



Chapter 1. Introduction

During winter we tend to lean naturally toward hibernation. Often, it's not until I'm standing atop a ridge, the blue sky brilliant above me, the snow sparkling around me, the air fresh and crisp, that I fully remember why getting out of the house and into nature during the winter months remains absolutely necessary. Snowshoes give access to the great outdoors and all the wonders of winter.

Most snowshoe days provide a path into the serene comfort of winter beauty, as well as mental and spiritual refreshment. For this reason, if no other, it's worth every effort to strap on a pair of snowshoes. And, no matter the situation you find yourself in while in the mountains, preparation and good judgment will help you enjoy the experience to its fullest.

Unlike summer trails where you must stay on path to keep from contributing to erosion and damaging plant life, winter trails lie where you break them. Go for a comfortable stroll through groves of Aspen, climb a mountain ridge, jog a mountain trail, or take the kids across the golf course. Snowshoes open the trails to winter exploration of all types. Winter's answer to hiking, snowshoes can take you to places even skis can't go.

The compilation of trails in this book provide a range of style and level of difficulty that will allow the family with small children as well as the expert snowshoer to discover the best snowshoe terrain in the Wasatch mountains. In order to provide information for the range of snowshoe abilities as well as to provide a book that will continue to be useful to you as your skill increases, included are trails of various lengths, difficulty ratings, elevation gains, and scenic options. Not only can you pick and chose your favorite style of trail, but you can also choose from 12 of the most beautiful canyons/areas along the Wasatch Front and through the Wasatch Range, as well as a complete guide to all the yurts within the state of Utah.

Wasatch Range

Just a glance at the Wasatch Range can leave visitors in awe. It's much the same for locals. Though I have driven past the range my entire adult life, I still can't make it through the Salt Lake Valley without exclaiming about the tall, rugged, and beautiful mountains.

Considered the western edge of the Rocky Mountains, the Wasatch Range stretches 246 miles from southeast Idaho in the north to central Utah in the south. Its slopes reach 73 miles from east to west. The range comprises three sections: the Northern Wasatch, including the Willard Peak (the highest peak in the Northern Wasatch) or Brigham City area and the Bear River Mountains running into Cache Valley and Idaho; the Southern Wasatch, which is home to the highest peak in the range, 11,928-foot Mount Nebo, and ends approximately at the city of Nephi; and the Central Wasatch Range, the primary focus of this book, which runs along the Wasatch Front (the populated east side of the Wasatch Range) from Ogden Canyon to American Fork Canyon and makes its way into the Park City and eastern portions of the range.

Perhaps the best part about the Wasatch Range is the snow: Five-hundred inches of the "Greatest Snow on Earth" blanket these slopes every year. Utah, due to its location, is the lucky recipient of this famous feather-light powder. Surrounding mountains ranges from different states act as barriers to moisture from the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, while also blocking arctic cold that slides down from Canada. These conditions result in low humidity that in turn gives the snow a dry, powdery texture, prime for winter recreation.

Although world-renowned ski resorts dot the canyons, the forests they sit within—the Wasatch Cache National Forest, the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, and the Uinta National Forest—offer hundreds of square miles untouched by resorts. The labyrinth of the Wasatch Range canyons—complete with rolling hills, open meadows, bowls, trails, passes, chutes, and as much steep as you can stomach—stand at the ready for the backcountry skiers, snowshoers, cross-country skiers, kids with sleds, and snowmobilers seeking asylum from winter doldrums.

History

The Wasatch was first viewed by white men in 1776 when fathers Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Velez de Escalante traversed the range. Spanish padres who were trying to find a route between the Spanish missions of New Mexico and California, these were the first non-Indian explorers to lay eyes on much of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Arizona. In the 1820s, fur trappers and traders discovered the area and established trading posts and trapping systems to profit from the fashionable beaver-hat industry. The trapping industry brought Peter Ogden, William Ashley, Jedediah Smith, Etienne Provost, and Jim Bridger, for whom National Forests, cities, and sections of land were named. Even then, these men used snowshoes to make their way across the snow-filled mountains. Fur interests throughout the west dwindled in 1840 when silk replaced beaver fur as the height of fashion, and mining moved in shortly after that.

During the Civil War, Colonel Patrick Connor and his Third California Infantry entered Utah to establish Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City. The Californians prospected for minerals in the Wasatch and other areas near Salt Lake, and by the 1860s, these prospectors discovered silver, lead, and zinc deposits in the canyons and mountains southeast of Salt Lake City, particularly in Big Cottonwood, Little Cottonwood, and Parleys. The abandoned mines still sit within these canyons. On many of the featured snowshoe trails, you will pass old mines and tailings piles, though they are often unrecognizable in their snow covers. By 1870, towns like Alta and Park City had sprung up with all the usual mining-town establishments. At one time, Alta supported 26 saloons and six breweries, while Park City derived the majority of its revenues from saloon licenses and fines for prostitution. Today, old brothels are used as homes, and in the Park City area, these small shanties cost a pretty penny.

Park City ski resorts were established as the mining boom busted, and land owners searched for a way to keep the town alive. Park City differs from the rest of the Wasatch Front in that the Salt Lake Valley was settled by Mormon pioneers looking for religious freedom, while a rowdier crowd looking for wealth settled Park City. The turn to outdoor recreation is now Utah's claim to fame and an economic stronghold.

The Snowshoe Scene

People have often asked me, "When Utah skiing reigns supreme and the powder days aplenty, why snowshoe?" It's true, in the Wasatch Front alone, there are 11 ski resorts that attract winter enthusiasts from around the world.

Pro Tip: Get into a Rhythm

"The first 10 minutes of any snowshoe run, (training or racing) is always the hardest. The sudden jump in energy exertion gets the heart and breathing both pumping very fast. Hang in there. After around 10 minutes, your body settles into a rhythm and it gets much easier and definitely more enjoyable. — **Scott Gall, Atlas Snowshoe Team and former North American Snowshoe Champion; Waterloo, Iowa**

Snowshoeing may not provide the adrenaline rush of steep, fast turns or a sky-high fly off a cornice, but it also does not require years of dedicated effort to learn the sport. A quick learning curve makes it well suited to all who can walk, even to the occasional user, as constant refinement of skill is unnecessary. Not only does snowshoeing hand everyman a ticket outdoors, but the aerobic qualities of the sport make it the health-conscious person's way out of the gym.

Taking the pace up a notch, many have found snowshoe racing a way to cross-train and enjoy competition within the sport. Racing ranks as a hot new winter venue with local races heading to regional and national distinction.

Whether you are three or eighty, want a full weekend or an hour of outdoor frolicking, snowshoeing gets you out of hibernation mode and into the mountain air. The price ain't bad either.

Accessible, Cost-friendly Sport

Known as winter's most affordable sport, snowshoe and accessory manufacturers have designed snowshoes, poles, boots, and clothing, incorporating detailed research for top-of-the-line, technically advanced products. The good news: the price tag welcomes with less than one-third the cost of most ski and snowboard packages. In addition, most snowshoe trails cost nothing. No lift passes to buy. Reasonably-priced gear. No regulated hours. Go where you want, when you want, and once you have the gear it doesn't have to cost a penny. When the urge hits to head out into the snow, you can leave your wallet at home.

Anyone Can Learn

If you're intimidated – don't be. Snowshoeing gives increased control in winter conditions. Extensive lessons or multiple days on the trail are not required to attain needed skills. A few minutes getting used to the feel of the shoes on your feet, and you'll be ready to stomp down the trail. Snowshoes give the ability to climb steep slopes, to maneuver through difficult terrain (See Chapter 3 for snowshoe technique), and if you need a partner to hit the trail with, you can introduce anyone to snowshoeing in a matter of minutes.

Options for camaraderie increase dramatically when snowshoeing. When I want to ski, I have to go with certain friends who have the time, skill set, and finances to ski. But, when I want to snowshoe I can ask anyone to come along: nieces, nephews, mom, dad, new friends, old friends, my kids, or avid enthusiasts of the sport.

Family: Snowshoeing with Children

My son was three when he put on his first pair of bear-paw snowshoes and traipsed around the yard. Before long, he was gallivanting across the lawn, wearing them in the middle of summer--he couldn't wait for snow. Because snowshoeing requires only that you know how to walk, it naturally encompasses children. The shallow learning curve, no height or weight restrictions, and the chance to traipse through the snow, knock snow and icicles from the trees, jump from logs, and explore...well, it's right up kid alley. Small babies fit in a baby carrier on your back, and when they're old enough to walk, they're old enough to snowshoe.

Kathy Murphy shared her story of snowshoeing as a child:

I started snowshoeing when I was seven. It was important to my parents that we were outdoor enthusiasts. My first snowshoes were 8" x 40" wood and had a tail. They were cumbersome. I grew up with snowshoeing and the opportunity to be outdoors. The silence and serenity of winter became important to me. Now today, 40 years later, I still love to snowshoe.

To make snowshoe trips for children a positive experience, realize that shorter trips should be the norm. Make sure their gear fits properly and that the width of the shoe isn't too much for them to handle. Parents and kids will have a better experience if the boots and snowshoes fit right and the snacks are plentiful. Remember, the right clothes will keep them comfy and warm. Good equipment can be passed down through several children.

The time approach, rather than the destination approach, proves especially effective with children and will stave off frustration at not making it to a certain overlook, summit, or lake. Go for one to two hours, have a snack, enjoy the snow. Go at your own pace-- each experience will be different. Time with your children, memory building, exposure to nature, and exercise are priceless gifts you, as a parent, can give. Every hill a new adventure.

Winter Recreation and Exploration:

We tend to lean naturally toward hibernation in the winter. Often, it's not until I'm standing atop a ridge, the blue sky brilliant above me, the snow sparkling around me, the air fresh and crisp, that I fully remember why getting out of the house and into nature during winter months remains absolutely necessary. Snowshoes give access to the great outdoors and all the wonders of winter. What better reason can there be than just the sheer enjoyment of winter hiking – the sport itself.

Unlike summer trails where you must stay on path to keep from contributing to erosion and damaging plant life, winter trails lie where you break them. Go for a comfortable stroll through groves of Aspen, climb a mountain ridge, jog a mountain trail, or take the kids across the golf course. Snowshoes open the trails to winter exploration of all types. Winter's answer to hiking, snowshoes can take you places even skis can't go.

Fitness:

During a moderate snowshoe workout, a 150-pound person can burn 680 calories. Compared with hiking's 340 calories or downhill skiing's 408 calories for a similar workout, snowshoeing makes its mark as the winter workout phenom. With this realization, joggers, biathlon, triathlon, and adventure-sports athletes, who have traditionally cross-trained in the gym during winter months, are now strapping on their snowshoes. With the improvement of equipment and the increased realization of the great workout snowshoeing provides, more people take their morning jog or run their dog on a pair of snowshoes. Stay fit, stay fresh, stay strong. No gym fees required.

The great calorie burn partners with a host of other natural byproducts of adding snowshoeing to your winter activity line-up. Others include: increased muscle development, increased physical endurance, and the spiritual fitness of spending time in the solitude of things natural.

Racing:

Lisa Jhung, a member of the Atlas Snowshoe Team, says, “No one is really a snowshoe racer, so don’t be intimidated. Everyone at the race does other sports in the summer, it’s just a great way to cross-train in the winter. The racing events give people an excuse to get out, come together, and often try something new.”

The five-kilometer seems to be the most popular race as those who are starting out aren’t going to jump right into a ten-kilometer race. Longer races like the ten-kilometer also exist to expand the racing options for those who become attached to the fun of racing. www.sports-am.com lists the Wasatch Front snowshoes races they host each year.