



## AAC Publications

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### **Marble Canyon Provincial Park, Guaranteed Rugged**

Canada, British Columbia, Interior Mountains

**When Brent Nixon started insisting he had an idea for what would be the longest sport route in North America, I told him to stuff it.** As I looked up at the notoriously loose, convoluted architecture of Marble Canyon's golden walls, it was obvious this was a pipe dream. Four hours' drive northeast of Vancouver, a bolted route up Marble Canyon's huge walls would require years of weekends, bolting sketchy limestone on lead, and an industrial amount of cleaning. In reality, it did require a ton of weekends, trundling choss became a near Olympic level sport, and this project took just over two years.

Brent began exploration of the line with Lisa Newhook in the winter of 2020 when they were stymied by a day too warm for ice climbing near Lillooet. Climbing in their mountain boots, they bolted a couple of pitches along the left edge of Marble's Apron, starting about 300m left of and eight pitches lower than Yellow Brick Road (455m, 5.10d A0). Finding moderate climbing and good stone, they vowed to return.

The following year, after continuous badgering, I found myself hiking up to the base of what would become Guaranteed Rugged (1,068m, 5.10c). He needed someone gullible enough to commit to this endeavor and to carry lots of batteries and bolts. After several trips, a pattern emerged. Some combination of Brent, Lisa, Kate Naus, and I would do the long drive from Vancouver, climb and bolt a few pitches, clean extensively on the descent, camp, get up early, climb to the high point, and do it all over again.

As the number of pitches grew, mainly following slabs interspersed with more vertical features, it became a race to get to the high point with adequate time to add enough bolts to make the trip worthwhile. Higher up, we resorted to sleeping on ledges to make progress, with one team of two pushing the bolting while another team disaster-proofed the route by trundling death blocks below.

Over the course of the summer, despite Brent's constant enthusiasm, I harbored doubts about whether we'd be able to actually climb to the summit. About halfway up the formation, the slabs reared up into an intimidatingly exposed headwall of MC Escher-esque (ER Escher is an artist famous for his illusory geometric illustrations) overlapping roofs and rotten tottering blocks for several pitches before laying back to a more moderate angle. My doubts were silenced one afternoon late in the summer when Brent, who'd just led bolted the horrifyingly loose and exposed crux while we belayed from a rapidly decomposing stance, disappeared around a corner only to let out a woohoo! He'd reached the base of the summit ridge, and it looked like gravy!

Once the route reached the summit ridge, 25 pitches up, a change in strategy was required. We decided to hike up the rarely used 6km backside trail, camp on top, rappel in, and bolt our way out. The trail was overgrown, and fixed lines were needed. By the time Kate and I hiked up to meet Brent and Lisa the next Friday, they had already lead-bolted the top-out pitch, one of the nicest of the route—a vertical 5.9 face almost a kilometer above the highway. We added seven more pitches that weekend, for 33 pitches in all. Now all that remained was the first complete ascent.

All winter we waited, like children with a sneaky secret. When May 2022 rolled around, bringing longer days and warmer temps, we could barely contain ourselves. We spent a couple of weekends adding bolts to runouts, cleaning loose rock, and optimizing belays. On the last weekend in May, we sent the

longest sportaineering rock climb in North America. Brent pretty much climbed the whole thing in his approach shoes. On the slightly icy hike down, I smiled to myself about the journey of the day, and the people and process it had taken to get there with. Guaranteed Rugged was Brent's inspired idea and it was a good one.

— Sean Draper, Canada

## Images



Kate Naus leading pitch 22, which is the third steep headwall pitch on Guaranteed Rugged (1,068m 5.10c).



Sean Draper at the super exposed wrap-around pitch 23 on the headwall section of Guaranteed Rugged (1,068m 5.10c).



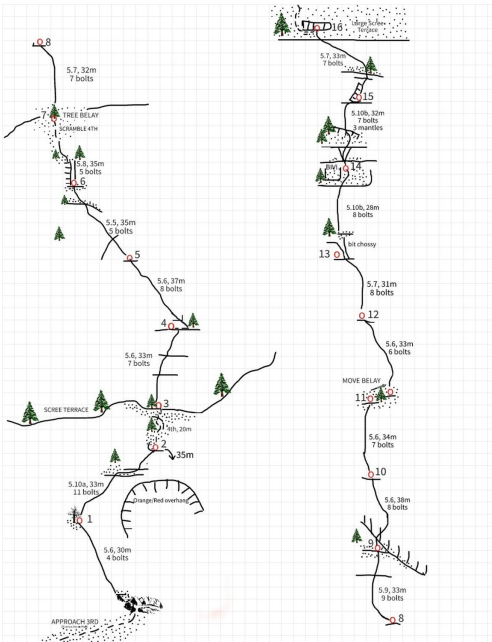
Lisa Newhook climbing the crux pitch 24 on the headwall of Guaranteed Rugged.



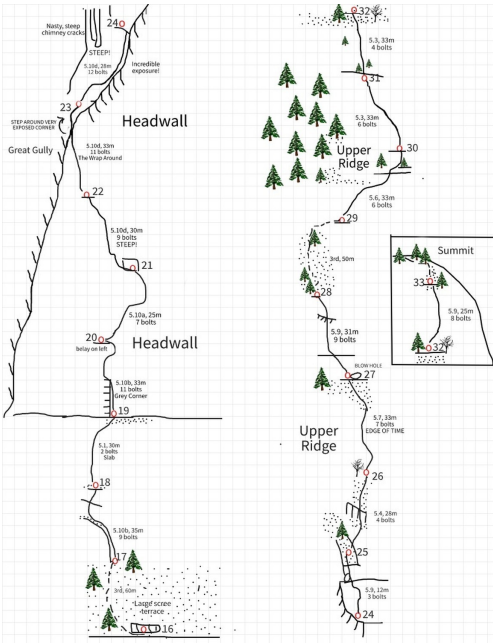
Kate Naus finishing up pitch 33 on Guaranteed Rugged (1,068m 5.10c).



Photo showing the start of Guaranteed Rugged in Marble Canyon Provincial Park.



Top of the first 16 pitches of Guaranteed Rugged in Marble Canyon Provincial Park, BC.



Top of the upper 17 pitches of Guaranteed Rugged in Marble Canyon Provincial Park, BC.

## Article Details

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