



# Seven Days in Snowboard Heaven

*In the beginning  
God created Jackson Hole*

by Dan Kozlowski

**My all-time best snowboard trip was the three years I spent in Jackson Hole.**

Working a cubicle and the corporate grind for an employer, pass, daily ride tickets and a full lot of backcountry gear made each morning in Three County just another vacation day. Open-gate bags left for the ski lift and bus, getting in 40 hours in Three Peaks, and weekend sessions at Grand Targhee were all regular parts of the day. Riding was my reason to rise in the morning and each new day was wonderfully similar to the one that came before. Inhaling the crisp winter air, I was drawn by the strange-day snowboard of each day and the mountain itself.

Now, with more words to write and more deadlines to hit, the history of 100-day sessions is no longer mine. An out-of-state address means almost no more ridge-top solitude on the groomed runs that shared broken trails, but every winter trip, I made the most of my temporary residence and change of heart. Three decades in winter days, the central in the backcountry can rarely be reached when the big mountain snow. So, for 20 years, when I had the desire to get away from Three Peaks, Jackson Hole was the only place in which an urban and suburban, can be so strong, as to be the 10th where it's being.

RESORT & TRAVEL

## Seven Days in Snowboard Heaven

### In the beginning, God created Jackson Hole.

Words: Dan Kostrzewski

My all-time-best snowboard trip was the three years I spent in Jackson Hole.

Trading a cubicle and the corporate grind for an employee pass, daily ride breaks and a full kit of backcountry gear made each morning in Teton County just another vacation day. Open-gate laps off Jackson's big red box, gravity-fed lines on Teton Pass, and snorkel sessions at Grand Targhee were all regular parts of the diet. Riding was my reason to rise in the morning and each new day was satisfyingly similar to the one that came before. Inhabiting this dreamy world, I was driven by the cravings of my snowboard id, much like any unrepentant addict.

Now, with more words to write and more deadlines to hit, the luxury of 100-day seasons is no longer mine. An out-of-state address makes annual homecomings my only refresher on the prime terrain this shred heaven holds, but every return trip, I make the most of my temporary window and charge it hard. Even limited to seven days, the vertical in Jackson's terrain can easily overstimulate the big mountain drive. So, for JH virgins who feel the desire to tap some true Teton satisfaction—but are hesitant to drop in blind—we share our sure-shot, one-week strategy on how to hit the Hole when it's firing.

#### Day One: Score First Box

Acclimating to the altitude can be done at baggage claim because, as day breaks on Day One, you should be charging up the Village Road to queue for first tram. Ownership is retiring Jackson's iconic tram at the end of this season, so winter '06 is your last chance—at least until \$25 million is squeezed from the Kemmerer family fist for a replacement—to score the first public box. And, all political brinkmanship, triple-chair rumors and subzero corral waits aside, nothing can compare to that fuzzy feeling when you stand shoulder-to-shoulder with 52 of your closest 12-minute friends, watch the doors shut tight for liftoff and mentally prepare for that first run down 4,139 continuous vertical feet of bliss.

The runs at the Village—as Jackson Hole Mountain Resort is known locally—are punishing in the length of their steep and sustained pitch. Ease in by hitting the bowls off Rendezvous, Cheyenne, Laramie, and Saratoga in order, and riding back up the respective quads of the last three. Then, legs willing, sign on for a nonstop screamer down the legendary Hobacks or alluring Lower Faces back to the tram dock. When your game is on, head for the in-bounds gnarl that made Jackson famous, picking a line through the Alta, Expert, and Mushroom chutes, then dropping into Goldminer, Paintbrush-to-Toilet-Bowl, and Bird-in-the-Hand in alternating succession.

Lines of this caliber will leave the pulse elevated and the quads crying, but top off the vertical tally with a few hot-box tree runs off the Bridger Gondola or some stock spinning and sliding in JP Martin's smooth-rhythm park below the South Pass Traverse on Après Vous. Confined to a small, sloped space, the sculpted terrain aligns with a natural flow and offers multiple feature-to-feature permutations for maximum fun. A final go-big temptation, the pristine 600-foot Zaugg-cut Superpipe sits adjacent the park as one last diversion. When the chairs do stop spinning, start resting for the reprise on Day Two.

### **Day Two: Head out the Gate**

Jackson's backcountry is a mindblower and Day Two—when your step still has spring—is the time for firsthand confirmation. Before heading through the access gate, be warned: this OB terrain is severe, getting cliffed-out 100 feet from the deck is entirely possible and the avy danger is very real. Fatalities occur and respect is warranted. Unless you have the skills, the gear and a partner who knows the lines, keep it inside the ropes. An even smarter option is to sign up for the services of the JMHR alpine guides. A half-day with the overqualified guides (\$415) will get you avy gear, score you an early pre-public tram and lead you safely into prime lines in the 3,000 acre, tram-accessed backcountry.

If you do exit the area after checking the daily avy forecast (307-733-2664), start with a hike up the Headwall and drop back into the controlled terrain of Casper Bowl or the newly legal Craggs for a tantalizing appetizer. Number two on the tick list should be a trio of 3,000 foot laps from the lower Rock Springs gate into the canyon of the same name, which unrolls a red-carpet, no-hike backcountry run that finds re-entry in the lower Hobacks. If you hook up with someone who knows the way, an afternoon bootpack to Four Pines or a scenic bluebird slog up Cody Peak and return through Cody Bowl to Pinedale will provide a close-up of the towering Teton backcountry. Know the line, exit and exposure of each run or your trip might end with an unplanned visit to the on-mountain clinic in the Cody House.

### **Day Three: Hike the Pass**

Even without self-inflicted injury, your wallet will be hurting from consecutive \$70 per day tickets, so self-ascent may be the best call on Day Three. The ski hill is only a small sample of the riding in Jackson, and Teton Pass is the next must-ride destination. Even though hikes start right from the parking lot at the 8,341-foot crest of Highway 22, the terrain rates high on the danger scale. Slides happen frighteningly often here, and more than a few burials have occurred within plain sight of the road, so arrive prepared, partnered and cautious with reliable data about the routes. Deep days and/or Saturdays see the lot fill quickly, so come early and carpool or catch the new Backcountry.com shuttle in Wilson, which operates free on weekends.

For run one, test those sea-level lungs in the strength-sapping bootpack up 10,086 foot Mt Glory. Drink early and often, and get amped when you pass under the First Turn landmark of the stickered high-frequency tower. Take a quick breather in the stoner shelter up top (universally recognizable by its prayer flags and rescue cache) and pick a rewarding return line. Dropping toward the valley into the full-throttle runs of Twin Slides or Glory Bowl will spit you out a short walk from the lot, while a longer leftside descent down the Coal Creek drainage will send you spiraling on a goofy-foot toeside toward Idaho. A hold-on-tight ride out Coal Creek's exit track will dump out at the highway, where thumbing it back up top completes the cycle.

On the other side of the plowed lot lies the prime skinning terrain of the Pass Ridge. The options here are plentiful—but so is the competition, with roving alpha packs of tele-skiers who would rather not see their set tracks postholed, so please help keep the peace. Immediately skinner's right from the lot is the split-board yo-yo terrain of Edelweiss, while striking out straight south presents, in order, the quick hits of Tele-Bowl (which should be rechristened Silly Kicker Bowl), the fall-away lines of Chivers Ridge, or the sweet shots of the Bearclaw. These fun lines funnel into a gravity-fed trickle out the snowpacked Old Pass Road, which ends near where Highway 22 begins the climb. After a few of these crest-to-valley runs it will no doubt be beer-thirty, so crawl into the welcoming roadside arms of the Stagecoach Bar.

#### **Day Four: Mechanized Access**

After two hard days of hiking, self-ascent may be losing its luster, which makes Day Four the perfect time to throw down for mechanized backcountry access. If the grand-a-day tag for High Mountain Heli is unobtainable, head to Togwotee Mountain Lodge (800-543-2847) for diesel-powered cat-skiing straddling the Continental Divide (\$295). At 9,631 feet, Jackson's other pass has long been a favorite for sled-powered pro riders due to its high-elevation seclusion, harder-to-tap reserves and craggy photogenic terrain. Climbing into the lone Bombardier for miles around with seven other lucky souls will instantly make this nectar section of the Absorkas your private high-mountain paradise. The operational pace in this zone is chronically unrushed and stunning IMAX views of the Teton Range alone make day four's northerly diversion worth the extra road miles.

Run through Togwotee Mountain Lodge, the newly permitted terrain covers 750 square acres of the 10,205 foot and varied aspect Angle Mountain. The operation is expertly guided by snowboarder Jamie Weeks, who has led the way for one- and two-plankers at the Jackson Hole Ski Resort and Alaska's Valdez Heli Ski Guides for the past seven years. Fully certified, Weeks has also coached at Jackson's Steep and Deep Camp and is a co-founder of the Chugach-based Steeper and Deeper Camp. If the feline ride alone doesn't satisfy, another high-horsepower option is revving up one of TML's 50 long-track sleds for a customized access mission to choice lines in the deeper Togwotee backcountry. Either way, top the day off with a rare slab of game and a frosty domestic beer at the lodge's Red Fox Saloon, whose slogan advises you not to trust anyone under 8,500 feet.

#### **Day Five: Shred the 'Ghee**

Lurking at the quiet edge of Tetonia is the JH alter ego of Grand Targhee. Even though it sits in the shadow of high-profile Jackson Hole, it is no secret that the 'Ghee gets pounded with high-purity pow (504 annual inches to Jackson's 402) and rarely draws a crowd. Storms tend to stack up on the west side and unload on this under-attended resort, while accumulation in Jackson is stalling at dust on crust. Day Five—or any day where a swallowtail is the stick to mount—is a great time to rip into this Wyo resort. For visitors without wheels, the Targhee Express will line up a ticket and 45-mile roundtrip bus ride from Teton Village for a full-meal \$69 deal.

The terrain at Targhee is lower angle, but feels soulful and surfy with fun features, stealth glades and slashes galore. The 'Ghee has also taken a freeform approach to big air by funding an ambitious crew that hand-shapes naturally occurring hips and kickers littered around the runs. For high-probability untracked, hit the new Sacagawea lift—nicknamed the Sac—that has opened up steeper lines such as Das Boat and Toilet Bowl down to the Teton Vista Traverse, and tapped solitary shots in what was previously a cat-only area that holds untracked hours after first chair.

A high-reward bootpack runs seductively up Mary's Nipple—which has officially lost her nipple in resort nomenclature to placate overzealous Mormon censors in the Victor Valley. To mourn, stop slopeside at the Trap Bar and Grill and have a pint with friendly non-Mo locals. On the return, stop in Victor both for high-altitude provisions at Habitat (208-787-SNOW) and authentic order-in-Spanglish Mexican fare at El Rosal Market next door.

#### **Day Six: Get in Deep**

If you have a few more days to burn before departure, stay on the Victor side and embark on an overnight trip into the Jeddidah Smith Wilderness through Rendezvous Backcountry Tours (877-754-4887) on Day Six. The self-

ascent specialists serve up panoramic riding terrain surrounding their Baldy Knoll Yurt operation and provide a handheld entry into higher-mileage touring in the three best Teton backcountry zones.

All of the yurts are easily approached on split-board, short skis or snowshoes and are stocked with bedding, cook gear, crank-up radios and cords of firewood, making them a plush introduction to winter backwoods living. The popular three-day, snowboard-only yurt trip runs \$550 per person including the guide. If just one day remains on the itinerary, try their 101-level alpinist intro to vertical gain with a one-run, 3,000 foot ascent of 25-short or Mt Albright in Grand Teton National Park.

### **Day Seven: Head Home**

Wake up late, circle around town and RSVP on a return reservation, while your legs thank you for a respite from the nonstop abuse. Load up on Western-themed trinkets, go spotting for bull moose and snapshot the spectacular Tetons in your mind. Think briefly of moving here; think better of it after weighing the occupational, financial and monastic sacrifices required to make it happen. Log this pilgrimage in the internal hard drive and catch that direct flight back to reality. Count yourself both lucky and cursed because, like the legions addicted to the divine riding in Jackson Hole, you will find yourself landing back here before long.

### **UnResort & Travel: Jackson Hole**

Hit up the King: Jackson's best-kept vertical secret is Snow King. Located in the town grid, this steep three-chair ski hill, which hosts the Town Downhill March 10-12 for bragging rights and the sledneck Hill Climb for beer-fueled spectating from March 23-26, is home to 1,571 vertical feet of north-facing slopes. With night riding for only \$15, the town hill provides a cheap chaser to a good double shot of riding. The King also furnishes plenty of adult entertainment with a well-lit tubing run, outdoor broomball rink and '80s-era slopeside bar in the Shady Lady.

Root on the Moose: Cheering on Jackson's senior-A hockey team is a blast, especially when for only eight bucks-plus three for the beer—you're banging on the glass, insulting the arch-rival Sun Valley Suns and witnessing an inevitable melee on the ice. At this highest level of amateur hockey, the team plays for the love and is comprised of an even mix of locals (always with a few NCAA standouts and the occasional former NHL'er) who reside in Jackson to ski, ride and skate. The team's Friday and Saturday night home games pack the Snow King Center to its 1,000-plus capacity with rowdy locals, who get rowdier at 43 North after the game.

Sample Fine Fare: For a break from burgers and fries, the options in Jackson are many. Spending a Franklin on dinner is easy in America's wealthiest zip code, especially at the haunts in sight of the antler-arched town square. As an alternative, try the nice-but-reasonable spots the locals frequent such as the Rendezvous Bistro (739-1100), Thai Me Up (733-0003), or Masa Sushi (733-2962). For breakfast—all day long on weekends—head to Nora's Fish Creek Inn in Wilson (733-8288) for stellar huevous and thick bacon.

Go VC: Located next to the tram dock and two floors below Teton Gravity Research headquarters, this self-contained hideaway is the best place to get coffee in the morning, a Thai Wrap at lunch and unwind with a pint at the end of a sick day. The Mangy Moose gets all the press and is a better place to rage with Southern-drawl snow bunnies at night, but the Village Cafe provides an authentic après experience that caters to understated rippers, implanted JH fixtures and convincing pretenders who can talk smack like pros.

Disco at the Coach: The Cowboy Bar is overpriced and overrated. For a real WYO bar head to the Stagecoach, which sits at the base of Teton Pass in Wilson. This bar crawls with all kinds, from Idaho-bound day laborers and weathered ski patrollers to wealthy Fish Creek homeowners and one-week wonders from NYC. For more than three decades the Stagecoach Band—now fronted by my former landlord Phil Round—has served up classic cowboy country on Sunday nights, but the best time to go is Thursday's Disco Night, which draws a diverse crowd in '70s-themed attire. The bar also has a Shake-a-Day dice game where you can roll for a free round and a drive-through window for packaged liquor sales since the cowboy state is still a stubborn open-container holdout when it comes to one for the road.

To the Hot Springs: Few places in this world are as spectacular as Yellowstone, but during winter the south entrance is closed to car traffic. A fun rest-day diversion (and a great way to make things right after ditching your girlfriend in the Hobacks) is to head to Huckleberry Hot Springs. Near Flagg Ranch Resort, which sits 55 miles north of Jackson at the end of the plowed road, the undeveloped springs are a mile walk up a packed riverside trail from the paved lot. The drive through Grand Teton Park is spectacular and the dip is worth the mileage, especially if your party is coed. Flagg Ranch (800-443-2311) also offers guided four-stroke sled tours to Old Faithful for \$230 per person. Watch out for wildlife if you go.

Stop at Hole in the Wall: To fix a broken strap or buy new boots, Hole in the Wall (307-739-2689) is hands down the best shop in town and has a lift-side location at the base of the gondola. Get geared up with a backcountry kit, demo a longer powder gun or just shoot the shit with Duncan and Chris, the two ripping, gear-savvy riders who run the show. And remind them that they are blessed—like I was for those three sick seasons—with the best job in snowboarding.