

Travel and Adventure: Glacier Point cross-country ski adventure

by Jim Farber

Glacier Point, perched high on the south rim of Yosemite Valley at 7,214 feet is one of Yosemite National Park's most popular tourist destinations. And from late May through December, its parking lot fills with cars and buses as visitors jockey for position to enjoy the spectacular views.

After a cross-country ski trek of 10 1/2 miles, the winter view of Half Dome from Yosemite National Park's Glacier Point is magnificent. Photo by Jim Farber. The Glacier Point Hut is warm, inviting and waiting at the end of the trail. Photo courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service. Yosemite Falls is just one of the spectacular views from Glacier Point in California's Yosemite National Park. Photo by Jim Farber.

But when the snows begin to fall and the winding 10 1/2 mile-road from the Badger Pass ski center closes down, the only way to reach Glacier Point is under your own power – either on cross-country skis or snowshoes.

It's a challenging, arduous 21-mile adventure. But the payoff is amazing when you find yourself standing on the canyon's rim gazing off at the monumental granite peak of Half Dome with only the sound of the wind, the rushing waterfalls far below, and the occasional caw of a passing crow for company. With your pack on your back, containing clothes and a sleeping bag, you can almost imagine yourself a modern-day John Muir.

Throughout the hustle and bustle of the tourist season, a log and stone hut at Glacier Point serves as the gift shop, dispensing every type of souvenir, from cuddly Teddy bears to topographical maps. But from January through March, the gift shop is transformed into a dormitory style Nordic lodge with bunk beds that can accommodate up to 20 hearty souls. There is a full kitchen, a commodious dining room, and, best of all when the temperature drops at night, a roaring fireplace surrounded by well-worn comfortable couches. Unfortunately, there are no showers.

Because of the limited amount of bunk space reservations are required. Groups (of six or more) can reserve space and make the trek on their own. But I recommend signing up for one of the two or three-day guided trip packages organized by the Yosemite Cross Country Ski Center at Badger Pass.

On the trail, these expert guides provide instruction, an in-depth knowledge of the region, as well as much

needed encouragement when the going gets tough. Then, when you reach the lodge these able guides become able chefs, offering up hearty breakfasts and surprisingly delectable dinners. Food for the trail is also provided. Because of the challenging nature of the trip, children must be at least 14 and accompanied by an adult.

So, how good a cross-country skier do you need to be to make the trip? Competent at least, which means you are able to maintain control and understand the mechanics of the sport. You might wish to take a class at Badger Pass before you embark. You will also be carrying a backpack containing your clothes, sleeping bag, food for the trail, etc.

To be honest, there are times on this trip when skill becomes less important than pure endurance. And during the hardest section, an unrelenting uphill climb of five miles, I found myself chanting Friedrich Nietzsche's axiom, "That which doesn't defeat me makes me stronger," like a self-empowering mantra!

But once over the top, the track levels out and then winds its way down toward Glacier Point. And suddenly there you are staring out over the full expanse of Yosemite Valley with the majesty of Half Dome towering in the distance and the Merced River far below as it hurtles over Nevada and Vernal Falls. Believe me, that moment is worth all the effort that it takes to get there.

The advantage of signing on for a three-day trip is that it leaves you a restful day to explore the region surrounding Glacier Point, most notably the high vantage point of Sentinel Dome. It was here that Yosemite's greatest photographers, from Carleton Watkins to Ansel Adams, set up their tripods to capture the grandest of panoramas.

There are few places on earth that are more spectacular than Glacier Point. To make the trek there in winter is an adventure you will never forget.

IF YOU GO

For Reservations: (through March 29) contact the Nordic Center, Badger Pass, Yosemite National Park: 209-372-8444; www.badgerpass.com.

The scheduling of guided trips is based on the number of people that reserve in advance. Group reservations are recommended.

The Cost: Overnight guided trips are \$192 per person. 2-night guided Trips are \$288. Self-guided trips are \$110 per person per night with a six-person minimum.

For room accommodations at Yosemite Valley: 801-559-4949.

Free shuttle bus service to Badger Pass is available from the Ahwahnee Hotel, Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village.

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