

## The Sherman Climb by Dave Cooper



**Getting to the Trailhead:** From the junction of Highways 50 and 149, located at the east end of Blue Mesa Reservoir, approximately 8 miles west of Gunnison, head south on Highway 149 to Lake City.

From Lake City, drive south on Highway 149 for approximately 1.8 miles to the junction signed to Lake San Cristobal. Turn right at this junction onto County Road 3 (Alpine Loop Road) and drive past the lake, continuing for 12.4 miles (from Highway 149) to the ghost town of Sherman. Continue through Sherman to the end of the plowed road, 13.3 miles from Highway 149. This is also the trailhead for Cataract Gulch. An outhouse is conveniently located at this trailhead.

**Gear:** A standard ice rack is sufficient. Some rock protection (small), might be useful. Two 60 meter ropes are necessary to rappel the climb. Use a combination of anchors: off trees, chains and expect to build V-threads. We only found one set of bolt and chain anchors on the route.

**Difficulty:** A relatively short approach (you gain 400 feet in 0.5 mile one way), to 3-4 pitches of ice offering climbing in the range of WI3 to WI4/5. The main objective hazard is the avalanche potential, both on and above the climb. This route should only be attempted when the avalanche danger is low.

**Guidebook:** Colorado Ice - Volume 1 by Jack Roberts (Polar Star Publishing).

**USGS Map:** Redcloud Peak, CO.

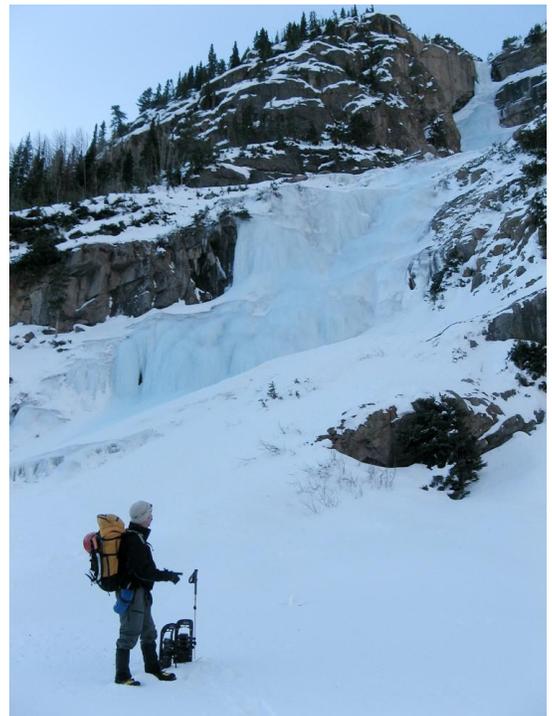
### *The middle pitch of the stunning Sherman Climb-small.jpg*

This week's climb has been on my to-do list for a long time. Remote and beautiful, the route is only climbable when avalanche danger is low, so we recently took advantage of a lull in the State's avalanche activity to jump on this San Juan classic.

Known simply as "The Sherman Climb", the route ascends a gully on the north-east face of "IXel Peak" (13,674 feet), which rises above the old town of Sherman. This climb was previously known as the northeast face of Half Peak, which is actually the peak to the south of IXel.

### *Early morning light on the climb-small.jpg*

As with most of the backcountry ice climbs in the Lake City area, this climb is a serious undertaking due to the avalanche-prone terrain, so great care must be taken when considering a climb of this route. Not only is the climb threatened by a huge bowl above, but the snow steps separating the steep ice pitches



may have significant snow slabs that could be triggered by climbers. Even with stable conditions predicted by the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (<http://avalanche.state.co.us/index.php>), the large debris cone that we ascended on our way up to the ice was sobering. The safest time to climb this route is often in early winter, before significant snowfall occurs.

### **The Approach**

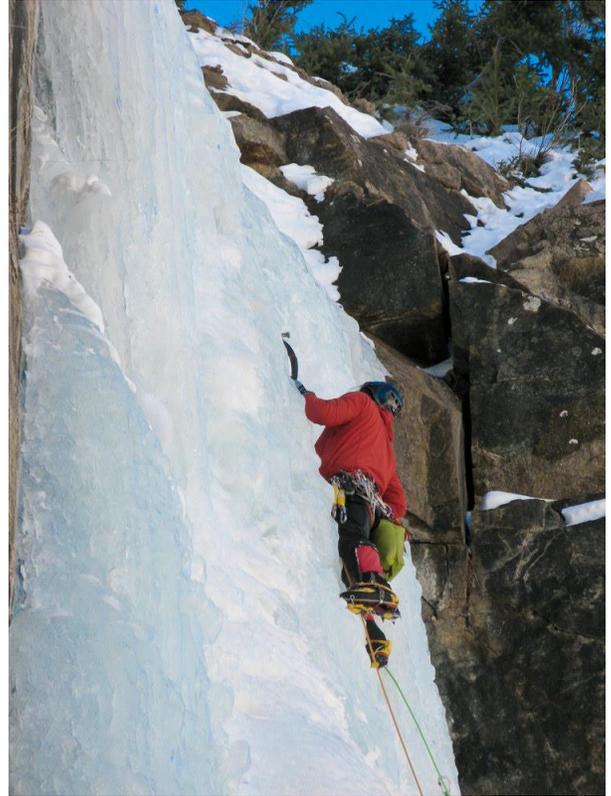
From the end of the plowed road, walk west along the road for approximately one third of a mile until you find a reasonable spot to cross the creek and hike up the slopes below the ice. The climb is hard to miss, a large expanse of blue ice cascading hundreds of feet down the gully. As we were approaching the climb, the early-morning sun was just catching the surrounding peaks, the reflected light causing the ice to light up with an intense blue glow.

### **The Climb**

The first two pitches consist of broad expanses of moderate ice (WI3), separated by a low-angled snow bench. With 60 meter ropes you may need to set up a belay near the top of the first flow, then run the rope up to a belay (rock or ice) on the left side, immediately below the second real pitch.

Climb the second pitch to chain anchors located at the base of the sheer granite wall, just below and left of a cave.

The third pitch is the crux. Move up and right from the belay and climb the steep curtain. We found tricky conditions on this pitch, which the guidebook rates as WI4-5. Above this curtain there are several hundred feet of low-angled ice flows alternating with long snow wallows, so most parties end the climb here. Climb snow to a tree anchor at climbers' left.



*Steep and technical climbing on the final pitch-small.jpg*

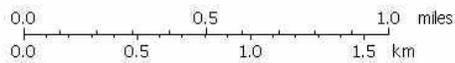
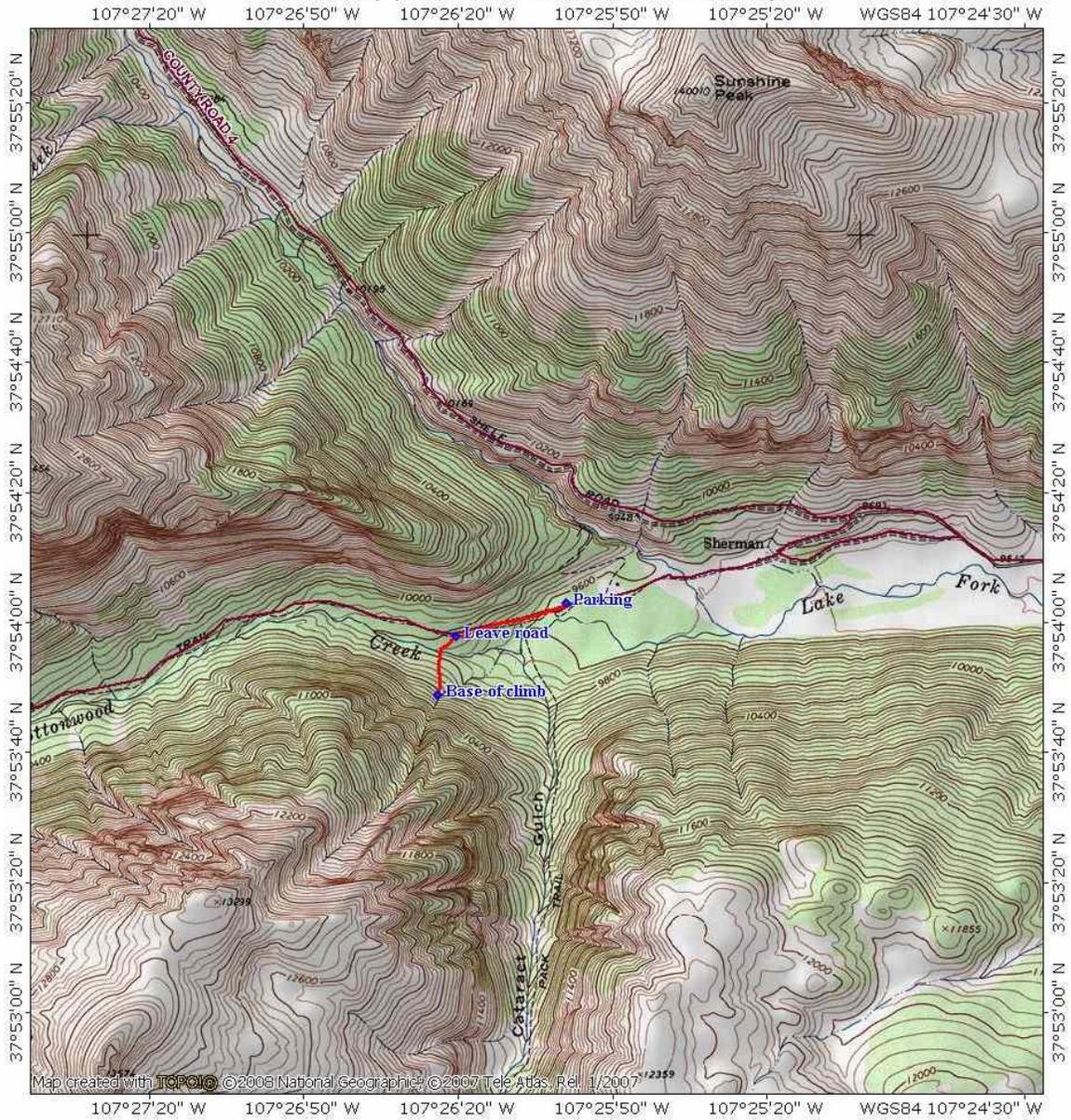
To descend, rappel on double ropes back down to the chain anchor, then make two or three more double rope rappels (depending on your rope length) back to the base of the climb. Expect to build one or two V-thread anchors in the ice.



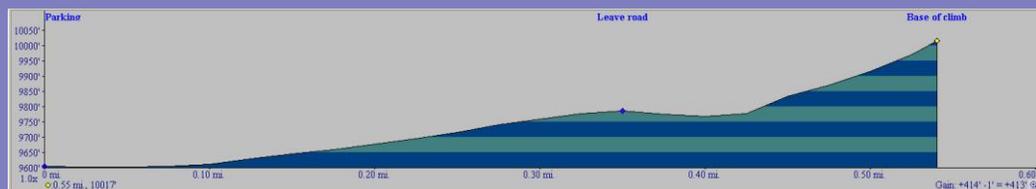
*Kevin Craig leading the crux pitch on Sherman-small.jpg*

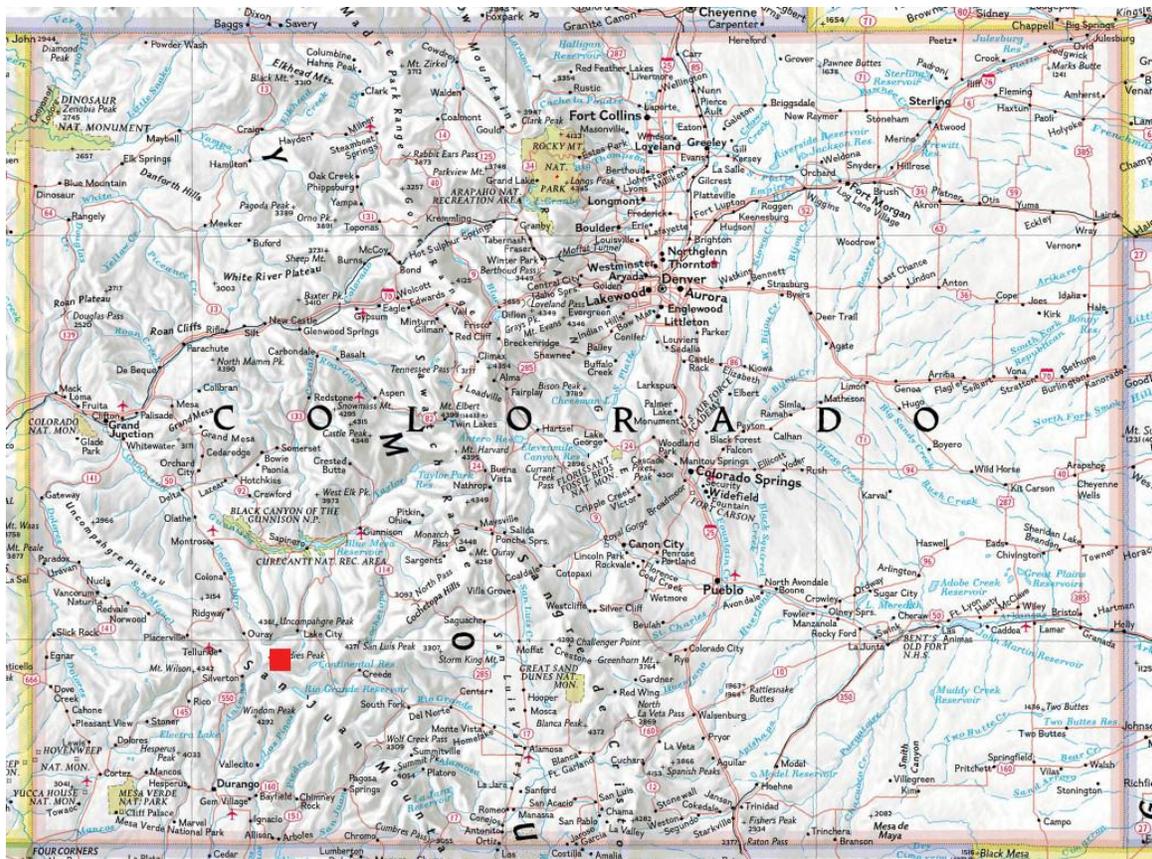
Remember, climbing is an inherently dangerous activity and you should always climb within your ability after carefully judging the safety of the route. We write about it, you take all the risks.

TOPO! map printed on 01/20/09 from "Untitled.tpo"



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)  
 Parking, 37,54,3, -107,25,59,9655 feet  
 Leave road, 37,53,58, -107,26,20,9787 feet  
 Base of climb, 37,53,49, -107,26,24,10037 feet





**Colorado Locator Map**

## Update on the Lake City Ice Park

Almost 3 years ago, I reported in this column on attempts to develop an Ice Park at Lake City. On our recent trip to climb in the area I was able to check out the progress that has been made.

I'm happy to report that the Ice Park is now a reality. While quite small at the moment (10-15 routes), the Park offers climbs covering a broad range of difficulty. For information on the ice park, as well as lodging, restaurant information and where to find locations to fill out liability waivers, go to: <http://www.lakecity.com/winter/iceclimbing.html>.

Lake City will even be hosting an Ice Festival this year, on February 28. For information on the festival, follow the links at the above website to <http://www.lakecityiceclimbs.com/>.



*Two lone climbers have the Ice Park to themselves.JPG*