

GROTTO MOUNTAIN

The large, rounded mass of Grotto Mountain is certainly less imposing than its neighbours across the Bow Valley, but in some ways has more to offer as a climbing area and has more potential. The major sport climbing centres of Cougar Canyon and Grotto Canyon lie at each end of the mountain and extensive, but largely undeveloped, cliff bands run along its southern slopes. The cliff bands are quite small in height and are also high up on the hillside. However, because of their southern aspect they clear of snow early in the year and enjoy long hours of sunshine for early and late season climbing. Rock with this orientation also tends to be better and perhaps with the establishment of good trails some worthwhile new areas will be developed. The Bataan sport climbing area, situated on the upper rock band between the two box canyons, has recently seen a resurgence of interest. Its excellent rock and interesting features make it worth the almost 1.5 hour approach—at least a few times a year! The trail to this crag makes a number of nearby undeveloped cliffs more accessible. Recent exploration of the cliff band below and right of Bataan has found the rock to be down-sloping, loose and not very promising.

Despite the predominance of sport climbing, Grotto Mountain does have some traditional climbing areas. From west to east these are: The Inner Sanctuary, Grotto Corner and the Southeast Ridge. Crag X is only briefly mentioned as it is now a predominantly sport climbing area and is described in the Sport Climbs guidebook by Martin and Jones. However, Armadillo Buttress in Grotto Canyon is included as its two multi-pitch gear routes are not covered in that guidebook, but they are both worthwhile.

The Inner Sanctuary

The Inner Sanctuary is the more easterly of the two deep box-canyons that penetrate the south slope of Grotto Mountain. It is ringed by steep or overhanging rock walls that, on the right-hand side, reach a height of about 400 m. Only two climbs have been done to date but other possibilities exist, most notably an interesting corner line to the right of Twisted Sister. This is undercut at the base and has a large overhang above a ledge at about two-thirds height. The rock in the canyon tends to be gritty and friable, however, and this, coupled with access problems, will likely limit development.

Approach

The most direct approach involves crossing the long quarry scar that diagonals across the slope immediately below the canyon. At present this is sign-posted No Trespassing and an approach in this direction is illegal. Hopefully, the wisdom of extracting low value resources in a prime tourist area will be eventually questioned and quarrying operations will be shut down. In that case, access may be accomplished as follows. Begin immediately east of the entrance to the Burnco gravel pit and landfill site off Highway 1A and hike up a shallow creekbed directly toward the canyon. Cross an open area and climb the right side of a large rock pile to gain the main quarry road that runs below the scar. Scramble up a small cliff and enter the drainage that leads into the canyon. The drainage is fairly easy going and soon opens out into a large scree bowl in the upper canyon.

The best alternative approach is to start in the Rat's Nest Cave parking area, as described for Grotto Corner, and hike up the west bank of the canyon following the ridge trail. At a short, level

section about two-thirds of the way up to Grotto Corner, contour left following a discontinuous, treed bench directly toward the canyon. Diagonal up left just before reaching the canyon to gain a break in the ridge and an easy gully that leads down to the creekbed. The gully is also used to descend from the top of the cliff and gear may be left at this point when using this approach.

Descent

To descend from Twisted Sister on the east side of the canyon, follow small game trails and ledge systems down through cliff bands on the south slope of the mountain and then move over to the west to gain the break in the ridge described above. From here, a small gully leads back down toward the creekbed, but it is necessary to move out left (south) lower down to avoid cliff bands.

Black Hole 100 m, 5.10a

C. Quinn & C. Perry, 1989

Located at the back of the canyon, on the right side, is a deep water-chute that leads to large scree ledges below an overhanging upper wall. Start below a left-facing corner about 10 m right of the chute. Climb the slabby left wall of the corner, passing a difficult section higher up, to a belay on a small ledge. Traverse left and move up into the chute. Climb this past a narrow, awkward section to scree ledges above. Pitons are required and there is no fixed rappel route.

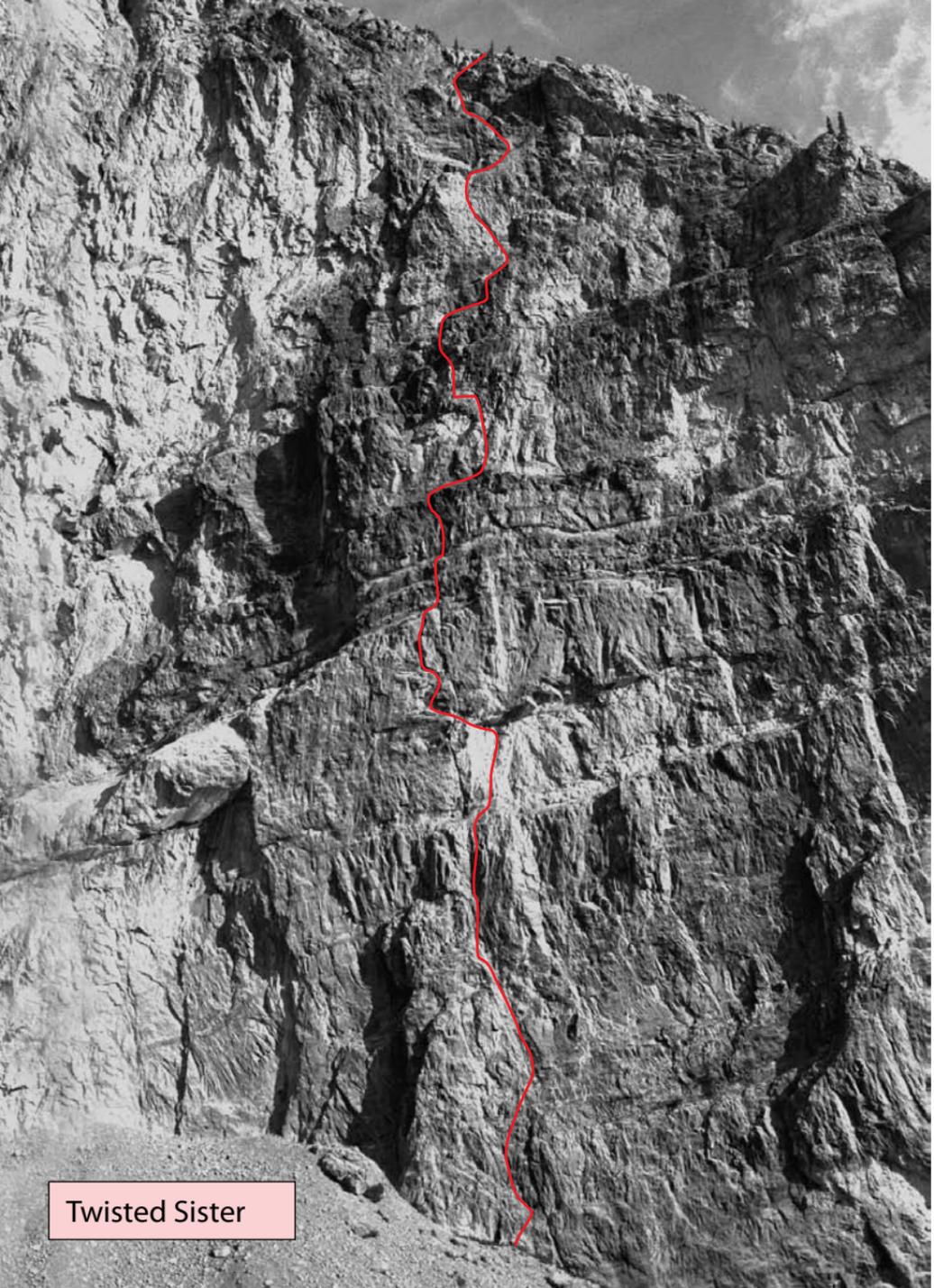
Twisted Sister 380 m, 5.10a

C. Quinn & C. Perry, 1989

This potential classic goes up a shallow buttress of grey rock near the left (upper) end of the right-



The Inner Sanctuary. Twisted Sister climbs the steep gray wall on the right side of the canyon.



Twisted Sister

hand canyon wall. The rock is variable although excellent in places and pitons are required.

Start about 50 m right of the deep water-chute noted in the previous climb, below and right of a shallow pillar with a sharp edge and inside corner on its left side. At about one pitch up the cliff there are two shallow left-slanting corners, and a little higher there is a prominent long yellow roof that extends rightward.

- 1) 45 m, 5.8 Climb a short wall, trending right, to a shallow scoop that leads to easier ground above. Move up right and then back left into the left-hand of the two slanting corners. Follow this to a small stance on the left.
- 2) 45 m, 5.10a Continue up the corner and climb a steep V-corner above, exiting on the right. Move up to a belay in a yellow, blocky corner immediately below the left end of the long, yellow roof.
- 3) 45 m, 5.9 Go up the corner to the roof and move out left on good holds to reach a small ledge above. Climb a short corner and continue up and left across a wall to gain the right end of a long, narrow ledge that slants up from the large scree ledge on the left above the water-chute.
- 4) 5.8 Climb steep rock above on good holds and move right at a ledge into a short corner. Climb this and continue up easier ground to a belay just left of a large ledge that leads rightward across the cliff.
- 5) 5.8 Move left and go up to a steep, left-facing corner with a large undercut prow to its left. Climb the corner and exit left to a belay on the prow immediately above the overhang.
- 6) 5.7 Continue up slabby rock and move left to a short corner on the edge. Climb the corner exiting left and then continue up and right following an obvious break.
- 7) 50 m, 5.6 Climb a wide, easy crack on the left to a belay on a block.
- 8) 50 m, 5.9 Move right and climb a shallow groove to gain a steep slab above. Traverse left across the slab on superb edges and continue up and left on good holds to a short exit groove. From the base of the groove, move out right on steep rock and then go up to gain a shallow depression that leads to easier ground above.
- 9) 30 m Continue up an easy ramp to the top of the cliff.