

Takakkaw Falls Area:

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Banff Rock

Takakkaw Falls is one of the most impressive waterfalls in the Canadian Rockies with an overall height of 380 m. There are a number of interesting climbs on the large cliff band left of the falls and although the area is not strictly in Banff Park, it is only a short distance west of Lake Louise and definitely worthy of inclusion. The most notable climb is the classic *Takakkaw Falls Route* which follows a line immediately left of the falls. There are three additional climbs on the wall left of this route, two of which are relatively modern and appear to be of good quality.

The geology of the cliff is interesting and there are three distinct layers of rock, all of which belong to the Waterfowl Formation – see *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*. The lower part is dolomite which often gives good climbing, as mentioned in the Castle Mountain chapter. Above that is a 30 m band of shale which the falls have eroded to form a large “rooster tail” and then an upper layer of limestone where the cave passage lies.

The first two climbs are located on an area of good grey rock immediately left of the start of the *Takakkaw Falls Route* and end at about half height. They are predominantly gear routes with some bolts, and have chained stations for rappel. Two 50 m ropes are required and a good assortment of gear.

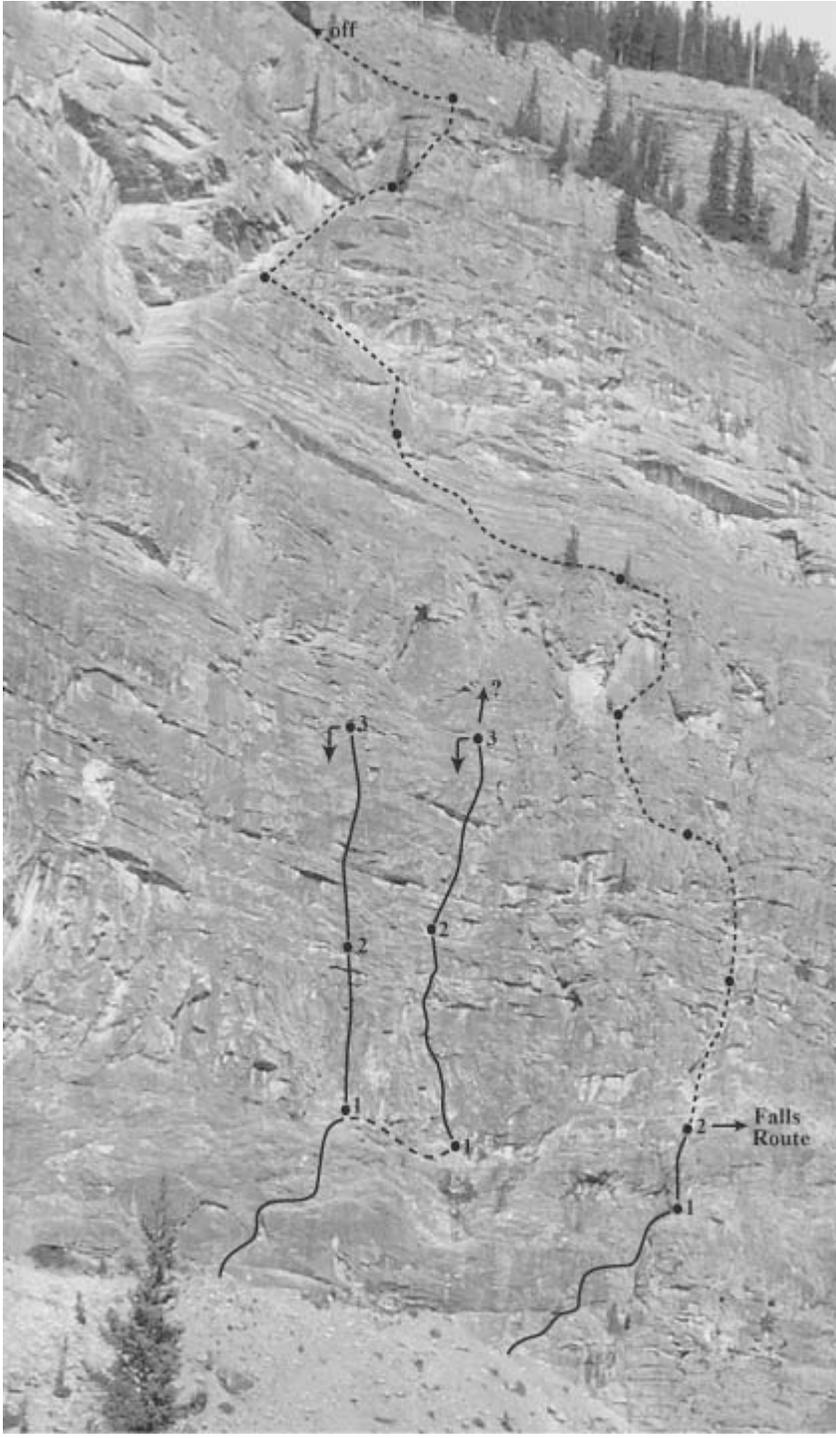
Suspended in Gaffa 125 m, 5.9+

Karl Krause, 1993

Topo.

Start about 35 m left of where the scree slope reaches a high point and levels off (see *Takakkaw Falls Route* approach), at a right-slanting weakness with a short, left-facing corner about 5 m up the cliff.

- 1. 50 m, 5.4.** Scramble up to the corner and climb it to ledges on the right. Move right and climb the broken wall past 3 bolts to a long ledge system and a chained station below a groove leading up to a prominent slot capped by a chockstone.
- 2. 25 m, 5.8.** Climb the right-hand crack with a small bush and go up into the slot. Move left around the chockstone and climb through a break in the overhang above to a chained station.
- 3. 50 m, 5.9+.** Move up to a ledge and then climb the wall above past 3 bolts to a right-facing break in a long line of overhangs. Climb over the overhang and follow the corner above to where it ends. Continue directly up the wall past more bolts to a final chained station below a yellow roof.



Sunburst and Snowblind 165 m, 5.9+

Karl Krause, 1993

Topo.

This route starts as for *Suspended in Gaffa* and climbs a parallel line about 20 m to the right. Currently, it ends at about half height but an unfinished, bolted pitch continues up towards the shale band that overlies the good, dolomite rock.

1. 50 m, 5.4. Climb the first pitch of *Suspended in Gaffa* to the chained station on the ledge system.

2. 20 m, 4th. Scramble across right and down slightly following ledges to a chained station below and right of a series of discontinuous, right-facing corners that leads a long way up the wall.

3. 50 m, 5.9+. Move left and follow bolts up shallow corners into an overhung bay. Climb a steep crack out of the bay to a bolt, move up and right to a ledge (old rope), and continue past two more bolts to a ledge above a short, left-facing corner. Climb the wall above past three bolts trending left to a chained station by a white scar on a ledge.

4. 45 m, 5.9+. Move up and right to a prominent, right-facing corner with a bolt. Climb the corner past two more bolts and continue up to a right-facing corner breaking through a long band of overhangs. Climb the overhang and the corner above (bolt) to a chained station on the left where the corner ends. There are bolts in place above but the pitch is unfinished.

High and Dry 380 m, 5.7

First ascent unknown.

The climb starts as for the *Takakkaw Falls Route* but goes directly up the wall to the shale band and then makes a long traverse left to exit up a very prominent right-facing dihedral. Little information is available and the line marked on the photograph is approximate where the route traverses left across the shale band and up into the exit corner.

1 & 2. 55 m, 5.4. Climb the first two pitches of *Takakkaw Falls Route* to the station at the start of the traverse.

3 - 6. 150 m. Continue directly up the broken corner system and move out left higher up into a prominent arch. Climb out of this on the right and go up to two trees on a long ledge system at the start of the shale band.

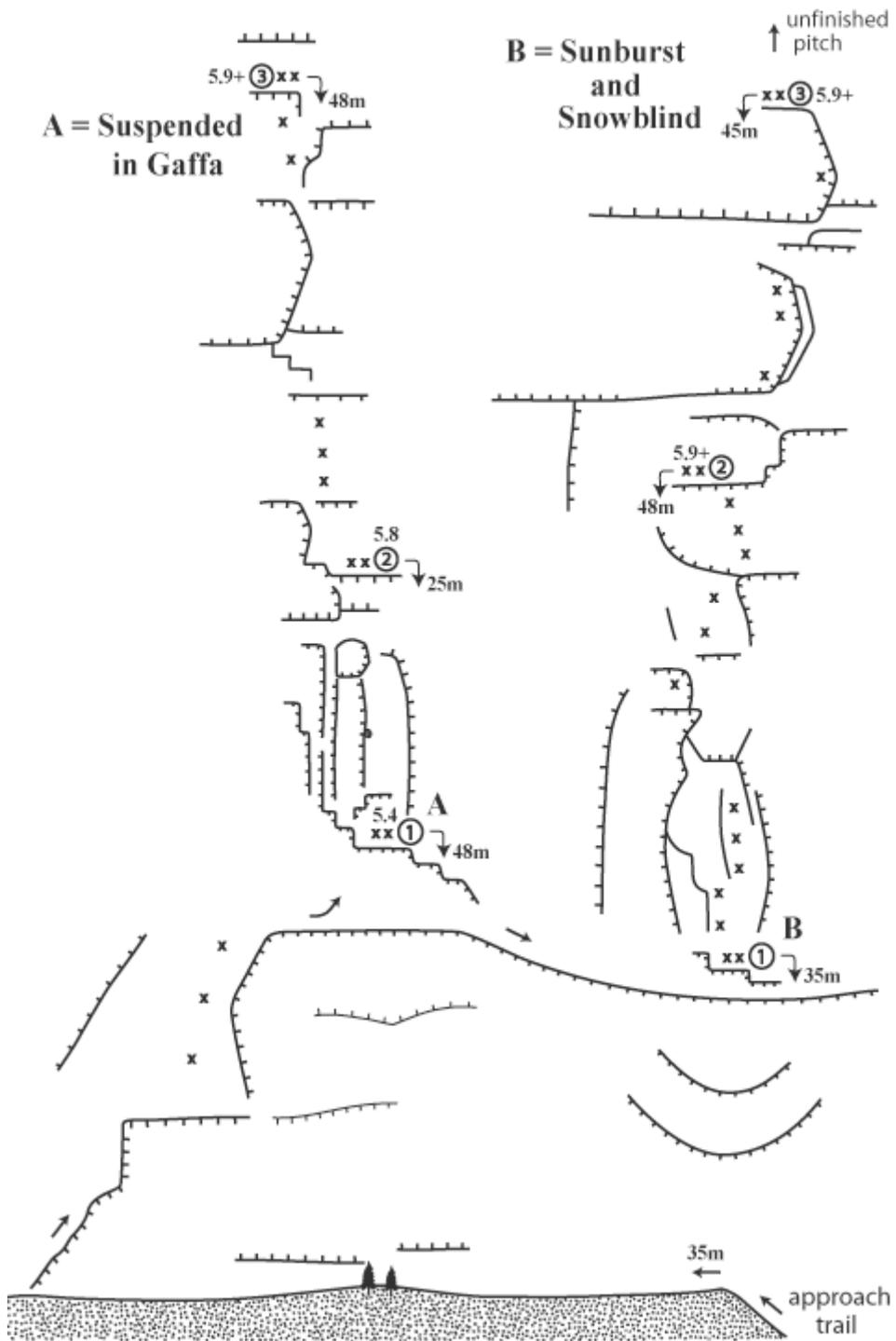
7. 45 m. From the left-hand tree, move up and then left across the shale band to solid rock near a small overhang.

8. 50 m, 5.7. Climb up towards a long line of overhangs and traverse left beneath them to gain the upper corner. (There may be an easier line left of the one marked on the photograph.)

9 & 10. 80 m. Climb the right wall of the corner to a tree belay. Continue up to a big ledge with trees a short distance below the top.

Traverse easily up and left below a rotten cliff band to reach the top.

Descent: The most obvious but long descent is to the left where an open treed slope near the edge of the cliff leads down to the river. Either wade/swim across the river or walk back along the bank to the bridge. Alternatively, traverse right across the top of the cliff to a rappel tree with old slings directly above the cave entrance on *Takakkaw Falls Route*. Descend by rappel as for that route (first rappel 50 m to cave entrance).



Takakkaw Falls Route 450 m, 5.6

Bernie Schiesser and Sid Marty, June 1966

Topo.

This truly unique climb has 350 m of moderate rock climbing and over 100 m of cave passage positioned next to one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the Canadian Rockies. The climbing is not sustained but the cave passage and location of the climb make it highly recommended. Some gear is required but the belays are all bolted and the climb is well set up for rappel.

An interesting account of the first ascent of the climb and the chance discovery of the cave passage are given in Sid Marty's book *Men for the Mountains*, p - ??

The climb starts well left of the waterfall and traverses across to a corner system on the left side of a large, indistinct pinnacle. The top of the pinnacle is level with the large "rooster tail" in the waterfall at about two thirds height. The climb continues up and slightly left to a hidden cave passage that begins below a band of overhangs and goes horizontally rightwards for some 100 m to the very top of the waterfall. The passage is about 1 m high and remarkably uniform and exits into a large basin where the waterfall disappears over the edge of the cliff. Most parties end the climb at this point but it may be continued for another pitch to the top of the cliff.

Gear: A small selection of gear (to 3 in) is required for pitches 5, 6 and 7, the remaining pitches are bolted. Two 50 m ropes are recommended for rappel although one 60 m rope will suffice. A headlight is useful for the cave passage which is very dark and quite sporting without one.

Approach: From the parking area follow the paved trail up towards the falls and then continue up to the base of the cliff. Climb steeply up and left following the base of the cliff to where the scree slope reaches a high point and then levels out, about 200 m left of the falls. Start about 5 m before the high point is reached, at broken ledges on the right.

- 1. 40 m, 5.4.** Scramble up and right to a ledge with a bolt on the wall above, about 7 m left of a large, left-facing corner. Climb up past a second bolt and then move right past a third bolt and a fixed piton into the corner. Climb up and then right out of the corner on a ramp to reach easy ground and a bolted station a short distance above.
- 2. 15 m, 5.4.** Climb the cracked wall above on good holds past two bolts to a second bolted station at the start of a long, narrow ledge system.
- 3. 20 m, 4th.** Walk right along the ledge (exposed) past a bolt and around an arête to a bolted station.
- 4. 80 m, 4th.** Continue traversing right and then drop down slightly into a scree bowl and move across to the base of a slabby wall, directly below the left side of the large pinnacle.
- 5. 40 m, 5.5.** Climb an easy, left-facing crack to a ledge (bolt), traverse right, and then follow cracks up and slightly right to a two-bolt, rappel station below an overhang at the start of the big, left-facing corner system on the left side of the pinnacle.
- 4 & 5 alt. 110 m, 5.4.** Pitch 5 is often wet early in the season due to windblown spray from the falls. It may be avoided by traversing right on pitch 4 to where the "trail" drops down into the scree bowl and then scrambling up and right on broken ground at first (cam and nut belay) and then easy, scree-covered slabs to a sloping ledge system that leads right past bolts to the station at the top of pitch 5.
- 6. 35 m, 5.6.** Make an awkward move up into the corner and continue up past a fixed piton to a station in an alcove.

7. 40 m, 5.5. Follow the corner above to a ledge on the left with a fixed, rappel station. Climb easily up and right to a station at the top of the pinnacle level with, and in full view of the huge “rooster tail” in the falls.

8. 30 m, 5.6. The next pitch is very atmospheric with great views of the falls and intimidating sound effects. Climb the wall above past three bolts to lower angle rock that leads up to a station below the shale band.

9. 25 m, 5.2. Climb easily through the shale band (no protection).

10. 25 m, 5.5. This pitch is not well protected and is sometimes wet due to seepage from the cave. Move up onto a small ledge on the left. Continue up and then left into a shallow groove that leads up to a station in a deep slot below the mouth of the cave.

11. 100 m. No rope is necessary beyond this point unless the climb is to be continued to the top of the cliff. Craw along the cave passage into the realm of complete darkness and the distant thunder of the falls. After a tight section, a circle of daylight appears ahead and the sound of the falls grows louder. Finally, the cave emerges into a large basin where the stream rushes by towards the edge of the falls and the top of the cliff is visible a short distance above. Either return from here or climb one more pitch to the top of the cliff.

12. 30 m, 5.6 (optional). Scramble up and right to a single bolt belay below a short exit groove. Climb the groove and continue easily to broken ground at the top.

Descent: Most parties reverse the cave passage and then rappel the route. One 60 m rope is sufficient but two allow a faster descent. There are a number of intermediate stations – see topo. To descend from the top of the cliff, either make the long walk off left (see *High and Dry*) or rappel from a tree with slings to the rappel station at the start of the cave passage (two ropes required).

