

Learning to Ice Climb in the Dax

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Abstract: 5 Grad students hiked into a popular hike in the Adirondacks to Mount Colden and up Trap Dike during the winter. Camped and ice climbed; and did not freeze to death.

Preparation

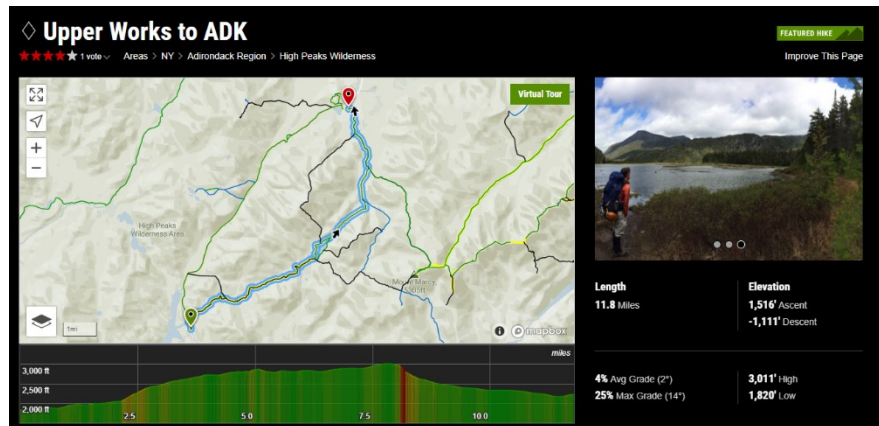
Missing the misery provided by winter camping and desiring the adventure of a challenge, we laid plans to hike into the winter wilderness. Unsure of the weather, and in an attempt to be cautious, we chose a hike that we had already done (Avalanche Pass Trail). This trail leads into avalanche lake which holds several viable ice climbs. Since we had little training for ice climbing, we settled on a 4th class hike (Trapp Dike).

Apart from guide books, we did not have equipment or experience for ice climbing. So we purchased snowshoes, crampons, ice axes, ice screws, and coats. Assembled a small team and a dog.

First day:

After spending all night making sure that our bags were ready and that we weren't going to freeze and die. We left the house at 3am and drove 6 hours to Heart Lodge in the High Peaks. To my surprise, the parking lot was packed. Every other time I have gone winter camping (in Idaho), I haven't see anyone.

We hike on a pleasantly traveled and well-marked trail to avalanche lake. At this point, we hadn't seen too many ppl on the trail. I ignorantly thought that since it was late afternoon that we were unlikely to see many more people and that I could get away with setting up the tent on the beautiful lake. (Again, I'm sorry. Things are different in the Dax. It is privately owned. Lots of people. And has rules to account for these things.) Ppl begin to emerge from the trail. I begin to think that I am being rude because our tent is probably



an eye-sore to those viewing the lake. A very kind off-duty ranger kindly advises us to relocate to a designated campground. We relocate into the trees to a secluded campground and set up camp (snow-clearing, packing the snow for the tent foundation, cooking, shoveling). Finally, we all crawl into the tent around 6pm as the sun is waning and go to sleep early. When I enter the tent at 6pm, Jack is sleeping on his stomach with his face directly into the ground and his arms at his side.

Day 2

We sleep for 14hrs. Jack still hasn't moved, lol. We cook a bit of a breakfast and have some really bad coffee. After some deliberation, we break down camp and head back to the lake. In light of my lack of experience and equipment, the others graciously forgo the ice climbing portion and hike around instead, so that Jack and I can have the harrowing experience that we sought. Jack and I, equipped with rope, crampons, 2 ice screws and 2 ice axes, begin Trap Dike. The dike had a firm layer of ice on this day and only one short vertical section requiring the ice screws. I think this was an ideal way to start ice climbing. We started to feel the rhythm and technique of driving our crampons and axes into the snow and the weather couldn't have been more forgiving. Just cold enough to keep the ice hard, blue skies, and minimal wind. We reached the top in good time and fumbled down the snowy trail on the south side of Mount Colden. Around 5pm we reached the car and met up with the others. Ate at a local diner and drank a lot of coffee before driving back.



Epic Doggo

