

## A FROZEN WORLD NUMBER 4

21 December 2004

Welcome to A FROZEN WORLD, the world's premier mixed and leashless climbing newsletter. The weather has changed dramatically here in Colorado, with the arrival of the winter solstice the sun once again returns to the northern sky, the arrival of spring is now merely three months distant. The mixed season may now be considered in full swing if you have projects in mind so you had better get out and send, now!

*Left: Everything has changed, yet nothing has changed. A climber (almost certainly the late Tom Patey<sup>1</sup>), sending leashless somewhere in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the advent of Piolet Traction steps were often cut to create "holds" in steep ice. (Note the author's comments on the need for confidence to forego the necessity of a "sling".)*



114. Sequence of movement on steep ice. The use of a very short axe permits a much more natural and relaxed cutting position than a long one. To 'pick' the axe into the ice as in B requires confidence; most climbers would hold on to it, preferably with a sling. On very steep ice an ice screw placed above the climber will increase his security and reduce the need for handholds.

<sup>1</sup> A colorful character in the history of mixed climbing, Scottish physician Patey established many difficult mixed routes in the mountains of Scotland and the western Alps in the 1950s and 60s. Of particular note are his *Scorpion* on Cairn Etchachan (grade 5, 1952!), *Zero Gulley* on Ben Nevis, *Parallel Buttress* in Lochnager, and the *British Route* on the Aiguille Sans Nom with Joe Brown (ED1) in 1963. Sadly, Patey became addicted to prescription amphetamines, an objective hazard of the medical trade at that time. He was killed in a rappelling accident whilst pioneering a new route on a sea stack at Whiten head in 1970.

<sup>2</sup> From *Mountaineering: Hill walking to Alpine Climbing*, by Alan Blackshaw, 1965.



*Rob seeking protection within  
“Free Strike Zone” (M7+),  
Rocky Mountain National Park,  
Colorado. Photo: Roy Legget.*

“I am not a number! I am a free man!”-*The Prisoner.*

“Then I lost my grip of the axe and it started somersaulting in the air with both my arms wind-milling trying to grab it and my feet scarting about in crumbly holds.”-Robin Smith.

“Some snow fell this morning: about 10 it cleared up, and the weather became pleasant.”  
-Sgt. Patrick Gass, Lewis and Clark expedition, Fort Mandan North, Dakota, December 24, 1804.

“Upon their phantasmogorical imaginations...that women are lawless, and not subject to the laws of this realm as men are, but might in such cases offend without dread or punishment of law.”-A Yorkshireman, 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Conditions**

A sustained bout of cold weather has brought the ice in Colorado into good nick. Vail has at last become a reasonable destination as the classic flow *Rigid Designator* has formed up, probably around stiff WI5 with several notable retreats already observed on this one. The freestanding *Fang* still has some way to go, but with a sizeable pedestal and an impressive hanging mass of ice it cannot be long now. Look for this intimidating WI6 test-piece to appear under the tree some time around Christmas, epic groveling will ensue shortly thereafter. 7<sup>th</sup> *Tentacle* is already well on its way to forming, although the bolt is currently far to the right of the ice. This route will probably get a freshly bolted start this year as the old Lowe start is chewed out, watch for it. Ice is also forming on *Little Thang*, soon, very soon. *Octopussy* (M8?) is big and dripping, rumors abound about retro-bolting this classic dangler in an effort to clean up the route and replace all the old fixed junk that sprouts from the roof there. Ice is beginning to form at the first *Fatman* smear, still M9 that, I can vouch

for it after barely getting up the first four bolts as a “warm-up”. It looks like ice might be forming on *Amphibian* as well, the initial “bolt of doom” on this route has been replaced by

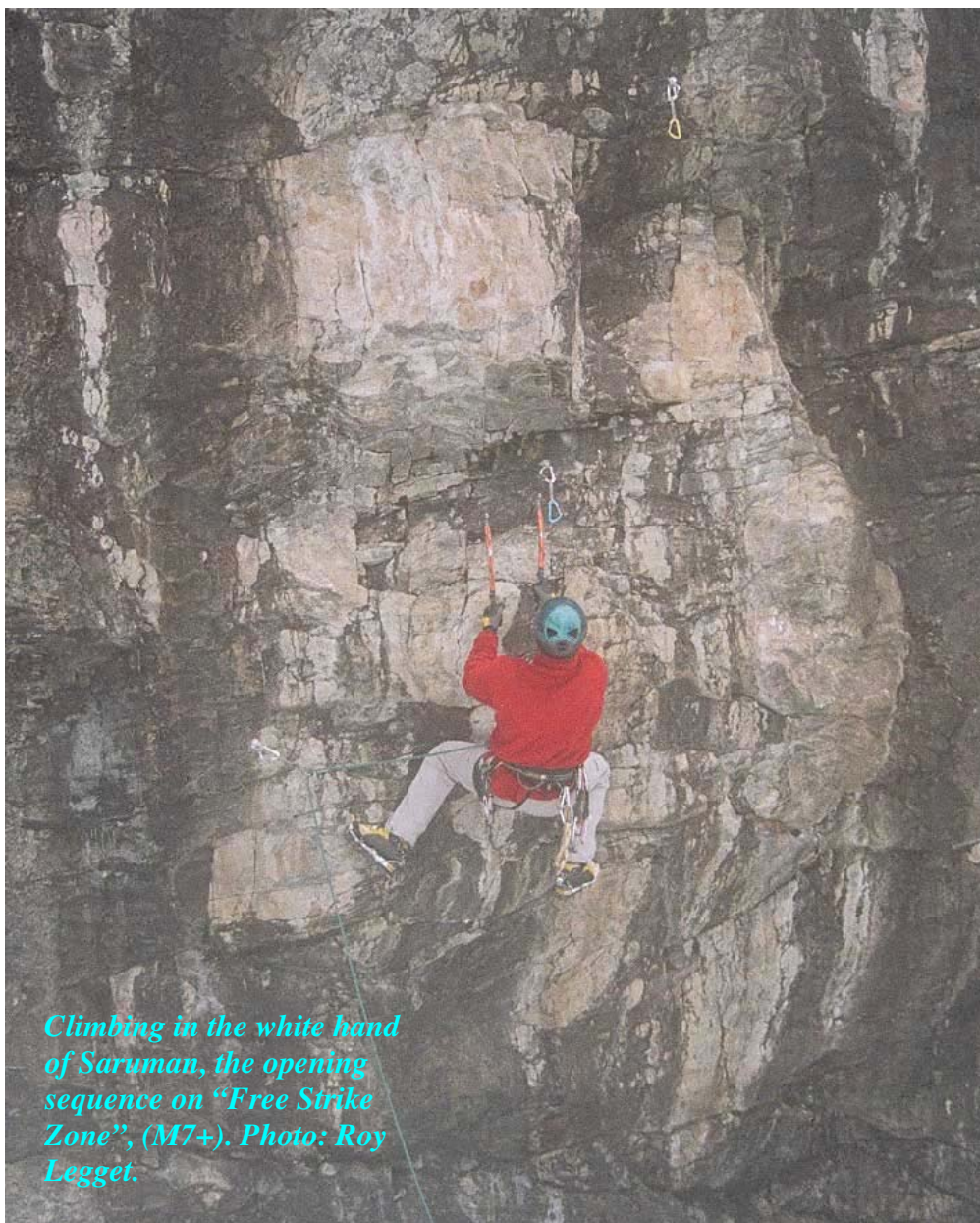


one slightly higher so that is one cleaver block you want drop in your lap (leaving only a half-dozen others en route to the chains). There is also a new line of bolts betwixt *Fatman* and *Amphibian*, I gave up trying to count all the loose blocks I could see from the ground on this one, but it makes for the 1<sup>st</sup> *Amphibian* smear sharing the last two bolts on that 1<sup>st</sup> pitch. If you try this one be sure and put your belayer in a safe place (like across the valley in a parking garage). *Serpent* (bolts left of *Amphibian*) apparently never did get climbed last year but someone did manage to dislodge a massive block attempting this route end of season. I would say that with the exception of *Fatman* the routes along this western side of the cirque are for the most part choss and one should think carefully about what the consequences of pulling a goober off might be.

*Right: A mind is a terrible thing to waste... Here we see an indigent climber at Vail huffing Barge cement from his fruit-boot. With the advent of bolted mixed routes the crags at Vail have become a veritable abscess of urban decay and pagan debauchery. Photo: Courtesy of “Citizens Coalition for an M-Free Colorado”.*

Moving right along, both *Somnambulist* (M9?) and *Pitch Black* (M10) have good ice buildup. The *Black* dangler is massive so avoid being under this one in an earthquake. There is probably enough ice to do *Dr. Delicate*, you would need to personify just that to send this one. *Secret Probation* (M7) is in fine form with steep ice and some good moves, there is ice on *Spiral Stairs* (WI3) as well. *Tourettes* (M6) formed up well this year but some ning-nong broke the tasty Stein-pull under the roof in a fit of pique, you can still do the route but it just ain’t as cool.

The smear to the left of *Tourettes* is in and is another candidate for retro-bolts, the feeling is generally that Vail suffers from a lack of moderate grade bolted lines for people to work though, basically few people are interested in getting killed or seriously injured on their days off so they are reluctant to push themselves above rusty pins and wobbly nuts. There



*Climbing in the white hand of Saruman, the opening sequence on "Free Strike Zone", (M7+). Photo: Roy Legget.*

is a new 4 bolt rig even further left of *Tourettes* called *8mm*, I have not yet sampled this new line but it is a much-needed addition to the moderate lines inventory at Vail.

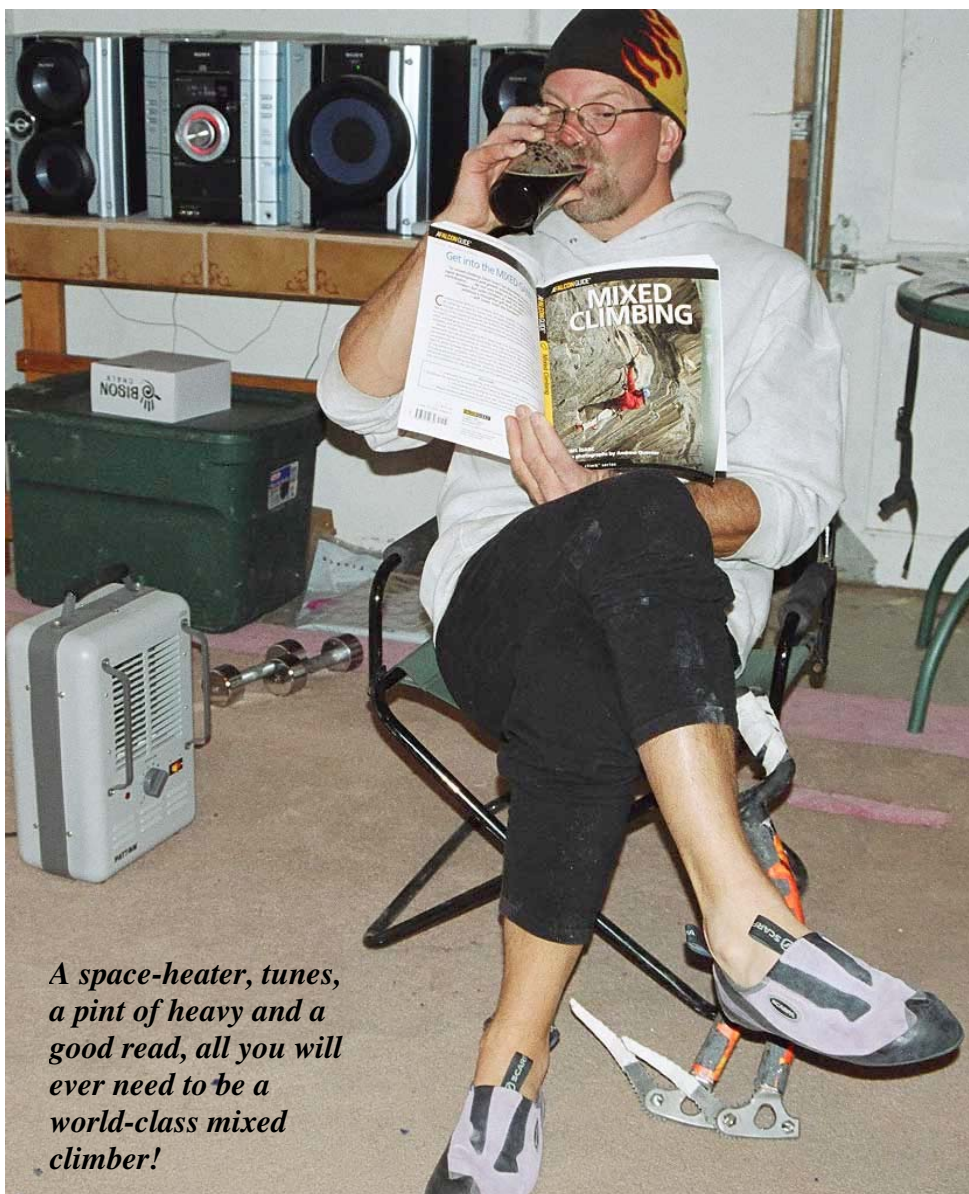
The Belfry has good ice buildup with *Pencil* looking quite brooding in WI5 armor. All the mixed lines can be sent right now with the exception of *Bats*, another variation is that the curtain on *Esmerelda* is not in so you must make for the *Eraser* (barely touching at last glance) forgoing the 4<sup>th</sup> bolt, this makes this route sportier than the usual M7+ but still fun. The *Inferno* area (a.k.a., The Club) is still some way off, look for conditions there to be good around February.

Ice continues to come and go in the Rocky

Mountain National Park as the weather here in Colorado continues to (wildly) change. *Free Strike Zone* (M7+) at Loch Vale is seeing a fair bit of traffic as the dangler has gotten holed. This route follows three bolts and a fixed pin up steep but very sound granite to gain the *Mixed Emotions* dagger from the right (small to medium cams with long slings on them). Exercise caution in winging the dagger as it must weigh several tons at least, if you climb up the right side of the ice to the rightmost tree you can lower/second from there and leave *Mixed Emotions* free and uncluttered for a party to climb on.

**Book Review: *Mixed Climbing*, by Sean Isaac with photographs by Andrew Querner, Falcon, \$15.95.**

If you are a mixed climber, wish to be, or simply wish to decipher the barbaric tongue of mixed climbers (Stein-pull?) this book should perform the proverbial trick, and so much



*A space-heater, tunes, a pint of heavy and a good read, all you will ever need to be a world-class mixed climber!*

more. The Canadian Rockies are a virtual ocean of limestone, not the best for rock-climbing (Find a good hold on a route? Take it home with you!) but a dry tool paradise. Back in the early 1990s I used to prowl the Ice-fields Parkway glassing all manner of ice lines that never quite seemed to touch down. The Canadians handily solved this quandary by simply drilling a line of bolts up to the recalcitrant dangles and after “dry-tooling” up the rock taking it from there.

Still no idea what I am on about? Never fear, my precioussssss... Sean Isaac has jotted it all down for your edification, and Andy Querner banged away with the camera until virtually every trick and stunt known to (cave)

man was captured on film. And so it is all here, soup to nuts, “mixed” and “leashless” demonstrated like never before, a brief explanation of what mixed “is”, gear (“Everybody like cake!”- Donkey) including useful do-it-yourself primers on concocting fruit boots and jury-rigging your old tools leashless. There is a brief treatise on leashless ice climbing, then, as the crowd grows restless and begin to stamp their feet and ogle the Vestal Virgins, out come the gladiators and wild beasts for a full-on treatise of the good stuff, leashless dry-tool technique with a sizeable dash of the spur thrown in for good measure.

And oh, how the blood doth flow! Consider this passage from chapter 3, “With all forms of turf, be sure that it is well frozen and attached.” YES!!! There is even a picture of the Seanman with his tool sunk in a dead tree, now that’s climbing!

What really enthralled me was the treatment of “advanced” dry tool technique, specifically the integration of the spur with the leashless tools, I got so excited I went out and spurred a tool to a hand switch to negotiate a tricky section on a favorite route (take THAT spur-less Jihadis!). Indeed, there are all manner of tricks (some of them bordering on stunts, but we shall see), it will take the better part of this season to try most of them out. Already though, reading through this book has changed the way I climb, so much for the old dog being immune to new tricks.

After the adrenaline surge of the middle seventy pages or so wears off there is a section on training including a discussion of “plastic”, weight training (on a bongo board, no less), then a brief overview of mixed climbing destinations and festivals, at last a handy glossary. Overall, aside from the “trickery” I enjoyed the elucidation of “on-sight” versus “flash” versus “red point”, plus his recommendations for warming up (always start on something easy!). I imagine that anyone struggling through the rigors of mixed will uncover useable information, the sticker price is such that you are committing a grievous error not to own this book.

Criticisms? Of course I have some, this is A FROZEN WORLD after all, right? My biggest disappointment is that the Andrew Querner photos are often so reduced in size as to be uninterpretable, the heel-spur sequence on page 75 is a particularly juicy bit that I actually used a magnifying glass on to see what is going on. Often times the black and white format of these pictures tends to cause the climber to vanish against the rock background, this would have been a much more handsome book had at least some of the images been retained in color (albeit slightly more expensive). I also am not a big fan of the “cartoon climber “ demonstrating technique such as are found on pages 71 and 77, if the technique in question matters it should have had a photo of a real climber performing the feat, not a penned-in mock-up.

There are a few awkward bits, witness this (ostensible) quote by alpine “hardman” (say what?) Jack Tackle on page 45 describing dry-tooling as “something I used to do in high school when I couldn’t get a date” (Oh, Editor! Where art thou?). Otherwise it is a pretty digestible read, perfect for morning toast and coffee, or in the car on the way to the crag.

I must add that regarding the accessories listed on page 20-21 (i.e., the ten essentials go leashless) I would NEVER go out in the winter mountains without a fresh butane lighter, I cannot remember how many times I have thawed out frozen partners with an impromptu fire. The author’s admonition on page 23 and elsewhere to consult *How to Ice Climb* by Craig Luebben might be ignored, Will Gadd’s *Ice & Mixed Climbing: Modern Technique* from **The Mountaineers Books** is a much more detailed work on the subject of ice climbing. In fact, the Isaac book dove-tails nicely with the Gadd tome, there is some (useful) overlap in the subject of mixed climbing but Sean pretty much picks up where Will leaves off, if you are an ice/mixed enthusiast you will definitely want to own both these superb volumes.

**Climb of the Month: *Secret Probation* and *Tourettes*, Vail, Colorado.**

There are two routes this month seeing as they are both in close proximity to one another and are of similar grade. Both routes are located on the mountainside just to the east of the main *Rigid Designator/Fang* cirque, they are perhaps a 15 minute hike from the base of *Designator*. Both these routes are moderate in grade and offer fun climbing with interesting



*RP "sans casque" on "Secret Probation". Photo:RCC.*

dry-tool sections and good ice build-up. They are two of the routes to come in earliest at Vail and see much traffic from late November on. Both can easily be done in a morning.

From the base of *Designator* hike east out of the cirque utilizing an obvious trail. You will pass under a chimney/dihedral feature with a fixed rope hanging there, this is the beginning of the path up to *The Belfry*, but also accesses the top of climbs like *Secret* and *Spiral Stairs*. Walk past this feature along the base of the cliff following a narrow "cat walk" ledge and carry on until you reach an obvious grade 3 waterfall, *Spiral Stairs*. If you look up right before you reach the waterfall, you will see 2 bolts that ascend a shallow corner system to gain a nice ice feature on the right wall, this is *Secret Probation* (M7), one of the most popular mixed routes in Colorado. Either stick clip or climb up and clip the first bolt, your next assignment is to drop a tool over the obvious block that protrudes from the corner. After you figure out a way to clip #2 gently nab the ice and tiptoe through the tulips over onto whatever ice has survived the angst of the top-

roppers. In time you can place a short screw before assailing the final curtain, much is written and said about this little climb, but I never cease to be amazed at how much fun it is and how I always manage a nice little pump from climbing this gem. Having said that, be aware that the slings atop the route are a short grovel from the top of *Spiral*, arrive early if you are planning a lead.

Once the minions of Mordor have overrun *Secret*, it is time to head down the street to *Tourettes*. Though not as tasty as *Secret*, *Tourettes* is a decent route with very thin as opposed to steep dry tool maneuvers. Still, the small roof and hanging ice curtain offer the prospect for a reasonable pump while the specter of a brutal fall always lingers nearby. To get some, simply proceed further along the cliff band until you come to a curtain atop a slab that has splattered ice upon the base of the slab at head height. Three bolts are present in the slab, finesse your way up onto the slab and with much fishing about divine the miniscule holds that permit you to clip the two subsequent bolts and gingerly snag the curtain. Walrus up and over the curtain, there are big bolts in the roof at the end of the ice. Because the top anchors cannot be reached easily without actually leading the route this route sees much less traffic than *Secret*, but whereas traffic machines the *Secret* holds larger still, inept thrashing seems to be degrading the *Tourettes* holds actually elevating the grade on this route, probably about M6+ at present.

*Right: Easy does it on “Tourettes”,  
Tantric breathing as opposed to much  
huffing (and puffing) usually suffice.  
Photo: Rich Purnell.*



I would like to thank **Sean Isaac**, and Theresa Eldredge at **The Globe Pequot Press** for supplying me with a copy of *Mixed Climbing* for review. If you are seeking A FROZEN WORLD issues 1 through 3 you may download them off Doug Millen’s **NEIce** site, thanks Doug for posting those!

You may contact me, Rob Cordery-Cotter at:

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Happy solstice! Go train!

Rob

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