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Winter Fun in Grand County, Colorado

SKIING

TRAVEL

TRIP REPORTS

By [Kühl Editor](#) on March 11, 2020

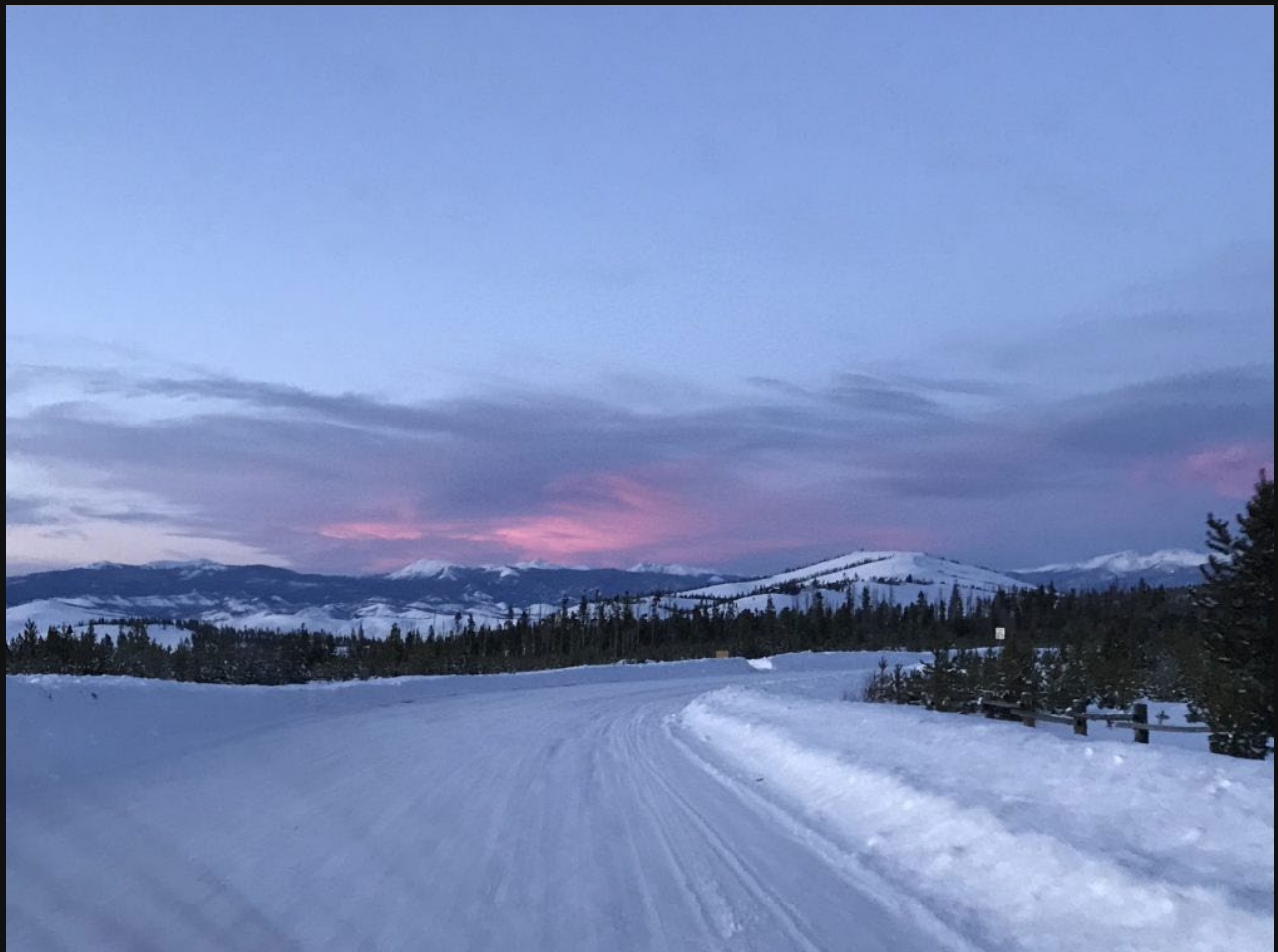
When I think of winter, I immediately visualize downhill skiing. After becoming hooked as a teenager, I'm programmed to set aside time for this vigorous outdoor activity every year. Once the leaves start falling from the trees, I start thinking about my first trip to the mountains. To broaden my scope of winter activities, I stepped outside of my comfort zone and tried cross country skiing last February at the [Latigo Ranch in Colorado](#). I was humbled when I quickly learned that decades of downhill skiing expertise was not transferable to this equally invigorating sport. This year, Grand County invited my husband, Ira and I to add a few more firsts to our list, along with a day of skiing at Winter Park Resort.

[Grand County](#) is located in the north-central Rocky Mountains, where the small towns of Granby, Fraser, Winter

Park, Kremmling, Grand Lake, and Hot Sulphur Springs are interconnected by scenic byways and mountain passes. Lakes, rivers, and mountain trails attract the summer crowds. Dog sledding, fat-tire biking, ice fishing, ice skating, sledding and tubing, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and sleigh rides draw the winter folks.

Snow Mountain Ranch

Unlike most ski resorts with a wide assortment of accommodations at the base, Winter Park Resort has fewer options. For our first trip to Winter Park, we stayed about 20 minutes away at the [Snow Mountain Ranch](#) in Granby (80 miles from Denver). Having never before experienced a YMCA facility, I didn't know what to expect.



Sunset at Snow Mountain Ranch, Grand County, Colorado

Cabins, lodges, and an assortment of other buildings are strategically placed on 5,000 majestic acres. From world-class athletes training for biathlons and cross-country ski racing, to families merely enjoying the outdoors, this site offers an abundance of year-round activities with reasonably priced lodge rooms and cabins. At the Indian Peaks Lodge, we had a simply decorated, spacious room with two queen beds, a balcony with a fantastic view of the Nordic ski area, and a clean bathroom. Our action-packed itinerary didn't permit time to indulge in the more than [120-kilometers of world-class terrain groomed for Nordic skiing](#), snowshoeing, and fat-tire biking.

Dog Sledding

We did, however, take advantage of the [onsite dog sledding facility](#) run by Chaplain Steven Peterson. Chaplain Peterson started dog sledding in 1998. As a lover of the outdoors, he frequently explored the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota with a dog by his side. After his dog passed away, Chaplain Peterson read about Nordic breeds that could handle pulling a pulk, a sled pulled by a person or a dog. Before he knew it, Chaplain Peterson had a team of Alaskan huskies to pull an old dog sled.

For more than a decade, Chaplain Peterson has been at Snow Mountain Ranch. From a handful of dogs, his program has grown to 20 dogs. All but one belongs to the chaplain. Surprisingly, these dogs are not very large. They are lean dogs with long legs and ample chests, bred for their endurance. Every fall, Chaplain Peterson trains mushers for his Snow Mountain Ranch program from a variety of backgrounds.



Dog Sledding at Snow Mountain Ranch, Grand County, Colorado. Pictured in [KÜHL W's Deflekt Hybrid Shell](#)

During my dog sledding experience, I shared an interesting conversation with a recent graduate from the University of Colorado-Boulder aerospace engineering program. I stood behind Kelsey Owens on thin rails as she took control of a team of nine dogs. Before her training began last fall, she had never been on a dogsled. By the time the dog sledding season began, Owens was up for the challenge.

At the front of the group was a lead dog followed by multiple tiers — point or swing dogs, team dogs, and then

wheel dogs. The team of dogs followed verbal commands as we moved through the rolling countryside surrounded by majestic, snow capped mountains. While the sled followed the contours of the snowy terrain, I had to keep centered over the runners so that I would not accidentally fall off or topple the sled. After this too brief introduction to dog sledding, I'm eager to try it again.

A Taste of Cajun

On the way to Winter Park, we sampled Cajun food at [Fontenot's Seafood and Grill](#), a restaurant that's been on the Winter Park dining scene for decades. Ira couldn't resist the shrimp po'boy, and I ordered the shrimp etouffee. Both were seasoned with a delicious assortment of spices with a significant kick.



Shrimp etouffee at Fontenot's Seafood and Grill

Grand Adventures Snowmobiling

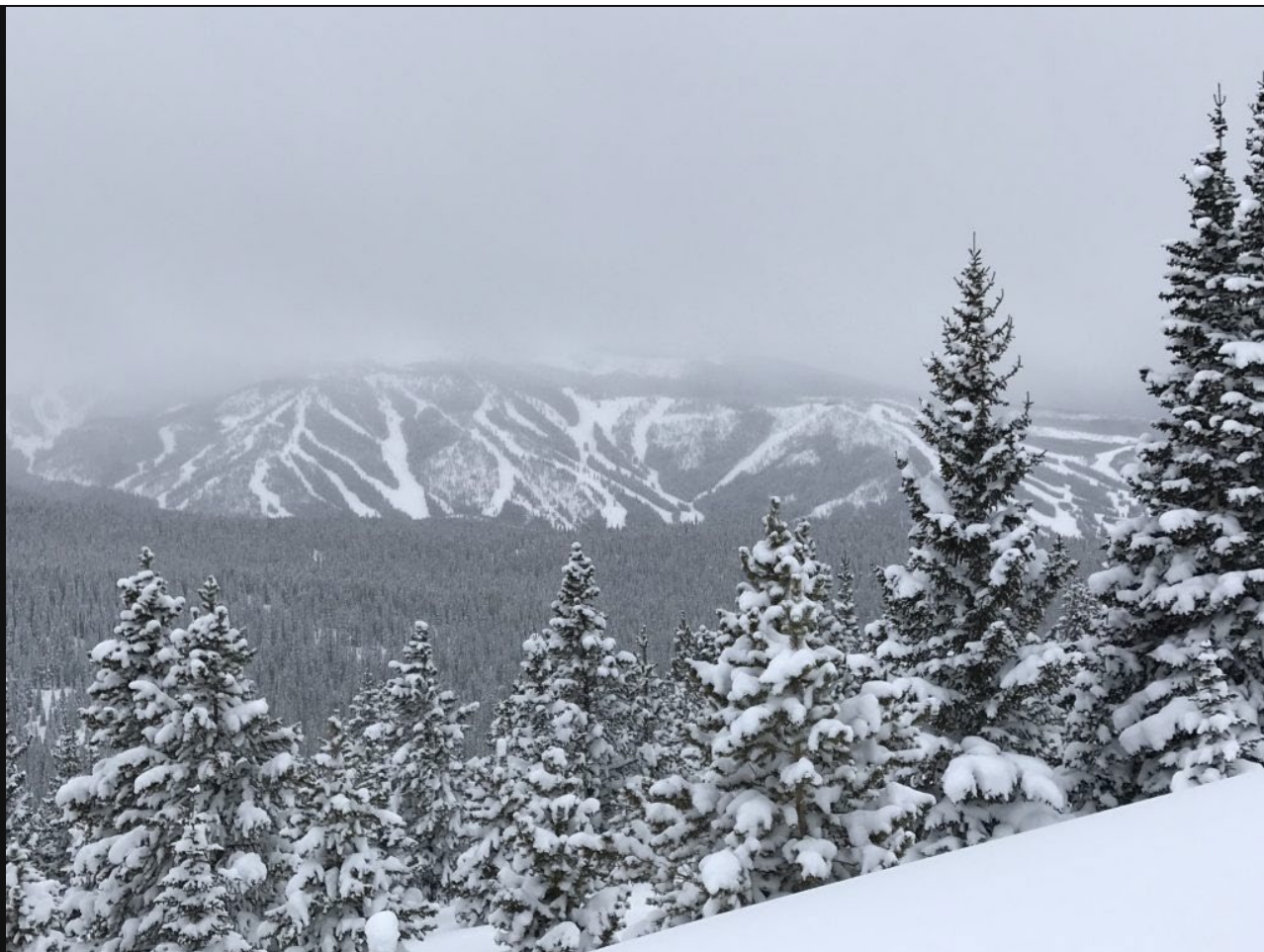
Next, we drove a short distance to the back of the Winter Park Mountain Lodge to join a [Grand Adventures snowmobiling tour](#). Grand Adventures has been operating since 1993 and now maintains about 100 miles of trails, mostly in the Arapahoe National Forest. Before arrival, we received helpful links preparing us for our adventure.

I was up for another first but was more comfortable being a passenger than driving my own vehicle. For two hours, we headed uphill with an elevation gain of approximately 3,000 feet. Our two-hour guided adventure with six other people covered about 24 miles on both double and single tracks. By taking a guided tour, we had the advantage of being escorted onto the more challenging single-track trails which were steeper, narrower, and weaved through tree-lined areas.



Sandy is all smiles despite the cold conditions on Grand Adventures snowmobiling tour

Even though overcast skies with intermittent snow diminished the quality of our panoramic view images, the weather conditions did not minimize the thrill associated with snowmobiling or the ability to partake in our mountain surroundings. The temperatures dipped as the late afternoon skies darkened. We occasionally stopped to record the moment with our phone's cameras and then quickly put our gloves back onto our freezing hands. Due to the uncooperative conditions, our view of the Continental Divide and the nearby ski mountain was less than ideal.



Cloudy view of Winter Park during snowmobiling tour

Along the way, we learned about local history. On Corona Pass Road, our guide mentioned that the roadway underneath the snow once connected Boulder to Winter Park. In 1990, a partial rock collapse at Needle's Eye Tunnel closed this famous thoroughfare. We also passed remnants of a railroad dating back to the early 20th century. David Moffat built the Denver Northwestern and Pacific Railway, a 24-mile standard-gauge railroad with 33 tunnels over Rollins Pass. Several years after the Moffat Tunnel was completed, the railroad was abandoned in the mid-1930s. Unsafe railroad trestles stand as a lasting reminder to this era.

At the end of our snowmobiling tour, my teeth were chattering uncontrollably. I would have to agree with Ryan Barwick, the owner of Grand Adventures, that it's imperative to dress for the conditions. I recommend adding a [base layer](#) like the [KÜHL Kaskade bottom](#) and [long-sleeve Krew top](#) on cold days. Barwick also urges participants to drive within their ability and to consider a weekday reservation to avoid crowds.

Dinner at Tabernash Tavern

On our way back to Snow Mountain Ranch, we dined at [Tabernash Tavern](#) in historic Tabernash. For over a decade, Chef Alberto Sapien has created unique dishes for locals and visitors. Fortunately, we had a reservation since most of the dozen or so tables were occupied when we were seated at 6 PM.

To help me defrost, I ordered a hot oatmeal cookie coffee drink. Despite its initial sweet taste, the combination of

coffee, Amaretto, Baileys, and Goldschlager provided internal warmth. By the time my order of Sea Scallops Milan arrived, I was defrosted. In the center of this dish is a mound of spinach and arugula salad surrounded by four jumbo sea scallops placed on top of porcini risotto cakes.



Sea Scallops Milan at Tabernash Tavern

With limited resources back at our lodge, we asked our server to pack up a serving of Quint Essential Chocolate Cake for later in the evening. Our chocolate cravings were completely satisfied with this dark chocolate cake topped with spicy Mexican chocolate ice cream.

Staying Outside the Resort

As snowflakes started to fall during our drive back to the Snow Mountain Ranch, we pondered the pros and cons of staying 20 minutes from Winter Park Resort. Snow and ice can make the dark, rural road unappealing for people coming from places that rarely have snow, whereas people comfortable with winter conditions will find the drive relatively easy.

The primary advantage of staying at the Snow Mountain Ranch is the fantastic grounds. Anyone interested in more than downhill skiing will be impressed with the number of onsite activities and diverse accommodations. An onsite cafeteria serves an all you can eat buffet for breakfast, lunch and dinner. However, the inconvenience of a lack of variety in dining options may make some question this choice. Visitors intent on downhill skiing at Winter Park Resort will need to either pay for premium parking or walk a distance from the free parking lots.

Downhill Skiing at Winter Park Resort

My love of downhill skiing was satisfied on our second day, when we explored a portion of the 166 trails and over 3,000 ski-able acres at [Winter Park Resort](#). This ski mountain opened in 1940. According to Winter Park Resort's promotional material, the resort is Colorado's longest continually operated ski resort. Several trails are named after people who had an impact on the area. On our first run, we skied down a trail that was named after the father of Winter Park Ski Area, George E. Cranmer.

Before lunch, we took advantage of no lift lines and skied non-stop. Shorter runs required taking an assortment of lifts as we tried to maximize our experience. As I review the trail map and recall our morning, I can single out several lifts— Eskimo Express, Prospector Express, Olympia Express, and Pioneer Express. To reach our predetermined midday stopping point, we took the High Lonesome Express to Lunch Rock. These lifts provided an abundance of Blue runs, mostly without moguls. We quickly learned to avoid Green Runs. The handful we tried were more like Nordic trails than downhill trails.



Sandy at Winter Park

We met our Winter Park liaison, Jen Miller, the Public Relations and Communications Manager at the resort, at the Lunch Rock on top of Mary Jane Mountain, where we feasted on tuna poke salads. Chunks of tuna on a bed of fresh greens, partially concealed by layers of green onions, sliced cucumbers, and pieces of avocado and then drizzled with a light dressing, was a great choice.

Even though Jen has only been in her position for a few months, she offered an abundance of interesting facts. Before this visit, I knew that the introduction of Mary Jane Mountain in the mid-1970s improved the Winter Park ski experience by offering more exciting terrain and increasing the size by 80%. However, I had no idea that Mary Jane had been a well-known madam in the 19th century.

After lunch, we accompanied Miller to the Panoramic Express. From the top of the lift, we followed her into the Parsenn Bowl. From this side of Mary Jane Mountain, we could ski along the outer edge on the Parry's Peak trail. We paused once or twice to take in the panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. For the remainder of the afternoon, we stayed on Mary Jane Mountain until we skied down. Unlike the day before, the skies were bright blue and offered a bit of thermal relief from the frosty temperatures.



Skiing down Mary Jane Mountain, Winter Park

Good Bye to Grand County

Our early 10 AM checkout did not allow time for any morning activities. Had there been more time, we would

have gladly ridden flat tire bicycles or checked out the cross-country ski trails. Instead, we followed the suggestion of a few locals and had a leisurely breakfast at Carvers in downtown Winter Park. With little time to spare, we packed our car and headed back home with incredible memories of two firsts and a bluebird ski day at Winter Park Resort.

*When Sandy Bornstein isn't trekking in Colorado or writing, she's [traveling with her husband Ira](#). After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Among other things, Sandy writes about family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences.*

Grand County Colorado Tourism Board, Snow Mountain Ranch, the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce, and Winter Park Resort hosted Sandy and Ira Bornstein during their two-night stay.



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