

MT COLONEL FOSTER

Ringing the Elk River valley in the northern end of Strathcona Park are a group of Vancouver Island's highest and most impressive alpine peaks: King's Peak, Elkhorn, Rambler Peak and Mt Colonel Foster. "The Colonel" is the fourth highest peak and undisputed alpine climbing mecca on the Island and is reached with relative ease by a trek up the Elk River Trail to Landslide Lake. The Lake comes by its name after an earthquake centred off Comox in 1946 shook loose a large section of the North Tower. The resulting landslide swept a wave of debris and lake water several kilometres down the Elk valley leaving scars that remain clearly visible to this day.

Colonel Foster is named for William Washborough Foster, a Colonel in the Victoria regiment and noted mountaineer of his day. The mountain was visited by survey parties and numerous summit attempts throughout the 1900's but it wasn't until 1968 that Mike Walsh succeeded in reaching the main summit. Since then many fine routes have been established on the various aspects of the mountain with many many more waiting to be climbed.

Summit Elevation: 7,000 ft./2135m

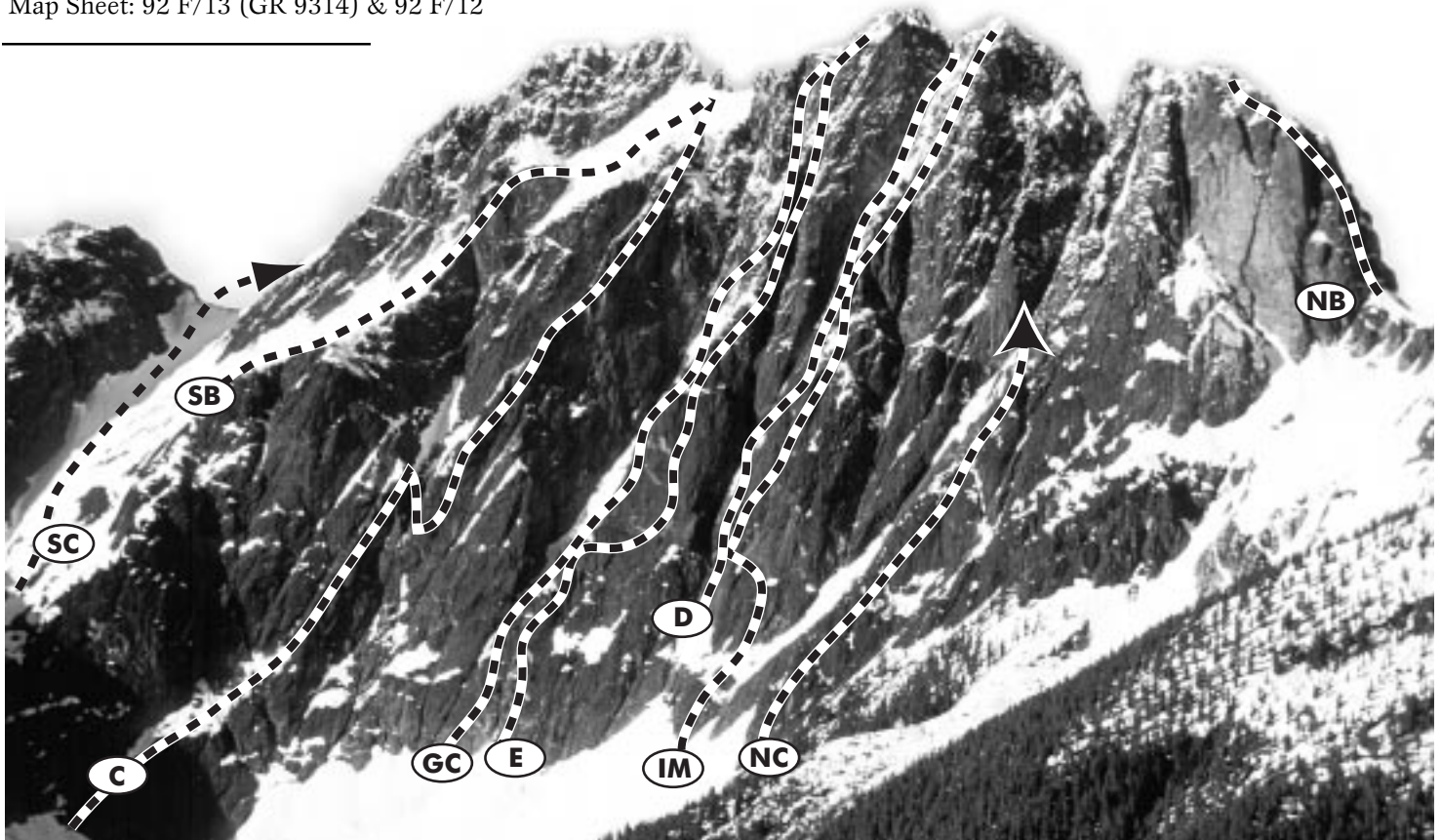
First Ascent: Mike Walsh, June 1968

First Winter Ascent: Joe Bajan, Ross Nichol, January 1978

Map Sheet: 92 F/13 (GR 9314) & 92 F/12

APPROACH:

4-6 hours to Landslide Lake via Elk River trail from Highway #28. To reach either the South or North col, traverse around Landslide Lake on south shore on a good beaten path to Iceberg Lake. To North Col, head directly R up moraine and through timber to slide basin and on to the alpine shoulder. To South Col, ascend snow gullies or low 5th class slabs depending on snow cover to South Glacier and South Col. The North Col can also be reached by striking directly up the forest from Landslide Lake but is very bushy! An alternative route preferable in late summer/fall to the South Col is to via Elk Pass and hike over satellite peak, descending an easy gully in to the South Col. Usual descents are completed by: continuing or backtracking along the summit traverse to either end, rappelling any number of lines down the west face, or taking the exposed but direct Snow Band Route with 1 or 2 raps.



SUMMER ROUTES

SC- South Summit via South Col & South Gullies **

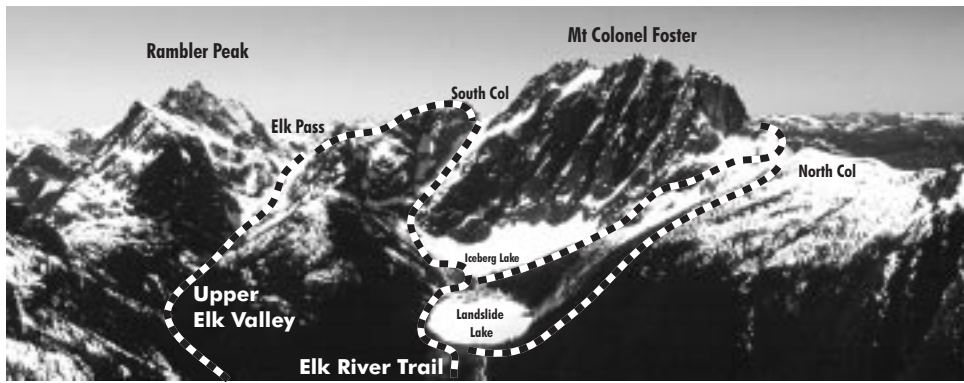
AI2-4th class ~ 1500 + m (II)
 Approach as above to Landslide Lake and around the south shore to Iceberg Lake. Walk from Iceberg Lake up the lower glacier below the South Col. Head up the narrow snow gully linking the upper and lower glaciers or when thawed scramble up the rock ribs on the right side of the gully. Attention should be paid to the avalanche exposure here at anytime of year. Continue up snow or ice to South Col. The South Col can also be reached from Elk Pass. From the South Col two parallel gullies lead directly up to the South Summit. When full of snow these gullies are a fast and easy climb but with thaw/no snow become more difficult, with exposed rock scrambling and lots of loose gravel. Easier gullies can be reached by heading round to the south west side from the col. These gullies join the South Gullies at a shoulder from where the rest of the climb is a steep hike to the South Summit.
 FA: Survey party 1936

SB- Snow Band Route: AI2 5.10 800m (III) **

Approach as for the South Col but leave the South Glacier on a spur glacier that rises under the South Summits. A couple of rock pitches lead on to the Summit Glacier and joins the Summit Traverse near the gendarme. Can also be used as a descent route off the mountain with a couple of rappels over the rock step. Exposed!!
 FA: Mike Walsh, Joe Bajan June 1974

C- Cataract: 5.8 1350m (IV) ***

A very long route up a beautiful knife-edge arete. Start far left of the waterfall that pours out of a cleft in the face. Climb 400m of 4th/low 5th class up the lower of two parallel angled gullies to a committing free hanging rappel down to the lip of the waterfall. Cross the creek! Escape over a steep bulge on the other side (~5.7). 20 easy pitches 4th class -5.8 follow up the knife-edge arete to a glacial arete & on to the summit ridge near the gendarme.
 FA: Philip Stone, Sarah Homer 6-7 August 1988



*Approaches to Mt Colonel Foster & Rambler Pk from Elk River Trail.
Photo shows northeast aspect from Elkhorn in May.*

E- East Face (Culbert Route) ***
5.8 1100m (IV)

A classic! Set the standard for alpine routes on the Island & is certainly the Colonel's must-do-route. Start up a triangular rock formation bounded by gullies, in to lower basin of the Grand Central Couloir, 4th/low 5th class. Traverse right, out toward buttress crest (can be wet from snow melt in early season) 5.8. Continue direct up buttress trending left near the top to reach the Main Summit, 4th class-5.7.

FA: Richard Culbert, Paul Starr, Fred Douglas August 1972

I-Into The Mystic ***
5.10a 1200m (V)

Probably the best summer route on Vancouver Island! Takes a direct line up the buttress of the North East Summit on steep and solid rock. Start with two 5.7 pitches, depending on snow cover, to a long ledge across the buttress toe. Walk to the left end of the ledge close to the couloir of the *Dirrettissima* to find a line of weakness in the overhangs above. Weave 13 steep pitches of 5.8-5.10a past roofs and ribs to 10 easier pitches up to the North East Summit. Fast descent down gully on west side from col between NE Summit and the NW Summit or head along Summit Traverse in either direction.

FA: Chris Lawrence, Philip Stone, Corrie Wright 10-11 June 1989

GC-Grand Central Couloir ***
1000m (III)

Follows couloir to Main Summit.
FA: Joe Bajan June 1974



Looking up the South Gullies to the South Summit from the South Col. The standard route to the South Summit & on to the Summit Traverse climbs the obvious snow gully to easier ground on a scree slope above.

NC- North East Couloir ***
5.9 ~ 700m (III)

Takes the gully between the North Tower and the North West Peak. Climb moderate angled snow to three steeper rock steps in the upper third. Some exposure to seracs and meltwater depending on season.

FA: Chris Lawrence, Chad Rigby 30 May 1999

ST-Summit Traverse ***
5.8 2200m (III/IV)

Most aesthetically done from north end, starting up North Buttress on the North Tower. Descend in to col between Tower and North West Summit with two rappels. Continue along ridge crest keeping to the west side until the Main Summit. Several rappels and 5.6-8 pitches are then required to reach the South Summit. Descend to South Col.

FA: Mike Walsh, Joe Bajan 1973

WB- West Central Buttress
5.8-4th class 450m (III)

Approach by traversing under the west face from from the South Col. Climb the prominent buttress on West Face, leading onto the Summit Ridge between the Main Summit and the Gendarme.

FA: Sandy Briggs, Ignaz Fluri 5 July 1991

WINTER ROUTES

GC- Grand Central Couloir ***
AI 4 1000m (VI)

Follows couloir to Main Summit. Also climbed in spring conditions.

FA: Doug Scott, Rob Wood, Greg Child January 1985

D- Dirrettissima ***
AI4 1000m (V)

One of Canada's finest winter climbs! Follows a plumline couloir with sustained 70-80 degree ice.

FA: Joe Bajan, Ross Nichol 28-31 January 1978

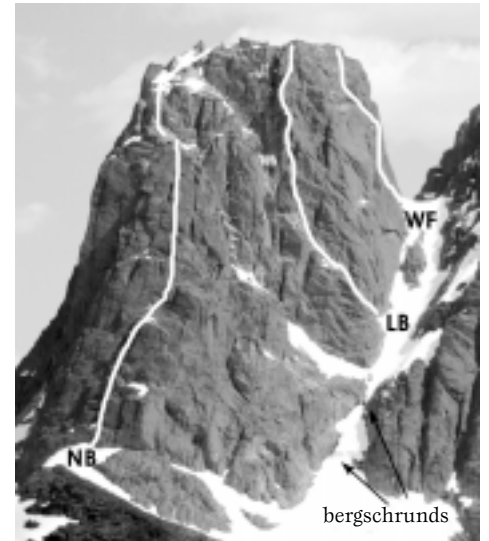
NORTH TOWER

The North Tower can be approached from either end of Landslide Lake. From the the outflow of Landslide Creek, cross the log jam and head up through steep very bushy timber to gain the shoulder below the Tower. Alternatively, follow the rough path around the south shore of Landslide lake to the far side. Continue up to the moraine by Foster Lake, then head up through open timber to a boulder field and then onto the shoulder below the North Buttress.

NB- North Buttress: 5.8 400m (III) ***
Excellent rock and excellent protection for 6 pitches of 5.6-8, lead to a ledge. There are several options up a short, steep wall ~ 5.9-8 leading to a summit boulder garden. 2 rappels down West Face.
FA: Scott Flavelle, Perry Beckham August 1977

LB- Lost Boys: 5.9 175m (II) **
Climb an easy ramp and ledge system out of the couloir to the base of a steep chimney. Climb cracks up right wall ~ 5.6-7, to reach a 5.9 arete.
FA: John & Fred Put Setember 1989

WF- West Face: 4th/low 5th class 100m (I)
Steep rock from top of snow gully. Descend route with 2 rappels.
FA: Mike Walsh 1968



North aspect of the North Tower. The rock on the North Tower is some of the best on the mountain and the North Buttress is an outstanding climb. Care needed with bergschrunds that form as snow in gully thaws.



Mt Colonel Foster's North East Face in winter as seen from King's Peak.