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Find Your Pitch, Ice Climbing close to home

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Climbers have three options in the winter: drive south, go indoors, or layer up and get on some ice. If you haven't yet tried option number three, there is still time, the season isn't over yet. Yes, attaching metal spikes to your feet and holding on by the tip of an ice axe can be a little intimidating, but there are few epic adventures more brag-worthy than standing atop a pillar of ice. Try it once, and you'll be hooked.

Most people have their baptism by ice at Ouray Ice Park in Colorado: the perfect launch pad for an ice climbing career. The man-made ice is reliable and thick, while in the Wasatch, fluctuating weather patterns and avalanches make route finding a little more fickle. For those sick of following a Candy Lane trail of colored, chalked-up holds in the gym, put your gloves on instead and try these ice climbing routes.





PROVO CANYON

After driving up this canyon, park at the Bridal Veils parking lot, and you will find another vehicle full of climbers. Accessibility and consistent ice make this place a little crowded, but there is a high concentration of climbs here. Access the famous Stairway to Heaven just off the trail, a multi-pitch climb that can reach up to 10 pitches during a good ice season. The first pitch, lovingly called The Apron because of its width, is easy to set up a top-rope on and do laps. There are a few bolts at the top, so you can hop between routes if you are in a bigger group.

If you keep walking up the trail before turning toward the Stairway area, you will come to the breathtaking Bridal Veil Falls. While it rarely freezes, there are a few fantastic climbs to the right of it. Ice leading experience is required.

LITTLE COTTONWOOD CANYON

You really can't call yourself an ice climber and live in Utah without climbing the Great White Icicle. It's a classic multi-pitch easily accessible off the freeway. The views get better and better at the end of each of the four pitches, but don't get distracted and forget to watch for falling ice. Because of high traffic, you will get hit with ice, so always wear a helmet. Once you've done this classic, you might as well hike over to Scruffy Band, a collection of ice dripping off granite slabs. You can switch easily between routes of easy grades.

MAPLE CANYON

When avalanche dangers are high in the Wasatch, Maple Canyon is the perfect alternative. Around every winding cobblestone corner, ice pours into perfect climbing routes. There are several routes accessible off the Main Road, but Box Canyon and Left Fork also reveal hidden treasures. Tennis Shoe Slab is long but sustained, and the intimidating Dagger is just around the corner, suspended over an easy first pitch that has set chains. The Wet Itchies and Bowling Ball Head are a little more steep, but fun if you are ready to push yourself.



JOE'S VALLEY

This famous bouldering destination also has stellar ice in the winter months. The CCC and Donoricicle are both breathtaking pillars of thick ice that just taunt you to climb them. A top rope can easily be set up at the Donoricicle, but leading experience is necessary for the two pitches of the CCC. A plus here is the belayer isn't stuck with a bad view, the frozen Joe's Reservoir and surrounding mountainous landscape are visible below.

****If you are going ice climbing in Utah, purchase the detailed guide "Beehive Ice" by Nathan Smith and Andrew Burr. Also, check avalanche conditions prior to the climb and check equipment constantly throughout.**

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