

McGILLIVRAY SLABS

The Palliser Formation outcrops on Mount McGillivray in a long line of cliffs punctuated by several buttresses. All the climbs described here lie on McGillivray Slabs, the portion of the cliffs closest to the road. The rock is moderate-angled with occasional steep walls and overhangs, and tends to be friable where it has not been waterworn. The climbing history is not well documented and there is little information to add to that published in the original Bow Valley Rock guidebook. The lines marked on the photograph are approximate.

Nowadays the crag languishes in almost complete obscurity as it has little to recommend it (except perhaps the lack of crowds). The cliffs face north and in many areas are broken by ledges, trees and shattered rock. The aesthetic natural setting is spoiled by highway noise and a panoramic view of the cement plant across Lac des Arcs. There are some interesting sections, however, that may warrant future attention. The large bowl at the upper left end of the crag is steeper and appears to have better waterworn rock than the slabs to the west. The slabs themselves have isolated sections of interesting rock and with modern attitudes toward bolt protection and linked climbing may yield some worthwhile routes.

Approach

There are two distinct areas on the cliff, each with its own approach. The large bowl at the upper left-hand end of the crag, home to Gollywog, Pythagoras and Pixie, is best reached via a fourth class gully (or through nearby trees) that drains the snowmelt waterfall that cascades over the cliff early in the year. Park either just off the eastbound highway at the entrance to a gravel pit at the base of the gully or across the road in the first pull-out along Lac des Arcs. For climbs farther right, the best approach is via a small trail that leads up to Kahl Crack near the far west end. The trail begins at a break in the prominent road cut, just east of a yellow "95 km/hr" sign. Either park just off the eastbound highway near the sign or about 500 m farther east on the opposite side of the road of the second Lac des Arcs pull-out. The trail climbs steeply up through trees and leads to a series of old gravel roads that zigzags up to a tunnel at the base of the cliff just left of Kahl Crack. This approach takes about 10 minutes. From here, a faint trail leads up left beneath the crag and is best used to access most climbs except Imagination, Tony's Route and perhaps 7-Up. These may be reached directly through the trees from an old road that runs west from the gravel pit up to the rock tunnel.

Descent

The easiest way off is to walk west along the top of the cliffs and follow an intricate but easy descent down cliff bands on the east side of a gully. Alternatively, from the top of the bowl it is possible to descend exposed ledges on broken cliffs to the east.

Gollywog 240 m, 5.7

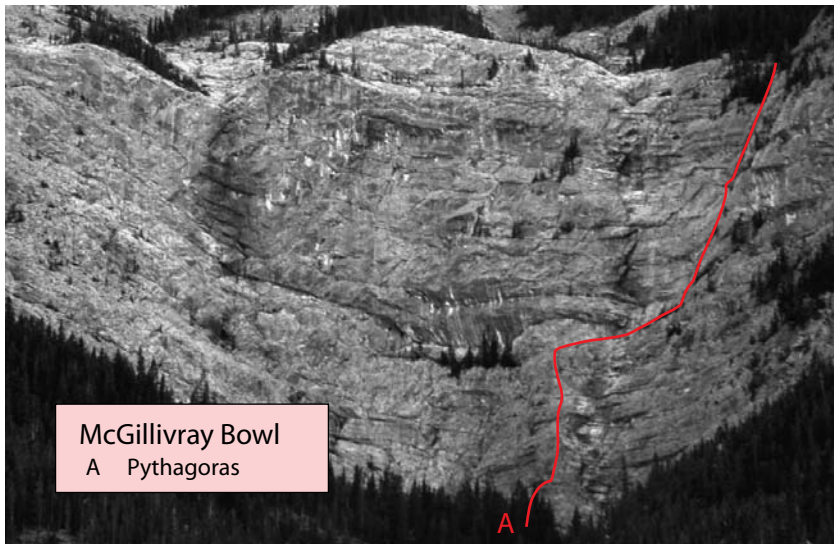
R. Howe & C. Smith, 1971

Gollywog climbs the wall just left of the big waterfall in the bowl at the left end of the slabs. From a large pillar that marks the start of Pythagoras, continue left and go up slabs and grooves for about 60 m to the base of a brown streak level with a large tree-covered ledge and 30 m below a dead tree. A cairn marks the start at a groove.

- 1) 45 m Climb the groove and go up left to a ledge.
- 2) 35 m Climb the slab and groove above, then move left onto a left-slanting slab and belay at a water hole.
- 3) 45 m, 5.6 Climb a smooth runnel on the left and continue up a slab past a large block to a grassy ledge.
- 4) 35 m, 5.7 Continue on grass ledges and go up to the base of an overhanging groove. Climb the groove, then go up a wall a short distance and traverse down left to a tree belay in a shallow cave.
- 5) 35 m, 5.7 Reverse the traverse and go straight up the wall, then trend left up loose rock to belay at three large trees.
- 6) Traverse about 15 m left to the base of a steep wall. It is possible to exit left here.
- 7) 30 m, 5.7 Climb up the wall, making two short leftward traverses, to a small slab. Climb the slab over a block, then continue up left on a slab to the top.

Pythagoras 270 m, 5.7

R. Howe, J. Martin & J. White, 1971



This route has some good climbing and was once quite popular. It is located near the centre of the big bowl, to the right of the waterfall. Begin at a groove on the left side of a large pillar.

- 1) 35 m, 5.6 Climb the groove to a large ledge.
- 2) 20 m, 5.4 Climb the slab above and a short corner.
- 3) 45 m, 5.6 Climb up a few metres, then traverse up right until it is possible to continue over slabs and groove to a ledge.
- 4) 45 m, 5.4 Scramble up left to ledges, then traverse up right along a ledge to two trees.
- 5) 45 m, 5.7 Climb a bulge to the left to gain a crack. Follow the crack to a roof, traverse left and climb a corner to a small pinnacle.
- 6) 30 m, 5.6 Continue up the corner for about 12 m, then traverse left and go over a slab to a big ledge in a bay.
- 7) 50 m, 5.7 From the right side of the bay climb a steep wall on small holds to a short corner. Climb the corner and continue a short distance up the wall above, then traverse right to another corner, which leads to easy ground.

Variation A more difficult variation (5.8) climbs the left-hand of two grooves above the first ledge reached on pitch 4, then traverses right to a belay on a small ledge with trees. A step right then leads to the regular route at the corner near the top of pitch 5.

Pixie 5.6

R. Howe & J. Martin, 1971

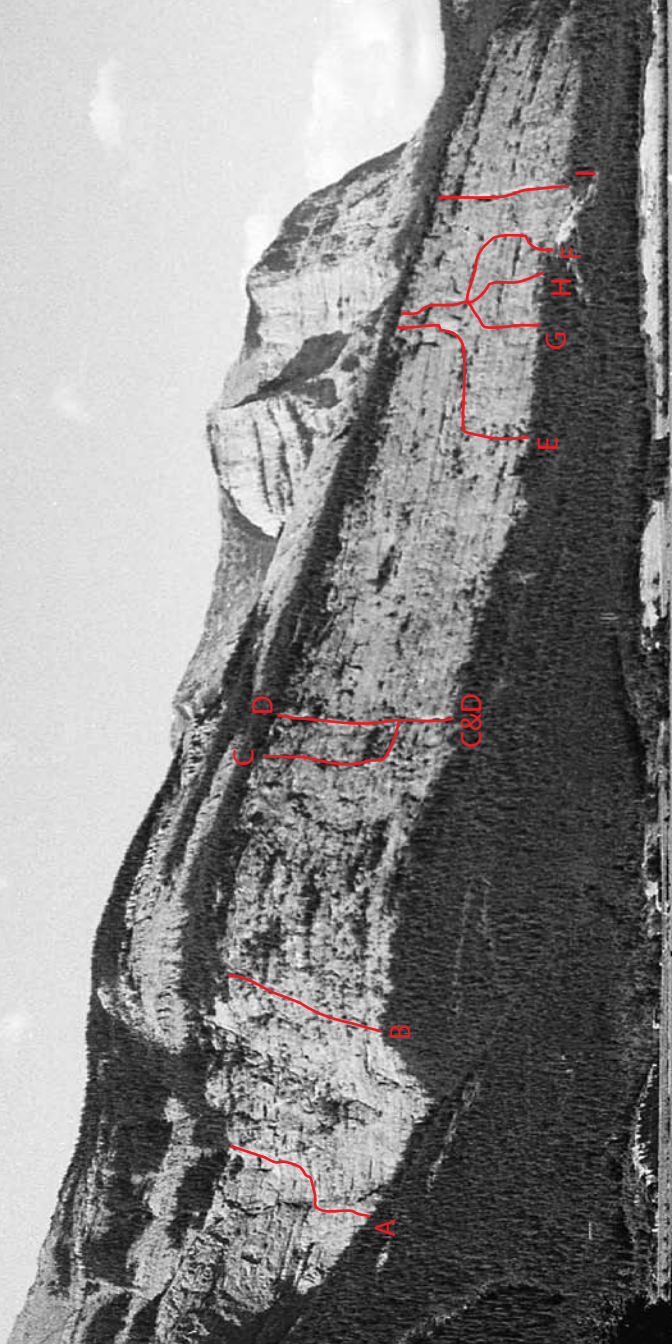
Pixie takes an ill-defined line of corners and grooves up the right side of the waterfall bowl. Many variations are possible. Start at a short corner at the top left edge of the bay of trees extending into the cliffs.

- 1) Climb the corner and slabs above to a ledge.
- 2) Walk left to an obvious corner and climb to its top.
- 3) Climb the corner on the left; near its top move right and up to a ledge.
- 4) Climb a shallow corner to a tree, traverse right, then go up right to a bulge. Slant up left under the bulge to a ledge.
- 5) Continue up a groove and then the wall on the left to a tree ledge.
- 6) Walk 15 m left and climb a broken slab to a tree.
- 7) Climb the slab above to a flake, traverse right to a shallow bay and go up this to easy ground.

Imagination 5.7

J. Martin & G. Rathbone, 1968

Starting in a gully system below a large tree-covered ledge, climb up easily to a steep section.



McGillivray Slabs

A	Pythagoras	D	Tony's Route	G	Rubble Without A Cause
B	Pixie	E	7-Up	H	Hiatus
C	Imagination	F	Pitter Patter	I	Kahl Crack

Traverse left under the tree ledge, then climb four slabby pitches that trend left and end below a steep slab capped by a roof. Follow a grassy ledge right until it ends at a small tree, then move up a short distance and make a friction traverse right (5.7) to a corner. Climb the corner to a ledge, then continue past a bulge to a final polished exit groove.

Tony's Route 5.5

A. Shaw & F. Williamson, 1969

Tony's Route follows a prominent left-facing corner that slants steeply up to the right from the large tree ledge. Start as for Imagination, but instead of traversing left below the tree ledge, continue up until it is possible to traverse left to the base of the upper corner. Follow the corner to the top in several pitches. Steep sections of the corner can usually be avoided to one side or the other.

7-Up 5.7

First ascent party unknown

This route takes the line of least resistance to a prominent corner and slab formation near the top of the cliff. Starting near the centre of the cliff, scramble up past trees and short walls to a treed ledge about halfway up, then walk right along the ledge to the base of the corner. Climb the corner (5.7) and, at its top, move right to a belay. Above, follow broken slabs to the top.

Pitter Patter 5.8

I. Stewart-Patterson & M. Toft, 1982

Start at the first weakness left of Kahl Crack. Climb up past the right end of a long horizontal roof and continue up a broken corner to a belay just below a second long roof. Climb up to the roof, traverse left immediately under it to a weakness and then climb up for 10 m to a belay. Follow easy ground to a tree ledge and walk left to a major right-facing corner. Climb a short wall to reach the corner and continue up this (5.8) to a tree belay. Move easily up to a large ledge, then climb one more pitch past an overhang to the top.

Rubble Without A Cause 95 m, 5.5

G. Powter & D. Chandler, June 1983

This variation start to Pitter Patter begins left of the prominent upper corner of that route and just right of the final pitches of 7-Up. Follow the base of the cliff up and left from the tunnel near Kahl Crack for about 225 m and scramble up to the highest, easily reached tree island with a shallow corner above.

- 1) 45 m, 5.5 Climb to the top of the corner and then move up and left (poor protection) to a bolt stance beneath a notch in a steep wall.
- 2) 50 m, 5.5 Go up through the notch to a good ledge (a belay here reduces rope drag) and then move up and right across clean slabs to reach the ledge at the base of the upper corner of Pitter Patter.

Continue as for Pitter Patter.

Hiatus 70 m, 5.8

B. Wyvill and G. Powter, June 1985

Hiatus is a second variation start to Pitter Patter. It begins at the left end of a long, horizontal overhang that extends across the lower part of the cliff. Scramble up to ledges below a break that leads up and right to a very short, flared chimney.

- 1) 45 m, 5.8 Climb up through the break to the chimney. Exit right onto slabs and go up to a second overhang 10 m higher. Move left and follow a left-facing corner for 10 m to a stance below an overlap.
- 2) 25 m, 5.7 Move left and climb a slab to the foot of the upper corner.

Continue as for Pitter Patter.

Overhang Route 5.7

B. Davidson & L. Drews

Details of this route are lost. Apparently it follows the first pitch of Pitter Patter and then continues more or less directly to the top.

Kahl Crack 200 m, 5.5

H. Kahl & party, circa 1965

Kahl Crack is a deservedly popular easy climb that follows a prominent groove near the right end of the slabs. Begin more or less directly under the groove and climb over slabby rock to its base. Climb the groove in three pitches and at the top, either climb a bulge directly or outflank it to the right on slabs. Above the groove two more easy pitches lead to the top.

Students' Route 5.5

A. Derbyshire & party, 1980

Starting about 15 m right of Kahl Crack, follow a groove in a slab to a ledge. Walk left to the end of the trees and climb broken slabs for two short pitches to a second tree ledge. Climb an obvious corner in two more pitches to a third tree ledge, then walk right and climb an obvious broken exit pitch.