

West Kootenay Alpine

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THE MAGICAL WEST KOOTENAYS are a world-class destination for skiing and mountain biking. The local rock-climbing scene is also gaining notoriety thanks in large part to the *West Kootenay Rock Guide*, which boasts more than 400 climbs in 22 climbing areas. Nearly a hundred new routes have been established since the guidebook came out in June 2009, and there is no end in sight of great rock left to develop.

Despite all this, the region maintains a certain anonymity with its remote location. That's fine with me. It means there is more to explore and fewer people to bump into when you are out there. The alpine-climbing scene is one that offers countless rewards for the adventurous, but apart from day-trip objectives in the Valhallas (which are well described in the new guidebook), good beta is hard to find.

One such local playground is the Silver Spray Cabin area of Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park. It is like a mini Bugaboos in that the hut sits smack dab in the middle of some attractive spires and sheer walls—a natural draw for alpine climbers. I was able to find lots of information on easy scrambling objectives in the area but shocked at the absence of beta on technical climbs. In July 2010, I headed up there with locals Sean Tasker and David Lavallee to get a closer look.

The most impressive feature is the steep ridge to the southwest of the hut. Technically an extension of the south ridge of Mount McQuarrie, this attractive wall and its sub-peaks required names to aid with descriptions; especially if there was climbing to be had. The obvious choice was South, Centre and North Cabin Peaks. An enticing open-book corner up the sheer

northeast-facing wall below North Cabin Peak was beckoning.

Not surprisingly, we found a couple of pins in the crack system out left of the open book, but the corner itself was devoid of any previous traces and challenging enough to have warranted pins if it had received a prior ascent. We equipped the second stance with rap hangers on the way down to avoid the nasty hanging belay that Sean used on the way up. Story Time is a very aesthetic line with comfy belay ledges, reasonable gear, great views and a quick approach from the hut.

The next day saw us on another cool feature that had been calling to me. Sunrise Mountain has a southeast-facing snow couloir, which sits to looker's right of an impressive prow that I labelled "Sunrise Prow". A bowl to the left of the prow holds snow that must avalanche down the face and clean the rock quite nicely in the spring. We climbed this face for two pitches before following a blocky spine up to the right to gain the prow proper. Some creative route-finding wrapped us around onto an exposed catwalk, which led delicately up the final headwall. The snaking nature of the route combined with the avalanche path led to the name The Serpent's Prow.

This is just a tiny taste of what this area has to offer in the way of new routes. I already have my eye on several other projects and will definitely be back for more.

Summary

Story Time (5.10-, 3 pitches), North Cabin Peak, Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park. FA: Shaun King, Sean Tasker, July 2010.

The Serpent's Path (5.10-, 5 pitches), Sunrise Prow, Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park. FA: Shaun King, David Lavallee, July 2010.

Facing page: Story Time on North Cabin Peak. Photo: Shaun King

The Serpent's Path on Sunrise Prow. Photo: Shaun King



