

pitch is 90 meters of Grade 5. In Ontario, on the northern tip of Lake Superior, lies a 12-mile gorge named Orient Bay. The area is emerging as a new site of water ice activity. Centered around the town of Nipigon, Orient Bay has some 150 named routes. Nearby sites such as Kama Bay and Ice Station Superior offer another 75 routes.

Mount Geikie, North Face. A new route was established on the 4,000-foot north face of Mt. Geikie in the Canadian Rockies. From July 23 to August 2 Scott Simper and Seth Shaw climbed continuous crack systems through the overhanging headwall to the right of the Lowe/Hannibal route. Two ledge systems split the route into thirds. The first section was mostly fourth-class climbing with a few pitches of 5.9. The second section was nearly vertical with sustained free climbing and some aid. The third section was overhanging but with moderate climbing of A1 with a few hard spots. The currently nameless route goes at VI+ 5.10 A3+.

Canadian Rockies, Winter Ice Activity. The 1996-1997 winter in the Canadian Rockies turned out to be perhaps the most prodigious season ever—not for the new route total (which was less than half of each of the previous three seasons), nor for the number of established routes formed (most venues north of Lake Louise were well below average), but for the mass of climbers that descended upon the area beginning in early February.

By late October *The Terminator* (150 meters, V WI 6) formed for the first time since 1986 on Mount Rundle near Banff. Added to the mix, the *Troubled Dreams* (WI 6+ M8) start to *The Replicant* (145 meters, V WI 6+) formed up as easy Grade 5 ice. And if that wasn't enough, by mid-December the ephemeral *Sea of Vapors* (165 meters, V WI 7+) came into being with nothing but fat, solid ice, thus becoming the easiest line on the wall (WI 5-). Other Rundle plums like *La Goute* (50 meters, IV WI 6+) and *Shampoo Planet* (190 meters, III 5.9+ WI 3R) also formed alongside several new mixed routes. An early report in *Climbing* magazine and endless raving on the Internet brought the visiting climbers by the busload. The early reports stated it was a banner year for the Rockies. Yet aside from The Rundle area and The Vermilion Pass region in Kootenay Park, the rest of the range was rather dry. Combine this with extended periods of high avalanche hazard, bitter cold and deep snow, and the throngs were confined to a rather small selection of routes that centered around the Rundle Wall. As soon as the cold spell snapped in early February all three of the major Rundle routes had line-ups virtually every day of the week for the rest of the winter. The carnage was so great that by mid-March climbers were leaving the car by 1 a.m. only to shiver in the pre-dawn dark for three hours just to lay claim to their route of choice. The Terminator area has for years been known as simply The Terminator Wall or, more recently, The Rundle Wall. However, after this season's circus a more appropriate name became required and was applied by Tim Pochay. It is now known as The Trophy Wall.

After everyone realized all three Trophy Wall routes were easy picking, the obvious challenge became to do all three in a single day. First up to the queue were Ken Wylie and Keith Haberl. In order to beat the crowds they employed blockers. While they ascended *Troubled Dreams* via headlamp, they had friends get onto *Sea of Vapors* (referred to as "Sea of Anchors" by the end of the season). While the pair made their way up *The Terminator*, their friends kept the ensuing hoards off *The Sea* until they were down and ready to complete the triumvirate. An unfortunate, but necessary tactic considering the crowds. In March, François Damilano and Guy Lacelle repeated the effort—but they had no crowds to worry about. The weather kept all other suitors away as the temperature in Banff that morning was -27°C! A week later when it warmed up,

Lacelle soloed all three in five hours. It's fascinating to note that Lacelle has now done the first solo ascent of the route and he also did the first one-day and overall second ascent of the route with Alain Chassie way back in 1986. That ascent still remains, by the way, the only time anyone has climbed the entire *Terminator* including the five challenging approach pitches. A few weeks after Lacelle's solo, Bruce Hendricks repeated the effort.

Some of the best mixed routes of the last three years were put up on the complicated walls to the left of *The Terminator*. These were *Ten Years After* by Keith Haberl and Ken Wylie and *Two-Piece Yanks* by Stan Price and Steve House. *Ten Years After* (150 meters, IV 5.8 WI 5+) is in such a rare and beautiful position it can not be ignored and the few parties that climbed it all considered it one of the top ten. Several ascents came throughout November and December until an extended arctic front curtailed all activity. By the time the temperatures cooperated, what ice not knocked off earlier had mostly ablated away into a thin veneer. Price and House were perhaps the last party up the route in early March and thought it solid grade 7 with virtually no protection between belays. This, however, was only the warm-up for their route on the impressive cliff above. Overall, *Two-Piece Yanks* (200 meters, VI 5.11 WI 7) is perhaps the hardest multi-pitch route in the range, surpassing last year's *Troubled Dreams* (M7; FFA: Alex Lowe). It takes the unlikely looking streak way above *Ten Years After* and to the right of *Sam Goes Trekking* (WI 4). Where *Ten Years After* has only this once had ice on it, *Yanks* seems to be around more often and could be considered *the* route for those interested in proving their metal in the modern era of mixed climbing. It is good, hard, and safe. The third pitch was the scene of a tremendous fall when Stan Price pitched off and ripped the entire pitch back to the belay, seriously mangling House's hand. Price immediately got back on the pitch with a bit more control and managed to find good protection, some of which is still there. After completing the pitch, the pair came down for a "rest day," during which they established the often-looked-at connector pitch between *Red Man Soars* (55 meters, 5.9+ WI 4+) and *White Man Falls* (90 meters, WI 6) to create *White Man Soars* (5.9+ WI 6). The following day, they climbed around *Ten Years After* and completed their climb utilizing a fixed rope from the first attempt. They didn't have to worry about crowds on this one.

The crowds seemed to be the main topic of conversation this season. Many of the locals became bitter and disillusioned with the amount of competition for routes from visiting climbers and sometimes large, guided parties. This was unfortunate, because there seemed to be a lack of creativity and commitment as everyone went after the high profile climbs and/or the ones with well-established trails. Areas like the Yoho Valley Road and Jasper saw little activity despite quality routes. The brilliant route *Shampoo Planet* was in uncharacteristically great shape clear into March but saw hardly any activity as everyone just had to go around the corner to the Trophy Wall. The original pitch of *The Replicant* (WI 6+) also formed, but it saw only three or four ascents as most folks opted for the easier Grade 5 ice to the right.

The Field area in Yoho National Park has been a consistent producers of new routes since the early 1970s and this season was no exception. *Mossey's* (35 meters, III 5.10 mixed, by Andrew Shephard) and *Quivering Butcheeks* (35 meters, III 5.9 A1 WI 5, by Barry Blanchard and Jack Tackle) take variations to the right of the popular *Massey's* (WI 4). The complicated gullies left of *Super Bock* produced two superb and aptly-named routes called *Home Brew* (80 meters, III 5.9 A1 WI 5) by Grant Statham and Larry Stanier and *Old Milwaukee* (70 meters, III 5.10+ WI 6) by Steve House and Bill Belcourt. Perhaps the most-forgotten-about venue in the range, the Yoho Valley Road, produced *It Ain't Ouray* (50 meters, III WI 6 R) and *Snowy's Revenge* (150 meters, III WI 5) and is now home to two dozen routes.

The Stanley Headwall had above-normal activity as *Nemesis* (160 meters, V WI 6), *Killer Pillar* (50 meters, IV WI 6) and *Suffer Machine* (200 meters, V WI 6+) were in better-than-average shape. The rest of the Headwall, however, saw limited action despite all the routes being there. This seems simply a function of harder climbing and a non-established trail to the base. I have yet to hear any one say "Been there, done that!" about the ice of the Stanley Headwall.

Having said that, the usual group of hard-core locals and regular visitors made rare ascents of *Acid Howl* and *The French Reality* (145 meters, V WI 6+). Tim Pochay completed an audacious solo of *Acid Howl* (320 meters, Grade V WI 6) with plastic conditions in early April. Despite strong attempts, the 1994 route *The Day After Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (160 meters, Grade V 5.9 A2 WI 6) remains unrepeatable.

Another important aspect of the season was the meteoric rise in overall standards and the firm entrenchment of water ice grade 7, if not grade 8. No less than half a dozen new climbs or existing climbs in grade 7 shape were completed along with another dozen in the serious grade 6 to 6+ range. Aside from the usual under grading/sandbagging, there is somewhat of a resistance to the new M grade introduced in Colorado a few years ago. Perhaps this comes from the Rockies' long tradition of alpine mixed climbing. Few of the mixed climbs in the Rockies differ greatly from pitches already found on the hard alpine routes like *The Beast Within*, *The Wild Thing*, the east face of Fay, the north faces of Kitchener and Cromwell, *Humble Horse*, and the *Andromeda Strain*, among others. The new "cragging" mixed climbs are, however, considerably steeper, usually have better protection and are much easier to get at.

It's curious to note that sport climbing started on the small cliffs and is moving onto big walls, while mixed climbing started on the big pigs and is now finding a home in the canyons. As a result, many of the Rockies activists feel the YDS rock grade combined with a WI grade still best describes the conditions you'll encounter. When pressed for a comparison of *Two-Piece Yanks* with the M grades at Vail, Steve House, in classic Rockies sandbagging form, called the route M6. "Let them choke on that," he said.

Dave Thomson is one of the few locals to employ the M grade to his mixed climbs. And since Dave Thomson has been for several years the most prolific contributor to the hard new route scene, it seems certain the M grade will become firmly established. In October, in the company of Tom Wolfe, Thomson climbed *Suffer Machine* (first free ascent), second ascent of *Ten Years After* with a new direct start, second ascent of a 5.10 mixed line right of *Sacre Bleu*, and then rounded out the month with a Halloween ascent of *The Terminator*. Almost single-handedly, Thomson has developed one of the best ice venues anywhere up Storm Creek. Alongside his 1993 routes *Tinkerbell* (WI 4) and *Sinister Street* (WI 5), Thomson, Wolfe and Sean Isaac added *Fleshlumpeater* (90 meters, IV 5.10 WI 5+), *Crash* (90 meters, IV WI 5), and the awesome *I Was a Teenage Yachty* (90 meters, IV M6). Thomson calls the first pitch of this latter route "the best mixed pitch in the Rockies," which is no small compliment. It is truly mixed in that rock and ice are used simultaneously most of the way with excellent three-dimensional climbing in chimneys and stringers of ice that actually take screws.

The two-mile stretch of road west of Vermilion Pass in Kootenay National Park now gives access to a collection of routes almost unparalleled in North America. Alongside Storm Creek and the 150- to 300-meter nasties of the Stanley Headwall, there is the nearby Haffner Creek Ice Flows, which offer 10 to 20 top rope problems from WI 4 to a variety of free-hanging daggers. But it was Thomson's efforts across the road in Marble Canyon that really stand out. Known for years to contain a variety of steep, chandeliers and brittle pillars, this narrow canyon coughed up one of the most technical short climbs in Canada. *Fantasy Shower* (30 m) took Thomson

numerous efforts of “working the moves” before he succeeded at redpointing 12 meters of very overhanging rock (bolted) to reach a fragile icicle. The route began to see instant top-rope traffic and Thomson’s grade of “M7 plus plus” is proving to be a major sandbag.

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BAFFIN ISLAND

Polar Sun Spire, North Face. The Great and Secret Show (VII 5.11 A4 WI3) on Polar Sun Spire rises up the 4,400-foot north face of Polar Sun Spire. Mark Synnott, Jeff Chapman, and Warren Hollinger established 1,000 feet of fixed line in three long efforts. Above remained the 2,000 foot crux of severe aid up constantly overhanging rock. Ten days were needed to aid the first 700 feet of the crux. Lower-angle climbing led to the top of the wall. The route consists of 34 pitches. Eight of the pitches required between eight and 13-and-one-half hours to lead. The group spent 39 days climbing and 36 nights on the wall. A full account of their climb appears earlier in this journal.



An unnamed, unclimbed, 2,000-foot formation in the Gibbs Fjord, where Hollinger, Synnott and Chapman made an exploration prior to their ascent of Polar Sun Spire. Mark Synnott

Mount Asgard, North Face. Spaniards Txus Lizanaga, Raoul Melero, Miguel Berazaluce and Natxo Baniciso climbed a new route on the north face of the peak. *Nunavut* is 800 meters long and was rated VI 6a A4. The team spent 17 days on the wall climbing capsule style. They returned to civilization using a raft to cross Summit Lake and then descended Weasel River. They were in the area from June 30 until August 11. They summited on July 21. (*Desnivel*)