

The Other Cross Couloir by Dave Cooper



The other Cross Couloir - small.jpg

When we think of a cross couloir, the first that comes to mind is the famous one on Mount of the Holy Cross. Recently a friend emailed me to report that she had just climbed another cross couloir in the San Juan mountains that was little-known and made a fine spring snow climb.

Always eager to check out a quality snow climb, I contacted a friend who lives in the area to see if he was familiar with the line. Indeed, he was: he had eyed the couloir for several years but had not had an opportunity to climb it. We immediately made plans to head down there, and a couple of days later we were hiking up to the base of the route at first light. As we walked up the 4WD road into Governor Basin, the sun rose on

Getting to the Trailhead: From the town of Ouray, drive south on US Highway 550 for 0.3 mile to Colorado 361 (the road to the Camp Bird Mine and Yankee Boy Basin). Drive 6.9 miles (measured from US550) on this increasingly rough gravel road to the Governor Basin turnoff, passing the Camp Bird Mine at mile 4.7. Turn left and drive 0.8 mile to the stream crossing at 11,150 feet. It may be possible for properly-equipped high clearance vehicles to drive further up the road. Just be careful not to block the road.

GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83): 37°58'40"N, 107°46'3"W, 11,150 feet.

Statistics: From the stream crossing, you will gain a total of 1830 feet in 4.1 miles round trip. Approximately 700 vertical feet of this elevation gain is in the couloir.

Difficulty: Depending on snow conditions, you may find anything from soft snow to hard, icy climbing, requiring crampons, a second ice tool and a rope. The snow angle averages 40-45 degrees.

Gear: Helmet, crampons, ice ax, a second ice tool, rope, light alpine rock rack and maybe a picket or two. One or two ice screws may be useful in late season conditions.

USGS Quad: Telluride, CO.

the couloir, prominent on the prow of a castle-like peak above us. Conditions were ideal, with a good overnight freeze to firm up the snow. Starting up the snow, only the points of our crampons penetrated the surface. Higher in the deeply-inset couloir the surface became an ice layer, making the use of a rope a sensible choice. A few small rocks did tumble down the couloir, keeping our attention.

Approaching the couloir-small.jpg.jpg

The climb went quickly and we topped out at a small saddle surrounded by impressive rock spires. It was still only mid-morning, plenty of time to take a break and enjoy the views of Mount Sneffels, Teakettle and Potosi across the valley, along with the improbable-looking Saint Sophia Ridge. It took us a few minutes to locate the descent route - a moderate scree gully to the west that allowed us to escape the summit block. A short time later we were walking over towards a broad snow couloir that cut through the lower cliff bands and provided an easy route back to the 4WD road.



With snow drifts on the road we had started the early morning hike from the stream crossing at 11,150 feet near the entrance to Governor Basin. By the time we descended, road equipment was clearing the snow from the road, which would allow high clearance, short wheelbase vehicles to drive quite a bit closer to the climb. With a short approach and providing 700 feet of moderate snow climbing in a scenic setting, this route is sure to become more popular as word spreads.

Approaching the start of the couloir.jpg

Climb Description

Assuming that you park at the stream crossing at 11,150 feet, walk up the 4WD road as it climbs through switchbacks up the ridge between Governor Basin and Sidney Basin, staying on the main road. After one mile (11,760 feet), continue on a side road on the left. This road provides easy access to grassy slopes below the obvious snow couloir - your destination. Gear up at the start of the snow, then move up and left into the deeply inset couloir. From here, climb 40 to 45 degree snow for approximately five rope-lengths to the top of the couloir, passing the horizontal section of the cross two-thirds of the way up.



As you top out at a small saddle, you may start to wonder if there is a reasonable descent route. Have no fear. Look for a moderate scree gully immediately west (to the right) of the saddle. This is not the first gully you come to, but one a few

At the top of the couloir.jpg

feet below, marked by a cairn. The gully descends west and south towards the head of Governor Basin, losing 250 feet of elevation. Once on the broad bench, continue south to the broad and relatively gentle couloir that provides access through the cliff band to the lower level by an old mine. Pick up a road

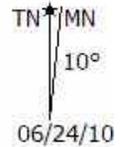
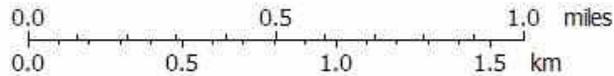
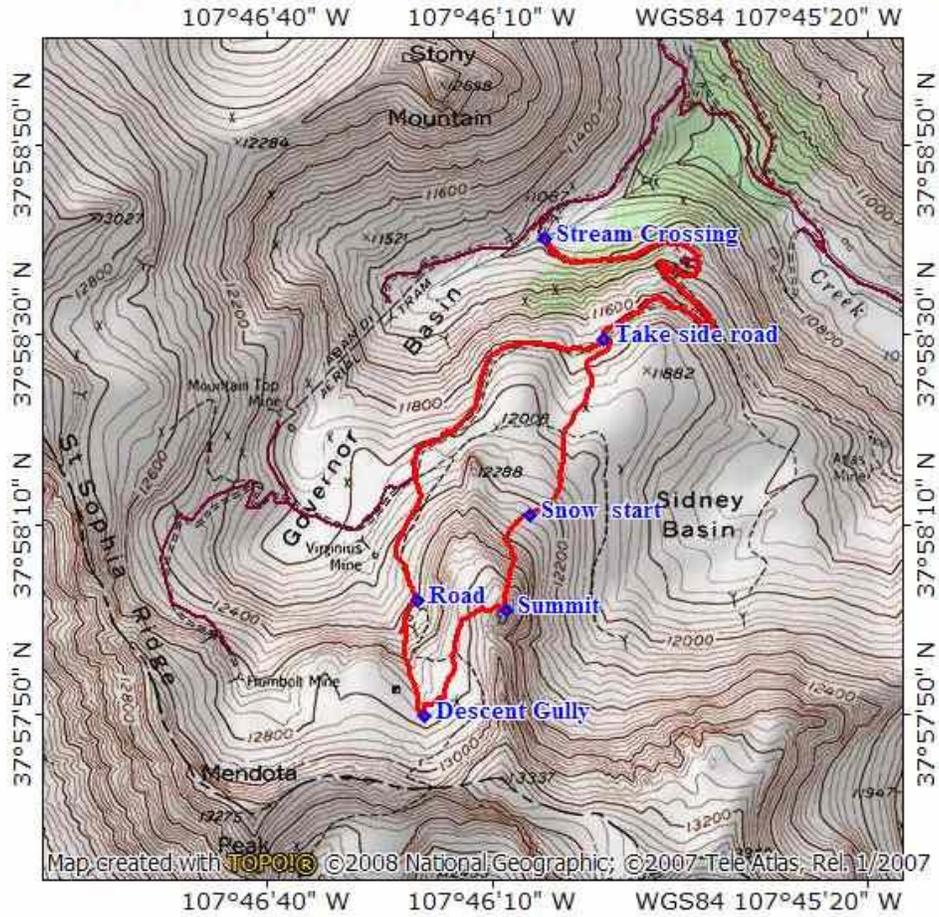
here and continue north to rejoin the road used on your approach to the climb.



Heading down into Governor Basin, Mount Sneffels in the background.jpg



TOPO! map printed on 06/24/10 from "Secret Cross couloir4.tpo"



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

Stream Crossing, 37,58,40, -107,46,3, 11122 feet

Take side road, 37,58,30, -107,45,55, 11751 feet

Snow start, 37,58,11, -107,46,5, 12228 feet

Summit, 37,58,1, -107,46,8, 12986 feet

Descent Gully, 37,57,50, -107,46,19, 12773 feet

Road, 37,58,2, -107,46,20, 12430 feet

