

climbing brought us to the nipple on the ridge. Lightning was striking the neighboring peaks as we fired the last two pitches, but rain held off until we started rappelling. We rappelled our route, except that the final four raps are to climber's left of the ascent line. Eleven rappels, and we were back at our packs, tired, wet, and relieved. On the second-to-last rappel, the ropes stuck, and we had to climb and downclimb an extra pitch of wet slab in the dark: a two-hour exhausting task, given the state our bodies were in. With dying headlamps we groveled down to the highway through wet slide alder and arrived at the car 22 hours after leaving.

This was one of the best climbing days either of us had in 2004, and we highly recommend our route to others. Rack: 60m ropes, a double set of cams from #0 TCU to #3 Camalot, 1 #3.5 and 1 #4 Camalot, 1 set of nuts, 5 pitons. All belays are on good ledges.

With the route set for rappelling, competent climbers armed with the beta should shave several hours off our time—12 hours up and down should be enough, plus the approach. The ultimate, though, for a fit party might be to link Prime Rib, the Little MacDonald summit, the Northwest Ridge of Mt. MacDonald, and back to the car, in a day.

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## PURCELL MOUNTAINS

### BUGABOOS

*Various free ascents.* In July and August Nick Martino, Cedar Wright, and I freed two unrepeatable aid lines on the Minaret of South Howser. On both the Italian Pillar (V 11+) and the Southwest Pillar (V 12- R/X) we created new pitches that wander from the original aid lines. Climbing in a team of three was interesting, with the leader clipping two 7.5mm ropes into each piece, and the seconds gingerly free-climbing, each on his own small line. Making first free ascents on such an inspiring, clean-cut, Half Dome-sized feature with two great friends was top-notch excitement. We climbed both lines “team free” (everyone free-climbing everything, no jugs), no falls, in 14 and 16 hours respectively, camp-to-camp.

We'd attempted the Southwest Pillar the year before, finding the first two pitches to be long, butt-cheek-clenching experiences. The route looks like a continuous 2,000' hand crack from camp, but it was a continuously hideous, hard-to-protect, flaring butt crack. It took us two years and some fixed copperheads to overcome.

The Italian Pillar, with wild but well-protected roof pulling, a dramatic “golden groove” crux last pitch (this variation to the original route goes up the middle of multiple parallel, arching cracks, with stemming and jamming between grooves), and a stone's throw from a five-star base camp, could become one of the more sought-after climbs in the Bugaboos. On the initial attempt by Cedar and I, we continued on through torrential rain and fog, fighting “team free” to the last pitch, before seeing the eyes of god and making a wrong turn. With dry rock and three people, we triple simul-climbed for 500' and found the true finish. On both ascents we continued past the summit of the Minaret and along the 900' summit ridge (steps to 5.10) to the summit of the South Howser Tower itself.

Nick and Cedar also made the first free ascent of Lost Feather Pinnacle, which went in a day at 5.10 and involved a 5.9 down jump that was “definitely X” for the follower.

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