

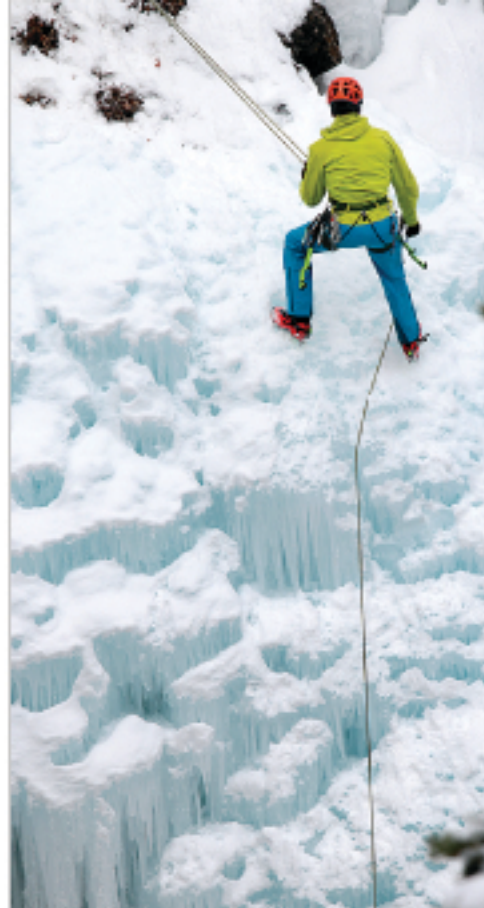
Hooray for Ouray!

by Jennaye Derge

The Ouray Ice Park is not just a sightseer's marvel, but an ice climber's mecca. Each winter, with the aid of water from the City of Ouray, a group of so-called "Ice Farmers" create more than 200 manmade icefalls along a mile-long stretch through the Uncompahgre Gorge. At this year's Ouray Ice Festival, held Jan. 16-17, the pros made scaling these 40-foot walls of ice look easy. Coming from all over the world, with a few hailing closer to home, climbers competed in elite mixed-climbing as well as speed-climbing competitions. And for those who fall somewhere between the elite and weekend warrior ranks, the festival offered plenty of gear demos, clinics, great schwag and late night parties for when it was time to go inside and warm up.



Using metal picks to propel oneself up an ice wall is no easy task.



A climber belays down after a successful climb.



A female competitor nearing the finish of the elite mixed-climbing route on Saturday.



Defrosting by the fire was a popular activity when not on the wall.



Large crowds flock the outdoor retailer tents for free stuff and warm beverages.