

The Salt Lake Tribune

Northern Utah recreation

High adventure in Ogden

Ogden City and the new Salomon Center are hoping to become destination spots for outdoor enthusiasts

By Tom Wharton
The Salt Lake Tribune

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OGDEN - Jared Williams and Kaylani Trevino learned to surf in Hawaii. Chances are they never expected to enjoy their favorite sport in what used to be a mall here.

But there they were on a recent Wednesday using the Flowrider, a machine in Ogden's new Salomon Center that simulates surfing waves using 55,000 gallons of water to create a surfing experience on 3 inches of water.

The Flowrider, Williams said, is better in some ways than surfing in Hawaii, where he might be lucky to catch three waves in an hour on the ocean. It's possible to ride up to 40 waves in an hourlong session at the Ogden center.

Drawing surfers like Williams and Trevino to Ogden is part of a major transformation the city is undergoing. Once known as a railroad town, Ogden is now billing itself as a place to enjoy a vast array of outdoor activities - some while indoors.

Many credit Matthew Godfrey for sparking the transformation, which includes the relocation of major outdoor industries to town, eight years ago when he became mayor. He began his term by asking people what the city might do best.

"We had never transitioned from being an old railroad town, and I thought it was about time to do that," he said.

What the Weber County hub possessed was two major rivers - the Ogden and Weber - flowing through the heart of the city as well as three ski areas 20 minutes away. There were places to put in urban trail systems, a kayak park, and routes for rock and ice climbing. Godfrey compared Ogden to outdoor towns such as Bend, Ore., and Boulder, Colo., and figured it could compete well.

Plus, in addition to the ski resorts and many trails, the city already had the Ogden Bay bird refuge, Fort Buenaventura, golf courses, climbing

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areas, mountain biking trails, the Ogden Nature Center, the Eccles Dinosaur Park, a modern baseball stadium (home to the rookie league Ogden Raptors) and fishing ponds.

In June, the innovative Salomon Center opened in what was once Ogden City Mall in the heart of downtown, a privately operated recreation project that includes the surfing simulator, a 55-foot-tall climbing wall, bouldering area, a Gold's Gym, wind-tunnel skydiving simulator, bowling alley, miniature-golf course, bumper cars, billiards, movie-theater complex and kids arcade. The kids-oriented Treehouse Museum, featuring arts and nature activities, moved into a new building next door.

The center has been "well-received," said Casey Nielsen, vice president of operations for the Salomon Center. "People enjoy it and bring their families here. We've seen a good response from the greater Ogden area and from out of town. We've had people come here from as far away as South Africa and New York. It fits well with the mayor's vision of Ogden being the outdoor recreation hub of Utah."

Godfrey sees even more interest when the Wasatch Frontrunner train makes its way from the Salt Lake Valley

to Ogden, making a stop within walking distance from the Salomon Center. The commuter rail service is expected to begin early this year.

"I am amazed at how many people in Salt Lake have never been to Ogden," said Godfrey. "The train offers almost a diversion itself for families. They can climb in with the family to ride the train. Once they get here, they will be blown away."

And he means that in more way than one. The iFly, for example, which uses a 1,200-horsepower wind tunnel that allows users to actually fly, is one of only 10 in the world.

Later this year, Ogden expects to welcome the first year-round ice-climbing tower in the world. Longtime Utah climber Jeff Lowe is developing the tower on a vacant lot on 25th Street near the Salomon Center.

According to Lowe, the climbing attraction will have different angles that appeal to beginners and experts and will be able to accommodate 12 rope teams and 24 climbers at any one time. The city will run it and use grants to buy it eventually.

The future of a proposed gondola on the east side of Ogden is up in the air. Mayor Godfrey said he was waiting for developer Chris Peterson, who could

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build a ski resort in the area, to bring forward a proposal.

Even without the gondola, city leaders are proudly pointing to Ogden as one of the West's newest major outdoor-recreation destinations.

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Guides to the Ogden area

* OGDEN, WEBER COUNTY AND THE UTAH TRAVEL COMMISSION have combined to produce a map for the Weber Pathways program, one of the top outdoor draws in this part of the state.

* OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS looking for a booklet that lists all Ogden has to offer might consider paying \$10 for the *Ogden Utah Genuine Adventure Guide*, which offers sections on alpine and Nordic skiing, trails, mountain biking, cycling, climbing, bouldering, paddlesports, fly fishing, water sports, motor sports, golf, scenic drives, parks, Historic 25th Street, shopping, outfitters, entertainment, arts, spas, fitness centers, dining and more.

* FOR INFORMATION, call 800-255-

8824 or visit www.ogden.travel.

Ogden outdoor adventures

Here is a list of recreation attractions in the Ogden area:

* **SALOMON CENTER:** This indoor complex at the old Ogden City Mall, 2261 Kiesel, includes the iFly Utah device that simulates flying in a wind tunnel (www.iflyUtah.com), the Flowrider surfing simulator, a large rock-climbing wall and bouldering area, bowling alley, gym, mini-golf, billiards area, bumper cars, restaurants and arcade games. For information, visit www.salomoncenter.com or call 801-399-4653.

* **ELIZABETH STEWART TREEHOUSE MUSEUM:** This children's museum at 347 22nd St. is heavy on arts and books, but also includes nature and outdoor activities for kids. For information, call 801-394-9663 or go to www.treehousemuseum.org.

* **PATHWAYS IN WEBER COUNTY:** This is a well-organized trail system, some on asphalt along rivers and others on dirt. The detailed map, with information on trailheads, length, elevation gain, difficulty and trail surface, includes 54 trails plus the Great Western Trail and bicycle routes. For information, call 801-393-2304 or see www.

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weberpathways.org .

* **OGDEN NATURE CENTER:** This is one of Utah's oldest nature centers, at 966 W. 12th St. It includes nature exhibits, picnic areas, ponds, raptors, an observation tower with telescope, treehouses, an observation beehive, more than 100 birdhouses, 1.5 miles of trails, a gift shop and workshops. For information, call 801-621-7595 or visit www.ogdennaturecenter.org.

* **GEORGE S. ECCLES DINOSAUR PARK:** This dinosaur park at the mouth of Ogden Canyon (1544 E. Park Blvd.) is partly inside and partly outside along the Ogden River. It features 8 acres inhabited by more than 100 life-size dinosaurs, an indoor museum, a café, gift shop and indoor exhibits. For information, call 801-393-3466.

* **WOLF CREEK ADVENTURES:** Winter activities at the Wolf Creek Resort in Eden include snowshoe tours, cross-country skiing, a geo-cache snowshoe tour, ski guide, ice fishing, snowmobiling, hot-air balloon rides and kite skiing. For information, call 801-745-2000 or go to www.wolfcreekresort.com/adventures .

* **DOWNHILL SKIING:** Three major ski areas - Snowbasin, Powder Mountain and Wolf Mountain (formerly Nordic

Valley) - are just east of Ogden. For information, see the Ski Utah Web site at www.skiutah.com.

* **OGDEN BAY:** This 20,000-acre refuge near Hooper on the edge of the Great Salt Lake offers ideal places for birding. Check with the refuge's headquarters to see what is open. For information, visit www.trails.com/tcatalog/trail.asp?trailid=XFA045-009.

* **OGDEN KAYAK PARK:** The Ogden Kayak Park and its whitewaters are near 24th Street and the Ogden River. For information, go to www.ogdencity.com/awr_rec.kayak_park.html .

* **FORT BUENAVENTURA:** Though closed until Easter, this former state park is on 84 acres near the Weber River. There are picnic areas, a canoeing pond, a replica fort, three cabins and restrooms. It will open again Easter weekend for a big mountain-man rendezvous. For information, see www1.co.weber.ut.us/parks/fortb/ .

* **OGDEN ICE TOWER:** Expected to open sometime in 2008 at Kiesel and 25th streets, this one-of-a-kind attraction designed by veteran climber Jeff Lowe will introduce beginners to ice climbing while providing a challenging place for experts to compete or practice.

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