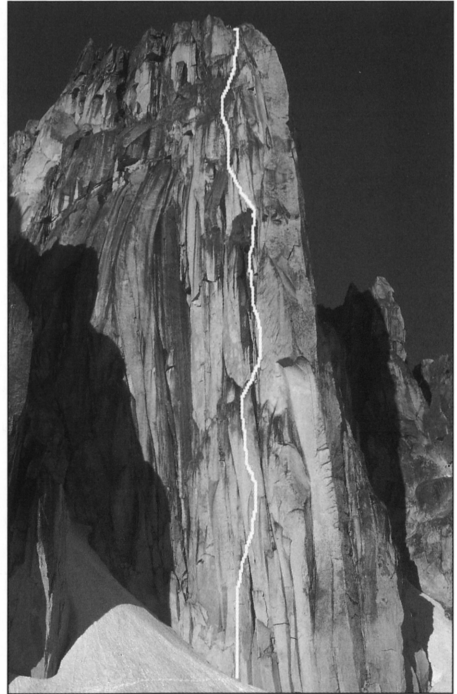


been looked at, talked about, but not attempted, due to its remoteness and apparent difficulty. In 1997 Brian Webster and I had attempted the golden southwest face but were thwarted after only two pitches by weather. In 1999 Californians Todd Offenbacher and Nils Davis completed this same line, naming it Wide Awake. However, the intimidating northwest face remained unchallenged.

Over six days Matt and I aided, cleaned, scrubbed, and fixed ropes, then freed the pitches on lead, until we were close enough to blast for the top. This "aid-point" style produced a high-quality 11-pitch free route, with six pitches of overhanging 5.11 crack climbing. Highlights include Matt's send of two 5.11+ pitches: Pitch 1, power underclinging protected by a mix of bolts and fixed pitons; and pitch 3, an overhanging, enduro, thin-hands-to-fist crack. We named the route Wild Fire (V 5.11d) because of numerous out-of-control forest fires that blazed in the valleys below.

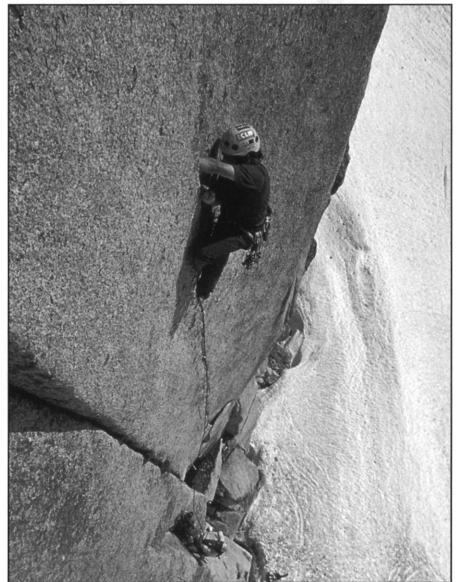
SEAN ISAAC, *Canada*



Wild Fire, the first route on the northwest face of Wide Awake Tower. Sean Isaac

CANADIAN ROCKIES

Canadian Rockies, summary. Ironically, the first significant ascent of the summer of 2003 was an alpine ice climb. These are, after all, the Canadian Rockies, where summer is but a brief interlude in the long, long winter. In late June the young Canmore team of Ben Firth, Greg Thaczuk, and Eamonn Walsh made the second ascent of Rights of Passage (1,000m, IV) on the northwest face of Mt. Kitchener in the Columbia Icefields. Local hardman Eric Dumerac and visiting French all-rounder Philippe Pellet had established the route in the fall of 2002. It received considerable attention after the overhanging glacial ice crux was graded an unprecedented WI8. (Given the nature of the climbing medium, an Alpine Ice rather than a Water Ice grade might be more appropriate, and might help better place the route in the



Sean Isaac jamming pitch two (5.11-) of Wild Fire. Chris Atkinson

context of earlier climbs.) The second ascent did little to resolve the grading controversy. Firth, who linked the two overhanging sections into one pitch, found the climbing strenuous but psychologically undemanding. This is unlike most hard ice climbing, where technical difficulty and danger usually go hand in hand.

In July the big limestone cliffs of the Bow Valley east of Canmore saw some notable repeats. Rich Akitt and Raphael Slawinski made the second ascent and the FFA of Quantum Leap (295m, 5.11d) on the south face of Mt. Yamnuska. Steve DeMaio and Jeff Marshall had established the route in 1990 as the third in a trilogy of ground-breaking routes on the cliff, the other two being modestly named Astro Yam and Above and Beyond (the names should be seen in the context of the then-fierce rivalry between traditional and sport climbers). Quantum Leap was named after a 12m factor-two fall Marshall sustained on the fourth pitch on an early attempt. Later in July Rolando Garibotti and Slawinski made the second ascent of Le Jour Le Plus Long (515m, 5.11a) on the northeast face of Windtower. This remarkable route had been put up in June 2000 by visiting Quebecois climbers Francois Roy and Remy Bernier. In a bold move, they headed up on a major first ascent carrying only clean gear—not a big deal on granite, but almost unheard of on Rockies limestone. As a result, there is not a single piece of fixed gear until the last pitch, where it joins the classic Homer-Wood route (570m, 5.10a). This adventurous state of affairs is a stark contrast to the belay and protection retrobolts proliferating on many of the Bow Valley's classic long routes in the names of convenience and safety.

That being said, the compact nature of Rockies limestone means that bolts often open up some of the best rock. The canyons of the Ghost Valley, a front-range area north of the Bow Valley best known for its ice climbs, are lined with endless walls of impeccable limestone (some enthusiastic locals have referred to the place as a limestone Yosemite). Braving the summer heat, long-time new-route activist Andy Genreux and visiting Colorado climber Chris Kalous bolted two seven-pitch routes that are likely the hardest multipitch sport routes in the Canadian Rockies. Premonition and Cowboy Poetry both feature multiple back-to-back 5.12 pitches, and share the crux 5.12c last pitch. Kalous redpointed every pitch on both climbs, and hopes to return this summer to redpoint the routes in a single push for proper free ascents.

In the alpine arena, a group of Jasper locals continued to explore the backcountry of the northern Rockies. Mt. Overlord is an unofficially named peak one kilometer north of Mt. Bridgland, northwest of Jasper. In July Carl Diehl and Dana Ruddy climbed Overlord's Northeast Ridge (900m, IV 5.7). They likened this feature to the East Ridge of Oubliette, the classic line of the Tonquin Valley. Also in July Ruddy teamed up with reclusive hardman Dave Marra and Sean VanAsten to climb the East Buttress (900m, V 5.10+) of Overlord. In the words of the first ascensionists, "poor quality rock in the lower half of the route is followed by immaculate quartzite of the upper part ... excellent gear, excellent climbing, on excellent rock—a classic in waiting." In September Marra, Ruddy, and Chris Delworth made the long, challenging approach to Dragon Peak. This quartzite peak with a spectacular east face is visible up the Athabasca River from Sunwapta Falls, along the Icefields Parkway. The trio started up the middle of three obvious arêtes in establishing the East Face (850m, V 5.8). Near the top, they avoided the blank-looking headwall by a leftward traverse to another arête, which led to the southeast ridge.

Also in September Slawinski and Peter Smolik made what was likely only the third ascent of the Northeast Ridge (V 5.10a) of Mt. Alberta. The lack of traffic may have had something to do with the guidebook reference to several "spooky pitches" reputedly featuring 5.10 climbing on loose rock, with no protection or belays. Slawinski and Smolik soloed or simul-climbed

most of the climb, belaying only five 60m pitches on the steep headwall. They never did find the “spooky pitches”; instead they found consistently interesting and safe climbing leading to one of the Rockies’ most spectacular summits. This beautiful route deserves to be climbed more frequently, being incomparably more enjoyable than the rubble of the normal (Japanese) route.

After a dry summer marred by massive forest fires, it might be expected that the ice season would be merely average. But a wet fall made for exceptional early season ice. The northeast face of Mt. Rundle is home to such legendary climbs as The Terminator and Sea of Vapours. It is also easily visible from the Trans-Canada Highway between Canmore and Banff, making these ice climbs the most watched in the range. As a result, when never-before-seen ice forms on Rundle, competition is fierce. Barry Blanchard and Phillippe Pellet were first to attempt a thin smear that appeared out of nowhere some 300m left of Shampoo Planet. However, they climbed only the initial two-thirds of the route, so the first ascent of The Oracle (450m, WI4+X M4) fell to Steve Holeczi, Rob Owens, and Brian Webster in early November. They found the route “very engaging and cerebral with very long runouts” on very thin ice.

Although The Terminator did, in fact, marginally touch down, Guy Lacelle and Owens ploughed up to it through the heavy snows of December not to climb the pillar, but to attempt a proper free ascent of T2. T2 is the mixed start to the usually unformed first pitch of The Terminator. Serge Angelucci and Jeff Everett made the visionary first ascent of this variation back in 1993. Although they did not use aid to gain the ice, they did employ yo-yo tactics. Moreover, they never linked the mixed start with the upper ice in a continuous push. As Lacelle and Owens traversed below the route, the fragile pillar suddenly collapsed, raking the slope between them. Regrouping, they succeeded in making a redpoint ascent of the mixed start (which now sported far less ice than in 1993), with strenuous M7 climbing using traditional gear. Running out of daylight, they retreated after the first pitch. In February Akitt and Slawinski likely made the first integral ascent of T2, climbing directly from the valley bottom up the rarely formed approach ice, on-sighting the mixed start, and continuing up the remaining two long pitches of steep ice. In March the T2 Integrale received several additional ascents by Europeans attending the Canmore Ice Festival.

Farther north, the Weeping Wall, given its proximity to the road, might have been thought climbed out. But last fall a beautiful line formed on the Upper Weeping Wall 100m left of the massive Weeping Pillar. In December Delworth and Marra snagged the first ascent of Master of Puppets (160m WI6). Two rope lengths of moderate ice lead to the most striking feature of the route, a slender freestanding pillar. From the top of the pillar another pitch of steep ice leads to the top of the wall. This exceptional line saw numerous ascents before the crux pillar fell off during an early February heat wave. Lacelle said it was among the ten best ice routes he has done—high praise indeed!

Blurring the line between waterfall and alpine climbing, in February Marra and American Tom Schnugg climbed For Fathers (1,000m, WI6) in the bowl to the right of Slipstream on Snow Dome. This bowl is a serious place, threatened by seracs from three sides. They attempted to finish up the serac, but after a narrow escape when a chunk of it collapsed, retreated down the route. (See a following report.)

On a lighter note Will Gadd and Slawinski brought the ice season to a close with an intriguing, if contrived, link-up of classics of three genres. On a beautiful day in late March, starting shortly after midnight they climbed the Regular North Face (III M3) of Mt. Athabasca. Returning to the car seven hours later, they drove to Polar Circus (700m, WI5), which they

round-tripped in just over four hours. They then made the three-hour drive to Yamnuska, where they climbed Direttissima (325m, 5.8) in two and a half hours base-to-summit, topping out just as it was getting dark. Their day included experiences ranging from frostbite on the summit of Athabasca to sweltering sun on the Yamnuska approach.

The past year in the Rockies was most remarkable for a revival in winter alpine climbing. The New England duo of Ben Gilmore and Kevin Mahoney kicked things off in December with a strong attempt on The Wild Thing (VI 5.9 A3 WI5) on the northeast face of Mt. Chephren. Rather than take the original start up the left-hand gully, they attempted the direct start up the gully directly below the upper difficulties. They reported excellent climbing with several WI5 pitches. They bivvied below the A3 chimney, then the following day attempted to free the crux aid section. They freed all but the slabby tension traverse at hard M6 or M7 ("hard to say, since everything feels harder when you're getting pounded by spindrift"—Mahoney). They climbed one further pitch in what was now a full-on storm before retreating owing to concern about avalanche hazard on the descent.

In February Firth and Slawinski made the long-awaited first winter ascent of the Greenwood-Locke route (V 5.9) on the north face of Mt. Temple. This route had seen several strong attempts, notably in 1988 by Trevor Jones, Sean Dougherty, and Chas Yonge. After four days on the face, Jones, Dougherty, and Yonge made it to within two pitches of easier ground before being forced down by a storm. Firth and Slawinski climbed the route with one bivouac on the face and one on the descent. In March Slawinski was back on Temple's north face with Valeri Babanov, the well-known Russian climber and recent addition to the Rockies scene. Over two days they made the second ascent and first winter ascent of the obscure Robinson-Orvig route (V 5.9 A2), a.k.a. the Sphinx Face, freeing the aid at the catch-all new-wave Rockies grade of M6. Bad weather on the second day prevented them from continuing to the summit, and they rappelled and downclimbed the route. (A full report on these climbs follows.) Two weeks later and just outside of regulation winter, Scott Semple and Walsh made the first one-day ascent of the Sphinx Face. Leaving the car at 3:45 a.m., they reached the East Ridge at 6:30 p.m. Like Babanov and Slawinski, they also descended the route. Far from being the "supreme test of climbing cool," as it is described in the guidebook, the Sphinx Face offers a reasonably quick and enjoyable way up the north face of Mt. Temple in winter, and deserves to be climbed more frequently.

The biggest news of the season came in early April, when Steve House and Marko Prezelj made the third ascent of the north face of North Twin, outside of regulation winter but in what were winter conditions. In a dramatic demonstration of the evolution of winter climbing, they dry-tooled most of the route, with the leader climbing leashless for ease and convenience. [See a feature article earlier in this Journal.—Ed.]

RAPHAEL SLAWINSKI, *Canada, AAC*

North Twin, north face, House-Prezelj. In early April 2004 American Steve House and Slovenian Marko Prezelj made the third ascent (Lowe-Jones, 1974; Blanchard-Cheesmond, 1985) of the daunting 4,500' north face of North Twin, one of the great prizes of North American alpinism. Their route takes an independent start before joining the Lowe-Jones in the upper half and finishing via that route. As the ascent was essentially a continuation of the 2003-04 winter climbing season, we are covering it in this year's Journal. See House's feature article earlier in this Journal for details.