

SEVEN DAYS, NINE WONDERS

It almost seemed like this was a doomed roadtrip for Blue Mountains photographer Ben Sanford. But then, after months of trying, everything came together, and he and his crew were able to string together an amazing sequence of some of Canada's more aesthetic ice climbs.

By **BEN SANFORD**

Jesse Renwick on Pitch 2 of *Kemosabe* (WI4), Waipurus, North Ghost, Alberta. It's a long day to access this region—a couple of hours each way in the car through the snowy/icy trails, then hours of walking to the routes. We had incredible weather, best of the whole trip, but it was getting too warm. I didn't place many screws on the first pitch simply because they would've been useless; by the time I'd topped out and the seconder came up, some might have melted out already. With storms rolling in that evening, it was the last day of our climbing roadtrip and I was on a high after an incredible week in the Rockies

THERE ARE SOME TRIPS you have where everything goes smoothly. Others seem to be precisely the opposite. This was one of those, a trip where it seemed everything conspired against us. We—me, Case Turner, and Doug Hollinger—had initially planned to meet in January, 2022, to put together a roadtrip climbing a variety of the amazing waterfall-ice routes that drip down the magnificent cliffs and mountainsides of the southern Canadian Rockies in British Columbia and Alberta.

The problems, however, started from the outset. I lost baggage at Vancouver Airport. Bungled COVID testing protocols for international travel blocked the three of us from our planned January trip. I partially tore my ACL in February. My credit card was eaten by an ATM; a replacement never arrived. When I finally got to Revelstoke, BC, where I planned to base myself, avalanches closed the highway for weeks. Then Doug and Case were struck down by COVID itself.

But finally, in March, everything came together. Spectacularly. Thanks to local knowledge of the region, we could mitigate the weather forecast to maximise the time our feet were in crampons. Avalanche conditions were favourable, too. Along the way, we were joined here and there by Jesse Renwick, Oakley Werenka and Chris Meginbir as we scored seven days of climbing, and ascended nine outstanding routes. It was a trip to remember.



IMAGES - CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Case Turner on *Wicked Wanda* (WI4), South Ghost River Wilderness Area, Alberta (AB). It was on the first day of the road trip, and a great way to kick things off

Seven Pillars of Wisdom (WI5+) is off the Icefields Parkway in Banff National Park, AB. It's a rarely formed route, and we were shut down on the third pitch because the ice was gone and we didn't have rock gear. Unable to protect the climbing, and with no idea what anchors were above even if we free climbed the pitch, we were forced to descend

Oh Le Tabernac (WI5) is another climb just off the Icefields Parkway in Banff NP. Low winds and nice sunshine helped us manage the wildly low temps in the minus 20s



We climbed *Kemosabe* as two parties: Case and I climbed the money pitch in the last of the sun; Jesse and Doug climbed it in the shade. Full shade makes for better shots which is why we went for that order. The ice quality improved for Jesse in the time the sun had gone, and we'd also cleared all the crappy ice out of the way as we'd climbed. The route was still dripping wet in sections for them, though



Climbing *Oh Le Tabernac* (WI5) in one long pitch definitely made for a tougher ascent but we had great conditions. Really cold weather in the minus 20s came in during the middle of our trip, causing us to reconsider our objectives; we couldn't climb long routes like *Polar Circus* because they're in shade and we'd be suffering in the cold to keep our digits warm. Instead, we opted for routes like this in the sunshine and had a great time





IMAGES - CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

Doug Hollinger on *Cosmic Messenger* (WI5+) in Banff National Park, AB

We free climbed the first pitch (pictured) of *Super Bock* (WI5), Yoho National Park, BC. Case then led the second pitch and I led the third. Doug followed, abseiled, dropped a rope, and then Case led up while I photographed from the top. But the most nerve wracking part of the day was walking across the lake to and from the car, when I went first and heard a few cracks underfoot

Case on Pitch Three of *Spray River Falls* (WI5) in Banff National Park, AB. We had awesome conditions for the approach; it was easy to move fast. The route had seen a lot of traffic, so it climbed fairly easily with a bunch of hooks already in the ice. There was a small cave at the top of the second pitch that was nice to belay from out of the wind

CONTRIBUTOR: Ben Sanford is a photographer and videographer based in NSW's Blue Mountains. You can see more of his work at [instagram.com/bensanfordmedia](https://www.instagram.com/bensanfordmedia)