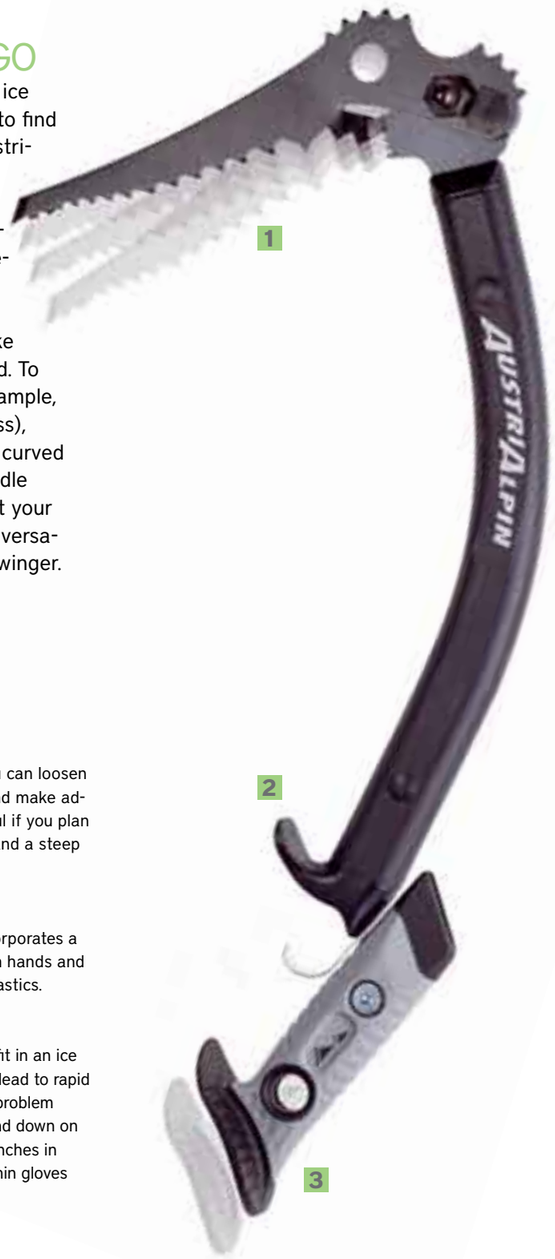
ICE GEAR 2008

Climbing New & Notable

AUSTRIALPIN HU.GO

With all the super-specialized ice tools these days, it's unusual to find one so multipurpose—the Austri-Alpin (*austrialpin.net*) HU.go breaks the mold with a variable-angle pick and a customizable grip, yielding a one-size-fits-most leashless tool. To adjust pick angle, break out the spare pick (included), make a few turns, and set as desired. To adjust grip (depending, for example, on hand size or glove thickness), you'll need a hex wrench. The curved shaft and modular rubber handle with pinky grip mean this ain't your grandaddy's axe, but rather a versatile, technical ice and mixed swinger.



1. PICK YOUR ANGLE

With a spare pick (or wrench), you can loosen the bolt securing the steel pick and make adjustments up to 20 degrees. Useful if you plan to climb a slabby icefall one day, and a steep mixed line the next.

2 DOUBLE UP

As a leashless tool, the HU.go incorporates a trigger grip, allowing you to match hands and pull off all manner of mixed gymnastics.

3 CHECK YOUR GRIP

A major factor in finding the right fit in an ice tool is the grip, as a mismatch will lead to rapid pumpitude. The HU.go solves that problem with a rubber grip that slides up and down on a track (adjusting from 3.3 to 4.3 inches in length), accommodating thick or thin gloves and meaty or meager mitts.

See p. TK for more details.

Ice Gear

WITH ICE CLIMBING, as aid, upward progress relies almost directly on gear. Accordingly, ice gear is highly specialized and typically falls into one of three categories: mountain use/glacier travel, waterfall- and pure-ice climbing, or mixed climbing/dry tooling.

Crampons

There are crampons for all types of climbing, from getting purchase on slick slopes to inverted heel hooking. A few things to know, to find foot fangs that work for you.

Frame. For glacier travel, you'll want a flexible or semi-rigid frame, which gives when walking. For pure ice, try a more rigid frame, to transfer kick energy into the frontpoints.

Frontpoints. For navigating snow and névé, horizontal frontpoints offer greater stability; for technical ice, dual vertical frontpoints offer superior penetration. And for mixed climbing (think: edging), vertical monopoints (single frontpoint) are the bomb. Some crampons allow you to switch out mono and dual frontpoints, too.

Bindings. The basic styles are strap-on, hybrid, and step-in. For mountain travel, strap-ons typically suffice and work with all boots; hybrids require a sturdier boot with a heel welt; and step-ins fit stiffer boots with both heel and toe welts.

Ice Tools

An ice tool (or axe) has myriad uses: walking stick, anchor, self-arrest, and couloir climbing in the mountains; a hammer or icicle sticker on frozen waterfalls; and a rock-climbing implement on mixed climbs. Here are a few factors to consider:

Weight. A light axe is fine in the alpine, for primarily glacier travel or icy couloirs. For technical ice, go heavier, to get a good stick. In all cases, test-swing in the shop.

Length. Mountain axes range from 55 to 75cm. For technical ground, go shorter, for better swing control; the longer axes are good for glacier travel. Technical and mixed, curve-shafted tools fall in the 45-to-55cm range; size there to preference.

Shaft. The classic mountain tool has a straight shaft, for anchor/boot-axe belays or walking-stick use. For steep ice, curved shafts offer better swing 'n' stick, knuckle protection, and clearance over bulges.

Grip. A straight tool sans rubber grip is preferable for mountain use, where you'll be posthol-ing through snow. For technical ice and mixed use, a molded-rubber grip delivers purchase and insulation against the shaft. Technical ice tools typically have pinky catches, for even better grip. For hardcore ice and mixed, the distinctive Z-shaped, leashless handles provide solid one- or two-handed grip positions.

Head. Most mountain-specific axes come with a fixed head, modestly curved pick, and rear adze. Technical ice and mixed tools tend to have modular heads, meaning you can swap out picks. They also sport reverse-curve picks, to enhance stick.

Leashes. For lower-angled mountaineering, a classic leash is fine. For waterfall ice, go with clip-on leashes, which let you retain the tool/s while placing pro.