

BANFF CENTRE MOUNTAIN FILM AND BOOK FESTIVAL

2020 SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

Raphael Slawinski



Raphael Slawinski was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1967. Before settling in Canada, his family lived and travelled in various countries including Algeria and France. Both his father and mother were highly respected academics and Slawinski continues the family tradition as a Professor of Physics at Mount Royal University in Calgary. Perhaps Canada's most prolific, self-proclaimed 'weekend warrior', Slawinski has been a leading visionary of ice, alpine, and mixed routes in the Canadian Rockies and abroad since the 1990's. Many of his climbing partners call him "The Professor", partly tongue-in-cheek, but mostly referring to his calculated, methodical approach to new routes and to climbing in general.

Slawinski is recognized by the climbing community as both a friend and a master. During his 30-year career, his list of first ascents includes dozens of ice, mixed and alpine climbs, and three first ascents of six- and seven-thousand-metre peaks in Pakistan. Along with climbing partner Ian Welsted, Slawinski was awarded the Piolets d'Or in 2013 for their first ascent of K6 West. He also has many first winter alpine ascents to his name including the first winter ascent of Mt. Alberta (via the Japanese Route), the Sphinx Face (V M6, with Valery Babanov) and the Greenwood-Locke route (V M6, with Ben Firth), both on Mt. Temple.

In the late 1990's, Slawinski began pushing the edge of ice climbing into the new genre of mixed climbing, reinventing how crampons and ice axes could be used to move up vertical rock between hanging daggers of ice. He is recognized as one of the early pioneers of difficult mixed climbing in the Canadian Rockies, leading the charge with bold new lines unimagined by others and climbing M10 and M11 on a semi-regular basis.

One of Slawinski's most memorable climbs was the first free ascent of The Day After Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot (270 m, M7, WI6, Stanley Headwall, Canadian Rockies) in April 1997. Slawinski recalls that day fondly and says "Matt Collins and I made the first free ascent of the route, onsight. We'd only been seriously ice climbing for 3 years or so, mixed climbing for even fewer, so we were still relative rookies. We didn't know the route had a bit of a reputation, we didn't even especially set out to free it. We just went climbing how we knew best, full of desire but with no expectations. To this day it's one of the best days of climbing I've ever had."

He also lists the first ascent of Rocketman (350 m, M7 WI5) on Mt. Patterson, DTCB (V M7) on Mt. Andromeda and the Dogleg Couloir (VI M7 A1) on Mt. Chephren as some of the most transformational and pivotal climbs in his career. When recalling the first ascent of the Dogleg Couloir, Slawinski remarks "Pierre (Darbellay) and I made the first ascent of this route over two and a half days, the first day in perfect weather, the rest in a storm, engaged in what was effectively an upward retreat. Not a pretty route but under those conditions it was one of my most intense and memorable mountain experiences – albeit one I'm not keen to repeat."

Age doesn't seem to be slowing Slawinski down too much, lately he has taken a liking to difficult rock routes which he describes this way: "I've grown to love pushing myself on rock high above the valley bottom, failing most of the time but occasionally surprising myself when I squeak through a hard section. Every one of those days is made better by sharing it with a good friend, shit-talking, laughing, and generally not taking ourselves too seriously."