

THE NUMBERED BUTTRESSES

Long approaches and a general belief that the rock is poor have limited the amount of climbing on these impressive buttresses. However, a good trail, accessible by mountain bike, now runs from Canmore to Banff along the south side of the river and provides better access to the cliffs. The quality of the rock on the truly north-facing sections of the buttresses is probably similar to that on such cliffs as Canmore Wall and Ha Ling Peak. These have the same orientation and are also Palliser Formation limestone. Some good rock seems likely and the best is probably to be found on the east-facing portions of the buttresses. The latter is certainly the case of EEOR and may be true for the Third Buttress (Aiguille de Rogan) and Cooper Hawk Buttress. The Terminator area near Banff has large sections of waterworn rock and seems an obvious choice for exploration.

This guidebook was originally intended to include only the buttresses between Canmore and Cooper Hawk Buttress, the last buttress on the skyline of Mount Rundle as seen from Canmore. Three climbs are now described on a cliff just west of the Terminator ice climbing area and thus all known climbs on the Palliser Formation buttresses are included.

Approaches

For the Second Buttress, the best approach is from the Spray Lakes road that allows some initial elevation to be gained painlessly. All other buttresses are reached from a mountain bike trail that runs from the Canmore Nordic Centre to the southeast end of the Banff golf course. At the two ends, it is called the Banff Trail and the Riverside Trail respectively. The cliffs are visited infrequently and there are no trails leading to the individual buttresses other than game trails. However, relatively open avalanche gullies and creekbeds cross the treed slopes between each of the buttresses and access is not as bad as may be expected. The Banff Park boundary crosses the cliff band at the northwest side of the eighth buttress and beyond that national park regulations are in effect.

The Second Buttriss



The Second Buttriss showing the unclimbed north face.

The Second Buttriss is characterized by a relatively sharp ridge leading to a thumb-like summit. It has a huge, unclimbed north face, only the upper part of which is visible from Canmore. Several attempts have been made to climb an obvious line on this face, which is best seen from Highway 1 near the Banff Park gate. It is similar in height to Ha Ling Peak and is certainly the highest unclimbed face in the area. All attempts to date can be described as "exploratory" and have ended only a few pitches up the wall. A route up the ridge was climbed in the early days of Bow Valley exploration but has probably not been repeated.

Approach

From where the Spray Lakes road turns sharply left and begins to traverse the slope below EEOR, follow an open break up and right through trees to the ridge that descends from the north end of EEOR. An intermittent game trail leads up the ridge to a rock band and then traverses down and right below it. About halfway to the gully, follow easy ledges leading up and right into the scree bowl above and then go up a side gully on the right to the base of the buttriss.

Descent

Either side may be used to descend easily to the base of the cliff, but the east side is more logical to return to the Spray Lakes road.

The North Ridge 375 m, 5.7

L. MacKay & D. Vockeroth, July 1968

This classic route was climbed by two of the early pioneers as part of a project to establish routes on all the major features in the Bow Valley. The original description is vague, but a recent attempt to climb the route has led to some improvements.

Start The first ascent party climbed a third class gully system some distance left of the north ridge, and after bearing right at a fork they reached the edge of the buttriss about 10 m above
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a prominent notch. The same point may be reached more directly by following a smaller gully system that begins about 50 m left of the ridge and goes up to the notch. This start is described below although there is a lot of loose rock lower down.

- 1-3) 140 m, 5.5 After scrambling up a short distance to the start of the gully, climb past a narrow section and continue more easily into a loose bowl. Move up and right to another narrow section, pass this on the left, and continue to easy ground that leads up to the notch in the ridge.
- 4) 15 m, 5.7 Make a difficult move up a short wall directly out of the notch to gain slabs that lead to easy ground. Belay in a short corner a little higher (piton).
- 5) Ignoring retreat slings on the steep ridge above, make a long easy traverse left to an inside corner and follow this to its top.
- 6-8) 90 m Climb up slabs (5.6), moving right to a nearly vertical gully. Climb out via the left wall of the gully (5.7) and continue to a chimney. Follow the chimney to easier ground.
- 9-10) 90 m Follow gray rock near the north ridge to the top.

The Third Buttress

The Third Buttress has a flat, relatively featureless north face with a prominent ridge, separated from the main face, on its left side. Farther up the side of the gully facing Canmore, a rounded buttress stands out from the cliff and, in certain light, forms an intriguing pinnacle. This has been whimsically called the "Aiguille de Rogan," after a leading Canmore visionary. The ridge was climbed many years ago although the north face of the buttress presents an obvious challenge when viewed from anywhere in Canmore. Recently a climb was done on the left side of the Aiguille and is described below.

Black 'n' Orange 190 m, 5.9

J. Firth & C. Perry, July 2000

This route, named after a famous Rogan fantasy, climbs a slabby groove line on the extreme left side of the Aiguille before the start of the smaller left wing. The best approach is from the Nordic Centre following a creekbed that leads directly to the cirque between the Second and Third buttresses. The approach takes about two hours to the cirque and another half hour to the base of the climb, and the views are impressive. Start to the right of a steep gully/crack that separates the left wing from the protruding buttress of the Aiguille and just right of a short, overhanging crack. Scramble up to a slabby ramp that leads up right to the lower bulges.

- 1) 35 m, 5.9 Climb the ramp for 6-7 m and then move out left below a small overhang and up onto slabs below the bulges. Traverse left on excellent rock to an obvious break in the bulges and climb through it into the groove above. Continue up the groove past an awkward bulge at the top and move up and left to a ledge.
- 2) 30 m, 5.9 Climb a shallow groove up and left for about 10 m and then make a difficult step across the steep right wall to gain ledges. Continue right and up to a single bolt belay at



The Third Butress with Buddha Ridge to the left of the main face and the Aiguille de Rogan left again.

a small ledge below the main groove line close to the left edge of the butress.

- 3) 45 m, 5.9 Follow the groove to just above a short, left-leaning bulge and then move across the slabby left wall and up to ledges. Climb the steep wall above to a break in the roofs, go up through it (crux) and continue up to an easy gully.
- 4) 50 m, 5.2 Climb the gully to a steep headwall and make a long, rising traverse right on easy ground to the right edge of the butress.
- 5) 30 m, 5.2 Follow the loose ridge to the top and add a rock to the small "summit" cairn.

Buddha Ridge 5.5

J. Martin & M. Scott, 1973

This is the long ridge on the left side of the butress. Avoid the lower, steeper section of the ridge by traversing left under it past a gully, then climbing straight up on easy rock to a big ledge system. Follow this right onto a face, and when the ledge ends, slant up right to a pillar. Climb down and right through a gully onto the ridge proper. The ridge is now followed over a series of short, steep walls until the angle eases. The final problem is a narrow, almost horizontal ridge with several small towers. An easy descent can be made by the gully between the second and third buttresses.

The Fourth Buttress

There is no route to the top of the Fourth Buttress as yet. An obvious line on the north face has been climbed as far as a large central ledge but has not been completed. The continuation corner system, which breaks through the upper half of the face, is steep and loose and needs a more determined effort to complete the route.

The Fifth Buttress

The Fifth Buttress has a sharp prow-like ridge similar to Ship's Prow with an interesting, east-facing section on its left side that is split by a number of large corner systems. The ridge was climbed in the early days of Bow Valley exploration.

North Ridge 350 m, 5.9

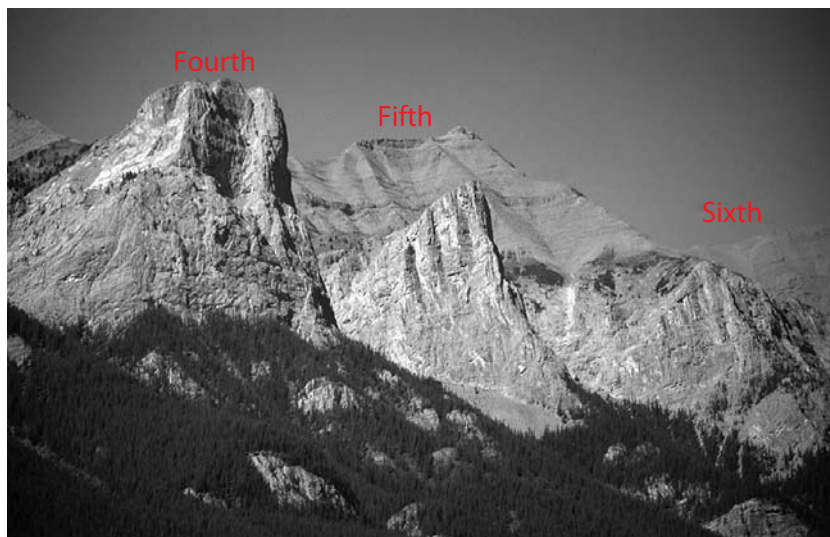
L. MacKay & J. White, 1972

F.F.A.: G. Homer & J. Lauchlan, 1976

The lower section of the climb up the ridge is easy and the crux is a 5.9 jam-crack near the top. This was climbed using aid on the first ascent.

The Sixth and Seventh Buttresses

These two buttresses offer little in the way of climbing possibilities. The Sixth is a wide buttress of low-angle rock and the Seventh is broken by easy ground in the middle into east-facing and west-facing cliffs, neither of which seems quite big enough to justify an exploratory walk.



The Eighth and Ninth Buttresses



The Eighth Buttress at the park boundary.

There are no routes on either of these buttresses although there is some interesting ground. The Eighth is actually two buttresses, one behind the other, both of which are probably Palliser Formation limestone. The lower one has some interesting easier lines that may be loose and the upper one has an extremely steep, west-facing wall. A narrow cutline marking the Banff Park boundary just touches the west side of the lower buttress and helps confirm the buttress count. The Ninth Buttress is fairly broken on its east side but has a relatively small, steep face on the right. This is split by several possible lines but the rock is uncertain and it is a long walk up to the base.

The Tenth (Destroyer) Buttress

Destroyer Buttress is a prominent prow-shaped buttress that stands alone in a huge basin across from Carrot Creek. It is number 10 in the count from Canmore and is about 2 km west of the park boundary. The sharp crest of the buttress has been climbed.

Approach

From the Riverside Trail (about 30 minutes east of the Banff golf course), hike up the huge avalanche gully that leads up into the basin west of the buttress. Follow the left-hand branch of the gully up toward the left side of the prow using good game trails on the right (west) bank. Angle up right to reach the base of the climb in about one hour from the Riverside Trail.

Descent

From the top of the buttress, walk through the trees and descend via the basin on the left (east) side.

The Destroyer 250 m, 5.9

T. Auger & D. Congdon, July 1987

The climb follows the crest of the buttress and is well situated with good rock in the upper section. At present, pitons are required for belays.

- 1-3) Easy climbing up the arete leads to a sloping ledge at about one-third height. Belay where the ridge steepens.
- 4) 35 m, 5.7 Climb up a short distance on shattered rock and then step right over an intimidating drop. Continue more or less straight up on face holds to a line of thin ledges.
- 5) 40 m, 5.8 Follow small corners trending up and right toward the base of a prominent pillar. Belay about 5 m below the start of a left-facing corner.
- 6) 35 m, 5.9 Climb the steep corner, bridging off cracks, to the top of the pillar.
- 7) 5.7 Go up to a large bay near the top of the face.
- 8) 5.9 Follow a steep ramp rightward to avoid an overhang. When a slab is reached, move right for a few metres then climb straight up a clean, strenuous crack (5.9) for about 6 m to ledges. Scramble up to the top.

The top is a beautiful heather meadow and larch forest that is isolated like an island by the surrounding huge scree basins and cliffs.



Cooper Hawk Buttress

West of Destroyer Buttress the cliff bands formed by the Palliser Formation continue almost without a break until they dip down to ground level near the east end of the Banff golf course. Some sections could be referred to as individual buttresses, but they are much less distinct than at the Canmore end. Cooper Hawk Buttress lies on the opposite side of a large, open basin west of Destroyer Buttress, at the beginning of the remaining section of cliffs. The climb described below is on the east-facing portion of the buttress that can be seen from Canmore on the skyline of Mount Rundle.

Approach

The climb was originally done in classic style using a canoe to approach from Banff and then finishing downstream in Canmore. The Riverside Trail now provides a more practical means of approach and allows the main avalanche gully east of the cliff to be reached quite quickly from Banff. Either hike up the gully itself to reach the base of the cliff near its right side or scramble up the forested ridge on the right.

Descent

Go down wide gullies on the left side of the buttress.

Cooper Hawk Buttress 320 m, 5.9/5.10d

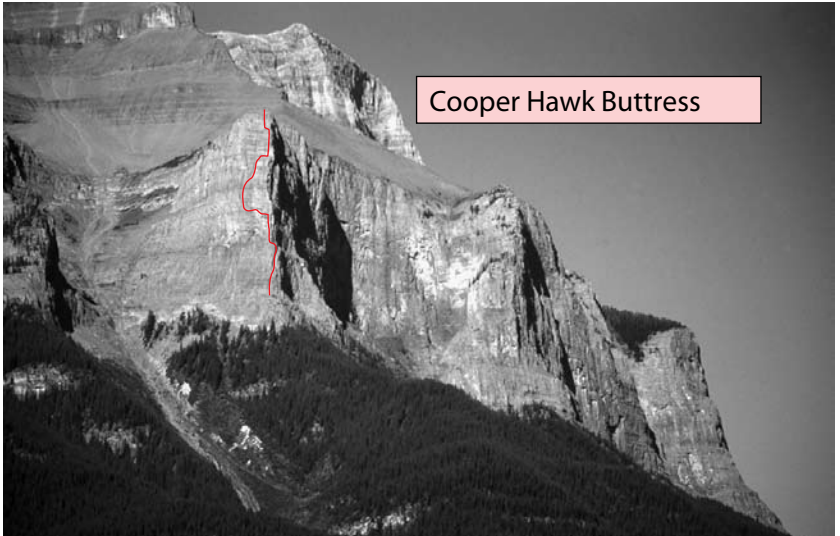
M. Whalen & C. Austrom, 1979

T. Auger & C. White, July 1986

The climb goes up the sloping east face of the buttress just left of the edge and has had two independent first ascents that followed slightly different lines. The route taken on the later ascent is described first as the "regular" route as it follows an easier line and the climbing is more consistent. The true first ascent is included as an alternative. The lower half of the regular route is reported to have interesting climbing particularly on the traverse pitch below the long roof. Higher up the climbing is much easier but enjoyable and on good rock. Take a small selection of pitons.

Start to the right of a large tree and scramble up easy ground to large ledges at the base of a corner system, just before the edge of the buttress.

- 1-2) 60 m Climb the chimney/crack (5.7) and then the corner above (5.8) to a large ledge system that extends leftward. Belay on the left below a crack system that leads up to the right-hand side of large, overlapping roofs. At this point the two climbs diverge.
- 3) A short pitch of good face and crack climbing leads to the foot of a corner.
- 4) Make steep moves at the start of the pitch and then follow corners to the first roof. Move over this to a semi-hanging stance on the edge of a 50 degree slab.
- 5) Traverse left across the slab just above the lip of the roof for about 8 m (fixed piton). Climb a short crack and make a few thin friction moves (5.9) to cracks at the base of the headwall. Go left past two fixed pitons and then diagonally down to a ledge. Belay on higher ledges to protect the second.
- 6) Moderate face and crack climbing leads to a good ledge.
- 7) 5.6 Move right for a few metres and climb a clean corner to a belay with good cracks (long



Cooper Hawk Buttress and the western cliffs.

pitch).

- 8) Move up to a grassy platform a short distance above and go right along this to the edge of the buttress.
- 9) Good face climbing leads up to an obvious ledge above.
- 10) Continue on good rock near the edge for a few metres and then move left and follow moderate cracks to the top of the buttress.

Variation (original line)

Note The exact line taken by the variation through the overhangs is uncertain and the point shown on the top where the two lines cross is approximate.

- 3) 45 m Traverse left along the ledge system to a corner below a large roof.
- 4) 30 m, 5.9 Climb the corner and then go diagonally right across the face to a hanging belay at the right end of the roof. Note: This roof is probably the one that pitch 5 of the regular route traverses beneath, but it may be lower down.
- 5) 30 m, 5.10d Move right around the roof and climb a crack and then a small pillar (5.10a). Instead of moving right into a big corner system, step left making a difficult series of moves up a short face to a ledge (5.10d).
- 6) 50 m, 5.7 Move up, then left to gain the "clean corner" on pitch 7 of the regular route.

Continue up the regular route to the top.

