

First Traverse of the Howser Spires, Bugaboos

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THE TWO exceptional companions whom Yvon Chouinard and I had on our successful traverse of the towers of the Howser Spires in the Bugaboos this past summer, Eric Rayson and Jock Lang, had both come to the United States in the early spring. They had been prompted to do so by Dave Dornan, who had met them in Europe the year before. They had come to sample American climbing and to visit climbing areas across the continent. Thanks to Dave's introduction, they were promptly received in the small climbing society when they arrived and were sent along to others as they went from place to place. From this inside viewpoint, they have come to know American climbing and its practices and philosophy more intimately perhaps than any other outside visitors. Their good will was our most cherished memory of a fine summer.

Yvon and I inveigled them into coming to Canada with us for a climb we had set our sights on the previous year. We wanted not only the good humor of our British friends, but also the assistance of their fine ice-climbing ability. Their apprehensions over a terrible Eiger-like climb vanished when we found *our* face in unclimbable condition and escaped to the friendly Bugaboos.

The first attempt on the Howser traverse began on the day of our arrival, but it was curtailed when a four-day rainstorm sent us all the way back to Boulder Camp. We had chosen to make the traverse in the harder of the two directions, from north to south. In this way we would make not only the first complete traverse but also the first ascent of the direct north face of the South Tower, a fine climb in itself. Four days later, we were off once again for the traverse. This time Yvon was full of confidence and assured us that we would "knock it off" in a day-and-a-half. This accounted for our traveling light with little food.

We crossed the glacier early in the morning, and as the sun rose, we were beginning the roped leads up the moderately steep icefield north of

the North Tower. We climbed separately in pairs, Jock and Eric, Yvon and I. We used crampons here and belayed with ice axes, secured by fine Scottish technique. By mid-morning we had reached the rocks and climbed until late in the afternoon to get to the summit of the North Tower.

During the day I became very faint and as the day wore on, grew weaker and weaker. By evening I was really sick and feared that this might force us to a second retreat. As the others finished off most of our food, I fell asleep.

The bivouac was warm and I awoke in the morning feeling fantastically well again, my fever having broken in the night. Yvon was as confident as ever about finishing the climb, and so we promptly finished off the remainder of the food, a *single* can of tuna fish. The day's work started with the ascent of the Central Tower. After a series of long rappels we reached the notch between the Central and South Towers. The notch is a very cold, inhospitable place, the apex of two steep couloirs. Here we found some old pitons left by a previous party, which had reached this spot on an attempt to do the South Tower by the north face.

The first direct-aid climbing of the route began here, with Jock and me leading while Yvon and Eric hauled and prusiked. Five nailing pitches brought us to the northeast arête and to what looked like easy ground. As we moved up from the arête, the other two took the lead and made fifth-class pitches up and over several difficult steps. As night came, Eric led us over what seemed the last major difficulty before a scramble to the summit. After placing a knife-blade in total darkness, he stepped into a sling suspended from it to reach a jam-crack leading upwards. We were amazed to watch him use in the crack like a pair of brass knuckles a two-inch bong with holes to lighten it. Eventually he stepped onto the bong to surmount the difficulty. Unfortunately the ledge he had reached was big enough for only one person, and so we fixed ropes and descended to a larger ledge some hundred feet lower for a bivouac.

This was another favorable bivouac weatherwise. We were off early without the usual breakfast ceremonies to the regret of all of us. By mid-morning we reached the summit of the South Tower and began the descent. We spiraled off the tower in some six rappels, a routine but time-consuming process. The last one deposited us onto the glacier at about three o'clock.

We had one of the finest alpine climbs in North America, for all aspects of mountaineering had been brought into play, from third to sixth class, from rappels to traverses, from ice climbing to purely technical

rock climbing. It tested all the skills. It was not hazardous, nor was it easy but rather it was enjoyable in the difficulties it presented. There have been very few climbs of any of the towers, and some had not seen climbers for years. The Howsers offer fine climbing. They are well worth the slightly longer hike it takes to reach them in what is one of the most accessible ranges of North America.

Summary of Statistics.

AREA: Bugaboos Group, Purcell Range, British Columbia, Canada.

ASCENT: First traverse of the Howser Spires (from north to south).

First ascent of north face of South Tower. August, 1965.

PERSONNEL: Eric Rayson and Jock Lang, *Scottish*; Yvon Chouinard and Douglas R. Tompkins, *Americans*.

