

A slice of the unknown

[July 01, 2020](#)

I step from a luxurious belay ledge onto a steep, prickly slab. The slab is undercut just beneath my feet: a rock dropped from here might hit the distant orange spot of my pack at the base of the wall. I clip a bolt. Wait, what, a bolt?

By this point Alik and I expected to be traveling across untouched rock. Five years earlier Alik, Ian and Nino climbed three pitches of the line we're attempting, but we've already passed their highpoint. It seemed unlikely that anyone else should've wandered up to this obscure face, overshadowed by the bigger, better known north faces of Ha Ling Peak to the north and Mount Lawrence Grassi to the south. And yet a bolted anchor four pitches up makes it clear we're not the first people up here. The slings on the anchor suggest the mystery climbers rappelled off, but then the bolt I've just clipped hints they might also have finished the route. We don't know.

I shuffle further left, stuff a cam under an overlap, and turn my attention upward. The limestone is perfect, almost too perfect, with no nut or cam placements. I alternate hands on two small crimps as I try to start a knifeblade in a thin crack. I almost drop the pin as it bottoms out after a few hammer taps. I try another spot in the crack, and another, with the same results.

We have a drill and I could just place a bolt to protect whatever lies ahead. I could but pride doesn't let me. What if the other climbers already climbed this pitch as is? Who were they, anyway? All the way up, as we kept running into their bolted belay (and rappel?) stations, we've wondered who else was drawn to this overlooked lump of rock. But all we know is that they were admirably restrained with the drill.

In the end, a small Pecker tapped into the bottoming crack gives me the confidence to lock off on the crimps, smear my feet and reach for a gaston. The moves end up being easier than expected, and just above the seam opens up to accept a pin that rings with those beautiful, rising notes. I feel a little foolish to have spent all this time hanging around on sweaty edges and fiddling with shitty knifeblades, instead of just punching it. Clearly I need to venture beyond [Bellavista](#) and the [Heart Amphitheatre](#) more often.

I traverse left across more perfect rock on sharp dimples sculpted by years of rain. A jug marks the end of the the difficulties and I scamper up an easy corner. The rope drag stops me on a loose ledge a few metres higher. There are no bolts to be seen. Maybe the others didn't climb this pitch after all. The rock all around is either too rank or too compact for gear, and I haul up the drill and place a couple of bolts for an anchor.

As I bring Alik up, I steal glances at the yellow and grey wall above. It looks like it goes. He comes up, floating past the crux where I stalled, grabs the rest of the gear and heads up on what we guess will be the last pitch. With my partner out of sight around a corner I'm alone again, only the rope moving through my hands telling me he's still climbing. Finally, with only a couple of metres left around my feet, the rope stops. Soon afterwards I hear a distant yell of "You're on!". The rope comes tight, I shoulder the pack and start climbing.

At this point in my short and uneventful story, the reader might wonder whether, to borrow an overused phrase, we did in fact "[boldly go where no one has gone before](#)". After some digging we learn that local climber Joey Wallick and his Euro partner didn't complete the route after all. Then again, does it matter? Would our experience have been different if they did? [James Monroe Thorington](#), an early Canadian Rockies climber and author of the first guidebook to the range, wrote: "We were not pioneers ourselves, but we journeyed over old trails that were new to us, and with hearts open. Who shall distinguish?"



The new and old come together on pitch 1: a bolt and pins, pins, pins. Photo: Alik Berg.



Alik doing what he does best: eating and adventure climbing.



Where to now? Looking up at pitch 4.



With no more bolts in sight, Raphael eyes the compact stone on pitch 5. Photo: Alik Berg.

The north face of Mt. Lawrence Grassi, the scene of much recent winter activity, not looking that appealing in June.

North-East Buttress of Miner's Peak, 240m, 5.10b

Alik Berg and Raphael Slawinski, June 2020

Left var. Alik Berg, Nino Guagliano and Ian Welsted, 2015

Right var. Joey Wallick and partner, 2019

A worthwhile traditional climb with little loose rock, this is the first route completed on this [overlooked formation](#). Bring **gear** to 3" including a good selection of thin pitons and doubles of small to medium cams.

Approach as for Ha Ling and continue east across the Rice Bowl, the scree/slab bowl between Ha Ling and Miner's Peak, on low-angled slabs, staying high and aiming for the point on the NE buttress of Miners Peak where the ridge steepens beyond scrambling. Continue 50m past the buttress crest to a smaller rib with a steep drop-off on the other side. A 2-bolt belay marks the start.

Pitch 1, 40m, 5.9. Climb the rib directly above the belay passing a bolt to ledges and a 2-bolt belay.

Pitch 2, 30m, 5.6. Climb the bulge above the belay and either move left into a right facing corner or climb better rock just to the right. Continue past a ledge to a higher stance and a 2-bolt belay.

Pitch 3, 45m, 5.8. Start up the left-facing corner above the belay passing a bolt, then move into a groove on the left until the angle eases. Continue up and left on easier ground to a fixed nut-and-piton belay where the wall steepens.

Pitch 3 left var., 5.9. From a lower belay on the large ledge on pitch 2 traverse left and slightly up for 15m to a short pillar. Climb the pillar and the finger crack above to a narrow ledge and belay. Climb over blocks on the left and onto easier ground to the belay at the end of pitch 3.

Pitch 4, 45m, 5.8. Climb up and left to a bulge. Pull over it on good holds into a groove and climb this to a horizontal break. Move right and step up into a short corner with a handcrack (!). At its end move right again and continue up to sloping ledges. Continue up a short corner moving right around a roof to a ledge below an obvious headwall and a 2-bolt belay.

Pitches 3-4 right var., 5.?. Continue up the left-facing corner on pitch 3 to a 2-bolt belay on a ledge on the right. Continue up the buttress to the pitch 4 belay.

Pitch 5, 20m, 5.10b. Step left past a bolt onto a steep slab. Follow the obvious left-trending break, with tricky gear at the crux. Continue traversing left to a 2-bolt belay.

Pitch 6, 60m, 5.8. Make a tricky step left from the belay to gain a compact left-facing corner. Continue up this moving left into the main corner. Below where the corner steepens move left across a water-runnelled slab into another corner and follow this to the top. Gear belay.

If you haven't left stuff at the base, **descend** the massive Ha Ling trail. To return to the base, scramble easily down the Rice Bowl to rejoin the approach.



The line of the North-East Buttress route on Miner's Peak, an obscure formation sandwiched between Miner's Couloir to the south and the Rice Bowl to the north. Photo: Chris Perry. Route line: Alik Berg.