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# Ice climbing is more than mom bargained for during ski vacation

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**ONE-TANK TRIP**  
NORTH CONWAY - Imagine sleeping under a tidal wave of ice, and you've got the White Mountain Hotel and Resort in North Conway. Perched directly below granite blue ledges and overlooking the snow covered Green Hills, Mount Cranmore and Mount Kearsarge, the resort is a lit-up oasis. My daughter, Haley, and I arrive in the midst of another White Mountain snow dump, and it is a balmy 10 degrees.

"Check that out," my daughter says, pointing up as we carried our bags through the snow.

## Ice climb

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"Sounds good," I tell her, and I sign Haley and I up for the next morning.

The second day of skiing is better than the first at Cranmore. Everywhere there are smiles and the lines are small, even with the irritating scanning of tickets at the Quad lifts. On our last run (never say it's your last run when skiing, because this is when you usually wipe out), I cross tips and twist my ankle.

"You're limping," Haley says after I take my skis off at the lodge.

"It's nothing," I say, hoping that a soak in the hot tub with a glass of Chardonnay will cure what ails me. The White Moun-

"It looks ready to topple over." Above us is White Horse Ledge - a famous ice and rock-climbing outcrop of jagged slab and vertical pitch. It does seem to lean toward the resort in the howling winds.

"We should climb it," she says, "after we ski tomorrow." "Sure." I agree with her so that we can go inside and warm ourselves by the fire in the lobby. Perhaps I'd jump into the hundred-degree outside pool and hot tub. "Absolutely."

The next day, after a filling breakfast of homemade muffins, eggs and fresh fruit, we head through the bumper-to-bumper traffic of North Conway. Known for its factory outlets and attractions like the Conway Scenic Railroad, we

tain Hotel is a welcome sight that night, lit up with candles and offering a roaring fire.

The next morning, my ankle is no better. So I call Sara and explain the predicament. She doesn't call me a chicken, but I feel somewhat relieved I won't be climbing up ice faces that day with the wind howling and the temperatures in the low teens. I ask her more questions about ice climbing.

"Who's the oldest ice climber?" I rest my ankle on a feather pillow.

"There was a couple in South Dakota - Herb and Jan Conn - who were in their 80s. Jan led the pitches, and Herb followed. And we have a male guide at EMS - George Hurley - who is 75 and stills takes people out."

I feel like a 40-year-old loser.

"You don't have to choose the hardest route to have a good time on the rock," Sara says.

turn off as quickly as we can to Cranmore Ski Area. It snowed 1 foot during the night, and the slopes were empty, filled only with fresh stashes of New England powder.

"You have to lean back in the heavy stuff," I tell Haley as we ski trail after trail, my daughter never tiring. From the Quad, we can look behind us to the White Mountain Resort, and it sits like some frozen jewel in a wonderland of white. The outdoor hot tub and pool emits vapor clouds that rise against blue bird skies, and I remember how perfect it was last night, sitting in all that warmth with a blizzard covering my face.

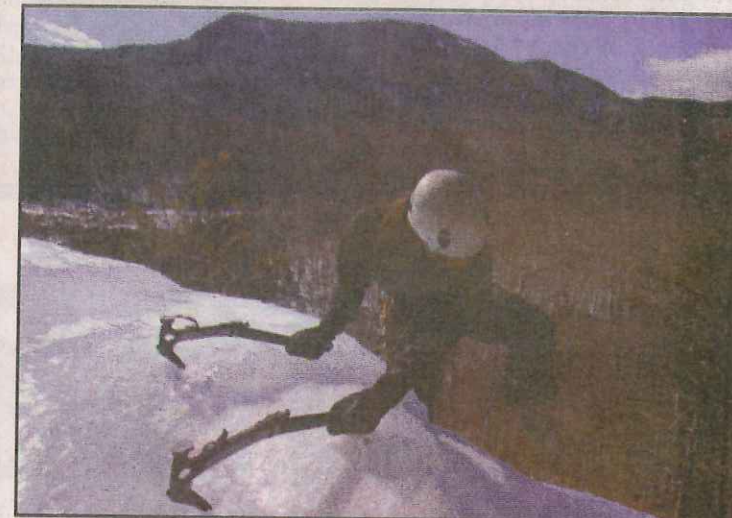
"There are those cliffs," Haley says.

They shine blue in the

distance. I promise her that I'll look into a beginner ice-climbing package the next morning. We careen through the snow one last time, my legs burning just trying to keep up with Haley.

The next morning, I contact Eastern Mountain Sports Climbing School and talk with Sara Reeder, a climbing guide. "I've never done this before," I say.

"No problem," Sara says. She describes how EMS guides the whole process. All gear is included, a guide comes with you the entire time, and techniques, like belaying and rappelling, are taught in a relaxed way, without pressure.



Courtesy photo

An ice climber starts the steep descent down Frankenstein Cliffs in the White Mountains.

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