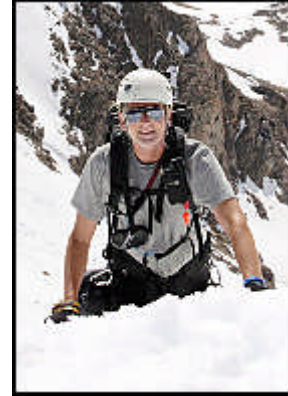


Rocky Mountain News

5 questions for snow climber and author Dave Cooper

By Janet Reese, Special to the Rocky
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Snow doesn't stop Dave Cooper from climbing mountains. In fact, Cooper, 57, loves climbing on snow not only in winter but year-round. He recently wrote a book, *Colorado Snow Climbs: A Guide for All Seasons*, which will be available in early December.



Cooper, originally from England, was a physicist before he left the corporate world five years ago to climb in the Himalayas. He wanted to spend more time climbing and decided to pursue a new career as a mountaineer, outdoor writer and photographer. Cooper lives in Alma and spends the winter snow climbing in Colorado, Wyoming and Canada. He spoke recently with writer Janet Reese.

1 Why do you snow climb year- round?

To know the mountains, you have to experience them in all seasons. Each season has a specific attraction and offers unique experiences on snow. I love climbing in the winter because it's the most pristine time. Spring is excellent for climbing on ridges. Late spring and summer is good for climbing couloirs, the most technical climbing. Autumn is great for climbing drift glaciers formed by winds.

2 What skills and gear are needed?

You need hiking skills and experience climbing peaks in summer. Navigation skills are important because there's no trail on the climb and you have to make route decisions. You must know how to self-arrest with an ice axe and how to avoid avalanches. Gaining the skills is a progression. Take a course on mountaineering, snow travel or go with an experienced person.

Gear depends on the season and the route. Spring and summer, you need sturdy boots, an ice axe and sometimes crampons in addition to the essentials. A GPS and a map and compass are important for navigation. Winter is more gear-intensive. Skis or snowshoes are needed for the approach. You have to think through consequences of equipment failure and weather so you can be prepared to negotiate difficult situations.

3 Have you ever found yourself in a dangerous situation on a snow climb?

I've been able to avoid dangerous situations for the most part. It comes back to having the right skills. I'm a conservative climber. My goal is to never put myself in a situation where I need to be rescued. I'm also willing to back off in conditions that aren't right, such as bad weather and rock falls.

4 What's a good winter route for a beginner?

Grizzly Peak off Loveland Pass. It has a short approach and you're on the ridge beginning at the parking lot. Avalanche danger is minimized there. But it's easy to lose your bearings in winter. Using trail marking tape and a GPS are huge assets in finding your way back. As you climb, look around at the terrain for key landmarks so you'll recognize them on your return.

5 What do you like about snow climbing?

Snow climbing takes me to some beautiful, remote, pristine spots. I enjoy sharing the mountains with my climbing friends. It also challenges my mountaineering skills.