

Lake Champlain

This region straddles the US 9 / I-87 (Northway) corridor and extends eastward to the park boundary, at the rocky shores of Lake Champlain. Found here is a patchwork of farmland, low mountains, and shoreline communities. Most of the climbing is inland of the lake and clustered along the Northway.

Between Exits 32 and 33 is one of the centerpieces of Adirondack climbing, Poke-O Moonshine. Poke-O is a group of cliffs with a collective number of pitches that exceeds 500. There are long, difficult free routes on the Main Face, single-pitch cragging on the Upper Tiers, and low-angle multi-pitch friction routes of varying difficulties on the Poke-O Slab.

A little to the south near Exit 31 is the super steep Honey Pot with a three overhanging routes. Further south still near Exit 30 is the popular Deadwater Cliff (38 routes), a quick-drying cliff known for excellent moderate crack and face climbs on immaculate rock. Also near this exit is King Philips Spring Wall one of the most popular toproping sites in the park, and Mt Makomis with mostly steep, difficult routes.

A few miles to the south is Sharp Bridge Campground, a DEC campground with a convenient little wall nearby. Little Johnson near Exit 29 is a recently discovered cliff with ten, mostly difficult routes.

Scattered throughout the rolling forests around Exits 29 and 30 are many other cliffs, some largely unexplored with just a single route. These include the Tsunami Craq, Mineville Slab, Sweet Fern Hill, Baby Dome, Meadow Hill, Bass Lake Hill, North Hudson Dome, and the Northway Express Wall.

Finally, dropping into the deep waters of Lake Champlain are two "sea cliffs": the Palisades and Barn Rock.

SEASON

Located downwind of the High Peaks, this region is in the rain shadow and receives far less precipitation than the Lake Placid area, Additionally, this region has the lowest elevation in the park, which contributes to its long climbing season. Most of the cliffs face east and south.

ACCESS

Annual closures for peregrine falcon nesting affect the Poke-O Main Face—look for the signs posted at the climber herd paths. The North Hudson Dome, Northway Express Wall. Another Roadside Distraction, and King Philip's Spring Wall are in the Dix Mountain Wilderness Area, where camping and group size restrictions apply—the same as those for Chapel Pond Pass (see page 177).

DIRECTIONS (MAPS PAGES 4 AND 26)

Most of the crags are described relative to exits off the Northway (I-87). Poke-O, the northernmost cliff, is between Exits 32 and 33, the Palisades are at Exit 31, North Hudson Dome is between Exits 29 and 30, and the Northway Express Wall is between Exits 28 and 29.

There are several options to reach this region from Vermont that involve either using ferriess or going around the lake to the south (see page 12).

WHERE TO STAY

Details on primitive campsites in this region are limited, and the sites at Chapel Pond Pass are recommended-and coveted (see page 197).

Camparounds: Sharp Bridge Camparound (518.532.7538) is centrally located for the areas around Exits 29-31. Ausable Point Campground (518.561.7080), off Exit 35, has a beach on Lake Champlain and a boat launch. Unfortunately, the Poke-O campground is now closed.

AMENITIES

Both Keeseville and Elizabethtown have gas, groceries, and diners. Along the Northway there is gas at Exits 31, 32, and 34,

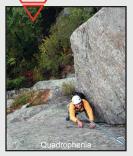
DIVERSIONS

One of the best swimming holes around—a three-tiered waterfall with large pools known as Split Rock Falls—is on US 9, 2 miles north of Malfunction Junction, on the right. Sea kayakers can find some excellent paddles around Valcour Island and along the Palisades shoreline of Lake Champlain with designated campsites that allow for multiday trips with climbing possibilities. A network of mountain bike trails is being developed at Split Rock Wild Forest, north of Westport. If it's raining, try The Crux (518.963.4646, www.climbthecrux.com), a climbing gym in Willsboro, not far from Poke-O.



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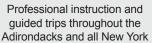
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Climb with us in the Gunks and Catskills as well!

PG	CLIFF	QUALITY	ASPECT	APPROACH		GRADES	#
31	Poke-O Moonshine Main Face	****	Е	10–25 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	171
106	Poke-O Moonshine Poke-O Slab	***	S	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	14
115	Poke-O Moonshine Summit Cliff	**	S	35 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	31
120	Poke-O Moonshine Headwall	****	E & SE	25 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	47
131	Poke-O Moonshine The Lunar Wall	*	SE	25 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	6
133	Poke-O Moonshine The Sun Wall	*	S	30 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	5
134	Poke-O Moonshine Second Tier	**	SE	20 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	13
137	Poke-O Moonshine Third Tier	**	E & SE	30 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	6
138	Poke-O Moonshine Fourth Tier	**	Е	1 hr	difficult	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	6
141	Poke-O Moonshine Beaver Wall	*	SW	1 hour	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	2
141	Palisades	***	SE	1 hr	moderate boat optional	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	6
145	The Honey Pot	****	SE	20 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	3
147	King Philip's Spring Wall	****	W	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	2
149	Highway Blues Slab	***	Е	15 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	3
151	Makomis Mountain Cliff	**	S	20 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	3
155	Deadwater	****	SE	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	23
162	Deadwater Way Left	*	S	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	5
163	Sharp Bridge Campground	*	S	15 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	8
167	North Hudson Dome	**	SE	1 hr	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	2
168	Baby Dome	*	S	5 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	6
169	Little Johnson	***	S	10 min	easy	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	10
172	Northway Express Wall	*	SW	45 min	moderate	.6 .7 .8 .9 .10 .11 .12 .13	18

POKE-O MOONSHINE

Location On US 9, south of Keeseville, just south of Northway (I-87) Exit 33

Summary A premier Adirondack climbing center with a wide range of single-pitch and multi-pitch climbing on excellent rock.



Poke-O Moonshine Mountain, located in the northeast section of the Adirondack Park, is one of the premier climbing destinations in the Northeast. The short, easy hike to the summit is popular because of its fire tower and many excellent viewpoints. For the climber, Poke-O offers a bit of everything, including multipitch slabs,

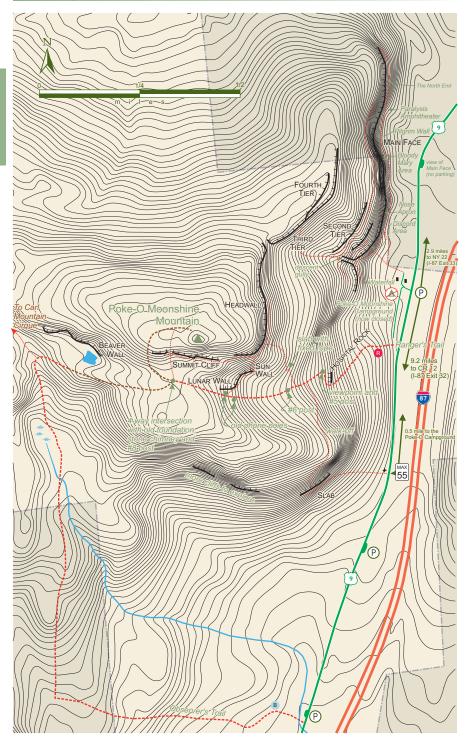
one-pitch cragging, long free routes, and steep face and crack climbing. This mountain is furnished with an immense quantity of exposed rock.

The 400'-high east face of the mountain, known as the Main Face, rises above US 9 and the Northway and holds the bulk of the climbing. The south face, known as the Poke-O Slab, is lower-angled and has many excellent slab and friction routes. Below the summit are numerous steep bands of rock known as the Upper Tiers with many high-quality shorter routes up to 180'.

The state campground at Poke-O closed indefinitely in 2008. You can still park here during the dayand there is often a porta-potty—but there is no water. Don't camp here.

Poke-O enjoys strong cell reception due to the Frankenpine (a camouflaged cell tower) next to the highway in front of the cliff.

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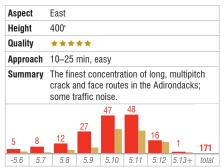
DIRECTIONS

(MAP PAGE 30)

Access to Poke-O is from the (now closed) Poke-O Moonshine Campground, on US 9, 2.9 miles south of the intersection with NY 22 (at Northway Exit 33) and 9.2 miles north of the intersection with CR 12 in Lewis (which goes east 1.7 miles to Northway Exit 32). Park on the road in front of the campground or, if the gate is open, in the campground itself. There is often a portapotty here, but don't count on it 619271,4917806.

Poke-O Moonshine

MAIN FACE



The Main Face of Poke-O Moonshine is one of the crown jewels of Adirondack climbing. Located conveniently near the road and the Northway, the Main Face rises 400' above a talus slope with 164 free routes, 38 variations, and 349 pitches. In addition there are 6 projects and 8 aid routes. There are only a handful of moderate climbs 5.8 and under (25 routes); the cliff really shines starting at 5.9. The predominant route grades are 5.10 (47 routes) and 5.11 (48 routes), and even more telling is that 66% of the quality climbs (three to five stars) are in the 5.10 to 5.11 level will feel right at home at the Main Face.

Despite the Main Face's reputation for cracks, many climbers have come away surprised by the "slab factor"—tiny edges on steep face. The climbing at Poke-O is unique and typically involves crack, corner, steep face, and slab climbing. There are relatively few ceilings and overhanging faces. The protection at Poke-O, especially 5.10 and up, can be tricky and often involves small wires, and the pitches are often long and require a range of passive and active protection. A typical Poke-O rack includes a full set of nuts, a double set of RPs or micronuts, and a double set of cams from TCUs through 3". Larger cams up to 4" are sometimes required as well, but rarely larger than 4". There are many bolts at Poke-O, but few pitches are completely bolt-protected; carry a small rack if you are unfamiliar with a route, even if it appears from the ground to be entirely bolt-protected.

Special mention should be made of the loose rock at Poke-O. The cliff is geologically active, with bits periodically dropping off. For example, a huge 40'-by-100' slab 20' thick (about 6,600 tons) peeled off of **Summer**

Solstice in November 1998, and the "horrifying flake" on Sailor's Dive fell in 2006, erasing P1 of that route (which has since been rerouted). On most routes, you have to contend with stacked blocks and loose rock. Wear a helmet! It won't protect against a major cliff event, but it will save your head when other parties drop rocks.

Finding routes on the Main Face can be daunting at first. The cliff has been broken into sections, each of which includes notes on the various major landmarks and cliff features used to find routes in that section. The base locator diagram shows these landmarks and cliff features as well as the terrain that runs along the base of the cliff and where the trail rises and falls. You can find a rough location simply by tracking the ups and downs on the terrain map. The diagram also includes many obvious features that can be seen from the base, like the Nose, the fragile finger of rock of the Pillar, the pillar of P.T. Pillar, the Thunderhead roofs, various black water streaks, and so on. Once you are in the vicinity, you can use the cliff topos and route descriptions to pinpoint your route more closely.

When you view the cliff from the road, the most obvious features (apart from the Nose) are the right-rising dikes—narrow bands that are striped across the cliff. Sometimes these dikes are quite solid (as on the Freedom Flight traverse), and sometimes they provide rests, belays, and route terminations; more often than not, however, dike rock is chossy and vegetated. When you climb full-length routes at Poke-O, you can't avoid climbing through dikes. The dikes are shown on the topos and should provide good markers for finding your route from the road.

HISTORY

Compared to the other big cliffs, Poke-O escaped the attention of early climbers. Possible reasons for this are its location far from the High Peaks, most popular with vacationers in Keene Valley and Lake Placid, or perhaps the intimidating nature of the cliff discouraged early pioneers who may have lacked the skills necessary to ascend it. Its climbing potential was discovered in 1957, when John Turner and friends drove down from Montreal.

1957–61: The Turner years: Turner was considered reckless in his time, but posterity holds his ascents to be bold and visionary. The two first routes in 1957 were The Snake and The FM, in which order is not remembered. His best achievements were Gamesmanship (at 5.8, it's the most popular route on the cliff today), Psychosis, Paralysis, The Body Snatcher, and, of course, his masterpiece Bloody Mary, a route that took nearly ten years for a second ascent. Turner wrote a miniguide to the cliff—route descriptions and a photo with lines—that appeared in Appalachia in 1961.¹ Every route in the first official guidebook by Trudy Healy in 1967 has been credited to Turner and the Canadians.²

¹ J. M. Turner, "Various Notes—Rock Climbing," *Appalachia* 33 (1960–61), [pp. 248–49.

² Trudy Healy, Climber's Guide to the Adirondacks, Adirondack Mountain Club (1967).

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In 1961, the Canadian visits ceased. They had completed all the lines they thought were within their capability and worth doing—excluding, or course, anything that required more than the odd piton for aid or that didn't go to the top of the cliff.

1961–74: Transition with the Gunkies: After the whirlwind achievements by the Canadians, things quieted down for nearly 10 years. No doubt everyone was playing catch-up with the Turner routes. At the time, the Gunks were in the midst of a renaissance, and a few Gunkies made the drive north—among others Jim McCarthy, Dick Williams, Richard Goldstone, Ivan Rezucha, and John Stannard, with routes that include **Psychosis, Bloody Mary, The Body Snatcher, The Great Dihedral, and Cirrhosis.**

1974–78: The Ski to Die years: Next on the scene was Geoff Smith along with his band of young protégés who called themselves the Ski to Die Club—a group that included Gary Allan, Dave Hough, Patrick Munn, and later Mark Meschinelli and Dick Bushey. With Smith's vision and drive, this group tore into Poke-O by first repeating Turner's routes, then adding their own. They began modestly in 1974 with Opposition (now very

obscure) and The Sting (immensely popular), but later, as forays out West developed their skills, they forged ahead with a litany of major full-length routes. The list includes Wild Blue, Summer Solstice, Microwave, Rattlesnake, Southern Hospitality, Sailor's Dive (the first ascent of the Big Wall), and It Don't Come Easy. While some of these routes originally used aid, many were done free, including the first 5.11 pitches at the

cliff—Firing Line, by New Hampshire visitor Jim Dunn, and P1 of Southern Hospitality. Smith and Dunn put in Fastest Gun, perhaps the most recognized achievement of this period, as it's one of the most sought after and popular 5.10 routes in the state.

The group was notoriously protective of the cliff and secretive about their achievements. Tom Rosecrans recalls that he



Mark Meschinelli. Photo by Don Mellor.





received little cooperation with route reporting for his 1976 guidebook²—the routes listed at Poke-O were the same as in Trudy Healy's 1967 guidebook. The next guidebook author was also kept in the dark and had to obtain his route information from New Hampshire (from Jim Dunn).

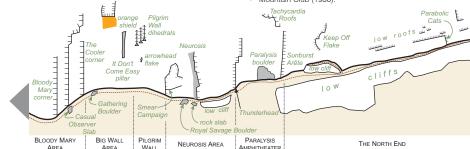
1978–82: After 1978, Geoff Smith took a hiatus from climbing, but his youthful followers—Mark Meschinelli, Gary Allan, and Patrick Munn—continued their work and added a few interesting lines, including Royal Savage, Cooney-Norton Face, Scallion, and Snow Blue. Their influence continues to this day, now going on 40 years.

1982–89: Visitors and style changes: In 1982, Don Mellor took an interest in the Main Face and focused on traditional full-length routes such as Wild Blue (freeing many pitches), Snow Blue (first free ascent to the top), and Moonshine. Mellor carried on the traditional customs that predated him—ground-up with minimal use of fixed protection. In the mid-1980s, a different style appeared, brought by visitors from the south (Dave Lanman) and a return of the Canadians from the north (Pierre-Édouard Gagnon, Gelu Ionescu, and Julien

Déry). These "outsiders" recognized the potential of bolt-protected face climbing at Poke-O and exploited it enthusiastically, at first ground-up (e.g., Maestro), then on rappel (e.g., Verdon). Their stylistic differences were not really all that new, as Geoff Smith and his group had certainly experimented with bolt-protected faces (e.g., Homecoming, Freedom Flight, Ukiah, and routes on the Poke-O Slab). But they were visitors, and this fact caused a clash with the established protectionists. In 1989, they grew tired of the cold shoulder and removed all their own fixed protection, never to return. Eventually, many of these routes were resurrected and are now considered to be some of the best at the cliff—the new style, unwelcome at first, was there to stay.

The next guidebook, a quirky creation with a blue plastic cover, was published in 1983, 4 with 67 routes on the Main Face. This number jumped to 77 in the 1986 supplement, 5 then to 92 in the 1986 guidebook.6

- 3 Thomas R. Rosecrans, Adirondack Rock and Ice Climbs (1976)
- 4 Don Mellor, Climbing in the Adirondacks, Sundog Ski and Sports (1983).
- 5 Don Mellor, 1986 Supplement, Climbing in the Adirondacks
- 6 Don Mellor, Climbing in the Adirondacks, Adirondack Mountain Club (1986).



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The year 1988 was important for the first 5.12 routes (Parabolic Cats. by Gunkie Bill Lutkus, and The Howling, by Gunkie Dave Lanman) and the first (and only) 5.13 (Salad Days, by Dave Lanman)—all put in by visitors.

The movement toward relaxed standards of new routing became more heavily debated beginning in 1988, both locally and across the country, as people disagreed on the role of bolts and their mode of installation. The Main Face was one of the many battlefields where routes were put in only to be removed. This lasted for several years, to around 1992. when finally a truce was declared, and today, climbers work out such disagreements amicably, off the rock.

1989-96: Locals make it big: Once the new style was firmly established. local climbers made their mark: Patrick Purcell (C-Tips, Home Rule, and Sinful Ways); Gary Allan (Forget Bullet, Karmic Kickback, and Sea of Seams); and especially Patrick Munn, with his long, hard free routes. Munn clearly got really good. He would fix ropes the full height of the cliff to work and clean various lines. His creations are some of the best at the cliff-their exceptional quality is still being discovered today. Together with Dominic Eisinger, Mark Meschinelli, and a reemerging Geoff Smith, he put in Calvary Hill, Psalm 32, Messiah, Amongst the Crowd, Deuteronomy, Remembering Youth, The Gathering, Extreme Unction, Raptor's Scream, Letting Go, God's Grace, and Resurrection. That's a big list, but what's even more impressive is that they're all four- and five-star routes, and all between 5.11 and hard 5 12

1996-2005: Pilgrim Wall: The cliff had a four-year break after the Munn-storm, but development picked back up again in 2000. Dennis Luther focused his attention on the left end of the cliff—the Luther Wall—a place under which people had walked for years. His routes on this wall stand as his legacy: Static Cling, Air Male, Group Therapy, Bastard, and Son of a Mother. The other big story of this period was the development of the Pilgrim Wall, a section of the cliff marked by a complex assortment of hanging dihedrals 200' up. Spearheaded by Patrick Munn and Dominic Eisinger, 20 new pitches were added, and they have proved to be extremely popular—Pilgrim's Progress, The Rapture, Morning Star, Earthly Night, Ancient of Days, Smear Campaign, and Mayflower.

2006 and onward: Very few routes have been added in the last few years, doubtless for want of giants like Patrick Munn and Gary Allan. However, there is something new in the air. More and more climbers are honing their skills on previously neglected hard routes, like Extreme Unction, Calvary Hill, and Pentecostal. It is to them that we must look for pioneering in the coming decade.



Gary Allan on P2 of The Snatch (5.10b) on the first ascent. Photo courtesy of Gary Allan.

2013 Mini resurgence: Poke-O sat idle for 5 years until Royce Van Evera, a ski instructor from Lake Placid, climbed Crux Capacitor, resurrecting an older 1970s era route. This ascent sparked a resurgence of development on the newly developed Superman Wall, right of the Poke-O Waterfall. Geoff Smith sadly passed away that fall, making this the last place he climbed.

ACCESS

Most of the cliffs at Poke-O are on state land. The Main Face, however, is not entirely public. The land between the road and the cliff is private, so don't park along the road in front of the cliff and walk directly to the cliff base. (You can stop your car and scope out your projects, however.) Park at the (now closed) campground and use the approach trails from there to access the base of the cliff. The left end of the cliff is on state land—the property boundary runs close to the base of the cliff up to the route Borderline. Beyond Borderline, the base of the cliff and the cliff itself are on private property. It is important for climbers to treat the land with respect especially so on the right end of the cliff.

Remember, park only in the campground or along the shoulder of the road in front of the campground. Do not wander into-or take shortcuts through-any neighboring properties. Restrict your walking to the approach path and along the base of the cliff.

Sections of Poke-O are closed during the summer months to protect the nesting of peregrine falcons. Starting in the spring, most of the Main Face is closed until the birds find their nesting sites. The DEC monitors the cliff (with cooperation from the local climbing community), and once the birds have chosen their nesting sites, the restriction is reduced to include only routes that are visible from the nesting sites. This includes some of the best routes at Poke-O, like Gamesmanship and Fastest Gun. If so, not all is lost, as you can always climb at the Upper Tiers. The closure notice is posted on the signboard at the (now closed) Poke-O Campground at the start of the approach trail. Closures are also posted online at the DEC website: www.dec.ny.gov (search for "peregrine route closures").

DIRECTIONS

(MAP PAGE 30)

Walk to the north end of the campground and find the start of the climbers' path next to the information board, which is near the campsite with the huge boulder. Any cliff closures will be posted on this board. Follow the climbers' path uphill over a short slab and look for an unmarked turnoff on the right. If you're heading for any routes in the Discord Area, the Luther Wall, or the Waterfall, continue straight and meet the cliff at the base of Discord 619111,4917955; otherwise, turn right and meet the cliff near Salad Days and the Nose Apron.

It is tempting to park at the dirt pullout across from the Main Face and walk to the cliff using an old climbers' path. This approach is on private property, and the owners have requested that climbers use the approach through the camparound.

DESCENT OPTIONS

For routes that reach the top of the cliff, it is always possible to walk off: walk left through the open woods and stay below the obvious 100'-high cliff (the Second Tier) until you come to the descent gully, a deep chimney that you can scramble down 619065,4917894. The walk-off makes sense if you reach the top in the dark or if you're completing a route at the left end of the cliff. Otherwise, there are several centralized rappels: Discord Rappel (page [44]), Central Rappel (page [65]), Neurosis Rappel (page [90]), and North End Rappel (page [96]).

Waterfall

The Waterfall is the almost-always-wet black wall on the far left end of the cliff, just left of the descent gullythe prominent deep gash that runs the height of the cliff. When dry, the rock is surprisingly clean and offers enjoyable climbing in a sunny location. The base of the Waterfall is open and grassy, but be on the lookout for poison ivv. In the middle of the wall is a large housesized boulder that leans up against the cliff. You can walk under it to reach the climbs on the far left side.

To reach the Waterfall, walk left and uphill from where the approach trail meets the cliff at Discord. You'll pass the Luther Wall and the Superman Wall.

1 Opposition 5.8 G 100'

One of the more unpleasant-looking routes at Poke-O, Opposition climbs the off-width crack in the prominent right-facing corner high above and left of the Waterfall area. The location of this climb was once known as the Screwiob Area, and the route follows the line of the winter route Goat's Butt.

Start: At the far left side of the Waterfall, on top of slabs, is a large, black right-facing corner capped by a large, square roof 30' up (the ice route Get a Job). Begin 30' left of this corner, just right of a 20'-high rightfacing chimney with a white chockstone at the top.

P1 5.8 G: Climb up an extremely vegetated rightfacing, stepped ramp that trends left. At the top is a cleaner right-facing corner with an off-width crack. Up the crack to the top and step left to a grassy ledge, then up an easy slab to the trees. 100'

History: Significant in that it was the first first ascent of the 1970s Poke-O crew of Dave Hough, Gary Allan. and Drew Allan.

FA Jul, 1974, Dave Hough, Gary Allan, Drew Allan

2 Goat's Foot on Rock 5.10b PG 140' ★★

Takes its name from the ice route-Goat's Foot on Ice—that ascends the same line.

Start: Located on the far left side of the Waterfall on top of slabs that drop down into the woods. Begin on a grassy ledge, just left of a large right-facing corner capped by a large, square roof 30' up (the ice route Get a Job) and at the base of a smaller right-facing corner, the right wall of which is a lower-angled ramp.

P1 5.10b PG: Climb the right-rising ramp to a ledge even with the height of the large roof to the right. Up an open book to another ledge, then up cracks into a shallow left-facing corner that becomes right-facing. Finish with a slight runout to the top. Belay off trees set back from the top edge of the cliff, 140' FA Jul. 2003. Nick Wakeman. Don Mellor

