

HISTORY BY GEOFF POWTER

As is the case with most climbing areas, the history of Bow Valley climbing has been a delicate dance between ethics, standards, personalities and technology. Each notable advance, dating right back to the first pure rock climb in the valley—the ascent of the First Sister by local pioneer Lawrence Grassi in 1925—has involved a very select group of climbers challenging current practises, envisioning new styles and turning to new gear to solve longstanding problems. At first glance, it is easy to believe that changes in Bow Valley climbing have been revolutionary rather than evolutionary, great leaps forward that have dramatically changed the sport. In print and in oral tradition, local history has been construed as one of dramatic—and often conflict-filled—radical change. But as appealing as this view might be, to some extent it is a misperception of the more complex, slow, evolutionary history of climbing here. There have been some dramatic jumps in standard and style, but it is important to realize virtually all of these “leaps forward” have been predicated on things that have more quietly gone before. This is particularly true of one of the central issues in our history—the use of fixed protection. The recorded history of the valley suggests bolts and pitons were once anathema, new climbs relying on fixed gear were great departures from tradition and the use of this gear brought people into conflict. While this is partially true, a more accurate telling of the history is that the change in fixed protection standards has involved a gradual creep toward what the collective of climbers wants. Even the most radical changes (especially the advent of top-down bolting) have been eventually absorbed into the local ethos and the conflicts more or less forgotten.

There is less debate about one of the strongest controlling factors in our history: the nature of the local rock. Some plain facts about Rockies’ limestone have sculpted our path: 1) the danger posed by the often poor-quality rock in the valley has kept the number of first ascensionists very low, with most climbers quite happy to stick to well-cleaned, easier grade routes; 2) there are a limited number of

natural lines and this has encouraged searches for other kinds of climbing and a subsequent turn to fixed gear; 3) much of the best rock in the valley is featureless and will not take small gear safely, so the most solid routes have either been heavily bolted or are dramatically run-out.

The effort to balance tradition and change has produced one other intriguing development: the preservation of a traditional ethos on Yamnuska while more varied styles have been seen on the other cliffs. Yam has always been the traditional heart of valley climbing, and so it is perhaps best to give its history first and then offer the story of the other crags in contrast to the Yamnuska narrative.

Yamnuska

It is no surprise that much of the history of climbing in the Bow Valley has revolved around Yamnuska. The big yellow crown sits like a siren over the eastern gate to the mountains, and is an obvious goal for any climber approaching the range from that side. It has all the ingredients of the perfect primary crag: southern aspect to give a longer season and breed familiarity with the face; natural crack systems to facilitate early probes; quick access from Calgary and a position that plants the wall in a climber’s mind every time they drive by.

At the beginning of Yam’s history in the 1950s, local climbing was at a stalemate. After the ascent of the First Sister mentioned above, there was virtually no significant rock climbing happening, and there was a general feeling—fuelled by both technical and ethical limitations—that the “best climbs had been done.” Climbing at the time mostly entailed repeats of snow, ice and easy rock lines and Canadian standards were dropping quickly behind the rest of the world. A strong ethical prohibition of the era may have contributed to the stagnation in technical standards: the community considered it illegitimate to place protection. The thought of attacking the wall without gear kept climbers off Yam for years.

Any venture onto the great face clarifies the difficulty facing the potential first ascen-

sionists. Routes on Yam are as much about discovery as they are about solving technical problems, and this has meant that very few of the routes on the wall have been completed without multiple tries—in several cases climbers have taken more than one season's effort. The first attempt on the face would be a brave leap, one that none of the locals was willing to risk.

In 1951, three young Austrians arrived in the Rockies eager to climb and more than willing to step outside local rules. Yamnuska was the first mountain Leo Grillmair, Hans Gmoser and Franz Dopf saw in the new land, and more than 40 years later Gmoser still sparkles with the feel of the first ascent: "We had no plans of really going anywhere. Leo had brought a nylon utility rope with him, but we were only going to go up a little to see what it was like. We tied the rope around our chests, Leo in the front, me in the back, and Isobel Spreat, a young British girl, in the middle. Leo wore only crepe-soled street shoes, and by the time we were most of the way up the climb, they had huge holes right through to his socks. But he led the climb with no hesitation."

This first ascent, up the great gash in the centre of the face, now known as Grillmair Chimneys, followed the Canadian ethic of the day—not a single piece of protection was even carried by the team—but only because the trio hadn't planned on the climb, and couldn't buy the pitons they were comfortable using in Europe. Their achievement seems quite striking even now: it snowed intermittently through the day, the team faced a completely unknown wall, and, though only 5.5, the route was long, loose and intimidating. The ascent of Grillmair required the same key ingredient that every subsequent quantum leap on the wall would demand: a redefining of the possible. If climbers had stayed away from Yam because it looked unlikely, the door to a different, more challenging type of climbing was now open, and the standards on Yam would soon influence the understanding of the possible in other parts of the range.

The Austrians' greatest contribution, how-

ever, came on the route they called *Direttissima*—a classic Yamnuska mélange of face, cracks, chimneys and overhangs; loose in places, but generally solid; a devious line snaking around to break the weaknesses of the corner. The route, done in 1957 at a stiff 5.8, earned the distinguished label of being "one of the hardest routes in North America," and again raised the bar of standards in the Canadian Rockies.

The addition of Yam, first fed by the Austrians, was mainlined by a growing group through the late 1950s and early 1960s. The period cracked open in 1957, with the ascent by a couple of Rockies' newcomers of Belfry, a 5.8 corner on the west end of the mountain. The style on Belfry was pure and gutsy, and the first ascensionists placed perhaps the first nuts ever used in North America. Most significantly, the route marked the arrival of Brian Greenwood, an immigrant Yorkshireman who soon became one of the dominant spirits of this mountain, and of much of the rest of Canadian Rockies' climbing as well.

From the ascent of Belfry in 1957 until 1975, Greenwood was involved in nearly every new route on Yamnuska. He was only one of the hard-core members of the Calgary Mountain Club (CMC), a group comprised primarily of immigrants who had come from a strong European climbing scene and found Canada still stuck in the past. The CMC quickly became the dominant force in local climbing and established its own way of doing things. Other than a few climbs snagged by marauding Americans, virtually all of the major rock, ice and mountain ascents in the area during the '60s and '70s were the work of the CMC.

After Belfry, Greenwood completed two other lines on Yam that still followed natural crack and corner lines, then turned to what he called the "second wave" of exploration—looking for the less obvious routes that also "might require artificial means." Corraling the Norwegian Jim Steen, Greenwood began the first probes at a route on the east end of the crag. At the high point of the first attempt, Greenwood proudly flagged the achievement

with a ratty, old shirt he had climbed in for years, and the climb was baptized The Red Shirt Route.

Native Canadians were conspicuously absent from Yam until 1962, when one of the strongest partnerships in the history of the mountain came on the scene. Don Vockeroth and Lloyd MacKay were a Mutt-and-Jeff routine, polar opposites physically and temperamentally. Vockeroth was a lanky 6'3" kid from the Alberta prairies, powerfully driven, who dreamed of becoming a guide like his hero Gaston Rebuffat. Vockeroth worked and worked at his climbing, and is remembered as the "boldest son-of-a-bitch ever" by many of his peers. MacKay, a 5'7" fireplug, was a bright, always positive, feisty lawyer who was equally facile in the climbing world as he was in the world of big money.

Vockeroth and MacKay emerged from nowhere, yet were quickly responsible for the two climbs that pushed standards a quantum leap forward. In 1964, with Greenwood, Vockeroth led the crux pitch of Missionary's Crack and later that year, he and MacKay teamed up on a line that had been passed over as going nowhere. Their Forbidden Corner has become the classic mid-grade route of Yam, a twisting, complex line with superb position and intimidating climbing. That the pair climbed the route with a rack of only six soft pitons made the ascent all the more remarkable. Missionary's and Forbidden Corner were the first major leaps in standard on the face since the first ascent, and marked the first time in the history of Canadian climbing that native Canadians took charge. Though Vockeroth is perhaps best remembered for the climbs established with MacKay, he also made significant contributions with other partners, particularly Corkscrew (with Greenwood and Hans Fuhrer) and the classic Kahl Wall (an early '70s route done with a young Tim Auger).

But the climb of the '60s—the one with the reputation, the route that was Greenwood's nemesis—was the great corner of Balrog. This 12-pitch route was worked for years, with the sticking point always the base of the

upper chimney. Though Greenwood, ever the taciturn hardman, never admitted it, another climber of the time said, "Balrog really pissed him off. It was as though he couldn't get on to other things with Balrog sitting there undone, so he went at it, again and again." Greenwood finally dragged two visiting Brits, John Moss and Nat Nicholas, onto the route at the end of the summer of 1969, with an armoury of a rack. Unfortunately, they forgot to bring food. The two days of the ascent, with a raging lightning storm around them, were a serious and hungry affair. Moss credits Greenwood's drive with getting them up, through some "very loose and doubtful rock," placing, surprisingly, only three bolts. When the three stumbled back to the parking lot late the next day, Greenwood's only comment in the logbook read: "The Balrog is slain!" Though Greenwood climbed for another five years, Balrog was his last significant first ascent on Yam.

Though the names Greenwood, Vockeroth and MacKay clearly dominate the history of Yam in the '60s, there were of course a number of other significant people working the crag during the period. Of these, two who deserve special mention are Dick Lofthouse, also from Britain, and Heinz Kahl, an Austrian who climbed Direttissima with Gmoser and Grillmair, and whose respect by the climbing community is commemorated through the wonderful Kahl Wall. Lofthouse and Kahl teamed up to produce one of the mid-grade classics of the crag, Chockstone Corner, and made the eventual ascent of The Red Shirt Route with Greenwood. With other partners, notably Dick Howe, Lofthouse added great lines like Bottleneck, Shuftee, Pangolin, Dickel and Gollum Grooves.

If you look at the Yam section of the guidebook, you get the sense the '70s were a down time for climbing on the wall—only eight new routes compared to the 20+ of the previous decade—but to see the period only in terms of the number of first ascents on Yam completely misses the spirit of the era. Firstly, skills that had been built up on Yam were proving fundamental to pushes on bigger walls, and the decade

was turning out to be one of the great periods in North American alpine climbing. And in terms of pure rock climbing, another force was at work in the early years of the decade: this was the time of big-wall Yosemite, with serious and steep nail-ups the rage of the hard core. Pilgrims returning from that valley brought big-wall fever back to the Bow Valley, and their use of bolts, rivets and sky-hooks had an enormous, if somewhat indirect subsequent effect on Rockies' climbing. While the big-wall era here may have been short-lived, the gear—and attitudes—left behind formed the skeleton of all the big pushes of the next era.

The big wall routes of the '70s are perhaps the strangest detour in the history of Yam, but are a telling insight into the climbers of the time. No one was more influenced by Yosemite than Billy Davidson of Calgary. Davidson was the perfect man for the big-wall zeitgeist—a bold, patient, completely self-controlled technical wizard.

Davidson and newly arrived Swiss climber Urs Kallen were the team of early to mid-1970s on Yam, responsible for the two big aid lines that were the essence of the decade, the CMC Wall and Yellow Edge. Both routes were originally conceived by Greenwood and had seen multiple attempts. Hesitant forays onto the grand sweep of CMC Wall began in 1968, but climbers believed the overhangs on the lower third to be irreversible and were fearful of launching onto the upper wall. In 1970, CMC Wall saw several attempts, including one that left Kallen and Greenwood benighted in the grey corner at the bottom of the headwall. In 1972 Kallen came back to CMC Wall, this time with Davidson. They launched up the wall, and to force their own commitment to the climb, Kallen suggested they throw down the retreat rope after the overhangs. Convinced there was no way off the wall but up, the two began nailing the headwall.

The bivy the second night on the route was desperate as the boys became convinced the route was simply too hard for them, and Kallen says they were “completely freaked” in the morning when they saw that their belay pins

had started to pull out under body weight. Davidson hammered in some bolts, then shouted to Greenwood—who was watching them from the parking lot—to come and throw them a rope. Greenwood walked up to the base, but decided all they needed was encouragement, and declined to bail them out.

The day of climbing was terrifying and agonizing: Kallen hammered the shaky second crux traverse in terrible heat, passing out from dehydration, and just before the top of the pitch had to retreat and let Davidson finish it. When the pair finally reached the top, they were more frazzled than elated, and on the way down threw away all their gear. It was three days before Davidson changed his mind about climbing and went back for his rack.

Subsequently, Davidson and Kallen attacked the next great aid problem on the face—the Yellow Edge, a steep arete on the east end. Though this route also involved repeated attempts, the ascent of Yellow Edge went much more smoothly than CMC Wall. Despite their success, by the end of the following year, 1975, Davidson had completely lost his motivation for climbing, and moved on to solo wilderness adventures. When Davidson packed up and headed west, the big wall era in the valley came to a quick stop, and Yam settled into a period of stagnation for the rest of the decade while revolutionary developments in the Bow Valley—most notably the advent of the dedicated free-climbing bolt—happened elsewhere (see the section on CMC Wall below).

The first energies of the early '80s on Yam were directed at freeing short sections of aid left on some of the classics of the previous two decades. Several parties worked Yellow Edge in 1980-81, removing all but a few points of aid, protected by Davidson's numerous—though dubious—rivets. (Yellow Edge—via an alternate line—was finally freed in 1986 during a brief winter visit by Squamish climber Peter Croft.) In 1981, Barry Blanchard and Kevin Doyle made one of their first marks on the local climbing scene with the free ascent of Kahl Wall—still considered by many to be the

finest mid-grade route on the face. The year 1982 brought two more significant frees: Jeff Marshall and Barry Blanchard finally removed the aid on Necromancer, and Dave Cheesmond made his first appearance of note on Yam with his free of Balrog, with Tim Friesen.

But the most significant, and most provocative, free ascent of the decade was CMC Wall, completed by Brian Wallace and Bill Stark in 1984. CMC Wall had far more aid than the other climbs, was far longer, and had a much more serious reputation. The fact that this line was freed so soon after its first iron-bound ascent is perhaps the greatest testimony to the rapidly changing ethos and standard in the community at the time. This ascent, perhaps more than any other in the history of the wall, changed how climbers viewed the potential of Yam.

Looking at the history of Yam climbing, it is easy to understand what Don Vockerath meant when he wrote about “the music” of the wall. Compared with the formalism of classic crack lines of the '50s and '60s, and the rough-hewn routes of the '70s, the climbs of the late '80s are jazz lines. They pull discordant, jarring paths out of the white noise sections of the face, where the essence of the climbing is found in long and difficult solo riffs laid over much more subtle and complicated rhythms in the rock. These climbs weave around and through some of the least-promising features of the face, yet somehow manage to find some of Yam's best rock.

By 1985, in the shadow of the freeing of CMC Wall, a powerful sextet had formed, ready to play on these jazzier sections of Yam. The members of this group, in various combinations, would be responsible for all the major routes of the next decade. The first push on Yam in the mid-'80s—in fact, the force behind most of the Rockies' technical climbing of the era—came from David Cheesmond, a South African import who quickly became the Greenwood of his generation.

Cheesmond redefined how to climb Yam, showing it was possible to treat the wall a little less seriously than had been typical of past generations. Cheesmond could leave Calgary after

work and climb a route on Yam every evening of the week. His 1985 Yam trio involved a fine blend of complementary skills—Cheesmond as motivator and routefinder; his South African buddy Brian Gross providing guts and tremendous free-climbing skills; recent Irish import Choc Quinn as workhorse and stand-up comic. Their seminal routes—The Heat Is On, Brown Trousers and The Wild Boys—all looked for new ground between major features, finding sections of good rock in steep and featureless sections of the face. As is the case with all the routes of the decade, however, the routes have fearful runouts, rare bolts and occasional bits of choss. Of the three routes, only The Heat Is On has seen more than a few ascents.

The following year, with Cheesmond and Quinn away on K2, new members of the '80s sextet jumped in and the standards jumped yet again. Steve DeMaio, a climber from eastern Canada, showed up in the spring and went to a Calgary climbing store to find a partner. He was directed to Jeff Marshall, and the pair was off on their first ascent path within a matter of days. Marshall and DeMaio, whooping and hollering up Yam like good ol' boys, followed in Gross' footsteps, dismissing the developing sport-climbing scene, looking for long and difficult climbs on the other big walls of the valley—the Wind Tower, Mount Loughheed and Ha Ling Peak.

The sixth member of the band was one of the rawest, most intuitive talents ever to climb in the Rockies. On Yam, Brian Wallace was the soloist who'd drop in for a jam, set a route on fire, then disappear. Wallace would climb only four or five times a season, yet be able to on-sight 5.11 on virgin rock. Initiated to Yam with the third ascent of CMC Wall with Marshall in 1983, Wallace returned the following year with Bill Stark and climbed the route free, creating the line now agreed by most to be the finest on the face.

As had been the case with all the new advances on the mountain, the new routes of 1986 demanded a new ethic and courage: the courage naturally grew from the drive of the team; the ethic came in the form of bolts

placed off skyhooks. As Gross explained: "Either we were going to drill off hooks, or do 150-foot run-outs. It wasn't a difficult choice." The vision of the first climb came from Gross, who had wandered onto an impressive wall to the right of Direttissima, which had been darkly named the Suicide Wall by Greenwood. Gross had an intuition a route might be pushed through to good rock above. After six attempts, Gross, Marshall and DeMaio summited the route they called Astro Yam, having assured themselves, as Gross put it, "Yam was a candy store. If we were willing to risk the big falls, drilling where we could, there was great potential." The advent of Astro Yam was another watershed in local climbing. It was now clear that Yam had more potential than limitations, and climbers' routefinding eyes adjusted to the new sense of the possible.

Astro Yam was quickly followed up with two sister climbs. DeMaio made an impressive rope-solo of Highlander, an arete and corner system right of CMC Wall and one of the very few new routes established in a single day. Immediately right of Astro Yam, tracing a more direct, and far more serious route up the wall, Above and Beyond was an eight-pitch line that quickly reestablished the standard for the face. The team sees this route as their finest accomplishment. It took five attempts, including a first effort where Gross took a huge 60-foot fall, shattering an ankle. He was out for all but the final push, where he was stung with another 30-footer.

Yam was left for a time as the various players went elsewhere: Cheesmond to the Yukon, Marshall, Wallace and DeMaio on to other walls of the Bow Valley. The choices would be tragic: by the summer of 1988, Cheesmond would be lost on Mount Logan and Wallace was dead after a fall on Mount Loughheed. The effect on the rest of the team was devastating. Quinn and Gross dropped out of climbing for a time, and though both DeMaio and Marshall regrouped in 1989 to push back on Yam, their mood, and even the climbs they worked seemed darker and grimmer. The boys returned for a few more routes together, but the lusty explosions of

those golden Yam years '85 and '86 still have not returned.

It seems fair to say that most of the years since 1986 have been a time of quieter consolidation of the standards and popularity of Yam. There has certainly been development—several new routes, continuing elimination of old aid, a steady grade creep, repeats of most of the big lines on the wall, affirmation of the bottom-up ethic—but there haven't been any of the big leaps in standard or approach that have marked each of the previous decades. Perhaps most importantly, the last decade and a half on Yam have cemented its place as the bastion of tradition. While much of the recent history of climbing in the valley has centred around the advent of top-down multi-pitch sport climbs, Yam has remained a sanctuary of bottom-up, on-sight climbing. For the most part, bolts have remained a last resort measure, although on some routes—notably 1994's Dreambed and 1997's Snert's Big Adventure—a more liberal frequency of bolts has made a higher grade route more accessible.

Another important advent of this most recent era has been retrofitting of stances and resident gear, and this is an interesting development in historical terms. The retrofitting of CMC Wall was perhaps the first step toward recognizing that the safety of a climb could be improved without threatening its integrity, and this trend has continued as many routes have had stances improved and ancient bolts replaced. The direct consequence has been that several routes have seen considerably more traffic since the retrofitting.

In many ways, however, the situation hasn't changed much from the first four decades: the vast majority of the climbers are still found on the classic moderate lines—Red Shirt, Grillmair, Direttissima, Forbidden, Kahl Wall—and very few people are venturing on to unknown ground, or, for that matter, on to established desperates. (Balrog, for instance, has been done fewer than 15 times, whereas Red Shirt sees that much traffic in a weekend.) And when standards are pushed, the push comes from a very select group of Yamophiles willing to put

in the necessary time, energy and risk. A few key players—and a few developments—have been at the heart of the most recent Yamnuska climbing scene.

Beginning with his ascents of Spring Fever (with Jon Jones in 1987) and General Pain—the great wall to the left of CMC Wall completed with Jeff Marshall in 1988—Andy Genereux has emerged as one of the stars in the history of the crag. A long-time local, Genereux has spent much of his time pushing routes in the Ghost Valley to the north. His creations there have been hard, necky lines done in fine style, and he's imported the same values onto Yam. Genereux has been taking the lead in seeking out some of the steeper, less inviting sections of the crag, continuing the tradition of drilling on lead but bumping the grade up into the 5.12 range.

Since the mid-'90s, a few other Yam die-hards have been seeking out virgin territory and pushing new lines. Because the untravelled rock on the wall is complex and blank these climbs have taken considerable effort and time, but have yielded good and difficult climbing. Foremost amongst this new generation are climbers such as Shep Steiner and Joe Josephson, who put up Bringers of the Dawn near Kahl Wall, and Brian Spear, who has been working new lines on the steep east end of the crag.

The last few years have also seen the arrival of several young talents who've brought sport skills onto the big crag. Most notable amongst their efforts have been the long-awaited free ascent of Corkscrew by Ben Firth and Dave Crosley, and frees of Marriage Rites (by Firth) and The Trap Line (by Crosley). Another important recent free came from a somewhat older team: 11 years after he created the fiercely steep line through the roofs of East End Boys, Steve DeMaio came back from retirement and freed the climb with Andy Genereux at 5.12 in a marathon effort.

The last few years have also seen repeats that have softened some of the reputations of hard routes. CMC Wall now sees repeats almost every weekend, and several parties have climbed

Astro Yam. The long-awaited second ascent of Above and Beyond—in 1997 at the hands of Firth, Jim Rosette and Dion Bretzloff, did little to dispel the myth of that route: 11 years after the first ascent, the repeat still required three tries and new bolts.

One of the interesting questions of the recent era has been whether Yam would see fully bolted, multi-pitch sport routes (particularly after they cropped up on other local crags, see below). Two hard routes of the mid-'90s—Gormenghast and Dreambed—have more frequent bolts than some of the other lines on the face, but keeping with tradition, they also require considerable natural gear, were drilled from the ground up and only have bolts on more compact sections of rock. To the end of the decade, some locals were still insisting a fully equipped route would be chopped. At the end of the '90s, Andy Genereux created a route crossing Yellow Edge that tested this promise: his Snert's Big Adventure is pretty much a full sport line, and some people suggested it had not been created in valid Yam style, but Genereux insists otherwise. He says all the bolts are necessary, and that the route was created in a respectful style.

The last few years before the publication of this guide have seen an energizing resurgence in the popularity of Yam. As little as 10 years ago, you would likely have known everyone on the wall on a weekend, but now, as the number of climbers has swollen, popular routes often have line-ups and it can be hard to find a parking spot. The up-side of all the activity has been that the trade routes are getting cleaner (though definitely also more polished), and there's more energy available to help with the access and preservation issues that will likely be dominant concerns in the near future. And best of all, there are simply more and more people getting a taste of that Yam fix.

And the Rest of the Valley

Until the mid-'60s, almost all the local climbing energy was directed at Yam, with only minor exploration of the other crags. A few routes had been done on Goat Slabs and some of the

more prominent features on the south side of the Bow Valley had been explored. Among the most active were Lloyd MacKay, John Martin, Chic Scott and Don Vockereth. Although Brian Greenwood was probably the most fervent of Yam's flagwavers, he finally complained in a 1969 article in the Canadian Alpine Journal that too much attention was being placed on Yam, and that people needed to think about climbing elsewhere. He suggested the two great walls above Canmore—Ha Ling Peak and the East End of Rundle—would be natural objectives. In the end, as before, it was Greenwood himself who led the way.

Greenwood was followed onto the outlying valley walls by a large group of talented climbers who understood their obvious potential. A wave of ex-pat Brits (including Jack Firth, Gerry Rogan, Chris Perry, George Homer, Trevor Jones, Bugs McKeith, Rob Wood and Jon Jones) emerged as the core of this group, and they were joined by a growing number of Canadian climbers on the Goat Walls, Rundle and Ha Ling: Lloyd MacKay and Charlie Locke climbed EFOR for the first time in 1970, and Murray Toft, Chic Scott, John Martin, Greg Spohr, Jim White and Tim Auger added their names to the slowly lengthening list of first ascensionists.

It's important to understand the context of the time to comprehend the climbs of the era. Most of the key players in the late '60s belonged to the Calgary Mountain Club (CMC), and the CMC offered an open door to the local scene for newly arrived and young climbers. The CMC met weekly at a bar in Calgary, and gave climbers a chance to hang out and find ready partners. It also gave an opportunity for new talent to have direct contact with the heroes of the sport, and for ethics, styles and standards to be inculcated quickly into the newcomers.

Two dominant factors contributed to the trends of the era: As the decade dawned, the new crop of energetic and experienced climbers arrived from Britain, consolidating the adventure ethic espoused by Greenwood and bringing with them dramatically improved equipment that expanded the envelope of

the game. 150-foot double 9 mm kernmantle ropes became the standard line (as opposed to the limited 100-foot cable-laid ropes of the '50s & the 120-foot ropes of the '60s). While pitons were still accepted as the best way to deal with the tight local cracks, the British climbers also brought wired nuts and hexes, offering faster and more economical ways of protecting—and thus opening—new lines. For this group, on sight was the only ethic considered: climbs were done from the ground up; hanging on protection and placing bolts were viewed as cheating or aid climbing; aid climbing was used when necessary, but an overriding consideration was expediency. The climbs were generally long and speed was essential for success.

The early '70s were dominated by efforts in the CMC Valley behind Yamnuska. While Billy Davidson sought out steep long aid routes like Iron Suspender, the immigrant gang applied the British crag climbing ethics that emphasized short, hard free climbs without bolts. Jon Jones, Alistair "Bugs" McKeith, Chris Perry, Jack Firth, George Homer, Rob Wood and others, plus a member of that rare breed, a native Calgarian, John Martin, formed the early core. At any one time the active exploration group consisted of approximately 6 to 10 people out of a total climbing population of perhaps 200 people. For the most part, whenever and wherever you climbed, you knew everyone else on the crag.

Jon Jones, Homer and others put in the first routes in the late fall of 1970, and in the spring of '71 added the first 5.9 in the area, Dirty Dago. Other moderate grade routes quickly started to fill out the valley. In 1973, McKeith and Firth added The Fourth of Firth, while Davidson, Homer and Jon Jones added False Modesty, both 5.9. Isengard, the first route to be graded 5.10a, was climbed in 1975 by Firth, Perry and the newly imported Trevor Jones on his first rock outing in Canada.

The first of the really revolutionary developments after the leap of the original routes on Yam came at the able hands of the Junior Boys' Choir. The Choir was a group of Calgary teen-

agers who had been brought into the lair of the old guard of the CMC during the early '70s and were given a quick tutelage in the ways of hard-core climbing and the depraved climbers' life. Many of the members of this group would go on to make contributions to the alpine world, and most prominent in terms of rock climbing in the valley were John Lauchlan and Bruce Keller. Lauchlan first made his mark with the first ascent of the huge wall of Gibraltar Rock south of Calgary, and then again with an attempted second ascent of CMC Wall on Yam. Although Lauchlan and his long-time partner Jim Elzinga had to be helped off the wall two pitches from the top, their effort gained them considerable recognition—especially given that they were only 18 at the time.

Lauchlan's pairing with Keller would be one of the strongest blends of technical skill and guts in the history of the area. These two combined a willingness to push, an eye for possibilities in blank rock, and an acceptance of the bolt in creating some stunning accomplishments. After the required apprenticeships on Yam under the hard men, Lauchlan and Keller began looking for new ground to try out their free-climbing skills. They understood that a free climbing push would require better rock than Yam tended to offer, and so sought out the better—though consequently blanker—sections of grey limestone. In 1975, the pair took centre stage in the local free scene with their ascents of Hurricane Holocaust (a very stiff 5.9) and Groundfall Wall at 5.10b, both in CMC Valley. Neither of these routes used bolts for protection and the latter, in particular, convinced Lauchlan of their necessity if standards were to rise.

Nowhere was this better exemplified than on their ascent of The Maker, perhaps the quintessential '70s climb, and still a severe undertaking by any standard. Lauchlan and Keller managed huge run-outs, drilled bolts in gripped positions after long and complicated routefinding, and still managed the climb in remarkable style. The attitude and approach that fuelled The Maker was the foundation for much of what was to follow in Rockies'

climbing—particularly in terms of the effort expended: Lauchlan and Keller worked the route over a long period of time, and this was a significant departure in the perception of how a route was to be done.

While the technical leaps were happening on these smaller crags, on the other valley walls the style was firmly fixed in the exploration and mountaineering vein. Guides' Route, completed by Charlie Locke and Lloyd MacKay in 1970, opened up the massive chunk of rock known as EEOR (East End of Rundle), and at 17 pitches was the antithesis of later attention to small technical routes. In 1971, Dick Howe and John Martin completed a number of seven-pitch moderate routes on McGillivray Slabs, and Jack Firth and Jon Jones did a dozen pitches up Goat Wall at 5.8 in 1973. The great wall of the Windtower, above Wind Valley, was an obvious lure that George Homer and Rob Wood were able to bag in 1972, at the classic, mysterious Rockies standard—5.8, A2. And the following year Homer was back in the same area with Jon Jones to check out the Rimwall with Pinko, 5.8.

Goat Slabs was the scene of a near multiple fatality on a new route when a young John Lauchlan made the classic mistake of putting three pitons behind one very large, apparently sound, block. As an afterthought he added a fourth, tied off in good rock above. While Lauchlan belayed the second man, John Martin, the block separated from the crag and cascaded in chunks over Jack Firth, whose foot was severely injured. Lauchlan was left suspended by the one tied-off piton and the party self-rescued in epic circumstances. The route was later completed in 15 pitches by the all Scottish team of McKeith, Dick Howe and Ian Rowe, and rather caustically dubbed Coup-Jack.

The shorter and more accessible Kid Goat and Nanny Goat were opened up by Perry, Trevor Jones and Martin in 1975-76, with the immediate best of the crop, Skywalk, coming in at 10a.

The daunting North Face of Ha Ling Peak finally received well-deserved attention in 1976. Quick Release was done with a crack-

of-noon start by Trevor Jones and a somewhat bemused American visitor, the granite aid specialist Jim Bauer, while Orient Express was completed after several earlier explorations in a 3 1/2 day push by the Perry, Firth and Mike Sawyer team. Both are now classics.

The magnificent Goat Buttress on the left edge of the Goat Wall had long been on the CMC exploration agenda. Davidson had prepared a mounted, metre-high black and white photo for his attempts. That icon had been bequeathed to various CMC houses over the years, and was used by Chris Perry to plot his attempts, first with Sawyer and Keller, finally and successfully with Trevor Jones in July 1977.

In the last two years of the '70s, the earliest evidence of the next trend was beginning to show in the valley. As technical skill rose, as a result of both improved gear and the training offered by the increasing number of long trad routes, people started focusing their attentions on the possibilities offered by some of the short aid climbs left behind by the big wall era. A lot of energy was expended by the group of climbers hired as guides at the cadet camp in Banff in 1978 on freeing Tourist Attraction near Banff (10b) and Mini-Gonda on Tunnel Mountain—a big deal as the area's first 5.11. When climbers started checking out these routes to test their mettle, the canyons and small crags started gaining a somewhat begrudgingly positive reputation.

Heart Canyon was the scene of Rough Mix, by Keller, Sawyer and Perry, and Overly Hung, 10a, by Mark Whalen and Sawyer in 1978. A couple of routes went up on Whiteman Crag: particularly Die Young, Stay Pretty, 10b, which was led by Shelley Scott and named by the second, Mike Sawyer, as a comment on her excellent free climbing abilities but lack of expertise with half-driven pitons.

And although it's just out of the scope of this book, the magnificent four-pitch Paper Chase by Mike Sawyer and Carl Oustram at 5.11a on Mount Cory in 1980 was a bell-wether route.

Ray Jotterand's energy and alpine expertise were also added to the local scene in 1978.

Jotterand came from Europe, with great talent and promise, and in February of 1979 was able to eliminate much of the aid on Yellow Edge with Trevor Jones. But 1980-81 proved instead to knock a massive amount of energy out of the local scene. Jotterand was killed on the Haute Route in Switzerland, Lauchlan died on Polar Circus and Mike Sawyer lost a hand—and nearly his life—in a helicopter accident. These three events, signatures of the risks of the adventure game, seemed to be the fulcrum upon which the next—and perhaps greatest change—in Bow Valley climbing turned.

Early in the '80s, North American climbing magazines started to talk about the European trend called sport climbing, which involved top-down construction of routes and an emphasis on safety, technical difficulty and maximization of good rock. Sport practices first showed up in North America at Smith Rock in Oregon, and when the technical standard there was suddenly reported to be the highest on the continent, locals naturally started to wonder about importing the new ways.

The impact on valley climbing cannot be overstated. For virtually all its history, climbing here had been guided by a few fundamental principles—climbs were led on sight, from the ground up; bolder climbs were better climbs; bolts were placed sparingly if at all, and only when no other protection was possible; blank sections of rock were unprotectable and were thus avoided; multi-pitch climbs were the real thing, so attention should only be paid to the big walls—and all of these principles fell by the way in an incredibly short period of time after the first rap-bolted climb appeared in 1980.

One of the first people to look into climbing in the local canyons was another ex-pat Brit, Dave Morgan. Morgan had grown up around the short technical crags of central Britain, and he was one of the first to act on the possibilities of some of the canyons off the Bow. He entered Grotto as the decade turned and, pre-placing gear, managed the 5.11 Stormy Weather in 1981. By the mid-'80s, however, when more climbs in Grotto began to see the drill, locals divided with some animosity into

sport and trad camps. It's hard to believe the intensity of the tensions that developed, especially now that hindsight suggests both camps profited from their differences. The most immediate and obvious impact was the opening up of many more climbing areas and huge amounts of new rock in more established areas. The introduction of the electric drill was singlehandedly responsible for a huge change in the number of readily accessible climbs within just a few years. There was an enormous swelling in the population of climbers by the beginning of the '90s.

One of the primary forces during the sport climbing surge was another newly arrived Brit, the ubiquitous Sean Dougherty. Dougherty was an irrepressible energy throughout the '80s, sparking everyone with his sport routes, his hard alpine and ice climbs, his guidebooks and a frenetic keenness for all things climbing. A few other long-term residents joined Sean in developing the majority of local routes, most notably Andy Genereux, Jon Jones and John Martin. Anyone who climbs in the new canyons owes them a debt of gratitude—their amazingly selfless investment was the first time local routes had been completed with attention to those who would follow.

Although many of the local trads claimed to be upset by the advent of the drill, sport climbing did seem to have a positive impact on the evolution of traditional climbing. First, the fight against the development of sport climbing encouraged some people to push their own standards on the bigger walls, perhaps to show what could be done with a true trad ethic. Second, many of the “trad” climbers of the time—despite their protestations—were quietly developing their technical skills in the canyons and then importing their improved talents up onto the walls. And perhaps more importantly, the presence of the larger number of bolts in the canyons seems to have had the effect of helping everyone see how much new rock the bolts opened up, and drills started following climbers onto Yam and the other walls.

A more evolutionary and traditional step forward took place in the later '80s when some of the Yam talent turned their focus onto the other walls. The most notable steps of this period were the climb of *The Iron Butterfly* on the Windtower (by DeMaio and Marshall), *The Remembrance Wall* on Ha Ling Peak (also DeMaio and Marshall) and *The Warrior* on Mount Loughheed (finally climbed by DeMaio, Marshall and Andy Genereux, after the route had taken the life of Brian Wallace during the penultimate attempt). This period also saw traditional probes at some unexplored ground, such as the Rimwall, where DeMaio, Choc Quinn and Jim Sevigny created *The Gambler*.

The next truly revolutionary development took a while. The first multi-pitch sport route was a predictable extension of the canyon routes, yet spurred just as much controversy, because some felt it more seriously crossed the long-sacred adventure principle. In 1990 Canmore guide Mark Whalen began quietly exploring the clean grey wall left of Geriatric on EEOR, seeking ground to teach clients multi-pitch leading skills. The rippled rock he worked required little cleaning, but demanded a huge investment of bolt money. Whalen's climb, the appropriately named *True Grit*, brought him much criticism for the rap-bolting, but

the great rock, moderate grade, stunning position and guarantee of safety made it an instant classic.

Doomsayers suggested that after *True Grit* was constructed the valley would suddenly fill with long rap-bolted routes, but it appears the effort and expense demanded by such an undertaking has kept the drill out of wanton hands. Since that climb went in there have been a few follow-ups—Whalen completed two similar, though easier, multi-pitches (*Raptor* on the wall left of EEOR, and *Sea of Dreams* on Mount Cory near Banff), Jon Jones added his own harder and more-committing *Parallel Dreams* to *True Grit*'s immediate left, and newcomers Roger Chayer, Hugh Lenney and Genie Hill built the marathon *Sisyphus Summits* on Ha Ling Peak—but there have been no other efforts that fulfil the dire predictions of gridwork bolts on the big crags.

In fact, the trend in route creation during the latter '90s has, for the most part, been a continuation of the classic Rockies' tradition. While the multi-pitch sport routes have become the most-travelled long routes in the valley by far, the other new routes that have been created have been ground-up lines that have used bolts sparingly despite high level technical demands. And countering predictions that climbers coming out of the canyons would lack the background to either lead safely on Rockies' limestone or honour the valley's ethical traditions, some of the sport climbing graduates putting up new trad lines—like the very-talented Ben Firth, Sean Isaac, Jim Rosette, Eric Dumerac, Brian Spear, Marc Piche and Dave Crosley—have all shown themselves committed to both the risk and the responsibility of tradition. The valley is reconfirming its place as a climbing paradise that has room for all styles and desires.