

CMC VALLEY

This quiet and secluded valley lies immediately north of Yamnuska and contains a number of south-facing cliffs smaller in height than Yamnuska and frequently more sheltered. Access up the valley from the east is blocked by Indian land and this, coupled with its remote location, gives the valley a quiet charm all of its own. It was popular as an early and late season climbing area in the '70s as it shared Yamnuska's favourable weather conditions and offered shorter, more sheltered climbing. The Simpson Hut, owned by the Calgary Mountain Club, played a large role in this early development. Weekend-long forays were common as CMCers explored the crags by day and socialized into the night. It was one of the more magical times for the CMC and for Bow Valley rock climbing. By the early '80s disuse, water-damage, out-of-control stove fires and vandalizing youth turned the Simpson Hut into a decrepit, trash-filled liability of squalor. In 1996 the CMC, under pressure from the Department of Lands and Forests, organized a weekend in which a dozen members volunteered their time to clean up the area. The hut was burned and dozens of bags of garbage were hauled out. Even today climbers and beer-laden youth are occasionally seen headed for the valley sans tents expecting to stay at the hut.

Today, the valley sees little climbing activity and most of this is centred around The Maker—one of the finest routes anywhere. There are a handful of other top-notch climbs including one multi-pitch bolted route. Considering the vast amount of rock and favourable weather conditions, CMC Valley is ready for a renaissance in new route activity, especially bolted routes and sport climbs. There are some obvious challenges left to those with an adventurous attitude and a willingness for hard work.

Pitons are required on many of the existing routes as the rock is often compact and difficult to protect with gear. Fixed pitons should be viewed with extreme caution—some have been in place for nearly 30 years! Also, the grades are definitely "old school" and were established when 5.6 was real climbing and 5.10 existed only in Yosemite Valley.

Getting There

The best approach begins at the Yamnuska parking area and crosses the long ridge that extends eastward from the cliff. Follow the normal approach trail for the main cliff for 10-15 minutes until the top of a small escarpment is reached after a long rising traverse to the left. Cross a small trail that runs along the edge of the escarpment and continue straight ahead for about 100 m to intersect a major trail that heads eastward and rises slightly. The trail slowly narrows and after a dry streambed is crossed, it heads directly up the hillside following the east bank. About halfway to the ridge, the trail contours to the east along the top of a small sandstone edge and then ascends diagonally through a poplar forest. When an open slope is reached, follow the left fork that climbs steeply up to the ridge and then turns westward toward Yamnuska. Stay on the trail just south of the ridge and after a steep section to regain the crest, turn right from the main ridge trail and move across to the north side overlooking CMC Valley. Pick up a smaller trail heading northwest and follow this as it contours the hillside descending slightly and then goes down an open ridge to trees. The next section is overgrown but relatively easy to follow. The trail descends and then turns east and enters a stand of mature trees. After another overgrown section, the end of an old road coming in from the east is reached. Bear round to the left and follow a rocky track straight down to the valley floor where it ends at a marshy bench just above Old Fort Creek. This is the site of the old Simpson Hut and is reached in about an hour from the



CMC Valley from the ridge east of Yamnuska.

parking lot. A number of trails lead down to the creek.

A more direct way of getting to the Ripple Wall area is to follow the ridge trail up to the east end of Yamnuska and then follow an open slope down into CMC Valley heading directly toward the cliff. When the trees are reached, follow game trails to the creek reaching it near the small valley that leads up to Ripple Wall. This approach is more direct but involves more altitude gain.

Camping

Numerous areas exist for camping in the trees on the bench around the old hut site and there are three or four good camp sites along the south side of the creek just upstream. To the authors' knowledge the creek water is still safe to drink but this could easily change if we aren't careful about where and how people defecate when in the area. If you are camping near the creek, please go up the hill and use areas in the trees above the creek. There is good soil here to bury your feces and it will go a long way toward preserving the quality of the water in Old Fort Creek.

Reaching the crags

Gain an overgrown road on the north side of the creek and follow this west (upstream). After about a kilometre the road makes a slight turn to the right and the crags come into view up and to the right. Look for a small but good trail going up toward them. This leads to a broad, open slope directly below The Runes and is the best approach for the South Face of Frodo Buttress, The Runes, Runewall and Bilbo Buttress. From here it is also possible to follow the small trail

below Frodo Buttrass to reach its west face, Ripple Wall and Wakonda Buttrass. Early in the season when the creek is high and marshy, this may be the driest alternative. Later in the season you can continue up the overgrown road that turns into a smaller trail. Follow the trail to a relatively flat and open "valley" (look for a cairn) that gives easy walking directly to Ripple Wall.

Descents

The cliffs extend almost without a break along the north side of the valley and there are only two major descent routes. These are Hidden Gully and the Main Descent Gully that are described separately in the Ripple Wall and Runewall sections respectively.