

Kenya

Mt. Kenya, Diamond Couloir, ascent. The Diamond Couloir is an African classic, an elegant ice couloir on the south face of 5,199m Mt. Kenya that was first climbed in October 1973 by Thumbi Mathenge and Peter Snyder. At that time the steep headwall leading to the Diamond Glacier was not well-formed, and the climbers logically cut out left below it to reach the hanging glacier. A direct line up the headwall was climbed in January 1975 by Yvon Chouinard and Michael Covington, and most parties repeating the route have followed this line. The recent and generally increasing desiccation of Africa's high mountains has led visitors to believe the climb now impossible because the steep entry pitch has failed to form.

In August Kitty Calhoun and Jay Smith climbed the full Diamond Couloir, starting with 10m of difficult M7 dry-tooling on overhanging volcanic rock, followed by 50m of thin WI5 ice [not long before their ascent an Italian party had retreated after the first 15m of scary mixed climbing—Ed.]. This long pitch gained the easier-angled and undulating middle section of the couloir, where several pitches of moderate ice led to the base of the headwall. Two pitches of WI 4+ led them onto to the hanging glacier. The following day, Jim Donini and Brad McMillon repeated the route.

DOUGALD MACDONALD, AAC



Fred Salamin on the now rarely formed entry pitch of the Diamond Couloir, Mt. Kenya, in October 2005. Fred Salamin Collection

Mt. Kenya, Diamond Couloir, complete ascent. On October 26 my girlfriend Séverine Bornet, who is aspirant guide, and I climbed the Diamond Couloir. It was not in fat condition. The ice was fairly thin, aerated and a little soft, due to warm temperatures. The entry pitch was completely iced and comparable to a French 4+, though the ice was not attached to the rock in some places. The headwall was of similar difficulty to the Modica-Noury on Mt. Blanc du Tacul, which is graded 5+. We easily used ice screws.

On the day before the ascent, as we were approaching the route, there was a considerable amount of rain. Next morning there were 5cm of new snow covering the base of the couloir, which near the top increased to 10cm. We took six hours from the start to the summit of Nelion. The weather was perfect that day and the next three, in which we climbed the north face of Batian before going home.

FRED SALAMIN, Switzerland

Editor's note: In August, Asa Firestone and Ken Ford climbed the Ice Window Route (Laulan, LeDain, and Snyder, August 1973), immediately right of the Dia-