

CRAG X AND THE SOUTHEAST RIDGE

Crag X is located at the base of the southeast face of Grotto Mountain, near the mouth of Grotto Creek. It is visible from Highway 1A and can be reached in about 10-15 minutes. It is home to a number of routes, the best being Sideline and various bolted routes nearby. These climbs are described in the Sport Climbs guidebook by Martin and Jones. Not included in that guide, however, are a number of traditional climbs dating back to the mid '70s. These have rarely, if ever, been climbed in the last 25 years and this is not surprising given the quality of the rock. For more information, dig up a copy of the original Bow Valley Rock climbing guide—they are listed there. Until they see more traffic and/or serious cleaning, they are worth only a brief mention.

Parking

Park at an unmarked designated parking area on the north side of Highway 1A near the railroad tracks and 300 m east of the Gap Lake boat launch and picnic area. In the spring, beware of massive numbers of wood ticks.

Southeast Ridge of Grotto Mountain 5.7



The southeast face of Grotto Mountain with the southeast ridge on the right skyline.

D. Morrison & J. Tarrant, December 1955

This is the obvious line that rises cleanly from Crag X all the way to the summit ridge. Most of the ridge is quite straightforward and can be fourth classed. Near the top, however, there is a short rock step that is quite out of character with the rest of the ridge. The photograph shows the ridge on the right skyline and the unclimbed, and impressively steep, southeast face.

From the Crag X parking area, hike up the hillside directly behind the old mining shed to above Crag X and then onto the southeast shoulder. Stick to easy ground along the ridge until the crux rock band is reached near the top. Traverse onto the southeast face and move up to a ledge, below and left of the steep prow. From a belay here, climb up and make awkward moves (5.7) up and right across a steep wall to reach an easy groove on the left side of the prow (visible on photograph). Continue up to easy ground and the summit ridge.

Descent is most easily made by traversing the peak and following the normal hiking trail down to the ACC Clubhouse. The trail described as an alternative approach to Grotto Corner also leads to the summit of the mountain and could be used to descend closer to the starting point. This is not well-defined, however, and is less easily found from above.

GROTTO CANYON

Grotto Canyon was the first sport climbing venue in the Canadian Rockies and it remains a popular destination. It was described in the original version of Bow Valley Rock but is now included in the Sport Climbs guidebook by Martin and Jones. Not included, however, is Armadillo Buttress, a relatively large cliff situated in the upper part of the canyon. This has two multi-pitch gear routes that are rarely done, but have something to offer the more experienced climber. The virtually unlimited big walls located high above the canyon above Armadillo Buttress are untouched and await the brave and adventurous!

Approach

There is an unsigned parking area on the north side of Highway 1A 9.7 km east of the Trans-Canada overpass near Canmore or 4.6 km west of the bridge in Exshaw. Recent development of mining and manufacturing interests may compromise this access, but the issue has been rather uneventful to date. From a trail on the west end of the parking area, hike through trees directly to the canyon. If in doubt over access, park at the provincial parking lot near Grotto Pond another kilometre to the east. From here a well-marked trail leads into the canyon.

Stroll up Grotto Canyon past numerous sport climbing venues to a prominent fork. Go left and continue through a very narrow section to where the canyon opens up. A short distance past the small sport climbing crag Garden Rock, the trail passes within a few metres of a steep, high buttress on the left (west) side of the valley. This is Armadillo Buttress.

Descent

Follow ledges down to the left. No rappel is necessary.

No Place For A Friend 90 m, 5.9

R. Baillie & M. Toft, June 1983

This route climbs the left side of the buttress, passing a prominent treed ledge at just over half height. It features steep face climbing on generally good rock and has a fair amount of fixed gear. However, it is rarely climbed and the pitons should be viewed with caution. At present, a small selection of additional pitons is required for the belay at the top of pitch 2.

From where the trail comes closest to the buttress, walk left to the first large tree growing next to the rock (cairn).

- 1) 25 m, 5.7 Climb the steep face behind the tree, past a bolt, to a ledge. The ledge may also be reached by climbing a shattered break a few metres to the left. Move right and climb a shallow corner to a small roof (piton). Climb over the roof and continue on steep juggy rock to a small ledge with two bolts 7 m higher.
- 2) 25 m, 5.8 Move up, then traverse right to a bolt below and right of a short corner capped by an overhang. Move left and climb the overhang (two fixed pitons), continue straight up on steep rock to a small ledge (piton), climb up to easier ground, and then slant up left to a big ledge with a dead tree (pitons required for belay).
- 3) 40 m, 5.9 Move right for about 8 m to a small spruce tree and climb the left-facing corner above (piton). From the top of the corner, angle up left to a bolt and then move up and right to an alcove with a fixed piton. Continue up with difficulty to a bolt, then trend up left to a break in the line of roofs above. Step over the roof (piton) and continue up easier rock to large ledges.

Asylum 100 m, 5.10d

D. Morgan, C. Yonge & C. Perry, July 1984

This interesting route follows a prominent right-facing corner system up the front of the buttress. It is a good testing climb although the blocky corner on pitch 2 may be dangerously loose and demands extreme care. The climb is not recommended for inexperienced parties. Take a small selection of pitons and a hammer to test those in place.

Start below and left of the corner.

- 1) 35 m, 5.10d Climb up and then make a rising traverse right past several pitons to the foot of the corner. Climb the corner with difficulty (small wires) to a bolt stance above an easier section.
- 2) 30 m, 5.9 Continue with care directly up the blocky corner above to a large ledge and tree belay on the left.
- 3) 35 m, 5.8 Make a rising traverse up left following an obvious line of weakness to a small corner (piton), below the steep upper section. Move left and then climb directly up on surprisingly good holds to reach easier ground.