

A Guide to

# Unicorn Canyon

Peter Nelson, Craig Doram



Zak McGurk cruising the second ascent of Money Jane

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Getting There .....	2
Climbing Area Descriptions.....	5
Pot of Gold .....	5
Sunshine Castle .....	6
Sunshine Castle - Left.....	6
Sunshine Castle - Right.....	9
The Moat.....	12
Rainbow Wonderland .....	13
Rainbow Wonderland - Left .....	13
Rainbow Wonderland - Right.....	15

## Introduction

Unicorn Canyon is located just outside the edge of Kananaskis, between Barrier Lake and Nakiska Ski Resort/Kananaskis Village. It is the canyon on the SW side of Mt. Lorette, and is the canyon Lorette Creek flows down. There are two main areas, “Sunshine Castle”, and “Rainbow Wonderland”. There are also two smaller areas containing a handful of routes, “Pot of Gold”, and “The Moat”. The areas are listed in the order you will approach them as you hike in. Please be aware this is a new climbing area in the Canadian Rockies. As such, there will be loose rock, as there has not been much traffic on the routes. Bring a helmet and exercise a little more caution than you would otherwise. Having said that, the routes have been cleaned, and most of the rock is quite good.

**NOTE: As this area is still under development we ask that you respect the closed projects and do not climb them. Bolt numbers in the descriptions below includes 2 for anchors.**

## Getting There

Take highway 40 south towards Nakiska Ski Resort. Park on the right-hand (west) shoulder of the highway **1km after the turnoff for Lorette ponds** (after Barrier Lake). A faint trail heads towards the river between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> last white road pylons. Once you hit the river, you have a couple options. The recommended way is to follow the water break upstream (south) for about 50m to stay in the

shallowest water (see figure 1). You will come to a small clearing just above the bank where you can switch shoes. The trail heads into the trees from here. **Bring an extra pair of shoes to wear across the river.** Hip waiters are nice, but not required if your tough. The water is usually about knee height.

The other option **if the river is low enough** is to cross straight across the river to the left side of the steep slope. There is a steep animal trail that will get you on top of the bank above the river. You will meet the main trail at the top of the slope. Follow the trail heading right (N). This option is not suggested unless its late summer as the river can be too high.

Once you cross the river, there is a mediocre trail which you should be able to follow. It trends along the top edge of the steep slope on the west side of the river. After about 100m the trail will take a 90 degree turn left (west) and head towards Mount Lorette. You will cross a large power line right-of-way. The trail continues to the right side of a small memorial (a small cross placed for a guy who died on Mt. Lorette) on the opposite (N) side. After about 10 more minutes of easy hiking you hit the creek/mouth of Unicorn Canyon. The trail gets harder to follow, as it is mostly on river rock. The trail heads up the canyon crossing the stream a couple times. You will approach the cliffs in the order described below. The total approach takes about 40 minutes, including the river crossing/shoe switch.



Figure 1: Parking, River Crossing and Start of Trail

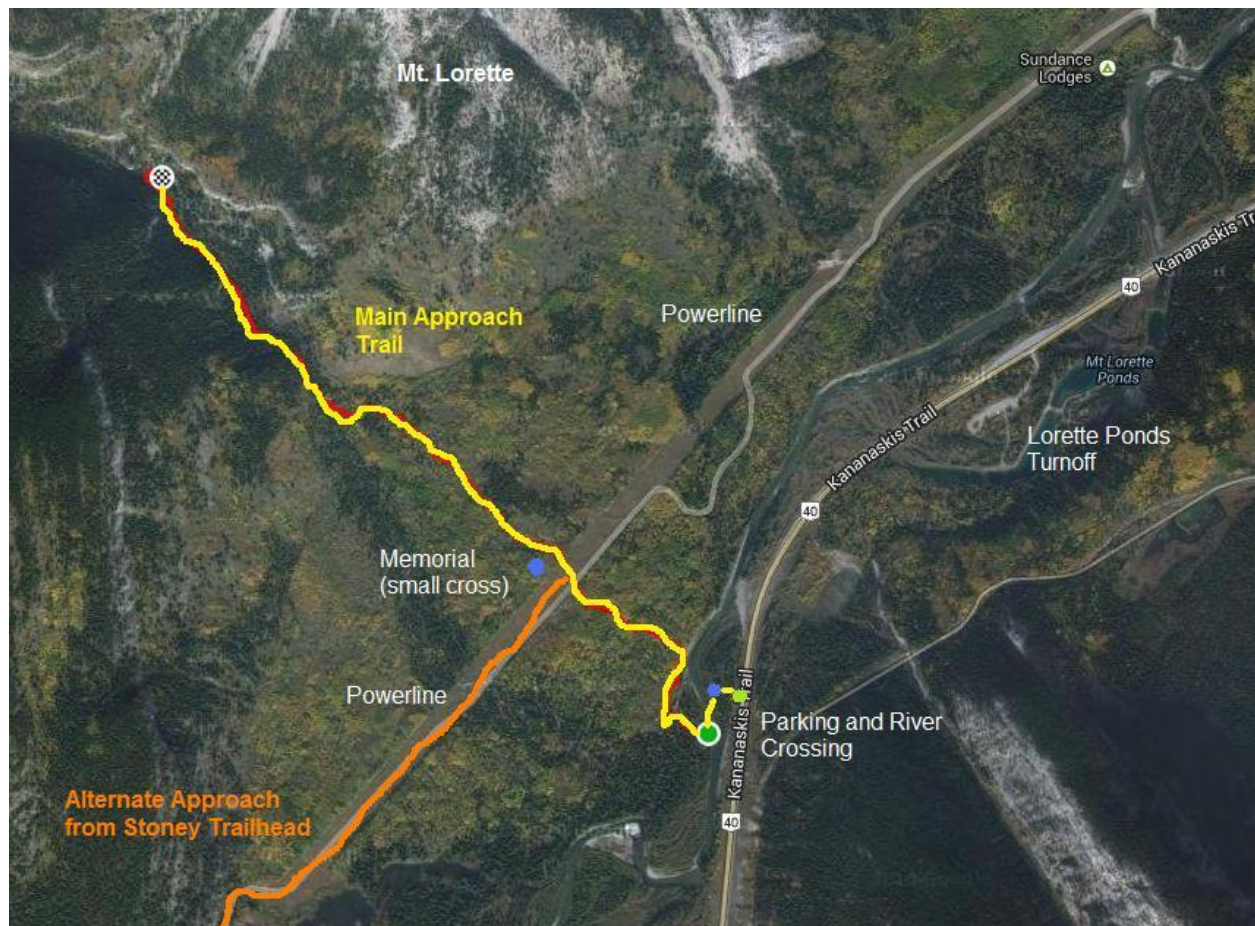


Figure 2: Trail to Unicorn Canyon

Another approach option to avoid the river crossing is to drive past the parking, and turn right at the Nakiska ski hill/Kananaskis Village turnoff (Mt. Allan Dr). Drive towards Nakiska and turn right at the Stoney Trailhead sign. Park at the Stoney Trailhead parking. Hike/bike along the power line trail approximately 4 km, until you hit where the main Unicorn trail crosses the power line (the memorial will be on the left). Note: at approximately 3.8 km, you will cross a stream with lots of gravel/rock washout. The trailhead/memorial heading into Unicorn will be on your left approximately 200m past the washout (after you pass the third double power pole). This approach adds about 35 minutes of hiking along the power line, so the total approach will be about 1 hr. However, you do not have to cross the river, and it is very easy hiking. You can also ride a bike along the power line which would cut the time down to 10-15 minutes.

## Climbing Area Descriptions

The figure below shows the approximate locations of the different areas, once the trail drops into the creek/canyon.

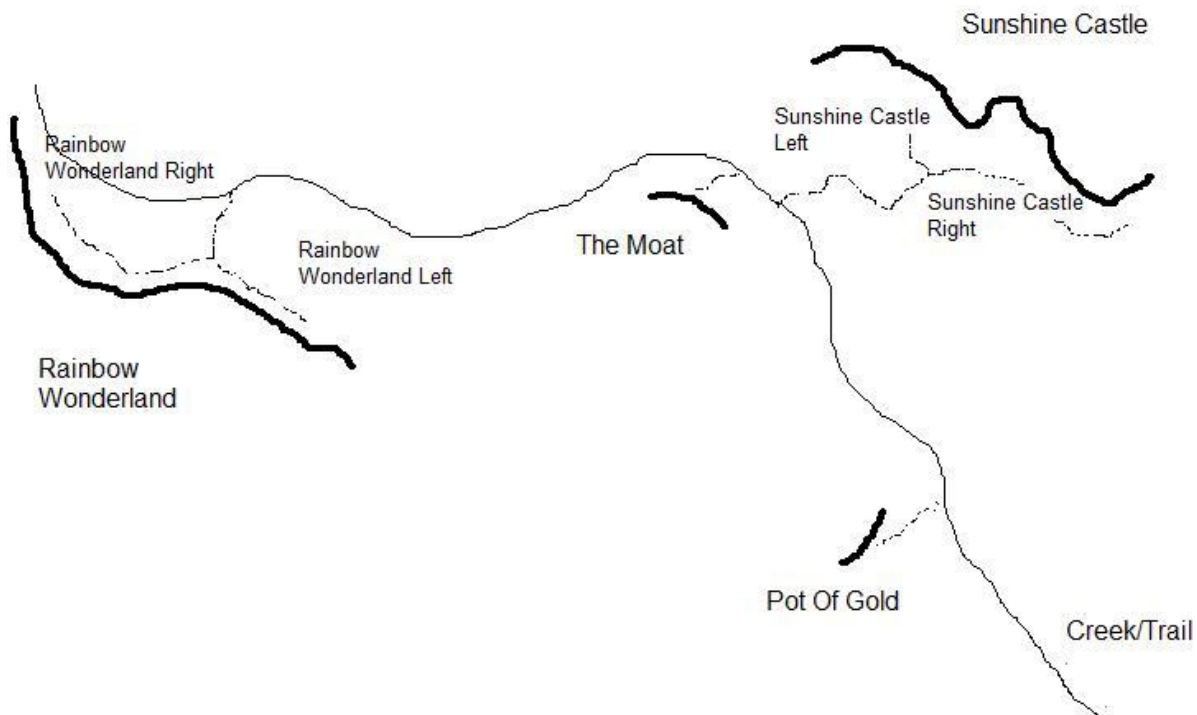


Figure 3: Area Locations

### Pot of Gold

This is the first wall on the left (west) side of the creek as you hike into the canyon. It is identifiable by its yellow-orange color rock. It is approximately 20m off the main trail, up some large scree. There is currently one route on the wall. Although the route has been cleaned, there will still be some loose rock.

1. **Manitoba Man Thong**      **5.11c**      **20m**      **10 bolts**

(Prep: M. Fraser, F.A: C. Doram 2015)

Fun face climbing with a bouldery crux section in the middle at the arête.

## Sunshine Castle

About 10 minutes from the mouth of the canyon, on the Mt. Lorette side (right/east side as you hike in). It is the imposing steep wall that can be seen from the canyon bottom, about 5 minutes after “Pot of Gold” (Look up and right). This wall gets sun all year round. It can be climbed on nice sunny days in winter. Take a right where the trail comes out of the trees, and cross the creek. Follow a steep trail up scree to a junction for the left and right side of “Sunshine Castle”. Routes are listed from left to right.

### Sunshine Castle - Left

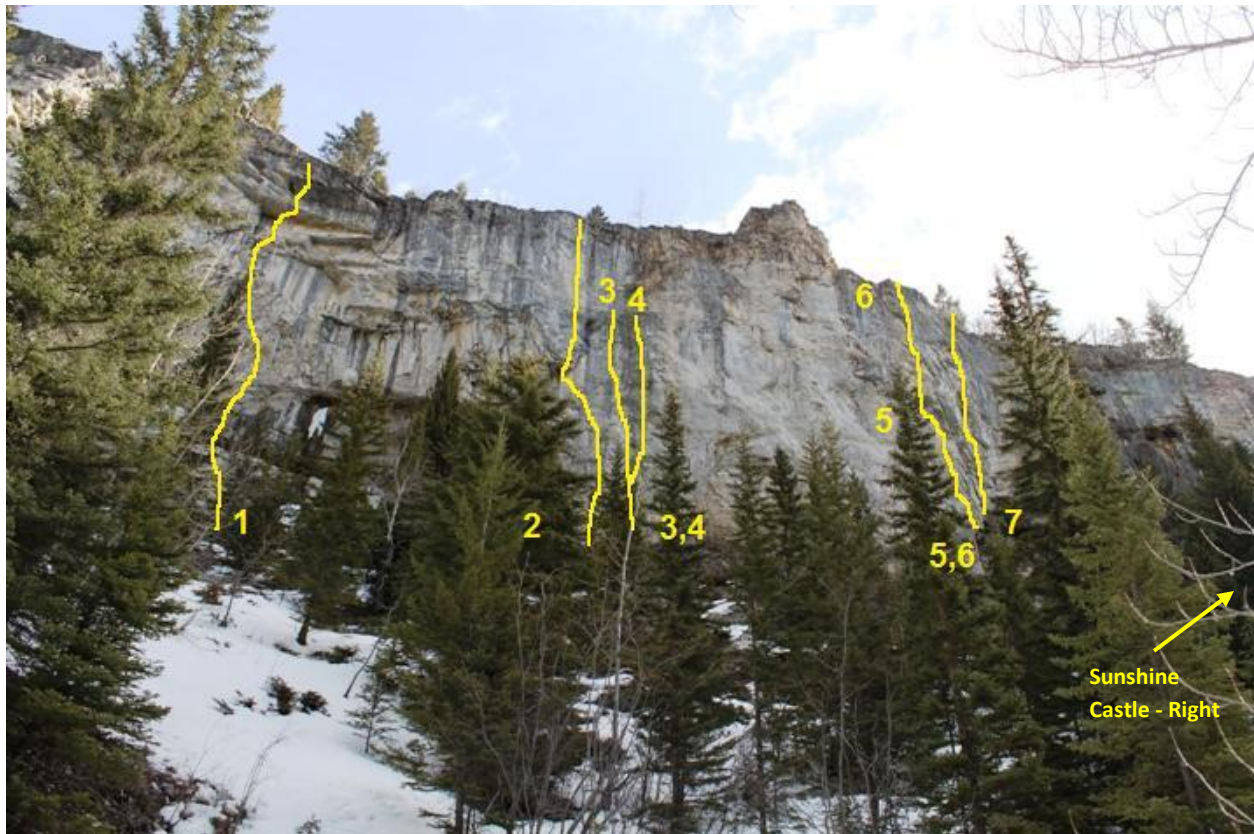


Figure 4: Sunshine Castle - Left

#### 1. Closed Project

(Prep: C. Doram)

This is the route that goes right up the center of the main overhanging Amphitheatre. Tops out through two large roofs. **Closed Project.** Not finished being bolted or cleaned



**5. Dandelion Darling Reins      5.12d      15m      9 bolts**

*(Prep: A. Quiring, FA: Evan Hau 2015)*

Climbs the yellow rock to anchors below the large triangle roof. Be prepared to whip.

**6. Open Project (Extension to 5)      5.13+?      30m      15 bolts**

*(Prep: A. Quiring)*

Climbs through the triangle roof above Dandelion Darling Reins and continues up the grey streak to the top.

**7. Open Project      5.13?      30m      15 bolts**

*(Prep: P. Nelson)*

Climb through a steep start to two permanent chain draws. Continue up overlapping layers to a steep roof near the top.



Figure 6: Sunshine Castle - Left



## Sunshine Castle - Right

These routes are accessed by continuing up the scree slope from the junction and then trending right passed the large seeping black cave. Routes are listed left to right.

### 8. The Long Way 5.13a 13m 9 bolts

*(Prep: C. Doram, FA: M. Stirling 2014)*

Start on two small crimps on the roof of the cave. A boulder problem leads to easier climbing on bigger holds. Finishes with a few difficult face moves. Stick clip the first bolt.

### 9. Mamma's Wool Sweater 5.12a 13m 8 bolts

*(Prep: C. Doram, FA: C. Doram 2014)*

A handful of difficult moves off the ground lead to easy fun 5.10 climbing up the corner to the chains. It is preferred if you climb this route in your Mom's Italian wool sweater circa 1980...



Figure 7: Sunshine Castle – Right

**10. Open Project**                      **5.13?**                      **16m**    **11 bolts**

*(Prep: P. Nelson)*

The left trending line of blank grey rock. Tough boulder crux leads to technical face climbing.

**11. Open Project**                      **5.13?**                      **16m**    **11 bolts**

*(Prep: P. Nelson)*

The vertical line of blank grey rock. Shares the same boulder crux as number 10 above, but continues straight up to the chains.

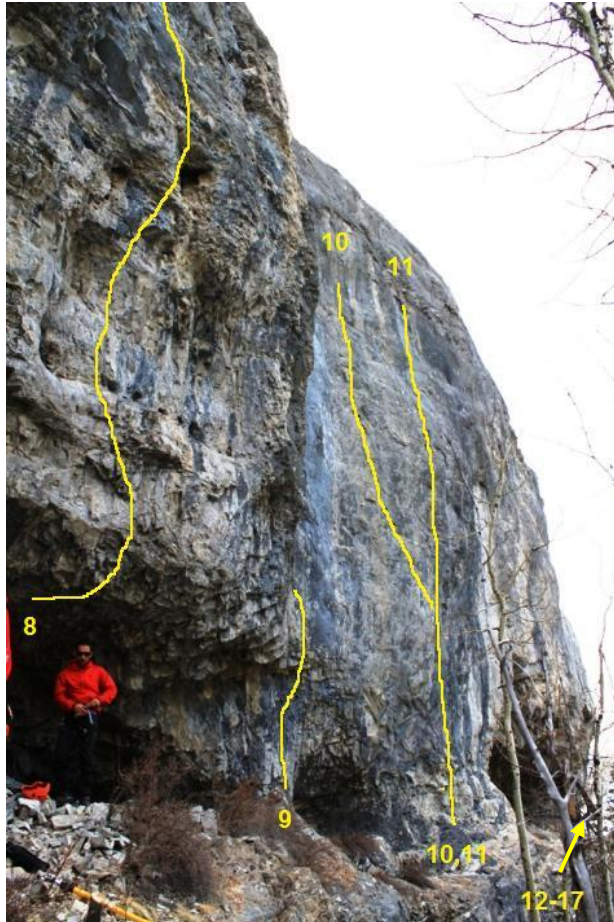


Figure 8: Sunshine Castle - Right (Note: 9 goes into a corner out of view)

**12. Murphy's Law**                      **5.11b/c**                      **15m**    **10 bolts**

*(Prep: C. Doram, FA: C. Doram 2013)*

At the second bolt head straight left to the arête on pumpy moves. 10m of easier technical climbing lead to the anchors. Trend right after the last bulge. Don't worry, the anchors are up there.

**13. Booty Booty Dance Club**                      **5.11b**                      **15m**    **10 bolts**

*(Prep: C. Doram, FA: C. Doram 2015)*

Easier ramp climbing leads to a steep bulge. A few difficult moves on good holds lead to an interesting finish.

**14. Princess Sparkles**                      **5.11a/b**                      **15m**    **9 bolts**

*(Prep: C. Doram, FA: C. Doram 2014)*

Follow the ramp trending right. A hard slab move at the bulge guards the easier climbing to the top.

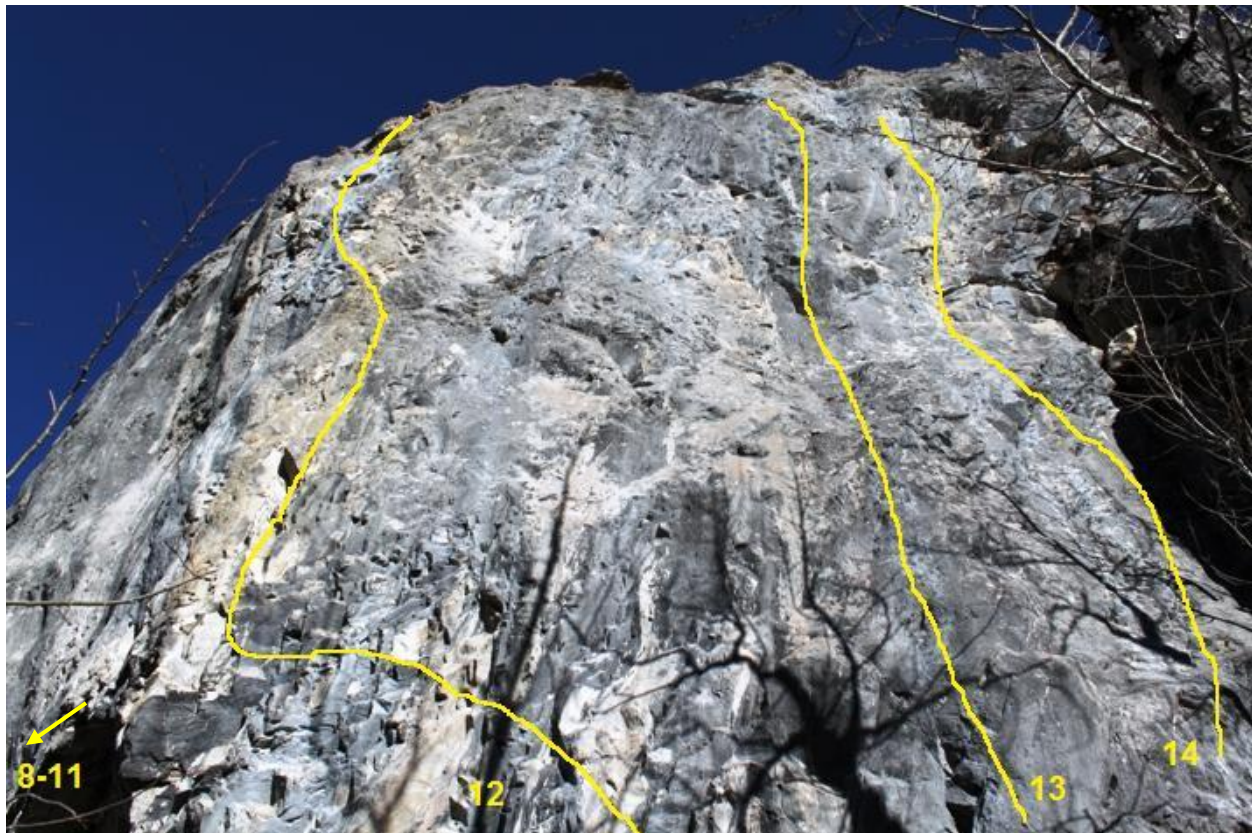


Figure 9: Sunshine Castle - Right

The following three routes are farther right around the corner. They are listed in order of appearance left to right.

**15. Cherry Popped**                      **5.10c**                      **12m**    **7 bolts**

*(Prep: M. Taylor, FA: M. Taylor 2015)*

Follow the obvious shallow corner to the visible chains. Tougher than it looks.

**16. Open Project**                      **5.13?**                      **10m**    **6 bolts**

*(Prep: J. Robbins)*

Hard technical climbing up the blank vertical face. Last couple moves will punch you in the face.

**17. Yoga Booty Smack Crack**        **5.9**                      **12m**    **Trad**

*(FA: J. Robbins 2013)*

The crack in the left facing corner directly right of #16. This route has never been cleaned and only climbed once to access the top of the cliff. There is one bolt for an anchor. Not recommended.

## The Moat

This is the small cliff at the left edge of the creek. Instead of heading to Sunshine Castle, turn left and walk about 50m. All routes were bolted by Mark Fraser. Routes are listed from left to right.

**1. Open Project**                      **5.11+?**                      **8m?**    **7 bolts?**

*(Prep: M. Fraser)*

**2. Open Project**                      **5.11+?**                      **8m?**    **7 bolts?**

*(Prep: M. Fraser)*

**3. Open Project**                      **5.11+?**                      **8m?**    **7 bolts?**

*(Prep: M. Fraser)*

**4. Open Project**                      **5.11+?**                      **8m?**    **7 bolts?**

*(Prep: M. Fraser)*

**5. Ode to Wolf**                      **5.10d**                      **8m**    **7 bolts**

*(Prep: M. Fraser, FA: M. Fraser 2013)*

## Rainbow Wonderland

This crag is located farther down the canyon on the SW (left) side of the creek. Continue past “Sunshine Castle” and “The Moat” for about 10 more minutes. Walk through the misty moss patch to reach the hard to see cliff. Routes are left to right.

### Rainbow Wonderland - Left

**1. Sneak-A-Thong                      5.12d                      30m    16 bolts**

*(Prep: P. Nelson, FA: C. Doram 2013)*

A boulder start with large pumpy moves through the roof. This leads to slightly overhanging sustained climbing to the anchors. Use a large sling on the third draw under the roof. Back clean the first two draws.

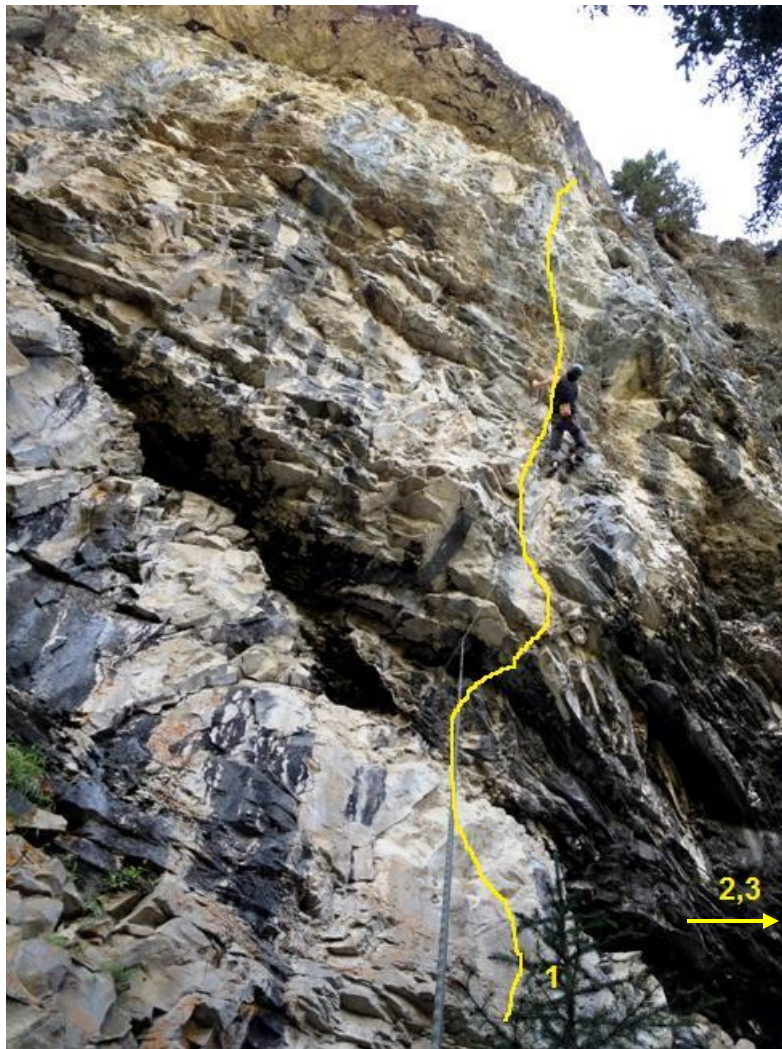


Figure 10: Rainbow Wonderland – Left: Sneak-A-Thong

**2. Boa Boa** **5.13c** **30m** **16 bolts**

*(Prep: A. Quiring, FA: A. Quiring 2013)*

It is recommended to use 9 longer sling draws to reduce drag. Trending right then left through blocky overhangs leads to the midway crux. Pull hard moves onto a ramp and continue to the top. A boulder mantle guards the chains.

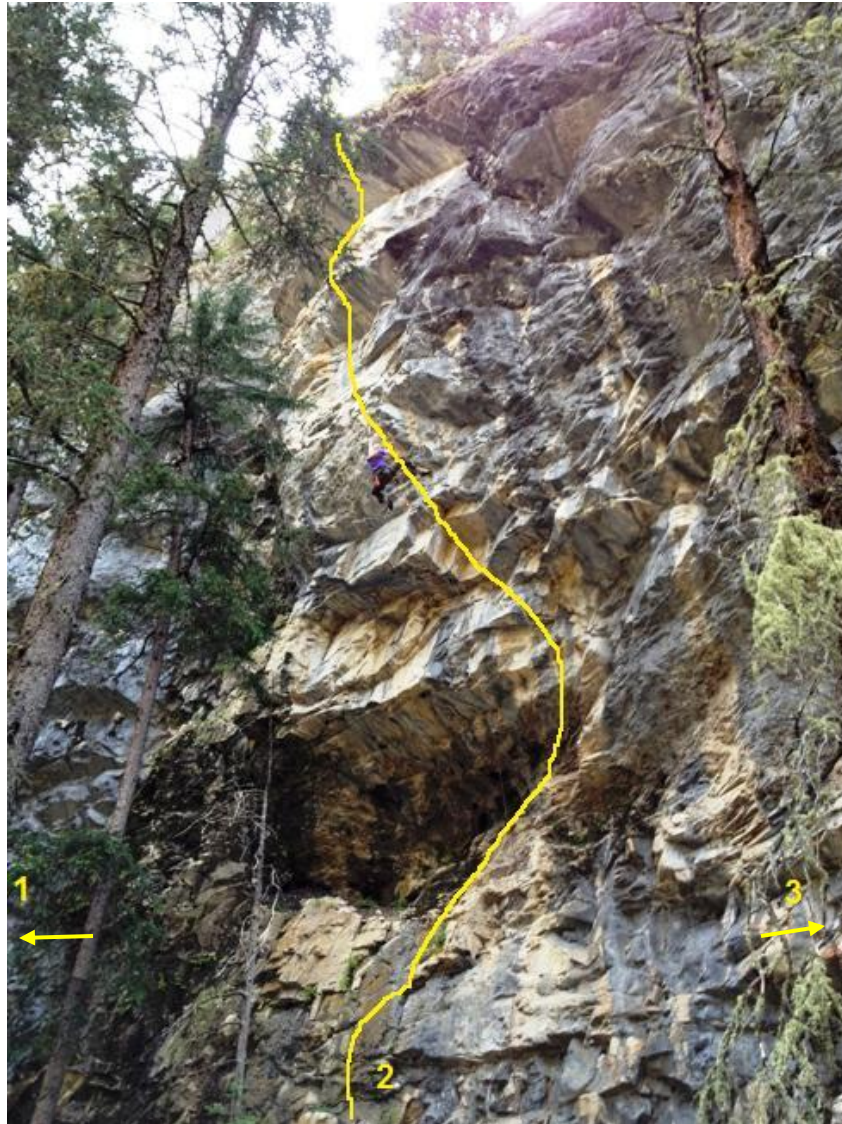


Figure 11: Rainbow Wonderland - Left: Boa Boa

**3. Closed Project** **5.13?**

*(Prep: K. Koscher)*

## Rainbow Wonderland - Right

The next two routes are located 50m farther up the creek on the left.

- 4. **Closed Project**                      5.12?  
*(Prep: K. Koscher)*
  
- 5. **Closed Project**                      5.12?  
*(Prep: K. Koscher)*

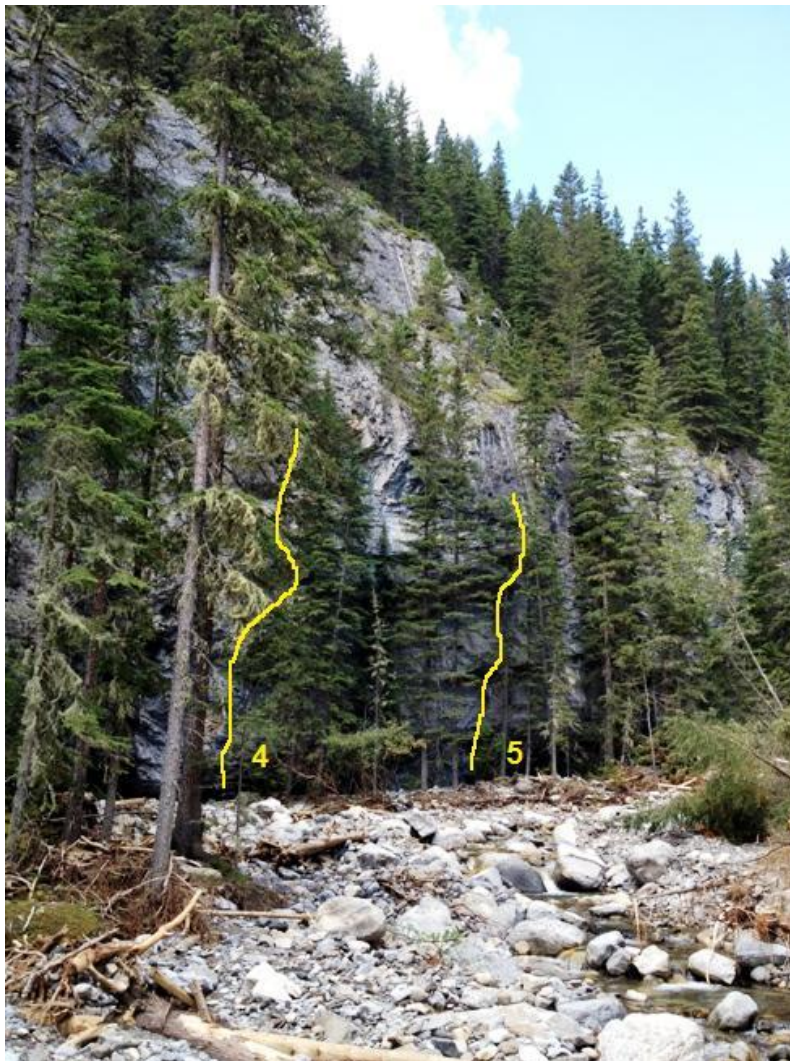


Figure 12: Rainbow Wonderland - Right