

## GULLY CLIMBING

Gully climbing, often called "gully scrambling" or simply "gully climbing," involves ascending narrow, steep channels in rock faces or mountainsides that are shaped by natural erosion. These gullies can range from shallow and rocky corridors to steep, narrow couloirs filled with snow and ice. Here's a breakdown of gully climbing, covering techniques, conditions, safety tips, and gear essentials.

### What is Gully Climbing?

- Gully climbing is the ascent of natural channels or depressions in mountains and rock faces formed by water or glacial erosion. These channels, known as "gullies" or "couloirs" (especially when covered with snow or ice), funnel runoff, making them prone to erosion and often steep and challenging.
- Gullies can vary from dry and rocky in summer to filled with snow, ice, or water in winter and early spring, affecting the techniques and gear required.

### Types of Gullies

- **Rocky Gullies:** Often dry and covered with loose rocks, these gullies are popular in summer. They require careful footwork to avoid dislodging stones.
- **Snow Gullies:** Common in colder climates or high altitudes, these gullies retain snow into spring and even summer. Ascending snow gullies requires crampons and ice axes.
- **Mixed Gullies:** These are typically found during the transition seasons (autumn and spring) and contain both rock and snow, demanding a mix of rock and ice climbing skills.
- **Water Gullies:** Sometimes filled with streams or runoff, especially after rain or during thaw. These can be slippery and often dangerous due to wet rocks and increased erosion.

### Techniques for Gully Climbing

- **Foot Placement and Balance:** Proper footwork is essential, especially in rocky gullies with loose stones. Plant your feet carefully to avoid dislodging rocks.
- **Use of Hands:** In narrower gullies, climbers often press hands or arms against the sides for balance and stability.
- **Ice Axe Technique:** In snow or ice-filled gullies, using an ice axe for balance and self-arrest is essential. When the slope is steep, the axe is used in "self-belay" mode to maintain stability.
- **Kicking Steps:** In snow gullies, climbers often kick steps to create footholds, especially when the snow is soft or loose.

- **Climbing in Pairs or Teams:** For added safety, climbers often ascend in pairs, maintaining distance to avoid loose rocks hitting one another and to support each other in case of slips.

## Gear for Gully Climbing

- **Helmet:** Essential for protection against falling rocks or ice, particularly in loose or steep gullies.
- **Crampons and Ice Axe:** Required for snow or icy gullies. Crampons provide grip on steep, hard-packed snow, while an ice axe aids in balance and potential self-arrest.
- **Mountaineering Boots:** Sturdy boots with good ankle support and, in snow gullies, compatibility with crampons.
- **Climbing Harness and Rope:** Used in very steep or technical gullies for additional safety, particularly where there may be a risk of slipping.
- **Climbing Protection:** For mixed or very steep gullies, climbers may use cams, nuts, or snow pickets for anchoring, especially if belaying is necessary.

## Challenges and Hazards

- **Rockfall and Loose Stones:** Gullies are natural chutes for rocks dislodged from above. Helmets and careful foot placement help manage this risk.
- **Avalanche Risk:** Snow gullies, especially those filled with fresh or soft snow, are prone to avalanches. Understanding avalanche conditions and reading the terrain is crucial.
- **Changing Conditions:** Gullies often change with weather and season. A snow gully in winter can become a rock gully in summer, impacting technique and gear.
- **Exposure to Elements:** Due to their narrowness, gullies can trap cold air and snow, making conditions harsher than surrounding terrain.

## Safety Tips

- **Assess Conditions:** Before climbing, check recent weather, avalanche forecasts (for snowy gullies), and any recent rockfall activity.
- **Buddy System:** Climb in pairs or teams, with spacing to avoid rockfall injuries from above.
- **Anchor Points:** In very steep gullies, set up anchors with ropes to prevent falls. Consider using protection if the gully involves steep or icy sections.
- **Stay Low and Move Steadily:** This helps minimize dislodging rocks or ice. Steady, purposeful movement also reduces fatigue.