

Winter Recreation

On the Manti-La Sal National Forest

by Eric Trenbeath
USFS avalanche forecaster

Islands in a sea of desert, the La Sal and Abajo Mountains of southeastern Utah provide stunning backdrops to the dramatic red rock country that surrounds them. With an average snowfall of 250 inches a year, the mountain ranges also host a variety of winter recreation opportunities including backcountry skiing and snowboarding, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing on groomed trails.

La Sal Mountains

The popular Geyser Pass trailhead (elevation 9600') provides winter access for backcountry skiing and snowboarding in Gold Basin, snowmobiling over Geyser Pass, and 12 kilometers of groomed cross-country ski trails. This trailhead is reached from the south of end of the La Sal Mountain Loop Road. Look for the signed turnoff on U.S Hwy 191 eight miles south of Moab. From this turnoff, follow the paved loop road up for 12 miles to the turnoff to Geyser Pass.

The Geyser Pass road is gravel surfaced and narrow, and even when plowed is generally snow packed. Grand County, under agreement with the Manti-La Sal National Forest (MLSNF) keeps this road plowed to the trailhead. For safety reasons, the road will be closed while the road is being plowed. If you find a closed gate at the turnoff, plowing is in progress. You can check for plowing updates on the USFS Utah Avalanche Center – Moab website: www.utahavalanchecenter.org. Follow the Geyser Pass Road five miles to a parking area at the trailhead.

Just below the parking area is a hill popular for sledding. If you are sledding on this hill, please park in the parking lot, not at the base of the hill so other vehicles can get through.

Cross country ski trails leaving from the Geyser Pass trailhead are groomed through a partnership between the MLSNF Moab/Monticello Ranger District and volunteers from the Lower Utah Nordic Alliance (LUNA). Because these routes are open to everyone, please be respectful of different users. If you are snowmobiling on these groomed routes, please go uphill on the right and downhill on the left

to avoid conflict with cross country skiers.

About a mile and a half up from the Geyser Pass trailhead, a right fork takes you into Gold Basin. This dead end road is groomed, and is used extensively by cross country skiers. Motorized use is not permitted off the road into Gold Basin, and the Forest Service would like to encourage motorized users to avoid use of the Gold Basin road and continue up to Geyser Pass, where abundant meadows and hills provide excellent snowmobiling opportunities.

A second plowed road exists on the east side of the range, and provides access to some of the best snowmobiling terrain in the La Sal Mountains. Plowing on this side of the range is provided by San Juan County. To access this trailhead, take Highway 191 south of Moab for 22 miles to the junction with Highway 46. Turn here towards the town of La Sal. Continue 3.5 miles past La Sal, turn left on the gravel surfaced, Upper Two Mile Road and continue two more miles to the marked trailhead for La Sal Pass. From here, riders can snowmobile up the road to the pass, where open meadows, rolling terrain, and hill climbing opportunities for all skill levels abound. You can also continue on the Upper Two Mile Road for about five more miles to the Dark Canyon Trailhead.

Abajo Mountains

Approximately 50 miles south of Moab, outside the town of Monticello, the Abajo Mountains provide additional winter recreation opportunities on the Manti-La Sal National Forest. Backcountry skiers and snowboarders can take advantage of the slopes on the now defunct Blue Mountain Ski Area, and the Dalton Springs Trailhead provides snowmobile access to the Harts Draw Road and North Creek Pass. Additionally, the Blue Mountain Ski Club, in partnership with the MLSNF Moab-Monticello Ranger District, and the City of Monticello groom cross country ski trails out of the Dalton Springs trailhead. From downtown Monticello, turn west on 200 S to Abajo Drive. Continue west to a forest service information kiosk. The turnoff to the Blue Mountain Ski Area is four miles from the kiosk. Dalton Springs trailhead is a half mile beyond.

Avalanche Danger

The La Sal and Abajo Mountains are exceedingly avalanche prone due to a combination of steep terrain, and weak, shallow snowpacks. Users are encouraged to keep abreast of current snow and avalanche conditions by visiting the USFS Utah Avalanche Center website at www.utahavalanchecenter.org. Travelers who venture into avalanche terrain should carry appropriate rescue gear: beacon, shovel and probe, and know how to use them.



Talking Mountain Cirque



South Mountain Couloir

Know Before You Go

The USFS Utah Avalanche Center would like to invite winter backcountry users to have fun, safe experiences on their national forest lands.

A free, Know Before You Go avalanche awareness presentation will be held at the Moab Arts and Recreation Center, 111 E 100 N in Moab, on Tuesday, December 6 at 6:00 p.m.

For more avalanche information call the Manti-La Sal National Forest at 801-647-8896.

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Program Winterlude Tickets on Sale

Join the Moab Music Festival for the upcoming Winterlude program and a week of events running January 27 through February 4.

Give the gift of music this holiday season with tickets to the Alison Shearer Quartet playing at the Hoodoo on Saturday, January 28. Tickets go on sale December 15. Admission is \$30. Make it a full evening with a delicious dinner by Josie Wyatt's for an additional \$65.

Other Winterlude events include a happy hour at the Hoodoo on Friday, January 27 and the Winterlude Showcase at Star Hall on Friday, February 3.

For more information go to www.moabmusicfest.org or call the box office at (435) 259-7003.

And be sure to mention you read about Winterlude in Moab Happenings!

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