



### ***Snowmobiling is on the rise in Mono County***

MAMMOTH LAKES, Calif. -- Snowmobiling is going uphill, particularly here, in the eastern Sierra county of Mono, where its popularity is rising.

Don Little of DJ's Snowmobile Rentals in Mammoth Lakes reports that since his firm first began renting snowmobiles twenty years ago at Smokey Bear Flat, a 500-acre pumice flat off U.S. 395, he's seen participation "go up and up and up! The children we took snowmobiling are now bringing their children to ride."

By 2050, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service suggests, snowmobiling in the Pacific census region will more than double says Dr. Emilyn Sheffield, professor of recreation at California State University, Chico. Observers like Dr. Sheffield attribute this to the overall growth of motorized recreation and cleaner, quieter and more reliable snowmobiles that require little maintenance.

Unlike eastern states where snowmobiling is a means of transportation or a male-dominated sport oriented toward speed and competition, western snowmobiling is a family activity that is destination oriented.

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“Western riders are inclined to pick a spot and ride to it,” says Jay Dobler, president of the California Nevada Snowmobiling Association. Dobler’s association includes many local snowmobile clubs who, with U.S.D.A. Forest Service sanction, mark trails and maintain warming huts. A log cabin atop Bald Mountain near Mammoth is one of them.

After a 20-mile ride up snow-covered roads from the Shady Rest trailhead in Mammoth Lakes, riders reach the historic cabin that once served as the mountain’s fire lookout ranger hut. From the top of Bald Mountain a 360-degree view of the eastern Sierra, the Owens River and Crowley Lake is seen. Bill Sauser, president of the 100-member Mammoth Lakes Snowmobile Association says the distance to the cabin can be covered in as little as a half hour, though most riders will spend two to three hours getting there with stops to enjoy the scenery. Sauser’s group maintains the cabin which is used by snowmobilers and cross country skiers alike and who find warm refuge beside its wood-burning stove.

California’s Off-Highway Vehicle Division, in cooperation with Inyo National Forest, pays for the grooming of 100 miles of trails within Mono County. Among Mono County’s most popular routes are the Airport Sand Flat (off the “D” trail), Crater Flat and the Mammoth Scenic Loop, all ideal for beginning riders. Intermediate riders try the Mammoth to June Run (“G” trail), a fifty mile loop, and advanced riders negotiate the ungroomed “J” trail into the austere calderas of the ancient Mono Craters near Mono Lake. Maps identifying Mono County’s snowmobile trails are available for free at the U.S. Forest Service Information Center in Mammoth Lakes and at visitor centers throughout the county.

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At Smokey Bear Flat, you-are-here maps and trail maps affixed to rental sleds provide easy identification of numbered, groomed trails that lead to scenic points. The most popular is Vista Point which, at 8600 feet in elevation, looks south along U.S. 395 toward Convict Lake. Varied trails at Smokey Bear Flat provide from one to four hours of touring. One-and-a-half to three-hour guided tours are also offered at Mammoth Mountain by Mammoth Snowmobile Adventures for from \$90 to \$260. Elsewhere in Mono County, innumerable, un-groomed routes lead to such alluring destinations as Bodie Ghost Town, Mono Lake, the June Lakes basin and Sonora Pass. For riders who want to explore these routes, snowmobiles on trailers can be rented from Sierra Arctic Cat/Yamaha of Mammoth.

Dobler says snowmobilers often combine touring with other winter sports, including skiing, and therefore prefer to base their trips at ski resorts and mountain towns. “The spending by snowmobilers on rooms, meals and goods provides much appreciated winter revenue for towns like Lee Vining and Bridgeport,” says Dan Lyster economic development director for Mono County. A 2005 study by Cordell, Green, Betz, Fly and Stephens lists snowmobiling as the nation’s fourth-largest snow-based recreational activity, ahead of snowboarding, cross country skiing and snowshoeing, with annual spending now estimated by the International Snowmobile Manufacturer’s Association to exceed \$7 billion.

Plan to spend from \$60 an hour to \$250 a day to rent a sled or \$4,000 to \$10,000 to buy a new one. Most rental companies require a valid driver’s license, credit card and brief orientation course. Rental drivers must be 21 years old to carry passengers and anyone 16 and younger (more)

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must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. It's best to dress warmly in layers beneath a waterproof snowsuit. Snow gloves or mittens, waterproof snow boots, goggles and a hat are also essential to enjoy riding, and riders should always carry water and a snack.

Orientation programs are provided at rental locations and more formal introductory courses are run a couple of times each winter by the California Nevada Snowmobile Association, with support from the California State Off Highway Motorized Vehicle program.

For more information about visiting Mono County, visit [www.monocounty.org](http://www.monocounty.org) or call 1-800-845-7922.

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*Note to Editors: Photographs and contact information for anyone quoted in this article are available by calling John Poimiroo.*