



# ACRES OF ICE OURAY ICE PARK

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## OURAY ICE PARK BACKGROUNDER

The Ouray Ice Park (the Park) is a manmade ice climbing venue operated in a spectacular natural gorge just outside the town of Ouray, CO. It is home to more than 200 named ice and mixed climbs, most within a 15-minute walk of the Park entrance. The Park and its infrastructure are jointly owned and managed by the City of Ouray, the nonprofit Ouray Ice Park, Inc. (OIP), and a mix of other private and public landowners. Each winter, OIP hosts the Ouray Ice Festival to celebrate the Park and raise funds for its operation. Despite the high cost of its maintenance, the Park remains free and open for public use. In nearly 20 years of operation, it has become one of the premier ice climbing venues in the world.

Ouray and the surrounding San Juan mountain range are home to one of the greatest concentrations of water ice climbs in North America. The range's steep relief and deep gorges provide a superb venue for climbing. Roads carved into the sides of mountains throughout Ouray's rich mining history provide stunning access to that terrain today. Classic ice climbs, such as Bird Brain Boulevard, Stairway to Heaven, and the Ames Ice Hose, along with natural waterfalls such as Bridal Veil Falls and extensive alpine terrain, make the San Juans a hub for world-class climbing.

The Ouray Ice Park is located in the Uncompahgre Gorge just south of Ouray. Natural classics in the Gorge like Stone Free and Tangled Up In Blue have been climbed since the 1970s – often with wooden Chouinard-Frost piolet, snags, and Goldline. In 1991, Bill Whitt and Gary Wild placed half-inch PVC pipe and sprinkler heads to flow water over the sides of the Gorge and “farm” additional ice climbs. Their effort attracted enough attention that in 1997 OIP was formed to formally organize the Park. OIP has continued to improve the Park's plumbing system, increase access to new terrain in the Gorge, and finance and maintain extensive infrastructure throughout the Park. The Ice Park spans more than 1 mile of the Uncompahgre Gorge. With a gravity-fed plumbing system using more than 7,500 feet of pipe and 150 shower heads, more than 150,000 gallons of water are sprayed on the canyon walls on a typical winter night.

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First organized by Jeff Lowe in 1996, the Ouray Ice Festival continues to showcase the best ice and mixed climbing talent in the world during the professional competition. Past winners include Will Gadd, Ines Papert, and Josh Wharton. Leading outdoor retailers highlight the latest ice tools, apparel, and other gear during daily vendor exhibitions. Roughly 75 interactive climbing clinics taught by local guides and professional climbers allow Festival participants into the Ice Park often using demo gear provided by vendors. Nightly events include slideshows by leading climbers, gear and climbing memorabilia auctions, and other social events. An estimated 3,000 visitors attend the Festival each year. Between sponsors and individual donations, the Festival funds the majority of operations in the Ouray Ice Park.

The Ouray Ice Park is larger and more sophisticated today than it ever has been, and the Ouray Ice Festival has become a major winter gathering of outdoor enthusiasts. As climbing equipment and techniques have evolved, so too have climbers advanced their skills on Ouray's ice and mixed terrain. Climbers have applied these skills to make bold alpine attempts around the world. The maverick, grassroots, and open spirit that built the Park has left an indelible mark on Ouray and climbers worldwide.