

JACKSON'S OTHER PASS

Togwotee Pass, Wyoming

By Dan Kostrzewski

Photo: Jonathan Selkowitz

Northwest Wyoming is blessed with a buffet of incredible terrain. From the lift-serviced steeps and spectacular open gates of Teton Village, to easy access from Teton Pass, there's plenty of vertical to be logged. And for variety, trips to Grand Targhee or high peak forays into Grand Teton Park often satisfy the cravings. So it's no surprise that the exceptional sliding to the east often gets overlooked.

A mere hour from Jackson, at 9600 feet, Togwotee Pass provides easy, high-elevation access and a respite from the crowded slopes of the Teton Range. Even though the area is inundated with snowmobile traffic, the steep slopes are apt to see p-tex only in the early season, when the Teton snow is still thin. A higher pass elevation and unique storm pattern often means a huge snowpack and long season. And after the sledneck hordes disappear in early March, it's hard to find another soul on the line of your choice.

Togwotee has great longer ski touring and sled access options taking you north toward the Absorkas and south into the Gros Ventres, but part of its charm as a day trip is that so many quick hits are available right from the pass. The area has long been a favorite of Lander, Wyoming-based NOLS instructors and Jackson pro riders seeking solitary photogenic backcountry. The Togwotee terrain is so spectacular that it even experienced a brief bit of fame in the snowboard film TB5. And more recently, Togwotee was the

starting point for the most isolated leg of Win Goodbody and Joe Hartney's Greater Yellowstone Ski Traverse.

But for those of us who don't have the luxury of a winter off, or the ease of mechanized access, the four options described below represent easy day trip options from the Togwotee high ground. Most of the climbs start with flat stretches and compared to those in the Tetons they are short and moderately graded. With the exception of early season, don't count on having an existing skin track to point or ease the way.

Two Oceans

After driving up and over the pass, park at the turnout on the right. Head across the meadow toward the base of Two Oceans. The standard approach option is to skin or bootpack up the ridge toward treeline. From this point descent options abound on either side. The left hand option offers short, rock-peppered lines with enough danger to require scouting from the bottom. To the right, north-facing, treed glades conserve powder during weeks of erratic weather. Another north option is the perfect glade trail, a remnant from the short-lived rope tow on the pass. Continuing up the ridge will open up steeper, challenging lines in the wind scoured northwest facing bowl. But consider yourself lucky if these lines are good and the snowfall has been anything but epic. Follow the base of Two Oceans back toward the parking area, and either repeat the climb or jump in the car to sample another of the easy access options.

Radio Tower/Brooks Mountain

A bit further down the road a small parking

lot on the left is the staging area for Radio Tower couloir. Follow the sled tracks for a few hundred yards and you'll see the only rideable line on the highway side of the 11,000-foot Brooks Mountain. The first of two ascent options is to gradually wind around the mellow-grade backside until reaching the radio tower. Drop into the couloir or continue along the two-mile summit ridge. Any of the north or west aspects provide a range of moderately graded lines ripe for an afternoon of yo-yo'ing. The other option is to head straight up the couloir, which requires a short, but steep bootpack. The entrance into the chute can be a large drop, but the remainder of the line down Radio Tower is consistently pitched and wide enough to permit nicely rhythmic turns.

Breccia Peak and Cliffs

With a name like the Breccia cliffs, this area was bound to draw the more adrenaline addicted Jacksonites. Some locals claim 13 rideable lines through the cliffs, all of which require Jedi skill, meticulous scouting and adequate snowfall. But for mere mortals descending the backside can also be a rewarding ride. The easiest route to the summit heads roughly up the southeast ridge from the Two Oceans parking area. This mellow descent is the simplest option from the peak. But if you're angling for an adventure, head through the notch and seek out the basin on the backside of the cliffs. After a lengthy slog, a rewarding panorama of short and sweet couloirs offers unlimited bootpack potential. The basin is a prime winter camping destination, but it is often used for large NOLS classes, so don't expect that the extra approach effort will net complete solitude.

Angle Mountain

When driving over the pass, Angle Mountain is the most visible and possibly varied, of the Togwotee options. The easiest approach is from Cowboy Vil-

lage Resort, where the high-pitched whine of snowmobile engines lend motivation to charge the climb. Heading directly up the gradual ridge will take you through a sparsely treed climb to the first peak. Descend one of the south facing bowls, east facing chutes or forested west slopes. Although the steep north aspect looks appealing, the return trip around can take hours. Almost all of the descents on the other side provide a view of the highway, for an easy walk or hitch back to the Cowboy Village bar.



Directions: From Jackson drive north on Hwy 26/89/189. At Moran Junction (the turnoff for Yellowstone) bear right and continue on Hwy 26/287 toward Dubois.

BETA

Maps: As is usually the case, four topo maps are needed to cover the pass. The most important are Togwotee Pass, Angle Mountain and Lava Mountain. The Bridger-Teton National Forest also prints a larger scale, free winter travel map for the area that can be found at The National Elk Refuge Visitor Center in Jackson.

Season: Annual snowfall can range from 250 to 800 inches. The season can last from October until late May. The height of snowmachine season runs from Christmas to early March.

Snow Safety: The Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center has just started a daily avalanche report for Togwotee Pass (307-733-2664).

Lodging: The Hatchet Motel (877-543-2413) offers inexpensive lodging, a restaurant and gas station at the base of the pass. They also claim the largest hot tub with a view of the Tetons. Cowboy Village (800-543-2847) is a nicer and pricier option further up the road offering fine dining and a great bar that advises 'not to trust anyone under 8500 feet. Another diversion from Togwotee is the ski-in lodging at Brooks Lake Lodge (307-455-2121). The historic lodge, built in 1922 to cater to the early Yellowstone tourist trade is a five-mile ski from the highway.

Radlo Tower Couloir
Photo: Matt Davanzo



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