

Ice climbing

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Ice climbing may seem insane to many people, even those who regularly strap themselves into harnesses and climb up thousand-foot rock walls. "But we're climbing on rock," these climbers protest, "They're just climbing on ice. Sometimes they can even see and hear the waterfalls thundering below the ice!" Though it may seem nuts, ice climbing is a safe, fun sport if the right equipment is used and proper precautions are taken.

One of the biggest differences between rock climbing and ice climbing, aside from the medium, is that ice climbing is extremely gear-intensive compared to rock climbing. If you're bouldering (climbing boulders unroped instead of climbing up a tall rock face) all you need to climb is a pair of climbing shoes, a chalk bag, and a crash pad to help soften your landings. Throw in a t-shirt and a pair of comfortable pants and you're all set. If you're sport climbing you'll also need a harness, a rope, a belay device, and a set of quickdraws, but that's it. Traditional climbing will require a full rack of gear, but it still pales in comparison to the assortment of gear required for ice climbing. Ice axes, crampons, full helmets, double ropes, double belay devices, ice screws, waterproof shell clothing, insulating layers, heavy gloves, and a host of other widgets and devices are required to ice climb properly. Though this large amount of gear scares off some people, it does tend to attract gear heads to the sport. Since ice climbing is a relatively expensive sport to jump into, it's not a very good idea to buy a complete set of gear before you complete your first climb. After all, though lots of people love ice climbing you might hate it and just concentrate on preparing your garden for the winter because sticking you with a big heap of expensive gear that will never get used. The best way to try ice climbing is to either have friends who already climb and would be willing to lend you gear, otherwise find an artificial ice climbing wall. These walls, sometimes made from converted grain silos or custom-built to be ice climbing walls, trickle water down tall walls until it freezes into great vertical terrain for ice climbing. Most commercial walls will be able to provide you with most of the required gear, granting that you dress warm enough when you arrive. These artificial walls give you a controlled environment to try ice climbing in, ensuring your safety and the suitability of the ice for climbing. If you like it, find some friends and head into the cold to find some great ice and wonderful climbing.