

INSPIRE



BY CLYDE SOLES

ICE CLIMBING HAS

picked up steam as new equipment allows climbers to push further and inspire new gear. The sport had reached a point where merely climbing ice was too easy for the hot shots; virtually anybody with a modicum of climbing experience and modern tools could ascend a frozen waterfall. So the next challenge was to climb sections of overhung rock in between smears of ice, called mixed climbing.

Within the past decade, the sport has undergone a revolution due to improvements in technology and the application of sport climbing techniques to the frozen world. The rapid advancements in ice gear have made tools just 5 years old obsolete. This demand, and the growing numbers of rock climbers willing to give ice a try, has expanded the market.

MARKET DOMINATED BY SPECIALTY

The average recreational climber probably doesn't get more than 10 days of easy to moderately difficult ice climbing per season. Most of the radical designs, much like race equipment in other sports, are intended for athletes on the cutting edge. At present, many consider the latest developments so specific that they are only suitable for European competitions. Of course, much of that commentary is based upon old dogmas and it should be pointed out that precious few naysayers have actually even tried the newest toys.

The ice climbing market remains the exclusive domain of specialty retailers with serious climbing departments. Larger chains dabble with summer mountaineering ice axes and crampons but seldom carry a decent selection of technical tools. In particular for this sport, a knowledgeable staff and a stock of all the replacement parts (spare picks, bolts, etc.) and an assortment of accessories is what makes a retailer earn customer loyalty.

Ice climbing festivals have been instrumental in the growth of the sport. The opportunity to test different ice tools and crampons at a demo is invaluable for consumers, particularly with the new breed of leashless tools emerging. For continued growth, both retailers

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAMMUT; HINSL ZLOBEL PHOTOGRAPHY

EQUIPMENT ADVANCEMENTS IN THE
LAST DECADE HAVE
MORPHED ICE CLIMBING FROM
THE DOMAIN OF THE
"CRAZIES"
INTO A RESPECTABLE SPORT.

IRATION »»»

and manufacturers need to support these community events.

NEW BREED OF ICE TOOLS

Without a doubt, “leashless” is the big buzzword of the ice world these days. Two decades ago, when ice axe shafts were straight, it was common to climb unleashed. But as shafts became more curved to allow more clearance over ice bulges, leashes became more supportive and complicated. For the past five or so years, many companies have attempted detachable leashes, which allow climbers to free their hand for placing protection, but the results have largely been crude and clunky.

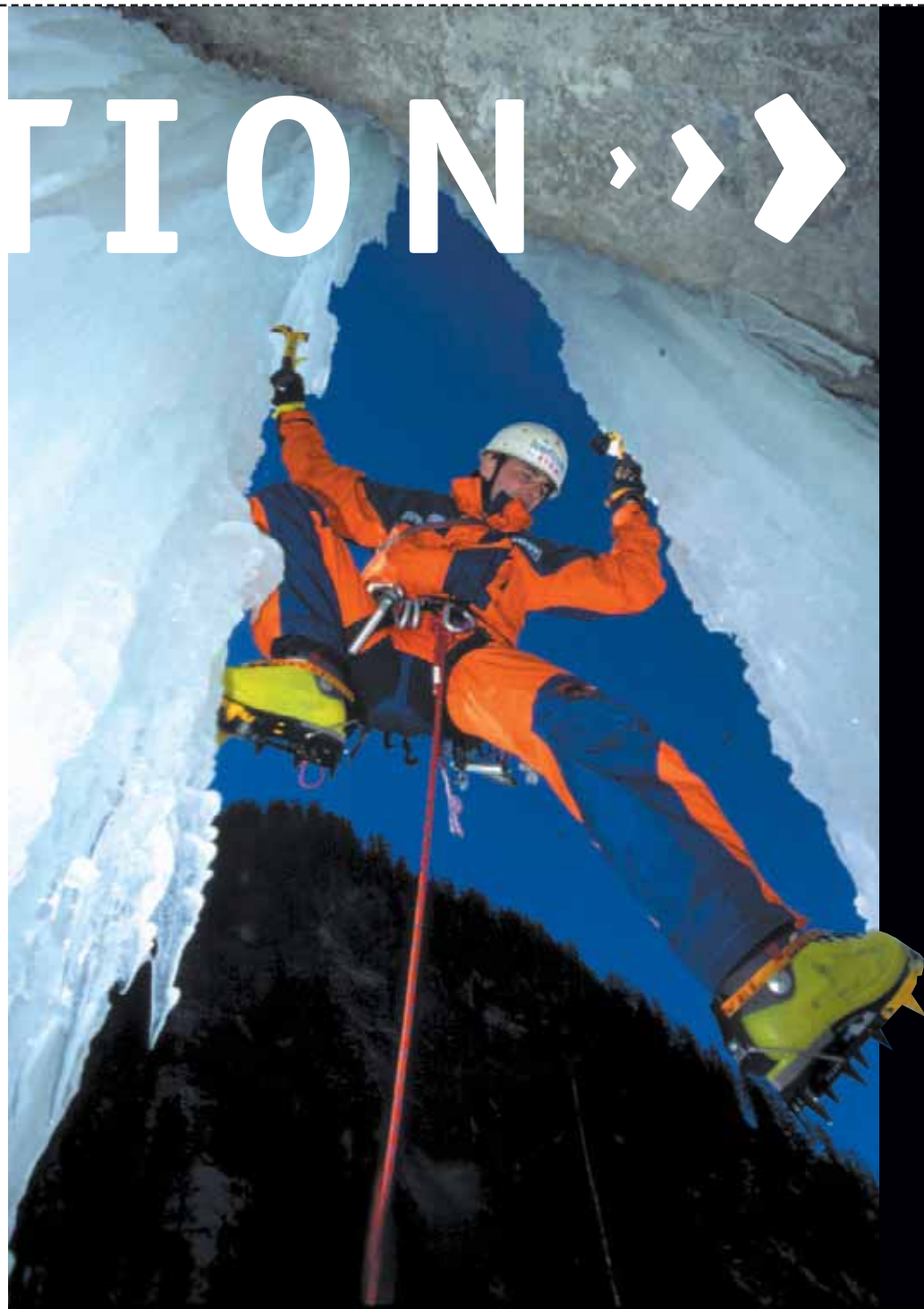
With the banning of leashes from the World Cup competition circuit three years ago, manufacturers suddenly had inspiration to rethink how tools are used. Last winter, Grivel introduced the first tools specifically designed for leashless ice climbing and was soon followed by Charlet Moser and Simond.

This will be the first winter that most non-professional climbers will have the opportunity to see what all the hoopla is about. The trigger-finger Grivel Top Wing, which gets a nicer grip material for next season, and the Charlet Moser Quark Ergo with its mondo grip will debut on ice climbs around North America. Without a distributor or rep force, Simond is destined to languish.

It’s important to realize that most tools designed for use with a leash cannot truly be adapted to leashless, even with the attachment of doohickeys, since the grips are sub-optimal. This has made it difficult for average climbers to give leashless a try because few are willing to invest \$500 or more for a pair of specialty tools.

Brilliantly, Trango has addressed this dilemma with the introduction of Madame Hook, a well-designed ice tool with interchangeable grips. This allows climbers the option to climb in the style that suits them without a major investment. Given the versatility and reasonable price, Trango should prove popular this year.

An interesting new approach from Camp, on its rather dated Tiburon, is best described as a leashless leash. This consists of a padded cuff worn on the wrist that



simply hooks onto one of two hooks on the shaft. This is far less complicated than other detachable leashes, though dropping a tool is possible.

Next season, Black Diamond will enter the fray with its radical Fusion ice tool, which features a molded leashless grip that is adjustable for hand size. Climbers on a budget will appreciate the new Charlet Moser Aztar (replaces the Axar), which will have fixed heads (hammer or adze) and interchangeable picks, a curved shaft suitable for alpine or ice climbs, and a nice leash.

BETTER CRAMPON/BOOT INTERFACES

Another consequence of ice climbing competitions and sport mixed climbing (more rock than ice, with bolt protection) has been the development of better crampon/boot interfaces. The new emphasis is on greater sensitivity, lighter weight, and hooking ability for hugging icicles and upside down climbing.

The leading Scandinavian
tent manufacturer
— expert in tents for all extremes!
Now in the USA!



www.hilleberg.com

HILLEBERG
THE TENTMAKER

For a free catalog:

14685 NE 95th St. Redmond, WA 98052
Phone: 1-425-883-0101 • Toll Free: 1-866-848-8368
Fax: 1-425-869-6632 • Web: www.hilleberg.com

New Take a Peek

LAYERS

NEW LOGO! NEW LOOK!
NEW STUFF!

Visit us
OR Winter Market } Booth
tel: 919-834-5007 www.layers-

essential gear
for life outside

CRAMPON/BOOT INTERFACES HAVE VASTLY IMPROVED. LEASHLESS

Three of the latest crampons (Cassin CC, Charlet Moser Dart and the Grivel Racing) are specifically designed to bolt directly to a pair of boots; the latter two can also attach with a traditional clip-in system. All of these also have heel spurs permanently attached, though some climbers report excessive flex. To reduce weight even further, the Dart has a fixed mono point (all other technical crampons have modular frontpoints), which makes it both expensive and short-lived.

The most exciting new crampons this season for normal climbers are the Cassin C14, a modular technical design, and C12, an alpine design with horizontal front points. Finally, a company has started supplying good anti-balling plates pre-installed on its crampons; a shameful omission by everyone else. This is a basic safety feature that should not be treated as an option. Both models can easily convert from clip-in for mountaineering boots to strap-on for almost any other boot, giving users even more versatility.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BOOTS

As mentioned, competition climbers bolt crampons directly to lightweight boots for maximum performance. This season, Kayland is offering the Ice Comp, which comes with the Cassin CC crampons pre-installed. Next year, Salomon intends to offer its Comp boot, which sports the Charlet Moser Dart, on a limited basis to select retailers. La Sportiva has bolted an as-yet-unnamed crampon to the Mega Max insulated rock shoe, resulting in the Mega Ice. At least one other boot brand has a competition boot/crampon hybrid under development.

Whether there is an actual market for these rigs outside of sponsored climbers (and wannabes) remains to be seen. They are best suited to radically overhung mixed climbs where reduced weight and enhanced sensitivity make a difference. On the vertical and moderate-angle routes where most ice climbers play, the hybrids have no big advantage and may be colder. Approaching distant climbs will likely require wearing a second pair of conventional boots and carrying the boot/crampons in the pack.

Still in the works for next season is the Montrail ICE 9 integrated boot/crampon system. This starts with a high-end insulated climbing boot, featuring the latest material technologies, that is flexible for walking. A unique crampon attaches to a metal cleat on the bottom of the sole, which makes the combination completely

rigid. Since the crampon is recessed into grooves, it rides closer to the foot for better feel. Assuming that it works as promised, this system should deliver performance and versatility.

Although plastic mountaineering boots remain stagnant—thermo-molded liners are long overdue—innovation continues in non-plastic boots. Once again, companies are moving away from traditional leather and toward new synthetic materials, laminated fabrics or high-tech coat-



ings on leather. The result is greater durability, less weight, better flexibility and a modern look.

Vasque kicked off the trend this season with the introduction of the spectacularly lightweight Super Alpinista, a single boot, and the Ice 9000, a double boot. Priced to keep the riff-raff out (\$400 and \$500, respectively), these were the first to break the mold of boot construction. The new La Sportiva Nuptse is a double mountaineering boot with a synthetic upper that isn't as light but is \$60 less expensive.

Kayland continues to demonstrate innovation with the Super Ice, a climbing boot which has carbon/Kevlar fabric uppers. This is also the only technical boot made for women, too. La Sportiva's Jannu is a high-performance single boot with an integrated gaiter that may well rival plastic boots. The new Asolo Summit features a monocoque carbon/Kevlar frame for enhanced sensitivity with less weight to give mixed climbers an edge.

FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT. ♡

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

It's too early to tell whether leashless tools will gain broad acceptance but most climbers who have actually tried the latest generation of products are enthusiastic. Climbers who claim these tools are useless for alpine routes forget that for many decades, climbing leashless was the norm.

What this revolution is all about is regaining freedom. Modern leashes tend to be bulky contraptions that bind the climber to their tools. Even the detachable designs



are a nuisance and interfere with the climbing at hand. Going leashless, with properly designed tools, is no more tiring yet allows greater options.

Perhaps a compromise that will emerge is a cleaner, simpler leash system. Even if you aren't into track skiing, check out Yoko's strapless poles with an integrated leash built into the gloves. It's clean, simple, and works really well. There's little reason this concept (plus an optional break-away feature to prevent dislocated shoulders) can't be adapted to ice tools. The ideal might be a norm so that many ice tool and glove manufacturers could get on board.

Though ice climbing has evolved rapidly, there is a lot of room for continued product development. Given that it's a sport that requires standing around in cold, miserable conditions, it's remarkable that the sport has grown at all. But better gear and clothing allows folks to have more fun—the real goal—so the outlook is sunny. ☺

BLUFF



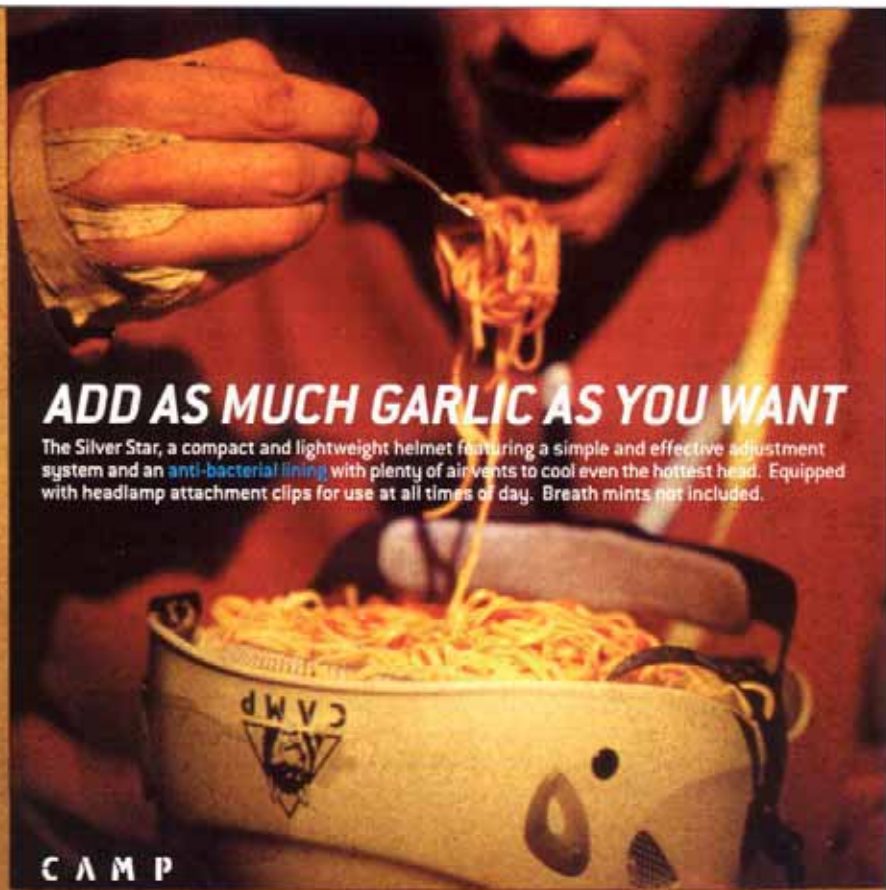
POWER LIFTER STRENGTH
YOGI FLEXIBILITY

TRAVELCHAIR

(THE ORIGINAL - SINCE 1984)

AVAILABLE ONLY AT SPECIALTY RETAILERS

www.travelchair.com



ADD AS MUCH GARLIC AS YOU WANT

The Silver Star, a compact and lightweight helmet featuring a simple and effective adjustment system and an anti-bacterial lining with plenty of air vents to cool even the hottest head. Equipped with headlamp attachment clips for use at all times of day. Breath mints not included.

CAMP

see our full line • www.camp-usa.com

made in Italy since 1989