New ‘Adirondack Explorer’ Features Ice Climbing

by Phil Brown
Adirondack Explorer

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Last winter, at age fifty-nine, I took up ice climbing. My first route was the popular Chouinard’s Gully above Chapel Pond. Don Mellor, the author of Blue Lines: An Adirondack Ice Climber’s Guide, led all three pitches.

Later in the season, I climbed four classic routes with Dan Plumley: Roaring Brook Falls, the Cascade (between Cascade Lakes), Multiplication Gully in Wilmington Notch, and Chapel Pond Slab. On each climb, Dan led and thus assumed the lion’s share of the risk.

On the day of our Roaring Brook Falls climb, we were in the parking lot when Seth Lang, a Crown Point photographer, happened to be driving by. He stopped to say hello, and I asked him if he could take some shots of our climb. One of those photos ended up on the cover of the January/February issue of the Adirondack Explorer. It shows Dan leading the first pitch.

Inside the issue is a lengthy story that describes my climb with Don and his
thoughts on ice climbing—illustrated with photos by Nancie Battaglia. My climbs with Dan (a partner with Adirondack Wild) are summarized in another story. These are supplemented with sidebars on ice-climbing equipment and Don’s guidebook.

Ice climbing is not for everyone. In fact, I shunned the sport until last winter. I didn’t see the appeal of standing around in the cold while your partner climbed a giant icicle. I decided to try it because, if you remember, we didn’t have much snow for skiing early in the season.

I liked the experience enough that I bought a new ice tool. For the novice, one of the attractions of ice climbing is that—unlike rock climbing—it’s fairly easy to follow a leader on a moderately difficult route. That’s because you create your own holds by stabbing the ice with your tools and your crampons.

Ice climbing is not for everyone, and I doubt it will replace skiing as my No. 1 winter pastime. But even if you don’t intend to take it up, I hope you’ll enjoy reading about my experience.

Of course, there’s much more in the new issue of the Explorer than ice climbing. You’ll also find stories on the debate over the Remsen-Lake Placid rail corridor, proposals for amending the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, the spread of Lyme disease inside the Park, recent cougar sightings, an update on white-nose syndrome, the latest in the NYCO Minerals lawsuit, a hike to the recently purchased Lake Andrew, and a ski trip to Copperas Pond, along with book reviews, natural-history columns, and more.

Some of these stories will be published at Adirondack Almanack in the coming weeks. If you like what you read, please consider subscribing to the Explorer. We are a nonprofit newsmagazine with a strong interest in environmental issues, outdoor recreation, wildlife, and natural history.