

## **(56) Yamabushi, 300m, 5.13a**

W. Gadd & various partners (see note at bottom of post),  
October 2006

This route was noted as a project on page 177 in “**Yamnuska Rock**” by Andy Genereux published in June 2006. The details on how to find the start for this route can be found there and on a cliff photo for this section of crag can be found on page 178. The entry below is forwarded from Will Gadd following the first free ascent of what is undoubtedly the hardest multi pitch free climb on rock to date in the Canadian Rockies. How fitting that it was put up on this local historical bastion of the sport “**Mt. Yamnuska**”.

Start right of the climb “**(55) Balrog**”, follow the line of bolts up through the big roofs.

In about 1999 Raphael Slawinski and I started work on a new line on the last major buttress of Yamnuska without a route on it. The reason there weren't any routes on this area of the wall is obvious: the rock is really steep, generally overhanging, with a maze of large roofs to negotiate. It's also relatively crack-free, meaning a climb would require extensive bolting. Our progress was slow for the first five years; the climbing/cleaning on lead was hard and took a lot of time—about two days for each pitch. The process of hanging off hooks or lousy gear to drill was also mentally taxing, so we would generally get about a half pitch done every year. The route is also much harder than any other multi-pitch route I've done--we only felt fit enough to try it each Fall, then it would snow, oh well, next year, repeat for years.

We did eventually give in to the “dark side” and try to rap-bolt the route to speed our progress up, but were foiled by the very steep rock after only about 60m—it was too difficult to find the climbing line on rap, and we were hanging too far out from the wall anyhow. Plus, although there has been rap-bolting on Yam, it just didn't feel right. But in 2006 I had an exceptionally good rock-climbing summer (meaning the paragliding sucked so I climbed a lot more), and felt fit enough to give the climb a serious effort, plus I had an under-

employed partner, Cory Richards. Raphael was game but unfortunately employed and not feeling rock-fit after a trip to Pakistan. Alpinism is really bad for rock climbing fitness.

It took 11 more trips up on the wall, but in the end we finished off what I consider the best rock route I've ever done in the Canadian Rockies. We put a lot of work into cleaning loose rock and equipping the route—I wanted to build something that other people would want to climb, rather than just get the route done as fast as possible. While there are some excellent routes on Yam with good rock, there are also many routes that emphasize difficult run-out climbing on loose rock. I wanted to create something physical and enjoyable that would attract climbers to the great climbing the cliff offers.

The climbing is sustained (five of the eight pitches are 5.12 or harder, and even the 5.11 pitches are involved), and the sometimes friable rock adds to the excitement. Eight pitches at the sport crag is no big deal, eight hard pitches on Yam took a lot more out of me, there's something about Yamineering that adds extra value. Each pitch also has a lot of climbing on it, usually two or three good cruxes to play with. It took two attempts before climbing the route free from bottom to top in a day, even knowing the route as well as I did. We likely could have done it sooner had we accepted a multi-day free ascent as is common, but there's just something about climbing from the bottom to the top in a day. Some gear is helpful for reducing the runouts, but not absolutely necessary. It seemed sort of silly to make people bring a rack for a half-dozen possible gear placements in over 300m of climbing. I hope it becomes popular, it's a very fine long day of climbing in a spectacular environment. All belays are bolted and at "hands free" stances.

**P1: 5.10b, 60m** Climb the shield right of the climb **Balrog**, easy scrambling across the ledge (skip the anchor, that's for rapping), up and left to a semi-hanging stance just right of the Balrog crack. Long slings reduce rope drag.

**P2, 5.13a, 25m.** Right up the shallow dihedral to the big roofs, get motivated and climb 'em! (Note: that two ropes are required to rap from the top of this pitch, a single 70M rope will be hanging in

space...). Prussics can be handy for the second if he or she falls off into space and is left dangling there.

**P3, 11d, 50m.** Up and generally left on perfect grey rock for about 20M, then back right a bit and up to "lunch ledge," the only ledge on the climb. A bit run reaching the ledge but not so hard, a cam might be nice. This pitch always seems hard. There are extendo slings on the anchor to keep the rope knot from catching on rap.

**P4, 12b, 35m.** Fun climbing on excellent rock to a semi-hanging stance under a roof. This is the last stance where rappelling is straightforward. With a single 70M rope the ends will just reach Lunch Ledge, fun rappel.

**P5, 12b, 30m.** Three different fun cruxes. This pitch was very scary to clean on lead, some of the bolts are off-line and were used to avoid dying while sending down huge blocks on lead. Excellent rock, and good luck on the last move to the anchor...

**P6, 12b/c, 30m.** Strenuous and gymnastic climbing up overhanging dihedrals to a baffling crux move before the belay. Down-clipping would be required to rap from here, even with two 70M ropes the ends hang too far out from the wall to reach back in. Down-clipping works OK.

**P7, 12b/c, 35m.** Just when you thought it was over...Very technical with small holds, devious. This pitch is harder than 5.11 but I'm not sure what it really is, I look forward to hearing someone else's opinion...

**P8, 11c, 50m.** Surprisingly hard, the first seven pitches take a toll. There is a two-bolt belay at the top of the steep rock, definitely stop here and bring the second up rather than topping out immediately, the last few meters of walking up to the top offer some of the finest rubble found on Yam. There is a bolt just below the top under a cairn to safeguard the last bit.

**Note on the grades:** I've spent so much time working on this route I have no idea if the above grading is accurate or not, everything started to feel sort of the same by the time I managed to link it all together. The Big Ass Roof (pitch 2) recently lost a pebble stuck in a small slot, which may make it a bit easier.

**Notes:**

The route history:

1999: Will Gadd and Raphael Slawinski bolt the first pitch and start work on the second and third pitches.

2000-05: Gadd and Slawinski work for four more days from the ground-up, and experiment with rap-bolting, which is not very successful due to the angle of the wall. Gadd also works on the route with Kevin Wilson for a cold day.

2006, September-October: Gadd and Richards spend 11 days cleaning and bolting. Kevin Dyck also puts a day in, as does Sarah Hueniken. Gadd finally does a complete no falls bottom-to-top ascent on October 12, leading every pitch with Josh Briggs jumaring.

“**Yama**” is Japanese for Mountain, “**Bushi**” for monk. The **Yamabushi** in Japan are warrior/monks who train with extreme asceticism; they run a marathon a day for 60 days straight, eating only small amounts of rice. Plus the name has “Yam” at the start, which is what locals call the cliff. Yam has a long and proud climbing history for Canadian climbers, it’s the crucible on which many leading Canadian climbers were forged over the last 50+ years.

## **(84) Zig Zag 5.12a/b, 200+m**

Sean Isaac & Jonny Red, Sept 2006

This post below was borrowed from Sean's website I will pester him to get the information and a topo for this route. The vague information included in "Yamnuska Rock" will allow people to locate and climb this route. Besides having too much information will just ruin the experience. This climb was marked as (84) Project on the Red Shirt topo on page 246 the line included there is approximate only but the start is accurate and should allow parties to locate and try there hand at this route. The crux pitch I believe is found at the bottom of the upper head wall roughly pitch 6 as it hooks left away from the crux pitch on (85) Grey Scale. the remainder of the climbing on the route is 5.11 and 5.10 have fun.

"This September 2006, Jonny Red and I polished off our new route on Yamnuska that we began working on last summer. This is for both of us our first new Yam route and were psyched to get it done. It is named Zigzag (5.12-) after its not-very-plumb-line which tends to stray all over the frickin' place keeping with the best of Yam tradition. Think Red Shirt but harder. It tackles the vast terrain between Red Shirt and Excalibur with the big prize being the big overhanging yellow headwall just left of The Bowl. We put six days into it last spring, climbing ground up and drilling on lead. The first couple days went well following our noses up mainly gray rock. The learning curve was huge as we struggled to impersonate Andy G. with a Makita dangling from our harnesses. After five wandering pitches, we smacked up against the yellow headwall. Not wanting to drill a bolt ladder on aid in the wrong place, we opted to hike to the top to scope the best avenue for last pitches. Scoping turned into drilling but at least the route was rigged and ready to send. Our final day on the route last fall went

well freeing everything except a single hang on the second to last pitch. With me training for my ACMG exam and Jonny off exploring the Karakoram, we didn't find time to return until a whole year later. I was in pathetic shape from short-roping 5.6 rubble all summer but Jonny found the guns to fire the crux clean. Of course we are biased like any first ascensionists so we think it is quality. In my opinion, the last 5 meters before topping out are absolutely stunning: 5.10 jugs on an exposed headwall with big air below. This is only the 5th route to be graded 5.12 on Yam which doesn't seem right with the amount of overhanging stone available for hard routes. Will Gadd is close to finishing a long-term project between *Balrog* and *The Wild Boys* through the oft-looked-at tired roof system. Once complete, it will be not only the first 5.13 on Yam but the first 5.13 multi-pitch in the Canadian Rockies. Long time coming...

I will post a route description and topo soon.”