

Veggie Tour - Imagine a Town

Contributed by Conor Hurley
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11/19/06-11/26/06 ~ West Yellowstone, Montana. It is 7 p.m. Sunday night. I've been on the road for exactly one week—though it seems like an eternity has passed since I climbed into my car and bid farewell to my home and friends. After crossing the Montana, I arrived at the West Yellowstone Ski Festival on Wednesday.

The Veggie Road

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Imagine A Town

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West Yellowstone, Montana

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Me driving somewhere in Minnesota with a window wide open and not all that warm.

I had a bunch of friends that were going to be here, so I figured it was a great place to kick off my trip. Not to mention, it would make for a lonely holiday if I spent Thanksgiving eating beans out of a can by myself. All kidding aside, the reason everyone comes out here is for the legendary snow and skiing. This year is no exception.

Imagine a town full of 4,000 spandex wearing, heart rate calculating, carbo-loading Nordic skiers. Well, that is what West Yellowstone, MT is like during the week of Thanksgiving. It's actually quite an amazing sight. For nearly 30 years, Nordic skiers have shunned their families and spent Thanksgivings here at the West Yellowstone Ski Festival.

After crossing South Dakota and the better part of Montana in 60° weather, I began to wonder if the same problem plaguing the East had hit the West as well. However, that all changed in the 89 miles that separate Bozeman from West Yellowstone. As I headed south along Rte. 191, the temperature plunged and snow started to appear on the ground. By the time I reached West Yellowstone, the streets were snow-packed and winter was in full swing.

Skiers of all ages and abilities flock to the small town situated on Yellowstone's western border. While world class racers and novices flood the 40-some-odd kilometers of groomed trails located just outside town, one can easily find peace and solitude while skiing in Yellowstone Park. More often than not, you'll find yourself skiing to the trails on the town's snow packed streets.

On Thanksgiving Day, I gave my thanks not for turkey, stuffing or gravy, but for the 4 or 5 inches of powder that the snow gods dumped on West Yellowstone. While the rest of Americans were just about to loosen their belts in preparation for dessert, I was out skiing in Yellowstone National Park. Since dogs are not permitted on any of the trails in the park, Ealu and I skied on the road that runs along the Madison River.

On Friday my new G3 Ascents showed up. I was now faced with a mounting dilemma. I did not have the proper jig drill, so I looked around town for a ski shop.

Kelly and Melissa, the owners of "Free Heel and Wheel" are two energetic and enthusiastic people who will take you out one of their busiest days of the year to talk to you about their town. It's home to not only a ski and bike shop, but also houses a hopping coffee bar that serves some great locally roasted espresso. Hiding in the back of the shop, you will find Thor: wax tech, bartender by night, and cross-country skier by day—truly a cool guy who sports "klistor" on his Montana license plate.

To say it nicely, Thor doesn't think much of snowmobilers. One time he caught a snowmobiler machining one of the local Nordic ski trails. Wielding his ski pole, he stopped the "biler and at pole point demanded his name and

registration number. After a \$280 fine, I don't think that guy will dare to drive his sled on a Nordic ski trail ever again.

After talking to all of them for a bit, Melissa mentioned that her husband Dan might want to go skiing on Sunday. So this morning, I showed up at the shop at about 8:30 to meet Dan and go skiing in the Centennial Mountains near the Continental Divide. Apparently, the "Early Bird" stash we hit up today was by his standards, early season, thin cover snow (4-5" of fluff on top of a 2-3' base). By mine, it was an unbelievable powder day. I guess I'll have to get used to this Western skiing, as every day so far has been a 10 in my book!

Dan is a phenomenal backcountry skier with a positive outlook on life, and is a self-proclaimed powder addict. With 15 years of backcountry skiing in the area Dan has a tremendous knowledge of where the skiing is good and where the skiing is dangerous. Today we played it safe and had a great time.

Apparently the West Yellowstone I saw is incredibly different than the town it turns into in a month or so. As the N. skiers leave, their beds are filled by an invasion of snowmobilers. With millions of acres of public land in the area, snowmobilers feel the need to shred just about every last inch of the beautiful wilderness.

According to locals, it is hard to find good skiing untouched by snowmobilers. Snowmobile access to Yellowstone is limited to four stroke machines; however the surrounding areas are still open to their noisy, pollution spewing predecessors. As the winter goes on, finding places that have been untouched by snowmobiles becomes harder and harder. In a nation that is plagued by obesity, would it be such a bad thing if more people got off those noisy machines and took a nice ski through the woods?

As the first chapter of my trip comes to a close, I can't help but think about what lies in store for me next. Tomorrow I am heading back up to Bozeman, MT where I will get some vegetable oil and fuel filters. From there I will be heading up to Nakusp, BC, where I will meet up with Aaron Cooperman of Sol Mountain Touring. The latest report is that there are 270 cm of snow on the ground and another big dump is supposed to arrive in the next few days. As my new friend Dan said today, "I guess you are going to have to come up with a rating scale that goes to 100, if you think today was a 10." Well, that may be the case, but any day that you can spend on skis will always be a 10 to me.

Over looking Custer's Last Stand...Where the West was taken, Eastern Montana Little Big Horn Battle Field.

Ealu making sure the madison River isn't going to over flow, Yellowstone National Park.

Super Tour Sprint Races, University of Utah skier and ultimately the race winner.

West Yellowstone, Main St.

Dan Aldes getting in some early season powder on "Early Bird", off of Targhee Pass on the Continental Divide.

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