hold he disappeared from view.

I followed by headlamp and took over for what we thought were the final meters of the wall. I pulled over the lip and, to my distress saw a final, short wall of blank limestone barring our exit. After hammering in a few bottomed-out beaks I started what proved to be the crux of the route: 3m of 5.11- crimping at the very top of the buttress. If one had light to see and the motivation to look around either corner, there might be an easier exit.

A long slog up scree slopes brought us onto the summit, where we took in a magnificent panorama of the Lake Louise peaks illuminated by a full moon, signed the summit register, and ran down the trail. Overall, we found the Northwest Buttress (1,200m, 5.11-) to be an excellent Canadian Rockies adventure, worthy of consideration for those looking for a challenging but objectively safe route up

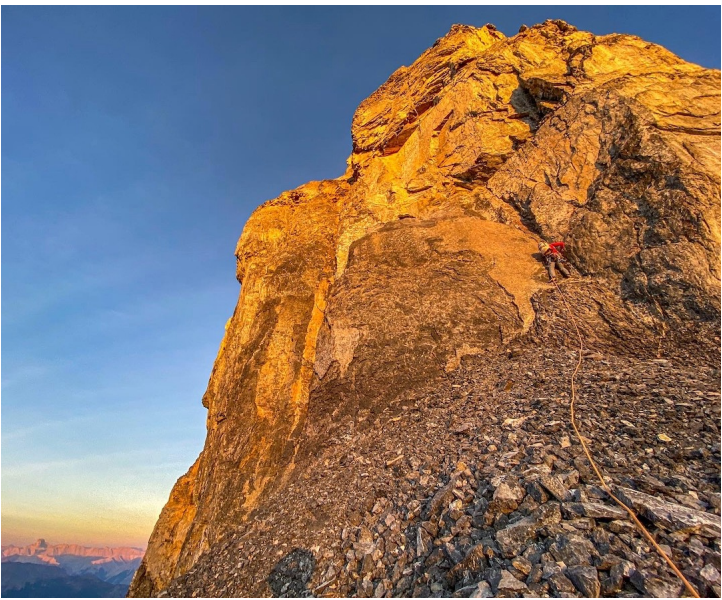
Mt. Temple's north wall.

— **Dane Steadman**

Images



The Northwest Buttress line (1,200m, 5.11-) on Mt. Temple.



Ryan Richardson starting up the second-to-last pitch of the Northwest Buttress (1,200m, 5.11-) on Mt. Temple just before sunset.



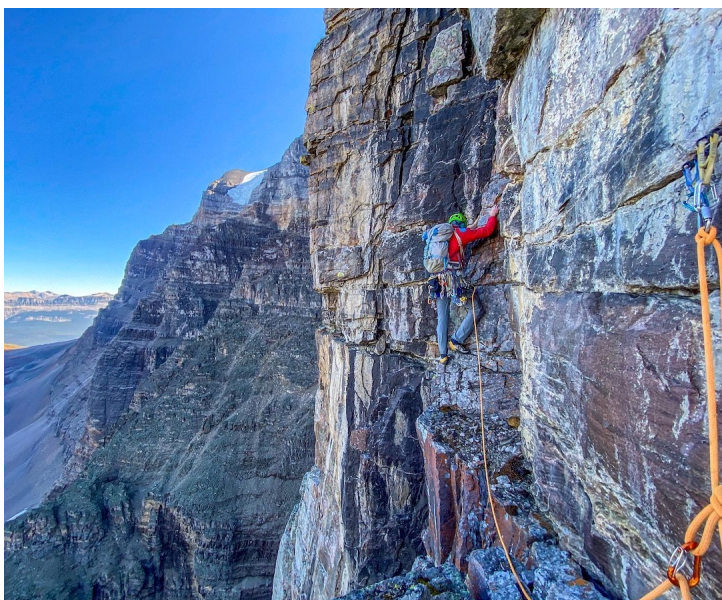
Ryan Richardson climbing steep cracks on the first pitch of the upper section of the Northwest Buttress (1,200m, 5.11-) on Mt. Temple.



Ryan Richardson approaching the upper Northwest Buttress of Mt. Temple midway through the climb.



Ryan Richardson following a quartzite chimney on the Northwest Buttress of Mt. Temple.



Ryan Richardson leading a pitch near the top of the lower buttress on the Northwest Buttress (1,200m, 5.11-) on Mt. Temple.

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