

WESTERN WYOMING: WHERE TO RIDE

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SNOWEST



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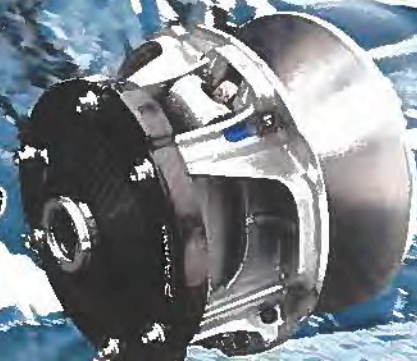
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BY LANE LINDSTROM

A NEARLY PERFECT SLEDDING TRIP TO BROOKS LAKE LODGE

There are many places in the West where there is a perfect mix of the right snow conditions, over-the-top scenery, varied terrain, good trails and excellent services.

But there are fewer places where all those variables work seamlessly to provide the almost perfect snowmobile trip. We say "almost" because we're not sure we have had the "perfect" snowmobile trip yet.

Our two-day ride at Brooks Lake Lodge in western Wyoming came oh so close last February though. Actually,

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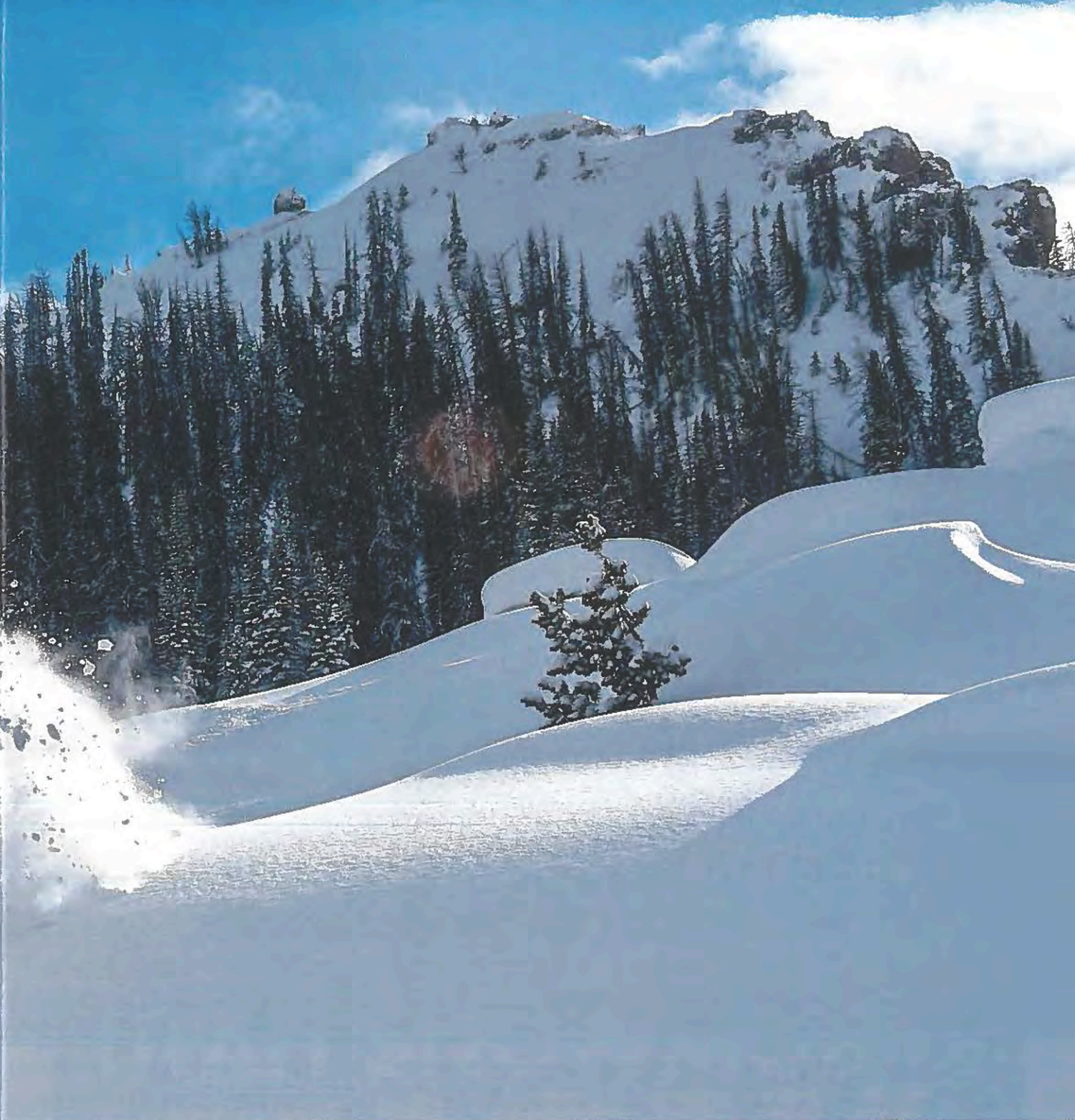
when we think back to that trip and try to think of what was lacking, we're hard pressed to put a finger on it. Maybe it was that our trip finally came to an end and we had to head home.

We had fresh snow each day we rode. And while we rode at times in monster blizzards (yes, that's with an "s"), the sun did peak out occasionally and the stunning mountain views that surrounded us were revealed. Brooks Lake Lodge (www.brookslake.com) accommodations and food are a cut above the rest. The terrain is fun and

varied and we were able to cover a lot of ground because we were able to tag along with one of Brooks Lake Lodge's guides, Skinner Bell, who has been guiding for 27 years—the past 16 at the lodge—and knows the area inside and out. Even though we didn't spend much time on the groomed trails, the trails we did ride were in good shape, especially considering the recent snowfall.

360-DEGREE EXPERIENCE

Even though we never strayed very far miles-wise from the lodge,



we were still able to experience lots of untouched snow and get a near 360-degree sweeping experience over the two days.

And it all started when we pulled into the parking lot just off U.S. Highway 26/287 just east of Togwotee Pass (elevation 9,659 feet). We were met there by one of Brooks Lake Lodge's employees who carried most of our gear in a sleigh the five miles to the lodge. We trailed along on our Ski-Doo Summit. You gain about a thousand feet from the parking lot to the lodge, which

sits at 9,200 feet. The road between the parking lot and lodge is closed in the winter and the only way in (or out) is via snowmobile or a tracked van.

We arrived at the lodge on Super Bowl Sunday and it was a pretty festive place during and after the game.

The lodge sits on the shores of Brooks Lake and between Brooks Mountain and The Pinnacles. What a perfect setting for a lodge and a great base camp to explore the area on snowmobile.

Monday after an amazing breakfast in the lodge's dining hall, we brushed

the several inches of new snow off our sled and headed out with Bell, crossing Brooks Lake and heading a bit north and west of the lodge. We experienced a fair amount of snowfall on our way to what the locals call Proposal Point, which sits on the edge of a mountain and offers an awesome view of the lake, lodge and surrounding mountains ... except that day when it was pretty much socked in. We would later return to that same spot after the clouds had lifted and indeed it a spectacular view.



BROOKS LAKE LODGE SNOWMOBILING

PASSING THROUGH THE PASS

After lunch we kind of headed the opposite direction, leaving the lodge and heading south and then west—this was the part of the trip where we jumped on the groomed trail (Forest Road 515) for a little while. We jumped off the trail at Wind River Lake and headed toward Sublette Pass, which sits literally in the shadow of Sublette Peak (10,537 feet). It snowed early in the afternoon but then stopped and the clouds lifted so we could see not only Sublette Peak but also Brooks Mountain. The pass goes between Brooks Mountain and Sublette Peak. What a great and fun place to ride. It wasn't overly technical but thankfully we were

with Bell and he knew how to navigate off the mountain through a field of car- and truck-sized boulders. The snow was soooo deep.

At day's end, we had 32 new miles on the odometer and had climbed past 10,000 feet.

We were pretty tuckered out but only that much more excited for day two.

More new snow overnight and fewer clouds made day two even more spectacular than day one's ride.

On day two, Brooks Lake Lodge general manager Adam Long rode with Bell and me. We again crossed the lake (which is 234 square acres big) and headed straight toward Brooks Mountain, which is more of a long

north/south mountain ridge than a single peak. We rode safely away from any avalanche danger zones but it still towered over us as we rode along the base, poking in and out of the trees. Again, the snow was near perfect with plenty of powder. Our afternoon ride was much the same but we ventured farther north as far as Upper Jade Lake, which is tucked away in the trees at the base of Brooks Mountain.

THE PINNACLE OF VIEWS

There were plenty of places we got out of the trees enough to see across the high mountain valley to The Pinnacles across the way. The afternoon ride was full of elevation changes, small



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drainages, tree running and a couple of pretty good stucks. One time we stepped off our sled on a hillside above Upper Jade Lake and sunk to our chest in the deep powder.

One of day two's adventures was on a ledge above Brooks Lake that had a several-hundred-foot drop on one side and tight trees on the other. It wasn't really a sled-width wide where we were trying to get through, but Bell managed to mountain goat us through this stretch. Good times.

At the end of day two we dialed up about 30 miles and lots of memories.

As mentioned, we did bring our own sled but Brooks Lake Lodge offers Ski-Doo and Polaris snowmobile rentals. The lodge is pretty much all-inclusive, meaning all meals are included in the price, as are the snowmobile and ice fishing guides. The lodge has seven rooms and there are eight cabins (we stayed in one of the cabins) on the property. There is also a spa, dry spa, 20-plus person hot tub and workout room.

The main lodge, which was built in 1922 by the same company that built Old Faithful Lodge, is the hub of activity on the property. That's where the check-in desk, bar, dining room, tea room (tea and treats are served every day at 4:30 p.m.) and lodge rooms are. You may have heard there was a fire at the lodge this past summer (July 28) but Long told us it will all be fixed



and ready for the winter season, which begins Dec. 20. "The dining room and tea room were affected," Long said. "But that should be functional for the winter season as long as construction and Mother Nature all work out."

We wish them good luck because

the lodge is a big part of the snowmobile experience in this area. It should be noted, even if you're not staying at the lodge, the dining room is open to the public for lunch (11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.) every day. Several riders stopped at the lodge for lunch during our two-day visit. ❄️



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