

Officer's Gulch - Unnamed WI3 Ice Climb by Dave Cooper



The main gully of Officers Gulch. The unnamed WI3 climb is out of sight, to the left of the smear seen in the center of the photo. The top of Round the corner can just be seen to the right of the smear.jpg

In a dry season such as we've had this autumn, ice climbers start to become more frantic than usual in their search for climbable ice. This led us recently to check out conditions in Officers Gulch, located off I-70 in Tenmile Canyon.

This area normally provides several good ice climbs, but those visible from the highway (such as the Shroud) haven't looked promising this season. The problem with climbs in this area is that the avalanche potential is huge for most of the winter. This area can only be visited when avalanche conditions are very low, so we usually only climb there in November and possibly December, and only when there has been little snowfall. The "Catch-22" is that without *any* snow there won't be any ice!

The main attraction of the area, a climb named "Round the Corner", WI4, can be much harder than its rating in early

Getting to the Trailhead: Take the Officers Gulch exit from I-70. Turn south and drive to the parking area by the restroom at the access point for the Frisco-Copper Mountain bike path.

Hiking and Climbing Statistics:

1200 feet of elevation gain in 1.3 miles one way. Allow at least an hour for the approach.

Difficulty: A short walk along the bike path followed by a strenuous climb up the main gully to the climb described, which offers at least one pitch of WI3.

Technical Gear: To rappel the route, two ropes will be necessary. Bring ice screws, V-thread material and slings if rappelling off trees.

Guidebook: "Colorado Ice" by Jack Roberts (Polar Star Communications, Inc.). Note that Roberts refers to the climb "Round the Corner" as the "Ice Hose".

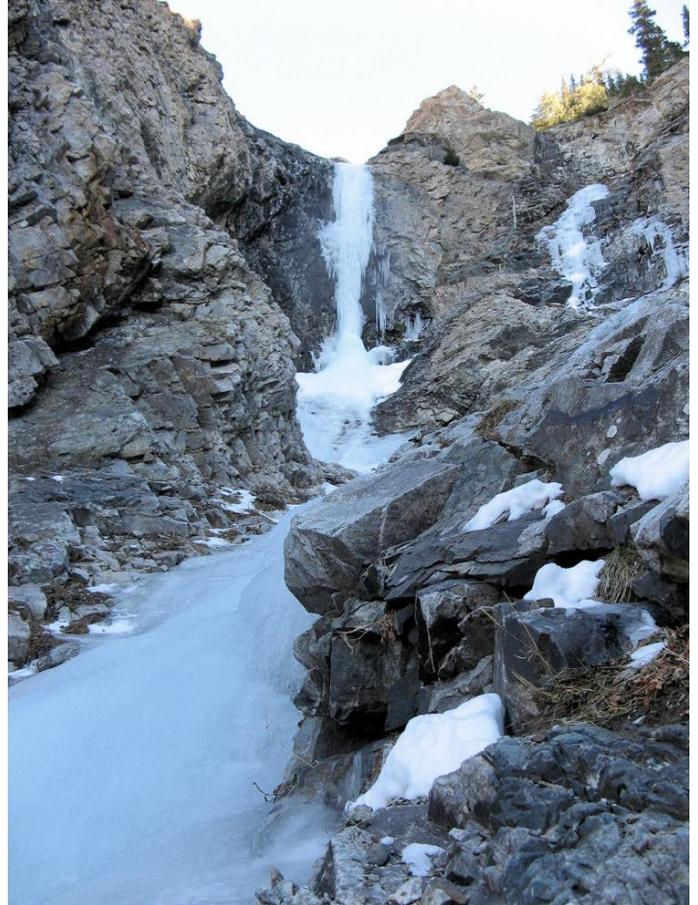
USGS Quad: Vail Pass, CO.

season. A more moderate objective for a warm-up climb is an unnamed pitch of good, “fat” ice further up the main gully. This offers at least one, and sometimes additional pitches of WI3 on a generally reliable ice flow. That’s the climb I’ll describe this week.

Approach and Climb Description

From the parking area, walk up to the bike path and follow it west for three quarters of a mile, to a point directly below the main gully, directly west of Peak 3. A large cairn may be seen at the point where you leave the bike path and head steeply up a bank to get into the gully. Before reaching this point you’ll pass several other ice flows, notably the Shroud and the minor gully containing the climb Tony’s Nightmare. Triple Falls, a fun, low angle romp up several pitches of ice, can be seen to the south.

Head east up the gully, possibly following a climbers’ trail to the left of the streambed. Gain a thousand feet of elevation in half a mile after leaving the bike path. Eventually arriving at a prominent smear of ice directly in front of you. The narrow slot to the right of this smear leads to Round the Corner. Continue up the main drainage, to the left of the smear, for approximately 100 yards to reach the base of today’s climb, an unnamed flow on your right which isn’t visible until you are directly below it.



Early-season conditions on Round the Corner-small.jpg



Climbing the unnamed WI3 flow in Officers Gulch-small.jpg

Straightforward climbing for a 60 meter pitch brings you to the top of the climb, although sometimes it is possible to continue up on moderate ice. Look for rappel slings on a small tree at the top of this pitch.

Descent

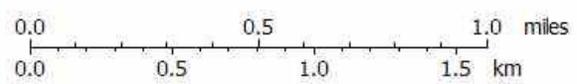
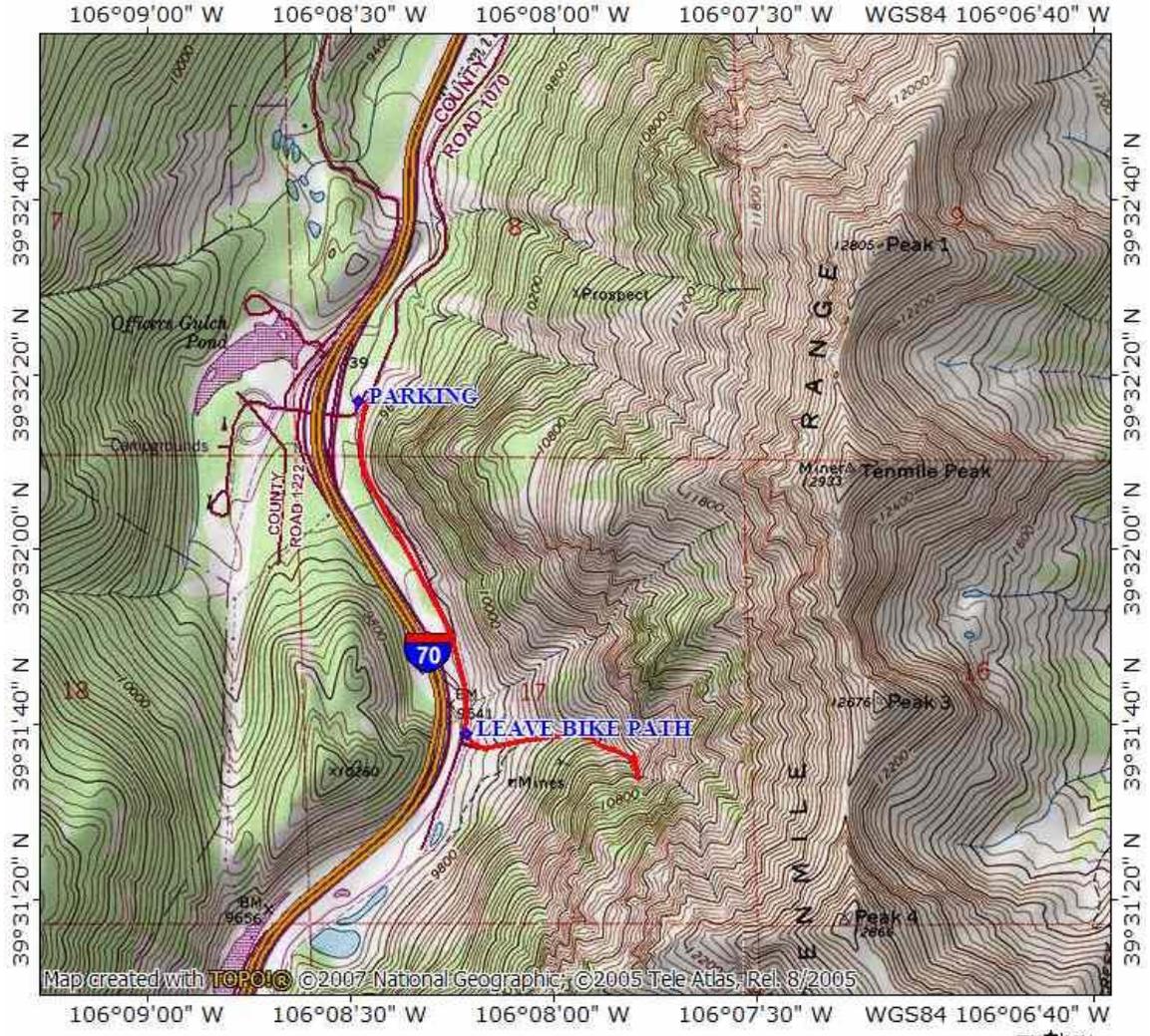
Double 60 meter ropes should get you down.

Caution:

The area described here is especially prone to avalanching and is best visited in the early season during times of low avalanche hazard. Climbers have died in this area.

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.

TOPO! map printed on 11/21/07 from "Untitled2.tpo"



TN ↑ MN
10°
11/21/07

