

Beta Report - Written by Keenan Nowak

We thought that Bute was an amazing zone with tons of potential. Half of the adventure (if not more) was the process of figuring out how to get in there— so be warned, reading this beta report will rob you of some of that experience. We chatted at length about the ethics of posting such a detailed beta report and came to the conclusion that this is just part of modern alpine climbing— the choice is yours, whether you decide to use .gpx tracks and follow detailed beta or go for the full-experience bushwhack adventure. That said, the routes could use a bit more traffic to clean them up and we hope that this information will help facilitate a few more trips out there in the coming years.

Huge thanks to Jimmy Martinello, Luke Neufeld, and Blake Herrington, each of whom shared beta with us before we headed up for our trip. Cheers to Jimmy and his partners Bruce Kay and Jay Sinnes for the vision in putting up the route— what an adventure!

Apologies in advance for my wordiness in this report... got carried away with stoke while thinking back on the trip. If you aren't partial to long reads, see the bottom of the document for a TL;DR. Bon voyage!!

Travel Logistics

We booked our approach from Heriot Bay (Quadra Island) to Homathko Camp (Bute Inlet) with Wild Waterways Adventures, which is owned and operated by Jenefer Smalley and Rueben Buerge. They were the second cheapest option we found, but the best deal when considering their scheduling flexibility and the size of their boat— which they promised would be able to handle Bute Inlet's infamous outflow winds. Weather in the inlet can be a real doozy— make sure your charter has an appropriately sized boat and experience in the area. Reuben and Jen were super generous in their ability to accommodate our weather-dependent plans and adjust the drop-off/pick-up schedule as needed, all of which was coordinated via InReach. Jen even brought us a big jug of lemonade for the return trip... pretty awesome after several days of dehydration!

On our way out, one of the engineers working out of Homathko Camp suggested that we should have come via fixed wing with Vancouver Island Air. This could be a good option— worth a call!

Approach to Basecamp

While planning the trip we talked to four people who had previously been out to climb various routes on Mt Bute. Most had chosen the fly in option, taking a helicopter at least one way up to the alpine near Bute. Those who had bushwhacked up the Galleon Creek endorsed it to be character building at best. We can verify the difficulties, but also have a .gpx file that will save you many hours of wallowing up loose dirt slopes covered in blow-down and devils club. Thank us later... latte donations accepted. Our initial attempt to rely on satellite imagery, word of mouth beta, and instinct doubled the approach time on the way in and added at least one sketchy river crossing. Young and dumb, what can we say!



The correct route starts from Homathko Camp on a well-established logging road. When we journeyed in, it was active with equipment and bridges in place. On the way out, the equipment and several small bridges had been pulled out. This may change in the future, so be prepared to encounter active logging.



Once you hit Galleon Creek, follow the road upstream for another ~1.5km until you reach a massive log jam just after the 5km road marker sign. There was previously a bridge at this location, but the log jam serves the same purpose for both wildlife and climbers alike. I'd be surprised if this log jam blows out anytime soon, as it appeared to be reinforced with cable. But who knows— no guarantees! Once across the jam, continue on the very-overgrown road for approximately 4km until it peters out— in the below picture, this is approximately where the pink track becomes purple. This location was our first campsite during the heinous approach to basecamp. However, I don't think there would be any issue for a fit party to reach basecamp in a push if you use our descent track (above). Refill your water here!

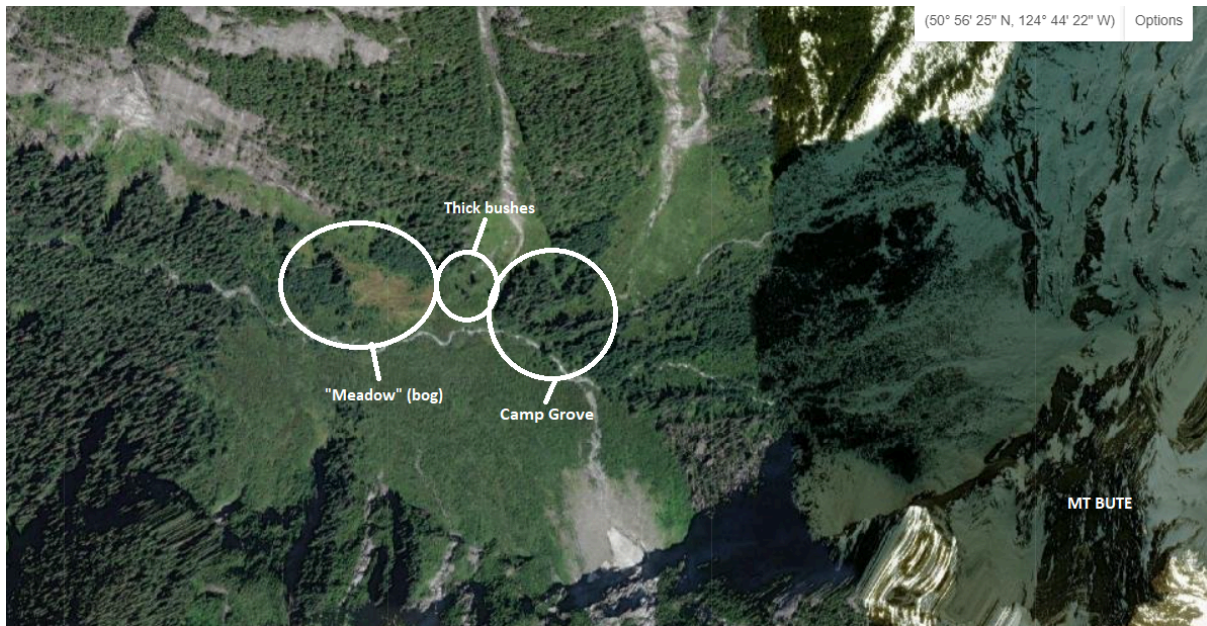
After this campsite and the transition to bushwhacking, you will follow vague game trails peppered with occasional flagging tape and other signs of human presence— including some bucked up logs/trail building efforts. You will find this trail by ascending about 50-100m above the campsite. To our knowledge, none of the previous climbing parties brought a saw up there— anyone's guess who did the trailwork, our thanks to them! Stay on this path for as long as you can, and if you lose it, stay close-ish to Galleon Creek throughout the rest of the hike and follow the path of least resistance. You will encounter several slide drainages and cross at least one trickling creek. Stick to coniferous patches of forest as much as you can for easier travel. Eventually, you will get to a "meadow" (bog) with views of Bute itself. Crossing the meadow means wet feet, but you are almost to camp and it saves a good amount of struggle compared to going around. Just ask Hayden and Christian – they tried to go around on the descent, but their weeny little approach shoes got wet despite their best efforts. I wore massive Scarpa fire boots that kept my feet dry, but ask me how much they

felt hanging off my harness while simul-climbing behind the monkeys— I need a couple more years to recover from that struggle. Once across the meadow, you will encounter very thick brambles. Since your stoke will probably be high at this point (almost done the hike!), just crash right through them. When you eventually trip on a vine, the other brambles offer a soft catch— not too shabby. You will eventually pop out at the old growth thicket that serves as base camp.

What not to do on the approach: We followed some bad beta and tried to hug the cliff walls that guard the north side of the drainage. This led us to an extended section of heinous sidehilling that wove through extremely dense horizontally-growing maple trees (see below track in purple). Not recommended! There is definitely climbing potential along this band of cliffs, but it pales in comparison to Mt. Bute and the walls near its base.



Base Camp



Once you pop out of the thick bushes, head for the lowest ground within the slightly sloping old growth grove. We happened to pop out of the bushes at the southwest corner of the grove, which has an obvious fire ring and signs of prior camps. This is a sweet hang-out spot where we spent all of our down-time. If you follow flagging tape along the south (low) side of the grove, you will find a relatively flat spot with room for three tents. We had two heavy rain days and were well sheltered by the trees in both the hang-out area and the sleeping area. Water is plentiful and clean, as both of these sites have easy access to the main vein of Galleon Creek, as well as its tributaries.



Accessing School of Rock

By our count, the approach from basecamp to School of Rock has been established at least three times. However, it is an absolute coastal jungle and regrows faster than my facial hair— that’s not saying much, but nonetheless you’ll probably have to cut the trail anew. Definitely do it on a rest day— it would suck to crash through the bush all morning and then try to get anywhere on the route on the same day. To find the approach path, head to the southeastern edge of the old growth grove (not far from the tentsite) and find a small log crossing a stream, which then leads you back to coniferous forest. Follow flagger, cut logs, blazed trees, and our .gpx while you navigate through the coniferous forest alongside the main vein of Galleon Creek. The crux of this approach is finding a safe spot to cross this main vein— we got lucky and found a tree down across it, which we supplemented with another small tree. Definite no-fall zone over the raging creek when we went— hopefully less sketchy for you! If this crossing is not an option, we did hear that one party went upstream until the tributaries became small enough to wade across. We tried to do that on our first scouting day and didn’t see any great spots before we decided to try the lower crossing, but we may not have gone far enough upstream.

Once across Galleon Creek, you really get amongst the bushes. If you were able to cross the creek where our .gpx did, you can keep following our track— otherwise, just try to

generally head in the direction of the route base. There are intermittent patches of coniferous forest that provide much easier travel than the bush. Stick to these and head for the talus slope. If you're on our .gpx track, you will skirt around large boulders before the grade of the slope kicks up and you start to hit the talus field. The start of the route is the obvious end of this talus field— a massive slab that heads up to your left. It was a bit of a waterfall when we were there!

Climbing Strategy & Route

We chose to leave basecamp at 0300 rather than carry a sleeping kit up to the base of the route and bivy there. In hindsight, I might have preferred to have a few extra hours of sleep and do the hike the prior day. We were on the route by 0600. The section of the route that we climbed can be broken down into 3 sections: the slab, the bushes, and post-bushes. It would be impossible to share the exact route we took once we hit the bushes, nor would we recommend following it... but this should give you an idea of where we went. In speaking with a member of the FA party post-trip, it became abundantly clear that we followed a very different route from them during our "bushes" section— so keep an eye out for potential ways to find clean rock. We didn't have much luck in that department, but we must have missed a better line!

The first ~1000ft of the route is a ~40m wide low angle slab with a dyke feature in the right hand corner. Difficulties stay around 5.7 the whole way up, but protection is sparse. We chose to simul-climb the majority of the route, this slab included— but at least one party has soloed the slab. Initially, Christian led up the centre of the slab, but eventually found better gear in the dyke corner. There was running water cascading down this corner, but for the most part we were able to stem and avoid it. There were two small sections that we were forced to solo given a lack of gear, and multiple 80ft runouts. Not for the faint of heart— Christian really entered a zen-like state from here on up.

After this slab, we traversed into the bushy/vertical terrain on the buttress. This is where we may have deviated from the FA line, so consider other options if you see them. Rope drag was an issue, so the followers tied in about 10m/20m



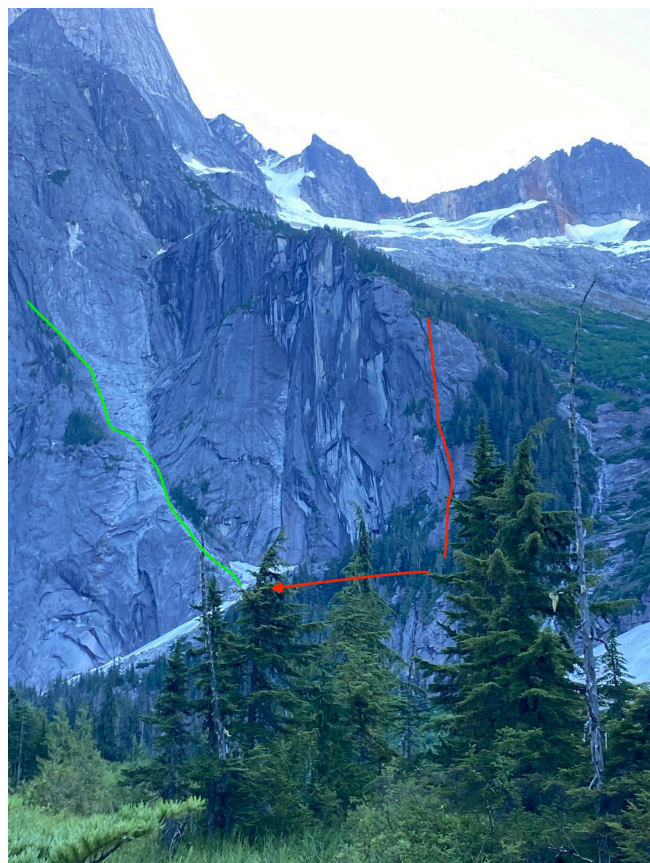
from the end of the rope and trailed the rest. The last follower also trailed the tagline. For what felt like forever, we quested through 5.9++ bush pulls, slinging greenery and plugging the occasional crack for protection. Run out. I found this to be burly even as the follower– the experience of yarding yourself up cedar shrubs with poor feet for 1000ft is something akin to doing a bajillion weighted AND band-assisted pull-ups. That analogy makes sense, right? Anyways, it was gruelling. Christian put in some real work through this section, and Hayden took over once we reached the less-bushy but still organic-filled upper section.

Here, we attempted to cut out to the ridge (skyline of above photo). Again, this felt like it took forever, with many false-ridge summits. We encountered a small amount of thin 5.10 climbing in this section, but it protected well with nuts. Hayden found one abandoned #6 cam, which leads us to believe we were on a somewhat similar route to previous parties at this point. Would love to know who bailed off of the 6– it's still there, as we opted to climb a neighbouring crack. We were very dehydrated and out of water by this point, having only encountered one small puddle thus far. Needless to say, we drank every muddy drop from that puddle. Eventually, we gained the ridge and found a chunk of snow with a healthy drip. It looked like another party had made camp here– we found a tattered Patagonia fleece sweater. We refilled our bottles, made our way several hundred feet higher to a larger chunk of snow (no drips...), and made our bivy on a flat rock. We had been on the route for approximately 13.5 hours at this point. After running out of fuel the next morning, we headed for the first sub-summit of Mt Bute via more discontinuous alpine climbing. The route looked waterless until the next sub-summit, which was at least another 1500' of technical climbing away. We made the decision to bail from there. In retrospect we may have been able to fill our bottles at the snowfield below the first sub-summit and hike back to the route, but it would have been touch and go to get to the top before the forecasted rain arrived.

Descent

See .gpx. There is a convenient descent route that follows grassy knolls down the south side of the peak. We did one rappel to access the walking, then traversed into the forest (steep!) where we had to do one or two more raps. Eventually we reached a good spot to rap over the cliff (three 65m raps?) and return to the start of the climb. We found tat midway down, so it looks like we hit the same spot as previous parties. These rappels will bring you to a large forested ledge that you can traverse back to the base of the slab.

Gear



We took a double rack from 0.2-3, a 4, offset nuts, a 65m tagline, and a 70m rope. Many microtraxions— at least 3. Selection of knifeblades, which we didn't use. Ice axes and crampons (ice axes came in handy on the steep bushy descent). We started the slab with ~2-2.5L of water each.

Weather and Season

Our trip fell early August, and if you read our trip report you'll know that we got totally skunked for water on the route. From my memory, there was a relatively large snowpack the previous winter and a late start to alpine climbing season. Be prepared for rain, no matter what time you go! Our weather window was short and ended up being one of the factors that led us to bail. We had a dedicated "weatherman" (big thanks to Vitaliy Musiyenko) who supplied us with SpotWx-generated forecast models via InReach.

Takeaways/TL;DR:

- Email us for the .gpx file. It will save you many hours and much struggle.
- Bring a machete or two and a folding hand saw to navigate the bushwhack between basecamp and the base of the route.
- Carefully plan your trip timing— we went at the beginning of August and got skunked for water on the route despite a very late start to the summer/large snowpack.
- Make sure to have a friend who can interpret the various readily-available weather models and send you updated forecasts.