

## Cold Is Hot

This ain't no Ice Capades. The tiny town of Ouray has turned itself into the best ice-climbing playground on the planet. And there's no better time to chill here than during the Ouray Ice Festival.

By Jayme Otto



**Chillin':** Ouray's Ice Park is one amazing playground for grownups.

ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY OURAY ICE FESTIVAL

Ouray's famed ice festival, the premier international gathering of ice climbers, gear manufacturing exhibitors and voyeurs, was started in 1996 by ice climbing pioneer Jeff Lowe. Today, the event serves as a fundraiser for the Ouray Ice Park, the world's first park devoted exclusively to the sport. The festival brings in over half the annual operating capital needed to run the park, allowing it to remain free of charge to climbers.

Held in the park, the festival features climbing clinics from beginner to advanced, an opportunity to demo the latest and greatest gear, gear auctions, film and slide show presentations, a children's climbing program with a dedicated munchkin wall, a climbing competition with made-to-order routes and all the fun and debauchery you'd expect from climbers—think everything from axe-throwing competitions to costume parties.

This year, festival director Erin Eddy, who took the whole shabang over from Lowe in 2001, is most excited about the addition of Timmy O'Neill, climber, adventurer, *EO* contributor and all-around goofball. O'Neill will be talking about his program, Paradox Sports ([paradoxsports.org](http://paradoxsports.org)), hosting the evening auctions and playing DJ at Saturday night's superhero-themed party.

### ► GIRLS KICK AXE

With Ouray being so small and rugged, and ice climbing being such a hardman's sport, women may wonder: are we setting ourselves up for a weekend of too much testosterone? A wise concern since census data shows that for every 100 women over the age of 18 in Ouray, there are 104.8 men. Luckily, local Kim Reynolds has

been encouraging the fairer sex to try the sport.

Reynolds began climbing ice in 1982, a time when just a handful of women participated. An Outward Bound guide up for anything, she was drawn to the aesthetics of the sport—the winter scenery, the frozen waterfalls, the isolation. “The places where water froze were pretty tucked away spots. You had to make a serious effort just to get there. Those kinds of places are really magical, and I was just drawn to that,” Reynolds says.

Ironic that the girl who fell in love with ice climbing's desolate landscape would go on to found Chicks with Picks ([chickswithpicks.net](http://chickswithpicks.net)), a company that's introduced 658 women to the sport since its inception in 1999. For Reynolds, it was about empowerment. “I noticed more women out ice climbing, but they weren't asserting themselves. They weren't leading and they weren't setting up their own anchors. I saw an opportunity to help women become more confident, more self-sufficient in the sport,” she explains.

Chicks with Picks aims to create a safe, supportive environment where women can learn to climb ice from other women. And while Reynolds no longer competes at the Ice Fest, she'll be there teaching clinics and manning her table at the expo.

In the Ice Park, you'll frequently find her in the lead-only area under the bridge, the steepest, deepest part of the canyon. Accessing this area requires a rappel to the bottom of the gorge, and the only way out is to lead. “Because of the skills required to climb in this area, it doesn't get over trafficked and the routes don't get picked out,” Reynolds says. For newbies, Reynolds recommends starting at the south end of South Park,



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