

The character of the ridge changed abruptly at this point, as it widened to a 1m-wide gangway of perfectly flat rock, which led over a series of subsummits toward a snowy col. The continuation ridge above the col was deceptively difficult, narrowing to a series of steep towers. Fortunately they were bathed in the setting sun, and we climbed a series of absorbing pitches, some up to 5.9, to reach the summit slopes just as night fell. We bivouacked in a hollow of boulders approximately where the Northwest Face route (de Saussure-Firey-Knudson-Renz-Rose-Schurr, 1980) reaches the summit slopes.

We talked, dozed, joked and shivered our way through the night, and were away at first light up boulder fields and snow. We arrived on the summit at 6 a.m. on August 8. It was a magical morning with the surrounding peaks tinged by the red of dawn. We plunged down the southern slopes that narrowed into a hanging glacial valley, below Kali Peak, that led down to the glacier leading up to the Zeus-Manitou col, and made a long abseil down a cliff onto the Zeus Glacier. What we saw descending from the col was evidence of rapid glacial recession in the area. The first party to climb Zeus in 1966 commented on snow slopes reaching to the col but made no mention of the rock wall below.

From the Zeus Glacier it was a long slog back up moraines to our base camp. We arrived tired but happy late in the afternoon, having completed a satisfying alpine route (550m, TD 5.9) and traverse of the peak. The weather stayed settled, so a few days later we crossed the Ragnarok Glacier and made the second ascent of the superb Northwest Ridge of Mt. Fenris (450m, AD, de Saussure-Schurr, 1981).

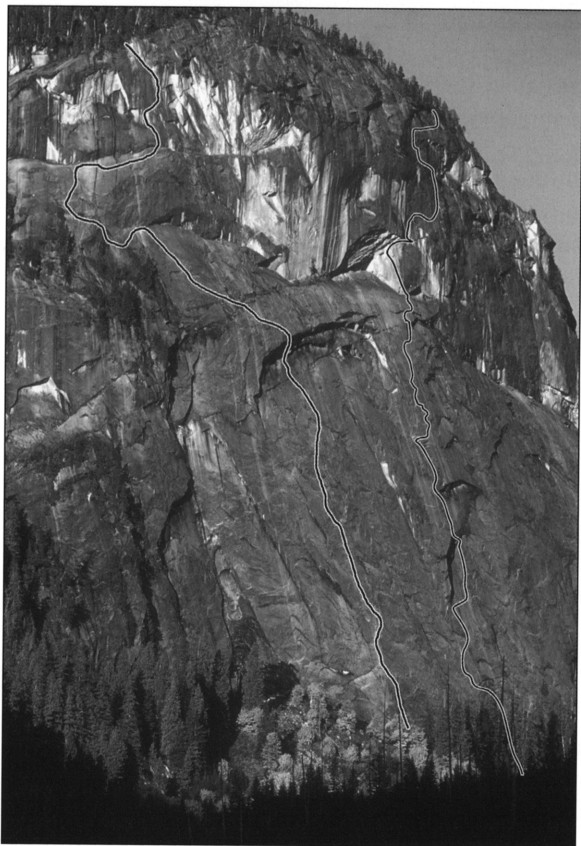
SIMON RICHARDSON, *Scotland, AAC*

*Eldred Valley, West Main Wall, Call of the Granite.* Due west from Squamish, the Eldred Valley is the backyard of the small coastal mill town of Powell River. Large mountains, deep valleys, and inlets prevent direct road access to the peninsula, but government ferries shuttle cars for easy access. The Eldred Valley is home to five granite walls, the biggest of which is the West Main, whose east face rises 3,000' above the valley floor.

In 1993 two Powell River locals, Colin Dionne and Rob Richards, claimed the first ascent of the West Main Wall. They worked on their route for a couple of summers before committing and climbing the 18-pitch Mainline (VI 5.11 A4) capsule-style in seven days, using only 18 bolts. Mainline was likely the biggest and proudest route to go up in Canada that year, but it saw little press; Colin and Rob wanted to keep the Eldred Valley a secret.

It wasn't until 1999, when Matt Maddaloni and the late John Millar made the short two-ferry journey, that other climbers began to take notice. Matt and John spent three weeks in the Eldred and established a hard aid line on Carag Dur, the valley's second biggest wall. Upon his return to Squamish, Matt beguiled me with wild tales of untapped big walls easily accessed by a two-wheel-drive vehicle.

In October 1999 I was fortunate enough to climb with Colin during the first ascent of Amon Rudh. Although not as big as the valley's other walls, Amon Rudh was the last unclimbed wall in the Eldred. It was on this trip that Colin opened my eyes to the process of large-scale new routing. I watched Colin, shod in blown-out Boreal Ballets, take off on lead, climbing at least 20' before swinging a power drill from his hip to place a bolt, then climbing another 20' or 30' and repeating the process. In three days Colin and I, along with Chris Wild and Victor Ting, established ten new pitches.



The Eldred Valley's 3,000-foot West Main Wall (left to right): Mainline (Dionne-Richards, 1993), Call of the Granite (Black-Easton, 2005). Aaron Black

In 2002, with the success of Amon Rudh still in the back of my mind, I teamed up with Ben Culhane and Ope (Dave Gemmel) to try and climb the Eldred's biggest and most imposing face: the West Main. But after 16 days of hard work, our time was up, and we had established just a handful of pitches.

Ope and I returned to the valley the next two summers and fumbled for efficient ways to equip and clean the route. During our third trip we made it to within three pitches of the top, before running out of drill-battery power, food, and motivation.

By the fourth season Ope was done with the Eldred Valley, and life had pulled him in other directions. Looking for a partner, I left messages on answering machines scattered across the continent. Sean Easton was the first to call me back, and he was psyched to come in for what would hopefully be the glory round. Back when I was starting to climb, I read articles that Sean had written

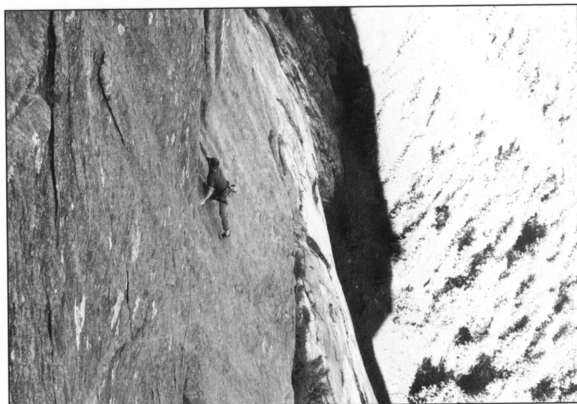
about his first ascents in far-off places like Patagonia. I was excited to climb with him.

Sean and I decided that the easiest way to equip and free the upper pitches would be to rap in. For a week we worked long days on the route from the top down, before we felt it was ready for the ground-up ascent. The route follows a line of shallow corners and face holds up the middle of the bottom slab. Upon meeting the headwall, the route stays right of the amphitheater-like feature known as the "Scoop" in the middle of the wall, and continues on a direct path through the largest part of the headwall.

Rain kept us off the route for the following week. Then, in late August, a questionable forecast changed for the better overnight, and six hours after I phoned Sean he arrived back in Powell River from visiting his girlfriend in Squamish. The next day started at 4 a.m., and by 8 a.m. we were at the base. The route was mostly dry, and on the first day we climbed 15 pitches of mostly 5.11-ish rock to a pre-placed bivy.

Day two launched us onto the headwall's steeper terrain. On pitch 18, I wound up for a long move and sprang for a hold past the limit of my static reach. As I caught the hold, my entire weight sagged onto a finger with a "pop!" that vibrated down my arm, the sharp

pain forcing me to let go and fly off. Only five pitches from the top, good finger or bad finger, going up would be the fastest way off the wall. Except for a 20' bolt ladder and one other move, I had freed every move on the route at some point. Our goal was always to free climb as much as possible, but I had to change into survival mode to get off the wall. I taped my tendon to the bone and continued wrapping the finger until it was splinted half-bent. Sean was now on rope-gun duty.



Aaron Black on pitch 19 (5.12b) of Call of the Granite. Dave Humphreys, [www.dlh-photos.com](http://www.dlh-photos.com)

The last pitches went as smoothly as could be expected, and at around noon Sean pulled me over the West Main's summit lip to complete the first ascent of Call of the Granite (23 pitches, V 5.12 C1).

AARON BLACK, *Canada*

## SELKIRK MOUNTAINS

*Mt. MacDonald, North Pillar.* At 7 a.m. on August 19, after a heinous two-hour approach, Bruce Kay (Squamish, B.C.) and I racked up at the toe of the steep pillar on the right side of Mt. MacDonald's 1,000m-high north face, for our first adventure together. We were surprised to see a bolt at the first belay, although we knew the pillar had been attempted a few times before. On the second pitch (5.7), two unnecessary and appalling protection bolts appeared, both within a few feet of bomber Camalot placements. The nut on the first one was tight, but Bruce managed to get the second one loose, remove the hanger, and unleash the fury of his hammer on the stud. It was the first time he had chopped a bolt in some 30 years of climbing. The pillar now steepened, and Bruce led a nice pitch of 5.10-. One final bolt appeared at the belay above the third pitch. The fourth pitch and the technical crux of the route involved moving right onto the arête. I welded two knifeblades for protection, before pumping out and having to hang on a short section of 5.11 face climbing. At the top of the sixth pitch we passed the last signs of other attempts. Pitch after pitch of sustained 5.10 climbing followed, with one more section of 5.11 on the eighth pitch. Finally, after 11 pitches, eight of which were sustained 5.10 and 5.11, we topped out on the pillar. Ahead, the angle eased a little, as the wall split into a series of gullies and buttresses.

It was 4 p.m., and we knew it was going to be a long night. We moved left into the gully, the line of least resistance, and simul-climbed for three long pitches to the final headwall. A more direct buttress line had been our original goal, but time was of the essence. In the fading light Bruce led a pitch of 5.10, to a small ledge below a dripping squeeze chimney. By headlamp I found a way to avoid spending the night there, by climbing a knifeblade-protected 5.10 face to the right, followed by a desperate 5.10+ bulge above a ledge. Climbing by headlamp