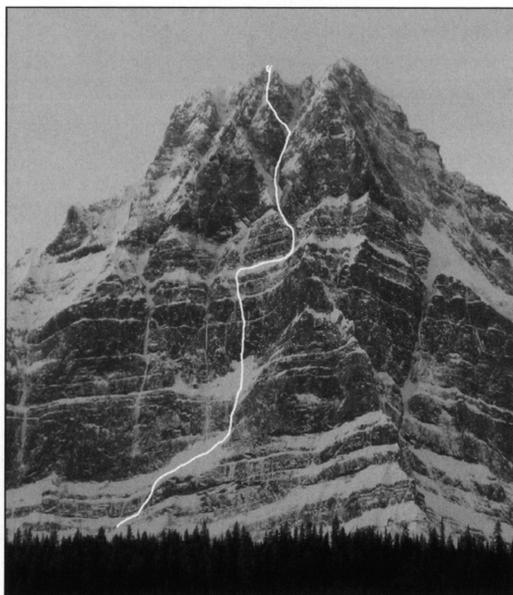


*Howse Peak, Howse of Cards.* In December Will Gadd, Kevin Mahoney, and I made the first complete ascent of the east face of Howse Peak. After the excitement over M-16 (Backes-Blanchard-House, 1999) and the gauntlet that was thrown down with “twice as hard as M8,” the tantalizing smears of the east face had become even more tempting to M-climbers like Will and me. Our first attempt was educational; our second, successful. Will, in late November, that we “have a look.” The face was thinner than usual, but snow conditions were bomber, and Kevin’s visit to the Rockies was too good an opportunity to pass up. We left late and had an unforgivable amount of fun—a strategy not conducive to alpine climbing.



The east face of Howse Peak, showing Howse of Cards. Not shown: M-16 (Backes-Blanchard-House, 1999), Northeast Buttress (Baker-MacKay-Vockeroth, 1967), North Face (Blanchard-Robinson, 1988). For the former, see report and route line in *AAJ* 2000, pp. 232-233. For the latter two, see *Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*, by Sean Dougherty. Will Gadd

On our second attempt we spent several predawn hours crossing Chephren Lake and pounding up the lower slopes to the first pitch. The ice had deteriorated from bad to horrible. Will intentionally knocked off ice, revealing a perfect torque crack and M7 edges that led through the bottom of the first pitch. Above, several hundred feet of snow led up and right to pitch two. Photos from 1999 showed two smears, but we encountered only one. A week previous, we had kicked off large fragile sections on rappel. A combination of thin ice and dry-tooling led to the middle snow slope.

On our first attempt Will had led the mental cruxes—thin WI6X and M6+X WI6R—through the prominent cliff band. Kevin and I took over the second time, while Will put his nervous energy into building a dee-luxe snow cave. On day two we reclimbed pitches three and four, trailing Tiblocs as self-belays to keep the route all-free. A pitch of snow-covered 5.7, a 100m snow traverse, and the exit gully led to two stellar thin ice pitches, the cornice, and finally the summit. We topped out at 2:00 p.m., rapped back to our cave, brewed up, and continued down. We had left Canmore at 4:00 a.m. on Thursday, December 5, and were back in town at 11:00 p.m. on Friday, December 6.

Between the time of our ascent and the first magazine pushing the “Print” button, the east face grew by 500' and the curtain of the first pitch by 75. Further journalism suggested that ours was a north face, two-pitch variation to M-16. In reality we shared three pitches with M-16 and added 11 new pitches on the face. We called our route Howse of Cards (3,500', VI M7- WI6X), due to dubious ice, a key hold that resembled a deck of cards, and the ongoing mystique of the face. We copped the attitude of the M-16 crew by adding “no bolts!” to the route description, and finishing it off with “no aid, no jumars!”