

The Ouray Ice Park

The Ouray Ice Park is a manmade ice-climbing venue operated in a spectacular gorge just outside the town of Ouray, Colorado. It is home to more than 200 named ice and mixed climbs, most within a 15-minute walk of the park entrance. The park is free and open for public use. In nearly twenty 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 ice climbs in North America. The range's steep relief and deep gorges provide a superb venue for climbing. 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 OIPI was formed to formally organize the park. OIPI 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. Today, the statistics are staggering. The Ice Park spans more than one 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.

Jeff Lowe organized the first Ouray Ice Festival in 1996. The 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 seventy-five interactive climbing clinics taught by local guides and professional climbers allow festival participants into the Ice Park – many for their first time on ice.

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Horsefly Brewing Company began after homebrew buddies went to a small brewery in Paonia, Colorado, to "check it out." After a few beers, talk turned to making it happen in Montrose. They did. Horsefly has a full menu of food as well as eight beers on tap and frequently features live music. Gift sets, beerphernalia and swag available.

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TOWN RULES

Offered by the Ouray Police Department

Ouray is a small community and home to about 850 residents. With several thousand guests arriving for the festival, it has quite an impact. There are a few simple ordinances and event rules that you need to be aware of:

- 1 Alcohol. Ouray has an “open container” ordinance; **Alcohol cannot leave fest venues.** Please restrict consumption of alcoholic beverages to commercial establishments that serve drinks, a private residence or your lodging facilities. If attending parties with alcohol at event sites, be advised that volunteers will be checking IDs. If you do not have your ID showing that you are at least 21 years old, you will not be allowed to drink alcohol at these events.
- 2 Parking at the Ouray Ice Park is reserved for sponsors and festival staff only. Access for the general public is an easy walk from the end of Third Avenue or by shuttle.
- 3 Parking in Ouray is allowed on our 100-foot-wide streets, but please do not block driveways.
- 4 Overnight parking on Main Street is prohibited. Vehicles left on the street during these hours will receive a citation and/or possibly be towed.
- 5 The bus shuttle runs along Third Avenue and Main Street and drops off at the ice park. The shuttle service is free, but the students at the Ouray School would appreciate your donation.
- 6 Pets must be leashed and the Ouray Ice Park discourages their attendance at events.

Thank you for your cooperation. Have fun and be safe!



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PARK RULES

Ouray Ice Park, Inc., is a Colorado non-profit corporation that manages and maintains the Ouray Ice Park in conjunction with the City of Ouray and the Commercial Use Program Concessionaire, San Juan Mountain Guides, LLC. Ouray Ice Park, Inc., may enforce all of the following rules and regulations. In addition, non-compliance with these rules and regulations may be referred to the City of Ouray Police Department, or the Ouray County Sheriff.

The following rules apply to all users.

- 1) Crampons are required for everyone in the posted “climber only” areas. Crampons and a helmet are required for everyone while climbing or in the bottom of the gorge.
- 2) Anyone under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult in the Ice Park.
- 3) All dogs must be leashed while in the Ice Park, and dogs are not allowed in the bottom of the gorge.
- 4) Anchors may not be attached to any manmade structures including the penstock, except established fixed anchors such as chain and bolt anchors. Anchors may not be placed over, bend around, or otherwise impede the watering system.
- 5) All climbing in the “Schoolroom” area must be on labeled and fixed anchors.
- 6) The Ouray Ice Park is open from 7:30am to 5:00pm. Ice Park staff may elect to turn on the water before 5:00pm, or turn it off after 7:30, at their discretion.
- 7) Only Ice Park staff may adjust, turn off, or otherwise handle any part of the watering system, including pipes, valves, shower heads.
- 8) Top-rope lines may not be left unattended or unused.
- 9) Non-commercial groups of 8 or more persons may not occupy more than two climbing routes in any one specific area, and may not occupy any one route for more than 3 hours.
- 10) Be courteous to others.

In addition to these general rules, the following regulations have been established by the Commercial Use Program Concessionaire in conjunction with the City of Ouray. For more information about this program, contact the Ouray Ice Park Concessionaire, San Juan Mountain Guides, LLC.

- 1) Commercial use without an OIP SGS Permit or OIP Commercial Group Use Permit is not allowed.
- 2) A permittee may not occupy more than two routes in any one climbing area.
- 3) A Permittee may not exceed a 4:1 client:guide ratio.
- 4) No more than four routes in the “Schoolroom” area may be occupied by any combination of Permittees (i.e. if Permittee #1 has 2 routes and Permittee #2 has 2 routes, then Permittee #3 must climb elsewhere.)
- 5) A permittee may not occupy a route for more than 3 hours.

Cross-Country Paradise



Staff Photo

As a winter-sport destination, Ouray is known the world over for its ice park. The park draws thousands of climbers to town each year and solidifies Ouray's reputation as a climbing town.

But the "Switzerland of America" is no one-trick pony. The town, and the area surrounding it, has developed some serious credibility among cross-country skiers and snowshoers. A small but growing group of athletes makes its way to Ouray each year thanks to the region's stunning winter scenery and accessible, pristine winter trails.

Options in town

A day on skis doesn't require a trip out of town in Ouray. The river-walk trail on the north end of town is groomed regularly for cross-country skiers and snowshoers, providing a gentle two-mile trail. Another trail stretches around the ice park, providing a stunning view of those enjoying Ouray's most famous winter sport. For kids and beginners, Lee's ski hill offers free rope tows on afternoons and weekends.

Ironton Park

Ironton Park is one of the true gems of the San Juans. Located just south of Ouray, in



Staff Photo

a flat valley ringed by mountains, the area offers a little more than four miles of trails maintained by

the Ouray Nordic Council. Those trails wind through the ruins of what once was Ironton, one of many towns that popped up in southwest

Colorado during the mining boom of the late 19th century.

In addition to the groomed terrain, the park has many miles of ungroomed trails, which take skiers to mineshafts and cabins.

The Top of the Pines

In the town of Ridgway, just 10 miles north on highway 550, the landscape breaks open. While Ouray is walled off by towering peaks, the views from Ridgway reach all the way to the horizon. Ouray County's Top of the Pines skiing area, which includes four miles of groomed trails, is perched atop a high mesa, offering a peek at stunning vistas around every turn.

The trails were built and are maintained by members of the local community, and Top of the Pines is still community owned. A small donation is requested from skiers or snowshoers who use the park, and a season pass can be purchased for \$50.

A full description of the trails, facilities and current conditions is available at the park's website, www.topofthepines.org. For additional information about trails throughout the area, visit www.ouraytrails.org.

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Rigging for Rescue, Teaching Advanced Rope Skills

If you find yourself with a need to be rescued in or around Ouray, there's a good chance ropes will be involved. The area's vertical terrain has made it famous, but the same dramatic features that draw climbers and sightseers often get them into real trouble.

"Almost every rescue we do is a roped rescue," said Bill Whitt, a veteran member of Ouray Mountain Rescue. Where mountain rescue teams are concerned, Ouray's is undoubtedly one of the best in the country with ropes. They owe that not only to the nature of the landscape, but to a skilled team and the work of a local company: Rigging for Rescue.

Based in Ouray since 2002, Rigging for Rescue is one of the world's preeminent roped rescue schools. The company doesn't just train professionals with the Ouray and Yosemite rescue teams, but oil-rig workers, U.S. Special Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and more. They're the best in the business, if not the biggest.

A lasting approach

"We're not a training mill," said Chris Jackson, who works out of the company's

base in Ouray. "We don't ever try to teach people by rote."

Many rope rescue schools design their curriculums around a few basic techniques.

Their students leave their

classes with a set of knots and pulley systems burned into their memories, Jackson said, but don't necessarily take away a real understanding of the concepts involved. In the rescue field, where scenarios can change in the blink of an eye, that surface-level knowledge is rarely enough.

"I think it's very rare that an actual rescue goes like a case study in a textbook said it should go," Jackson said. "In the actual situation, not everything is going to be laid out for you."

That means Rigging for Rescue courses are intensive. The idea of the course is to give students a real understanding of what makes rope systems effective, so they can improvise when necessary.

"It's sort of like drinking from a fire hose," Jackson said. "But by the end of the course people have a really good understanding."



Photos by Lora Slawitschka



Beyond climbing

Whether they are rescuing a hiker who got in over his head or a driver who veered off the Million Dollar Highway, the ability to improvise with ropes and pulleys is exactly the skill-set the Ouray Mountain Rescue team needs on a regular basis.

Many of the team members are strong rock and ice climbers or mountaineers, Whitt said, but even those skills aren't always enough.

“Rope rescue is totally different from just going out and climbing for fun,” he said. “There are some shared skills for sure, but it’s a whole different animal.”

Rigging for Rescue offers seven-day rope climbing rescue seminars across North America. Contact them at info@riggingforrescue.com or 970.325.4474



Generation Next

The 2012 Kids Climbing College offers an opportunity for children ages 8 to 17 to try the exciting sport of ice climbing for free. Held annually at the Ouray Ice Park Kids Wall, The KCC is a super fun way for youths to get a taste of this great local winter sport. The Kids Wall is a specially developed forty-foot high, 140-foot wide slab of ice located on top of the ice park within easy walking access. It features a dozen different routes with various levels of difficulty for all the kids.

The 2012 Kids Climbing College will again be hosted by San Juan Mountain Guides and sponsored by the Ouray Ice Park and Alpine Bank.

The KCC is free, ages 8-17, first-come-first-serve. SJMG will provide harnesses, helmets, boots, crampons and ice tools. Participants should bring: a fun-loving adult to sign paperwork, warm clothes, gloves and warm hat (ski clothes work well for climbing). Participants' families should park in the designated Ice Park Parking areas and walk up to the Kids Wall.

An advertisement for the Ouray Victorian Inn. The top half features a photograph of a large, snow-covered evergreen tree in front of a building. The text "Ouray Victorian Inn" is written in a large, yellow, serif font. Below it, in a smaller white font, is the tagline "The place Ice Climbers call home". The bottom half of the ad has a green background with white text that reads "Closest hotel to the Ice Park", "Great rooms, Great breakfast, Great Value", and the website "www.victorianinnouray.com" followed by the phone number "800 84-OURAY".

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Bruce Franks: Bringing Game

“Bruce Franks [President of Asolo, USA] has been an integral supporter of the Ouray



Ice Park and its annual ice festival for going on fifteen years,” says Mike Gibbs OIP Board of Directors member and cofounder of San Juan Mountain Guides. “I know it’s ice-fest time when I see Bruce wandering the park wearing an old-school Leica film camera around his neck and a Cheshire cat grin. I wish he brought more game to the ping pong table, but I love him all the same.”

Photo courtesy: Ouray Ice Park

Franks has been bringing game to Ouray since friend Jeff Lowe organized the first Ouray Ice Festival in 1996. Asolo has been a leader among businesses underwriting the festival through sponsorships – making the event possible.

Franks has been a part of the outdoor gear industry since he helped start an outfitter shop in Moscow, Idaho in 1970. He says it has been important to spend a life in a business and among products he loves.

It has been a pleasure,” Franks says of his involvement with the festival. “The competition gets stronger year after year and is the hallmark of the weekend.

“It’s a class-act event.”

Gee Honey, Let's go HAVE SOME FUN in Ouray County... we can check the

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Welcome Ice Climbers & Festivarians! Good Luck! — Ouray County Commissioner Lynn Pughett



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