

# La Gorgette Climbing Guide Wadi Bani Auf

Ross Weiter, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, April 2007



## **A WARNING ABOUT ROCK CLIMBING**

Climbing is a sport where you may be seriously injured or killed. Read this before you use this guide.

This guide is a compilation of often-unverified information gathered from many different climbers. The author(s) cannot assure the accuracy of any of the information in this guide, including the route descriptions and the difficulty ratings. These may be incorrect or misleading as it is impossible for any one author to climb all the routes and confirm all the information. Some routes listed in the guide have had only one ascent and the information has not been verified. Also, ratings are subjective and depend on the physical characteristics such as height, experience, technical ability, confidence and physical fitness of the climber who supplied the ratings.

Therefore, be warned that you must exercise your own judgement with regard to the route location, description, difficulty and your ability to safely protect yourself from the risks of rock climbing. Examples of these risks are: falling due to technical difficulty or holds breaking off, falling rock, climbing equipment dropped by other climbers, equipment failure and failure of protection including fixed protection such as bolts.

You should not depend on any information gleaned from this guide for your personal safety. Your safety depends on your own experience, equipment and climbing skill. If you have any doubt as to your ability to safely attempt any route described in this guide, do not attempt it.

## **INTRODUCTION**

La Gorgette is the best hard sport climbing crag in Oman (Wadi Daykah is better for softer folk.) It offers shade and a great secluded atmosphere.

However, it does take 2½ hours to get there from Muscat, the last hour of which is on a dirt road. Another minus is the variable and unsightly amount of litter, such as washing powder containers and rusting cans.

The area was developed for climbing in 2002-2004 when the local French guides Patrick Cabiro and Nathalie Hanriot bolted all the lines. The bolts were paid for by the government while their time was courtesy of their employer, MDAC (go, Rob!). These two guides can be credited with introducing sport climbing to Oman by bolting up La Gorgette and a few climbs at Wadi Daykah, Wadi Adai, Wadi Mayh and Hadash. Thanks for the money and effort spent and information provided!

The rock is dolomite: a variety of limestone rich in magnesium carbonate. Due to weathering and frequent summer thunderstorms, on many climbs it has sharp razorblade-like features, but on most climbs it is fine. Most climbing is vertical, with a few overhanging climbs in the Entry Canyon.

Due to its altitude of 1000m the area has a relatively long season of October to April, if you stay in the shade.

## **GEAR AND ETHICS**

Helmets are recommended, especially for belayers, as there is some (not much) loose rock, especially on the harder routes which have not seen much traffic. Many of the routes are 30m long so bring a 60m rope to return to the ground. Almost all routes are bolted. Bring 10 draws plus 2 slings for the belay.

The Entry Canyon and the Right Fork areas of the gorge are used as a minor pedestrian thoroughfare by the locals, with maybe 30 people passing through every day. The Left Fork is deserted all day. Either way, please climb in long trousers and with covered shoulders. It will not only be in keeping with local customs but will also save your legs from many scratches by the sharp rock.

It is worthwhile to make a note of the quality of the bolting: many of the routes were rap-bolted in a hurry and the bolt placements are sometimes poor. Hence you can expect some run outs and some hard-to-reach bolts. Occasionally you will come even across single bolt lower-offs. Beware and feel free to make improvements.

Sometimes some of the easily accessible hangers disappear from climbs, presumably as booty for the more agile amongst the local kids. It is a good idea to bring a few hangers and a couple of 10 and 12 mm nuts if you have them (and a wrench). Think of it as an entry fee.

## **THE CLIMBS**

The routes are bolted sport climbs unless indicated otherwise as trad or top rope. "Trad" climbing means climbing on nuts and cams, i.e. removable gear, i.e. no bolts. Grades are French, see the comparison table. All climbs are described from the direction of the Entry Canyon, as going inside.

For all new routes and comments to help keep this guide correct and up to date, please utilise the *New Routes* forum on [www.omanclimbing.com](http://www.omanclimbing.com) (set up by Tony Robson).

## HOW TO GET THERE / CAMPING

La Gorgette requires a 4WD to get to it, from either direction. The condition of the track is highly variable and dependant on how long it is since the last rain. Immediately after rain the road is likely to be impassable and the lower gorge flooded. More than a week after rain, and you are likely to have a comfortable ride with no problems.

It is possible to camp at the entrance to La Gorgette, on some abandoned terraces shaded by palm trees. However this is not a wilderness campsite as the locals walk through La Gorgette and through the campsite area when travelling between villages. It is very unobvious but highly relevant to note here that the La Gorgette climbing area is directly below and right next to the village of Balad Sayt.

One note on dirt driving: people live, work and walk all along the road in the Wadi Bani Auf. Tourists driving past them at high speed and covering them in a cloud of dust do not make them happy. Please consider.

### From UAE

Head through the Omani towns of Ibri and then Bahla and about 8km past Bahla turn left to Al Hamra. Before you get to Al Hamra there will be a turn right, from there follow the brown signs for Balad Sayt (or Bilad Seet, or something phonetically similar). Drive all the way to the highest point on the road, at the Sharaf Al Alamayn pass (2000m), the road is sealed up to this point. You can camp here, at a flat spot 200m left. Descend into the Wadi Bani Auf on the other side. You will pass a turnoff for the village of Hat on your right, park 2km after this. At this place on your left you should readily see a narrow slot gorge, with many palm trees fringing the entrance and a small parking and camping area. Get the book *Off Road Oman* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.) and see the map on page 162.

### From Muscat

Drive to Barka, turn left at the big roundabout. Drive 30km to Nakhal and another 35km to Al Awabi. 7km past Awabi turn left into the Wadi Bani Auf. 13km further turn left at the T-junction. 14km further is a split in the road, the right fork goes to Balad Sayt and the left fork goes to La Gorgette (and Sharaf Al Alameyn). From this split it is 1km to the entrance to the gorge, which will be on your right. It is in a low spot and is fringed with palm trees. There are camping spots on the unused terraces and an off-road parking spot in the shade. Get the book *Off Road Oman* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.) and see the map on page 161.

It is also possible to camp at the Sharaf Al Alameyn pass, which is ½ hour drive (uphill) away.

**International Grade Comparison Table**

France climbing	USA climbing	Australia climbing	UK climb adjective	UK climb technical	USA bouldering	France bouldering
5a	5.7	15	HS	4b		
5b	5.8	16	VS	4c		
5c	5.9	17	HVS	5a		
6a	5.10a	18	E1	5b		
6a+	5.10b	19	E1	5b		
6b	5.10c	20	E2	5c	V0-	4a/b
6b+	5.10d	21	E3	5c	V0	4c
6c	5.11a	22	E3	5c	V1	5a/b
6c+	5.11b/c	23	E3	6a	V2	5c
7a	5.11d	24	E4	6b	V3	6a/b
7a+	5.12a	25	E4	6b	V4	6c

### Index to first ascentionists:

(thanks a lot /merci beaucoup!) (PN) Patrick Cabiro & Nathalie Harriot; (S) Soren Henningsen

### Star ratings:

\*\*\* *fantastic*

\*\* *good*

\* *worth doing*

<no star> *only if you have done everything else.*

## Les Puns

The names of most of the routes are Patrick Cabiro's puns. French speakers will maybe enjoy them. For example, "Encens Interdit" translates literally as "forbidden incense" but sounds like the French "en sens interdit," which means going in the wrong way, as in someone driving on the wrong side of the road. "Meet Oman" sounds like the French "mythomane," a pathological liar. "Ahmed Alors" (Ahmed Then) is very similar to "Ah, merde alors!" (Oh, Shit Then) And so on.

## ENTRY CANYON

This is the part of the canyon as you come to from the camping place. The first 3 climbs are particularly good and recommended.

\*\* **Ali Baba (18m, 6c) (PN) 04**

\*\* **Bachir Le Chat (16m, 6c) (PN) 04**

\*\* **Zaar Toustra (60m, 6b+/7a/6a) (PN) 04**

\* **Full Battery (17m, 5c) (PN) 04**

**Two Tanks (17m/18m, 5b/6b+) (PN) 04**

Start from top of brown rock. First belay is right of scoop, 2<sup>nd</sup> belay is right of crack. 4<sup>th</sup> bolt on 2<sup>nd</sup> pitch causes a lot of drag and there is a 6m run-out to get to the anchors.

**Banana Split (26m, 6a+) (PN) 04**

**Asolo Malequoum (26m, 7b to 7<sup>th</sup> bolt) (S) Feb'07**

A chickenhead paradise, with one long dyno. Has been climbed to 7<sup>th</sup> bolt in one push, this and the 6<sup>th</sup> bolt have lower-off biners. The rock higher up looks horribly friable.

\*\* **Robby (25m, 6b) (PN) 04**

Nice crack.

\* **Bill Please (25m, 6b) (PN) 04**

Nice face climbing.

\* **Pick Up (25m, 6a+) (PN) 04**

More nice face climbing.

**Ludo Sick (30m, 6a) (PN) 04**

From large ledge at 4m traverse left into bottom of awkward crack.

\*\*\* **Encens Interdit (25m, 6c) (PN) 04**

The overhanging start requires full power and there are other cruxes later!

**Crack Boum Huc (30m, 6c) (PN) 04**

Start at the large flowstone feature just before the pool and then a rising traverse 5m right to hand crack. Pity about the misplaced first bolt.

**Smile Burger (30m, 4c) (PN) 04**

No bolts.

## LEFT FORK

The climbs on the left side are worth doing.

\*\* **Meet Oman (20m, 6a) (PN) 04**

Delicate face climbing on small holds; harder than it looks. If you use the big dihedral/crack on the right, it's difficult to step over left to clip the second bolt. Best to find a way to go straight up the face.

**How Are You (22m, 6c) (PN) 04**

This one has a funky horizontal traverse before the main vertical part. It doesn't look particularly well bolted, and will have lots of rope drag, but that was apparently the only way to get over to a good line.

\* **L'Arape Demente (28m, 6a+) (PN) 04**

Very absorbing face climbing.

**Aero Friend (28m, 6a+) (PN) 04**

Not bolted. It can be top roped from the anchors on the route to the left, or done as trad using the big crack. However it is a difficult anchor because there are two hangers placed such that it's nearly impossible to pull the rope.

**\*\* La Girafe (engl. The Giraffe, 27m, 6c) (PN) 04**

This very aesthetic arête has several hard sections. It feels insecure even with 9 bolts.

And now for the so called Razorblade Wall on the right side of the Left Fork.

**\* Pat Oman (21m, 6b) (PN) 04**

Enjoyable moves, if you do not mind the razor blade features; with stemming at the top. Don't sneeze.

**Cascarette (25m, 6b+) (PN) 04**

Scary, best avoided.

**Arach'Ouille (25m, 6b+) (PN) 04**

**Patatraque (25m, 6c) (PN) 04**

**Merci La Vie (eng. Thank You Life, 25m, 6c+) (PN) 04**

Thank you, God?

**RIGHT FORK**

**Austria Crack (17m, 5c) (PN) 04**

The crack, featuring ultra-sharp rock. Use trad gear and the chock stone.

**Brigite d'Etape(17m, 6a+) (PN) 04**

The narrow face between the two cracks, more sharp rock but the holds are good.

**Natou (17m, 6a) (PN) 04**

Starts out up the big offwidth crack, with a delicate step left onto the face about halfway up.

**\* Ahmed Alors (20m, 6a+) (PN) 04**

Absorbing climbing and good moves past 2<sup>nd</sup> bolt, although has sharp rock.

**Amna (20m, 5c) (PN) 04**

The bolted arête just right of the large gully. Local kids sometimes take the hangers from these bolts.

**KimBill2 (30m, 6c) (PN) 04**

The face right of the KB corner.

**\*\* KimBill (30m, A0 5c or free at 6b+) (PN) 04**

A pun on names of Kim and Bill and the Kill Bill movies After the hard boulder start it is 5c and nicely long, too. It was bolted to have an aid (A0) start but this goes free at 6b+. This climb might require more than 60m of rope.

Now there are some good beginner/children's climbs on the left side.

**\* Azmatic (18m, 5c) (PN) 04**

Has a crux move off a rounded feature midway up the face, then good positive holds near the top. A nice climb.

PD Oman' and 'Sony est cher' are not bolted. To rig top ropes, someone needs to scramble up the chimney on the right hand side of the routes, 3m to the right of 'Sony est cher,' then traverse across to find two plain bolt hangers for 'PDOman'. For 'Sony' it is a good idea to leave the top rope in place on PD, then put a quick draw in the one anchor bolt as a directional.

**PDO Man (12m, 4c) (PN) 04**

Top rope.

**Sony est cher (12m, 5c) (PN) 04**

To actually get to the single bolt anchor (!) requires a fairly long reach and a certain amount of technique. Say 4c for the first 10m, but the last 2m is 5c. This can be very frustrating for beginners, lots of people struggle and give up.

**Rivesalte (13m, 5a) (PN) 04**

**Chameau Mix (13m, 4c) (PN) 04**



Top view of the La Gorgette "slot canyon" from Balad Sayt



