

## The Pumphouse – Ice Climbing by Dave Cooper

When friends and I started climbing the ice at Vail, at least 20 years ago, there were no guidebooks, just a photocopy of a hand-drawn sketch available at one of the local mountaineering stores. On our first visit, we were drawn to the obvious blue expanse of ice perched 600 feet above the golf course. This ice, which we called the 19th Green, has since come to be known as “The Pumphouse” or “Pumphouse Falls”.

The first time I led this excellent, moderate pitch of ice, I had a bit of an equipment malfunction. The ice tools I was using at the time were the latest and greatest from Europe - manufactured by Stubai, with a recent innovation for the pick called a half-tube. Halfway up the route, one of my tools simply wasn't working any more. After placing an ice screw (back in those days these were pound-in screws known as Snargs) and checking my pick, I discovered that the half-tube of the pick had collapsed, rendering the tool useless. Rather than continue on with my third tool (another relic of past days), which was quite inferior, I decided to lower off and borrow my climbing partner's ice tool to finish the route.

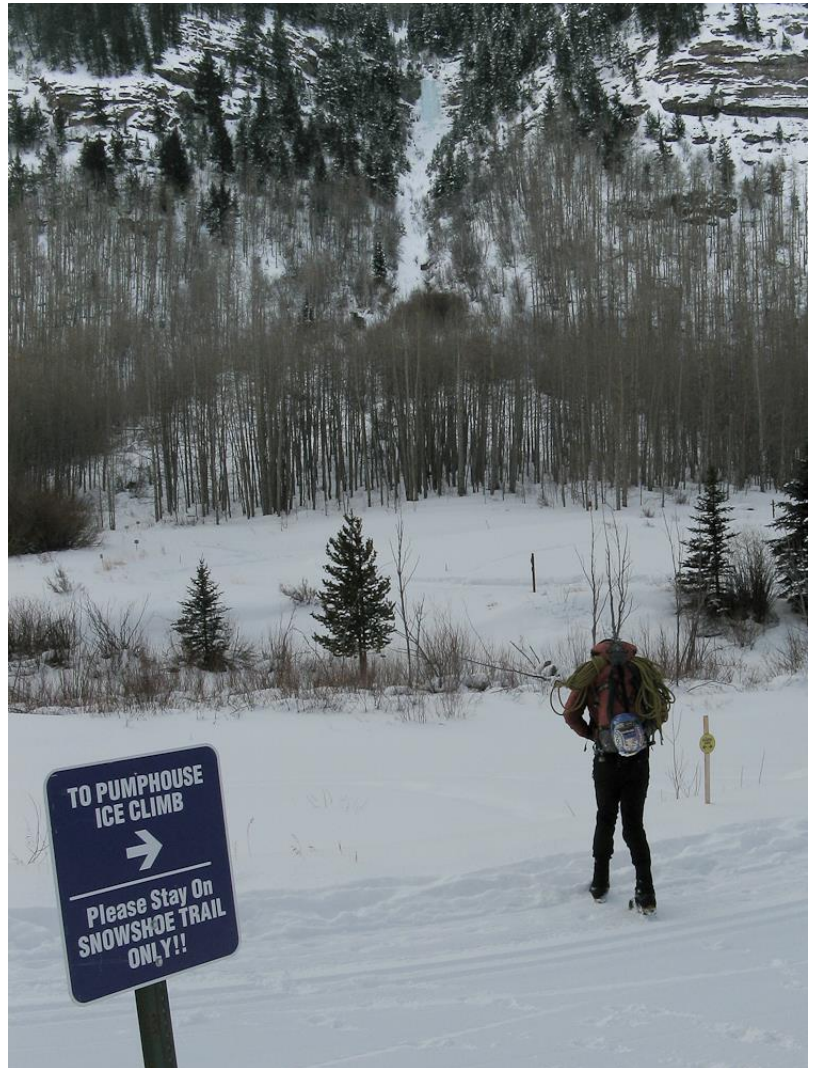
I've climbed the ice here many times since, but always remember that first visit.

*Following the signs to the ice climbing. The -Pumphouse- can be seen at top, center-small.jpg*

Nowadays, ice climbing has become mainstream, so it was no surprise on a recent visit to see signs directing climbers to the different climbs. Even on a weekday we weren't the first climbers to be making the hike up to the ice. Luckily the Pumphouse is wide enough to accommodate two parties safely.

### The Approach

From the parking area, the climb is directly above you on the opposite side of



**Difficulty:** The climbing is normally in the WI3 to WI4 range, depending on the line chosen and the conditions.

**Gear:** A standard ice rack should be sufficient, plus extra slings to backup the rappel anchor. A single 60 meter rope will just reach the ground when doubled for the rappel, though a 70 meter rope can allow more choices for a safe belay stance when top roping.

### Getting to the Trailhead:

From the Vail East Exit (Exit 180), take the North Frontage Road west for a mile until it crosses under the Interstate and continue west on the south side of the Interstate. Continue on for a third of a mile to the Pumphouse parking area, on your left. There is limited parking available here.

the golf course and 600 vertical feet away. Signs warn ice climbers and other foot traffic to stay off the groomed cross country ski trails, so carefully step across the tracks, and follow the signs, crossing the bridge and following the foot trail along the edge of the groomed track until signs direct you up the hill to the south. Sometimes the approach to the base of the ice is a bit of a wallow, but on the last visit a well-worn trench greeted us.

## The Climbing

Several different lines are possible, usually ranging from WI3 to WI4 in difficulty. The ice pitch is 80 feet long, with a 20 foot walk back to the anchors - bolts with slings and rappel rings attached.

We took an open line slightly left of center and climbed a few laps, leaving the ice screws in to allow us to

### *Ice Climbing at the Pumphouse, Vail.jpg*

“pink point” the route - a tremendous luxury on ice, since even with the improvement in ice screw design, placing the protection can be strenuous. And yes, it does feel like cheating!



*Beth Sholes of Superior, CO. Leading at the Pumphouse-small2.jpg*



Include the usual climbing disclaimer , perhaps with the observation that ice climbing has additional hazards.

