

The Ames Ice Hose

by Dave Cooper



Getting to the Trailhead: Three miles west of Telluride, take State Highway 145 south towards Ophir and Lizardhead Pass. Drive south on SH145 for 7.2 miles until you reach an intersection signed: National Forest Access – Ilium, Ames. Turn sharply right onto this dirt road which can be quite icy. In 0.9 miles make a sharp left turn and drive downhill to the Ames Power Plant, 1.2 miles from SH145. Park in the small parking area by the plant.

Statistics: Trailhead to the base of the climb (9,230 feet): 750 feet of elevation gain in 1.0 miles one way. 3 pitches of ice.

Difficulty: The rating normally given to this climb is WI5/6 M6 R. When in good shape it may not exceed WI4+, but it is a long sustained climb and should be approached with respect. Check conditions before heading over there at <http://www.jackrobertsclimbing.com/icecond.html>.

Gear: Two 60 meter ropes, sizeable ice rack and a mixed rack for the first pitch if it is thin. When the ice is fat you can leave the rock protection behind. Bring V-thread material (as always).

USGS Quad: Mount Wilson, CO (optional).

The impressive Ames Ice Hose - compressed.jpg

Surely one of the most impressive pieces of ice in Colorado, the Ames Ice Hose near Ophir ranks high on my list of favorites.

I recently had the opportunity to visit the climb again and found it to be in great shape. Sometimes the first pitch can be very thin and require advanced mixed climbing skills. As of March 13th that first pitch was pure water ice, steep and fat.

Approach

There are a couple of ways to approach the climb. The most frequently used approach starts at the Ames Hydroelectric Power Plant, a historic site which was the first commercial power plant in the US to generate Alternating Current (AC) power. The plant was built in 1891 to provide power for the Gold King Mine.

From the parking area walk 20 yards further up the road to an open gate on your left. Pass through the gate

Approaching the Ames Ice Hose - compressed.jpg

and follow a track as it passes between several buildings. The track turns right immediately after passing an old log building. Fifty yards beyond the log cabin the trail climbs steeply up a slippery hillside to a bench, then turns right on the bench and crosses two drainages, the second of which is another fine ice climb known as Ames Falls. After crossing above Ames Falls the track climbs steeply west to gain the old railroad grade. Follow the railroad grade northwest for 0.6 miles to the base of the snow slope leading up to the climb. Scramble up the slope for 400 vertical feet to the start of the ice.

The Climb

The route is generally climbed in three pitches. The first pitch, as mentioned earlier, can vary from sparsely protected M6 to good steep water ice (WI4+) later in the season.

The first pitch is a little less than a rope length and ends at a belay stance on the left side of the ice (one bolt and a pin), or immediately opposite in a cave which can be used to provide shelter from falling ice.



Climber leading the first pitch - compressed.jpg

The second pitch is a full 60 meters and climbs a narrow slot (WI4-5) to a large ledge. Set a belay at the right end of this ledge. I can attest to the fact that there is no truly protected spot at this belay. The first time I was here my shoulders were bruised for weeks afterwards. Fixed pins have been added at this belay stance.

The third and final pitch climbs the wide sheet of ice for 60 meters and can be anything from WI4 to WI5+. 60 meter ropes barely reach the tree anchors at the top of this pitch.

Descent

Three double rope (60 meter) rappels down the route get you back to the base of the climb. A tree at the top of the climb provides the first rappel anchor, to the fixed pins at the top of the second pitch and then to the bolt/pin anchor at the top of the first pitch for the third rappel.

Caution:

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.



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