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Rockies
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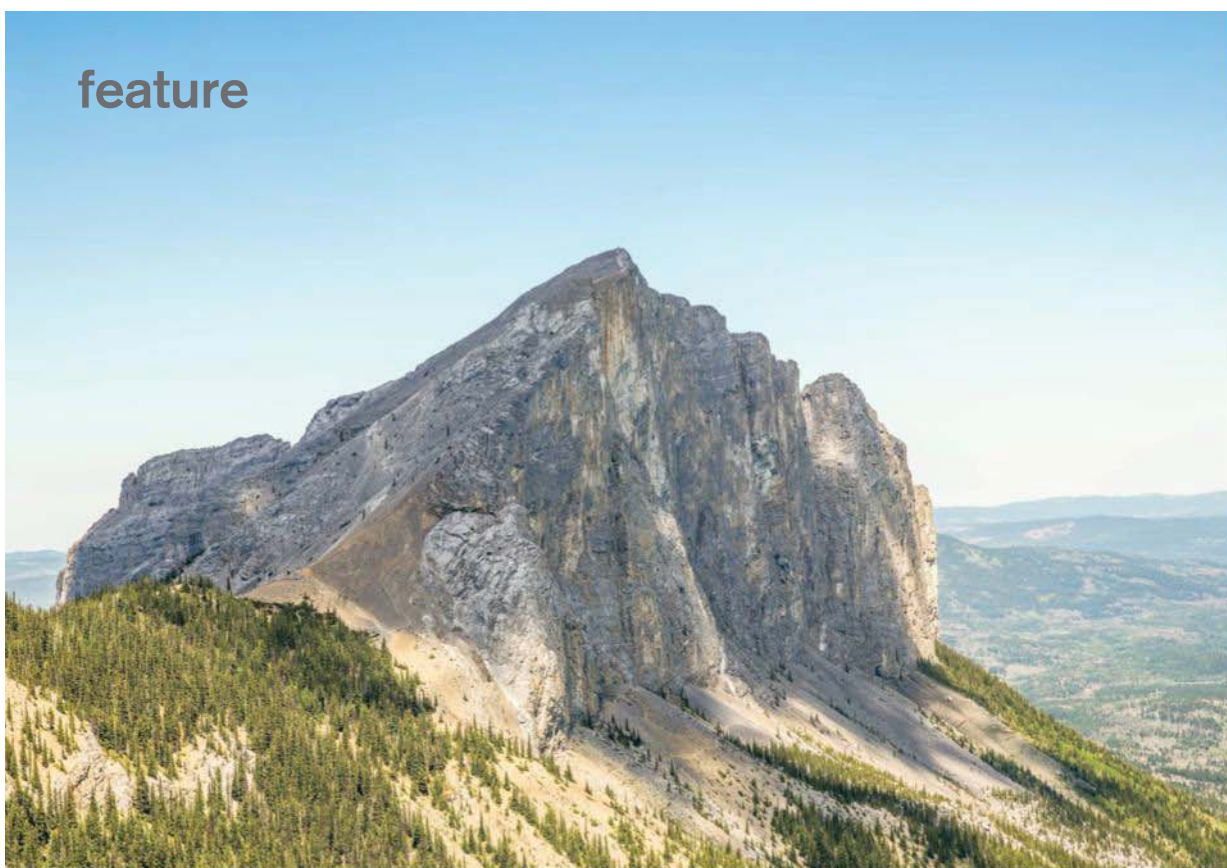
Sportaineering

The First Ascent of a Huge
Moderate Rockies Sport Route

Story by **Tyler Kirkland** Photos by **Dan Kim**

The Goat Buttress is a mighty spire. To me, this has always been the single most impressive feature of the Bow Valley. It's this kind of feature that inspired me to tie into a rope in the first place. To put myself in that place and to experience it would be no simple task. As I researched the various routes on the wall, I found no good route for me.

The most repeated line was Goat Buttress, first climbed by Chris Perry and Trevor Jones in 1977, but it's a serious undertaking. At 5.10d with big run-outs, tricky gear and bad rock, I couldn't risk it. There was the collection of Peter Gatzsch's routes, most rated 5.9 or 5.9+, but upon further investigation I discovered that most of these routes still await a repeat. He has a bit of a reputation for not "wasting" bolts on easy climbing and also denies any route is harder than 5.9. He once suggested to me that a good introduction to the wall would be the easiest route, with the most protection, Wild Colonial



Boys. A serious and scary 5.10c, according to the guidebook.

With the options looking less than attractive, I felt inspired to explore my own way up. After several binocular sessions I could see the line with several landmark features to aim for.

Step one was to reach the base of the proposed line. I made several attempts over the years to hike up to the face, but was often foiled by bush, fallen timber, cliffs and washouts. With a warm, dry winter, a summer ahead free from any real job and much excitement to make an effort on the long awaited project, I recruited Matt Breakey for some exploring in late February 2016.

Shouldering heavy bags of rope, a rack, hammer drill, anchors and hangers we persistently thrashed our way up to the base of the wall in three hours 25 minutes. Still full of excitement, despite the demoralizing approach, we clambered over a large snow bank to sink in a couple of bolts. After caching some gear for the next visit we tried a different way down, which sadly, was not much better. Back at the car, realizing we only had the rope out for a half-an-hour and had hiked for the other 6.5 hours had me feeling like the project was perhaps a bit too logistically challenging. It was too far, too tall and too loose for a ground up sport climbing project. Hiking to the top and rappelling in looked to be an even worse option. A few days later, I was passing by and looked over to catch a view of the buttress. The project would go, I thought. Even if it is far, tall and loose. A few more trips back and forth from the wall with loads of hardware slowly revealed the best approach and with more careful route-finding we found a route took about two hours of hiking.

March arrived and progress was full swing ahead. I had thrown the idea at Mark Carlson years earlier and he was as stoked as I was for a Goat project. With an approach sorted out and a cache of gear waiting Carlson was keen to get on the wall with me right away. Our first day was productive, easily making our way up, bolting on lead, the first 120 metres. After that point the wall steepened. Fast lead bolting turned to Ao hang-dogging. Satisfied with our





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day, 140 metres up, we started rappelling. Looking around on a large gravel ledge, which is now between pitch two and three, we discovered an old, rat chewed sling around a tree. Someone else had been exploring. After some more research we realized we had started up an obscure and likely unrepeated route called Gatzsch Your Goat. It was established by Gatzsch and Andy Genereux more than 15 years earlier.


Subsequent progress was not nearly as fast. The route was

steeper than I'd hoped. There was of course the obvious roof that would require some creative problem solving, but ledges were few and overhangs plenty. We had unknowingly entered our long apprenticeship in route-frigging. Slowly learning the use of fifi hooks, daisy chains and ladders, we became more and more proficient drilling $\frac{1}{4}$ " aid bolts from top-stepped ladders, as we clung and swore our way up. We tried to free climb anything 5.9 or easier, but the leads typically took three hours or more.

10 Tips for Your First Multi-Pitch

1. Be a pro at single-pitch climbing to understand how systems work.
2. Start on an easy-for-you climb to dial in the systems.
3. Go with someone who knows what they're doing.
4. Carry the right gear, such as quickdraws, correct length rope(s), helmets and headamps.
5. Check the weather and bring the appropriate clothing.
6. Start on routes that are easy to follow with big ledges for belaying.
7. Be a good belayer, make yourself comfortable, and keep room for the second.
8. Keep the rope stacked so it's easy to feed out for the leader.
9. Clip a piece of gear as soon as you can when starting a pitch.
10. If you're rappelling, tie knots in the end, use a Prusik, good anchors and don't simul-rappel.





The climbing is cryptic and the path of least resistance is seldom direct or obvious. Climbing the route in pieces several times, over and over to dial in the moves, really paid off.

After yet another 18-hour day from the car we began to think a more complex strategy would be needed to carry on with our chosen method of ascent. Up until that point, pitch 12, we would free-climb up to our high point and push the route higher. It was time to learn how to jumar.

On my next two visits, I was accompanied by volunteers carrying hundreds of metres of donated rope. I gave them a preview of the project and beer in return for hauling up and fixing lines that would allow for a fast jug to the high point. Our progress picked up speed once again and we were finding our way up the face a few pitches each day. On July 1, we stood atop the Goat Butte for our first time, surrounded by black clouds rumbling and flashing. That night we celebrated at a bivi at the base of the wall while watching fireworks from the Kananaskis casino and flashing lightning off in the prairies. We were pleased to have reached the top of the face, but work remained before a complete free ascent.

July and August set records for rainfall in Alberta, and I spent a sunny summer in Squamish. The fall arrived as did dry weather in the Bow Valley. After a few months away we were eager to be back on the wall. That time with crow bars, pruning the route into "sport" cragging shape by removing loose rock. We moved some protection to be sure the $\frac{3}{8}$ " stainless steel bolts were in the



correct place for clipping. After all of the fine tuning, the route was ready for climbing by mid-October. The days were getting shorter and winter was on its way, so the climbing would have to wait for spring.

It's good to have unfinished business when winter arrives, it kept me motivated to train. I abandoned my normal winter routine of backcountry skiing early in the winter, so I could travel to the U.S. to start rock season early. A snowy spring had me patiently waiting until the end of May to get back on the face and check the fixed lines. The Fluffy Goat Butt-face was at my limit of climbing. Having only ever red-pointed a handful of 5.11 pitches, I knew I would have to work hard. A strategy formed to project blocks of pitches, jugging up and red-pointing a few each session before trying a full ascent. That was a fun process, like having nice "cragging" days on a big wall with music, chalk wafting in the breeze and lots of whippers.

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With all the pitches red-pointed and beta fresh it was time to go for the full deal. On June 20, 2017, Carlson and I started up the route at 6:30 a.m. We went up the rippled slabs and grunted through the overhangs on that mighty spire. We stood atop at 4:15 p.m. completely satisfied with a drizzle of rain coming down. The project was complete after nearly 40 days of effort. I'm not a "hard man" or bold, but I certainly know how to have fun, even if my style is a bit fluffy.

Tyler Kirkland is a Calgary-based climber.

