

North ridge *** 5.10a, 500m Grotto mountain, Bow Valley, Alberta

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The "north ridge" route on Grotto mountain ascends the eye-catching line up the northwest ridge of the mountain that can be seen from the western end of Canmore. The stepped nature of the ridge offers frequent rests on large ledges between sections of fun and varied climbing on generally great rock by Rockies standards. The exposure and views on the ridge are dramatic, making this one of the finest ridge climbs around Canmore and a highly recommended route.

Note : Despite its moderate grade, this adventurous route is a serious undertaking totaling 1100m of elevation gain and 500m of technical climbing, mainly on mid fifth class terrain, and featuring a few sizable runouts. As of July 2025, the only fixed gear found on the route are two old pins, making for difficult retreat high up the ridge. It should only be attempted by experienced Rockies climbers.

Parking: Cougar Creek/Mount Lady MacDonald Trailhead

Approach: Follow Cougar Creek for approximately 1h to reach a large drainage below the northwest ridge of Grotto mountain (51.10533,-115.30023). Follow a goat trail up the left side of the drainage to a large headwall. Bushwack in the forest to bypass the headwall by its left flank. Once above the headwall, continue bushwacking straight up to the base of the route (51.10157,-115.29090).

Pitch break down:

- P1 (5.6, 50m): Scramble up the left side of the ridge for 20m to reach the obvious left facing corner higher up. Ascend the corner on excellent rock and continue climbing straight up to the base of a loose roof. Build a gear anchor below and right of the roof.
- P2 (5.10a, 60m): From the belay station, step right around the corner and climb a short slab section on solid rock. Walk straight up on loose

rock to gain a steep crack that is climbed to a large scree plateau. Note: the crack is surrounded by a few sizable loose blocks.

- P3 (5.8, 45m): The rock on this pitch is about as good as chert can get. Start about 20m left of the ridge line. Scramble up to gain the dirty looking open book just right of a large loose-looking left facing corner. Climb this to its top before angling up and right to gain another obvious corner/crack. Climb this to a large ledge above. Traverse slightly right to gain yet another crack system. Either belay here (intermediate gear anchor) or follow the crack to its top before traversing right again to bypass a final section of overhanging choss. Sling a large boulder to belay.
- P4 (5.10a, 35m): Walk up the ridge line to reach the base of a small step of compact yellow rock. This pitch starts about 5 meters right of the ridge line, at the base of a steep left facing corner. Climb up the face to reach the left facing corner, which is climbed to top of the pitch. Sling a large boulder to belay. Note: the corner features a short hard to protect section of physical/awkward climbing.
- P5 (5.10a, 50m): Walk up the ridge line to reach a large left trending ramp. Scramble up the ramp to its left end. The belayer should anchor him/herself there. Place a piece before stepping left into the void and making a first hard move (crux) to gain the obvious crack system around the corner. Enjoy 40 meters of amazing climbing on solid rock before reaching another scree-covered plateau. Sling a large boulder to belay.
- P6 (5.9+, 60m): Another amazing - yet committing - pitch. Climb delicately up the face just left of the ridge crest to gain a crack and a piton. Continue up past the piton before stepping right around the ridge crest to gain a small ledge. Tackle a short section of face climbing and a right leaning overhanging crack to gain easier ground. Sling a large boulder to belay.
- P7 (5.5, 70m): Climb loose blocks left of the ridge line for about 30m to easier ground. Walk another 40m to belay off a large boulder.
- P8 (5.10a, 60m): Walk toward the next steep rock step. This pitch starts one meter right of the ridge crest. Make a few moves up steep

chose before traversing left around the ridge crest to gain a system of broken corners. Climb this to a small ledge before moving right and making a committing move back left up a slightly overhanging crack (crux). Continue up corner systems on good rock to easier ground and another scree-covered plateau. Sling a large boulder to belay.

- P9 (5.7, 30m): Scramble up the ridge for about 100 meters (one 5.2 move along the way) and start belaying on the left side of the ridge crest, just below the final rock step of the ridge. Delicately climb the exposed face to gain a crack 10 meters off the deck. Place a piece before moving up the loose looking exit. Walk another 15m to belay off a large boulder.

Gear: Double rack from .2" to 3". A small selection of nuts and a 4" piece might be useful. 240 cm slings for belays. Double 70m ropes.

Descent: From the top of the route, hike south for a hundred meters or so to meet with the hikers trail up Grotto mountain. Follow the trail back to the trailhead.

Route overlay



-  Approach
-  Climb
-  Crux