



Ice Climbing in Eastern Turkey

Turkey, Erzurum Province, Uzundere

In Turkey, the history of ice climbing is not old. Except for long alpine ice gullies in the high mountains, few ice climbs had ever been done, and nowhere in Turkey was there a real water-ice climbing area. However, in eastern Turkey, near the town of Uzundere in Erzurum province, the altitude is high, the winter season is generally cold and long, and the terrain is mountainous—perfect conditions for waterfall ice buildup.

The ice climbing history of Uzundere began in January 2012, when my friend Çetin Bayram, the head of ATAK (an Erzurum-based sports and search and rescue club), invited me to climb an icefall he had found in the winter of 2011. The 30m Serafin (WI3+/4) became the first frozen waterfall route in Uzundere.

In January 2014, Doğan Palut and I returned to Uzundere to climb new routes, following more exploration by Çetin. I was very happy to make the first ascent of Lucifer, a massive 45m icefall (WI4+/5) in Uzunkavak village. In February of that year, an “icefall meeting” incorporating most of the committed climbers in Turkey was kindly sponsored by the Hotel Xanadu of Erzurum. During the meeting, Efecan Aytemiz, Emrah Ozbay, and I climbed the first multi-pitch water-ice route in Turkey: Sarigelin (85m, WI5+). By the end of that winter, Uzundere had at least seven outstanding new water-ice routes and was well on its way to become a genuine ice climbing haven, with good potential for rock climbing as well.

As a consequence, the municipality of Erzurum sponsored the first International Erzurum-Uzundere Ice Climbing Festival in January 2015, hosting 25 foreign climbers as well as 175 Turkish climbers. Before and during the festival, a number of new ice routes were opened, including the longest water-ice route in Turkey: Nakavt (300m, WI6, Findik-Şarkoğlu), on a mountainside near Kirazlı yayla, at an altitude of 3,000m. Visiting climbers established a number of very impressive ice routes, including Anatolia Pillar (100m, WI6), above Cevizli village, climbed by Anna Torretta (Italy), Cecilia Buil (Spain) and me; Çetinceviz (100m, WI5+), the extreme left icefall near Cevizli village, first ascent by Charlotte Barre, Mathieu Maynadier, and Thomas Vialettet (France); and Tovaritsch (260m, WI5+ and grade III, V mixed climbing), above Kirazlı village pasture, by Roman Abildaev, Sergey Seliverstov (both Russia), and Anıl Şarkoğlu (Turkey).

As of end of winter 2015, Uzundere region boasted 14 frozen waterfall routes, with a potential for many to be explored and climbed. This is not a great number compared to regions such as Cogne in the European Alps, but remember, this is a very new climbing area.

Uzundere Area Ice Climbs (February 2015)

Serafin (Uzundere), 30m, WI3+/4, Tunç Findik, January 27, 2012. This icefall is 10 minutes’ drive from the town of Uzundere and can be reached by 10–15 minutes of easy trekking from the main road. With an altitude of 1,000m, the icefall faces northeast. The icefall has a shape of a wide curtain draped from a bed of rock, and in its ideal form three different routes of varied difficulty can be climbed. There are bolts for belaying and rappels at the top section of the icefall, and the top of icefall can be easily gained by walking up a footpath on the right-hand side. The proximity to the main road and the varied climbing make this route ideal for training courses.

Abinis (Uzundere), 60m, WI2+/3+, Tunç Fındık, Doğan Palut, January 18, 2014. This icefall is found in the valley of Suyatağı village. The north-facing icefall can be easily reached by trekking 15–20 minutes and is at an altitude of 1,100m.

Lucifer (Uzunkavak village), 45m, WI4+/5, Tunç Fındık, January 21, 2014. Also known as Hosan waterfall, this impressive, north-facing icefall is 33km away from Uzundere, at the end of the Cehennemdere Valley of the village of Uzunkavak. Forty to 50 minutes of straightforward trekking in snow brings one to the bottom of the route. The massive, blue-colored icefall is at 2,100m and can be safely climbed all winter. At the top of the icefall, on the right side, is a belay/rappel anchor with bolts.

Sarıgelin (Uzunkavak village), 85m, WI5+, Tunç Fındık, Efecan Aytemiz, Emrah Ozbay, February 9, 2014. This was the first multi-pitch icefall to be climbed in Turkey. Situated on the left flank of Lucifer and thinner, longer, and steeper, the icefall faces north and is at an altitude of 2,100m. The first pitch has a one-bolt rappel/ belay anchor, and the final pitch offers belaying/rappeling options by means of huge trees.

Firdevs (Tortum Lake), 35m, WI3+/4-, Tunç Fındık, Efecan Aytemiz, Emrah Ozbay, February 7, 2014. An interesting icefall that can only be reached by crossing Tortum Lake by boat. The route can be easily observed across the lake while driving the main road from Uzundere. In its ideal form, the route has two pitches; the lower pitch is a narrow, tender ice tube in a fragile rock bed, and the upper part is a solid, thick icefall. The icefall faces west and it is at an altitude of 1,000m. Very beautiful lake setting makes this route an interesting one.

Küçük Fare (Uzunkavak village), 20m, WI3, Arif Mithat Amca, February 9, 2014. This small, subsidiary icefall is in the same creek bowl as Lucifer and Sarıgelin, situated at the extreme left corner. A small but thick icefall, it is ideal for getting used to ice climbing and warming up for harder routes, as well as training courses. The icefall faces northwest, and there is a belay/rappel peg at the final ledge.

Sakalaçarpan (Cevizli Gorge), 22m, WI3, Tunç Fındık, Anıl Şarkoğlu, January 7, 2015. The extreme end of Cevizli Gorge can be reached from Uzundere by driving 50 minutes. From the termination point of the jeep track, trekking 10 minutes to a rocky valley brings one to the bottom of the route, found on the right-hand side. The icefall faces north and is at an altitude of 1,600m. The route is a stepped-up curtain, and there are belay/rappel bolts on the right where the icefall finishes.

Sol Kroşe (Cevizli Gorge), 26m, WI3+, Tunç Fındık, Anıl Şarkoğlu, January 7, 2015. Trekking 10 minutes from the end of the jeep track brings one to the bottom of the route, which is to be found inside the left-hand side rocky canyon, somewhat hidden from view. The tube-shaped icefall faces south. At the end of the route, on the left-side rock wall, is a belay/rappel anchor. Caution: The route is situated inside a narrow cleft and falling ice can be dangerous.

Nakavt (Kirazlı village pasture, the extreme right icefall), 300m, WI6, Tunç Fındık, Anıl Şarkoğlu, January 18, 2015. A fantastic, massive ice route in a truly alpine setting, and a committing adventure! This is the longest ice climb in Turkey. Situated at the north-northwest-facing alpine bowl of Mt. Güllü (2,933m) and in perennial winter shade, the icefall starts at an altitude of 2,500m. The approach can be long and arduous; after driving 40 minutes by jeep from Kirazlı village, one reaches the pasture at ca 2,300m, and the trek to the northwest face of the mountain takes almost an hour. Please assess the avalanche danger inside the narrow mountain valleys and on the route itself, especially after fresh snow has fallen. The route has two vertical pitches of 40m and 45m, graded WI6, and can be climbed in five pitches total, with hanging belays. Descend the same route, leaving ice screws or Abalakov anchors. R1: WI3+, 55m. R2: WI3+ M2, 45m. R3: WI5+/6-, 55m. R4: WI3, 50m. R5: WI6, 45m.

Anatolia Pillar (Cevizli village), 100m, WI6, Anna Torretta (Italy), Cecilia Buil (Spain), and Tunç Fındık, January 23, 2015. Located at the extreme left end of the steep rock band that encloses the south of the Cevizli village, the icefall is a vertical, tube-like ice smear adhered to the rock wall, and is the most

fantastic route to date in the Uzundere region. An hour of trekking up steep, narrow, and icy creek bed is required to gain the bottom of the route, which starts at 1,700m. The icefall is two pitches long, and at the end of the first pitch is a hanging belay with ice screws. The end of the second pitch is a narrow, vertical tube that ends in a frozen creek bed; belay from ice screws and a small tree on the ledge. Descend the same route, leave ice screws or Abalakov anchors. Or finish the route at the forest pasture high above, around 2,100m. To do this, one needs to climb at least 300m more, with occasional steps of WI2 to gain the pasture, and then trek to north (right) for 1.5 km in the pine forest to reach the jeep path to the village. This will take at least an hour. The icefall faces north and is also known as the Nebidere waterfall.

Çetinceviz (Cevizli village, the extreme left icefall), 100m, WI5+, Mathieu Maynadier, Charlotte Barre, Thomas Vialetet (France), January 23, 2015. Located in the middle of the steep rock band that encloses the south of the Cevizli village, the icefall is a thick and stepped curtain. An hour of trekking up a ridge feature is required to gain the bottom of the route. The icefall faces north and is climbed in two pitches. Descend the same route, leaving ice screws or Abalakov rappel anchors.

Yolaltı (Cevizli village), 30m, WI4, Sergey Seliverstov, Roman Abildaev (Russia), January 23, 2015. This icefall is located on the right side of the valley, on the way to Cetinceviz icefall, and more or less hidden from view. The best way to reach the route is to rappel to the bottom and then start climbing. The lower part of the icefall is a thick ice cone, and upper part is a fragile ice tube; it faces north and is in shade all day.

Sugar Couloir (Kirazlı village pasture, the extreme left icefall), 450m, WI5 and grade IV mixed, Anna Torretta (Italy), Cecilia Buil (Spain), January 24, 2015. This is a long and committing mixed and ice climbing route. Situated at the north-northwest-facing alpine bowl of Mt. Güllü (2,933m) and in perennial winter shade, the icefall starts at an altitude of 2,500m. The approach can be long and arduous; after driving 40 minutes by jeep from Kirazli village, one reaches the pasture at ca 2,300m, and the trek to the northwest face of the mountain takes almost an hour. Assess the avalanche danger carefully, especially after fresh snow has fallen. The route has snowy gullies as well as mixed parts (grade IV), and it offers two pitches of steep ice climbing (WI5), with a total of eight pitches. The ice pitches are composed of a short, vertical ice fang of 5–8m and one full-pitch vertical curtain. Descend the same route, leaving ice screws or Abalakov anchors.

Tovaritsch (Kirazlı village pasture), 260m, WI5+ and grade III, V mixed climbing, Sergey Seliverstov, Roman Abildaev (Russia), Anıl Şarkoğlu, January 24, 2015. Situated at the north-northwest facing alpine bowl of Mt. Güllü (2933m) and in perennial winter shade, the icefall starts at an altitude of 2,500m. The route is the left icefall starting from the entrance of the Nakavt icefall (see above) and is in shade all day.

Logistics and Accommodation

Uzundere is 84km and one hour's drive from Erzurum, the biggest city in eastern Turkey. Erzurum can easily be reached by plane or bus from the main hubs of İstanbul and Ankara, and there are daily flights by Turkish Airlines and Anadolu Jet. The usual transportation to/from Uzundere is by local minibus or regular bus services from Erzurum, but renting a car is strongly advised, because the icefall routes are mostly at remote locations with poor or nonexistent local transport services. All provisions can be found in Erzurum (food, drinks, etc.) and hotel accommodation is quite good. For climbing equipment, there are some shops, but it is generally better to bring along specialist ice-climbing gear. Propane gas canisters for stoves are available.

The best accommodation in Uzundere is in cheap family hostels or using the newly established Emrah Ozbay climbers' hut at the village of Dikyar (5km from Uzundere). Camping is also possible.

Food is best obtained at the restaurants and teahouses in Uzundere, but these will generally be closed at night. There are markets and bakeries in Uzundere.

Information

For information on travel, routes, and logistics, please contact Çetin Bayram (mobile +90-533-3872850; email feniksanka25@gmail.com) or Tunç Fındık (mobile +90-533-4139124; e-mail tuncbayonet@gmail.com). Except for a Turkish-English booklet prepared by the municipality of Erzurum, there are no guidebooks to the area yet.

Images

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