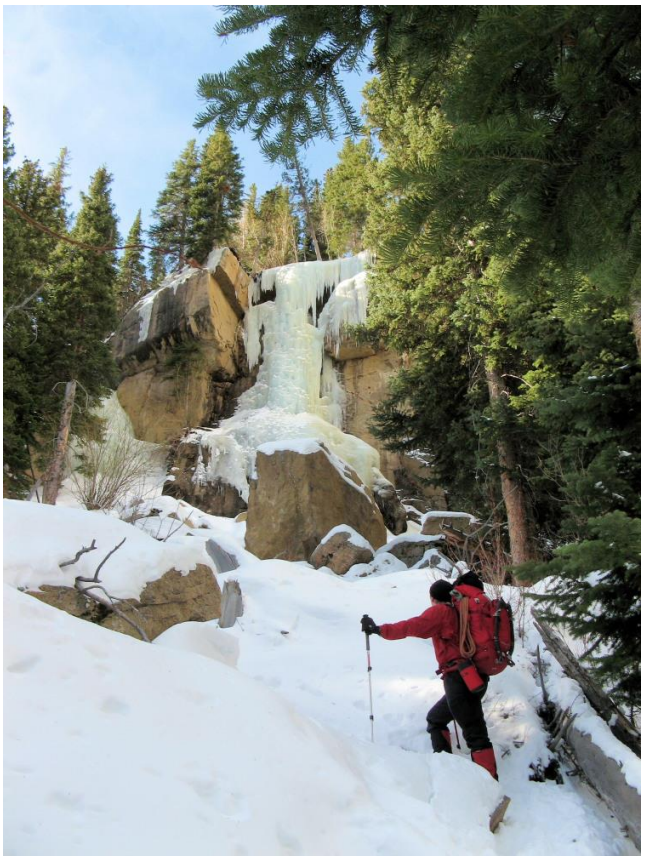
An old dog learning new tricks

by Dave Cooper



Approaching Hidden Falls.jpg

Over the last few years there has been something of a revolution in ice climbing regarding the use of leashes. The leashes attach from the ice tool to the climbers wrist, allowing the climber to periodically relax his/her grip on the tool while still hanging securely from the overhead placement. The ability to relax your grip stops your hands and forearms from "pumping out", extremely important when climbing a long, steep pitch.

A few years ago equipment, technique and training had evolved to the point where climbing even overhanging ice was no problem for elite climbers. In an attempt to make ice climbing competitions more challenging, some of the European competitions banned the use of leashes. Lo and behold, the climbers found that, apart from the problem of occasionally dropping their ice tools on spectators, the abolition of leashes actually gave the climbers more freedom to make some of the gymnastic moves and flexibility to switch hands during complex climbing sequences.

Since then, a new generation of ice tools has emerged, designed specifically for leashless use. The shaft is more aggressively curved and a pommel added to support the hand. Initially adopted mainly by climbers for use on mixed routes (a route requiring climbing both on rock and ice), leashless tools are rapidly becoming the norm for pure ice routes as well.

Head to the Ouray Ice Park these days and you're likely to find a majority of climbers using these new-fangled, leashless ice tools. When I show up at a climbing area these days I feel something like a dinosaur, so after being continually given grief by my climbing partners I decided to give this new technology a try. As the ice season winds down we headed to Hidden Falls in Rocky Mountain National Park, a spot that we have often used as a practice area in the past.

Getting to the Trailhead: If travelling from the Denver/ Boulder area, take Highway 36 to the town of Lyons. From Lyons, take Highway 7 west. Drive on Highway 7 (Peak to Peak Highway) to its intersection with County Road 84W, 2.2 miles north of Allens Park. A prominent sign indicates that the Wild Basin Entrance Station is to the west. Drive on 84W for one third of a mile, then take the right fork, signed to Wild Basin. Pass the entrance station and continue on the snowy, single lane road past Copeland Lake to the winter closure, a total of 1.4 miles from Highway 7.

Gear: A standard ice rack is sufficient. One 60 meter rope is sufficient. If top-roping, you should also have material to extend the anchor, since the trees are set back from the edge of the ice. Otherwise use a 70 meter rope.

Difficulty: 100 feet of WI3+ to WI4. In some years, a steep column of ice has occasionally formed off the prow to the right of the main flow. If this is there, it provides technical climbing on vertical ice (WI5).

USGS Map: Allens Park, CO.

On the last Sunday in March we found the ice at Hidden Falls to be in surprisingly good condition considering the warm temperatures the Front Range had been experiencing. This was the ideal place to test out this new aspect of the sport, though I confess to having several misgivings about the whole idea. The thought of being on a long multi-pitch route with the potential to drop an ice tool causes me to have

nightmares (the tethers that some climbers have adopted to solve this problem seem to me to take away some of the flexibility gained by going leashless in the first place). Also, the manufacturers have disclaimers stating that the likelihood of falling while climbing, increases if not using leashes! Still there must be something to this new trend, so I took a few laps on the ice of Hidden Falls with borrowed tools and was pleasantly surprised. It didn't feel all that strange once I became used to the different curvature of the tools and arguably is more akin to rock climbing. It may be a while before I lead anything without leashes, but I do think it's worth pursuing.

The Approach

One way to reach the climb is to walk to the Ranger Station and continue on the Thunder Lake Trail, then cross North St. Vrain Creek and head up to the climb. Using this approach, the Falls can be difficult to spot. I'll describe what I think is a better approach, especially if already tracked.

From the winter parking area, walk southwest along the road towards the Wild Basin Ranger Station, passing the Finch Lake Trailhead at mile 0.8. Continue to the Copeland Falls Trailhead, on the left at mile 1.1, immediately before the road crosses a bridge. Take the Copeland Falls Trail as it parallels the creek close to the south bank, passing Copeland Falls and continuing to mile 1.8. Look for the ice a short distance above the trail, on your left. Head up to the ice.

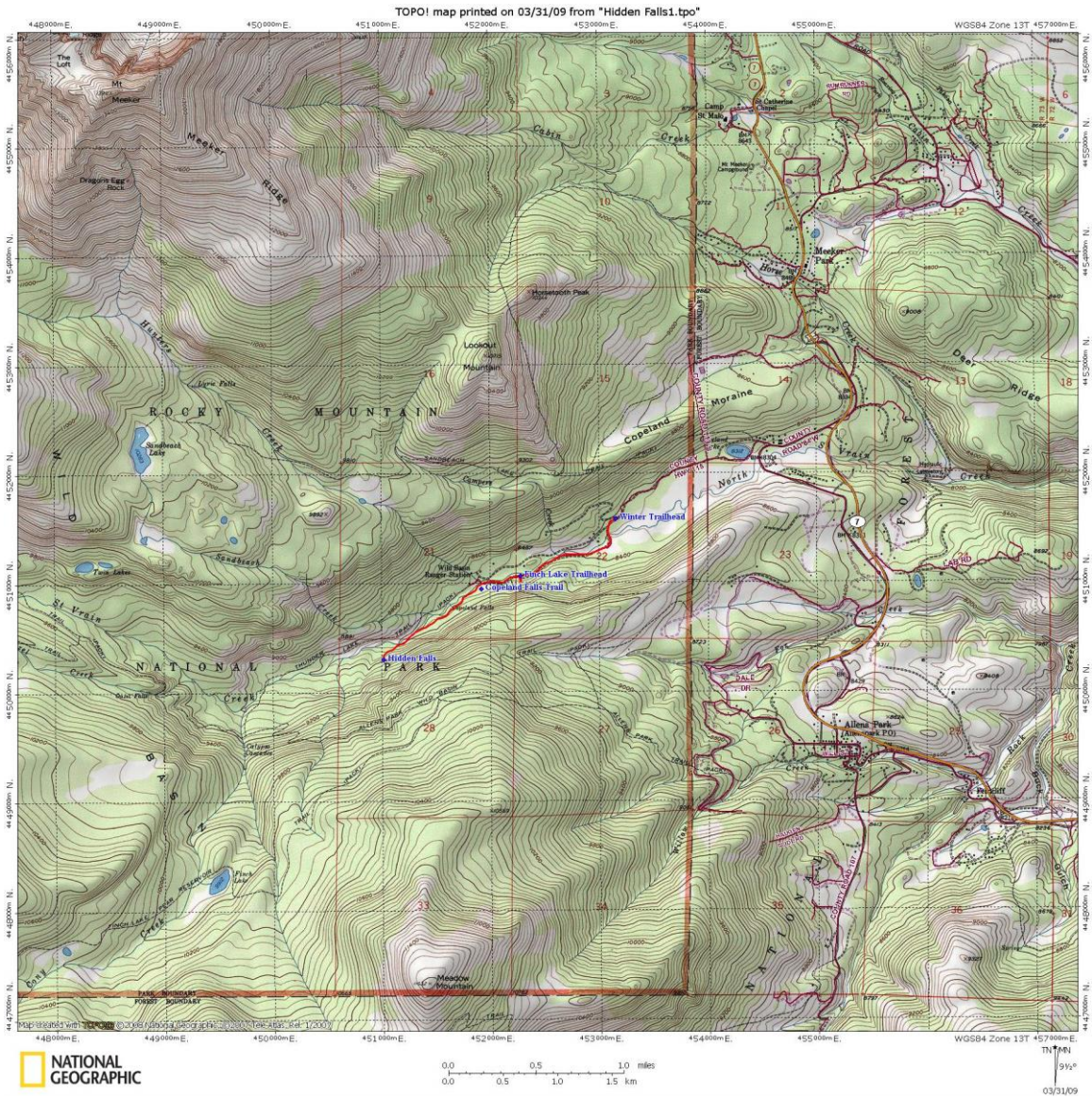
The Climb

Hidden Falls offers 100 feet of ice that may accommodate two parties if it is well formed. If more than one party is climbing, it's best to alternate rather than risk knocking ice down on another climber.

20 feet below the top of the climb is a cave (left side) with fixed anchors. To this point the climbing is usually WI3+. If formed, the last 20 feet offer a steeper finish to tree anchors.

Either rappel from the fixed anchors in the cave or from trees at the top. If rappelling from the top, make sure your ropes reach the ground. It's probably better to walk off to the climbers' left, back around to the base of the climb.

Climber on Hidden Falls-small.JPG



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.

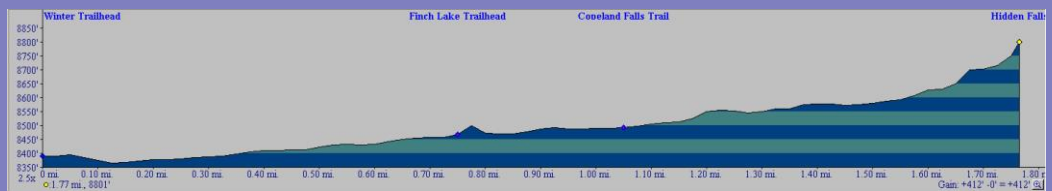
GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

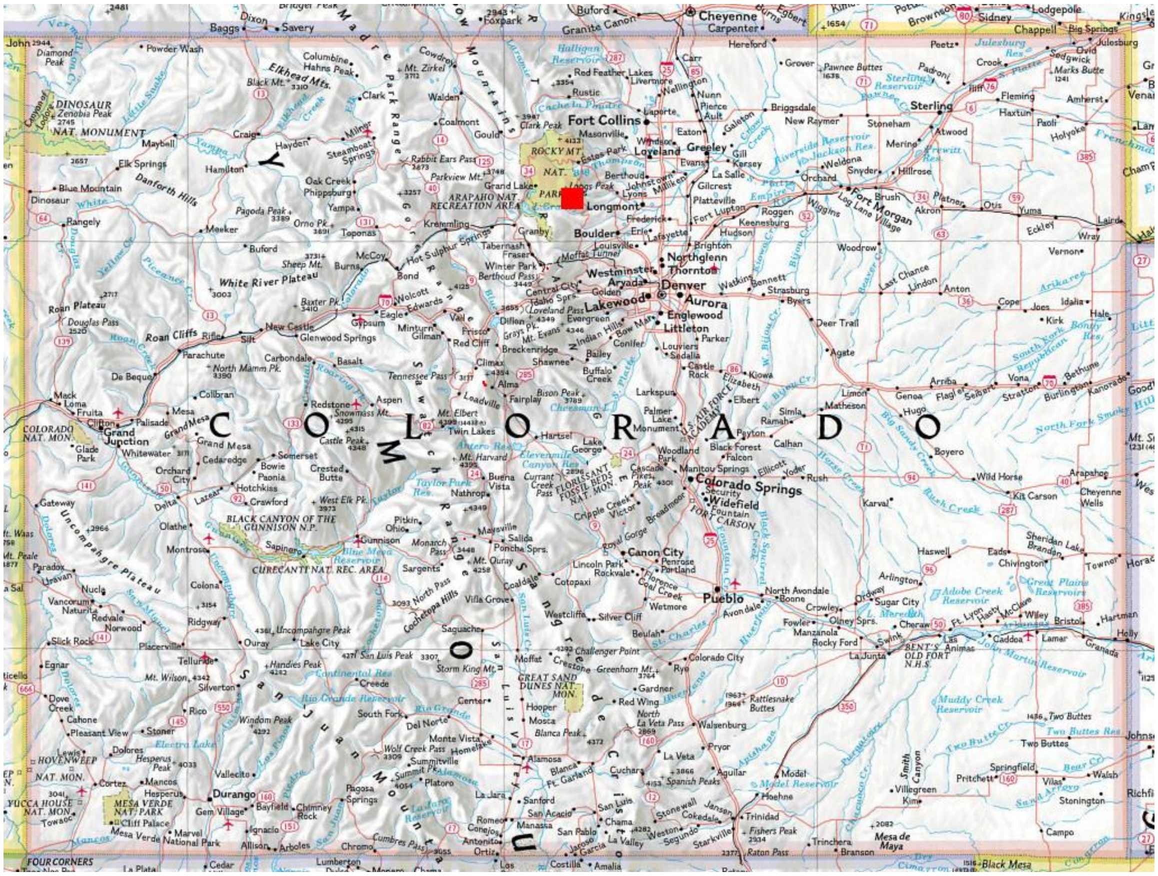
Winter Trailhead,40,12,48,-105,33,2,8386 feet

Finch Lake Trailhead,40,12,31,-105,33,39,8432 feet

Copeland Falls Trail,40,12,27,-105,33,54,8770 feet

Hidden Falls,40,12,6,-105,34,32,8783 feet





COLORADO
Cheyenne
Sidney
Lodgepole
Julesburg
Baggs
Dixon
Savery
Foxpark
Buford
Granite Canon
Carpenter
Hereford
Grover
Pawnee Buttes
Peetz
Crook
Sedgwick
Ovid
Chappell
Big Springs
DINOSAUR NAT. MONUMENT
Zenobia Peak
Diamond Peak
Powder Wash
Columbine
Hahns Peak
Elkhead Mts.
Black Mt.
Mt. Zirkel
Clark
Cowdrey
Walden
Red Feather Lakes
Livermore
Rustic
Wellington
Nunn
Pierce
Ault
Laporte
Fort Collins
Briggsdale
New Raymer
Stoneham
Sterling
Fleming
Haxtun
Amherst
Paoli
Holyoke
Iliff
Atwood
Merino
Maybell
Craig
Hayden
Milner
Steamboat Springs
Coalmont
Gould
Clark Peak
Masonville
ROCKY MT. NAT. PARK
Estes Park
Loveland
Greeley
Eaton
Galeton
Windsor
Gill
Kersey
Evans
La Salle
Berthoud
Johnstown
Milliken
Gilcrest
Platteville
Longmont
Lyons
Longs Peak
Weldona
Orchard
Snyder
Hillrose
Fort Morgan
Brush
Log Lane Village
Wiggins
Akron
Platner
Otis
Yuma
Eckley
Wray
Laird
Elk Springs
Hamilton
Danforth Hills
Blue Mountain
Dinosaur
Rangely
Meeker
Pagoda Peak
Orno Pk.
Oak Creek
Phippsburg
Yampa
Toponas
Rabbit Ears Pass
Parkview Mt.
Grand Lake
ARAPAHO NAT. RECREATION AREA
Kremmling
Granby
Boulder
Erie
Lafayette
Frederick
Fort Lupton
Roggen
Keenesburg
Hudson
Brighton
Louisville
Northglenn
Thornton
Westminster
Arvada
Denver
Aurora
Lakewood
Golden
Englewood
Littleton
Parker
Watkins
Bennett
Strasburg
Byers
Deer Trail
Woodrow
Last Chance
Lindon
Anton
Cope
Joes
Idalia
Kirk
Hale
Vernon
Buford
Sheep Mt.
Burns
McCoy
Bond
White River Plateau
Hot Sulphur Springs
Tabernash
Fraser
Winter Park
Berthoud Pass
Moffat Tunnel
Central City
Idaho Sprs.
Loveland Pass
Evergreen
Mt. Evans
Indian Hills
Bow Mar
Conifer
Roan Plateau
Douglas Pass
Roan Cliffs
Rifle
Silt
New Castle
Glenwood Springs
Baxter Pk.
Wolcott
Edwards
Eagle
Gypsum
Minturn
Gilman
Vail
Frisco
Dillon
Grays Pk.
Red Cliff
Breckenridge
Shawnee
Bailey
Buffalo Creek
Louviers
Sedalia
Castle Rock
Kiowa
Elizabeth
Elbert
Agate
Parachute
Carbondale
Basalt
North Mamm Pk.
De Beque
Tennessee Pass
Climax
Alma
Fairplay
Bison Peak
Larkspur
Palmer Lake
Monument
U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY
Limon
Genoa
Arriba
Flagler
Seibert
Vona
Stratton
Burlington
Bethune
Kanorado
Simla
Matheson
Ramah
Hugo
Mack
Loma
Fruita
Mesa
Collbran
Redstone
Aspen
Snowmass Mt.
Leadville
Mt. Elbert
Twin Lakes
Hartsel
Lake George
Woodland Park
Black Forest
Peyton
Calhan
Falcon
Boyero
COLORADO NAT. MON.
Clifton
Grand Junction
Palisade
Grand Mesa
Glade Park
Whitewater
Cedaredge
Somerset
Castle Peak
Bowie
Paonia
Crested Butte
Mt. Harvard
Buena Vista
Nathrop
Antero Res.
Elevenmile Canyon Res.
FLORISSANT FOSSIL BEDS NAT. MON.
Cascade
Pikes Peak
Manitou Springs
Colorado Springs
Ellicott
Yoder
Rush
Wild Horse
Arapahoe
Cheyenne Wells
Kit Carson
Karval
Orchard City
Hotchkiss
Delta
Lazear
Crawford
West Elk Pk.
Taylor Park Res.
Cripple Creek
Victor
Security
Widefield
Fountain
FORT CARSON
Gateway
Uncompahgre Plateau
Olathe
BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON N.P.
Pitkin
Ohio
Maysville
Salida
Poncha Sprs.
Monarch Pass
Mt. Ouray
Gunnison
Sapinero
Blue Mesa Reservoir
CURECANTI NAT. REC. AREA
Montrose
Sargents
Royal Gorge
Broadmoor
Canon City
Penrose
Portland
Lincoln Park
Rockvale
Florence
Coal Creek
Cotopaxi
Wetmore
Pueblo
North Avondale
Boone
Avondale
Haswell
Eads
Chivington
Sheridan Lake
Brandon
Towner
Arlington
Ordway
Sugar City
Crowley
Olney Sprs.
Adobe Creek Reservoir
Great Plains Reservoirs
Paradox
Uravan
Nucla
Vancorum
Naturita
Redvale
Norwood
Colona
Ridgway
Cochetopa Hills
North Pass
Villa Grove
Saguache
Westcliffe
Silver Cliff
Beulah
Fowler
Manzanola
Rocky Ford
Swink
La Junta
Cheraw
Las Animas
Ft. Lyon
Hasty
McClave
Wiley
Caddoa
Lamar
Bristol
Hartman
Holly
Granada
BENT'S OLD FORT N.H.S.
John Martin Reservoir
Slick Rock
Placerville
Telluride
Ouray
Uncompahgre Peak
Lake City
San Luis Peak
Storm King Mt.
Moffat
Crestone
Challenger Point
Greenhorn Mt.
Colorado City
Rye
Egnar
Mt. Wilson
Silverton
Handies Peak
Creede
Continental Res.
Rio Grande Reservoir
GREAT SAND DUNES NAT. MON.
Hooper
Mosca
Center
Gardner
Red Wing
Rattlesnake Buttes
Muddy Creek Reservoir
Two Buttes
Dove Creek
Cahone
Pleasant View
Rico
Stoner
Windom Peak
South Fork
Del Norte
Monte Vista
Homelake
Blanca Peak
North La Veta Pass
Walsenburg
Pryor
Two Buttes Res.
Lewis
HOVENWEEP NAT. MON.
Dolores
Hesperus Peak
Electra Lake
Wolf Creek Pass
Summitville
Alamosa
Blanca
Ft. Garland
Cuchara
La Veta
Spanish Peaks
Aguilar
Model
Model Reservoir
Smith Canyon
Villegreen
Kim
Springfield
Pritchett
Vilas
Walsh
Stonington
Cortez
Mancos
Vallecito
Summit Pk.
Platoro
Hesperus
Durango
Pagosa Springs
La Jara
Sanford
Hoehne
YUCCA HOUSE NAT. MON.
MESA VERDE NAT. PARK
Cliff Palace
Towaoc
Gem Village
Bayfield
Chimney Rock
Romeo
Conejos
Manassa
San Acacio
San Luis
Chama
Stonewall
Jansen
Cokedale
Trinidad
Fishers Peak
Mesa Verde National Park
Marvel
Ignacio
Allison
Arboles
Chromo
Cumbres Pass
Antonito
Ortiz
Jaroso
Garcia
San Pablo
La Valley
Weston
Segundo
Starkville
Raton Pass
Trinchera
Branson
Mesa de Maya
Campo
FOUR CORNERS
La Plata
Cedar Hill
Lumberton
Dulce
Monero
Chama
Costilla
Amalia
Black Mesa