

cool. Nobody else knows. I was getting to the point where I was wanting somebody to do that face. When you did, it made me really happy. I really liked it.”

“Jim,” I replied, “We liked it too.”

STEVE HOUSE, AAC

Emperor Face, historical note. Nearly forgotten, in 1974 Pat Callis and Jim Kanzler made the first significant attempt at the then-unclimbed Emperor Face, climbing high on the face through a feature they called the “Jaws.” Callis recalls their attempt:

“It was a significant mountaineering experience at the time, involving four bivies, but we did not write it up because we did not go to the summit. We were escaping, having misjudged the nature of the upper wall as being ice. The lower part was great ice, and we did half the face in one and a half days but did not take enough rock gear and food for the rest of it.

“Ours was the first serious attempt, and it was in was in 1974, following two earlier explorations by me with Hank Abrons in ‘72 and Kanzler in ‘73. Also, we invited Jeff Lowe and Mike Weiss to go on another try in ‘75, but after hanging out at the base waiting for weather, we had to give it up.

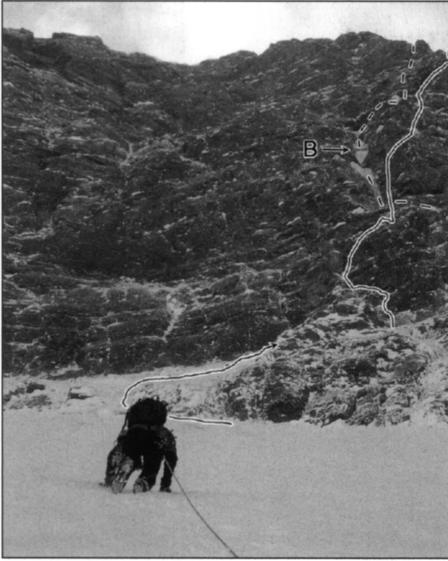
“Kanzler deserves recognition for realizing the feasibility of the line through the Jaws in ‘74 and talking me into doing it. Although it was the line Abrons and I picked in ‘72, by ‘74 I was thinking of a more conservative route that went left up the snow ramp at the bottom before going directly up.”

Mt. Alberta, Anderson-House. At 4:30 a.m. on March 26, 2008, in bitter cold, Steve House and I left the Lloyd McKay hut and approached the ridge leading to the rappel station down to the north face of Mt. Alberta. A harsh breeze made it was hard to fully appreciate the beauty of the aurora display on the northern horizon, dazzling and ominous at the same time. After rappelling onto the northern slopes, my losing and then finding one of my ice tools, sometime between 9 and 9:30 we arrived at the base of the north face, roped up, and started the real climbing.

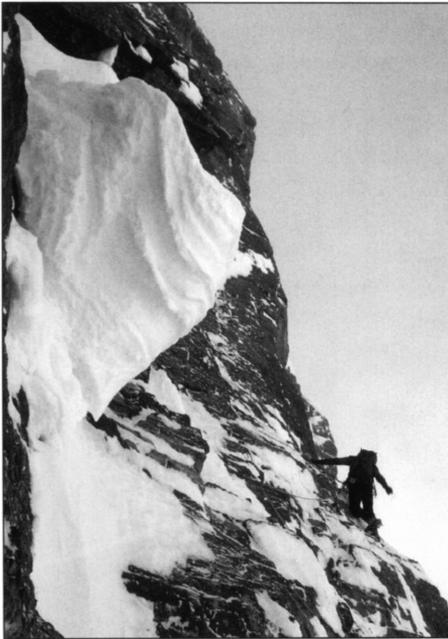
We climbed what we may be the common approach pitches, probably M5, though photos in the guidebook seem to put the normal start farther right, and where we went did not feel that “climbed.” Anyway, we reached the base of the ice (snow) field in three pitches. We put the ropes away and soloed the incredibly steep (for snow climbing) face, passing the occasional bare ice patch. Near the Yellow Band, the snow yielded to the typical steely, hard, gray ice you’d expect there. We got the ropes out again and did three easy but scrappy mixed pitches through the Yellow Band to the base of the steep, rock headwall. The weather deteriorated, and it started to snow and cloud over. We considered bailing to the Northeast Ridge, but continued,



Colin Haley leading on the lower half of the Haley-House route.
Steve House



Vince Anderson nearing the Yellow Band on the north face of Alberta, with the headwall rising above. Dashes: Anderson-House (2008), with bivy spot (B). Solid: Glidden-Lowe (1972). For an overview photo of the face see *AAJ* 2007, p. 191. *Steve House*



Anderson leading the third pitch of the second day. He dead-ended, came back left and took a crack straight up that offered two fantastic M7 pitches. *Steve House*

convincing ourselves that retreat would still be feasible from a short ways higher. We could see the start of the Glidden-Lowe route nearby, but found a crack system 60m right that looked like better climbing in these winter conditions. Two long, difficult pitches (M7 and M8R/X) of high-quality dry-tooling led up and left to intersect the G-L above its third pitch, in the snowy alcove described for that climb. Here the G-L angles up and right onto a buttress, but we found a steep, narrow ice pillar above. It was now about dark, probably 9 p.m., and we hoped to find a decent bivouac spot above the obvious ice. After an exhausting bout with this pitch (cold, black ice) and one more short pitch through snow mushrooms, we found a bivy spot between mushrooms that was somewhat protected from the now-frequent spindrift avalanches. We fixed 30' of the next pitch, and by 1 a.m. we were finally settled in and ready to try to sleep. The night was cold, but tolerable. Our down sleeping bags had gotten a little wet, but we hoped to avoid another night on the mountain.

We woke after 6 a.m. and slowly made our way out of our wet cocoons and back onto the climb. Steve had done the bulk of the hard leading the previous day, so I took the sharp end and started up a small ice corner to the end of the water ice. A small ledge system then traversed right, towards the G-L and the summit ice slopes. Deep snow covered the airy traverse, which required belly crawling and precarious tip-toeing to reach a niche with more moderate ground above. By now, most of our gloves were frozen hard and semi-useless from constant immersion in the snow, making it quite difficult to manipulate the gear. Another few pitches of good mixed climbing up flakes, corners, and slabs covered in thin névé (M7 and M6) brought us back to the G-L exit pitch. A short bit of moderate mixed terrain put us onto the upper slopes, from where we continued straight up on slabby mixed, because we thought the exit traverse onto the ice seemed convoluted.

The ground we climbed, however, would probably be less attractive in summer conditions. A 150m pitch put us onto the summit ridge and gave us our first glimpse of the sun in two days. At 5:45 p.m. we stopped briefly on top before heading down the corniced south ridge toward the Japanese Route.

Unsure of where to descend the east face, we guessed the wrong gully and spent a truly miserable night out, shivering in our frozen, useless sleeping bags, before brilliant morning sunshine greeted us on the 28th. By 10 a.m. we were safely in the flat basin and slogged back to the hut, where we could eat, drink, and rest a bit before heading out for Steve's truck.

VINCE ANDERSON, AAC

Mt. Alberta, West Face. I first saw a photo of the face in a 1989 *Climbing* magazine. A spectacular aerial shot showed a wall of black limestone topped by a dazzlingly white summit ridge, with a rare blue sky. A gothic flying buttress, rising gracefully to the summit icefield, jumped out at me. The caption read: "The unclimbed west face of Mount Alberta." At the time, given my abilities, the photo may as well have been of Olympus Mons on Mars, but I did not forget it.

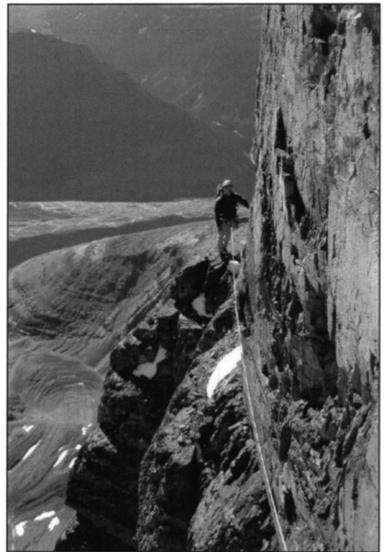
One weekend in late July, Rich Akitt and I headed for the face, but, for reasons that escape me now, I thought we should traverse to it on one of the large scree ledges that girdle Alberta. We retreated, and the next day ran up the Northeast Ridge, descended the Japanese route, hiked out to the road, and drove back to Calgary, arriving shortly before dawn on Monday.

I thought I was done with Alberta for the season, but gradually I found myself thinking about it again. So on a heartbreakingly beautiful Friday afternoon in mid-September, Eamonn Walsh and I waded across the Sunwapta River and headed up Woolley Creek. The fresh snow plastering the peaks would not melt until spring, but ever the optimist, I figured the steepness and sunny aspect would mean it would still be in rock-climbing shape.

We skidded down rubble and jumped gritty crevasses toward Alberta, visible only as a hulking black shape against a star-filled sky. The moon was just past new and did not light our way like last time, but unlike



Mt. Alberta's West Face route, viewed from the approach. Raphael Slawinski



Eamonn Walsh on Mt. Alberta. Raphael Slawinski