

Main Fork Hyalite

HOME TO WELL OVER HALF THE TOTAL PITCH COUNT IN HYALITE, THE MAIN FORK ALSO offers the widest variety in terms of difficulty and access. There are steep pillars, mixed routes of all styles, thin ice routes, consistent formers next to once in a lifetime gems. The Main Canyon holds routes you can safely set a top rope on, it offers a variety of areas less than 45 minutes from the car, or you can walk for almost as long as you want in search of the next icy adventure.



Parking

P All routes in the Main Fork are approached from the Grotto Falls Parking Lot. From the Dam continue up the road for 1.8 miles to the fork and stay right (left is the road to the East Fork). Continue up the narrow road for two miles to the obvious parking lot at the end. The first climbs visible on the left just before the parking lot are part of the *Genesis* Area.

Organization



Although home to many complicated gullies and drainages, most established climbs in Hyalite Creek are clustered in groups, or areas, providing a somewhat convenient order in which to describe them. All ten sub-areas will be treated as individual chapters, with the routes within each chapter, described as they are encountered. The areas will be listed in the following order with the side of valley in parenthesis:

Black Magic Wall (right), Genesis (left), The Unnamed Wall (right), Mummy (left), Twin Falls (right), Winter Dance (left), Responsible (left), Dribbles (left), Palace Butte (right), Maid of the Mist (right) and Overlook (left).

Hyalite for Uninitiated

Once the basic layout and approach trails are understood, climbers can get around without hesitation and often climb one or more routes more quickly than you might expect. Once long-day routes like *Responsible Family Men*, and *Dribbles* are routinely done in just a few hours. Yet still, the number of lost climbers remains impressive. And it's no wonder; the criss-crossing trails, combined with challenges in seeing many routes from the path, create potentially frustrating days on even trade routes.

The main confusion on the lower part of the Hyalite Creek Trail is the fact that two summer trails are established to Grotto Falls. The one and a quarter mile "Grotto Falls Trail" is wheel-chair accessible with gradual switchbacks to Grotto Falls, while the second "Hyalite Creek Trail" is for hiking and more or less cuts the corners straight up the valley.

Between the parking lot and *The Dribbles* (the farthest commonly climbed route) there are no less than five clearings or meadows of various sizes that tend to confuse people. If in doubt about a particular route, simply read back to the previous chapter and things should clear up.



Alex Lowe on the first ascent of Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow.
Photo © Kristoffer Erickson. April 1997.

Black Magic Wall

HOME TO A MERE FOUR ROUTES, NONE OF THEM MODERATE, THE BLACK MAGIC WALL is the spiciest wall in the canyon. Only *Black Magic* has been climbed regularly while the others have rarely been seen before or since their first ascents. They all offer good quality climbing on one of the nicest cliffs in Hyalite.



Black Magic Wall

Approach



The best approach is to hike west out of the parking lot, immediately crossing the creek, then up the forested hillside to the cliff. If any of the routes are in descent shape, there will likely be a beaten trail. The routes will be described from right to left.

△ Smears for Fears

75 m, 5.11, WI 6+

FA: Alex Lowe, Clark Alexis. April 4, 1997.

FFA: None to date.

This is the right-hand of two parallel melt-freeze drips that appeared late one season on the far right side of the cliff. It is characterized by a prominent corner on the bottom half. Since few ice climbers are around so late in the season, it is unclear just how often these might come in. Given the right pattern of cold, sun and precipitation, they likely form very quickly and disappear nearly as fast. | **Route:** Climb a poorly protected corner (5.9/5.10) to a rotten break below an overhanging smear. Three bolts on right side of the smear lead through an overhanging section. Mixed climbing for 40 feet reaches another bolt on right, followed by 50 feet on very thin ice and mixed terrain to a good ledge. A 15 m WI 4 pitch ends in a bowl below the trees. | **Descent:** One 60 m rappel from trees.

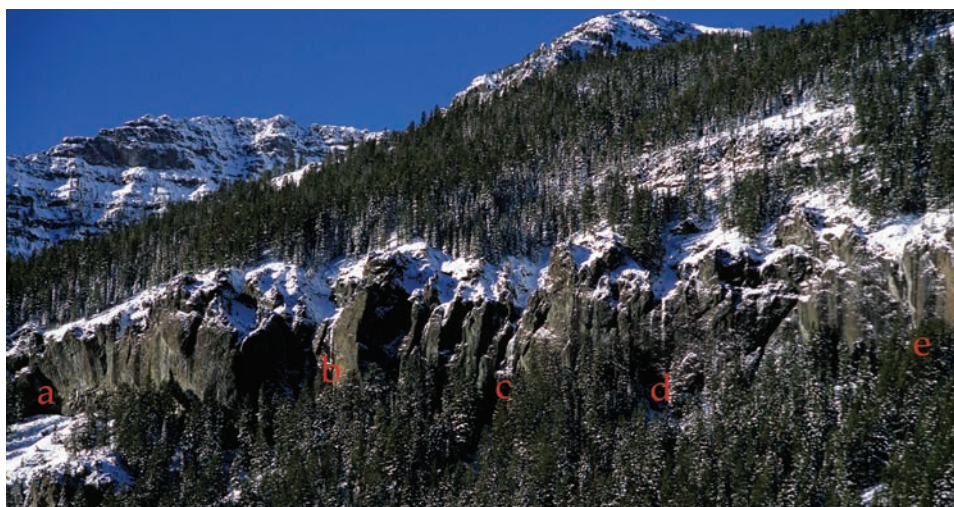
△ Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow

50 m, 5.11, WI 6+

FA: Alex Lowe, Kris Erickson. April 2, 1997.

FFA: None to date.

Just right of "Fears," *Smear Today, Gone Tomorrow* streaks down a uniform wall. The climb was done over two days with the first establishing the fixed protection (on lead) then climbing it complete (with a leader fall) the next day. It starts at a belay on top of a detached block with a single bolt. The description comes directly from Alex as written in the Barrel Ice Book. | **Route:** Traverse down and to the right 20 feet to ascend 80 feet of difficult (5.11-) drytooling past six bolts on the left side of the ice. Once past the last bolt (marked with cord hanging off it) the climbing becomes much more serious. Protection on a fat ice day may consist of Spectres, stubby screws and a strong head. Chances are most of your gear won't hold a two foot fall. The ice ranged from 2-5 inches in thickness requiring good bonding between the ice and rock. Bring a selection of pins (mostly thin) for the belay at the top if the ice isn't thick enough for a solid screw. You might also find a spot where the ice has melted away revealing a pin placement. | **Descent:** Rappel the route.



The Black Magic Wall. a) Come and Get It Wall, b) Shores of Pluto, c) Black Magic, d) Smear Today Gone Tomorrow, e) Smears for Fears. Photo © Joe Josephson. Nov 2003.







Clark Alexis on the first ascent of Smears for Fears.
Photo © Alex Lowe. April 1997.





Kris Erickson on The Shores of Pluto.
Photo Alex Lowe, Nov 1996.

△ **Black Magic**

45 m, 5.9, WI 5

FA: Alex Lowe, Pat Callis. 1986.

If you were counting the top Hyalite routes on one hand, *Black Magic* would certainly be included. For years Alex was the only one to ever climb it, dragging along whom ever he could when it was formed. In the mid 1990s, rising standards and enthusiasm started to see more and more ascents creating something of an upper-end mixed trade route. More recently, drought has taken a toll, and it rarely forms.

| **Route:** The first half follows a great crack on solid rock taking plenty of good gear. A good rest on a small ledge marks the point ice must reach for the route to be “formed.” Difficulty for the top half is largely dependant on conditions and thickness of ice.

| **Descent:** Rappel the route.

△ **The Shores of Pluto**

57 m, 5.8, WI 5+

FA: Pete Tapley, Jack Childress. October 30, 1996.

The route is about 130 meters left of *Black Magic* and is marked by a small evergreen growing in the cliff about 30 feet to the right of the smear. The route had several ascents the season it was first climbed and none since. When first climbed, the rock section was a grade harder. Subsequent ascents and attempts have dislodged a large block, making a sizable foothold. | **Route:** This obvious smear tapers to a hose and was first reached via dry tooling up a short crack system leading to a small pine tree (essential protection) on the right. Bring mid-small wires, lots of Spectres and a few screws. Most likely, thin ice will gradually thicken to a narrow ice hose ending in a low angle gully. Climbing the route 2 or 3 weeks after the initial ascents, Alex Lowe and Kris Erickson found thicker and better ice. They also added a difficult direct start over the roof to reach the ice. It is said to be, “good fun, (but) don’t fail (sic).” | **Descent:** Rappel the route. Carefully check any fixed pitons at the anchor. On the second ascent, Kelly Cordes had one fall out in his hands. Bring extras.



Black Magic Wall

Alex Lowe on the first ascent of Black Magic.
Photo © Jenny Lowe, 1986.

