

All Mixed Up (WI4)

by Dave Cooper

Several early season snow storms, along with warm weather in between have combined to create an abundance of ice this year in Rocky Mountain National Park.

One of the beneficiaries of this weather pattern has been a climb on the northeast face of Thatchtop Mountain known to climbers as “All Mixed Up”.

With more ice on the climb than I have seen in previous years, several pure ice lines exist this year. Justifiably popular, on a weekend in November or December you are likely to encounter several parties on this route. Even on a recent weekday excursion we shared the route with another party. The ice is wide enough on the lower pitches to accommodate several parties if care and consideration are exercised by all parties. This is one of those climbs where you should choose a

Getting to the Trailhead: From the major intersection of US Highways 34 and 36 in the town of Estes Park, head west through town on US 36. Turn south in 0.4 miles and continue on US36 as it turns west to Rocky Mountain National Park. Turn left (south) on Bear Lake Road after 4.4 miles and drive to the Glacier Gorge parking area at 13.1 miles.

Hiking and Climbing Statistics:

The approach gains 1800 feet of elevation gain in 3.0 miles. The climb is four pitches long.

Difficulty: A moderate trail approach to a steep snow slog gets you to the base of the route. Four pitches of moderate ice climbing up to WI4 will get you to the top of the climb. Depending on conditions, protection may be scarce, so make sure you are comfortable leading at this level.

Many harder variations exist in the bowl.

Technical Gear: A moderate ice rack and a small alpine rock rack should be sufficient for protection. Remember that if you’re climbing the main flow, at least four ice screws will be used up at the belay stances.

USGS Quad: Mc Henrys Peak, CO

line and stick with it.

On the exit pitch all lines converge, potentially causing congestion. Please try to move efficiently through this pitch and not tie it up.

This truly is a classic climb, offering multi-pitch climbing in a high alpine environment. Enjoy.

“All Mixed Up” ascends four pitches of ice on the northeast face of Thatchtop Mountain

Approach

From the Glacier Gorge trailhead follow the signs to Mills Lake and Black Lake. Near the east end of Mills Lake, after 2.4 miles, find a place to cross the inlet, being careful of thin ice on the lake. If you’re lucky you will find a track from here heading west up steep, snow-covered slopes into the large



bowl above Mills Lake; if not, look forward to a strenuous wallow in deep snow over and under downed timber. Once out of the trees, carefully find your way through rock, ice flows and krummholtz to the start of the climb, clearly visible above you. The morning we were there, clouds bathed the Front Range below us.



Looking back to the east

Climb Description

Choose a starting point to ascend the low-angled ice-covered slabs of the first pitch. Some years you'll find pitons at the end of the pitch, just below a steep curtain of ice, though with the amount of ice this season they are probably concealed.



Climber starting up the second pitch

The next two pitches climb short steep ice curtains interspersed with low angle sections. Where you belay may depend on how many ice screws you have, but hopefully the end of the third pitch finds you at the top of a long snow slope separating the first three pitches from the last. Find a protected belay stance at either side of the final pitch, probably requiring some rock protection.

In some years the final pitch, a thick column of ice approximately 150 feet long, is the crux. This year however we found it to be easier than some of the lower pitches. In fact the plastic ice was a delight. Exit onto snow and set up a rock anchor at the top of this pitch.

Good plastic ice on the exit pitch was a delight

Descent

To descend, walk up the snow for 50 feet and exit climbers left onto gentle terrain. Traverse left for perhaps a hundred yards until finding a reasonable downclimb route in a shallow gully. Carefully pick your way down until you reach a downsloping ramp which takes you back to the base of the route and your packs.



Carefully descend to climbers left

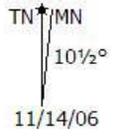
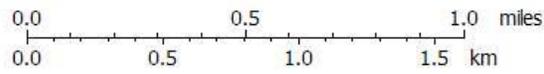
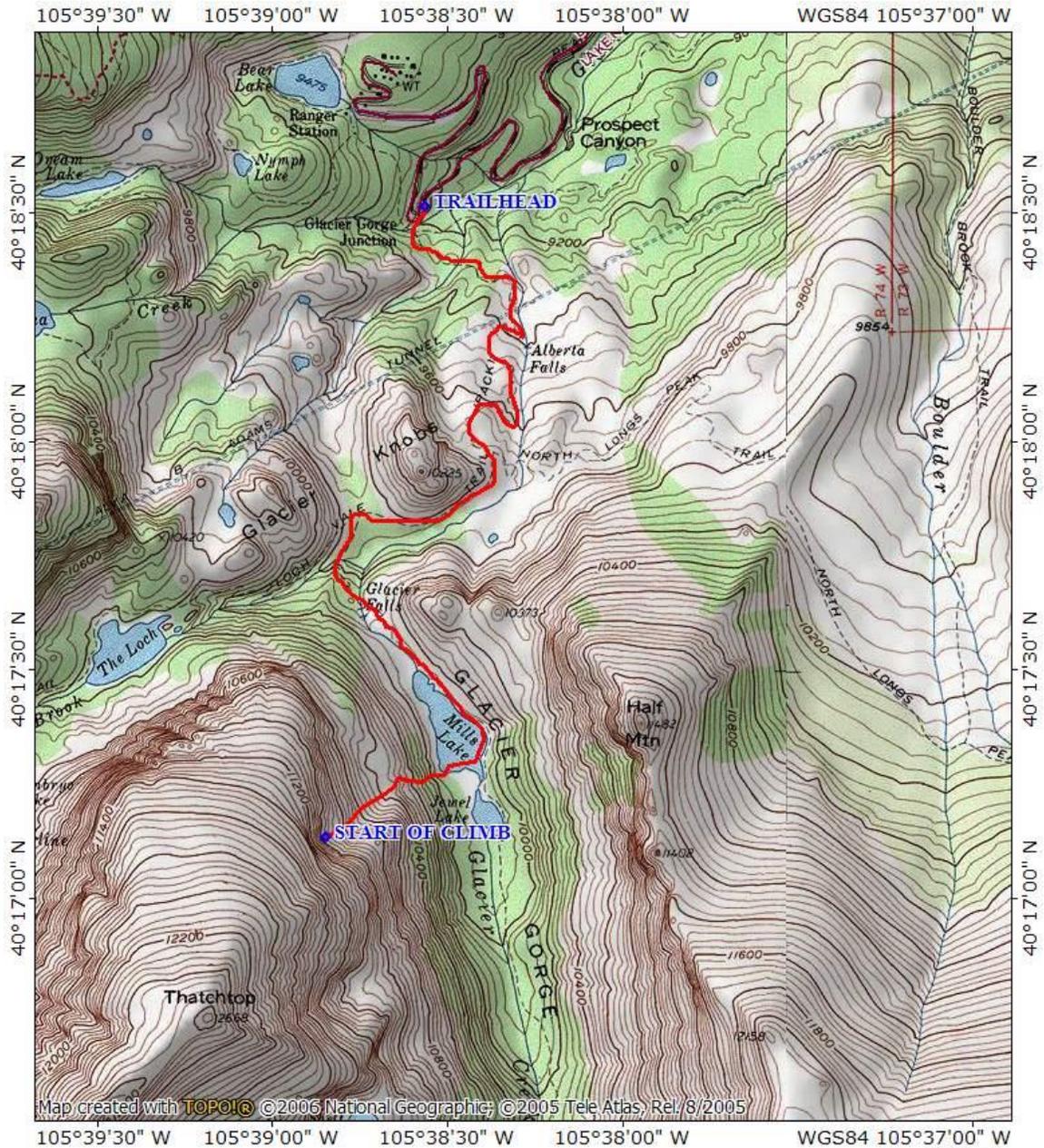


Caution:

The snow above the climb has been known to slide, so check on avalanche conditions before getting on this climb. Be aware of the potential for ice fall and always wear your helmet.

Also, watch out for the ravens if you leave your pack at the base of the climb. They can empty your pack in their quest for food. They are especially adept at opening zippers.

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.



11/14/06

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 START OF CLIMB: 40,17,8N / 105,38,51W, 10993 feet
 TRAILHEAD: 40,18,31N / 105,38,34W, 9216 feet

