

SQUAMISH

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2024

Imperial College
Exploration Board



Squamish is situated on Canada's western coast, sitting at the mouth of the Howe Sound, a vast expanse of water which traverses British Columbia connecting the town with the Pacific Ocean. In all directions, alpine foothills spill into this basin in huge swathes of pristine granite punctuated by pine forests and magnificent waterfalls. Thousands of climbing routes can be found on these walls and beyond, of every conceivable style, length and difficulty. The granite is fine, exceptionally solid and varied in style. Featureless slabs and splitter cracks of all sizes proliferate, but incredible variety can be found by following many of the hundreds (thousands?) of lines on The Stawamus Chief: a collection of three granite peaks that rise 700m from the water to tower above the town.

In summer 2024, with the help of the Exploration Board, we were lucky enough to travel to Squamish, spending a few weeks camping right at the base of The Chief. We had a fantastic time exploring classic lines, crags and some things further afield. Great company and the amazing setting of BC made this a memorable trip. We reckoned the climbing was pretty good, too.



THE TEAM

BEN JONES

Doctor, medicine graduate

Favourite moment:
Spirit of Squamish team sends!

Least favourite moment:
Last pitch of Rock On

Favourite pitch:
The 10b top of Ultimate Everything-glory jugs all the way to the top of the Chief!

Best rest day activity:
Isaac taking me mountain biking



CHORLEY KING

Graduated MEng Aeronautical Engineering 2023

Favourite moment:
Simulating Spirit, looking down at the top of pitch 5 to see James on the ledge below with a 10m pile of slack on the ground

Least favourite moment:
having to walk for two hours in the sun to go bouldering because James decided to get a dog

Favourite pitch:
shnake P4

Best rest day activity: Grand Wall



GEORGE GUNN

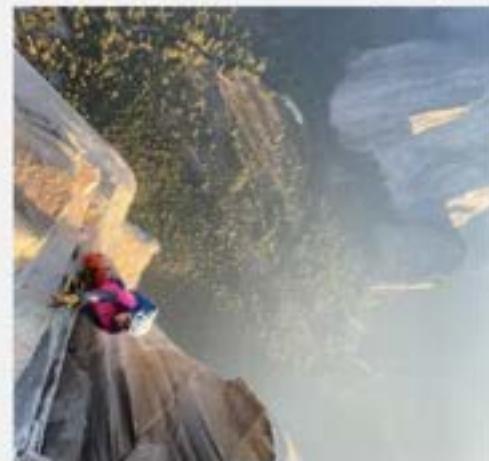
Graduated MEng Design Engineering 2023

Favourite moment:
Summoning an wild can-opener every meal time

Least favourite moment:
Meeting addicts in downtown Vancouver

Favourite pitch:
P4 on St. Vitus Dance

Best rest day activity:
Sending hard, I don't need rest



ALEX WEIR

2nd Year Geology:

Favourite moment:
Alding grand wall

Least favourite moment:
Bivvying on a wet friction slab

Favourite pitch: Exasperator

Best rest day activity:
Instant pancake mix



JAKE LEWIS

PhD student in high speed aerodynamics

Favourite moment:
Latching the big pendulum on P1 of Cannabis Wall or climbing The Chief

Least favourite moment:
Watching England lose to Spain in the Euro's final

Favourite pitch:
P3 of Cannabis Wall or P1 of Skywalker

Best rest day activity:
Going to Whistler and paying loads of money to ruin his shoulder falling off a mountain bike



ISAAC BLANC



4th year Mechanical Engineering with year in industry

Favourite moment
Discovering a tent full of sleeping bags whilst benighted

Least favourite moment:
Revenge of the tingly cheese, atop a Squamish mega classic

Favourite pitch:
B-flat

Best rest day activity:
Whistler A-Line, brah

WILLIAM LOVETT-TURNER

3rd Year Earth and Planetary Science

Favourite moment
Lunch in A&W after getting down from Life in Space/Polar Dome

Least favourite moment
Being hungry on the way down from Polar Dome

Favourite pitch
Lost Horizon (better on the second attempt once I actually had the right gear)

Best rest day activity
Tacos



SOPHIA MARR

3rd Year Geophysics

Favourite moment
Mt Habrich (the second time)

Least favourite moment
Mt Habrich (the first time)

Favourite pitch
The only one I did clean?

Best rest day activity
Booking buses to Mexico



JAMES GIBSON

Graduated Msc Mathematics

Favourite moment:
Picking up Joy for a day of dogsitting

Least favourite moment:
Accidentally giving Joy heatstroke

Favourite pitch:
Final 10b pitch through a roof on Rock On ☺

Best rest day activity:
Swim & Sauna at the Squamish Aquatic centre



Expedition report



In this report we have written accounts of some of our favourite days and adventures. On any given day several teams were trying multiple different routes, crags or climbing disciplines. For simplicity, included are our personal highlights, along with a selection of photos chosen from thousands. Hopefully this gives the reader a flavour for Squamish climbing and some of British Columbia's most scenic views!



Three boys, one bear. Welcome to Canada's West Coast

Keenest of the bunch, George, James and Chorley were the first to leave the shores of the UK in search of the legendary granite cracks squamish has to offer. A minor logistical mishap meant George was flying out a few hours early on a non-direct flight. Conveniently this meant he didn't have to hulk the haul bag onto the tube then the Elizabeth line all the way to heathrow.

The trio reunited in the arrival lounge at YVR, and pressed onwards. With a stroke of luck they just made the last bus of the evening, having initially waited at the wrong stop. The evening ride up Canada's western seaboard was picturesque with blue ocean meeting the mountains of Howe sound. The sunset was also very decent. The group arrived at the adventure center just as dusk was setting in. A local bus was the ideal route to the campsite however in their haste nobody had picked up any cash and thus couldn't ride the pagan bus network. Walking was briefly considered, and a taxi promptly called. It arrived about an hour later, walking probably would have been faster.



Upon arrival at the campsite, another logistical error became evident. Stawamus Big Chief campground is a walk-in campsite site, with no booking system. Not normally a big deal but it was Canada day and the site was full to the brim. To add to the misery it started raining. 45 minutes of searching later and the notoriously friendly nature of Canadians was yet to be seen with nobody willing to share their pitch with us. We were left with no option but to head into the forest in search of a boulder to sleep under. Laden with gear, the journey through the forest was cumbersome, but they eventually found a nice roof to sleep under, set up camp and closed their eyes.

This peaceful feeling didn't last long. George was first to be woken. He thought he could hear footsteps. He listened in carefully, and they were definitely there, in fact they seemed to be all around him. He grabbed his head torch and fearing the worst turned it on, expecting to see a large bear towering over him. But there was nothing, he got up and walked around to see if he could find the source of the noises. Still nothing. These bears were waiting for an opportune moment to strike. Eventually exhaustion kicked in and he fell asleep, but not before another hour and a half of being completely wired had passed. Chorley was next to be awoken, and he too thought he could hear footsteps. Much like George he got up looked around, found nothing and then remained on edge. Eventually the exhaustion once again took over and he fell asleep. Upon waking the next morning the group discovered that James had had the same experience too. In the light of day, the footsteps were revealed to be small water droplets hitting the leaves on the forest floor. Or at least that's what we told ourselves and we slogged back to the campsite in search of a pitch.

Thankfully the public holiday was now over and the trio managed to find a suitable spot for their tents in the campsite.



Meanwhile, Jake and Ben would be arriving from their trip to Yosemite, where they had hatched an evil plan. Hearing about the chaos of finding camping in Squamish, Jake contemplated how he felt about caves. He decided his feelings were mostly negative. He then considered beaches. Beaches, him and Ben agreed, were quite nice. If they came a day or two later, via a romantic beach getaway in Los Angeles, would the others have moved out of the hole in the ground and sorted a nice campsite, he wondered? Ben agreed this was a theory worth testing. And so it came to pass that Jake and Ben strolled into the campsite 2 days later- relaxed, tanned, and with a newfound love of Mexican food- their camping pitches waiting for them, along with cold beers and some entertaining stories of sleepless nights. Thanks guys!

ANGELS CREST

Described in the guidebook as being 'One of the longest and most adventurous 5.10 routes on the Chief', the Angel's Crest tackles the striking arete bordering the north gulley, climbing from the valley talus field all the way to the second peak of the Stawamus Chief.

The route is famous for its exposed ridges, difficult route finding and alpine-like feel, each factor compounding on the last to create an amazing and packed day out. In contrast to our other objectives, the long length of the route requires teams to employ true alpine tactics to avoid a benightedness, including moving together on easy terrain, packing light to remain fast, and being pedantically efficient at belays and on route. Unfortunately, Angel's Crest is also infamous for its popularity, with ill-prepared teams often forming long queues. Preferring to be the ill-prepared climbers causing the queue rather than ill-prepared climbers trailing behind it, two teams departed camp at 5am spurred on by copious amounts of coffee. Strong James partnered with Flt Lt. Chorley Love Handles, while Bald Eagle Isaac paired with Brev Alex.

The two teams reached the base of the route at 6am; anxiety plus caffeine expedited our legs but also our bowels, so many detours to the toilets were required. The most physically demanding pitches are concentrated at the bottom of the arete, serving as a sanity check to dissuade over-confident teams. The traditional start of the route is a delicate thirty-foot climb up the polished, aged branches of a nearby tree. Despite being reassured by Canadians throughout the trip that all trees in Squamish are bomber, we instead opted to follow the newer start which ascends a bulging slab up to the base of the Angel Crack. Chorley, the master of all things friction, chose to lead this first pitch and quickly disappeared around the bulge. Waiting attentively below, progress was indicated to belayer James only by a faint grunt here, a rich expletive there, until finally a reassuring 'Safe!' was called down.



RIGHT:ISAAC CRUISING THE STEEP CRACK ON THE PENULTIMATE PITCH

LEFT:CHORLEY AND JAMES ROCKIN' ON AT THE TOP



With the arête now gained, the climbing becomes easier as the ridge levels to a shallower angle. Staying on the correct route is now the main challenge, with walking through short sections of forest and up easy, exposed granite slabs common between the pitches. The groups were successful in navigating through this section until Strong James started thinking with his biceps more than his brain, and began questing up a prominent yet narrow finger crack after a long walk. With these moves feeling much harder than the expected grade of 5.10 (but still on holds he would consider to be jugs), Strong James downclimbed and then found the standard route just a few metres to the right of where he had been. Chorley looked up to Strong James, wishing he had the technical prowess of the master ahead of him, and called up to him, shouting "You're too strong for your own good James!". James gave a humble laugh as he swiftly cruised up the layback corner crack, his feet nimbly finding the coarse dimples dotting the blank face. Both teams found this easier section to be a necessary reprieve from the harder pitches below, arriving at the base of pitch 9 after just under 2 hours.

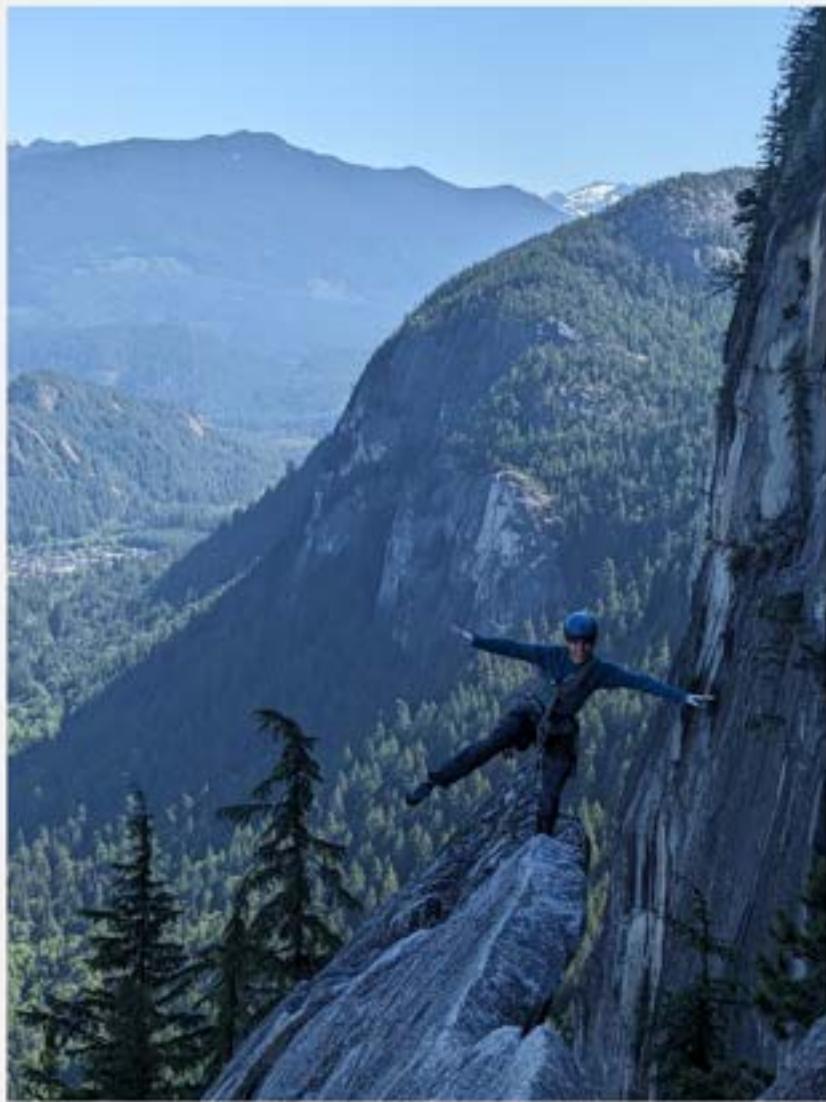
The climbers were now greeted by one of the most iconic features of the Chief, a jagged row of steep granite fins jutting out over the northern gully called the Acrophobes - named after the irrational fear or phobia of heights. While the climbing isn't hard, these pitches are truly memorable for the 400m of exposure on either side of the knife edge. Beyond this point the crest is too steep for trees to bind their roots to the smooth granite, revealing a full panoramic view of the Squamish valley and magnifying the already dramatic position the climbers found themselves in.

2 pitches now remained. The first was a long, wide crack with mandatory pulling on deeply wedged chock stones while clipping old, rusted pegs. The second began with crawling along a narrow ledge until reaching a corner with a featured crack at the base which grew into a narrow chimney. Despite these being some of the hardest and most exposed pitches of the entire route, the teams had matured in confidence throughout the day and now found themselves undaunted by the steep climbing ahead of them. The climbers were reunited as at last Brev Alex exited the chimney. Overcome by a wave of artistic expression, Chorley summoned the spirit of the great poet Basho and uttered the following, very unexpected words:

*Rock unaware of
fingers sliding, I call down
an old, strained word - Take!*



ABOVE: ISAAC TAKING IN THE VIEW WHILE JAMES CLIMBS THE FIRST PITCH OF ANGEL'S CREST
BELOW: ALEX BALANCING ON THE ACROPHONES





CANNABIS WALL

One of the main expedition objectives was to develop our aid climbing skills following on from last year's Yosemite expedition (which George, Jake, Chorley and Alex had gone on). Squamish offers a number of shorter big wall objectives, allowing the aid climbing itself to be focused on without also worrying about the complicated logistics involved with longer routes such as those on El Capitan. Jake and Ben actually came to Squamish straight from Yosemite, where they had bailed off the Prow before successfully doing the South Face of Washington Column. This had made Jake more psyched for trying a wall in Squamish, while Ben had decided he'd done his aid climbing quota for the summer and wanted to focus more on free climbing. On arrival in Squamish, Jake found that George and Chorley also weren't that keen on doing a wall, as they had realised that the amazing free climbing Squamish had to offer would be much more fun than messing around in ladders and taking three hours to climb 50 metres. Luckily Isaac had never been bigwalling before and was keen to give it a go, so the team was formed.

Cannabis Wall was the obvious route choice - 5 pitches of C2 climbing, which Jake had climbed many pitches of in Yosemite (including some C2+), although the team had been told by Olly that Squamish C2 was a step up from Yosemite C2. The approach from camp was also short, only 15 minutes or so, and the small number of pitches meant a very chilled approach could be taken, fixing pitches from the ground before committing. In fact, Jake and Isaac quickly realised it would be possible to climb the route without a portaledge, fixing to the top of P2, abseiling down then completing the remaining 3 pitches the day after. However, Isaac was keen to get experience using a haul bag and sleeping on a portaledge, and Jake wanted to see if it was possible to do a bigwall without constantly being in a state of stress, so it was decided to do the route in "chillwall" style, with each person only leading one pitch a day.

Most routes in Yosemite are very well-travelled, with lots of information about gear needed and the current state of the climb, including pitch-by-pitch descriptions on most trade routes. Cannabis Wall was quite different, with only a few sparsely detailed previous reports, and a (relatively) vague topo that didn't even include pitch lengths. This was all fine aside from the suggestion of copperheads being required, as Jake and Isaac didn't have a complete heading kit and weren't too excited about buying one and then learning how to place them while on lead. Luckily one of the climbers in the Climb On shop had done Cannabis Wall recently, and said we should be okay and that most of the heads could be bypassed using beaks anyway. After a day purchasing supplies and contemplating why they were spending the best part of 3 days on aid climbing while in one of the best free climbing destinations in the world, Jake and Isaac were ready for the wall.

Jake decided to take the first pitch, as it involved hooking off the ground and he had a bit more experience with hooks than Isaac, so was perhaps less likely to mess this up and deck. Luckily the placements were very obvious, and after two or three hooks in a row Jake was into an impressive expando flake. Jake's previous experience aiding expando rock on El Cap had left him rather unhappy, but this time he was mentally prepared and ready to trust his cam placements to take up the slack caused by the flake expanding away from the wall when weighted. After a few such placements a bolt was clipped with some relief, and Jake followed the bolt/rivet ladder to a pendulum point. He noticed some of the rivets were wobbly, and jokingly pulled on one - when it began to easily slide out of its hole he hurriedly pushed it back in and moved on. The pendulum was by far the biggest Jake had done (unfortunately we didn't have a camera on hand), leading to a hooked edge and then some free climbing, which Jake initially tried to aid and then reluctantly freed. Jake hates free climbing in the middle of aid pitches - the lack of detail on the topo meant he wasn't able to strategically avoid these as usual, and in fact he got all the free climbing on route - good practice!

Isaac took the second pitch, which involved some beak placements that weren't completely trivial - a very impressive lead from Isaac considering his inexperience with aid.



Interlude (from Isaac):

The second pitch began as a corner and curved over into a small roof. The climbing relied on placements in the back of the corner, which were always forthcoming. The satisfaction of sliding his pegs into a dusty crack reminded Isaac of his first true love: MechEng. He also appreciated how patient Jake was while belaying, although later learned he'd been reading a book on his phone.

As a reminder that it ain't over until the fat 'biner clicks, the final 5m of climbing above the roof proved remarkably exciting. To Isaac's inexperienced eyes, the series of wobbly beak placements that were required for progression appeared upsettingly insubstantial. Matters worsened when he reached a pea-sized bat hook hole, which seemed to be gloating at him.

He thought of Strong James, who was at this very moment posing in the mirror at the Squamish Leisure Centre. If only Strong James were here, he would surely fit his little finger into the bat hook hole and do a lock-off. Alas, Isaac was with JCB Jake and they were aid climbing, so Isaac pushed the steel point of the bat hook into the granite dimple and thought lots about friction. The hook stayed put and Isaac inched upwards, toward the glistening bolts.

Interlude over.



After this the pair fixed ropes to the ground, packed the haul bag and went to join the others back at camp.

Jake and Isaac began Day 2 by hauling the haul bag and portaledge up to the top of P2. Jake then led off on Pitch 3, an interesting pitch involving quite a few beaks. This went by without too much trouble, and he was happy with the fact he'd managed to use beaks and microwires to bypass all the fixed heads but one - this latter head probably could also have been topstepped past on reflection.

It was now getting very hot on the wall, so the team decided to set up the portaledge (as this would be where they would sleep), rest on that while the sun calmed down a bit, then fix P4 above for the day after. After the usual tussle getting the slightly broken portaledge up the two had some food. Jake was incredibly chilled out and chatting quite a bit of rubbish, and couldn't work out why Isaac seemed stressed - he then realised Isaac still had a pitch to lead that day, and quite an exposed one at that. This pitch was graded the easiest on the wall at C1+, so Jake had decided it made sense for Isaac to take it, but this turned out to be a bit of a sandbag, with lots of small cams and RPs required. Another very good lead from Isaac.

After Jake had cleaned the pitch and then had a brief look at his final lead, the two abseiled back into the portaledge, leaving the line fixed for the day after. It was still relatively early, so they had a nice evening eating loads of tinned food and watching the paragliders who would periodically jump off the top of the chief above them. The pair really enjoyed finishing early enough to actually enjoy the evening, and Jake vowed to make this more of a theme in future bigwalls (instead of the stressful abseil back into the portaledge at 1am ready for a 6am wakeup the next day).





The final pitch the next morning turned out to be a bit of a mission. The first four pitches were remarkably clean considering how relatively little traffic this route gets, but this was more than made up for in this last long pitch, which featured loose rock, vegetation and spider's webs. An interesting thin crack, requiring a few beak placements, lead into a short free traverse (which incidentally was probably the hardest free climbing Jake did on the whole trip), and then a never ending cracked wall of easier but looser aid, featuring mainly cams but also the odd beak placement. One of these beaks blew out as Jake bounce tested it, which isn't normally cause for concern but it led to him accidentally headbutting the big loose block he'd been carefully avoiding - not ideal! Eventually the final anchor (a large tree) was in sight, but Jake was dismayed to find he had to free out the final, loose section - while easy, quite a stressful prospect after 3 hours on lead. After some rope draggy inelegance he was able to sling the tree and fix the line for Isaac to come up. The team were now quite far above the ground, and Isaac wasn't super keen on the exposure while cleaning, but the route was complete! They had a brief look at the much less climbed continuation that went to the top of the face, decided it didn't look very appealing, and abseiled back down to the ground.

The pair were both very happy with their ascent. This was Jake's fourth successful wall and second where he was the most experienced climber, as well as the hardest aid he had led. Olly later said he thought the route would probably get A3 in Yosemite - Jake was glad he didn't know that beforehand! He was also happy he'd got to use beaks for the first time, and felt much more confident with the concept of bounce-testing. Jake now wants to go back to Yosemite and get on El Capitan again, perhaps trying Zodiac.

Isaac was glad he'd given bigwalling a go, and enjoyed spending time on the portaledge, but decided that ultimately he didn't really enjoy aid climbing, finding it too much of a slog compared to free climbing.

There is a bit of a question as to whether the ascent counts as a "clean" (i.e. hammerless) ascent, fully achieving the C2 grade, as the beaks were first hand placed but then tapped in with a hammer to seat them. The pair never nailed any beaks so hard they couldn't be removed relatively easily, but at a few points the hammer use perhaps went a bit beyond just seating the beaks (normally when the climber was scared), so it's probably fair to say this ascent was not clean - something to work on for the next wall, although there is a lot of debate on the ethics of nailing anyway so neither climber felt too guilty.









GRAND WALL

"A long day of hard dogging" was how James had described his experience climbing the Grand Wall with Chorley a few days prior. It was the evening before Alex and I would attempt the route and we were seeking advice. It had been a typical evening, with the sun casting its warmth on The Chief and the small picnic table around which we sat. But as the sun dipped beneath the hills, the air grew colder and filled with midges, just as my stomach filled with knots. In the subdued colours of dusk, our surroundings seemed slightly sinister. Somewhere in the distance, Ben flambéed.

Chorley gave me a reassuring look and raised one finger. "You see that?" he said, pointing to a location on the wall, "and then there?", now pointing some 80m higher. He grinned. "That section is so easy, they've only put 6 bolts in." I was not reassured.

Grand Wall is, by most accounts, not a terribly hard climb. But we are, by all accounts, not terribly strong climbers. Moreover, it is an exposed line up the middle of an imposing wall. I was intimidated by the thought of pushing myself with so much air beneath. Prior to the trip, we had consulted (gone to Spoons with) the part-time big-waller and full-time sandbagger Oliver Tappet. He had described the difficulty of Grand Wall as "very soft E2". The guidebook thought otherwise.



In climbing, 'dogging' refers to the practice of resting on the rope midway through a pitch of climbing, either because the climber is knackered or because they fell off. It is considered cheating, in much the same way that running the 100 meters would be less impressive if you paused halfway for an ice cream.



We set our alarms for 6:00 and headed for bed, stopping to fill our water bottles. I mentioned my anxiety to a local climber, mentioning I would take jumars to ascend the rope in case I couldn't follow Alex on the harder pitches. "Nah brah", he replied, "you don't need those! Leave the ascenders in your tent." I walked back to my tent and made sure the ascenders were firmly clipped to my harness.

Mercy Me (Pitches 1, 2, 3)

In the cool air of the following morning, we got going. The first two pitches were as easy and as runout as Chorley had promised. It was a distinctly un-Squamish style of slab climbing that relied on actual holds instead of jams and friction. Having led the perma-wet crux of the second pitch, I watched as Alex traversed right on steeper terrain, eventually dipping out of sight. I followed when I heard him shout, balancing carefully between holds that all seemed to be at the wrong angle. Realising that my feet were on the handholds and my hands were on nothing, I lost balance and swung into space. Things went better on my second attempt and soon we were standing beneath The Split Pillar.

The Split Pillar (Pitch 4)

A vertical crack separated the Split Pillar from the wall. At the base, it was narrow and forced me to layback on fingertips as I climbed above the ledge. Fortunately, it soon relented and allowed for thin hand-jams, which widened to good hand jams a few meters higher. From this point onwards, climbing the pitch was a race against my arms. I pushed upwards, throwing my hands deep into the crack and squeezing my bones against the rock. I remembered doing laps on the plastic crack in our London gym, which was accommodatingly lined with soft rubber. As though sensing my ingratitude, the crack widened as I moved upwards and I was forced to rely on fist-jams. Some 20m above the ledge, I ran out of beans and my fists slipped from the crack. I dangled on the rope and admired the view, which until then I had barely noticed. Once my arms stopped complaining, I pulled back into the crack and continued upwards as it continued to widen. After a few more moves of loose fists, it widened further into a squeeze chimney, which I groveled through in a typically inelegant manner. Stood atop the Split Pillar and awash with relief, I shouted for Alex to follow me up. A short while later, he was beside me and we peered up at the next pitch.

The Sword (Pitch 5)

Alex swam up the first few moves to pause atop a narrow ledge. He placed some protection and then pulled into the first strenuous layback. A series of grunts followed, then a yelp and then a clattering thud as Alex landed back on the ledge. Ankles remarkably intact, he made a second attempt. This time, he placed high protection before falling off and, this time, the rope kept him off the ledge. A few attempts later, he shouted triumphantly that there was a "really good finger jam" just out of sight, which enabled him to pull past this section and onto some easier terrain. Watching the ordeal from below, I developed serious doubts about my ability to free this pitch without my own fingers falling off. Soon, Alex had passed the easier ground and got stuck into another strenuous layback, which he promptly fell out of. He was now far above, and I craned my neck to see him dangling. Showing great perseverance (and even greater trust in our smallest cams) he pulled back on and desperately clawed upwards. The falls were frequent, but the progress was undeniable. Once Alex had finished the pitch and tagged up our bag, I climbed to the narrow ledge and reached for the "really good finger jam". It was nowhere to be found. Even as Alex shouted down encouragement, I clipped my jumars to the rope and started jugging.

Perry's Layback (Pitch 6)

It was a hanging belay beneath the next pitch and the wind was picking up. The butterfly-coiled rope danced maniacally below, threatening to tangle. In front of me was a mess of hardware, shoes, a bottle and a backpack, all tied to the wall. Behind me was the warm sun, for which I was grateful. Alex led along a rising traverse, which concluded at the base of yet another stiff-looking layback. However, this eventually succumbed to his "attrition" climbing. Countless hard pulls and soft catches later, he shouted down that final hard pitch was done. I jumared up.





The Flats (Pitch 7)

Alex played "Everybody Loves the Sunshine" from his phone, while I led across the sweep of slabs known as The Flats. The climbing was moderate, but required concentration in the growing heat and in my deteriorating shoes. The 5.9 and 5.10 sections were, as per, graded the wrong way round in the guidebook and the bolts were in silly places. All told, an enjoyable pitch in an amazing position.

The Sail (Pitch 8)

The final pitch began in iconic Squamish style: by climbing a tree. Above this, a burly-looking undercling traversed out right above an ankle-breaking ledge. With most of my toe-rubber missing and the sun beating down, I decided that it was not the time for my first 5.10c onsight and resorted to aiding. As we approached the 9th hour of climbing, I practiced our well-rehearsed chant: "Take! ... Slack! ... Take! ... Slack!"

Bellygood Ledge (escape)

We were met atop the route by a group of Squamish locals who had approached via Bellygood Ledge. I was glad to see them belay each other across the ledge, until I noticed that no-one was clipped in. Concluding that Bellygood Ledge must be easy, I relaxed as Alex and I donned our approach shoes and began to simul-climb it. Minutes later, I found myself balanced on tiptoes and edging sideways while scratching at the granite with my fingernails. As it turned out, the ledge was wildly thin in the middle and almost completely unprotected. It was like a no-hands balance boulder that one might find in a London bouldering gym, except with an unthinkable swinging fall should you sneeze. We didn't.

ULTIMATE EVERYTHING

Towards the end of Ben's time in Squamish, him and Isaac set off for a big day on a big rock. They planned to link Deidre (5.8) with Ultimate Everything (10b) via Broomstick Crack for a mega 18 pitch outing.

Climbing on Deidre went smoothly considering the number of teams on this classic slabby moderate- which navigates the Apron (the big sweeping slabs stretching from the forest floor to halfway up The Chief). Ben even had time for a poo with a view (and an audience) at the belay.

The climbing involved four pitches of flowy and fun slabs and corners. Though never difficult it starts with a pretty big runout off the deck on a (thankfully quite frictiony) friction slab. They had become accustomed to this style on previous routes- the angles are moderate but the holds are barely there, allowing the climber the authentic experience of feeling like a wedge of parmesan teetering above a grater. Isaac hates that feeling.



At the top, Broomstick Crack is a cool razor thin horizontal flake feature snaking up more slabs. The climber balances their way along to reach forests clinging high up on the Chief.

Some scrambling and routefinding led the pair to the base of their next route, Ultimate Everything- a big adventurous 10 pitch line all the way to the top, supposedly tackling a bit of everything along the way at about 5.10b. The climbing was definitely varied, offering cracks, slabs, corners, and even a roof to finish! One of the most unique features of the route, however, was a huge polished dyke splitting a slab and face for 2 pitches (7 and 8) of technical shuffling finishing with a bouldery (and slippery) granite puzzle. Isaac took the lead of both, leaving Ben the final 2 pitches. The final crux pitch, a techy, slabby fingertips crack rising to a thuggy overlapping dyke escaping a huge roof was a fantastic opportunity to pull hard right at the top of the Chief to a perfect summit top out. The 5.10b jug hauling was great fun and the position unbeatable. Pumped and exhausted, a quick photo-op in the late afternoon sun rounded off a great day!







SNAKE



The plan was simple: climb Snake (5.9) to the top of the apron; link into a higher ledge via Broomstick Crack; climb Squamish Buttress to top out. Our goal: to climb the chief.

Now linking three routes together may seem like a nice and easy day out but we had failed to account for one thing - three-week-old, bear bin aged cheese. As it may be obvious from the title of this section, we had to bail at the top of the first route due to unforeseen circumstances... Unfortunately, we had to call in one of our worst distress signals - a code brown.

The route started with a speedy first pitch from Isaac up to a wooded ledge. This was followed by a slightly less speedy pitch during which I got lost and nearly took us up the wrong route. I finally found my way back to the slightly run out traverse to the anchor which turned out to be quite straightforward once I stopped attempting to use the handholds for my feet. Pitch 3 was a very easy traverse. Nice climbing though! Pitch 4 is mostly laybacking up another obvious corner with a nervy friction slab crux. That said if you actually had faith in the laws of physics and the stickiness of Squamish granite, you'd find all of the friction stuff a walk in the park. Pitch 5 continued up the corner to an awkward few moves which gain you a narrow ledge. A few spots of polish indicate that you have to hand traverse to the right on near non-existent feet to reach the anchor. If I'm honest, I'm quite glad that Isaac led the fifth pitch because it felt quite touch and go even on second.

At the fifth anchor Isaac informed Will of his plan to relieve himself on the large wooded ledge at the top of the route. They only had one pitch left to climb on Snake.

I made a very graceful start to what would turn out to be our final pitch of the day. Pitch 6 starts with a large mantle which funnily enough is much harder when you've got a rucksack full of water on your back. So, after failing repeatedly to get over this lip, I did the honourable thing and made Isaac take the bag. The rest of the pitch was beautiful laybacking up jugs to a gully at the base of Memorial ledge. The only downside of the final pitch is that it zig zags around a bulge meaning that you accumulate a moderate amount of rope drag and crucially cannot hear your partner once you're at the top. Normally this might slow you down slightly whilst your belayer waits a bit longer to be certain you're safe. However, time was of the essence for Isaac. When he finally reached the ledge, Isaac filled me in on the horrors of the code brown and we made the necessary decision to bail. The full details of this code brown remain confidential to preserve what is left of Isaac's dignity.

The incident aside, Snake was a brilliant route and well deserving of its top 100 status.

It is important to note that no Squamish classics were defaced in the climbing of this route.



LIFE IN SPACE





We split into two groups: Isaac and I attempting the full route and Sophia and Will opting to skip the first 16 pitches (a pre-existing route known as the Goldilocks zone) and climb the final ridgeline to the summit. We planned to tackle the route over two days: walk in and bivy at the base on day one, then climb the full route and descend back to Squamish on day two. With hindsight a rather ambitious plan.

After a morning of preparations, we began our approach along the forestry track. It felt refreshing to leave the suburbia of Squamish behind. Four hours of hiking, one river crossing and far too many bear scares later we found ourselves at the base of the route. Looking up at this looming mass granite I couldn't help but think back to my experience on Grand Wall, which was soundtracked by 'Take!... Slack!... Watch me here!'. It all seemed a little improbable in that moment. To make matters worse the bivy was far from luxurious: it can best be described as inclined and moist. It felt like the friction slab of bivvies; tentative and uncomfortable.

The following morning couldn't come soon enough. We rolled (literally) out of our sleeping bags and after everyone had wag-bagged we got going.

After racking up Isaac blasted up some easy ground to where the wall begins to steepen, and the real climbing begins. Will and Sophia continued past the base of Goldilocks Zone, having barely walked 100m before turning around to see the others already at the top of the second pitch. For Alex and Isaac a couple of 5.10 corners followed, which were climbed with relative ease and efficiency compared to equivalently graded climbs on the Chief. With smiles on our faces, we kept swapping leads and tried to link as many as possible of the 5.8/5.9 pitches that followed. Two and half hours later we found ourselves at the base of the 5.10b crux (pitch 10). Isaac checked his watch and then turned to me with an astounded look on his face. 'We are averaging 15 minutes per pitch lad!' It almost felt too good to be true.

I looked up at the crux pitch. A daunting roof of granite lay overhead. I started climbing up the awkward handcrack that bypasses this overhang and spits you out right on the roof's edge. After a bit of a struggle, I made it to the top of the crack and began the exposed traverse along the roof's edge. It was a spectacular position, with the rest of the wall falling away beneath me. Once we had both reached the anchor, we began simul climbing the easy 5.8/5.9 pitches that followed.

After a final battle up a flaring 5.10 hand crack, Isaac and I found ourselves at the top of the Goldilocks Zone. In total it took us just over 4 hours, which by our standards was rapid. Meanwhile Will and Sophia made the hike round Goldilocks Zone, to the base of the Life in Space extension up Habrich. After a couple of hours of endlessly picking out the sparse ribbons on trees marking the (barely existent) trail, climbing fixed ropes and through trees and boulders, they found the base of the route and began the climb.

Sophia had led the first easy (damp) pitch, before Will led the next pitch of bolted slab climbing and an awkward corner. Will was struggling his way up an awkward chimney on the third when we emerged across the small plateau bringing us to the start of the final 12 pitches to the summit. It was to our surprise that Will and Sophia only appeared to be on the third pitch. We soon caught up to them and joined Sophia at the belay at the base of a 5.9 chimney. It was clear from all the grunting and swearing coming from Will that there was an awkward pitch ahead. Eventually, Will shouted down that he was at the anchor and Sophia followed.

We climbed as a group for another pitch, which was admittedly also awkward and far less enjoyable than the climbing we had experienced on the Goldilocks Zone. This brought us to a small idyllic meadow that hangs on the ridgeline. At this point Isaac and I overtook Will and Sophia (a decision we would soon regret). After two more pitches of climbing we merged with the north-east ridge of Mount Habrich.

From this point on we simul-climbed over the easy ground to the summit and then descended to the neighboring peak called Polar Dome, where we had agreed to wait for Sophia and Will.

From Polar Dome, we had a full view of the NE ridge of Habrich. However, there was no view of Sophia and Will. In that moment Isaac and I knew we had made a mistake blasting on ahead. Neither Will nor Sophia had a lot of experience on multi-pitch trad routes, let alone a big alpine route. On top of this neither of them knew how to simul-climb, and Mount Habrich wasn't the ideal place to teach themselves. A couple hundred metres of technical ridgeline awaited them that would have to be pitched out - probably tripling the time it would take.

From the meadow where we left them, Will and Sophia battled up the cruxy 5.10 corner crack, which is where things began to go wrong. After a strong lead by Will, Sophia had a minor nervous breakdown getting herself up, but rallied to lead the next 5.8 pitch, which turned out to be much trickier than anticipated. Relief to have made it to the top soon turned to dismay - there was no sign of the expected shiny bolts. The best part of half an hour of Sophia climbing, downclimbing, traversing, getting tangled in trees looking for the bolts then ensued before she eventually made a gear anchor, whilst, unbeknownst to her, Will's bowels were roiling. The moment she shouted 'Safe!' Will leapt off belay into the bushes and she was left trying to figure out which way the route went next. This was the end of the proper pitched climbing, and it wasn't overly obvious. Will eventually made it up to the belay, and they set about continuing, but the pink tags on the odd branch never seemed to correspond to the route description. By this point, they had the realisation of their impending benightedness, and looked on with guilt as they spotted us on Polar Dome.

Initially Polar Dome was a very pleasant experience for Isaac and I. We reclined against a boulder, listened to music and had a panoramic view of the sunset over the Tantalus Range. Just as the sun was getting low, we spotted Sophia's bright orange jacket pop out at the base of the ridge. I grimaced at how much more of the ridgeline awaited them.

Once the sun had set, it got very cold and our time on Polar Dome got a lot less pleasant. The day before we had deemed it a clever idea to only pack one warm jacket in an attempt to be 'fast and light'. This had worked well while we raced up the route, but our planning had failed to take our less-experienced companions into consideration. This decision meant jumping jacks and pacing was required to fend off the cold. To make matters worse, we had no water after our bottle had split halfway along the route. Rather than being 'fast and light' we were 'cold and thirsty'.



However, whilst we were pacing around Polar Dome, we stumbled across an encampment with a tent, sleeping bag, pillows and water. We could hardly believe our eyes. It was like a mirage in the desert.

We tentatively shook the tent and asked if anyone was home. To our surprise there was no response. The tent was empty! We proceeded to debate the morality of sleeping in another man's tent. What would happen if they too were having an epic and just yet to come back? Would they be understanding about finding two blokes in their sleeping bag? Probably not. Glancing back to the ridgeline we saw that Sophia and Will's headlamps had not moved far. We were in for a long night on Polar Dome. In that moment, shivering, both Isaac and I agreed that we would take the risk of sleeping in another man's tent. We bundled in, and were soon fast asleep.

Will and Sophia were slowly but surely making progress, trying to remember what they'd watched on youtube videos and Instagram reels about simul-climbing and alpine techniques. In a haphazard combination of simulling in very bad style, and pitching the odd bit out, they found their way up the ridge in the dark, whilst being confused and amused by the sporadic and cryptic texts they received when they caught service about 'sleeping in someone's tent'.

They topped out about midnight, with relief, and with some minor faff managed the 7 or so abseils down to Polar Dome. It took them a moment to find the tent, which they were still struggling to believe the existence of. They unzipped it, causing Isaac and I to bolt upright in fear that the tent's owner had returned. Reunited, we decided that there was no way we were descending back to Squamish that night, and so all four of us settled in to the two-man tent, safe and warm and very very hungry.

When we woke up we were even hungrier and thirstier. The previous day's rations of 4 cereal bars each felt a long way away. Between the four of us we managed to pull together half a handful of trail mix and two energy gels for breakfast, and decided we could afford to borrow a litre of water from our new anonymous friends' 30l stash. This gave us just about enough energy to not stumble the entire way down - only some of it. The descent felt like an eternity, but we made it back to the haven of A&W in time for the most viscerally required lunch of our lives.









EARTHSHINE



Undeterred by our tribulations on Mt Habrich, it wasn't long before we returned. With a final window for a route before the weather was due to deteriorate, we were faced with the choice between one last route on the chief (and Sophia's final opportunity to get to the top of it), and something that was a bit more of an adventure.

As much as Sophia was keen to top out on the Chief, she also felt she had something to settle with Habrich. And so, after some research into the routes making their way up Habrich's South face, we settled on Earthshine, another new but highly rated route that seemed like it would pose a good level of challenge.

It's possible to walk-in, climb, and walk-out in a single day for an efficient team taking advantage of the gondola, but we felt that a) even the generosity of the exped board might not stretch to a \$70 gondola ride, and b) recent experience suggested that with Sophia in tow, 'efficient' was unlikely to be an apt word to describe our progress.

So, the plan was made to take our time, possibly spending two nights up on polar dome (in our own tent this time), and preparations undergone (notably including the purchase of \$20 worth of top-tier trail mix, a rating agreed on by the squirrels who ravaged it before we could even stow it safely in the bear bin).

We set off the next morning, hiking up in the shadow of the gondola, with heaviness: of our packs, of the conspicuous absence of the trail mix, of the fact we weren't flying up in a gondola, and of the fact that this was our last route of the trip.

It was a steep, sweaty and beautiful hike up. It took us about 3 hours to climb what the gondola does in 10 minutes, but once we reached the track that extended up the Skypilot valley, the miles flew by, and we soon found ourselves at the base of the climbers' trail. After backtracking to the last place there had been water trickling down the side of the path to replenish our supply, we started up. This was a much better-established trail than the one up the opposite side of Habrich, but no easier going - we gained 600m elevation over a kilometre. Glad to have identified the path forking off round to the start of the climbing routes, we continued up to Polar Dome and set up camp, this time able to fully enjoy and appreciate what an amazing spot it was. Mountains extended in every direction, and we enjoyed one of the best sunsets either of us had ever experienced (admittedly, the colours were likely aided by some Mie scattering of the wildfire smoke that was covering much of Western North America at the time).

After a far, far more comfortable and less hungry sleep than our last on Polar Dome, we stashed our stuff and headed down to the start of the route, praying for a less complicated passage than last time.

Alex cruised up the first two fun crack pitches (5.8, 5.10a), and Sophia then made a meal of the third, somehow getting a bit lost and very confused on a 15m bolted slab pitch (5.8). Alex took over again, linking pitches 4 and 5, both more bolted slab face climbing (5.6, 5.9) and very enjoyable. Yet more slabby face climbing ensued in Sophia's pitches 6 and 7 (5.9, 5.8). Alex took the lead again for the crux 5.10 pitch, which was a well bolted mini-roof followed by some awkward stemming, and surprised Sophia by being a) doable and b) actually very fun. Alex continued up the ninth pitch, longer but very enjoyable (5.9/8). Sophia then scrambled up the last pitch, a few metres of 5.3, and got confused as to whether she was at the right set of bolts (it definitely wasn't 17m). Alex soon joined her and we simul-climbed through some trees, before deciding that it wasn't very efficient and just scrambling up the easy ground to the summit. Thrilled to have topped out in broad daylight (!), we noticed (amongst the otherwise amazing view) rainclouds in the distance and possible wildfire smoke on the horizon, and decided maybe it would be wise to get back instead of spending another night on Polar Dome.

We abseiled down (interestingly, not significantly more straightforward to find the bolts the second time round in the light - they were still very inconspicuous) to the notch between Habrich and Polar Dome, found all our stashed stuff, had a meal of instant noodles, and more or less slid down the steep trail into the valley. We had soon made it to the top of the gondola, and our aching bodies told us that it was worth spending the \$20 to ride down. This was right - half an hour later we were washing the backcountry grime off in the stream, and were soon making our way into town to consume a very large amount of pizza and reflect on our new and improved Habrich experience.

Earthshine was incredibly well bolted, to the point of basically being a sport route with about two gear placements, and it was also an insight (for Sophia) into the inconsistencies of grading (there were 5.8 pitches on Life in Space harder than the 5.10 pitches on Earthshine), but it was an incredibly enjoyable and suitably adventurous route to end our time in Squamish on.

We spent our last couple of days hiding from the rain and making rice crispy cakes, before Popariding to Vancouver and hopping on our respective planes/buses.





SPIRIT OF SQUAMISH



This route is true to its name and worthy of the traffic it receives. Bolted in 2020, the route continues on from the super classic Klahanie Crack and features more amenable crack pitches, stunning waterfall views and a pool at the top to cool off in. Due to this the route was very popular with the group with all expedition members venturing up it more than once. This quickly morphed into a competition to see who could complete the route the fastest.

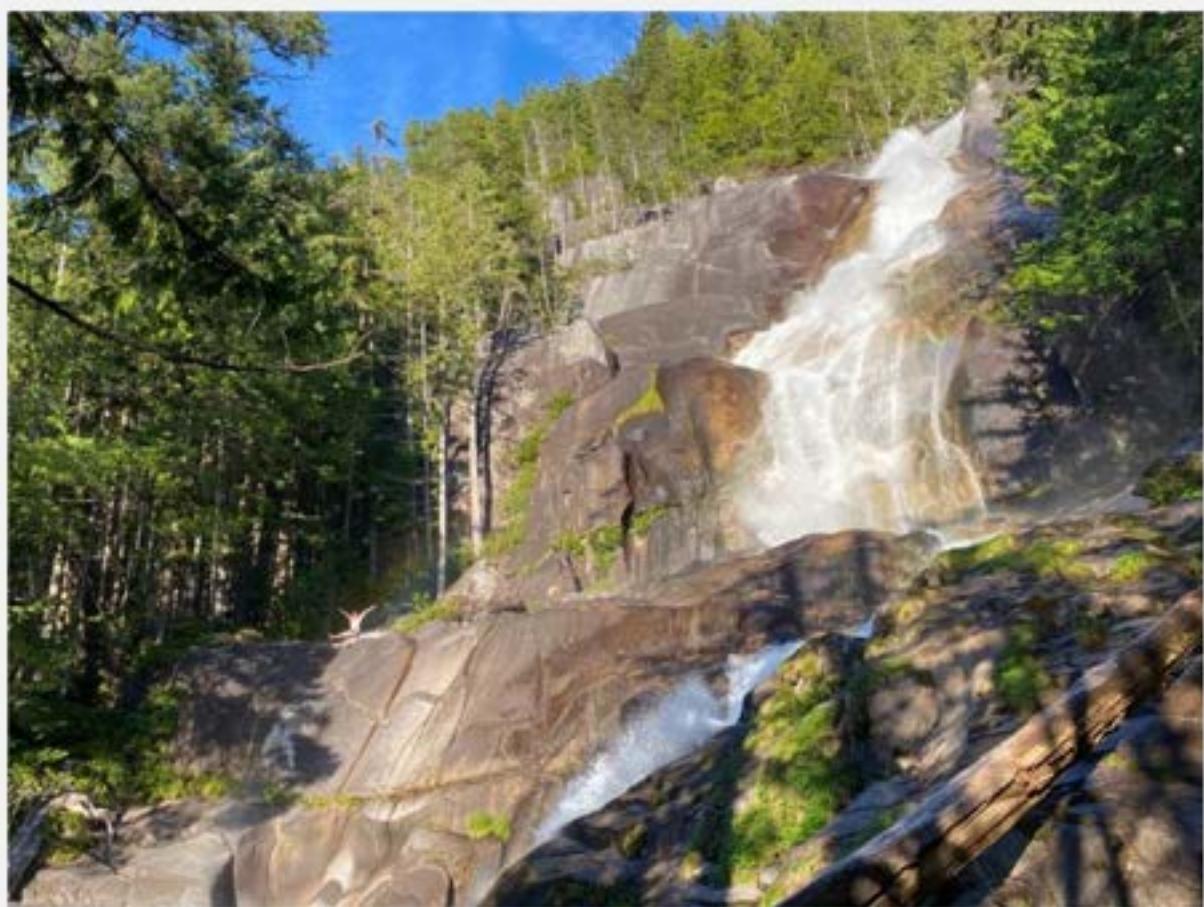
The first round saw the time to beat set at just under three hours by Isaac, George and Ben, who finished marginally ahead of Jake, Chorley and James. Jake and Ben both put in mighty efforts on lead up Klahanie crack to kick off the ascent. The pools at the top were a welcome relief from the scorching July sun and popular with other climbers too, who had cleverly brought some refreshments with them to enjoy the view. Chorley and James were next to have a second go at the spirit speed record. Armed with the new beta they streamlined their rack and linked as many pitches as they could. This lighter rack left payload capacity for refreshments without the duo feeling hindered. This new beta worked a treat with the pair topped out just over an hour later, and headed off for a swim.

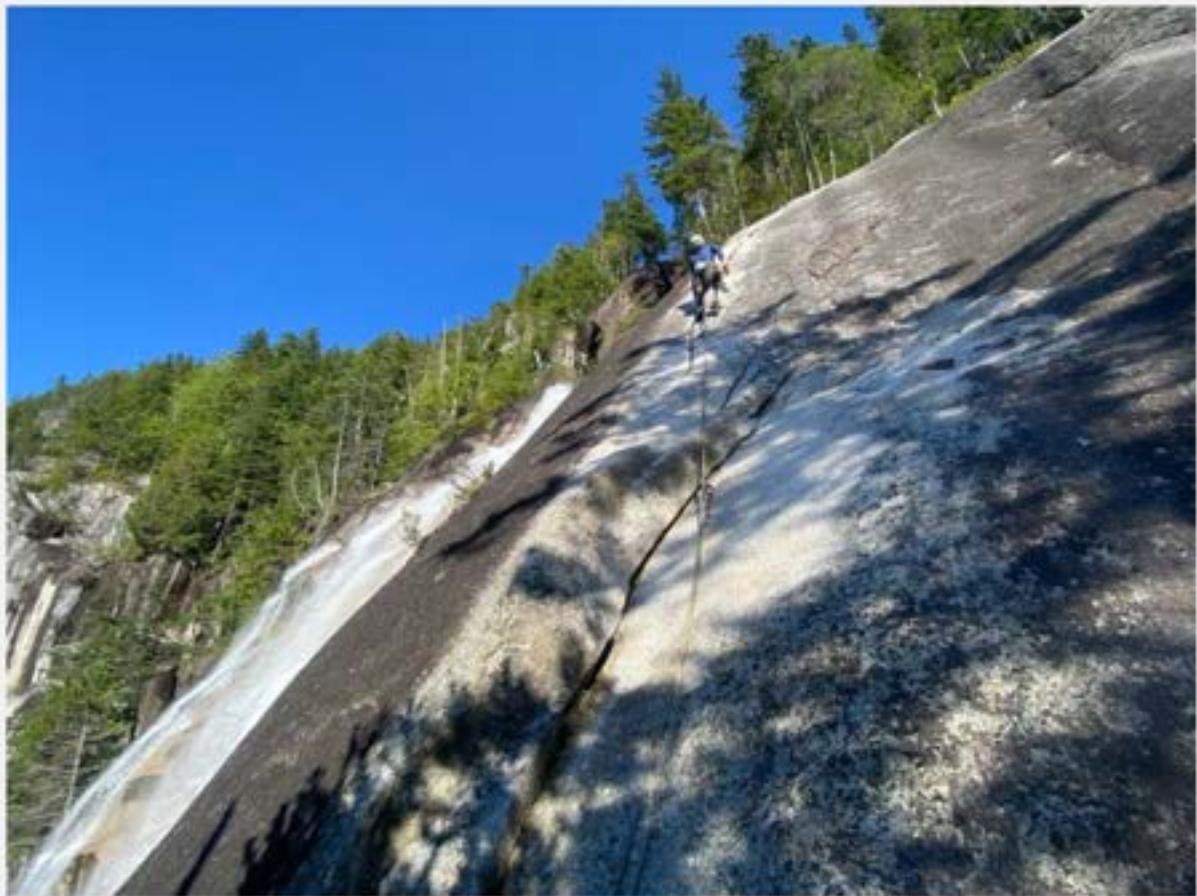


News of the triumph spread quickly amongst the expedition, all were eager to have another crack at the record. The team were eager to put crack climbing techniques they had refined and honed since their first attempt to good use. George and Ben implemented the same streamlining and linking tactics to great effect. George blasted up Klahanie Crack and linked the second pitch in under 6 minutes. Ben followed on in quick succession and they were on their way. Alex and Sophia set off trying to break the speed record, with Alex demonstrating his crack prowess on P1. Seeing this clear and present threat to their speed record, Flt Lt Chorley Love Handles and his wingman James felt they were authorised to engage, and scrambled to prepare a surprise attack. Embracing a true fast and light methodology they set off after George and Ben.

The sheer speed on display from G&B led the chasing pack to resort to below the belt tactics, french freeing their way up the route pulling on bolts as they went. Flying below the radar of their moral compass enabled them to catch up and pass George and Ben by the end of pitch 4 and they shot off into the distance. Afterburners roaring they made it to the summit in just over 28 minutes. Alex and Sophia meanwhile had discovered the quality of the route, and elected to savor each pitch. G&B pressed on at pace and reached the summit in a personal best of just over 2 hours. Whilst they had failed to take the speed record, they could hold their heads up high in the knowledge that they climbed the route staying true to the spirit of Squamish.

The gang all convened at the top and went for a sunset swim under the waterfall armed with their refreshments. A pack of local influencers were also at the pools this time, and seemed to be doing little to prove Charles Darwin and his famous theory wrong. The expedition party watched the sun set, and set off back to camp in high spirits. Other attempts were made at the speed record later on in the expedition however the impressive feat was not to be replicated.





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