

SNAKE CANYON VIA FERRATA GUIDE

“La Serpent Se Mord La Queue”

By Bill Huguelet and Kim Vaughn



Between the first and second Tyroleans

Bilad Seet

Hat

VIA FERRATA

La Serpent Se Mord La Queue

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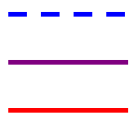
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START

PARKING
UNDER
PYLON

FINISH

APPROACH
CABLE
TYROLEAN

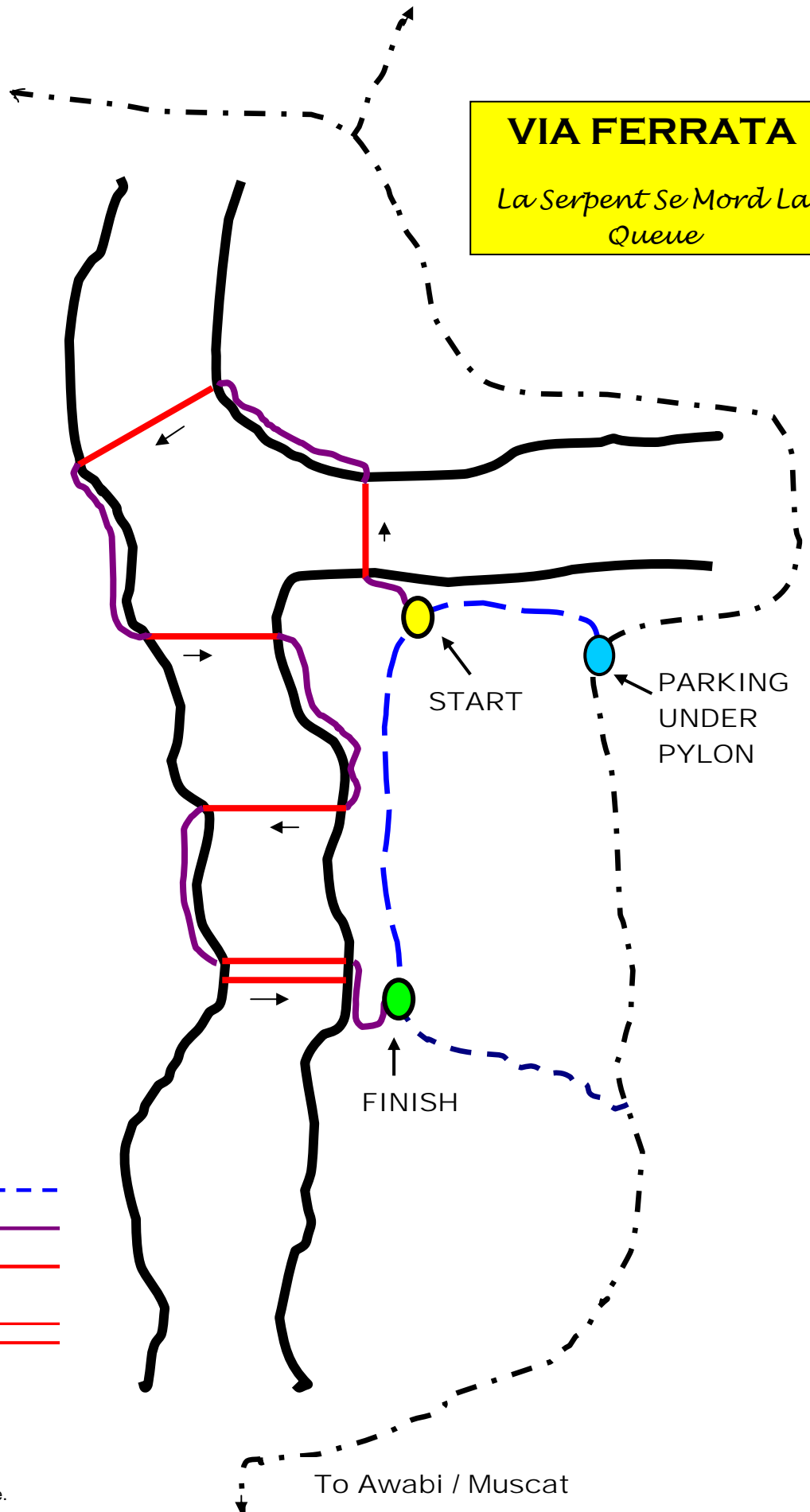


MONKEY
BRIDGE



This drawing is not to scale.

To Awabi / Muscat



Snake Canyon Via Ferrata “La Serpent Se Mord La Queue”

History

The construction of this via ferrata was a project of Oman’s Ministry of Tourism. It was designed and equipped by Patrick Cabiro, Nathalie Hanriot and Ludovic Pinel during the winter of 2004/2005.

Access

A four-wheel drive vehicle is essential! From Muscat, go in the direction of Sohar to Barka. Turn left at the main Barka roundabout, direction Nakal / Rustaq. Pass through Nakal and Awabi. Approximately 5 km past Awabi, turn left into Wadi Bani Awf. Drive up the wadi road, which is often very rough, for about 22 km to the village of Zammah. This is where Snake Canyon ends. The road turns right in the village, and climbs out of the wadi in a series of steep zig-zags. After a couple of kilometers it levels off, with views down to the left over the canyon. Continue a few hundred meters on this balcony road. You will begin to see a deep branch canyon straight ahead. The road curves to the right to eventually get around the head of this canyon. Just before it does this, look for a huge red and white electricity pylon very close to the road on your left. There is a narrow space on the left right under the pylon where 2 vehicles can park; others can find a place on the right as long as the road isn’t blocked.

Approach

Looking down from the parking, you will see the canyon make a Y junction. The first cable crosses near the junction, on the right-hand branch of the Y. You should be able to see it from the road. Go on up the road about 20 meters from the parking. Scramble down to the left below the road and follow the edge of the gorge down towards the junction of the two canyons. You walk on black limestone bedding planes. It’s steeper than it looks. Keep going down. A cairn of about a meter high marks the start, maybe 10 minutes from the road. Looking down from there, you see a short segment of cable, which can be used to show beginners how to use the gear. The main cable is just below that.

Difficulty

This ferrata is not difficult physically, but it is “airy”. For people not used to heights, it is very impressive. There are four “Tyrolean” crossings of the canyon, which require proper equipment and knowledge of how to use it. The final crossing is a “monkey bridge”—two cables, one for the hands and one for the feet. For people less than 1.5 meters tall, it may be difficult to reach the upper cable comfortably. In this case, it might be better for the person to go across the top cable on a pulley.

Timing

A small, fast group can do the ferrata in 1 hour 15 minutes. A larger and slower group may take several hours. The level of experience of the group is a major factor in the speed of progress. If you think your group will be slow, make sure to take adequate water and something to eat.

Itinerary

From the cairn marking the start, there is a short section of cable. Below that, look for the beginning of the main cable. The first Tyrolean is breathtaking! The cable traverses to the left. There is one section without easy footholds, where you have to hang on to the cable and get along as best you can. Tyrolean number two is also breathtaking! The path goes along a ledge, then on to Tyrolean 3. The cable then goes to your right, with a tight spot to

crawl through or go around outside. Then there is a descent, with some rungs for feet and hands. Short people may have some difficulty here. After that comes the Cave; a good place to stop and rest. Next comes a climb, then a traverse on a wide ledge, then Tyrolean 4. From there the cables go to your left. There is one short climb, then a ledge to the Monkey Bridge, the last major challenge. From there, there is some steep climbing (hand and foot rungs) to the finish.

Return to the parking

From the finish point, you have two options. 1) Go along to your left to the starting point and then back up the bedding planes to the road. 2) Looking up at the road, slightly to your right is a rocky spur. Pick your way up this to the road, then walk 200 meters along the road to the cars.