

ended in soaked failure as we attempted the classic Lotus Flower Tower during brief lulls in the deluge, which became blue sky and dry on our pick-up day.

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CANADIAN ROCKIES

Canadian Rockies, Various Activity. The 1997-98 season ended up a below-average year for ice formation, but new route activity, with the major emphasis now switched to mixed rock and ice, continued at a fevered pace, making this winter one of the most interesting in the history of local "ice" climbing.

Two of the longest routes of the season were plucked in October by Grant Statham and partners a mere half hour from Canmore. His *Cabrio* (WI5 R, 400m) with Larry Stanier climbs four pitches of thin ice to easier terrain. A hundred meters left is *Centaur* (5.9 WI4, 350m) climbed with Joe Buszowski.

El Niño did its magic early, as temperatures remained mild and kept any significant snowfalls at bay until January. Early season routes included *Burning Man* (III 5.11 WI4, 150m) by Keith Haberl and Ken Wylie, while Raphael Slawinski made the first free ascent of the classic *Auto de Feu* (5.10 WI5). Wylie and Steve DeMaio squeezed a "sport ice" route between two classics of other genres. *Hovering Half Breed* (M8, 40m), with small patches of ice and 14 fixed bolts and pitons, lies between the classic pure ice of Whiteman Falls and the truly mixed Red Man Soars.

Sean Isaac found a rarely iced up corner farther down the valley, which produced a brilliant unnamed 5.10 turf route. Steve House later soloed this route along with *Whiteman Falls* (WI5+) and *Red Man Soars* (5.10 WI4).

Thomson and Issac started the season with a direct rock pitch to the 200-meter-plus ice route *Suffer Machine* to give *Teddy Bear's Picnic* (V M8 X WI5+, 200m). The pair also added independent routes on either side of Suffer Machine. To the right is *Uniform Queen* (WI 4+ M7-, 180m), which is probably the best pure mixed route on the Headwall. To the left is *Fiasco* (M7+ WI5+, 180m), which offers a 5.12- variation with your hands or M7+ drytooling over a large roof to reach an elegant three-and-a-half pitch ice line. Just around the corner, Slawinski and Chris Geisler found *Blind Eye* (V 5.10 mixed WI5, 170m), a quality four-pitch route immediately right of Nemesis. Thomson and Issac also finished a route started last season to the left of *The French Reality* (WI 6+). Their *French Toast* (M7 WI5, 150m) climbs two rock overhangs interspersed with steep and thin ice. Immediately after Fiasco, the pair went to work on a variation to another Headwall route, *The Day After Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*. After numerous efforts to clean, bolt and finally lead the first M9 pitch (a combination of bolts and natural gear), the ice on the second pitch (out of four) had melted away, leaving the route for next year. (Unreported from last year was Slawinski's on-sight first free ascent of *The Day After Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* with the two overhanging aid pitches going at 5.10+ mixed climbing.)

After cleaning up on the Stanley Headwall, Thomson took his drill elsewhere to produce a series of spectacular routes that climb up large sections of overhanging rock to reach large icicles that rarely or never form completely. The first and probably hardest route was *Mixed*



Monster (III M8, 120m) on Mt. Wilson. After a short ice pitch, two short rock pitches (25m, 15m) were climbed to reach a six-meter overhang that was drytooled to reach a 45-meter section of ice. Because of sloping holds on the third pitch, Thomson used rock shoes and ice tools.

Also on Mt. Wilson, Thomson, Kefira Allen and Eric Dumerac added the beautiful *Stairway to Heaven* (M7+, 100m) above the classic ice route *Midnight Rambler*. Down the road from the popular area of Field, Thomson and Allen climbed an often-looked-at problem on Mt. Hunter described in the guidebook as a route that would be “an exciting exercise in classic Rockies frigging around.” At the time, of course, this meant aid climbing with pitons and shaky gear. Nowadays, it means cleaning and drilling. Their *Sure, Why Not?* (V M7 W15, 410m) follows several classic ice pitches, using two pitches of difficult and overhanging rock to link them.

Thomson and Allen also made the long walk up to the compelling line *Sky Pilot* near Banff. This Grade 6 pillar formed early in the season for only the second time ever. It is unknown if anyone managed to climb the fragile column before it fell off, but in March, Thomson added bolts up to a dynamic icicle that hung down from the main broken-off curtain. Thomson declared *Dog Fight* (M7 W16 X, 80m) his best mixed route all season, because in one full 50-meter pitch one is faced with difficult drytooling and a significant amount of challenging ice.

The only other route of the season to compare to these is *Unicorn*, next to the popular *Kitty Hawk*. Eyed for years, it was finally attempted by Eric Dumerac, who climbed the first (M7-) pitch with widely spaced but good natural gear. Realizing he needed bolts for the upper free-hanging dagger, Dumerac recruited Thomson and his drill. Re-leading the first pitch, the pair then drilled a number of bolts to reach the ice to create a second spectacular M7 pitch. With its difficulty and quality quickly confirmed by Tim Pochay and Statham, Unicorn may prove to be the best mixed route in the range, although it doesn't always come in enough for an ascent.

A significant factor for all of these climbs is their size and their significant distance from the roadside. Unlike the short 20 to 30-meter mixed routes in Vail and other areas, these climbs are generally started from the bottom and combine long stretches of strenuous rock climbing and drytooling as well as significant portions of ice.

JOE JOSEPHSON

Mt. Andromeda, Andromeda Strain, First Free Ascent. In September, John Culberson and I made the first free ascent of *Andromeda Strain* on Mt. Andromeda in the Canadian Rockies. This 2,300-foot route is alpine climbing from the car at its best. I freed the former A1 crack in crampons at 5.10d. Other attractions on the climb included an icy 5.9 pitch, a pitch skirting an ice blob rated M5, and an ice pitch of W15.

DAVID A. TURNER

BAFFIN ISLAND

Mount Thor, Ascent and Tragedy. A team of Parks Canada rescue specialists were in Auyuittuq late last August in response to a climbing accident on Mt. Thor. A solo climber named Go Abe from Japan was overdue on his second attempt on a central line on the face. It turned out he had been killed in a fall in which he landed on the ledge at two-thirds height. I believe the fall happened as he was approaching his previous year's high point, one rope length above the ledge. It appeared he had tried to follow his own line as much as possible on the lower face,