

FROZEN MOMENTS: Ice Climbing in the Crystal River Valley

By Duane Raleigh

They don't call it Redstone for nothing: From end to end, cobbled sandstone cliffs, framed by a patchwork of shimmering aspen and spruce, punch into the azure sky. It's a rock-climber's paradise. For three seasons anyway. Beginning sometime around

Thanksgiving, plunging temperatures and abundant snowfall lock the Redstone valley in winter's icy grip, quieting and freezing about a dozen cascading waterfalls – a boon for ice climbers.

From the granite gorge of the Narrows, about three miles south of Redstone, to the historic quarry town of Marble, the solitude and spectacular beauty of about two-dozen five-star ice climbs attract local and out-of-town climbers. Most of the climbs are on Forest Service property, but access and the odd route are occasionally on private land. Please respect these owner's rights by maintaining a low-key presence and issuing the proper respect, including leaving the dogs at home.

No one knows for certain when ice climbing kicked off in the Redstone valley, but it was likely in the early-1970s, when locals booted up and began steadfastly ticking winter's creations. Since then, hundreds of ice climbers have followed suit, even topping the ante with modern mixed and dry-tooling routes. Most of the climbs are moderate WI 3 ice, although a few routes hit the top end of difficulty and will challenge the most traveled ice aficionado. In almost all cases, you can skirt around the climb and drop a top rope. Naturally, you can lead all of the routes, protecting yourself with half a dozen or so ice screws. The following guide lists the valley's best-of-ice climbs, but there many more. You can find them in the comprehensive guide books, the Colorado Ice Climber's guide, by Cameron Lawson, and Colorado Ice, by Jack Roberts.

THE NARROWS is a dark, gunsight canyon with atypical grey granite buttresses and spires. Here you'll find the valley's most sought-after ice climb, Avocado Gully, a three pitch WI 3, although in early and late season when the ice isn't fully formed or melted out, it can be more like a poorly protected M4. Be prepared to

lead – you can't hike to the top of this climb. Bring four ice screws and be prepared for a rappel descent.

To get to Avocado Gully: From Redstone's south entrance, go 4.1 miles south on Hwy 133. When the canyon's sandstone walls abruptly turn to granite and nearly pinch off the road, you know you're in the right spot. Park at the plowed pull-out on the east shoulder of



THE DROOL • PHOTO BY SUE McEVoy

the road. Park, cross the highway (walking west) to a typically well-packed trail through the woods. About five minute's walk up drainage will land you at the base of Avocado Gully. The first pitch is an easy scramble up a dihedral/chimney. The second pitch is a business, with slabby ice steepening to near vertical. The third pitch tackles an avocado-green flow of moderate ice. Fixed rappel stations get you back to the ground.

For a much greater challenge, the mixed routes Banzi Pipeline and Holy Guacamole are located 2-mile down canyon from Avocado Gully. Look for the boot-packed trail. If you can't find it, don't worry; the ice isn't in. Depending on how well it has formed, Banzi Pipeline can be a moderate M4 or a horror-show M7 with virtually no protection. Bring 3 short ice screws, cams to 3 inches, and hope for the best.

Twenty feet right of Banzi lies Holy Guacamole, a more-recent addition with a M7 grade and full bolt protection.

For an après-ice soak, try the Penny Hot Springs, a hot-pot area in the Crystal River, .2 miles upstream from the parking spot for Avocado Gully, before mile marker 55. The native Utes used to seek out these cur-

[Click here for Page 2](#)

Continued on page 33