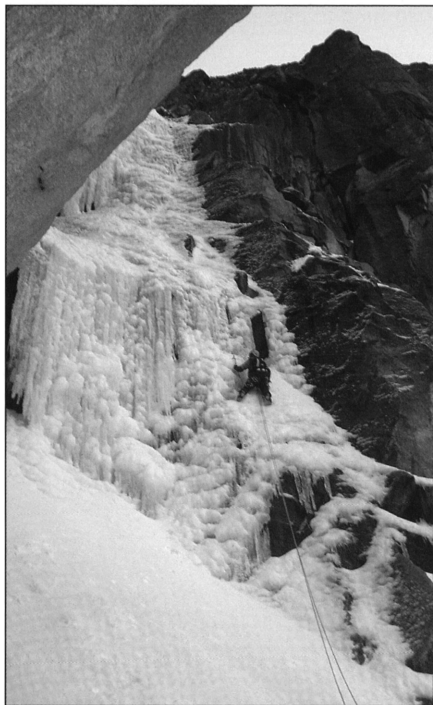


## Kenya

*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 Borner, 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-



Fred Salamin on the headwall pitch of the Diamond Couloir, Mt. Kenya, October 2005. He likened this section to the Modica-Noury Route on Mt. Blanc du Tacul, France, which is 5+. *Fred Salamin Collection*

*mond Couloir, negotiating steep and often thin ice in a 3m-wide runnel. They noted the "Window" had long since disappeared. They continued to the Gate of the Mists and over the summit of Nelion, for what local porters report was the first ascent in six years.*

*Back in the winter of 1997-1998 three local climbers, with a total of more than 50 years experience on the mountain, were surprised to find the Diamond Glacier reduced to almost half its size and no ice to be seen anywhere in the couloir. The following Christmas (1998) the Diamond Glacier had all but disappeared, and not even running water could be seen in the couloir. However, during the previous October the couloir was climbed direct at hard Scottish V Mixed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that glacial decline has been taking place on the mountain at an increasing rate since the 1980s. However, during this time there have been periods when the classic ice routes have been climbable, if not in their original fat state.*

## Uganda

*Rwenzori Range, traverse, various ascents, and new peaks.* From January 31 to February 12, Cam Burns, Charlie French, 12 porters, one ranger, and I traversed the central portion of the Rwenzori range, from Roccati Pass south to Kilembe. The traverse included ascents of Mounts Speke (16,042'), Stanley (16,763'), and Baker (15,889'), as well as an ascent of Keki (13,760') in the Nyamugasani Valley and two previously unclimbed peaks (13,400' and 13,440') in the Kamusongi Valley.

Leaving Nyakalengija on January 31, we hiked four days up the Bujuku and Mugusu rivers to the northeast side of Mount Speke, making camps at Bigo Hut, Skull Cave (named for human