

Explore the high mountain wilderness in Alpine

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The Independent

ALPINE — The village of Alpine and surrounding country are often referred to as "The Alps of Arizona." At altitudes ranging from 8,000-11,000 feet, visitors will find a surprisingly unspoiled atmosphere in this far eastern part of the White Mountains.

For a few miles farther and a few minutes more, you will find what the White Mountains used to be — quiet communities in the midst of vast forests of spruce, pine and fir. On top of the Mogollon Rim, Alpine retains its small-town charm while offering a feast of winter activities.

There are plenty of places to stay in and around Alpine. Lodging and restaurants are available in town and at Hannagan Meadow. Your basic needs can be met in town where you'll find a market, hardware store, cafes, taverns and gas stations. According to the Alpine Chamber of Commerce, "If we don't have it, you probably don't need it."

Alpine is one of the White Mountains main centers for cross country skiing. Ski rentals are available in both Alpine and Eagar.

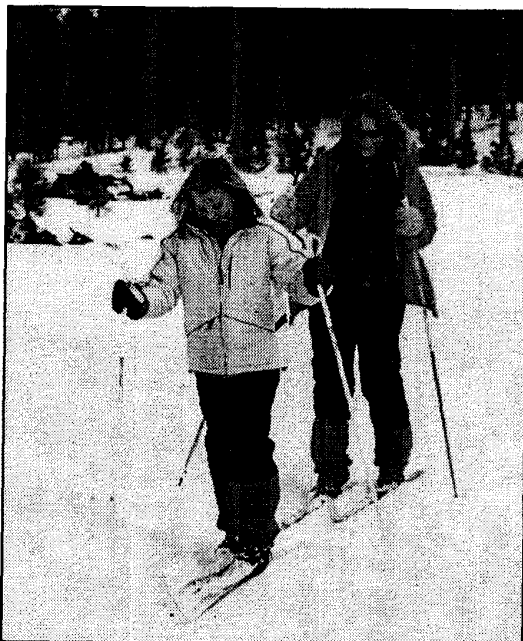
Those who want to experience the true beauty of the mountains in a natural way may choose the Williams Valley Winter Sports Area northwest of Alpine. To get there, take U.S. Highway 191 for 1.5 miles north of Alpine, and turn west for 4.5 miles on Forest Road 249. The forest road is not plowed during storms.

There is a non-motorized area for Nordic skiers who prefer the silence of the winter woods. Slopes are rated moderate to gentle, and turns are gradual on most of the ski trails. Twenty kilometers of trails are maintained for both striding and skating by the Alpine Ranger District.

For family fun, try Toboggan Hill. A not-too-difficult climb will earn you a speedy ride to the bottom on sleds, tubes and toboggans.

Snowmobilers have their own area to the west of the non-motorized area. Snowmobile routes cover more than 100 miles, going through unspoiled forests and meadows all the way to Sunrise Trailhead and Hannagan Meadow. The staging area for your snowmobile experience is from FR 249.

While you are in the neighborhood, it is worth driving another 23 miles on U.S. 191 to experience the Hannagan Meadow Winter Recreation Area. Groomed ski trails are narrower than those of Williams Valley. The 14 kilometers of trails are suitable for all levels of



cross-country skiers, with more trails for advanced skiers than Williams Valley.

You'll find some of the best remote area skiing in the Southwest on the trails leading into the Blue Range Primitive Area. They are only for the brave, however. Advanced skiers with snow camping skills will find this area pristinely rewarding. You'll need to pick up an Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests map at a ranger station if you spend much time in the back country.

Snowmobilers can see a lot of forest and mountain to the west of Hannagan Meadow by following marked forest roads. Snowmobiles are not allowed on Nordic ski trails, or in the Blue Range Primitive Area and Wilderness areas.

New trailheads with toilet facilities were constructed at both Williams Valley and Hannagan Meadow in 1995 from Arizona State Parks Off-Highway Vehicle Funds.

Providing there is enough snow, Alpine hosts the southern-most dog sled competition in North America in January. It is a sanctioned event, held at Williams Valley, and often has up to 50 teams competing. Check with the Chamber of Commerce to see if this is happening.

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