



PICTURE PERFECT: "DUDE, WHERE'S THE RIUNITE ON ICE?"

COURTESY OF C LAZY U RANCH

## Dude, Where's My Ranch?

Come wintertime, Colorado's best dude ranches turn into snow sport playgrounds—with first-class food. By Jayme Moye

After a hearty breakfast burrito stuffed with scrambled eggs, sausage, hash browns and cheese, you hop into the snowcat for a six-minute climb to the saddle on Baldy Mountain. Your guide suggests a couple groomers for warm-up, and the burrito in your belly agrees. You get in a few easy runs, taking it just slow enough to enjoy the views, then pause at the base in the warming hut, an outpost tent equipped with couches and a wood-burning stove, for a cup of coffee. Now it's backcountry time. Load into the snowcat for a 5-minute ascent to the top of Baldy, where the wide-open Sage Brush Bowl awaits.

Your guide has already been pumping you full of promises about the Chimney Rock Chute, a steep off the backside that holds snow like it's its job. And you've got the entire thing to yourself. The Rock does not disappoint. You spend two hours carving untracked turns through deep pow. Then your stomach starts growling.

Fortunately, it only takes about 20 minutes to

drop back into the ranch with your guide, where a lunch of Colorado beef burgers, mac and cheese, and a tossed spinach salad with raspberry vinaigrette await. When you're finished, you can catch the afternoon snowcat and do it all again.

Or maybe you'll want to get out on snowshoes to explore the paths overlooking the ranch's 8,500 pristine acres, or hit the trails on cross-country skis, or what about the tubing you saw earlier in the field next to the horses?

Welcome to **C Lazy U Ranch (clazyu.com)**, where your toughest decision is how you want to play today. Located just outside of Granby, about two hours from Denver, C Lazy U Ranch is one of nearly 30 dude ranches in Colorado that open their pastures and stables to visitors. Most raise cattle, and some, like Zapta (ZRanch.org), raise bison.

Some of Colorado's dude ranches date all the way back to the late 19th century, when the state's economy broadened from its mining roots to include agriculture and livestock—and then tourism. Some offer luxurious suites and organic food, others rustic log cabins and family-style dining. One thing they all have in common is jaw-dropping scenery and an authentic commitment to the cowboy lifestyle. And perhaps most importantly, come wintertime they turn into little slices of snow sports paradise. •

## GET BRANDED!

There's a ranch for every endeavor.

### for nordorks...

**Devil's Thumb Ranch** is located at the foot of the Continental Divide in the beautiful Ranch Creek Valley of Grand County, just 65 miles from Denver and only 10 minutes from Winter Park. While the two gourmet restaurants, cozy luxury suites with fireplaces and 10,000-square foot spa are reason enough to visit in the winter, the real draw is the Nordic ski terrain—100K of groomed trails. DTR also offers the only skijoring program in the state, including lessons and workshops on learning to skate ski with your dog and rigs for rent.

[devilsthumbranch.com](http://devilsthumbranch.com)

### for foodies...

**Smith Fork Ranch** is a historic family-owned guest ranch tucked into the Gunnison Valley between Aspen and Telluride. Featuring first-rate winter fly-fishing, snowshoeing, horseback riding and sleigh rides, the ranch is committed to organic farm-to-table dining. Guests harvest fresh salad leaves, veggies, fruits and herbs straight from the farmstead to enjoy alongside local lamb, beef, trout and game prepared by the ranch's gourmet chefs. An impressive wine cellar features Colorado wines alongside vintages from California, France, Italy, Spain, Australia and Germany.

[smithforkranch.com](http://smithforkranch.com)

### for skiers...

**Homeranch** is set in the Elk River Valley, just north of Steamboat Springs. Named as one of the "1,000 Places to See Before You Die," the ranch is known for its natural splendor and luxury accommodations, including a gourmet executive chef that dishes out haute mountain cuisine. It's also the ideal winter destination for all flavors of skiers, offering 30 km of groomed cross-country trails, along with ample backcountry trails and a complimentary shuttle and bagged lunch to Steamboat Springs to get your downhill on.

[homeranch.com](http://homeranch.com)

—J.M.



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HO, HO, HO: SANTA AIN'T NO COWBOY.