

Manawatu Gorge

It's nothing great, but it's close to home!

by Matt Natti

Introduction

Ok, so we will assume that the only people REALLY interested in the Manawatu Gorge are from the Palmerston North area, so that is where this guide will base it's driving directions from. From downtown Palmy, hop on Main St. heading east, Main St. becomes State Highway 3. Follow Hwy 3 east towards Woodville. Just after the turn off for State Highway 57 there is a big car park on the left side of the road (this is the parking area for the gorge hiking track). This is a good landmark to base odometer readings for the 3 climbing areas through the gorge, so when you get to this point, keep track of your distance travelled. For the sake of directions, this parking area will just be referred to as the start of the gorge. On a side note.... it is technically illegal to park anywhere along the road while driving in the gorge, though many of the pull-offs can (and often do) happily accommodate a few cars. It should also be mentioned that the gorge is unfortunately well known for break-ins, so it is recommended that if you park at any of the locations mentioned it is advisable to lock your car and leave all valuables out of site (or take them with you).

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Warning- The rock here is Greywhacke and is therefore not the most solid of climbing mediums. Be aware that over time routes may change slightly as holds may break. On this note, it is advisable to wear helmets while climbing/belaying here. Also, as stated for all climbing areas in the Gorge, mind your valuables in the car as that theft can be a problem.



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Rock Climbing Information

Bay 1

This is the first bay on the left AFTER the gorge hiking track parking area. It is located (0.4)km from the start of the gorge and is easily identified by a yellow "S" (wiggly road ahead) sign just past the pull off. Bay 1 offers both bouldering and lead climbing possibilities. There are some decent cliffs, some of which can be top roped from the guard rail using a few long slings. The bouldering is an interesting (albeit small) venue which is actually UNDER the highway. It can be reached by walking just past the yellow "S" sign and then down a makeshift path on the left. The cliffs are actually directly below the car park. To reach the roped climbs, you can walk down the hill (past the boulder) and make your way along the river using a series of guide ropes. The other option is to abseil from the guard rail and pull your rope when you reach the grassy patch at the bottom of the crag. "Groovy Gecko" is the face you will typically abseil down and because of it's location and easy grade, it makes a great "final climb" as that you can opt to place a quick draw at the belay and continue up to the guard rail. This enables you to belay the remaining people up the route from the parking lot (perhaps while listening to the car radio even!).

1. Nathen's proj

This fun, possible 2 pitch line starts at ground zero on the left end of the cliffs and heads up to a good belay ledge. It then continues up the tricky face, trending slightly right. Currently just a Top Rope from the guard rail.

2. Choss Heap

This seems like it would be a great line to bolt..... but the rock quality is poop. It can definitely be done as a top rope (long slings on guard rail), but it made need a bit of cleaning and a helmet should DEFINITELY be worn by the belayer!

3. Mankey Brown Crack (13)

What? A trad line!!! This line climbs the crack which starts at the belay ledge at start of "Trundler's Delight's" second pitch. It cruises up the right facing corner, left of the bolted line, using lay-backs and good face holds. It appears the best placements are IN the corner, seams on the face may be subject to blow-outs! Due to Chucky's height, only 1 cam was placed for this whole line, but I think it is a good training piece for placing gear (perhaps done as an aid climb!). Due to its location, it will probably need cleaning now and again, especially after a rain. For the record, the boys actually continued on as a 3 pitch climb for this by topping out on the last 2 bolts of "Trundler's Delight." Trad gear (small- medium cams and full rack of nuts), (DBB)
Daniel "Chucky" Clearwater, Andy Gifford 23/10/07

4. Trundler's Delight- (19)

This route gets a mixed review..... the first part of the first pitch is dirty and unaesthetic but the ribbed corner (crux) on the upper portion is worth the dirt! The second pitch is a really fun slab. Start left of "Erica's Arete" on a grovelly bulge, head up to a dirty ledge, head right up a nice corner and up to the 1st belay. From there, cruise up the slab to a fun roof. Either rap of rings at the top, or finish at the guard rail as a final route for the day. This line was a long time in the making as that a MASSIVE death block needed to be trundled off the top before it was deemed safe to bolt. It took 3 "after work" sessions, using pry bars and car jacks to get it off..... but DAMM what a splash!!! Pitch 1 (19)- 6 bolts. Pitch 2 (17)- 5 bolts (or run it as one tall pitch, clipping one of the belay rings, 13 draws in all). (DBB)

Matt Natti 20/10/07 (only second pitch was done originally, due to lack of bolts and excessive dirt still on the first pitch, but Matt completed the line on 3/11/07)

Erica's Delight- (17) (variation)

This is a great, easier option to run a nice, tall line. Start up "Erica's Arete," but rather than heading to the rings on the right, go left, clip the "cross over" bolt (a long sling is helpful here to reduce rope drag) and head up the second pitch of "Trundler's Delight." Although you CAN use Trundler's mid belay and do this var. as a 2 pitch, it is WAY better to do as a long, 13 bolt line!!!

Matt Natti 20/10/07

5. Erica's Arete (13)

Originally lead as part of "Erica's Delight," this is also a great route by itself. Start in the middle of the face (middle of the whole crag, close to the river) and follow the bolt line trending left to the arete. Finish at the rings in the middle of the first ledge. (6 bolts, DBB)

Matt Natti 20/10/07

6. Bling (15)

Shares the first bolt of "Erica's Arete," but cruises up to the right on good holds. This line was named because of the amount of shiny new "stuff" used during the first ascent (bolts, hangers, rings, Clay's rope, Matt's harness etc!). (5 bolts, DBB)

Matt Natti, Fionn Claydon 2/11/07

7. Groovy Gecko- (14/15)

This was the first route bolted at Bay 1. It was cleaned with the intention of being a good access point and exit point for the area. It also turns out to be a very enjoyable route. Climb the left side of the low angle face on good holds. (6 bolts, DBB)

Matt Natti, Fionn Claydon 18/9/07

8. The Gorge-us Arete (aka Ben's project)- (17-19?)

This is a "still to be cleaned" project with all the bolts (minus hangers) in place, on the left side of the big slab (right of "Groovy Gecko"). To keep it simple, if it is clean and there are hangers on it when you get there... it has been sent and is fair game to climb. If it has seen no love by 2008, buy a few hangers at Bivoac, scrub it and send it.... this line looks too good to be ignored! (6 bolts, DBB)

9. Chainsaw Pants Massacre- (19)

This is a great line (probably the nicest in the whole gorge) with a lot of cool moves. Climb onto the block above the river and up the middle of the steep angled face. (8 bolts, DBB)

Fionn Claydon, Matt Natti 18/9/07

10. Have a Cigar (18)

This is the bolted line just left of the off width. It starts with a left, hand jam! The bolts are set up on this line to steer you away from the opposite wall of the crack but there are a few places where it is inevitable, just don't hug the right side the whole way,(6 bolts,DBB)

Matt Natti, Fionn Claydon 2/11/07

11. The Awful Offwidth- (12)

This is the obvious, wide crack. Due to the size of the gear required to adequately protect it, it is realistically either a solo or it can be top roped from the rings at the left-hand top of the crack. Andy, however, lead this using "French Nuts" (ie, he clipped the bolts from "Andy's Arete" on the way up!) Matt Natti was the first to solo the crack on 3/11/07. (DBB)

Andy Gifford 23/10/07

12. Andy's Arete- (15)

This is a super fun line which starts just to the right of "The Awful Off-width" which cruises up the face using the left facing arete for most of the climb. The start of the climb uses the face left of the crack but after pulling up and standing above the 1st bolt, use of the crack or opposite wall is..... shunned! This line was cleaned AND bolted by Matt Natti as a "thank you" to Andy (for assisting in the acquisition of almost all the bolt hangers used in the Palmy area), it was sent in good form. (6 bolts, DBB)

Andy Gifford, Matt Natti and Jamie??? 28/9/07

13. Sticky Situation- (17)

Start up the bulge right of "Andy's Arete" and trend right up the low angle face on good holds. Due to a lack of suitable bolt placements near the top of this climb, a mallion was added for clipping into the top bolt, allowing the bottom carabiner to hang over the edge of the small ledge (rather than on it, which could lead to a snapped biner!). (5 bolts, DBB)

Matt Natti 20/10/07

Photo 1: The Bay

The Bay 1 Boulder

After many return visits, the holds that are still there seems fairly solid, the landing has been improved and COUNTLESS variations of dumb moves on bad holds have been tried!

For anyone with a bit of imagination, there is potential for a bit of fun for all climbing levels.

Originally cleaned and developed by Jenna Burgi, Fionn Claydon and Matt Natti (after being rained out from a trip to Balance Bridge on April 9, 2006).

White Horse Rapids

This area was developed by a local climber named Scott Woods who, when he came to his senses and realised where he was, bailed out of Palmy and moved to the South Island! The best landmark is the bay 1.7km from the start of the gorge and is the only one which is not sealed (it is dirt and gravel). From this bay, the climbing area is another 0.3km up on the left at a sharp bend in the road. It is easily identified by a very vegetated bluff which sticks out into the river. It is also directly across from the train bridge and a big waterfall. After CAREFULLY making your way to this point (there are a few narrow sections, so please watch out for vehicles), hop the guard rail and head down a sketchy path (through blackberry bushes) to a stand of small trees. The first 2 routes are accessed by abseiling off to the right (from one of the trees) onto a good sized ledge 1 meter from the water (3-4 people can stand on it comfortably). The other routes are all accessed by abseiling down from the top of the cliff (just after you go past the trees, straight out towards the river) to bolted, hanging belays. Due to the dodgy nature of both the parking AND the access, this area is NOT a recommended climbing spot. Please use extreme caution if you DO decide to ignore the voluntary ban on these routes.

The two climbs that are accessed from the most westward set of bolts on the northern face are nice climbing:

The westward route is a grade 15 crack and involves delicate face moves and a fun hand crack.

From the west on the north face the climbs are 15, 18,21,14,14,16, 18,19,20 then ledge 1m above river.

The more eastward route is about 21 and has thin face moves, topping out at the same point as the above climb.

On the west face there is a 12 and a 27 to 29 which hasn't been done yet.

There are more climbs on the other side of the river but these have to be finished first.

Balance Bridge Area

Balance bridge offers the best "ground up" climbing in the gorge. Unlike the White Horse Rapids area, it is possible to walk to the base of most of the routes at the bridge (depending on how high the river is). It is also a bit different as that the rock there is limestone as opposed to greywacke. The bridge is located 6.6km from the start, and signifies the end of the gorge.

Safwan's Boulder

Ahhhh, poor Safwan..... allergic to ropes. He decided the landing was good enough on this small face to warrant giving it a little love.

1) Desperation (V0)

A sit start boulder problem which goes up the face between (eliminating) the right edge and the massive lay back flake on the left.

Safwan Zainal (9/03/06)

Lowtide Rock

This hard little rock is right down by the water (on the left hand side of the group if you are looking down from the bridge) and is only accessible when the river is down and not worth trying until the ground underneath is dry.

2) The River So-Low (14)

This line is basically a face move, followed by a pull onto the ramp above. The crux is low, the top is PISS easy. As that this line shares the last bolt of "Jarhead," try to stay left of the bolt to keep the lines somewhat separate. For the record, the first ascent was done just after the hangers had been placed... with out any quick draws, harness or belayer! (2 bolts, DCB)

Matt Natti 4/3/07

3) Jarhead (19)

A fun face climb, just left of the arete. As with "The River So Low," the top bolt is shared so try and stay right of the 3rd bolt as you pass it on the way to the top. (3bolts, DCB)

Nathen Tiereny 7/3/07

4) project.

This route starts with a very bouldery move and a "not so hot" landing so the first bolt was placed so it can be clipped from the cheater stone around the corner, making the first move protected from above. After pulling off the ground, follow the arete up and right to the highest point of the face and then up to the chains. (3 bolts, DCB)

5) Breath of Freshers (20)

The right hand face offers one beautiful, steep line with good holds and cool moves. (2 bolts, DCB)

Matt Natti 10/3/07

Red Block- This is the first "cliff" you get to when you walk down the track from the road. It is red (duh), slightly overhung and offers 3 good lines to play on. Climbs are listed from left to right.

6) One Little Tri-cam (13)

This short, pocketed climb was originally lead using just a single tri-cam for protection but as that is was hard to protect before the crux and most kiwis don't have tri-cams.... the bolts were put in to make it fun for everyone. (2 bolts, DCB)

Matt Natti 2/4/06

7) Little Red Riding Hood (20)

This climb offers cool, thought provoking slopers which lead to an easier, pocketed top out straight up the tall face in the middle of the rock. (3 bolts, DCB)

Matt Natti 2/4/06

8) Slippery When Wet (18)

The right-hand line. Yes, the arete is in! Be careful of the top clip as that it is a bit reachy. (4 bolts, DCB)

Matt Natti 12/4/06

The Corner- In between Red Block and the Main Wall is a short, steep and blank face. If the landing was better it would be a great boulder problem!

The Main Wall- This one is fairly obvious..... it is the big cliff right along the water.

9) The Soggy Scotsman (14)

This is the left of the 2 lines on the non-water side of the cliff. Although the line was originally sent by Matt Natti (after bolting, scrubbing, memorizing EVERY hold and practising the moves with an ascender while on top rope), Andy is given FULL credit for this route after sending the line a mere day or 2 after it was bolted..... on-site, at night (it was really dark), in the rain (it was REALLY wet) and with a slight beer buzz on (why else would you be out climbing in such conditions)!!! If you really want to do this route properly..... never mind, Andy is a nutter! (3 bolts, DCB)

Andy Gifford 21/3/06

Photo2: Balance Bridge Area



9a) Out patient (16)

This is the indirect start to "Impatience," which eliminates the washed out, bouldery, crux beginning moves. Start at the same belay ledge as "The Soggy Scottsman" but traverse right, using the painted bolt hanger as the first clip, until you get to the 3rd bolt of "Impatience." Finish straight up the wall to the "Impatience" belay.

10) Impatience (20)

This was the first line bolted by Matt in the Gorge. Originally this route was a grade 19. After the high waters of the '06-'07 winter, the banks have washed away a bit and now the start is a bit harder and a LOT lower than it was originally. As that the crux is within the first few moves, a new "first bolt" was added so that the start can be worked with less chance of injury. (5 bolts, DCB).

Matt Natti 17/3/06

11) Wasabi (21)

This highly satisfying line starts just before the drop off into the water. The crux, which offers a good burn that is over quick, lies in between the 2nd and 3rd bolt and is good for logging a bit of air time. Yes, the 4th bolt is a bit run out..... but if you can make it through the crux, the rest of the climb should just be no sweat. (4 bolts, DCB)

Fionn Claydon 9/10/07

12) Get your Gri-gri On (18- 24)

At the top of the cliff there are a few old bolts, which were the protection for the original climbs at Balance. The status quo for the "routes" on this face is a) get someone to lower you down and then top belay you, or b) set up a single line abseil, go down on a gri-gri and then belay yourself back up. Hopefully a way to place a platform at the bottom of this climb can be devised and a line of proper bolts can be placed. Of course, there is always the deep water solo option!

Grandmothers House- This is the short cliff over the river and UNDER the bridge. No routes yet, but some unofficial bouldering and dry tooling has been done.

Deep water solos- There are also a number of great " deep water" solos and boulder problems at Balance. None have grades or names, but they are a blast on a hot summer day!

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