



## WINTER IDAHO: FEEDING ELK AND SNOWMOBILING

Story and photos by Yvette Cardozo

High on Adventure, March 2017

Yes, Idaho has some delicious skiing. Yes, some people want to do something else. In winter. In the snow. And so, in the McCall area of southwest Idaho, there's elk feeding and snowmobiling to hot springs.

### FEEDING THE ELK

Back in 1983, Lyle Points' pop, Vernon, started to worry about the elk on his land. These were wild animals. And in harsh winters, they were doing badly.

"No elk is going to starve on my place," he declared.

Why not give them a bit of help?



Elk bull sits among hungry female elk.



Heading out in sleigh to feed elk

He started dragging out bags of hay, sometimes breaking trail through five feet of snow, to give the elk a bit more food when food was REALLY hard to find.

Thus started a family legacy which has now stretched to three generations.

These days, the public helps. For \$20 (less for kids) you can climb into a sleigh, sit on bales of hay and go out to the nearby woods where the herd of Rocky Mountain Elk are patiently waiting.

They, meaning the elk, not Lyle, have worked out a system. These elk actually take turns, some coming to nibble the hay from right under your rump, others sitting a few yards away until the next sleigh comes along.



Elk nibble hay from bales visitors sit on

Sometimes, it's three sleigh-loads a day. Sometimes only one. Sometimes none. But they still don't go hungry because, as Lyle explained, "This is just the appetizer. Later, I will go out with more bales, cut them into chunks and drop them in a line."

Like crumbs on the floor.

This winter was the snowiest, the coldest, the harshest in 30 years. Food was even harder to find than normal. And then there are the wolves.

"I figure giving the elk some extra food is an extra bit of help to survive," Lyle explained.

As it is, the herd is down to 180 elk from previous years when it could sometimes reach 300.

So, my friends and I climbed into Lyle's sleigh, pulled by his two handsome, coal black Percheron horses and headed for the nearby woods.

We all sat on fresh bales of hay and it didn't take long for the elk to come over.



Visitors in sleigh during elk feed trip



Lyle points and his percheron horses and the elk

It's the cows (females) and young males with tiny antlers that nudge in. There ARE bulls, some with seven point antlers (yes, that's a LARGE rack). But the bulls just sit there, keeping watch.

Okay, it is truly a bit strange to have a large wild animal nibble eagerly at something your rump is resting on. You can actually feel them chew. And certainly hear them as they crunch.

There's a temptation to reach out and pet their furry heads, maybe stroke the small antlers of "teenage" males. But don't.

Lyle has rules. You don't touch. You don't get up. You certainly don't feed them if you brought snacks for the kids.

Meanwhile, during the ride, Lyle talked about elk, about how they eat and digest in their four-part stomach, what they eat on their own (any plant they can find), how many bales he takes out a day (16 - 20) and how his family got into the elk feeding thing because, well, they couldn't bear to see such beautiful animals suffer.

We were out there for more than an hour. Plenty of time for everyone to take a LOT of pictures and videos.



Hungry elk at sled



Hungry elk nibble hay from bales visitors sit on

### SNOWMOBILE TO HOT SPRINGS

Turns out, Idaho has the most usable hot springs in the entire US. 30 springs are, as they say here, "soakable," out of the state's 340 hot springs.

Yes, it's warm down there underground. The state apparently sits above a massive hot spot that fuels not only this but the springs and geysers of Yellowstone National Park.

So, locals have their pick from rustic pools that are run like swimming holes of the 1950s to private (sneak in spots) to elaborate places that have been visited for well over a century.

In winter, many folk just rent a snowmobile and thrash their way around...something that could be risky if you don't know where you are going or how to get there.

A new option is the guided snowmobile trek out of Brundage Mountain ski resort through Brundage Snowmobile Adventures.



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**On the Trail by Mark Schneider****Snowmobiling to Burgdorf Hot Springs**

Learning about this, my friends Mark and Lisa and I signed up. We met our guide, Brad, and were outfitted in warm snowmobile jackets and bibs, plus helmets, then climbed aboard 800 cc Skidoos (twice as powerful as anything I've been on before) and took off.

That machine could climb vertical walls. It took a bit to figure out just how much gas to give it, but soon enough, we were motoring along, cutting into a forest thick with pine, firs and Tamaracks.

It was snowing lightly, giving the landscape an ethereal glow. We were traveling through a Christmas card during the snowiest winter in 30 years.

The trail took us up the local foothills, where we stopped a bit at an overlook, then down, finally, to an old pioneer trail, Warren Wagon Road.

Okay, I got my machine up to 50 mph on the open stretch, but kept wondering what would happen if I got bounced off. Mark, a fearless soul, got his up to 65.

And, 35 miles after leaving Brundage, we turned into Burgdorf Hot Springs.



**Soaking in water at Burgdorf Hot Springs**



**A romantic moment at Zim's\_Hot Spring**

This place is a legend, owned by a local family and operating since 1865. It's rustic, but has just about anything you want. You can rent a cabin overnight for \$40 per person, there's a simple cafe for food and, of course, the hot spring.

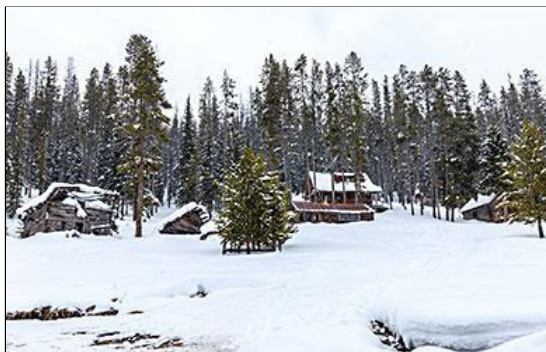
In winter, the place really does look like a Hallmark scene. Rustic cabins sit picturesquely scattered around the rolling property and in the middle is the spring...actually a large, rectangular pool with gravel bottom, two smaller VERY hot pools, a simple cafe and, off to the side, a building to change into bathing suits.

Inside the main building, caretaker Caroline Huntley chatted about the springs' history...how Fred Burgdorf built a simple hotel in the 1800s and people would come by horseback to stay and soak.

Today in summer, you come by car but in winter, the only way in is by snowmobile. You can buy a snack and pet the two resident (very friendly) dogs, then slide out of your travel duds, into your bathing suit and hit the water.



**Soaking in water at Zims Hot Spring near McCall, Idaho**



**Rustic buildings at Burgdorf Hot Springs during light snowfall**

The main pool is a soothing 100 degrees. The two small pools at the end hit a scalding 108 degrees or so. Good for maybe five minutes while you peer between window icicles at the snowy landscape.

Finally, we climbed back into our snowmobile suits, took off and made our way back to the resort.

We witnessed one last adventure on the final stretch of road - four skiers and a snowboarder came freefalling down the mountainside, cut between trees through the thick powder and slid onto the road in front of us.

We waved as we sped past and a few minutes later, we were back at the resort, pulling up to the main lodge.

**Photo Diary:** <https://goo.gl/photos/CqFPbQpSusHgYYHW6>

#### INFO

**Elk** - <http://www.hfpsleighrides.com>. Call the 208-325-8783 number. It's \$20 for adults, less for children. This is strictly winter. You ride out on a sleigh, sitting on hay bales.

#### **Snowmobile** -

\* Brundage Snowmobile Adventures - snowmobile bibs, jackets and helmets are provided but not gloves or boots.

<https://brundage.com/on-the-mountain/winter/snowmobile/>

\* Burgdorf Hot Springs - <http://www.burgdorfhotsprings.com>. Open year round.

\* Zims Hot Springs - (Facebook page) <https://www.facebook.com/Zims-Hot-Springs-150883568368927/>

