

Desert Ice – No Thoroughfare Canyon-WI4 by Dave Cooper

Think about your usual ice climbing location – a cold, snowy valley high in the mountains. This week we visit a very different environment – still cold, but rather than snow covered mountains you will be in a desert environment.

Located in the Colorado National Monument, the outing described here allows you to combine scenic desert canyon hiking with a couple of pitches of spectacular ice climbing. I guarantee that this will qualify as one of your most unique ice experiences.

For non-ice climbers the hike itself is certainly worthwhile if you enjoy the desert canyons – high sandstone walls surrounding the sandy streambed with a wide variety of vegetation and intriguing pools to explore. Since the rough trail bypasses the lower falls it is possible to hike several miles up the canyon.



On the trail to No Thoroughfare Canyon

Approach and Climbing Description

To reach the lower icefall, follow the trail signs to No Thoroughfare Canyon, passing two trail junctions in the first 0.3 miles. The trail follows the wash for a total of 1.9 miles to the base of the lower icefall. Much of the stream will be frozen in the morning, so take care when crossing the stream. Expect the approach to the lower falls to take about an hour.



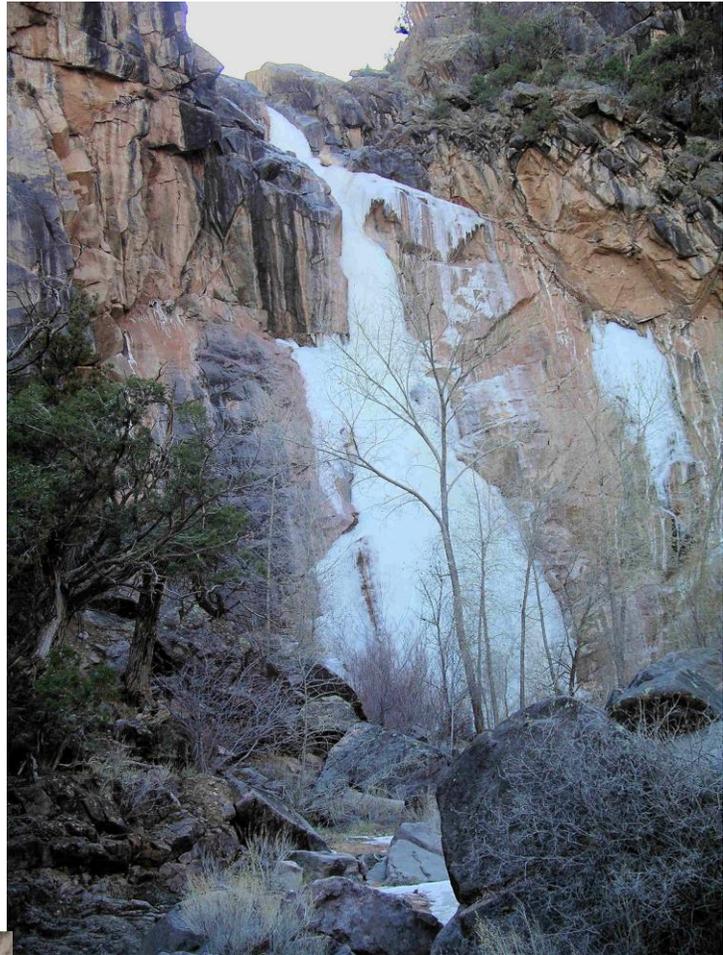
Desert hiking, with ice tools at the ready!

Both the lower and upper falls occur where granite has intruded into the soft sandstone. This harder rock has eroded more slowly, creating the steep drop-offs.



One of the partially-frozen pools on the way to the climbing

The first view of the lower falls is quite unexpected and seems quite incongruous in this location. A full 50 meters of W14, the crux being near the top.



Either lead the pitch or walk around on a steep, somewhat loose trail on the right side of the falls. There are fixed anchors at the top of the pitch.

Your first view of the lower falls

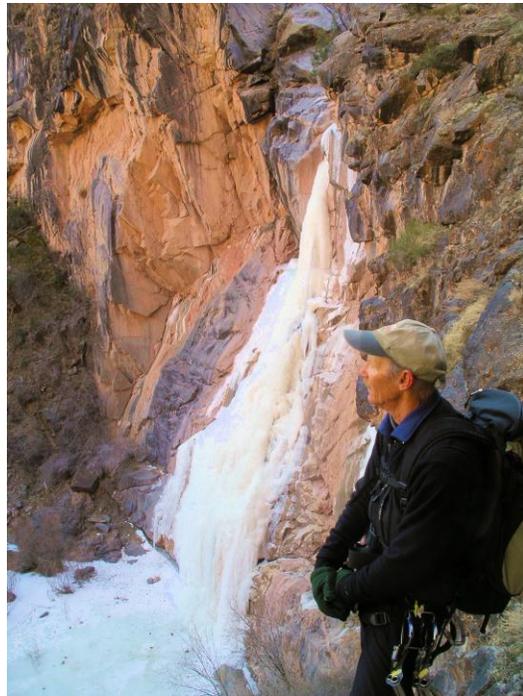
After entertaining yourselves on the lower falls, head up canyon for just less than a mile to the upper falls. Allow about forty minutes to get



there from the lower falls.

At the base of the lower falls (left)

Looking across to the lower ice fall (right)





The upper falls

The upper falls consist of an easy approach pitch (WI2) to a flat area that works as a staging area for the 50 meter main pitch of WI3+. Belay well out of the way of falling ice.

There are no fixed anchors above this upper ice, so either walk off to the right on a cairned trail or rappel the two pitches using two 50 meter ropes and V-threads.

Walk back down the canyon to the lower falls and either rappel this pitch from the fixed anchors or walk down on the trail.

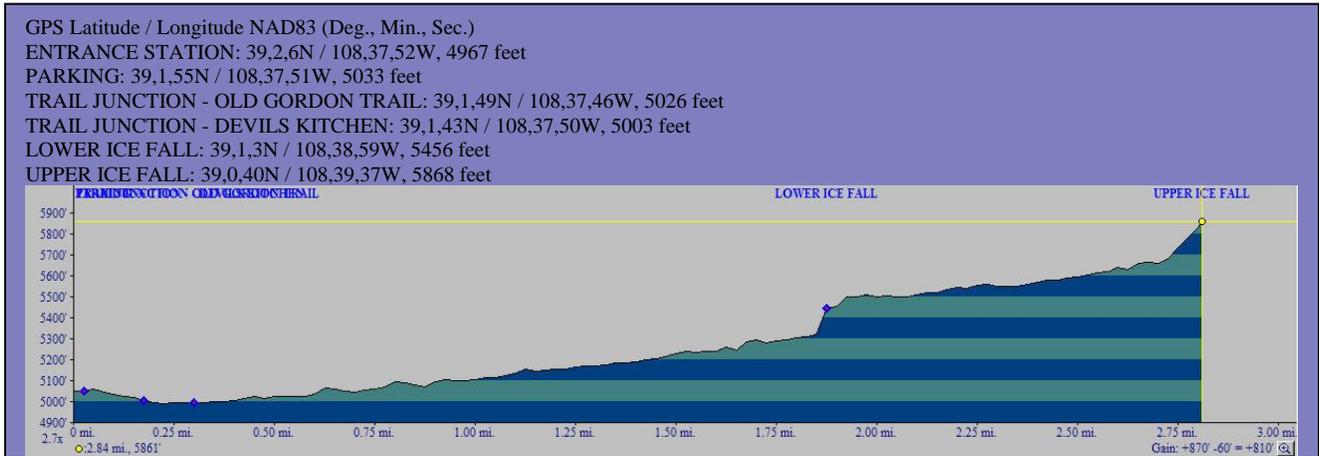
Getting to the Trailhead: From I-70 take the Horizon Drive exit in Grand Junction (Exit 31) and follow Horizon Drive for 1 mile SW to a roundabout. Take the N 12th. Street exit south from the roundabout and drive 2.2 miles to Grand Avenue. Drive west on Grand Avenue. After 1 mile Grand Avenue intersects US 50 where the road becomes US 340. Continue west on US 340 for 0.9 miles to Monument Road, shortly after crossing the Colorado River. Take Monument Road SW for 3.7 miles to trailhead parking on the left, a quarter mile past the East Entrance Station. Note that this is a US fee area.

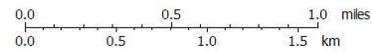
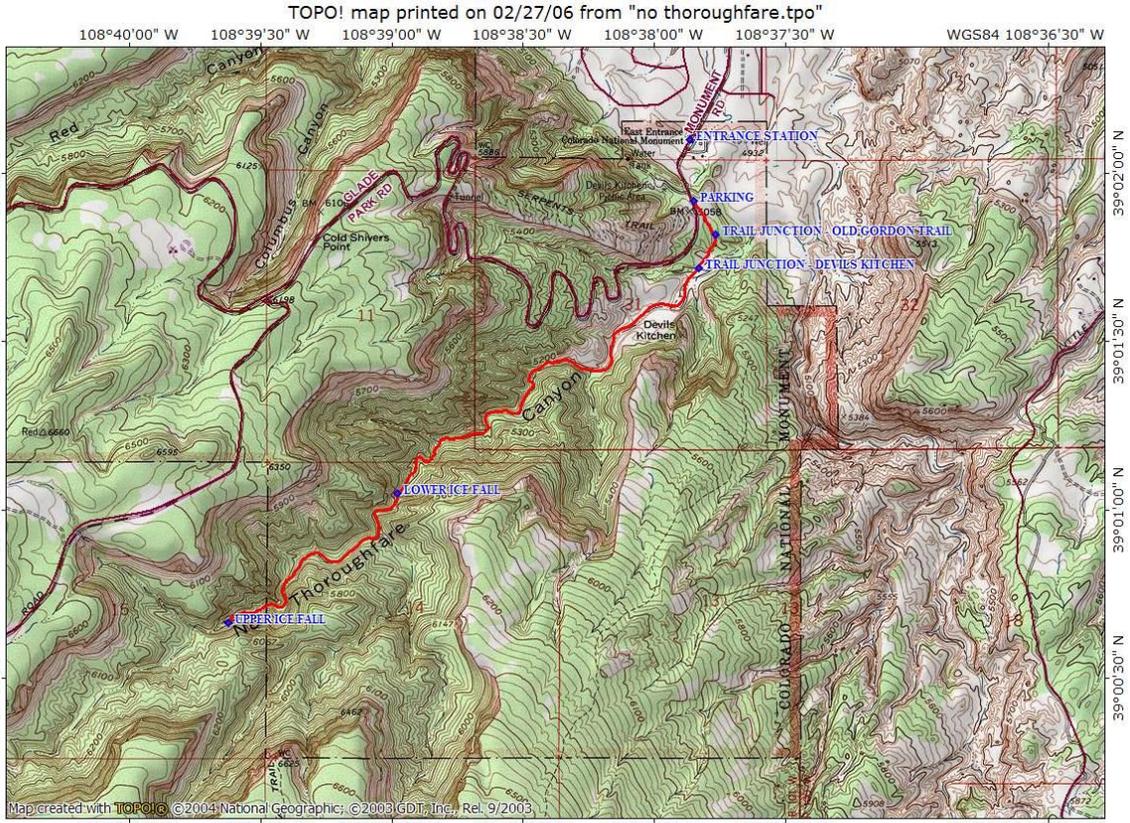
Gear and Guidebooks: A standard ice rack and double 50 meter ropes. If you plan to rappel the upper icefall, you will need V-thread gear for two double rope rappels.

For more information, see “Colorado Ice - Volume 1” by Jack Roberts

Climb Statistics: Gain 900 feet of elevation in 2.8 miles of hiking (one way). The lower falls offer 50 meters of ice rated WI4, while the upper falls have a WI2 approach pitch followed by 50 meters of WI3+.

Ice climbing disclaimer.





TN MN
11½°
02/27/06

