



Dining On **HIGH**

Outdoor adventure collides with epicurean delight as Colorado mountain cuisine reaches new heights

by Josh Dinar

The Ranch House Restaurant, Devil's Thumb Ranch, Tabernash

When I was growing up, eating at a restaurant was an occasion, something that happened infrequently; something we planned for, dressed up for, got excited about, and afterwards, remembered. I love restaurants; I make my living from restaurants, but there are some weeks when I need more than one hand to count the number of meals I've had at restaurants. A perhaps enviable byproduct of my job is that the remarkable meal, the truly standout meal, has become that much harder to come by. I may need two hands to count the number of restaurants I ate at last week, but I only need one to count the number of meals I remember from last year.

At many of Colorado's ski resorts, the problem of standing above the culinary crowd has been solved. Destination dining takes on a new meaning when you have to ride a snowcat, gondola, snowmobile or a pair of skis to make it to dinner. Now, I've never had any trouble working up an appetite. An hour of exercise does it for me in only slightly higher proportion than, say, *thinking* about exercise. But there's something about a hard-earned meal—or at least the delusion that a meal has been hard-earned—that makes the entrée that much more gratifying and the story of the meal that much more worth telling.

Following are a few of Colorado's most rewarding culinary high points, where world-class cuisine and jaw-dropping views may be the main course, but getting there and away are all part of the experience.



Beano's Cabin, Beaver Creek



Dunton Hot Springs



Alpenglow Stube, Keystone

Allred's Restaurant Telluride 970.728.7474 | www.allredsrestaurant.com

The free gondola ride from the town of Telluride is worth taking if only for the bird's-eye views of one of Colorado's quaintest cities and the craggy peaks that encircle it. Cuisine to match the staggering vistas is no small undertaking, but Chef Erich Owen rises to the challenge at Allred's, located a few steps from the top of the gondola at 10,500 feet. Dishes like Vanilla & Apricot Poached Maine Lobster and Black Butte Porter Braised Short Ribs are a far cry from traditional après ski fare—and a perfect reward after a hard day on the mountain's legendary bumps.

Alpenglow Stube Keystone 800.354.4386 | www.keystone.snow.com

With the distinct honor of being the highest AAA Four-Diamond rated restaurant in North America, "The Stube" is accessible by riding not one, but two gondolas up to a dizzying elevation of 11,444 feet. Views from the romantic dining room are everything you might expect them to be, and the price-fixed dinner of Bavarian-accented contemporary cuisine (try

the Cider Roasted Muscovy Duck!) offers the perfect complement to this high altitude culinary haven.

Beano's Cabin Beaver Creek 970.949.9090 | www.beavercreek.snow.com

Snuggle up under a blanket on a winter night as a snowcat-drawn sleigh carries you up Grouse Mountain to the glowing lights of this hand-hewn log lodge. Trade in your shoes for a pair of slippers and sit by the roaring fire enjoying a glass of wine and ambient live music, the lights of the resort like stars in the valley below. A nightly five-course price-fixed dinner includes choices like Pan-Seared "George's Bank" Caught Scallops and Gingerbread Crusted Colorado Rack of Lamb.

Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro Aspen Highlands 970.923.8715

www.aspensnowmass.com

Aspen Highlands offers what is arguably some of the best skiing in the country, and there's no better stop for a rewarding lunch than at this small, unassuming mid-mountain ski hut (located, as the name implies, under the Cloud Nine Quad) where a price-fixed menu changes daily but uninterrupted views of the Maroon Bells remain constant. On Tuesday and Thursday nights, you're just a snowcat ride away from a dinner of Andreas Fischbacher's fine, Bavarian accented offerings such as venison ragoût, pheasant breast and strudel variations.

The Dining Room at Dunton Hot Springs Dolores. 970.882.4800

www.duntonhotsprings.com

Once a well-guarded secret spot for Telluride area hippies, this ghost town perched in a high alpine meadow has since become an unlikely bastion of luxury. The rustic charm of the buildings' façades gives way to glowing hand-hewn opulence. Outdoor adventure is everywhere here—endless miles of snowmobiling, cross country skiing and climbing are just the beginning; at Dunton you can have a helicopter pick you up at your front door for a day of skiing bottomless untracked peaks in the San Juans with Colorado's only heli-ski operation. Finish off the day with a soak in the natural hot springs and a meal designed by Dunton's private chef with seasonal, local ingredients and served at a communal table where guests can share their day's adventures. The menu (included in the price of your stay) is determined by the chef's whim, the guests' preferences and the availability of ingredients, and the result is often stunning.

Game Creek Club Vail 970.479.4275 | www.gamecreekclub.com

There's a waiting list for membership at the über-fancy Game Creek Club, but the old-world European-style dining room is open to the public nightly. Nestled away in the picturesque Game Creek Bowl, you ride the Eagle Bahn Gondola before boarding a snowcat which brings you to the lodge, where a price-fixed menu offers French and continental cuisine in an elegant and remote setting.

The Ice Bar Restaurant Crested Butte 970.349.2275 | www.skicb.com

The greatest charm of Crested Butte is that its charm is understated. This place is cool the way Aspen was cool in the '70s. The allure of CB is perfectly encapsulated at this small mid-mountain A-frame lodge, where the rustic appeal doesn't feel born of a business plan, even though the resort's new owners are dropping a couple hundred million into improvements and working to make CB more "family friendly." The Ice Bar is open for lunch (make reservations!) and kicking back with a cocktail on



Cloud 9 Alpine Bistro, Aspen



Winter Park



Cloud 9 Alpine Bistro, Aspen



The Ice Bar Restaurant, Crested Butte

the patio at the restaurant's namesake (yes, the bar is actually made of ice) is a life-affirming way to unwind after a day on Crested Butte's epic terrain. But "Last Tracks" dinners are a not-to-miss experience, with an after-hours chairlift ride up and a short ski over to the restaurant, where a stunning price-fixed five-course continental feast precedes a guided, torch-lit ski or snowshoe trek back to the base.

The Ranch House Restaurant Devil's Thumb Ranch, Tabernash | 800.933.4339 www.devilsthumbranch.com

For cross-country ski enthusiasts, for enthusiasts of kicking back in front of a glowing fire, for enthusiasts of fine mountain cuisine in a setting so cozy you could melt, Devil's Thumb Ranch is simply heaven on earth. Located just north of the downhill Mecca that is Winter Park, Devil's Thumb offers private log cabin accommodations tucked into the woods in the middle of over 4,000 acres of pristine terrain. Just a mile's ski, snowshoe or, (if you must) drive down the road is the Ranch House Restaurant, where chef Tricia Cyman serves up Elk Carpaccio and Niman Ranch Beef Tenderloin among other awe-inspiring plates perfect to prepare you for a long night's hibernation and the next day's outdoor adventure.

Tennessee Pass Cookhouse Ski Cooper Leadville | 719.486.8114 www.tennesseepass.com

Starting at Ski Cooper, a few miles north of Leadville, diners snowshoe or cross-country ski about a mile up to this no-frills yurt. There's no running water here, no electricity. Your dinner is lit by candlelight and your bones are warmed by a giant potbelly stove and a couple shots of schnapps. You've pre-ordered your entrée (say Grilled Elk Tenderloin with blueberry, sage and port wine or Colorado Rack of Lamb in rosemary pistachio pesto), which comes along with three additional courses, so all there is to do is kick back and savor an unforgettable evening at the top of the world. 