

Big Lines

It is one of the pinnacle convergences of alpine and humanity: climb a peak by foot, then descend it by board. The interior ranges of Western Canada are home to some of the most technically demanding and truly spectacular winter descents in the world. These are high, wildly dramatic summits that require experienced mountaineering savvy to ascend and serious snowriding skills to descend, not to mention the need for a healthy dose of bravado.

Thanks to a small but growing demographic of glisse mountaineers in the region—those who use alpine climbing techniques to reach otherwise inaccessible ski and snowboard descents—more and more iconic peaks in the Rockies and its many sub-ranges are seeing skis and snowboards for the first time. This is just a sampling.

North Face of Mount Bryce

Rocky Mountains, BC

Without a doubt, at 3,507 metres (11,506 feet), Mount Bryce is the biggest, most logistically complicated, the most totally committing unskied gem of a north face left to ski in the Rockies, in Canada, and quite possibly, in North America. Several factors have helped it maintain its virginity, despite attempts from many of North America's steep specialists: ski mountaineers like Troy Jungen, Ptor Spriceniaks, Andrew MacLean, John Chilton, and others.

Just to see the face requires good weather and a big day of touring on the Columbia Icefields. The entire trip would take a strong party a minimum of four days, but five or six would be more likely. The route-finding to simply get to the north face—which sits above a 1,300-metre cliff—is a complicated matter. Personally, I know of three attempts, via different aspects, that haven't come remotely close to success.

There are ways, however. It requires mountaineering skills, but nothing so technical a pair of touring boots couldn't handle. It requires excellent decision-making. For the right conditions, luck is key. Many elements need to come together perfectly for enough snow to stick to the ice and for the right temperatures to keep the mountain together. It's the toughest slog, despite the fact that often the face on Bryce is arguably in better condition than Mount Robson, mainly because it's slightly lower in elevation and slightly lower in angle. I can't think of another face in its class.

—ski mountaineer, climbing badass and Golden resident Jon Walsh

Photo: Jon Walsh



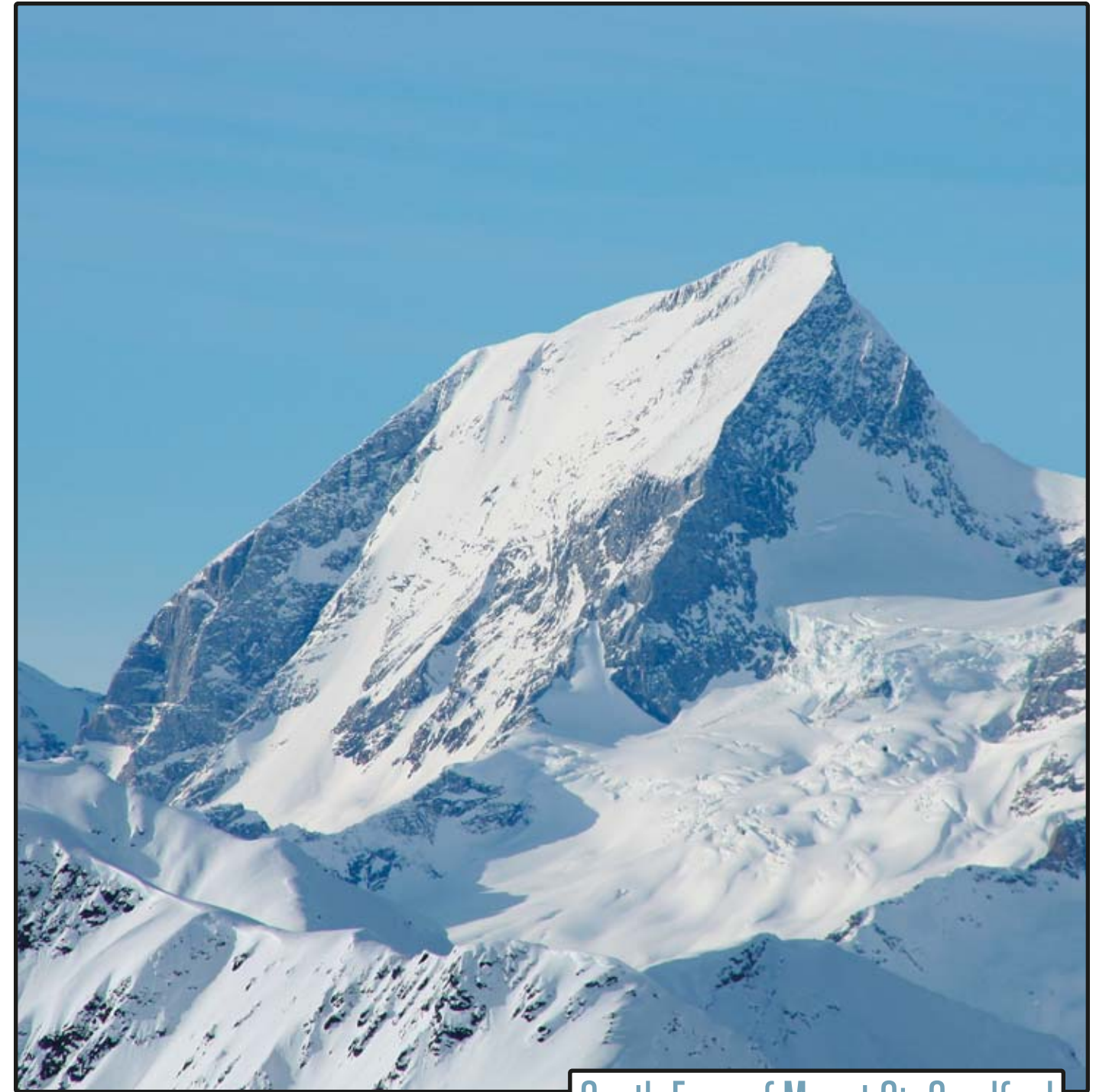
North Face of Mount Robson

Rocky Mountains, BC

At 3,959 metres (12,989 feet), Mount Robson is the tallest peak in the Canadian Rockies and home to one of the most aesthetic north faces in North America. While many have thought about descending it, and fewer have been bold enough to try, only Troy Jungen and Ptor Spriceniaks have skied the face, and they did it in 1995. The main feature of the descent is the upper-glaciated 900-metre north face, averaging an improbable 57 degrees in steepness.

It is accessed by a 25-kilometre, 3,000-metre climb from the Mount Robson Provincial Park parking lot off Highway 16, west of Jasper, Alberta.

Photos: Ptor Spriceniaks, Jon Walsh (bottom)



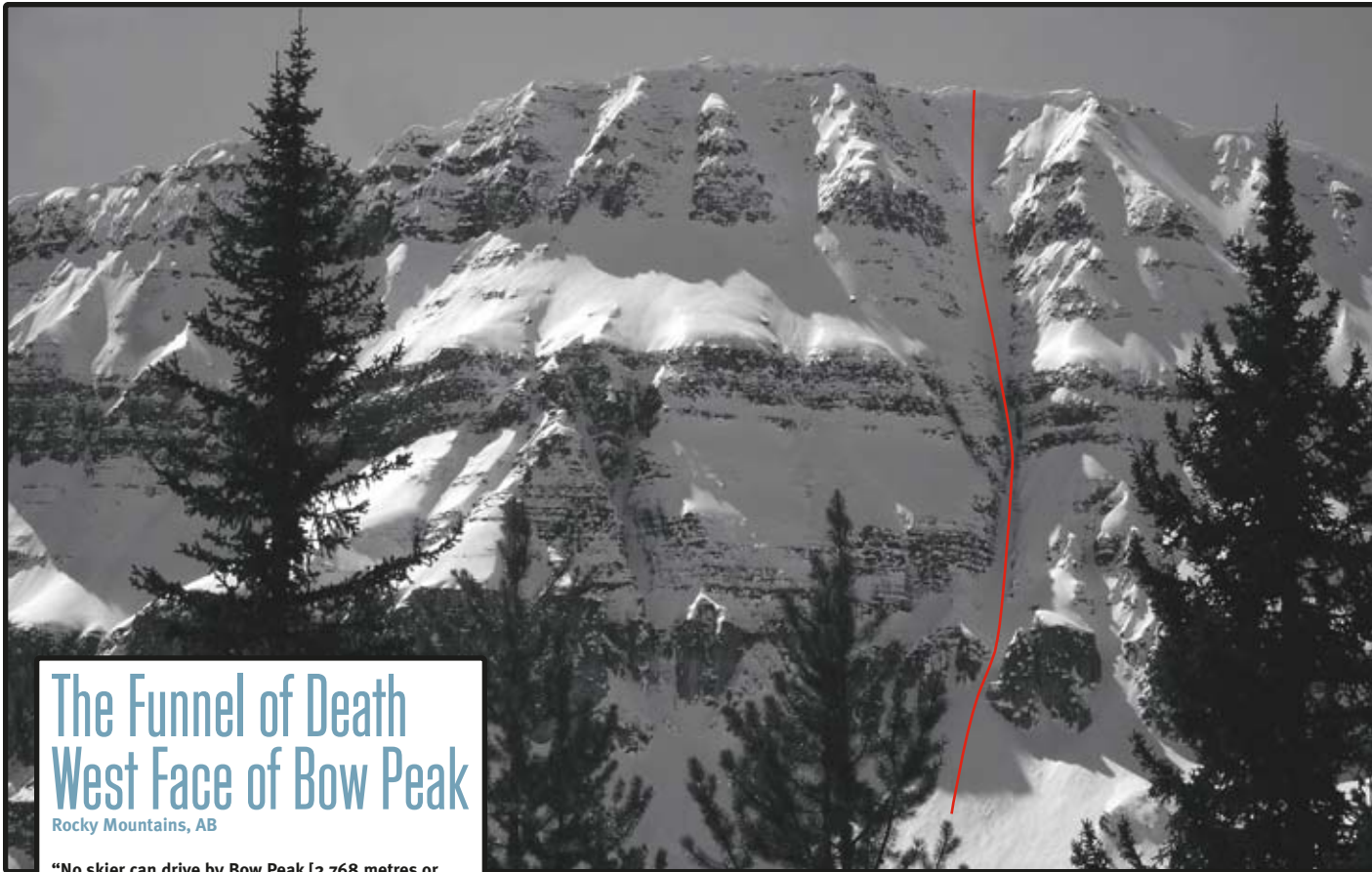
South Face of Mount Sir Sandford

Selkirk Range, BC

At 3,522 metres (11,555 feet) Mount Sir Sandford is the tallest peak in the Selkirk Mountain Range and the 12th highest peak in BC. The south face is a giant 50-degree-plus slope that remains unskied. "It's like a siren, one of those lines that calls you into it," says Revelstoke touring savant, Greg Hill, who stood on the top of Sir Sandford last winter and stared down the line before dropping the north face. "All you see is this huge snow slope that disappears off to skier's right. It could be more of a Medusa, though; it gets pretty thin in the middle."

Located 50 kilometres as the crow flies north of Rogers Pass, the peak is accessed either by helicopter drop into the Great Cairn Hut or as a stop along the northern Selkirk traverse.

Photo: Greg Hill



The Funnel of Death West Face of Bow Peak

Rocky Mountains, AB

"No skier can drive by Bow Peak [2,768 metres or 9,081 feet] in winter without ogling the numerous couloirs that cleave this face," says Canmore resident Andrew Wexler, who skied the line with Jon Walsh last winter. "Look closely, and you'll probably be drawn to one in particular: the Funnel of Death." The couloir is 900 metres of bigness, with an exposed, hourglass upper, a super-tight classic middle, and a broad lower fan.

First descent (unconfirmed): Ali Haeri, Frank LaBelle and Jeff Bullock, 2005. It can be accessed by a 30-minute drive north of Lake Louise on the Icefields Parkway and a relatively short skin from the parking area to the base of the couloir.

Photos: Andrew Wexler Skier: Jon Walsh



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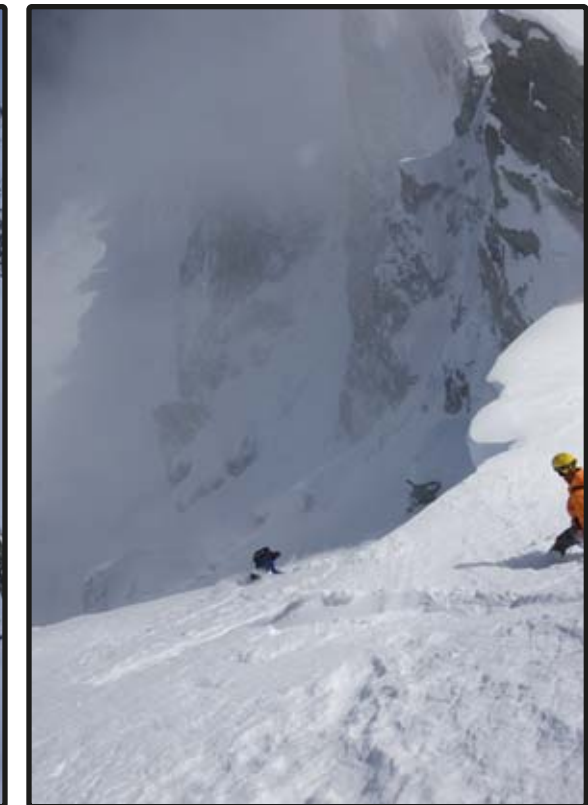
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North Face of Swiss Peak
 Rogers Pass, BC

With a 2,000-metre vertical drop off its 3,167-metre (10,390-foot) summit, the north face of Swiss Peak is the longest vertical ski run in the Rogers Pass area, which is saying something. The sustained 45- to 50-degree, 1,000-metre upper ramp that highlights the line was first skied by Greg Hill and Troy Jungen in March 2005—with 50 centimetres of fluff no less. The face can be accessed by a 3,000-metre climb from Hermit Meadows, just past the Rogers Pass Summit on Highway 1.

Photos: Jon Walsh Snowboarder: Ty Mills

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GETTING LUCKY

FIVE BACKCOUNTRY SKIERS WENT IN SEARCH OF THE HIGHEST SELKIRK SUMMITS. THIS IS THEIR STORY...

STORY+PHOTOS BY GREG HILL

THE ADVENTURE BEGAN ON APRIL FOOL'S DAY 2007.

A HELICOPTER DROPPED AARON CHANCE, DAVE SPOLLE, CHRIS DELWORTH, JAMES BRUCE AND MYSELF OFF IN THE ADAMANT RANGE.

WE QUICKLY SET UP CAMP AND GOT PSYCHED FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS.



EARLY THE NEXT MORNING WE STARTED BOOTPACKING UP MOUNT ADAMANT.

DAMN, THIS IS STEEP.



YEEHAWWW!

WE HAD AWESOME POWDER TURNS OFF THE SUMMIT...



OOHHH YAHHHH!! I HOPE THIS RUN NEVER ENDS!

... AND FOR THE NEXT 3,000 FEET.

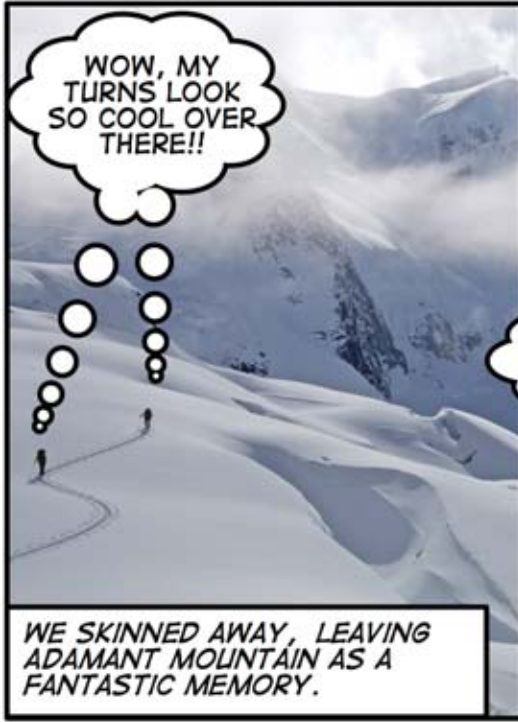


LOOKING BACK UP AT OUR TURNS, WE ALL DECIDED IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST RUNS OF OUR LIVES.



WOW, MY TURNS LOOK SO COOL OVER THERE!!

WE SKINNED AWAY, LEAVING ADAMANT MOUNTAIN AS A FANTASTIC MEMORY.



ANOTHER SUMMIT!?!?



WE SUMMITED PIONEER MOUNTAIN AND STARED AT SIR SANDFORD IN THE FADING LIGHT. IT TANTALIZED US WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESS. WOULD THE WEATHER HOLD AND WILL THE STABILITY STAY AS IT IS?



WE AWOKE TO A PERFECT DAY.



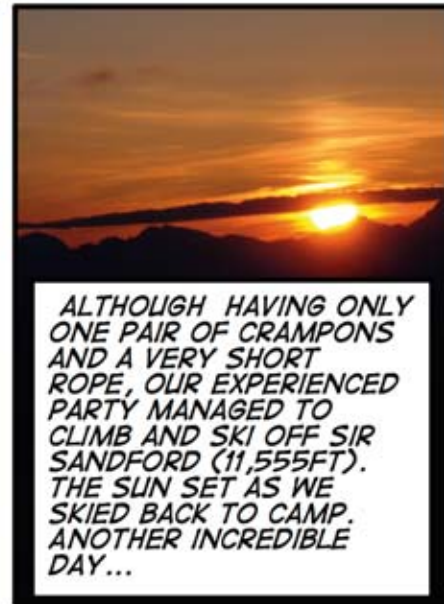
6,000 FEET TO GO! I'M ALREADY TIRED!



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