

NEXT WEEKEND: 17 GREAT GETAWAYS NEAR YOU

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# LODGING TIME

IT'S ACTION BY DAY, COMFORT BY NIGHT AT THESE  
**10 TOP WINTER HIDEAWAYS**

layered up liked a *pousse-café*. The steel edges on my new (waxless) Karhus were sharp. Despite the extreme cold, I felt ready and eager. And, like the man said, we'd warm up once we got started.

"How long is this leg?" I asked and introduced myself.

"Sixteen miles," he said and told me his name was Dave Stewart.

"I'm the trail chief for this section," he added like this was no big deal. But I was impressed. The Catamount Trail, I knew, got by on an austere budget. The work gets done by volunteers like Stewart.

Finally, at a little after eight, a couple dozen of us started out. Within a few minutes, the stronger skiers had moved ahead and the rest of us were strung out behind them in a long, ragged column. The trail crossed an open field, then entered the woods and began a gradual climb. The hill was just enough of a workout that in five minutes, I didn't notice the cold and could hear, and see, my own breathing as I worked to plant a ski, place a pole, kick and glide, and eventually find my rhythm.

Dave Stewart and I traveled side by side for a while. He skied so fluidly, he might have been walking. After a while, he moved ahead, leaving me to ski alone through hardwood forest for three or four more miles before I emerged from the trees and crossed Sugar Hill Reservoir Dam. The morning had warmed just a little, and I stopped to take a picture and drink some hot tea. It was one of those winter days when the stillness itself seems to have substance, there is a kind of purity to the air, and you can see and hear for miles. One of those days that makes skiing alone through the woods seem like a sort of grace.

When I got to my lunch spot at the Rikert Ski Touring Center, several miles short of Rip-ton, its little room was filled with packs and the smell of wet wool steaming in front of a woodstove. There was hot cider and chili. My feet felt light without the skis. I asked Stewart, who had beat me by a good while, if he had ever skied the entire trail.

"Not yet," he said. "I'm pretty busy with just this section. But I might get around to it one day. How about you?"

"Working on it," I said. This day put me almost exactly halfway there. Just takes time, I thought. And snow. And, after all, what's the hurry? Canada isn't going anywhere. ▲

## (Ski In)

### THOMPSON PASS MOUNTAIN CHALET

WHERE: 25 miles north of Valdez, Alaska.

WHY: Heli-ski terrain on a tele-ski budget.

Matt Kinney, owner of this modest pitched-roof cabin, enjoys skiing the nastiest of the nasties: 45-degree steeps, crevasse-cut glaciers, couloirs the width of a Volkswagen bus. But he also likes wide-open cruisers and easy tree runs, and it irks him that outsiders don't know that this mild stuff exists in the Chugach Mountains. Blame it on ski videos, on extreme-ski championships, on Red Bull. "Anybody of any ski ability can come and ski the Chugach," Kinney says. "There's as much intermediate terrain here as there is expert terrain." And there's just so much terrain. The Chalet is located on the edge of the 5.6-million-acre Chugach National Forest. The area immediately around the hut gets about 200 inches of annual snowfall; after hiking up a couple of hours, you're in thousand-plus territory. COST: Three days with a guide is \$435 per person for a group of four. CONTACT: 907-835-4817; [www.alaska.net/~chalet](http://www.alaska.net/~chalet).

CHUGACH MOUNTAINS, ALASKA



NEAR SHRINE MOUNTAIN INN, COLORADO



## (Ski In)

### SHRINE MOUNTAIN INN

WHERE: 17 miles south of Vail, Colorado.

WHY: The scenery and ski terrain of Vail—minus the crowds and clutter.

The soldiers of the U.S. Army's Tenth Mountain Division skied, slept, and fought mock battles in the Colorado Rockies, dodging avalanches and fighting frostbite all the while. Fortunately, much has been done since the WWII era to enhance the comforts of winter stays in the high country. Case in point: The Shrine Mountain Inn, located an easy three-mile ski from the Vail Pass Trailhead, and ideal for intermediate skiers heading out for their first back-country hut stay. The term "hut" is a gross understatement here. Shrine Mountain consists of three roomy cabins, each with a large deck, and has a communal wood-fired sauna. The best nearby skiing is the 1.7-mile trip to the top of Shrine Ridge. "The views can't be beat, especially for the low work required

HANNAGAN MEADOW LODGE, ARIZONA



## (Drive In)

### HANNAGAN MEADOW LODGE

WHERE: 22 miles south of Alpine, in eastern Arizona.

WHY: Every visitor hears wolves. A lucky few see them.

The Coronado Trail Scenic Byway snakes through more than 400 turns in the White Mountains between Alpine and Morenci, Arizona. In those 86 miles, the Hannagan Meadow Lodge is one of very few signs of civilization. The lodge and its eight fire-warmed log cabins are a place apart: You can get away with toting a foot-long Bowie knife (resident guide Nick Ramon does), and the property serves as gateway to some of the most beautiful cross-country ski terrain in the Southwest. "With our high elevation—9,100 feet—we often have the first, last, and best snowfall in Arizona," says lodge co-owner Tessa Waite. Skiers

NEAR CASCADE LODGE, MINNESOTA



can explore 16 miles of groomed trails through sweeping meadows and pine forests; the nearby Blue Range Primitive Area has hundreds of miles of ungroomed routes. Near the lodge, keep watch for Mexican gray wolves, reintroduced in 1998. COST: \$70 and up. CONTACT: 928-428-2225; [www.hannaganmeadow.com](http://www.hannaganmeadow.com).

## (Drive In)

### CASCADE LODGE

WHERE: A hundred miles north-east of Duluth, Minnesota.

WHY: Huge hills plus huge lake equals Superior views.

Surrounded by forest and fronted by Lake Superior, the 1927 Cascade Lodge is one of the North Shore's oldest resorts. The main lodge looks out on the water; a handful of log cabins sit by Cascade Creek. Most guests come to this remote outpost to ski the 150 miles of interconnected groomed Nordic tracks in the area. COST: \$85 and up. CONTACT: 800-322-9543; [www.cascadelodgeinn.com](http://www.cascadelodgeinn.com).

PHOTOGRAPHS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: GREG VON DOENSTEN; BENE GLADEN/COURTESY OF CASCADE LODGE; COURTESY OF HANNAGAN MEADOW LODGE; SCOTT CRAMER

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