

(a) Ice Dragons,
(b) Magic Pants,
(c) Moon Burn.

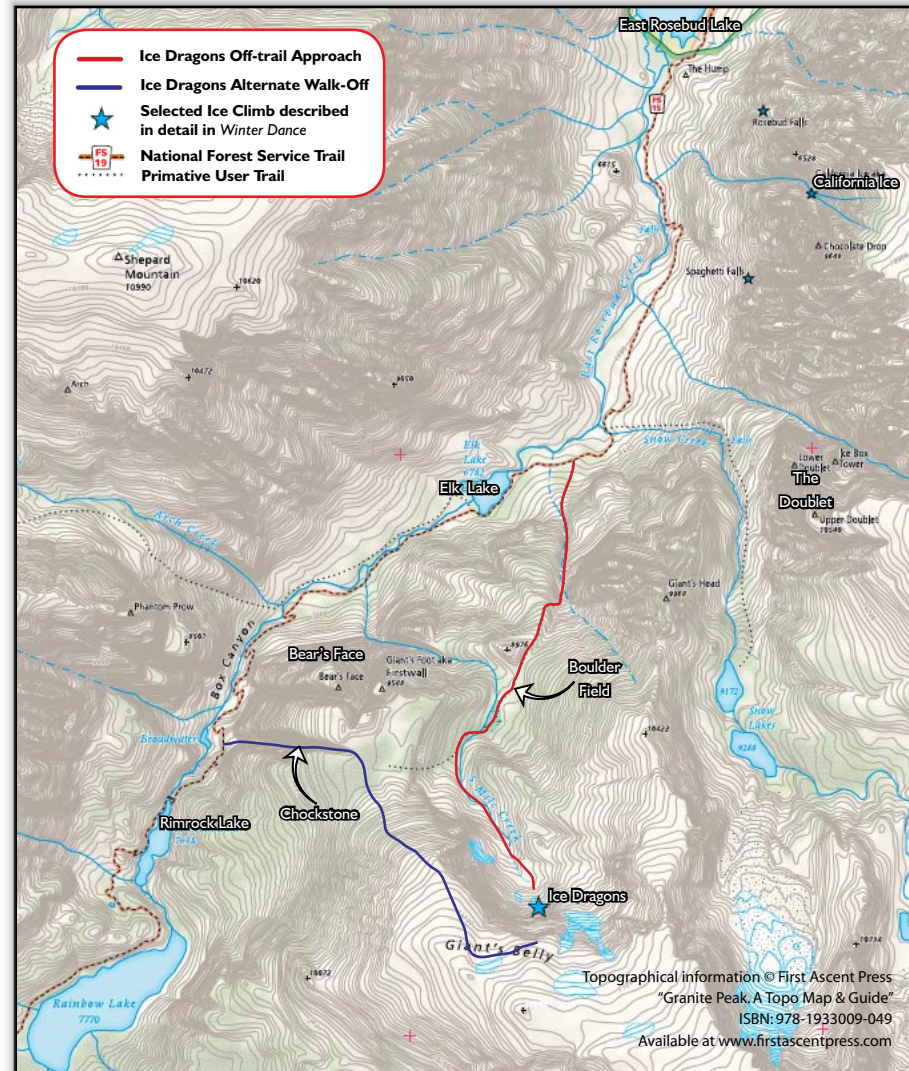
Photo taken from East Rosebud Lake.

When *Winter Dance* was published in 2004, there was little known about a great, alpine ice route called *Ice Dragons*. Not helping matters was the only photo available at the time was a 20-year old shot with the climb totally obscured by clouds. On October 25, 2005, Doug Stroup, Kris Erickson and I climbed the route the day after climbing the nearby, classic, rock route *The Ramp* (5 pitches, 5.7 to 5.9) in T-shirts and shorts. Indeed, conditions frequently allow for such a unique weekend sports package. Combined with another 25 years of experience hiking throughout the area, I've now been able to adequately describe the climb and recommend the best approach and descent options for this three star route.

The original description for *Ice Dragons* detailed a “5.10, M5” route. This lead to some folks thinking the occasional melt-freeze line to the right to be *Ice Dragons*. After talking about it at length with Mike Abbey, the route described here is, in fact, *Ice Dragons*. The route forms up fat most seasons, but during some it can be thin (like during the FA in 2000) and in rare years there is no ice at all. In 2008, two excellent mixed routes were completed to the right.

With more climbers getting on it, some now consider *Ice Dragons* to be Southwest Montana’s premier early season adventure for those fiends eager to swing tools. It has a scrappy 4-hour approach as do the iconic Sphinx routes; but here you can have up to six long pitches—3 times that found on the Sphinx. Enjoy!

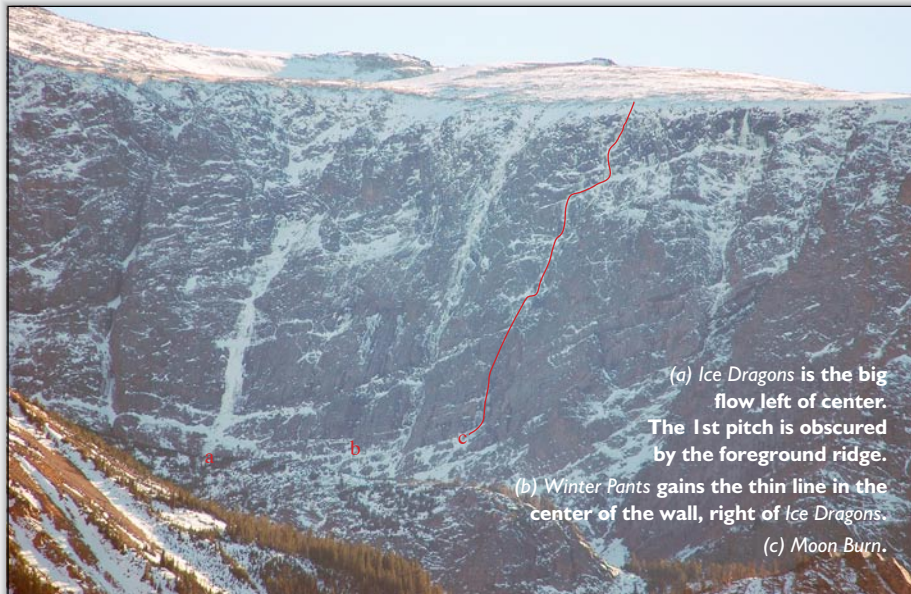
—Joe Josephson



Checking Conditions



Ice Dragons and the approach gully are both easily visible from East Rosebud Lake, which is accessible to vehicles most of the winter. If the snow is too bad to get to the lake then it's probably safe to say the snow conditions on the route will be dangerous.



(a) *Ice Dragons* is the big flow left of center. The 1st pitch is obscured by the foreground ridge.
 (b) *Winter Pants* gains the thin line in the center of the wall, right of *Ice Dragons*.
 (c) *Moon Burn*.

Location



Ice Dragons is the farthest left of several major lines pouring off the “Giant’s Belly,” a north-facing wall that is part of the complex Mount Inabnit (11,924 ft). *Ice Dragons* is formed by a seep pouring from an alcove two-thirds up the wall. The others are more ephemeral as they are melt-freeze lines that may appear after big fall snow storms. Indian summer and dry winds typically sublimate them away quickly, while *Ice Dragons* keeps on dripping and getting fatter. After years of obscurity, this wall has become something of a popular destination with *Ice Dragons* generally receiving multiple ascents each season. *Winter Pants* and *Moon Burn* are two high-quality mixed routes also gracing this alpine gem.

Approach



From East Rosebud Lake, hike up Forest Service Trail #15 (the trail to Cooke City) for about 2.5 miles. Just before Elk Lake, cut south off the trail and head up the large scree gully. Hike up this for 1,600 vertical feet to a hanging valley. Continue south across a boulder field (tricky if covered with thin snow) to a beautiful meadow with Five Mile Creek meandering through it. Continue up the creek and around the corner to the left and then up to the base of the route.

“ICE DRAGONS” BIO

First Ascent: Ron Brunckhorst & Michael Abbey. October 28, 2000.

Getting to the Trailhead: Refer to *Winter Dance*, pages 182-189.

Approach: 4 to 4.5 hours

Grades: Typically WI 3+, but up to M5 or M6 if the bottom is thin. Easy rock/mixed (M4) to exit from top of the ice to plateau.

Commitment: Even strong, experienced parties take up to 14 hours from car-to-car. Expect and go prepared for a long day in remote alpine terrain. Bring extra slings and experience for rappels.

Gear: Ice screws and small rock rack. A full mixed rack, including pitons, is required if the route is thin. Two ropes if planning to rappel route. If walking off, one rope is fine.

Aspect: North

Elevation: 9,600 feet at base : 10,800 feet at plateau.

Best Season: Mid-October to mid-November.

The Route

Hike up scree to the base of the ice and a belay ledge/cave on the right. A steep pillar to start is the crux but it is short lived. Continue up a narrow, thin section to wider ice above. Another 150 meters or so of undulating ice with one steeper wall leads into a broad alcove where the ice emanates. If continuing to the top, climb snow covered rock up a slab then traverse right into the base of a gully. Another two pitches or simu-climbing on easy rock and mixed climbing up the faint gully system leads to the plateau. Depending on the amount of simu-climbing, expect up to six or seven long pitches from the base of the route to the plateau.

Descent



Either rappel the route or walk off. The walk off is the recommended option if you go all the way to the plateau. After descending the plateau and reaching flat ground at tree line, you can descend a narrow slot to the west to arrive at the Forest Service trail just north of Rimrock Lake (marked with the blue line on the map). The narrow scree-filled slot is blocked by a major chockstone but there is a hole that you squeeze through to get under and out from the chockstone.

If you prefer to descend back into Five Mile Creek, there is another steep downhill to reach the meadow area in Five Mile Creek. From here, it is recommended you return via the gully to the southeast of Elk Lake (the way you came), marked with the red line on the map. The Five Mile Creek drainage has some bad bushwacking and is dangerously loose as it nears the main valley.

Ice Dragons on the left. The upper mixed pitches follow a hidden gully. *Winter Pants* showing the FA line taken in late November 2008. This photo was taken in early October 2005 when the entire route was thinly iced. Often, the upper half is thicker while the lower half has little to no ice at all. This melt-freeze line typically comes in after early season storms then sublimates away to nothing. Only the start to the route *Moon Burn* is seen in this photo.



“WINTER PANTS” BIO

First Ascent: Ty Nygard, Justin Griffin, & Aaron Thrasher. Nov. 25, 2008.

Getting to the Trailhead: Refer to *Winter Dance*, pages 182-189.

Approach: 4 to 4.5 hours

Grades: M6, WI 3+. This line occasionally forms as ice most of the way down. Such thin ice climbing would undoubtedly add a few notches to the overall grade. It would also add a direct start.

Approach, Descent, & Commitment: As per *Ice Dragons*.

Gear: Standard rock rack and ice screws.

Aspect: North

Elevation: 9,600 feet at base : 10,800 feet at plateau.

Best Season: Mid-October to mid-November.

The Route

The following description is taken from the “Montana Ice” web site: <http://montanaice.com/node/860>

“After crashing out at the trail head we woke at 4 a.m. and wandered in the direction of *Ice Dragons*. The walk was lengthy but a pleasant tennis shoes experience most of the way. We abandoned rucksacks at the base of the descent ridge and euro-styled it to the base of our objective, the obvious hanging smear to the right of *Ice Dragons*.

We pulled on our winter pants and climbed. Some easy steep snow and short ice step soloing brought us to the base of the first pitch, a right trending ramp with a steep section at the start (m4 60m). The second pitch climbed a obvious open book with a small roof to run out moss climbing (m5 60m). The third pitch climbed a clean right facing corner over a bulge on excellent rock with excellent protection to a difficult face crux and belay at a ledge just left of the ice (m6 20m). Pitches 4-6 were mostly ice climbing on beautiful, featured thin ice. Pitch 4 was notable with difficult climbing to reach solid ice followed by brilliant sticks in a fun corner.

Descend as for *Ice Dragons*. A fun route on good rock. A must do and a long day.”

“MOON BURN” BIO

First Ascent: Sam Magro, Whit Magro, & Aaron Thrasher. Dec 11, 2008.

Getting to the Trailhead: Refer to *Winter Dance*, pages 182-189.

Approach: 4 to 4.5 hours

Grades: M5, WI 4.

Approach, Descent, & Commitment: As per *Ice Dragons*.

Gear: Standard rock rack and ice screws.

Aspect: North

Elevation: 9,600 feet at base : 10,800 feet at plateau.

Best Season: Mid-October to mid-November.

The Route

Moon Burn starts in the first major dihedral to the right of *Winter Pants*. The first pitch is sustained 200 feet of M5 climbing with sufficient edges for the crampons and the occasional frozen moss stick and hand jam followed by 80 more feet of easier terrain. The second pitch pulls out of the dihedral to the right for a long 250 foot pitch (simu-climbing) on easier terrain. On the first ascent, Pitch 3 offered a bit of drytooling that gave way to thin, delaminated WI4 which eventually fattened up at the top of a 220 foot pitch. At the top of the ice they traversed right on a snow field to the base of a short technical dihedral. This last pitch (pitch 4, 200') started with a techy corner, that may be easier with fatter ice. Above the dihedral, the climbing moderates with a final cruxy cornice mantel move to gain the plateau.

Earlier in the season before the cold and wind attack the ice, the ice should be better bonded; and in a fat year offering less mixed climbing and more ice. Either way the route offers good climbing and adequate gear in any condition.