

ICE AND ALPINE CLIMBS

The winter weather in Estes Park fluctuates between bitter cold and unseasonably mild, allowing rock climbing periodically but certainly not for any sustained length of time. Thus the preferred mode of ascent becomes ice climbing, generally available from late fall through late spring. RMNP contains the best ice climbing in eastern Colorado, and some of the best alpine climbing in the state.

This chapter outlines most of the ice, snow, and mixed routes located in RMNP, although it is not an exhaustive list. Remember that in describing each climb, it is assumed that the route is fully formed. A phrase like "... the thin sheet of ice on the left is WI 5 ..." makes no sense at all when the thin sheet doesn't exist. The majority of the routes come in every year, but there are a few that form up very infrequently, or only when certain weather patterns persist. Many of the frozen waterfalls stay in good condition all winter long, but the less substantial ice and mixed routes are best climbed in early winter as they tend to deteriorate and even disappear later on. They do, on occasion, reappear in the spring, only to fall down with the next warm day. Most of the alpine couloirs listed here are commonly climbed only in the summer. Early summer ascents are best for some as they melt out later on, but late summer (or early fall) ascents are best for others to avoid avalanche danger and to allow for more challenging conditions.

First ascent information is provided when known; however, several of the alpine routes were first ascended as summer rock climbs. Only in later years were these routes ascended as ice climbs and information is scarce concerning first ascent teams.

Most parties carry a small selection of pitons (in addition to rock gear and ice screws) for the mixed routes in the mountains; the plethora of short pillars in the Park often require only ice screws. Snow stakes or flukes may be helpful on a few of the alpine couloirs, and a two hundred foot rope is useful on the longer routes as its use saves time with fewer belays.

Avalanche danger in RMNP is generally lower than other backcountry areas in Colorado, though it is still a serious threat. Check on current weather and avalanche information before venturing out. The Colorado Avalanche Information Center can be reached at 303-275-5360 from the Denver-Boulder area, and at 970-482-0457 from Fort Collins; these numbers give statewide avalanche information, though only in the winter months. Of course, the avalanche season isn't over with the arrival of summer — wet slides are common, and are extraordinarily dangerous, entombing victims in snow the consistency of cement. On rare occasions, slab avalanches of enormous blocks of ice can cut loose in late summer. In July of 1998, the top layer (eight to ten feet) of the Thatchtop-Powell Icefield slid all the way down to the previous season's snow (a very weak layer from the fall of 1997, coupled with a long hot spell, was the likely cause). Evidence of massive slab avalanches could also be seen on St. Vrain and Arapaho Glaciers in the Indian

Peaks later that summer, from 10 miles away. The chances of surviving a ride with ice blocks the size of a house are zero — the best defense is to climb in the early morning hours.

Routes in this section are arranged by the trailhead used to access them, beginning in Wild Basin to the south and moving to Lawn Lake Trailhead on the north side of RMNP.

RATINGS

Alpine and Water Ice Ratings: Routes that are primarily ice climbs are rated from 1 to 6, with plus (+) and minus (-) signs applied as with rock climbs. Roughly speaking, 1 = low angled ice up to 30 degrees; 2 = good ice up to 60 degrees; 3 = good ice up to 75 degrees, possibly with short vertical sections encountered, 4 = good, steep ice, perhaps with a few rest stances; 5 = steep ice that is typically thin and scary or long and sustained; and 6 = overhanging ice, iced over roofs, telephone poles of ice, etc. This system is further divided into Water Ice and Alpine Ice (WI and AI), but the distinction between the two is somewhat subjective on a few climbs.

Of course, it is more complicated than this. For example, a climb rated WI 4-might consist of 80-degree ice (derived from flowing water) that is solid and thick enough to accept (mostly) bomber ice protection, or perhaps a lower angled but more tenuous flow. A 50-degree gully filled with hard snow (Alpine Ice) might get a rating of AI 2. However, ice is an ever-changing medium and it is important to realize that a simple change in the weather or season can drastically change the condition of a route. Consider the famous **Lambs Slide** on Longs Peak. In early June the snow is often soft enough that one can safely ascend it without crampons; in August it is sufficiently hard that crampons are a must; and in a dry October, the snow has turned to cement-hard black ice. Add to this the extra dimension that rock climbing gives to a route (mixed climbing is often required on the alpine routes), and it becomes obvious that the ratings should be taken with a grain of salt — they give only a general indication of the route’s difficulty.

Mixed Ratings: In recent years another rating system has emerged that is useful for routes where mixed climbing is the focus. These routes typically involve dry tooling on rock to connect thin patches of ice, and are indicated with ratings of M1 through M9. While nothing in this book is rated harder than M8, routes as difficult as M9 have been reported in Vail, Colorado, and as this system is open ended, it’s likely more difficult climbs will be put up in the future (for example, a recent route in Iceland is supposedly harder than the hardest at Vail — perhaps it’s an M10).

It is not clear how to translate traditional rock climbing ratings (such as 5.8) to the newer mixed ratings. Take the classic **Hourglass Couloir** on Arrowhead, which has a traditional rating of 5.6 AI 3. The 5.6 is done with crampons and axes, so it’s mixed climbing — but how difficult in terms of the mixed system? And how does the 5.6 on **Hourglass Couloir** compare with the traditional rating of **Hallett Chimney**, which is 5.6 AI 5? In reality, the “5.6” in both instances has almost nothing to

do with a 5.6 rock climb on Lumpy Ridge done in summer with rock shoes. Furthermore, a slab and a chimney, both rated 5.6 in the summer, may translate into radically different M-ratings. Climbing in crampons with axes scraping on the rock deserves a different rating scheme, one that does not rely upon the Yosemite Decimal system. There are plenty of routes in the M5 through M9 range that have been published in climbing magazines, and these grades, at least, seem well established. Routes in the M1 through M4 range, however, are nonexistent.

With the goal of a consistent grading system in mind, I talked with mixed climbers in the area to come up with consensus ratings. Following is a list of ratings for several established routes that serve as mileposts in the “M-system” and that help to flesh out the lower grades of M1 through M4. The author would appreciate any additions to this list, or conformations/disagreements on what’s been selected (1419 Paramount Pl, Longmont CO 80501; or contact us at: www.earthboundsports.com).

- M1 **The Homestretch**, Longs Peak (winter) M1-. **Kiener’s**, Longs Peak; M1+
M2 **The Cables**, Longs Peak (in fall); M2-. **Dream Weaver**, Meeker; M2+
M3 **Hourglass Couloir**, Arrowhead; M3. **Lochluster**, Loch Vale Gorge; M3
M4 **Alexander’s Chimney**, Longs Peak; M4+. **The Window**, Longs Peak; M4
M5 **Dragon’s Breath**, Chasm Lake Area; M5. **Hallett Chimney**, Hallett; M5
M6 **Mixed Emotions**, Loch Vale Gorge; M6-. **Necrophilia**, Thatchtop; M6
M7 **Free Strike Zone**, Loch Vale Gorge; M7+. **Get a File**, Nymph Lk; M7-
M8 **Blade Runner**, Loch Vale Gorge; M8.
M9 **Amphibian** (in Vail); M9. **Fatman and Robin** (in Vail); M9

As with the Water and Alpine Ice ratings, the Mixed grades give only a general indication of the difficulties that may be encountered. Changing conditions can affect consensus ratings by a number grade or more, especially in the lower grades. **The Window**, for example, listed above at M4, can be downright desperate when conditions are bleak. No attempt has been made to put a protection rating on these climbs, though a few are certainly deserving of an R or X rating. Once again, the problem lies in the vagaries of the medium — **The Squid** accepts bomber screws along its entire length when it fills in nicely, but it’s an entirely different game when the ice is thin.

One final note: The sport of ice climbing has seen a tremendous increase in the number of participants over the last decade, yet there are only a few easily accessible classic ice climbs in the area. These tend to become crowded, especially on weekends, and conflicts arise when several parties are vying for the same 60 foot chunk of frozen water. Add to this mix the problem of ice climbing near other parties — ice is going to fall on your head if you choose to climb behind another party, while passing a team puts them in the line of fire — and there is real potential for a nasty fight.

Case in point: On January 18th, 1998, the Boulder Camera ran a story about a climber who reprimanded another person for putting his party in danger by climbing nearby. The argument escalated, and one man threatened to kill the other. This led to a bit of wrestling on top of a 100 foot drop (!), and then one guy struck the other with the hammer end of his ice axe, delivering five to seven blows to the ribs, and two shots to the head. (The victim was treated in a hospital for lacerations on the head, which exposed his skull, while the other man was held in jail without bond).

If you decide to visit **All Mixed Up**, **Jaws**, **Hidden Falls**, Loch Vale Gorge, the **Lower Flow** and **Upper Tier** in Big Thompson Canyon, **The Squid**, the climbs around Black Lake, **Alexander's Chimney**, or **Grace Falls**, you WILL encounter other climbers on the weekends, and you may not be able to climb at all.

WILD BASIN

Several short ice climbs have become popular in the southern reaches of RMNP, near North Saint Vrain Creek. Two alpine routes are also available on the bigger peaks.

Travel Directions: Drive south on Highway 7 past the Longs Peak trailhead and turn west into Wild Basin, 12.8 miles from the intersection of Highway 7 and 36. Follow signs toward the Wild Basin Ranger Station and trailhead — the last mile of road leading to the trailhead is closed in the winter. A new entrance station has been installed at Wild Basin; be prepared to pay an entrance fee.

North Saint Vrain Creek

A-1 Hidden Channel WI 2+

This is the nice channel of ice just left of the main line on **Hidden Falls**. Descend east with a steep trail.

A-2 Hidden Falls WI 4-

Located a short distance from the parking lot, **Hidden Falls** is difficult to find unless a telltale path through the snow is present. Hike 0.1 mile past Copeland Falls (0.4 miles from the trailhead), then break left across North Saint Vrain Creek and into the woods. If the approach trail is not evident, hike up the slope on the right (north) until it is possible to see over the trees, then look southwest. **Hidden Falls** drops over a small cliff band one-tenth of a mile from the river, and is clearly visible from this vantage point. The initial portion of the climb (WI 3) ends in an alcove with a rappel station; the upper pillar provides an exciting (WI 4-) finish when it is in. Descend east. This area is very popular; expect company. **Variation:** A thin veil immediately right of the falls usually provides a difficult (M5) top rope problem.

A-3 The Dangler M7- WI 5

Begin in a right-facing corner right of **Hidden Falls**; look for a dagger dropping from an iced-up roof near the top of the wall. Climb the corner to a ledge (belay here to avoid rope drag), and then follow a wide crack to a stem and dangle that

reaches the ice dagger. Most of the route involves dry tooling; indeed, the dagger does not form very often (though the iced over roof is more reliable). FA: Kevin Cooper and Forest Noble, 1998.

A-4 Ouzel Falls WI 2 to 3

A fifty foot column of substantial girth lies three miles from the trailhead, about one-half mile from a trail junction at Calypso Cascades. Several lines of ascent are available, but the lower portion of the climb may be buried in snow.

Isolation Peak

A-5 North Face II AI 3

This is an alpine route on the north side of Isolation Peak. Head south to the base of the north face from Fifth Lake, the uppermost of five lakes on the East Inlet (of Grand Lake). Fifth Lake can be reached either by passing through Boulder Grand Pass from Thunder Lake, or by taking the East Inlet trail from Grand Lake (on the west side of the Park). The first option is preferred as the easiest descent from the peak heads into Wild Basin (and hence your car). Either way, it's a long hike of nine or more miles. The route follows a long couloir just right of center, then angles left on a ramp which intersects the **North Ridge** route about 150 feet below the summit (see High Peaks section, pages 12-14). In the latter part of the summer, the snow on this route melts out, leaving loose rock — climb it in early season. Descend as described in **North Ridge**.

Mount Alice

A-6 Central Gully IV AI 3 M4 A2

Central Gully climbs the most obvious line on the remote northwest face of Mount Alice. Get to the face by hiking to Lion Lake No 1 (seven miles), then continue past Lion Lake No 2 and Snowbank Lake to the pass between Mount Alice and Chiefs Head (consult a map). Go south from the pass down easy slopes to the base of the main couloir on the left side of the face. The seven pitch route follows the couloir for its entire length, encountering chimneys, short cracks and an aid section (about two-thirds of the way up). To descend, go north from the summit along **Hourglass Ridge** (3rd class, see High Peaks section, pages 12, 15-16, 20), which leads directly to the Alice-Chiefs Head saddle.

LONGS PEAK TRAILHEAD

The east face of Longs Peak contains many of the old, classic alpine routes in the park. These routes are long and involved, sometimes requiring a bivouac to complete in the brief winter days. Mount Meeker also holds two long couloirs, and shorter ice climbing attractions exist near Chasm Lake.

Travel Directions: Drive south on Highway 7 from Estes Park, turn right past mile 9, and go one mile to the Longs Peak trailhead.

Approach: With the exception of **The Cables** on the north face, all of the ice climbs on or near Longs Peak are accessed from the Chasm Lake trail. Start on the

Longs Peak trail, the only available option out of the parking lot, and stay left at the first junction, one half mile from the lot (the right trail goes to Eugenia Mine). Go left at 2.4 miles (the right trail goes to Battle Mountain group campsite), and left once again on top of Mills Moraine near a horse rack (the right trail continues through Granite Pass to the Boulderfield and then to the summit — this is the way to **The Cables**). Chasm Lake lies 0.8 mile from the Mills Moraine junction, a short distance beyond a ranger cabin.

Chasm Lake Area

B-1 Dragon's Breath III M5

This four-pitch line follows difficult mixed ground up the slabby wall southeast of Peacock Pool, which is situated 400 feet below the Chasm Lake trail. Drop off the trail toward Columbine Falls (see below), then circle the lake and on up to the base. The belays are all fixed, and although the route is not very steep, it requires delicate moves on thin ice and rock. Usually the first two pitches form up every fall; the last two may not in a bad year. Rappel the route to descend.

B-2 South Side of Lady Washington III M4 to M6

Several lines of thin runnels may be present on the slabby cliffs immediately above the Chasm Lake trail on the south side of Mount Lady Washington, before the next route is reached. The climbs don't last long due to southern exposure, but if conditions are right, they provide difficult mixed terrain up to four pitches. The routes on the left are usually longer, and the middle routes form up most frequently. Bring rock gear.

B-3 Columbine Falls WI 3+/4-

Climb the frozen stream that falls just below the Chasm Lake trail above Peacock Pool. This is about one half mile from the Mills Moraine junction. The bottom portion of the climb may be covered with deep snow, especially later in the winter. One hundred feet left of the falls is a fine flow that goes at WI 3 for a 120 foot pitch.

B-4 Chasm Lake Outlet WI 2/3

Several good lines of lower angled blue ice can be found above the ranger cabin and below the shelf that holds Chasm Lake. These may be obscured by snow later in the season.

Mount Meeker

A few, poorly documented climbs have been completed on the north face of Meeker. **Lober's Ribbon** is among them (5.8 WI 4), but I'm unsure of its location (left of **Dream Weaver**?). See photo page 22 for the following four routes.

B-5 Dream Weaver III AI 3- M2+

This route has gained some notoriety in recent years, especially after it was featured in a climbing magazine article. It can be climbed all year long, but the best conditions are found late spring into early summer, and late fall. Begin immediately left of **Flying Buttress** on Mount Meeker, and climb a narrowing snow gully

for 600 feet. Above this, several constrictions and narrow passages give the route its flavor; these are passed via thin ribbons of ice interspersed with easy to moderate mixed climbing. Finish the route by scrambling up slabs directly to the summit, and descend **The Loft**. An escape is possible at mid height — cross through the notch behind **Flying Buttress** and descend a gully (the beginning of the next route) to the west. Bring a light rack with a few pins.

B-6 Right Chimney III AI 3 M4

The gully on the right side of Flying Buttress is a great option if parties are on **Dream Weaver**. Begin with the easy right couloir for 500 feet. Once above the main Flying Buttress, the route gets interesting, with a few pitches of mixed climbing that go straight up a tight chimney. 1. Follow a 55° mixed gully right of a rock buttress to the base of the tight chimney. 2. Climb the chimney past two difficult bulges to a good belay with rock anchors. 3. An easy section leads into a steeper gully with a 70° curtain at the top of the chimney. Belay on the left. All of these pitches are long and only adequately protected in thin conditions; bring a 200 foot rope. The difficulties ease in the last portion of the route when the gully broadens, climbing several hundred feet to the summit.

B-7 Dark Star III AI 4+ M4

Dark Star follows a hidden slot right of **Right Chimney**. Hike up the couloir (the descent gully for **Flying Buttress** and the start of **Right Chimney**) to the base of the slot; it is located behind a tall rib of rock on the right. Ascend the chimney for four mixed pitches and descend the Ramp below **The Loft** (see next climb). With the right conditions, the right wall of the chimney may also ice up, providing a difficult mixed variation. FA: Duncan Ferguson, Harry Kent and Rich Paige, late 1970s.

B-8 The Loft (or The Apron) WI 3 or 3+

The broad plateau between Longs Peak and Meeker is called the Loft. A short, steep wall below the Loft holds a pitch of ice that can be thin at times; in spring and summer the ice is covered with soft snow or has melted out. Approach from the ranger cabin below Chasm Lake by hiking left of Ships Prow to a low angled snow field which steepens just below the ice — this snowfield, along with the much larger snow pillow above, is known as the Apron (beware of slab avalanches). The left side of the ice wall is WI 3+, while the right side usually goes at WI 3. A prominent ledge system slants left from the base of the ice. This is the Ramp, a 3rd class route to the Loft, and it is a convenient descent for this route and the climbs on Meeker. It begins with a 200 foot traverse left, then goes straight up a snow rib (or easy rock if the snow is gone). The angle eases above the rib, and 300 feet of talus leads to the Loft.

Longs Peak

Most of the following routes are shown on various photos and topos in the High Peaks section (under Longs Peak). Routes on the Lower East Face are also shown on page 237.

B-9 Ships Prow Ice WI 5 M5 (?)

A thin smear or two (rarely substantial) may be found on the right side of Ships Prow above the left shore of Chasm Lake. See photo page 37.

B-10 Flying Dutchman II AI 2 (M2)

This long couloir begins below and left of and is parallel to **Lambs Slide**. It climbs for 1,000 feet until it intersects with **Lambs Slide** a pitch below the north edge of the Loft. A short narrow section near the top provides the crux, which usually consists of forty feet of moderate water ice until it melts out. Expect a brief mixed wall in that case.

B-11 Lambs Slide II AI 2

This famous chute begins left of the Lower East Face on Longs Peak (a few hundred feet above Chasm Lake) and ascends for 1,000 feet to the Loft. It is most often used as an approach for **Kiener's Route** and the mixed routes nearby. Once the Loft is reached, one may descend the Ramp (see **The Loft**), or continue to the summit via **Clark's Arrow** or **Gorrell's Traverse** (see rock climbing section).

Variations: If the Loft is the goal, the Glacier Rib can be climbed for its entire length (3rd and 4th class) — it is the long band of rock that separates **Flying Dutchman** from **Lambs Slide**. It may also be possible to climb left of Zumie's Thumb on the upper right fork of **Lambs Slide** all the way to the tail end of the Beaver, though a short vertical slot looks difficult (bypass on the left?). **Lambs Slide** is also an excellent expert ski run in spring and early summer (approach via **The Loft** or climb the route), though several skiers have taken long nasty cartwheels in late season attempts. Sharpen your edges!

B-12 Alexander's Chimney III WI 3 M3+ to M5-

Alexander's Chimney ices over in late fall to produce an uncontested RMNP classic. When combined with the **Notch Couloir** or **Eighth Route**, it offers 1,500 feet of alpine climbing in a magnificent setting. Climb **Lambs Slide** for a few hundred feet and do a short stretch of mixed climbing to reach the base of an obvious chimney on the right. A long pitch goes straight up the chimney (often M3 at the bottom), after which there are several options. The original finish (done as a rock climb in the summer) traverses right on a big ledge for 150 to 200 feet to a belay at the last of several large flakes resting on the ledge. Go up for a half pitch (5.5) and then back left to a low angled bowl, which leads up to Broadway. The traditional ice climbing finish keeps going up the chimney beneath a huge chockstone; this is an awesome pitch (M4+) which ends at a piton belay on the left. From here, one can work up and right to rejoin the original line at the bowl, or do a direct finish (M5-) to Broadway. FA: Werner Zimmerman, 1919 (as a rock climb). The ice climbing finish is known as **Trash Patrol** (and was done first as a rock climb, messy 5.7). See topo page 242.

B-13 Smear of Fear IV M6 WI 6-

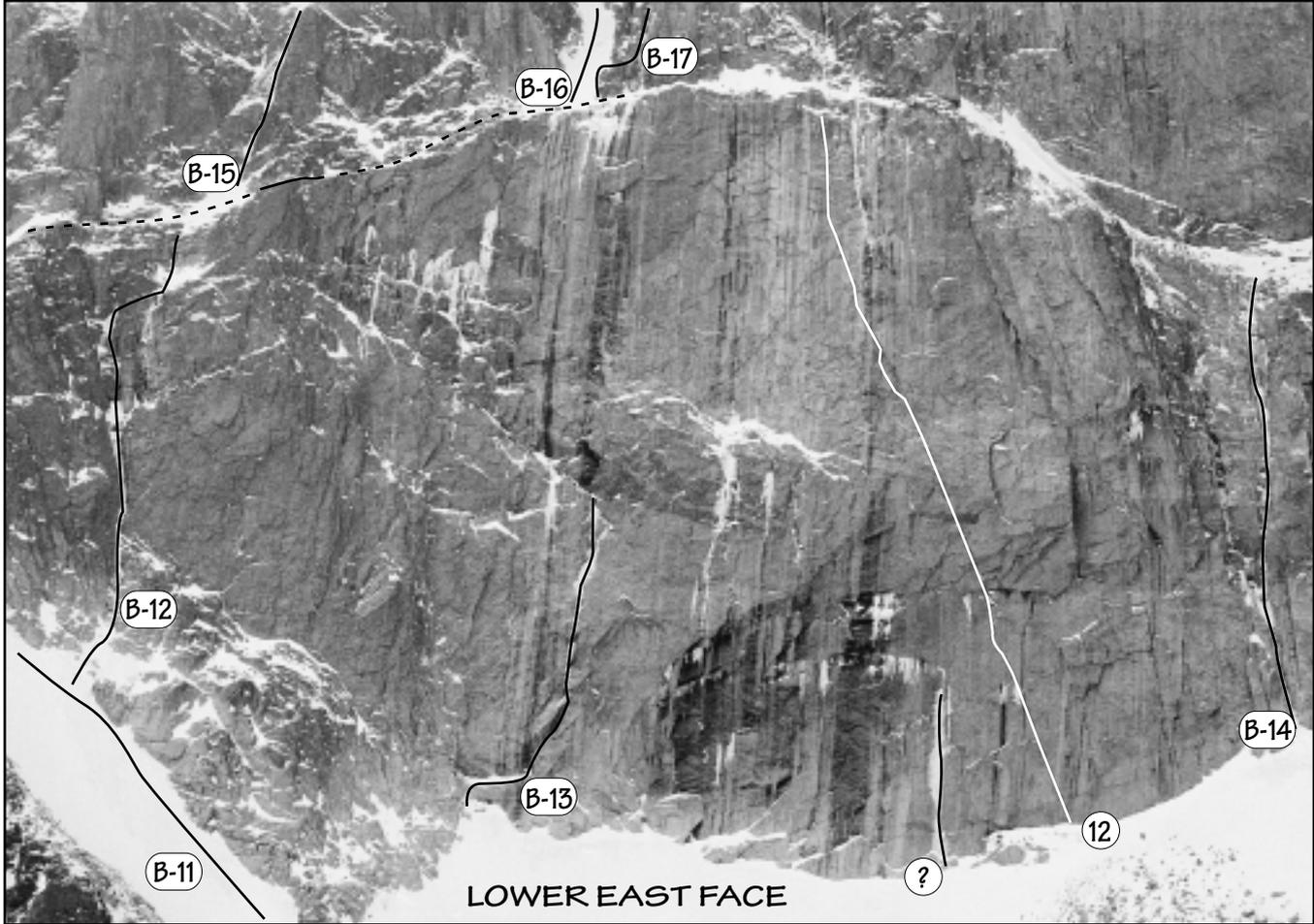
An amazing line of ice stretches up the Lower East Face right of **Stettner's Ledges**. Normally only three pitches are climbable, and even these can be out of condition. Begin on the right side of a long ledge, which is reached from the left by scrambling up the first part of **Stettner's**. Climb along a leaning, right-facing corner (M5+ or 5.10), and pull over a desperate ice bulge to a belay (WI 6-). In thick conditions, this entire pitch may be climbed directly on ice (60 meters, still very difficult). 200 feet of good ice (WI 4 and 5, with some mixed) leads to a ledge that marks the end of the climb in most years; three fixed rappels go back to the ground. In 1996, the climb was extended to Broadway with more difficult dry tooling on ledges out left (M5+ WI 4). Descend via **Lambs Slide** if going to Broadway. FA: Duncan Ferguson, Jeff Lowe and Malcolm Daly, 1989. **Variations:** The sick smear left of this route is known as **Fear of Smears** (unclimbed?), and a 200 foot stretch of ice 100 feet left of **The Diagonal** sometimes forms up (**Crazy Train**, WI5, FA: Tophr Donahue and Kelly Cordes, 2000; marked with “?” on photo page 237).

B-14 Field's Chimney III WI 5 M6+

This infrequently formed route climbs the right side of a fanned out, recessed area right of the Diagonal Wall (and left of **Craig's Crack**, which is a rock climb that may hold ice in the fall). 1. Climb an obvious pitch of WI 4 through a constriction to a belay on the left. 2. Climb up to and over a difficult overhang (M6) to a stance beneath an overlap. 3. Go straight up thin ice and cracks and belay at the base of a ramp angling up and left (M6+). 4. Follow the ramp left to Broadway. Descend from Broadway by rappelling **Crack of Delight** (four rappels from bolt anchors, see rock climbing section, page 53). FA: Jack Roberts and Michael Bearzi, 1996.

B-15 Eighth Route III WI 3 M3

This route ascends the broad gully immediately above **Alexander's Chimney**, which is sometimes used as an approach. One can also reach it by traversing Broadway from **Lambs Slide**. Climb the middle of the gully for two pitches of classic ice (WI 3, see Ships Prow photo in High Peaks section, page 37). Above this, the angle eases for several hundred feet until two big chimneys block the way. The standard finish avoids these by traversing right to a low-angled slab. Go up the slab to a wide crack (belay), and then angle up and right to the ridge. FA: Werner Zimmerman climbed this route in the summer of 1919. Its second and better known ascent came in 1940 by Paul Hauk, Ernie Field, and Warren Gorrell. **Variation 1:** The lower portion of **Joe's Solo**, up the gully (described in the rock climbing section on pages 62 and 64), is occasionally lined with ice. A mixed route (WI 3 M3?) joining upper **Eighth Route** can be had in these conditions. **Variation 2:** At least one of the big chimneys at the top of the route has been climbed for a difficult direct finish (the left may be WI 4 while the right may be Wilford and Sherman's line). Climb the chimney with ice in the back until a constriction forces the leader to move out of the slot and onto the face (crux); continue to the top of the ridge. FA of direct finish: Mark Wilford and John Sherman, 1995. **Variation 3:** Climb left after the first two pitches along a ramp leading to the notch behind Zumie's Thumb (**Thumb Route**, FA: Grant and Jones, 1946, though a marked photo by Warren Gorrell dating from 1936 has this route delineated). Where it goes from there is



not certain — either rappel south to reach the upper right fork of **Lambs Slide**, or try a line to the ridge of the Beaver (this was marked on Gorrell's photo, but it looks improbable). The easiest descent from the ridge hikes down to **The Loft**. If the summit is the goal, one can climb the Beaver (overlooking the Notch) and rappel 100 feet into the Notch (pick a finish described in that climb).

See Longs Peak overview photo (page 66) for routes **B-16** through **B-19**.

B-16 Notch Couloir II AI 2+ M3-

The obvious couloir on the left side of the Diamond is best climbed in summer or fall, and is usually approached via **Lambs Slide** and Broadway or **Alexander's Chimney**. The crux comes after a jog in the couloir at a short wall. The wall may be covered with good water ice, filled in with snow, or even require some harder mixed climbing. Easier snow with one short rock wall leads to the Notch. There are several methods of escape from the Notch: 1. Drop over to the south side of Longs (4th class), cross over the top of Keplinger's Couloir, and join the Home-stretch. 2. Drop out of the Notch as above, but back track along **Clark's Arrow** to **The Loft**. 3. Traverse 30 feet right on the east side of Longs to an obvious weakness, follow that to the southeast ridge (5.5), and then continue to the summit. This is the standard finish (called **Stepladder**) and is quite enjoyable. Another option exits right below the Notch to join the upper section of **Kiener's Route**. Huge avalanches sweep the couloir in the winter and spring if conditions are bad. FA: J. W. Alexander may have soloed the general line of this route in 1922; the next day he repeated the feat with Jack Moomaw, beginning with **Alexander's Chimney**. It is unclear, however, whether these ascents took place in the couloir itself. A published account of the climb by Moomaw mentions "climbing out of the Notch Chimney," and photographs accompanying the tale show Alexander on a rock wall "above Broadway." This supports an ascent nearer to present day **Kiener's Route**, perhaps up the Notch Chimneys, which lie directly above and left of Kiener's Chimney (and which are a favorite route finding error while climbing **Kiener's**). Another (erroneously labeled) picture shows Table Ledge on the Diamond — this photo could only have been taken by traveling well to the right of the couloir (again, on or near present day **Kiener's**). Godfrey and Chelton's book *CLIMB!* gives credit to the seven member party listed in the FA of **Little Notch** (see **SE Ridge Variations** in High Peaks section), presumably garnering information from Warren Gorrell's 1936 marked photograph. It is not known whether any of these ascents chopped steps up the entire length of the couloir.

B-17 Kiener's Route III AI 2 M1+

A popular winter tour of the east face of Longs climbs up **Lambs Slide**, traverses right on Broadway and wanders up broken ground left of the Diamond. This route is described in more detail in the High Peaks chapter as a rock climb (see page 43). Though **Kiener's Route** is easy to moderate in difficulty, it should not be taken lightly in winter — escape is difficult, and a bad storm can make this a serious outing. First Descent of approximate line: Elkanah Lamb, 1871. FA: Walter Kiener, Agnes Vaille and Carl Blaurock, 1924.

B-18 Schobinger's Cracks II M6

Traverse Broadway from **Lambs Slide** past the bottom of **Notch Couloir** and belay at the base of a pronounced chimney, about 200 feet right. **Schobinger's Cracks** follows a narrower chimney on the right for a pitch, steps right to a crack leading to a ledge, and then follows the left-hand of two slots (this is called Eubanks' Chimney; look for a chockstone) to upper **Kiener's Route**. FA: This was first done in 1958 by Chuck Schobinger and John Amato as a rock climb. Will Gadd and Mark Twight did it as a mixed climb in 1996.

B-19 The Window III M4 (?) WI 4+

A giant, exfoliated flake, shaped like a K with a hole at its middle and located on the far left edge of the Diamond, is the namesake of this awesome route. Climb **North Chimney** (a disagreeable affair at best, see High Peaks chapter) and traverse left on Broadway for several hundred feet until directly below the Window. This point is more easily reached from **Lambs Slide**. Angle right toward the Diamond on easy ground to the base of double, right-facing corners, and ascend the left corner to a belay on top of a block (two half pitches, or one long pitch). Step down from the block and move right into the second corner, go up a short distance, then hand traverse right to the right-facing dihedral that forms the base of the K. One can also take the corner and arete above the block to a good ledge (80 feet), then traverse right to the K (4th class). When conditions permit (late spring and early fall), the slab below the Window is lined with exciting ice. Climb to a belay in the Window, then go through the hole and rappel south. Traverse left along a ledge and take the second chimney with a chockstone (this is Eubanks' Chimney) to the upper part of **Kiener's Route**. FA: Bill Eubanks and Brad Van Diver, 1950. **Variation:** A direct start, which may be best for an ice climbing ascent, begins 150 feet right of the normal route in a big, north-facing dihedral. Two pitches (mixed or WI 4+ depending on conditions) gain the base of the K. FA: Dale Johnson and Cary Husted, 1960.

B-20 The Cables AI 2 M2-

The north face of Longs Peak is the normal descent route for Diamond climbers in the summer, but in the winter, it becomes a classic mountaineering route. Hike up to the Boulderfield, then head south to Chasm View at the edge of the Diamond (see Longs Peak Overview topo, page 29). The route starts about 150 feet above Chasm View at a prominent right-facing dihedral. It is easy enough to reach the base in good conditions (3rd class), but in winter or spring it may be prudent to rope up for an approach pitch. The dihedral usually begins to ice over as early as September; by spring it is filled with snow (and is usually easy in these conditions). Climb the corner in one long pitch, passing two huge eyebolts along the way (may be buried in snow). Belay at the second one, or go a bit higher to a more comfortable stance. These eyebolts formerly anchored a $\frac{5}{8}$ inch stainless steel cable used for ascending the peak from 1925 until 1973. A second cable was installed immediately above the first belay, and although this pitch is much easier, a rope is still advisable. Scramble left from the first belay, then go back right into a low angled, left-facing corner, and belay from a nice ledge at the top of the corner. From here the difficulties taper off to 2nd and 3rd class climbing. The best route goes left from the second belay along a good ledge for several hundred feet. Climb

along a faint rib from a point near the left end of the ledge, then angle left toward the summit, zigzagging as necessary to avoid short walls and slabs. The most common mistake is to continue too far along the good ledge beyond the faint rib — this leads to dangerous slabs, which fall directly to the edge of the Diamond. Reverse the route to descend, rappelling from the eyebolts in the dihedral. FA: Enos Mills, early 20th century, or perhaps Carlyle Lamb (Elkanah's son). The two were neighbors at the foot of the mountain, and worked together to build the first trail up the peak. Paul Nesbit's Longs Peak guide (first published in 1946) lists Mills as the first person to climb the North Face, but no date is given. He made his first ascent of Longs Peak in 1885, and owned the Longs Peak Inn by 1902 (he bought it from the younger Lamb), so it is possible he had climbed the relatively easy north face by this date. Godfrey and Chelton's book claims "about 1912." Mills also made the first winter ascent of Longs in 1903, and was instrumental in lobbying Congress to set aside land for Rocky Mountain National Park, which happened in 1915. Carlyle Lamb first climbed Longs with his family in September of 1879. When the north face received its first descent in 1922, the Estes Park paper wrote an article about the event, and recounted the history of the route: "Years ago Carlyle Lamb scaled this portion of the peak...and Enos Mills says he was able to make the climb, but not the descent." Though it's not clear from the article who made the trip first, Lamb had been living in the area for seven years longer than Mills, so perhaps credit should be given to him.

B-21 Left Dovetail II AI 2 M2-

The snowfield beneath the North Face is known as the Dove as it resembles a diving bird. This route climbs partway up the tail of the Dove to the toe of a low-angled rock buttress. Ascend the buttress toward a small snowpatch (see next route), and stay just left of it for a pitch that leads to a ledge. Traverse the ledge a bit, then up a wall to the summit slopes. FA: Warren Gorrell, Alene Wharton, and Watson, 1935.

B-22 Right Dovetail II AI 2+ M1

Climb the tail of the Dove to a headwall, then up a tight couloir, which leads to a small snowpatch in a bowl. Move onto the buttress left of the patch and climb a pitch of good rock to a ledge, then traverse right on this break all the way to a notch in the **Keyhole Ridge**. Follow that route (see page 89). FA: Melvin Wickens, 1930, though it may have been climbed by William Ervin and Bruns in 1925.

GLACIER GORGE TRAILHEAD

The heart of RMNP ice climbing lies in Glacier Gorge. Despite the tedious approach to most of the climbs, this area is quite popular. The routes are excellent, the views tremendous and the long ski out provides a welcome treat at the end of the day. The first 23 routes are located in Glacier Gorge; the remaining climbs are in Loch Vale (these are the two major valleys accessed by the Glacier Gorge trail system).

Travel Directions: Drive on Bear Lake Road to the Glacier Gorge Junction Trailhead, located inside a hairpin turn about a mile before the end of the road. The parking lot is small and fills up even in winter. Additional parking can be found 0.1



A typical weekend day on All Mixed Up, Glacier Gorge. No fewer than twelve climbers can be seen in this foreshortened photo.

mile down the road or at the Bear Lake Trailhead (at the end of the road, one more mile). A 0.3 mile trail leading southeast from the Emerald Lake trail (which begins at Bear Lake) connects the two lots. Or, use a 0.25-mile trail from the east end of the Bear Lake parking lot — this isn't as well known, and may not be tracked in the winter.

Approach: The main trail heads south out of the lot toward Alberta Falls. It passes the North Longs Peak trail at 1.5 miles, and then hits a junction at 2.0 miles. This junction can be reached more quickly with a short cut that follows an unnamed creek on the north side of Glacier Knobs, and it is almost always tracked in winter. (The short cut can also be followed in summer with an old path that stays above the creek, though the Park Service frowns upon its use for some reason. It was built in 1921 as the standard route to Loch Vale, replacing a trail built by Abner Sprague in 1913, before the Park was born. The present day trail was built in 1927 to include scenic Alberta Falls in the trip to Loch Vale). At the junction, the right fork leads into Loch Vale on the north side of Thatchtop and ends at Sky Pond (4.5 miles), which is situated below the north face of Powell Peak and the east face of Taylor Peak. The left fork leads into Glacier Gorge, passes Mills and Jewel Lakes, and continues to Black Lake at 4.5 miles. A third trail very near to this junction leads to Lake Haiyaha, and then drops into Tyndall Gorge just below Dream Lake; all of these trails are signed.

C-1 Parking Lot Wall WI 3 to M6

A short cliff (100 feet high and visible from the parking lot) lies just west of the trail to Mills Lake about one tenth of a mile from the car. Bits and pieces of ice can be found in several locations; these are usually top roped due to poor protection. A hidden wall right of this (look for a perched boulder) also sports a few top ropes. It is best reached by leaving the trail at a boulder just past the first bridge — hike upstream for 100 yards, then angle left for a few minutes to the wall. These cliffs have also seen some rock climbing action in summer, though nothing of lasting merit has been recorded.

Thatchtop (Glacier Gorge side)

C-2 All Mixed Up III WI 4

This beautiful route goes up an iced over cliff band in the back of a bowl which lies on the northeast side of Thatchtop high above Mills Lake — the bowl also contains the next three lines. **All Mixed Up** can be seen from several spots along Bear Lake Road, though it may look like nothing more than a snow ribbon from this distance. Hike to Mills Lake and wallow up the eastern slope of Thatchtop above the south side (far end) of the lake. Often there is a trail beaten through the snow; expect a workout if the duty of breaking trail falls on your party. Three pitches of lower angled flows (WI 3) lead straight up to a snow ramp belay below the final crux pitch, a steep pillar in a chimney. Belay high on the second lead to avoid getting stranded on the snow ramp (which may have inadequate anchors in heavy snow). Descend the rib forming the south (left as you face the climb) side of the bowl, then take either of two snow chutes back to the base. This route has become

extremely popular, and it's not unusual to find more than five parties in the area on the weekends. **Variations:** The lower pitches can be done in several ways: straight up the middle is the standard route; to the left is a smattering of icy slabs intermixed with rock; to the right one will encounter a few short, WI 4 curtains and a bit of mixed ground at the end; and further right a switchback ramp system can be followed. All of these end at the snow ramp, which can be traversed left to avoid the final pitch and the massive traffic jam on busy days. Note that there are at least two unnamed half-pitches of ice near the shores of Mills Lake. One is immediately right of the approach to **All Mixed Up** (WI 2+), and the other on the black wall at the north end of Mills Lake (thin and difficult, and forming only rarely; FA: Douglas Snively and Duncan Ferguson).

C-3 Pipe Organ II M4 WI 4+

The huge left-facing dihedral right of **All Mixed Up** sports a steep pillar and curtain of ice one pitch off the ground. Approach via a couple mixed pitches (on rare occasions ice will go all the way to the ground), or traverse in from the rightmost variation described in **All Mixed Up**. FA: Milan Proska and John Marrs, 1984.

C-4 Dazed and Confused WI 4+

This is a good route on the right side of the bowl that is also known as **Middle Finger of Dr. Wazz**. Look for a yellow pillar/curtain near the top of the face, and climb a long stretch of lower angled ice to reach it. Descend by walking south around the top of **All Mixed Up**, then join its descent. FA: Malcolm Daly and Larry Day, early 1980s, or perhaps John Marrs and Dan Bankard, 1984. **Variation:** Another short curtain lies right of the crux pillar (unclimbed?).

C-5 Overflow WI 3

Hike past Jewel Lake (which is just south of Mills Lake) and look for a 75 foot flow in the trees, low down on the east fact of Thatchtop. FA: Richard Rossiter, Ralph Baldwin and Tim Hogan, 1977.

Arrowhead and McHenrys (Solitude Lake Cirque)

The following four routes begin in the Shelf and Solitude Lakes cirque, which is the hanging valley between Thatchtop and Arrowhead, backed by McHenrys Peak.

C-6 Hourglass Couloir III AI 3 M3

The north face of Arrowhead (the spur originating from McHenrys Peak) holds a superb mixed route of moderate difficulty. The route comes into condition in late spring and usually lasts well into June. Hike (or ski) toward Black Lake, but head right across Glacier Creek (3.75 miles from the trailhead) where Shelf Creek comes in from the west. Climb the steep hill on the north side of Shelf Creek to reach Shelf Lake, then continue to Solitude Lake. Consider bivouacking here as the approach takes several hours and the route consists of eight pitches. Follow the obvious chimney line in the middle of the face straight to the summit, passing several chockstones in the lower chimney and a mixed band at midheight. A splendid, ice-filled slot on the left with seventy degree water ice leads to the upper snowfield. Descend into the Solitude Lake cirque from the summit via third class gullies and ramps (described in the rock climbing section under Arrowhead; see Descent Three).

C-7 Sister Sweetly III M4 AI 4

This route climbs the steep gully about 100 yards right of **Hourglass Couloir** in six pitches. The initial pitch consists of difficult mixed climbing, and is followed by a pitch of AI 4. Continue along easier ground above, then go straight up another section of M4. The final section works up a slab, and then bends left. A 60 meter rope was used on the first ascent, and all six leads are long. FA: Jon Allen and Clay Wadman.

C-8 North Face Direct III M4 AI 4+

This line climbs the north face of McHenry's Peak, beginning at the back of the hanging valley which holds Shelf and Solitude Lakes. Hike beneath the previous two routes, and begin at an ice chimney which leads to the first of three obvious snow bands. The route's ten pitches alternate between mixed climbing and alpine ice as it passes through the snow bands, and finishes on the north ridge right of the actual summit. Descend the next route, or climb over McHenry's summit and down its southeast ridge to Stone Man Pass. From there, a snowfield leads to the broad plateau above Black Lake. FA: Bill Feiges and Peter Metcalf, 1979.

C-9 McHenry's Notch II AI 2 4th class

The wide couloir at the back end of the Solitude Lake cirque leads directly to a prominent notch on McHenry's north ridge. Follow the ridge (4th class) to the summit, descend the southeast ridge to Stone Man Pass (3rd class), then drop into the plateau above Black Lake.

Black Lake

Routes **C-10** through **C-16** are situated below and around the shores of Black Lake.

C-10 Reflections WI 3

Several ice climbs form on the cliff bands below Black Lake, east of the final steep slope that leads into the Black Lake basin. The most obvious is a two-pitch route up thin ice on a long slab followed by a tiered section. Short pillars and slabs can be found on either side of this line.

C-11 Scotty M4- WI 4

Named for its similarity to mixed climbs in Scotland, this route climbs a wide, iced over crack/chimney (one long pitch) right of **Reflections**.

C-12 Black Lake Ice WI 2 to 3

The broad slab southeast of the lake (just right of the summer trail to Spearhead) holds a thick sheet of classic blue ice that reliably forms up every winter. Pick any of several lines up the slab (WI 2) and finish with short walls and pillars at the top (up to WI 3). Walk toward Longs Peak and back down to the base.

C-13 West Gully II WI 4

The **West Gully** is the best route in the Black Lake basin. Located in a channel above the west end of the lake, it consists of a low-angled pitch to a steep pillar. Above the crux, two hundred feet of iced-over slabs lead out of the basin onto the plateau below McHenry's Peak. Descend as for **Black Lake Ice** or down ramps and gullies below Arrowhead. This area is subject to slab avalanches. FA: Duncan