

# Turpin Meadow Ranch: Snowshoeing in Wyoming's Grand Teton Wild Country

By Ryan Alford

"We cannot overlook the importance of wild country as a source of inspiration, to which we give expression in writing, in poetry, drawing and painting, in mountaineering, or in just being there." – Olaus Murie

Traveling to Wyoming offers a unique opportunity to see countless landscapes – each representing a different brush stroke on a vast painting that seems to go on forever. At the focal point of this work of art is the northwestern corner of the state: Home to the majestic Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks...and the tranquil offerings of Turpin Meadow Ranch.



I consider myself a religious man. I believe spirituality – no matter the denomination or worship setting – is ingrained in the surrounding world. Connecting with nature and Mother Earth has its benefits; it provides a necessary hit of the “reset” button for the soul. To aide in the pursuit of transcendental perfection, Turpin Meadow Ranch offers snowshoers a wild country excursion where breaking trail in two to three feet of snow is fairly typical. But “typical” doesn’t describe the overall experience at the Ranch; it is the epic snowshoe destination and genuine rustic lodge found only off-the-beaten path.

In fact, the Ranch is found tucked away in a scenic valley about 10 miles down Buffalo Valley Road, just off highway 26/287 and approximately 45 miles northwest of Dubois,



# GO HIGHER

## WITH TUBBS MOUNTAINEER SERIES



[WWW.TUBBSSNOWSHOES.COM](http://WWW.TUBBSSNOWSHOES.COM)

**FREE GET OUT AND EXPLORE  
GIFT PACKAGE WITH PURCHASE!**

- Princeton Tec® Aurora Headlamp
- Highgear® Adventure Plus Tool
- American Hiking Society Membership Offer



- Viper™/Python crampons aggressively grip in ascent, descent and sidehill traverse.
- Proprietary ArcTec+™ decking is puncture resistant to -40°F and sleek 7075 aluminum frame is light and strong.
- New ActiveLift™ heel lift reduces fatigue during climbs.

Wyoming (pronounced Du-boyz). My wife and children accompanied me from our home in Denver, as we had decided to make this a Christmas trip. Despite the long drive, excitement levels ran high as the kids anticipated some holiday fun.

Traveling to the Ranch is an experience, and quite the reward after a white-knuckle drive over snowy Togwotee Pass (pronounced Toe-go-tee), which is part of the Absaroka Mountains. You ultimately start to see what makes Wyoming famous after reaching the peak of Togwotee; it's a remote, unscathed mountain experience with an elevation of 9,658 feet. The pass and surrounding mountains receive heavy snowfall throughout the winter season. Total snow depths at the pass can reach up to 25 feet during the winter season and sometimes upwards of 40 feet.

After conquering Togwotee, the drive becomes less treacherous and far more scenic. The majestic Grand Tetons are located to the south and are a prominent part of the Jackson Hole Valley skyline. Eventually, the Teton Range will become a permanent part of the skyline you will witness and appreciate once you reach the Ranch. Views to the south from any of the cabins at the Ranch provide a humbling view that will forever haunt your snowshoeing dreams.

I unfortunately brought to the Ranch a whole year's worth of stress – 2008 was certainly a year worth forgetting. But, once I stepped out of the car and heard the crunch of snow under my boots, I could feel the year's frustrations and aggravations slowly melt away into the cold air that surrounded me. "I hope you have a chance to unwind while you're here," said Dennis Jordan, the General Manager at the Ranch. "We're really glad you're here."



With a couple feet of snow on the ground, the Ranch's main lodge aglow with Christmas lights and members of the staff preparing a holiday feast, I immediately felt at home. As my family and I eagerly entered the lodge, we were greeted with smiles, introductions and warm regards.

Dennis and Beth Jordan work together to run the Ranch's day-to-day operations – and their four kids aren't far behind. As my kids (Hayden and Lola) began to run amok after a long drive from Denver, I felt somewhat concerned for the ruckus that they were about to create. But the Jordans made us feel as though we were part of their family, instantly alleviating my apprehension. "I now have a home in Wyoming," I thought.



Unpretentious Turpin Meadow Ranch is the ideal place to take a family, especially for Christmas. The charm and spirit of the Ranch enveloped my surroundings while visiting. And before we started to unload our luggage and check-in to our cabin, we were excited to see a group of moose grazing near the main lodge. As we gawked at our first encounter with Wyoming wildlife, the moose introduced us to an upcoming long holiday weekend of relaxation and snowshoeing.

## Dude, Where's My Ranch?

The Jackson Hole Valley and surrounding eye-candied, Federally-owned lands are rich with history. A majority of the land in the area, including Yellowstone National Park, is protected by the government and administered by the National Park Service. Thanks to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the Grand Teton National Park is protected and preserved for future generations.



Circa 1927, Rockefeller and others purchased much of the Park lands to later turn it over to the Park Service so it can be protected. Rockefeller fought long and hard to have the Grand Tetons and neighboring lands (specifically the valley floor) recognized as a National Park in the United States.

“This was his movement toward using his wealth to save some of our national treasures,” Dennis said. “The Rockefellers have given probably billions of dollars to protect some of our most precious lands – places that can’t be replaced.”

This was made a success in late February 1929 – mandating that more than 309,000 acres (just the mountains) be shielded from development and other urbanized atrocities. The



protected acreage would grow from there. In 1950, the Park was expanded to include the lands purchased by the Rockefellers.

As part of these protected lands, Turpin Meadow Recreation Area becomes the cornerstone of the Ranch’s every activity. When traveling over Togwotee Pass, you have opportunity to see the Recreation Area from the east entrance area. This is also a major staging point for several snowmobile tours that will stretch

for miles throughout the wilderness.

“During the summer, this area is known for pack trips – whether it’s fly fishing or leisure hiking. And during the fall, it’s known for hunting,” Dennis explained. “Turpin Meadows (and the surrounding Recreation Area) has a trailhead that gives you access to Teton Wilderness, which is one of the largest wilderness areas in the lower 48 states. Of course being part of the Yellowstone ecosystem, it’s very much watched by the National Park. The trailhead also gives you access to an area called Yellowstone Meadows, which is the headwaters of the Yellowstone River. What makes Yellowstone Meadows so unique, with all the development in the United States, is that this area is actually – when you look at the lower 48 – the farthest point from any road...about 37 or 38 miles. And that’s a dirt road!”

The Ranch is so remote that the closest official town is Moran Junction, which has nothing but a post office and a school. There are no other services in Moran and it’s about 20 minutes north on Highway 26/287 from the Buffalo Valley Road turnoff. So, that leaves Jackson to the west and Dubois to the east – both more than an hour’s drive. At the Ranch, you’ll be lucky to have cell phone service. However, Internet and TV services are provided via satellite technology.

“The thing about Jackson Hole and Teton County – when you look at it as a whole piece – 97 percent of it is owned by the Federal Government. And none of that 97 percent can be developed. So it’s very much under control. That leaves 3 percent of the pie left for development. Of that 3 percent, half of that is in some type of agriculture preserve or conservation easement. That leaves one and a half percent of the land in Teton County that can be owned and developed. That small percentage exists between Jackson and Teton Village – known as the West Bank area. They are the only areas that can be developed. That’s what has driven the land prices up. It’s a supply and demand issue.”

These standards and federal mandates keep northwestern Wyoming pristine and pure – not allowing development to spread across the land and strip it of its beauty. When snowshoeing the area around Turpin Meadow Ranch, the importance of these provisions is gut-wrenchingly apparent. These lands require protection; they require our devotion to their ongoing proliferation.

As Rockefeller and friends fought hard to protect the Grand Tetons, hundreds of private investors began to form and mold Wyoming’s tourism industry: Enter the establishment of dude ranches. Essentially, a dude ranch (or guest ranch) specializes in providing a window to the American West – specializing in horseback riding, hunting (in some cases), pack trips and fly-fishing. Basically, it’s a highly luxurious version of a cowboy’s life.

In the early 20s, Wyoming’s dude ranches flourished in the Bighorn Mountains, through Yellowstone and finally in the Jackson Hole Valley. For some ranchers, offering a dude ranch experience was more profitable than raising and selling cattle. Approximately 36 ranches were born from this movement in Wyoming, including Turpin Meadow Ranch.



Only 17 exist today and provide a myriad of services, including snowmobile tours during the winter.

The way a dude ranch operated then is far different than the way it operates today. However, the experience at a dude ranch is changing based on the desires of today's clientele.

The summer season at a dude ranch is busy with horseback riding, fly-fishing and pack trips. As the season turns colder, hunting begins. But when winter arrives, the dude ranch becomes a bustling combination of hardcore snowmobilers and Nordic enthusiasts. Snowshoeing is the up-and-coming dude ranch activity: It boasts a following from affluent adventurers and health-conscious adrenaline junkies.

Snowshoeing becomes a lifestyle activity at a dude ranch. And it's the dude ranches that are pursuing snowshoers.

This is where my adventure at Turpin Meadow Ranch truly begins to take shape. I'm a snowshoer...and it's the lifestyle I desire.

## **Turpin Meadows: A History That Started in the Late 1800s**

When walking the grounds of the Ranch, it's not difficult to see that history has made its mark. The Ranch's humble beginnings started in 1887 by Dick Turpin – a trapper and up-and-coming resident of Jackson.

"The owner's cabin is the oldest building here. They believe it was built and owned by Dick Turpin," explained Dennis. "Based on what we've seen, he built the cabin here in 1887, wintered here for one year and then moved closer to Jackson. This is the first place he settled, when he moved to Jackson Hole."

According to the Jordans, the Ranch started as a simple general store off Buffalo Valley Road – the major thoroughfare to Jackson Hole and Yellowstone. At this point in its history, it hadn't yet been established as an official dude ranch. From 1887 to 1917, it was just a cabin in the middle of a vast wilderness area.

"It officially started as a dude ranch in 1928 by Lester Leeks and Jim Simpson – two colorful figures in Jackson Hole history. Lester and Jim were early settlers in the valley and captured the fact that Yellowstone was such a big magnet for people. They started a

successful outfitting business in Jackson with fishing and hunting as the attraction. They had quite an interesting clientele list, inviting successful businessman for fishing and hunting expeditions.”

Eventually, the Ranch was sold to Burt and Helen Turner who were the longest owners from 1935 to 1965. The Ranch went through a number of owners over the last 40 years. Today, the Ranch is owned by Herb and Dona Fisher, purchasing it in 2002/2003.

“So the area was named after Dick Turpin. He’s not very well known compared to Davey Jackson and Jedediah Smith – some of the old time trappers that found Jackson Hole. He’s one of those trappers that wintered here and lived here, which is mind-boggling to me. Our winters are very harsh and ultimately a big draw for many people to this area, especially for snowmobiling. The joke is that there are four seasons here: Summer, early winter, winter and late winter.”

The Ranch’s many owners have kept it virtually unchanged – adding more and more services and attractions as the years have passed. It seems as though the surrounding world has evolved with the modern era, but Turpin Meadow Ranch has followed a different timeline. Its amenities provide an exhilarating experience for today’s adventurer and its surroundings have been virtually untouched from what it was a century ago.

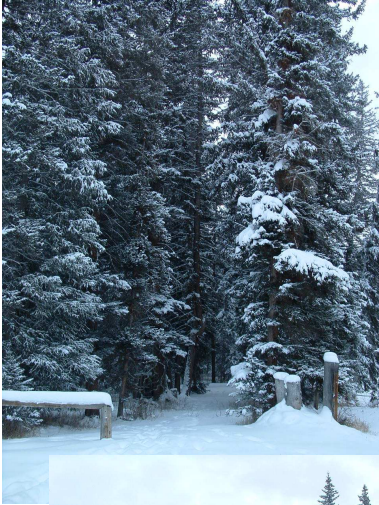
“If it wasn’t for some of our past owners, who put Turpin Meadow Ranch on the map, the same couldn’t happen today. You couldn’t put the Ranch here today. We are one of the last outposts. At the same time, there’s nothing that will affect our view. When you look down the valley, it’s National Forest and protected lands. We’re in the fortunate position that we’re never going to see a change. How many places can you say that will happen? Great resorts are being built in Jackson with condominiums. But once again, they’re just condominiums. That’s where we think Turpin Meadow Ranch can give people something different. They can come and stay in a rustic cabin, surrounded by beauty, sit on their front porch and look at an incredible view that will never change.”

## **Snowshoeing: A Conversation With Mother Earth**

I couldn’t have experienced a more magical snowshoeing experience at Turpin Meadow Ranch. As I go through the mental pictures and memories of my encounter with big Wyoming snow and big Grand Teton wild country, I become lost in my thoughts.

Two full days at the Ranch wasn’t enough, especially when 5 million acres called my name the morning I ventured out. This amount of acreage is made possible through the Ranch’s permits, giving its guests rights to explore the surrounding Bridger-Teton National Forest and Shoshone National Forest (winter only). These protected lands border Grand Teton National Park – not far from Turpin Meadows.



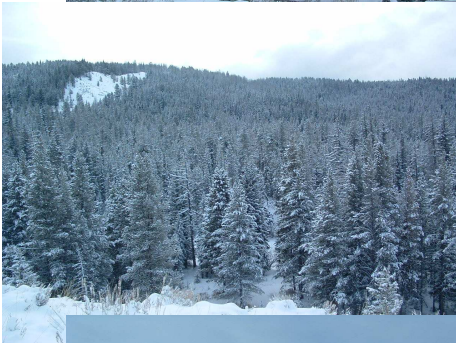


The morning greeted me with fresh snow on the ground, about four new inches of powder. After a warm breakfast at the main lodge, I quickly donned my snowshoeing uniform – dressing appropriately for deep snow.

Breaking trail in the deep snow was challenging at first. After a while, I found a steady pace through a meadow that eventually led me to the side of the river (Buffalo Fork of the Snake River). Snowshoeing by the river was surprisingly quiet as the rushing waters were overall muffled by the ice and snow. My surroundings didn't seem real – as if I was looking at a post card from the confines of my cubicle in Denver.



Moving away from the river, I was engulfed by a Lodgepole Pine forest...expecting to see Frodo Baggins and Gandalf with the Fellowship following close behind. And that's essentially what it all looked like: Some chilling environment straight out of a Tolkien novel.



My heart rate settled after my initial exertion. The sound of my heavy breathing was the only sound that penetrated the silence. Occasionally, I could hear a distant woodpecker and a jay that curiously followed me through the forest. A squirrel's chattering also made its way into this distant world – a world that I seemed to have discovered.



Reality set in when I entered the outskirts of the Turpin Meadow Campground – the necessary human scar that became the staging point for Yellowstone Meadows. The trailhead started here and it was strange to think that 30 miles away was some of Earth's most treasured terrain.



I happily began to snowshoe up the trail. I made my way up a high ridge to a perfect lookout point. To the south was the valley that eventually empties into the Grand Teton National Park. The view was swallowed by the majestic Grand Tetons – unfortunately behind some cloud cover that day. But, I remember seeing them during a family trip many years ago. I wasn't disappointed.





To the north were rolling hills completely covered in Lodgepole Pines – all sugarcoated with snow that deepened by the hour of every day. At this point the snow had stopped long enough for me to see blue skies and witness the powers of the Wyoming wilderness. A true source of inspiration, as Olaus Murie coined it.

“You were right on the Continental Divide,” Dennis told me later. “Up a ways from where you were, there’s an area called Two Oceans Pass, which is known for the ‘parting of the waters.’ This is a place where you can see a spring that forms Atlantic Creek – that flows to the Atlantic Ocean – and the other is the Pacific Creek – that flows to the Pacific Ocean. Essentially, Pacific Creek flows into the Snake River that flows into the Columbia...which flows into the Pacific Ocean. Atlantic Creek flows into the Yellowstone that ultimately flows into the Missouri...which goes to the Mississippi. When you stop to think about all the drainage and where it goes, that all happens about 20 miles from here. The Yellowstone River is known to be one of the last rivers that’s not damned or controlled in any way. From an ecological standpoint, it’s important to keep the Yellowstone pure and pristine. And all this begins in Yellowstone Meadows.”

I thought of the movie “Field of Dreams” when Shoeless Joe Jackson asked Ray Kinsella (played by Kevin Costner), “Is this heaven?”

No...it’s Wyoming.

## The Cabin and Family Experience

The Ranch sits on approximately 32 acres, next to the Buffalo Fork. As part of its comforts – and its rustic appeal – 13 guest cabins are behind the main lodge. The number will soon be 14; construction is underway on a multi-room cabin.

The cabin I stayed in (the Buffalo, as it was called) had the more appealing view and setup. It had two bedrooms with one





bathroom – just right for a family of four. The décor was simple and not overly exaggerated. It was modest and thoughtfully cared for. Best of all, no TV!

The Jordans and the Ranch staff excel at providing guests with what makes them feel more at home, comfortable and stress-free. Every night was satisfyingly quiet: No airplanes flying overhead, no vehicles zooming down the street, and no rat race to contend with. I slept. And

that's all I wanted to accomplish when I walked through the cabin doors every evening after a day of snowshoeing. The cabin was very peaceful and warm.

Winter “cabin only” rates range from \$130 to \$289 per night – all depending on the group size, the cabin type, and the time of the season. Each cabin receives daily cleaning and laundry service. I felt the rates to be highly reasonable, while the environment and guest services are nothing short of spectacular. Of course the rates increase when introducing snowmobiling or other services into the overall package.

Visit the Ranch's website ([www.TurpinMeadowRanch.com](http://www.TurpinMeadowRanch.com)) or call 800-743-2496 for special holiday packages and rates. Summer rates are also available.

## Dining at the Ranch

We arrived at the Ranch on the evening of Christmas, after driving approximately nine hours from Denver. We were invited to attend a special Christmas dinner with the Ranch staff and the Jordan family.

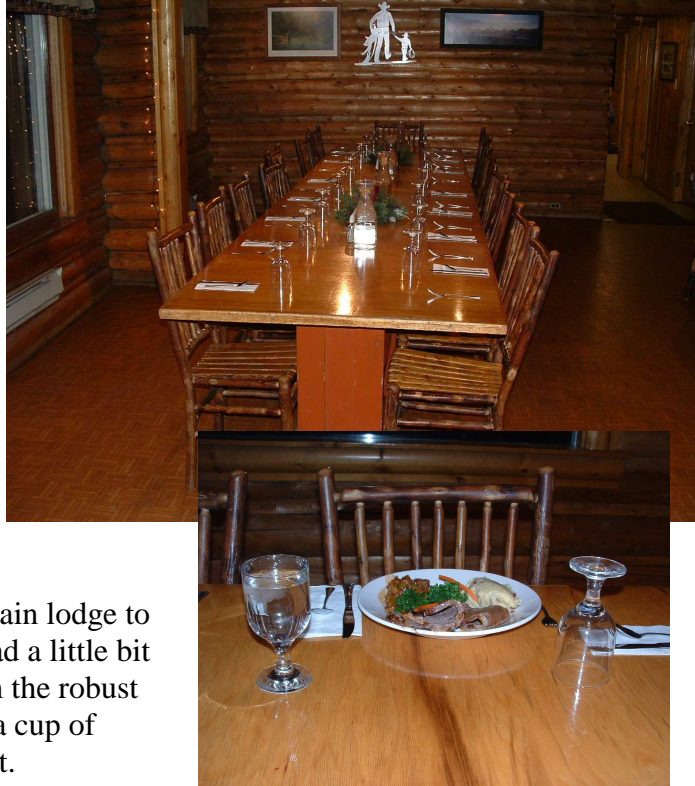
After settling in our cabin, we quickly went back to the main lodge to participate in appetizers, coffee and tea. A selection of cheeses, crackers, shrimp cocktail and sauces were served to everybody in attendance. We were the only guest family that evening and it was a unique pleasure to celebrate the holiday with new friends.

Smiles, laughter and good conversation filled the lodge. My family and I automatically felt as though we were among people we've known for many years.

Soon after appetizers, dinner was served. Head Chef Jason Campbell and Sous Chef Ryan Gassensmith organized a feast that held a five star rating – a cooking style described as “bistro with a western influence.” It was genuinely one of the best meals I've had in my lifetime. Every dish was cooked to perfection and was what we needed after a long day in the car.

The evening's menu included:

- Entrées: Suckling Pig and Roast Prime Rib
- Accompaniments: Whipped Potatoes, Broccolini, Julienne Carrots, and Apple Stuffing
- Desserts: Crème Brule and New York Cheese Cake with Mixed Berry Compote



Every morning, we walked to the main lodge to eat a hearty breakfast. The menu had a little bit of everything, for every taste – from the robust to the modest. I usually settled for a cup of decaf coffee, some oatmeal and fruit.

A breakfast buffet was also available to guests: scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, fruit, cold cereal and more. Each breakfast was what I needed to boost my energy before snowshoeing...and everything was warmly prepared. Breakfast was also special for me because it was a chance to spend time with my wife and kids before seeking the day's adventure.

Dinner was amazing. The opportunity to dine at the Ranch – for three nights, including Christmas – helped bring my family together. We enjoyed good conversation, and tasting new kinds of foods made it special. Dishes served included:

- Buffalo Osso Bucco with Whipped Klondike Rose Potatoes topped with a Black Mission Fig Demi
- Atlantic King Salmon with Shaved Lemon and Thyme over Quinoa and Julienne Summer Squash and Zucchini
- Traditional Meatloaf with Caramelized Onion Whipped Potatoes

When staying at the Ranch, the full experience includes dining at the lodge. Each meal – including breakfast and lunch – added a certain quality that allowed for a pleasant stay. If you visit the lodge, be prepared to eat...and eat well.



## How to Get There and Other Information

Before traveling to the Ranch, there are a few things to keep in mind:

Some guests may have specific dietary requests, such as being a vegetarian or having medical restrictions. Advance notification of special concerns is requested.



Of course you can drive to the Ranch, but you can also fly into Jackson Hole Airport. Visit [www.JacksonHoleAirport.com](http://www.JacksonHoleAirport.com) for more information. The staff at the Ranch can pick you up and drop you off at the airport for a small fee. However, a vehicle cannot be provided for personal day trips.

To contact the Ranch for availability, rates and more information, call 800-743-2496 or by e-mail: [info@turpinmeadowranch.com](mailto:info@turpinmeadowranch.com).

