

BEST FLIGHTSEEING & SCENIC APPROACHES



PILOT GETAWAYS

ADVENTURE TRAVEL FOR AVIATORS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008

ALPINE

Fly-in Snowmobiling
Adventure

White Sand Christmas
in The Bahamas

Canyoneering &
Houseboating on
Lake Powell

REPRINTED WITH
PERMISSION FROM
PILOT GETAWAYS



Alpine, Wyoming

Snow-Fueled Fun from Mild to Wild

by Erika Kendrick & Cari Miller
aerial photos by George A. Kounis

Miles before your plane ever lands you'll be blown away by the beauty of Alpine, Wyo. It is a place removed from it all, with panoramic views of pristine powdered peaks that top out at 11,000 ft. in every direction. It's enough to leave Ansel Adams spellbound.





Above: The homes that line the runway at Alpine Airpark have stunning views.
Below: Landing on Rwy 13; the airport is often the first in the area to be cleared of snow.

Your flight to Alpine will remind you what a world without chaos could be. Once you step away from your airplane, your only mode of transportation will be your snowmobile, or your own two feet. The town of 750 may be small, but it's bursting with snow-covered mountain charm, friendly and accommodating folks, and outdoor thrills. Snowmobile at heart-pounding speeds, or take your time and marvel at the elk and the moose. Snowshoe or ski through the backcountry with or without a guide. Whether your adrenaline meter registers way above wild, or settles comfortably around mild, get ready for an adventure.

Flying There

The town of Alpine is at the north end of Star Valley on the Wyoming-Idaho border. Alpine Airport is at an elevation of 5,634 ft. on the southeast shore of the Palisades Reservoir. Despite being surrounded by peaks as high as 11,300 ft., the field has easy approaches from any direction.

From the south, approach over Afton (AFO) and follow US 89 to enter Star Valley. From the east, plan to cross the Wind River Range at 14,500 ft. From the north and west, terrain is relatively flat leading to the Palisades Reservoir.

The airport was originally built in 1971 as a private residential runway and was nearly abandoned until it was discovered and revitalized in 2006 by developer Bill Wiemann. An avid pilot, he saw huge potential for the airport and has since spared no expense in realizing his vision of a pilot's mountain paradise, Alpine Airpark.

The runway, though private, is now open to the public and

operates as a day VFR strip year-round. Fortunately, the weather is usually VFR, providing you with good odds of a weather-safe arrival. Alpine is also in a good location, so tricky mountain winds are rare. "Light and variable" will be the likely response on the Unicom frequency when you're five miles out, giving you a green light for the preferred arrival to Runway 13. This puts your approach over the reservoir where you'll have clear views of the Tetons to the east and the black runway standing out against its stark white surroundings ahead. Thanks to a private snow removal contract, Alpine is often the first airport cleared and operating in the region after snowfall.

In the unlikely event of a low ceiling at Alpine, if visibility is clear below, you can follow the "local" procedure and plan to shoot an RNAV/GPS approach to Afton down to the 1,000–1,400-ft. MDA. Once below the clouds, you'll be able to cancel IFR and head 29 nm up the valley to Alpine if the ceiling and visibility in the valley per-

mits. At 6,201 ft. MSL, AFO is nearly 600 ft. higher than Alpine, so the Star Valley slopes gently downward toward Alpine along the Salt River. If visibility is poor, Afton has weather reporting and would be your best alternate; it's easier to drive from Afton to Alpine as they're both in the Star Valley.

If the visibility is very low, Jackson (JAC), 29 mi northeast of Alpine, offers two ILS procedures with decision heights as low as 200 ft. AGL (if you meet certain minimum climb gradients). Landing fees are higher in Jackson than other nearby airports and if the snow is too heavy, there's also the possibility that you may not be able to drive over the mountain road to Alpine.

When in need, two airpark residents, both named Rex, are always standing by to accommodate you. Call Rex Doornbos, (307) 413-3305, or Rex Draper, (208) 200-6050, to assist you with any required airport services, Alpine Airpark property information, up-to-the-minute weather and runway condition reports, a ride to town, or even a ride to Afton for an Aviat Aircraft manufacturing tour (Alpine Airpark is also a Husky dealer), www.alpineairpark.com or www.alpineaviation.net.

History

In west-central Wyoming, near the Idaho border, the Salt River and Wyoming ranges run for almost eighty miles. Millions of years ago these ranges were pushed up and eastward by fault movement and now they make up the long, remote alpine tail of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The long parallel successions of the jagged, pyramid-shaped peaks and ridges are the backbone for the stark and rugged beauty of Star Valley.

The Shoshone Indians were the first people known to seek shelter in Star Valley beneath these peaks and ridges, taking advantage of abundant wildlife and natural salt deposits during the summer and fall until the early 1800s. By 1812, the valley saw its first white explorers traveling through the area en route to the West Coast. They



paved the way for both Canadian and American trappers, and by the late 1870s a group of Mormon pioneers led by Brigham Young Jr. and Moses Thatcher settled the area. They hailed it "The Star of All Valleys."

Star Valley is 14 miles wide and 50 miles long and has four incorporated towns. Alpine is at the northern end, where the Snake, Salt, and Greys rivers converge and enter the Palisades Reservoir. Alpine's early settlers relied on agriculture to sustain their economy. The valley was well suited for grazing and became home to many dairy cows. Independent creameries and stunning mountain scenery earned the valley its nickname "Little Switzerland of America."

The economy of Star Valley has shifted from agriculture to outdoor adventure tourism over the last 20 years. Commercial grooming for snowmobiling started here in 1989. Snowmobiling has been booming in the area ever since. With hundreds of square miles to explore, ample wildlife, and a scenic backdrop to enjoy, Alpine and its surrounding area has grown into a mecca for the wintry pastime.

What to Do

Alpine has 500 inches of snow annually, panoramic views of 11,000-ft. peaks, 335 miles of mapped trails, and a sparsely crowded, inviting atmosphere. It also has some of the best snowmobiling terrain in the U.S. with unbelievable trails to match. Venture out onto any trail, and you'll be



Courtesy Wyoming Travel and Tourism

The area offers snowmobiling options from mild to wild.

surrounded by pine-covered crests and snow-capped peaks. Unlike the backwoods, the trail system is developed and expansive; some trails span up to 100 miles without ever crossing a paved road. Alpine has been consistently voted a top-10 destination for **snowmobiling** and has held the number seven "Top Trails" seat for two consecutive years in SnoWest magazine's, "The Western Guide to Snowmobiling." Alpine also consistently reigns supreme in

the magazine's "Scenic" category. The official season is December through March, but January through mid-April is considered premium snowmobile season when lows round out around zero and sunny daytime highs hover around the 20-degree mark. Order your trail map or get snow info at wyotrails.state.wy.us/snow.

Before hitting the trails you must first choose your snowmobile. You'll want to consider speed and power as well as your

Nobody sells more Huskys

HUSKY
Nobody!

And Now, the World is our Territory!

Now everyone can take advantage of the Largest Volume Husky Dealer's inventory with the latest options and paint schemes.



BACKCOUNTRY *specials*

Husky 200s & 180s with 3 Blade Composite Props, Garmin 696 Panels, Two Toned Leather Seats in stock ready for sale and delivery.

And we can help Broker your trade. Call Bill today for details.

701-367-6161
alpineaviation.net





Photo by Cari Miller

From the airport, you can ride on snowmobiles to the Box Y Lodge nestled 30 miles deep in the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The business owners, Tim and Cindy Haberberger, proudly display their collection of worldwide hunting trophies throughout the property. Opposite page: The Alpine back-country offers limitless virgin snow for skiers.

desired level of excitement. Touring snowmobiles have a bit less power, are slightly more comfortable, have more baggage room, and can carry up to two people. These machines are perfect to take in a leisurely scenic/wildlife-spotting excursion at up to 50 mph.

If you're feeling a bit more adventurous, you can saddle up on a 700-cc Polaris RMK power sled. But beware, these require a more aggressive approach, beyond "beginner" experience, and the patience to dig your sled out of waist-deep snow. If flying at 70-plus mph over off-trail ranges or high-marking up nearly vertical terrain sounds fun, then these machines are for you.

Now, it's time to get ready for the trails. If you're up for a mild exploit, something middle-of-the-road, or if a wild escapade sounds more your speed, there's an adventure tailored to fit your enthusiasm level. For adrenaline junkies who straddle the line between Wickedly Wild and Mellow and Mild, a guided snowmobile tour is on tap. Rob Meikle, a 16-year veteran Wyoming trail guide and the owner of the Rockin' M Ranch and Snowmobile Rental company, will be your escort. He can also lead you on an equally thrilling, yet less risky, action-packed snowmobiling adventure. You'll get the inside scoop on everything you wouldn't see riding alone and all the latest wildlife info. He'll take you to check out the 900 elk at the Elk Feeding Grounds, explore the scenic sights, stop for lunch at the Box Y Lodge & Guest Ranch, and fly through as many piles of powder you can manage. All that and still make it back to the ranch in time for supper. And when the inevitable happens and your sled gets

stuck in the snow, he'll be right by your side to dig you out from its waist-deep clutches. Once you've gotten the lay of the land, you can snowmobile to pubs or out to dinner, or head over to the market to pick up a few groceries.

Rockin' M Ranch rents touring snowmobiles for \$135, power sleds for \$185, and snow clothes for \$15 per day. Guided tours include clothing, lunch, snowmobile, and guide, \$225 for one rider plus \$95 for an extra rider, or \$350 for the guide only for larger groups, (307) 654-2288, www.rockinmbranchwyoming.com.

For pure adrenaline seekers who like to walk on the wild side, you can opt to jockey your sled through steep ascents, around hair-raising turns, and over the occasional cliff-edge descent. Or you can open up the throttle in wide-open meadows and let the wind whiz by at blistering speeds. Fly rampant over rolling mountain top terrain or snowmobile south on the A trail to hit mega 3-12-foot-deep powder in LaBarge. If your adrenaline meter reads way above wild, take your snowmobile exploring in the Blind Bull area—with or without a guide. This wide-open snow bowl of pristine powder is where you can test out just how fast and how high your sled can go.

Bring your skis or snowboard along and take the excitement to the next level and plan for some **back-country skiing/snowboarding**, using the snowmobile as your makeshift ski lift to get to otherwise inaccessible pristine runs. Wolf Creek and Red Creek are favorites of locals. (Ski equipment rentals are not available.)

If you are at the Box Y (see *Where to Stay*) ask Tim, Cindy, or Meagan if they have extra

time to tell you about **snow tubing** options. They may let you use their tube to tie behind the snowmobile, water tube style, where you can "whip" your victim across the snow at frightening speeds around bends while they hold on for dear life. Or, turn the hard-bottomed tube into a snowsled and launch yourself on your belly down the "front-yard" hill on the property.

It doesn't have to be all about horsepower in Alpine; quite a few tranquil activities can be found on the menu as well. **Snowshoeing** and **hiking** are great ways to experience the off-trail serenity of the Bridger-Teton Forest. If you stay at the Box Y or The Flying Saddle, they'll let you use their equipment, otherwise you'll have to bring your own.

While a **cross country skiing** trail can be found along Greys River in Alpine and another on the west side of the airport that starts at US 26 and national forest Road 020, you can plan to use your snowmobile to head out to your very own remote trailhead. You can also cross-country ski the snowmobile trail system, but be prepared for an occasional snowmobile whizzing by at 70 mph. (Ski equipment rentals are not available.)

If you're in Alpine on Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2009, after you've hit the slopes and snowmobiled yourself into a tailspin, grab a cup of cocoa and watch the fur fly as the canines race across town. You can see the annual **International Pedigree Stage Stop Sled Dog Race** that regularly attracts top canines and dog sled-racing greats. The race commences in Jackson, Wyo., on January 30th and ends February 7th at Snow King Mountain, www.wyomingstagestop.org.

Photo by Sue Haun

Where to Stay

Lodging in Alpine can be just as adventurous as your daily exploits. You can opt for a milder, luxurious lodging experience or go for a wild high-powered one. If you'd like to indulge your mild side, preferring a little more luxury peppered in with the rugged excitement, then the Flying Saddle Resort or the Rockin' M Ranch are where you'll want to be. But if you want the ultimate remote back-country excursion, then the Box Y Lodge & Guest Ranch is the perfect choice.

Just a few steps from the bank of the Snake River, the **Flying Saddle Resort** offers a range of accommodations from modest to luxury. Previously a chain hotel, the Flying Saddle has been transformed into a rustic luxury resort by Abi Garaman, a hotelier who has integrated his boutique hotel background with Alpine's small town rustic flair. The hotel shows like an art gallery, featuring Abi's award-winning local scenic photography hanging in museum quality throughout the hotel, and available for purchase. The hotel has 32 newly designed rooms and six luxury cabins, a year-round heated indoor pool, a steakhouse, lounge, and a very well stocked drive-through wine and liquor store. The hotel will be happy to pick you up from the Alpine airport and give you a "guided tour through town" on your way to the hotel. Once you check in, your snowmobile and gear will be waiting for you to drop your bags and hop right onto the trails, rooms \$78-\$150, snowmobile packages start at \$150 daily, 118878 US 89 & 26, (877) 772-4422, www.flyingsaddleresort.com.

The **Rockin' M Ranch** (home of Rockin' M Snowmobile Rentals) sits on the banks of the Salt River, 4 miles south of Alpine and well suited for those seeking a bit more of a remote adventure theme. The owners, Rob and Jamie Meikle, offer seven new cabins that can sleep four to eight. All cabins have full kitchens, gas fireplaces, WiFi, satellite TV, and covered decks with gas barbeques. Rob will be glad to pick up guests (or snowmobile renters) from the

airport and make a couple stops in town if you would like to get groceries to stock your kitchen. But, for this remote hide-away, you will need to plan to use your snowmobile to head to town for any pizza or pub stops, cabins \$145-\$225, 371 McNeel Power Plant Cty Rd 104, (307) 654-2288, www.rockinmranchwyoming.com.

For a remote back-country experience, plan to stay at snowbound **Box Y Lodge & Guest Ranch**. The lodge at milepost 28 on the Greys River snowmobile trail is only accessible by snowmobile from November thru April. When you step off the plane, Rob will be there to greet you with a handshake and a smile. He'll promptly whisk you off to get snow-suited, gloved, booted, and briefed on all snowmobile operations before your 30-mile snowmobile trek to your log cabin at the lodge.

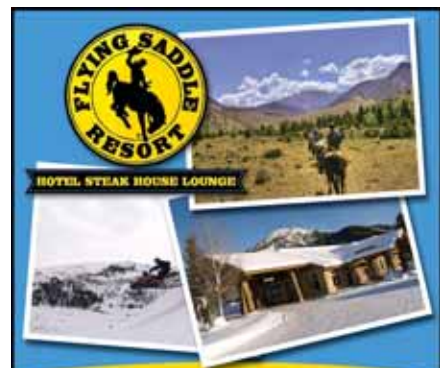
The business owners, Tim and Cindy Haberberger, will greet you at the lodge upon your arrival with a hot mug of cowboy coffee. They have been operating the lodge to rave reviews for 13 years as you can see by the overflowing guest book. The Box Y was homesteaded in the early 1900s and has been added to and updated over the years to include nine well-appointed guest cabins on 240 acres. The main lodge showcases Tim and Cindy's staggering collection of trophies amassed from worldwide hunts, including caribou, moose, bear, and mountain lion to name a few. Cabins sleep two to eight, and your stay includes home cooked meals. For large families, the crown-jewel is a two-story, three-bedroom cabin that sleeps up to eight; it has a fully-equipped kitchen and front-porch rockers to take in the incredible unobstructed view. The closest neighbor is 30 miles away. While city slickers can't count on any electrical outlets or cell phone service at this remote getaway, Tim and Cindy will be happy to charge a device or two for you. And if you just can't bear to be disconnected, free satellite WiFi and satellite phone (\$2-\$3 per minute) are available in the main lodge. Rooms run \$135-\$155 per person, including three



Call us, or stop by Alpine Airpark 46U, we'll show you what flying a Husky is all about. Alpine Aviation, the Largest Volume Husky Broker.

We can also help Broker your trade. Call Bill today for details.

701-367-6161
alpineaviation.net



Rooms starting at

\$78 per night

- Steps to the Snake River
- Spectacular Mountain Views
- Indoor Heated Pool
- Newly Constructed Rooms and Luxury Cabins
- Direct access to 4 seasons of outdoor FUN

Check Web for Specials
www.FlyingSaddleResort.com

877-772-4422



meals daily, Milepost 28 Greys River Road, (307) 654-7564 (leave message), www.boxylodge.com, (preferred communication is via email: boxylodge@msn.com).

Where to Eat

Alpine has you covered, whether you seek a fine dining experience or a cup of coffee by the fireplace. The **Flying Saddle Steakhouse** is the only fine-dining experience in Alpine. The warm atmosphere, soft lighting, intimate seating, and formal wait staff, are perfect for a romantic evening out on the town. The menu is host to cuts of buffalo, elk, ribs, tenderloin, and beef, as well as an impressive wine collection. Table-side Bananas Foster is a guilty pleasure that's sure to be a sweet end to dinner. However, the most enticing indulgence is their sweet potato fries, a crispy, buttery, sugar-cinnamon extravaganza that is like fireworks for the senses—a double order is recommended! Entrées run \$12–\$29, open 5–10 p.m., 118878 US 89 & 26, (307) 654-4422, www.flyingsaddleresort.com.

Gunnar's Pizza is a great place to grab an authentic New York slice in the middle of Wyoming. Gunnar's is a great reason to put your diet aside and dive into a slice of Greek Pizza Pie. Other options include homemade Italian dinners, pitas, hoagies, NY subs, specialty pizzas, strombolis, and an extensive smothered & covered French fry menu. This is a locals' hangout and is a great place to get the latest updates on animal sightings on the trail and snowmobile risks and warnings. Entrées run \$6–\$19, Tue–Sun 11 a.m.–9 p.m., 170 US 89, (307) 654-7778.

If you're hitting the trail on your snowmobile, head down the Greys River trail to



The Flying Saddle Steakhouse offers a fine dining experience in Alpine and serves an impressive array of steak and game.

Courtesy Flying Saddle Resort

the **Box Y Lodge & Guest Ranch** to grab lunch and reenergize by the fire; any other lunch spot is 30+ miles into town. The Box Y offers a standard lunch menu of burgers, chicken sandwiches, hot dogs, fries, and soup. Made-to-order breakfasts and buffet-style prime-rib dinners are reserved for overnight guests. But, Cindy's never-ending jar of homemade cookies is there for lunch visitors too. Enjoy your lunch and chat with fellow snowmobilers and maybe even a guide or two who can help you plan the next leg of your day, entrées \$3.50–\$9, 11 a.m.–3 p.m., Mile Post 28, Greys River Road, (254) 381-0350 (sat phone, leave a message), www.boxylodge.com.

The Bull Moose Saloon is perfect for a cold brew at the end of a long day where they advertise "fun served at the bar." Park your snowmobile and dance the night away to live music on most weekends or hang out on the outdoor deck overlooking the mountains. Children are welcome. Check their website for events, open 8 a.m.–2 a.m., 91 US 89, (307) 654-7593, www.bullmoosesaloon.com.

with prior notice, (307) 885-3353. Four-wheel drive vehicles run \$59–\$89 per day, and you simply leave the car at Alpine Airport when you leave. The Flying Saddle Resort can also arrange to have a rental delivered for resort guests.

Experience the Wild West charm in Alpine, Wyo. The unmatched mountain scenery, the friendliest of folk, endless miles of virgin snow, and a brand new airport are waiting. Whether you make the 30-mile trek to the Box Y Lodge or relax in the lap of quiet luxury along the Snake River at the Flying Saddle Resort, you'll enjoy the wild, unspoiled atmosphere and mellow attitude of Star Valley. Hop on your snowmobile and watch the elk or go for a wild ride on the trails. Catch a whiff of the crisp mountain air. Exhale the serenity steeped in blankets of snow. The valley is tranquil and serene. And just when you've had enough, fire up your beast and blaze back onto your trail, racing back through the pristine scene. You'll feel like a pioneer, having discovered a pilot-friendly treasure in the West. ■

Transportation

Getting around Alpine is an adventure of its own. Once you are picked up from the airport by any of the local hotels, your snowmobile will be your primary source of transportation through town and through the wild. On any given weekend you'll be among many sleds at the grocery store, restaurants, hotels, and pubs. If you need a car for short-term use, Rex or Rex at the airport might be able to arrange for a **crew car**. For longer usage, Robinson Motors in Afton can deliver a **rental car** to Alpine Airport

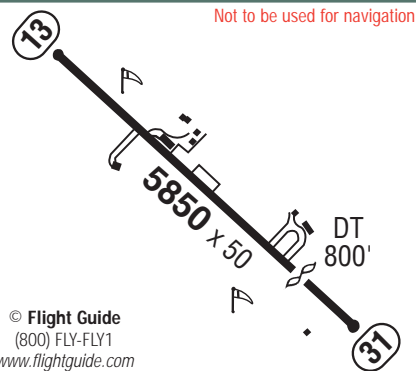
46U

Alpine Airport

Alpine, WY • N 43° 11.1' W 111° 02.5' • Elevation: 5,634 ft.

Sectional Chart: Salt Lake City

Pattern Altitude: 6,634 ft. MSL



FREQUENCIES

CTAF: 122.9

Salt Lake ARTCC: 133.25

Casper FSS: 122.05

AWOS at AFO 29 nm SSE: 119.025

NOTES: Rwy 13/31 is extended 225 feet on the NW end.

CAUTION: Birds and gliders in the vicinity of the airport.

RUNWAYS: 13/31 5,850 x 50 ft. Asphalt. Not lighted.

SERVICES: *Alpine Airpark*. Tiedowns: Free. Heated hangar: \$100/night. Fuel: 100LL (self-serve), Jet A. 24-hour callout, (307) 413-3305.

PHONES: Bill Wiemann (701) 367-6161, Rex Doornbos (307) 413-3305, Rex Draper (208) 200-6050. AWOS at AFO 29 nm SSE (307) 885-2654.