



## SNOWMASS IS RICH WITH NATURAL SPLENDOR AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURES TO ENJOY IT

**Snowmass Village, CO (Spring, 2008)** – Snowmass’ unique natural splendor is hard to overlook, from the massive mountain that rises 4,406 feet from the valley floor to the unique granite stripe on prominent 14,000-foot peak Mt. Daily. Snowmass offers diverse opportunities to enjoy this natural abundance, from an award-winning field guide that details the 423 plants, 112 birds and 49 mammals in the valley to free guided tours to over 40 miles of trails visitors can explore on their own.

### Natural History

The highest area of Snowmass began forming around 34 million years ago when hot magma welled up through sedimentary rock, creating domes that eventually eroded into the mountains seen around Snowmass today. Mt. Daly’s signature diagonal strip was caused by a younger intrusion of granodiorite, while other nearby areas such as Baldy Mountain, Burnt Mountain, and Garret Peak are composed instead of sedimentary rock layers such as sandstone and shale.

The Big Burn area is Dakota Sandstone, a layer rich with dinosaur footprints along the Front Range (so keep your eyes open!), while Sam’s Knob was formed in much the same manner as Mt. Daly’s strip. This solidified magma intrusion is especially noticeable just above The Ullrhop Restaurant where the Lunchline Trail curves around it. Even glaciers left their mark on the valley, carving out rocky bowls called cirques and hanging valleys, hence the names of Snowmass’s extreme winter terrain in The Cirque and Hanging Valley Headwall areas.

Much of the Snowmass Valley itself is composed of shale, sandstone, and mudstone, and the Mancos Shale rock visible on the Rim Trail was deposited by a shallow sea that covered the area 75 to 100 million years ago. It’s possible to find small marine fossils, including cone-shaped baculites, while the black pieces of shale suggest where plants decayed eons ago.

What the glaciers, magma intrusions, and seas left behind today is a diverse valley of ecological environments ranging from sage brush to riparian habitat to alpine basins.

“Because we have a lot of different habitats, we have a diversity of plants, wildflowers, and animals,” says Janis Huggins, author of the popular natural history guide *Snowmass Village: Wild at Heart*, which won the 2006 Colorado Book Award for nonfiction. “You can pass through so many different plant and animal communities that it gives people a greater chance to see more wildlife.”

Snowmass is home to numerous species, including the Burnt Mountain Elk Herd, which uses the valley as part of its primary migration corridor. The elk herd winters in the Wildcat area and often can be seen in lower Brush Creek. Numerous other species are found in Snowmass year-round as well.

“As cold as it gets in the winter, we have a surprising amount of wildlife and birds here,” says Huggins. She cites the ptarmigan and blue grouse one might see cross country skiing and the mountain lions and black bears that hopefully one won’t. The lucky might catch a glimpse of

golden eagles, coyote, mink, martens, and weasels. According to Huggins, bobcats hang out by the famous Government Trail, while big horn sheep graze above the Big Burn. "It's so pristine in this valley with such incredible views," says Huggins. "There's not a lot of people passing through here on their way to someplace else, and it really is one of the most special places."

### **The Trails**

Snowmass Village is 25 square miles wide and surrounded by the fourth largest wilderness area in Colorado, the Snowmass Maroon Bells Wilderness Area. The resort offers over 40 miles of multi-use trails and over 26 world-class hiking and biking trails. A free detailed trail map can be picked up in the Snowmass Village Mall, as can a pocket trail guide to the plants, birds, and mammals of Snowmass Village. Whether visitors are seeking a short casual hike on the beautiful Highline Trail or a more backcountry trekking experience on the renowned Government Trail, most trailheads are within easy walking distance to lodging. The top of Snowmass' Rim Trail offers an excellent place to examine the area's geologic history, including the remnants of volcanoes that were active 10 million years ago, while the Ditch Trail provides an easy, relatively flat walking trail that opens up to spectacular mountain views.

### **The Chairlift**

The Burlingame chairlift (\$6/adults and \$4/children and seniors, bikes are always free) provides easy access to many of the higher elevation on-mountain trails that will take hikers and bikers to the more remote Snowmass Maroon Bells Wilderness area trails.

### **Free Guided Nature Walks and Hikes**

One of the best ways to explore Snowmass' natural abundance is through the free Aspen Center for Environmental Studies hikes and walks with a naturalist. In the summer, a free Nature Trail walk is offered daily leaving from the Snowmass Village Mall, while on-mountain walks and hikes are available throughout the week as well.

### **Outdoors Adventures**

From spectacular overnight horseback trail rides to jeep tours to bird's-eye views from a hot air balloon, Snowmass offers diverse ways to explore the natural mountain environment. For more information on Snowmass activities, please call 1-800-SNOWMASS or visit [www.snowmassvillage.com](http://www.snowmassvillage.com).

For more information, visit the official Snowmass Village website at [www.snowmassvillage.com](http://www.snowmassvillage.com) or call 1-800-SNOWMASS.

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