

# GROTTO CORNER

Grotto Corner is a prominent, slightly S-shaped, open-book corner located in a long cliff band high on the south slopes of Grotto Mountain. It lies to the west of the large southeast face (directly above Gap Lake) and east of the two deep canyons. The approach takes a little over an hour but the rock is excellent and the climbs are well worth the walk. The corner itself is a classic, gear-protected crack climb that gives good practice for longer and more serious routes. Jughaul Wall climbs the right wall of the corner in an excellent position and on amazing holds. The two newer routes are also good although the left one is reportedly quite run-out.

## Approach

Rat's Nest Canyon and Grotto Corner.



The normal approach begins in the creekbed that leads up to a small canyon, below and left of the corner (see photograph). The lower part of the trail is also used to access Rat's Nest Cave and is well travelled. Turn off Highway 1A east of Canmore just before the road goes up and around a bend toward Gap Lake and park in a flat area at the mouth of the creek. Follow a good trail up the west bank of the creek to a power line, move right for a short distance, and continue up the east bank for about five minutes to where the main trail moves left into the creekbed. Game trails lead up and right around some small cliff bands, above which it is best to angle back left slightly and follow more open ground along the ridge directly above the canyon. Eventually a broad gravel creekbed is reached that comes down from the large bowl above and to the right of the corner. Cross over to the left side of the creekbed and move left again higher up across the steep scree slope situated directly below the descent gully on the right side of the crag. Scramble up left over small rocky ribs (various ways) to gain a good trail that leads up and left to slabs at the base of the corner.

An alternative approach, which also makes an interesting circuit when used to descend from the start of the climbs, is to follow a cairned trail from the power line road up the west ridge of the canyon. The trail is well marked and continues up to the summit of the mountain. Follow the trail to the first small cliff band, almost level with the base of the corner, and then contour right, rising slightly, on an intermittent trail to reach a small canyon in the upper portion of the creekbed above a steep band of cliffs. The creek feeds a small waterfall that cascades over the cliffs into the lower creekbed early in the year. Scramble down the canyon to the edge of the cliffs and follow an easy but exposed bench up rightward to the base of the corner. It is worth noting that the lower canyon contains a number of undeveloped cliffs, some of which are quite large.

### Descent

The small gully on the east side of the crag is used to descend. It is reached by scrambling down the edge of the wall and then moving east on easy ground down to a good tree with slings, overlooking the gully. A short rappel into the gully and some easy down-climbing on the east side lower down allows the scree slope at the base to be reached. The easiest return to the start of the climbs is to follow a break up and left over the ridge and then descend scree below slabs to the base.

### Grotto Crack\* 70 m, 5.8+

B. Greenwood & G. Homer, 1972

The route climbs the crack at the back of the corner that is formed by one overhanging and one vertical wall. The first pitch is sustained and quite difficult for its grade but can be well protected. Watch out for a crow's nest partway up the pitch as it may be occupied at certain times of the year. Scramble up the easy lower corner to the base of the crack.

- 1) 40 m, 5.8+ Climb the crack to a piton belay in a scoop where the left wall eases.
- 2) 30 m, 5.8 Continue up the crack, which widens and becomes less difficult.

### Jughaul Wall\* 105 m, 5.7

M. Sawyer, J. Firth & C. Perry, June 1976



Nigel Hellewell climbing the first pitch of Grotto Crack.



This route follows an impressive line up the right wall of the corner and is much easier than it looks. Begin a short distance right of the lower corner, below easy-angled slabs.

- 1) 45 m, 5.5 Climb easily up and slightly right past the farthest right of three small trees to ledges level with and about 30 m right of the base of the crack. The ledges may also be reached by scrambling up to the base of the main corner and then moving out right. A faint crack system splits the steep wall above and leads up to a prominent tree. Climb up to a bolt belay below a small overlap.
- 2) 50 m, 5.7 Move up right over the overlap and climb the crack system, which is discontinuous, to where the wall steepens. Traverse left to another crack system that leads directly up to the tree. The section below the tree is very steep, but the holds are superb and the climb is technically easier than its grade. Continue up the groove above and belay at a second tree.
- 3) 20 m, 5.5 Move left and follow a crack system up the slabby wall to the top.

To the right of Jughaul Wall there are two thin crack systems, the right-hand of which leads up to a small tree on the edge of the wall at about two-thirds height. The right-hand crack begins up and left of a diagonal break, with two small trees, just above the lower slabby section. Heartburn climbs the right-hand crack and Pasta Jam climbs the one on the left.

#### Pasta Jam 105 m, 5.9

D. Bretzloff, B. Firth & J. Firth, 1996

The route climbs the crack between Jughaul Wall and Heartburn.

- 1) 50 m, 5.5 Beginning about 10 m right of Jughaul Wall, climb up through a circular break in the lower band of overlaps and continue up slabs to the base of the upper wall. Climb steepening rock to a bolt belay at a small ledge with a tiny bush below the upper crack line.
- 2) 40 m, 5.9 Climb the juggy wall trending left slightly toward an orange streak just to the right of the crack. Climb the crack and the wall to a bulge and then make difficult moves up and left to gain the upper crack. Follow this to a belay on the right.
- 3) 15 m Back left to easy rock and go up to the top.

#### Heartburn 115 m, 5.8

B. Firth, D. Bretzloff & J. Firth, 1996

- 1) 50 m, 5.5 Begin as for Pasta Jam and move farther right on easy ground to a bolt belay above two small trees in the obvious diagonal break below where the wall steepens.
- 2) 50 m, 5.8 Move right up the break for a short distance and then go up and left across the steep wall past a tiny bush to gain the thin crack. Follow this to a tree belay on the right edge of the wall.
- 3) 15 m, 5.6 Traverse back left onto the wall and go up to the top.