

## Adirondacks: Screw & Climax WI3++, Blue Chute WI3

The trip resumes 2 weeks later when Wayne Stone and I canceled this trip due to extremely cold temps in Lake Placid with highs for the 3 days projected 6 above by 1pm. We can say same trip different ice with the high tomorrow around 40 and lows near zero while we are here. So here we are Friday, 2 weeks later at BWI, ready to board our flight to Albany. I tell ya, it sure beats driving 8-9 hours. The flight was over before we knew it. We landed at 715, got our car, stopped in Keene Valley for some gear and arrived shortly before 10pm at the Northway Hotel.

We stopped briefly in Keene Valley to pick up my new Grivel Rambo4 EVO crampons and an MSR canister that I bought from the Mountaineer and arranged to pick up after hours from a local merchant. I would have them to use on Saturday. I had to fit these new crampons on my new La Sportiva Nepal EVO GTX boots to climb in the morning. I was surprised that they were infinitely easier to adjust and fit than Rambo2's that Raboy gave me-thanks Davy!!! (I'll use these with my plastics if I ever do). A one screw adjustment was all that was required; on with the show. I was also testing my new MSR REACTOR stove, for in-room French press (compliments of Kurt ferstl) coffee (Verona) to start the day off right.

We got up early to a typical near zero degree Lake Placid morning and had breakfast a few blocks away at the downtown diner. We decided to save Multiplication Gully WI3+ for Monday and headed for the North face of Pitchoff to climb Screw & Climax WI3+.

The temps already had risen when we got to the parking lot. We got geared up and made it to the beaver pond in 18 minutes. All the climbs looked fat fat fat. Central Pillar was a work of art and reminded me of the Mormon Temple in SLC. We've done all those climbs before so in a small way we weren't interested, but hell I'd climb anything, if someone shared leads.

{youtube}7kGNbdiwVII{/youtube}

We followed the direct route straight up the stair master to the base of Blue Chute WI3, right next to Weeping Winds WI3+, in a POST-HOLIO hell nightmare approach. Each step took me leg deep to my crotch in snow almost every other step at best. Aggravating and exhausting, the approach in the rising temperatures was a genuine ordeal ball buster. I'd never been that far over on the north face and the traverse through this impossible snow was heinous ordeal (hey, ever heard of snow shoes?). The postholing trudge was impossible to describe. I always carry my piolet (marginal knees) and I am glad I had it today. After an exhausting and sweaty approach, we finally made the base of Screw & Climax WI3+ .

Wayne offered P1 to me and after he left the ground, I was disappointed I didn't take this first pitch. Only until I was half way up this expanse of ice, did it look much more formidable and I was glad in a way I was seconding. After all, it didn't look all that steep and the ice was fat. I found myself in a sea of ever steepening ice and wondered how Mr. Wayne did it! He is a beast! There is a lot of exposure on this route. It reminded me of surfing big waves and being halfway up the face of a giant closeout! I am not sure I could do a really really big slab climb on ice. OMG! I look for nice blue, white or tannish ice where it is thicker when I climb. Ha! In the back of my small mind I look for abalakov placements and it looked like the ice for that purpose would have been questionable, kinda bubbly. It was going at 3+ already before the big ledge. We missed the rap station on the right as we looked ever upward at the WI-4( as the book says) looming above between us and the abseil.

I actually thought I could lead the second pitch but Wayne took off. This was way more steeper than the pitch we just did. I even had a time cleaning P1's steep section as I was on my new front points on vertical ice. What I should have done was sunk my tool and clipped off, but in the moment, one is concerned with dropping stuff while the clock is ticking on your pumped guns. My new boots and crampons made all the difference today. The Nepals provided a stable platform for my feet and the splayed secondary and tertiary points assisting the monopoint of the RAMBO4 provided less fatigue and greater confidence; my college course flashed before my eyes on this steep shit. The one thing about climbing a hard route, (for me anyway), with new-new gear, is untested gear can epic, for example. The strap on my new crampon was way too long and I kept skewering the strap with my monopoint. When that happened, the monopoint would not really penetrate the ice; it was scary enough. Luckily the RAMBO4 has splayed secondary and tertiary points plus an ancillary spike next to the main monopoint to give me an adequate hail Mary stance.

{youtube}4bjGnrvKIUA{/youtube}

This climb had more consequence to a dropped tool. I deployed my tethers for my leashless tools as dropping them on this climb would have made for a cluster epic to match the cluster approach. With the security of my tethers, I actually bumped my right tool and it skittered off in a heart stopping 3ft freefall; this happened cuz I had them teathered, only the second time I had ever used them, first time I ever dropped a tool. I was still afforded the "leashless" style climbing with my teathers, but I didn't want to get use to this, all that dangly stuff was getting to me this day already.

I gained the belay and we rapped. This was a day for test pieces. I deployed my Petzl Shunt to do this long rap to see how it worked on iced ropes. The device worked with confidence and would have fit this application, but the autoblock work just as good without added weight, I do like it but haven't dialed this into my setup.

{youtube}9GNDSYo5MOU{/youtube}

The wind began to howl in the trees at about 25mph and we still had time at 3pm for another route. We decided to do Blue Chute WI3. The temps were awesome, but the snow was now sticky, cookie dough and if you think postholio was bad, try it in cookie dough. This stuff made the approach seem like dancing with breadboxes on your feet in a mud pit. The snow stuck to my boots and crampons even with the anti balling plates on the RAMBO4's, which made each footfall terribly tedious. It was dangerous and exhausting to lift the weight of a mountaineering boot and crampon with a giant glob of cookie dough to the next post hole.

{youtube}UtNnspUzV-8{/youtube}

We struggled to kick up the steep gully of Blue chute WI3 and made an anchor. I launched off and immediately skewered my strap again but the monopoint on the rambo4 is much like a barbed trident and it was almost impossible to free the skewerd strap but no sooner had I freed it, it was skewered again. I could not find confident purchase with this thing on either front point while on lead; leading ice is mentally taxing already. This climb is more my speed, sheltered gully, sections of steep ice, rests, plenty of bail points! It was getting later in what was already a long day and we were grateful to the mountain for the visit, but the light was just starting to change. I avoid benighting on a route, which

complicates the dynamic of safety in this semi remote locale.

We rapped all the way down nearly to the pond, because of the steep deep snow down the stair master. Walked out, went home and ate at Lisa G's Restaurant. The link to her website is all-mess-up, but the food is fabulous, especially the stuffed pork pablano-OMG. Vincent Penoso