

Red River, New Mexico: A Place for Family Fun in the Southern Rockies

By Jim Fagan

My wife and I have been to Red River several times for both summer and winter vacations. It has long been a favorite spot for Texans to escape the dreadful summer heat that is inevitable. Affordability and close proximity have always been major draws-not just to Texans. From our home in Denton (40 miles north of Dallas) we can be



in Red River in less than twelve hours. Due to its small size and location slightly off the beaten path, Red River is sometimes overlooked by Texans looking for a mountain getaway.

Since discovering snowshoeing in 2003, we made several brief trips to Red River to enjoy the superb powder in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Typically, we leave Denton and drive to Clayton, N.M. to spend the night. At an elevation of a little over 5,000 feet, it gives us a chance to relax and begin acclimating to the even thinner air in Red River. In the morning, we dress in snowshoeing togs to make the easy three-hour drive to Red River. On the way, we usually spot antelope on the peaceful drive toward beautiful Cimarron Canyon. Once out of the canyon, you enter the quaint little town of Eagle Nest. Take a right on Highway 38 and you are only eighteen miles from Red River.

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Since we would arrive in Red River before noon, we always stopped at one of our favorite places first: Enchanted Forest Cross Country Ski and Snowshoeing Area, located just off highway 38 near Bobcat pass. Unless you have a four-wheel drive vehicle, parking in the overflow parking area right off the highway is best. A 10-minute walk up the hill puts you at the Enchanted Forest Day Lodge. Nestled on an undulating plateau in the Carson National Forest, Enchanted Forest offers first-rate cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Improvements to the trail system have been an ongoing process and are continuing. Thirty-three kilometers of Cross Country ski trails are groomed for both classical and skating styles. In addition, there are fifteen kilometers of dedicated snowshoeing trails. Snowshoers are required to stay off the ski trails.

John and Judy Miller retired on the recent 25th anniversary of their ownership of Enchanted Forest. Ellen and Geoff Goins, their daughter and son-in-law, are now the owners. Geoff will probably greet you when you arrive. He will fit you with ski or snowshoe rentals and sell you a trail pass. Cross-country ski lessons are also available –

all at quite reasonable prices. Log onto their Web site, www.enchantedforestxc.com for current prices. We typically snowshoe a half-day that first day. At 9,200 feet, that's enough for flatlanders. The trails have some spectacular views of the surrounding terrain. Geoff will recommend trails appropriate for your age and fitness level.

In addition to everyday skiing and snowshoeing, Enchanted Forrest offers guided snowshoe tours, headlamp hikes, and cookouts. The Web site gives dates and prices – or you can give them a call at (575) 754-6112.

If your tastes run more to downhill skiing, Red River offers a significant variety of terrain that can be accessed by six lifts and one surface tow. An added advantage is that the ski area is right in town. Skiers can walk or ski to the lifts from many of the lodging facilities. The town of Red River sits at an elevation of 8,750 feet. Elevation at the peak of the ski area is 10,350 feet, giving a vertical drop of 1,600 feet. Average annual snowfall is 214 inches. That can be supplemented by snow making capabilities on 85 percent of the runs. Thus, skiers are almost guaranteed good quality snow for the



duration of the season.

Bargains abound for skiers willing to do a little investigating. For example, if you check in at a participating lodge on Sunday or Monday and stay for three nights, a fourth night of lodging and a day of skiing are both



free. Some exclusion dates apply, so check ahead of time. January is the best month for bargains. Staying at participating lodging gets you a 30 percent discount on lift tickets. That makes a \$61 adult lift ticket only \$46. That's a great deal compared to many of the larger ski areas. "Ski and Stay" packages in January are available for as little as \$53 per person per night, which includes lodging and lift tickets. All deals and specials are listed at www.redriver.org/specials-discounts.



The Red River Ski Area also offers evening snowmobiling and tubing. Snowmobile tours include a two-hour trip to the top of the ski area, a light dinner, and the return trip. Cost is \$70 for a single rider, \$50 for a second one. All equipment (boots, jackets, pants,

gloves, helmets) is provided. You must be at least 16 with a valid driver's license to drive. Tubing is available for a cost of \$12 per tube as soon as the slopes close at 4 p.m.

Kids of all ages enjoy this increasingly popular activity.

On a recent trip to Red River, we went on a guided snowshoe tour led by a local guide, Jeff Fagan (no relation). For the very reasonable cost of \$75, Jeff will take two



people snowshoeing in one of the canyons around Red River. Additional participants are \$25 each. The tours last for a half-day and can be tailored to the desires and fitness levels of the participants. We chose a tour that goes up Pioneer Canyon past some abandoned mines. It ends at an old miner's cabin, built in the early 1900's. The scenery is spectacular. Jeff also has a wealth of knowledge about the history of the area. Just ask.

Snowshoe tours can be booked directly through Jeff by calling (575) 770-9451 or through Bighorn Sports at (575) 754-2721. If you need to rent snowshoes, Bighorn will rent them to you for \$10 per day. From late spring through the fall, Jeff conducts guided

flyfishing tours, which can also be booked through Bighorn Sports. Log onto their Web site www.bighornsports.us for details about fishing locales and pricing. We plan to go fishing with Jeff when the weather and our schedule permit. When not fishing or snowshoeing, Jeff often showcases his musical talent by performing with his band, the Highway 38 Houndogs, in locations around town.

If you come to Red River looking for five-star hotels with fancy dining, you have come to the wrong place. If, however, you want a friendly, fun place with comfortable lodging, this is it. There are activities for families along with reasonably priced good food. Lodging is largely devoid of chain hotels. It runs the gamut from small lodges, B&B's, to large condo rental units. There is something to fit most budgets and tastes. Log onto www.redriver.org or Google Red River, N.M.



Different eating establishments that can satisfy any appetite are plentiful in Red River. We were impressed by Timbers Restaurant's varied menu with excellent choices. If you crave good Mexican cuisine with a Southwestern flair, try Sundance Restaurant. For lunch, check out Mountain Treasures

Gallery and Bistro's signature soups and sandwiches.

We stayed most recently at Copper King Lodge. The accommodations were just right for our needs. There are a variety of units to suit different size groups. Copper King is located right on the river, adjacent to the Copper Chair Lift. The staff at Copper King was attentive to any needs. Our unit was clean and comfortable, the kitchen handy when we felt like cooking. The www.copperkinglodge.com Web site will give you more information. Or, call 1-800-727-6210. Prices are reasonable and vary according to season

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and size of unit. Many lodging units have kitchens. A well-stocked grocery store is located in town if you need it.

Only about 500 full-time residents live in Red River. Visitors find them exceptionally cordial and helpful. This compact town makes walking to most places easy and enjoyable. If you want to take a break from outdoor activities, there is a wonderful, self-guided tour of the Enchanted Circle. An 85-mile scenic byway loop connects Red River with Questa, Taos, Angel Fire, and Eagle Nest. For a varied experience, summer or winter, give Red River a try. Fishing in spring and summer, skiing outside the back door in winter, snowshoeing/skiing at Enchanted Forest – it doesn't get much better than that. Planning a trip is easy; the fun is definitely there. Log onto www.redriver.org or call (575) 754-1708 for more information.

