

## Alexander's Chimney (IV, WI4, M4) by Dave Cooper



*The east face of Longs Peak. Alexander's Chimney is the obvious ice runnel indicated by the arrow. Lamb's Slide is the snow gully shown at the lower left in this photo.*

One of the classic mixed routes on the east face of Longs Peak, Alexander's Chimney usually comes into shape between the end of September and early October, fed by melting snow from early season storms. By December the route has often sublimed away.

We recently (September 27th) found the route to be in excellent condition, sometimes described by ice climbers as "fat", meaning substantial ice.

The route climbs a chimney system at the left side of the lower east face, starting at a point about halfway up Lamb's Slide and ending at Broadway, the significant ledge system cutting across the face.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** The access road to the Longs Peak Ranger Station is located 6.4 miles north of Allenspark, or approximately 9 miles south of Estes Park, on State Highway 7. Drive a mile west up the access road and park in the large, paved parking lot by the ranger station. Rocky Mountain National Park fees are not collected at this location.

### **Hiking and Climbing Statistics:**

4000 feet of elevation gain in 8.8 miles round trip. The climbing portion constitutes approximately 500 feet of this elevation gain. The highest elevation reached is 13,100 feet. Allow 3 and a half to four hours for the approach.

**Difficulty:** A long trail approach to a technical mixed snow, ice and rock climb. Conditions vary but we found WI4, M4.

**Technical Gear:** Since conditions vary so widely, it is best to be prepared for anything. If you plan to rappel the route, two ropes will be necessary. Several ice screws and an alpine rock rack should be sufficient for protection.

**USGS Quad:** Longs Peak, CO

### Caution:

Be aware of the potential for rock and ice fall and always wear your helmet.

Also watch out for the ravens. When we climbed the route in 2005 we had left our packs at the base of the climb, only to discover, on our return that the ravens had opened the zippers on our packs to get at the food. In the process, much of the contents had been strewn down Lamb's Slide

Remember, climbing is an inherently dangerous activity and you should always climb within your ability after carefully judging the safety of the route. We write about it, you take all the risks.

### Approach

From the Longs Peak Trailhead, follow the Longs Peak Trail for 3.1 miles to a saddle (Waypoint "SADDLE") where the Chasm Lake Trail

divides from the Longs Peak Trail. The solar outhouse located here makes this a natural spot for a rest stop.

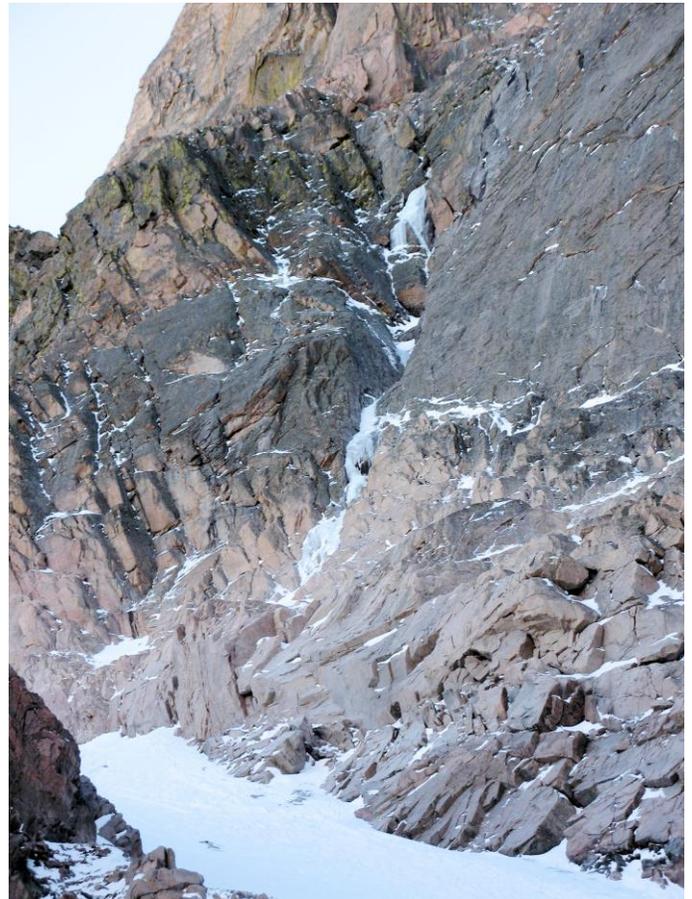
Continue on the trail towards Chasm Lake. Upon reaching the Ranger Hut below Chasm Lake, scramble up snow, rock and ice on a climbers' trail that takes you to Chasm lake. The trail is cairned.

Once at Chasm Lake, follow a climbers' trail around the right (north) side of the lake across large boulders and reach Mills Glacier, at the base of the east face. When the lake is solidly frozen it is faster and easier to cross it directly, but wait until it is safe. On our climb on September 27th it hadn't started to freeze.

Head to the left up Lambs Slide (the broad snow couloir at the base of the lower east face) several hundred feet to the base of Alexander's Chimney, an obvious recess filled with ice. (Lambs Slide is named for the Reverend Lamb, who in 1871 attempted to descend the couloir in icy conditions and ended up sliding much of the way down, an exciting first descent). Note that Lambs slide can be wind-loaded and avalanche-prone, so check conditions.

*Alexander's Chimney is best approached from the left side via a rock scramble .*

### Climb Description



The

easiest way to get to the start of the route is to go a short distance past the route, then cut in from the left on snow and rock.

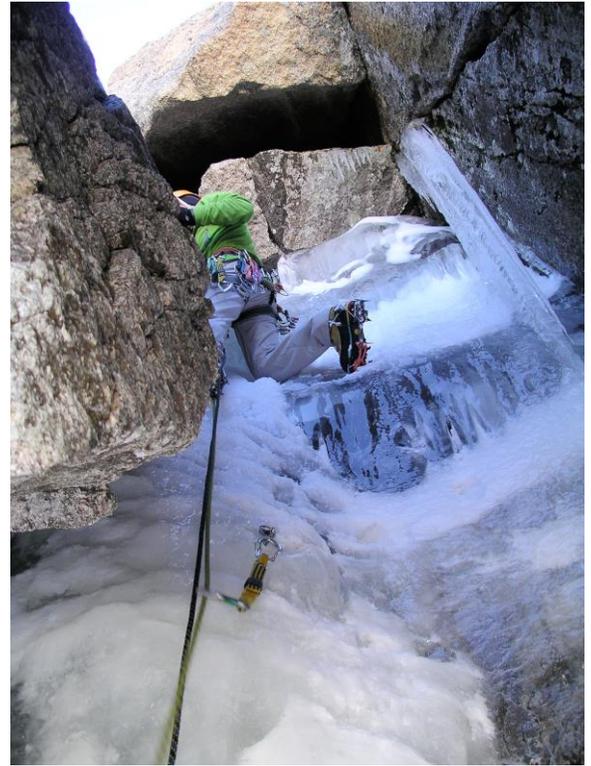
The first pitch starts with a short steep ice ribbon (WI3+), then quickly lays back as it heads up to a fixed anchor of pitons and hammered-in pieces of protection.

#### *The easy second pitch*

Pitch 2 is an easy climb up snow and low-angle ice, ending below a huge chockstone (several fixed anchors).

The third pitch is usually the crux pitch, and involves climbing ice under the chockstone for 15 feet before climbing to the left out of the chimney on tricky mixed ground.

The third pitch continues up a left-facing corner, which can sometimes be very thin and requires rock protection. As of the end of September, however, the ice was excellent up this section and allowed the use of ice screws.



*Starting up the crux third pitch*

Continue above the left-facing corner up a short, steep twenty foot section of often-brittle water ice (WI4) to fixed anchors.

*The left-facing corner on the third pitch in "fat" conditions.*

This point, at the top of the third pitch, is where many parties will end the climb and start rappelling back down the route. I must say that in my opinion this isn't a bad idea, since the exit pitches up to Broadway are extremely awkward for me (I claim it's height-related - more difficult for tall climbers).

Anyway, if you decide to continue up, there are several choices, the easiest of which, though not exactly the most elegant, steps up and left around the next chockstone and goes a short distance up to a right-trending ledge system. Head right on this snow-covered ledge, crawling or grovelling under a low overhang until you can again stand up. You are now at the infamous "Death Flake", an obviously loose, massive flake that provides the only handholds as you carefully traverse with your crampon points on narrow ledges. Try not to pull the flake off.

This brings you to a good belay spot. The last pitch heads up and left in a short dihedral. Exit the dihedral onto flakes, then pick your way left and up to Broadway on easier ground.

### **Descent**

Walk left (south) on Broadway until you reach Lambs Slide. Carefully descend Lambs Slide back to your packs.

