

# Travel

> LONG BREAKS AND WEEKENDS AWAY

## Je suis un Rocky star

Jon Perks enjoys the wide open spaces – and large, full plates – of Colorado

**I**t's not every day you get to eat a grilled Utah elk chop. In fact, I never had.

It was, I can report, delicious – although after an action-packed day at Devil's Thumb Ranch, I would have eaten anything.

Set in 5,000 acres of glorious raw Coloradan countryside, it's nirvana for anyone who loves the outdoor life.

While in winter the main attraction is the renowned Nordic Ski Area (cross-country skiing to you and I), summertime presents its own list of temptations, from fly fishing to hiking (up to the Devil's Thumb rock outcrop that gives the ranch its name), wagon and trail rides...

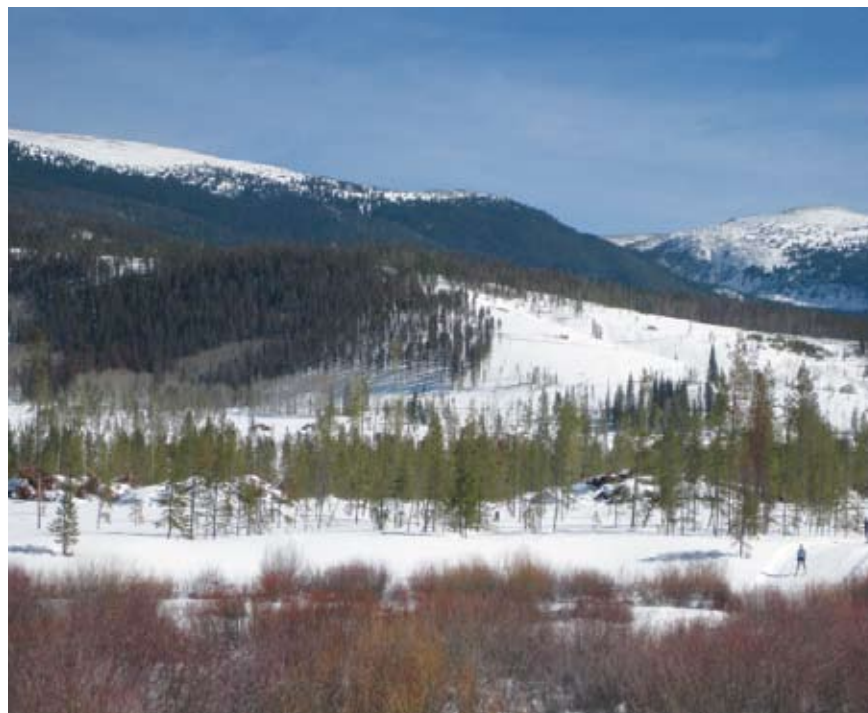
All year round distractions include the Ranch Creek Spa (with such delights as a fabulous Swedish massage or something called Rocky Mountain Rain Therapy), Rachel's (heated outdoor) Pool, a basement games room and, along the corridor, a 37-seater theatre which hosts a weekly film night.

It's all the brainchild of Bob and Suzanne Fanch, who made their fortunes in cable television, and who bought the ranch in 2001, and are currently building a new family home on the 'plot'.

With stunning views wherever you look, it's not hard to see what first caught the Fanch's eyes and imaginations.

The elk chop was part of a fabulous dinner we enjoyed with Bob after our morning's Nordic Ski lesson and afternoon treatments. Keeping busy is not essential, however; "plenty to do... or do nothing at all" is one of the owners' great mottos.

Accommodation is either in the main lodge (my room, 110, named Continental Divide View for obvious reason) or at one of the 16 cabins up



on the ridge, which vary from one bed to four bedroom, everything beautifully dressed and styled with Suzanne's clever eye.

Local artists' paintings sit happily on walls alongside snow shoes and framed collections of 'barbed wire through the ages', while in the Hallowed Grounds coffee shop, there's a great map of the US made from each state's licence plate.

For food – and what food – there's the Ranch House Restaurant, Heck's Tavern (and its welcoming battered leather sofas and roaring

fires), or, for intimate parties, John L's Wine Cellar (named after Bob's father).

You do simply get lost in the peace and tranquility, but we sadly had to leave to head to Winter Park Resort for the next stage of our whistle stop visit.

Just 20 minutes' drive from the ranch (and from our second stopover), Winter Park is a haven for snow sports, whether you get your kicks on skis or board.

We were signed up for a one-day Burton snowboarding course with instructor Andrea



teaching us the basics of J-turns, garlands, toe edges and, most importantly in my case, how to get up when you fall over.

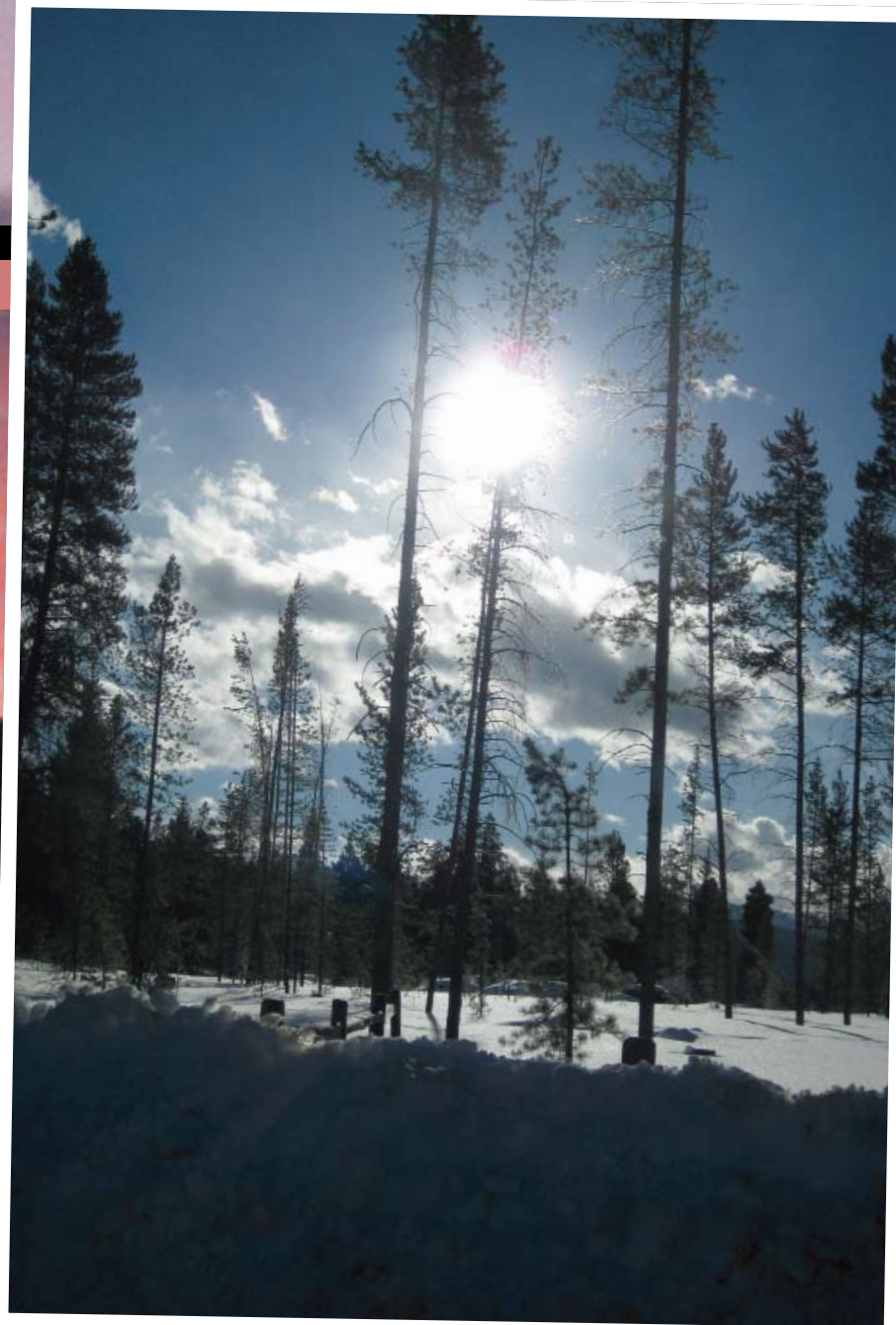
Which, when your two feet are both strapped to a piece of wood, is not that simple.

Great fun, all the same, despite the odd tumble and bump.

The second half of our Coloradan adventure was at the intriguingly named C Lazy U Ranch, also in Grand County.

You can lounge about and do nothing should you so wish, but the name comes from the

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ranch's brand – a letter C and a 'lazy' U (ie. on its side), which a previous owner came up with after seeing the shape the nearby river made as it snaked through the estate.

"We don't have any keys – the only thing we lock up is the booze," laughed operations director Dale, as he showed us to Willow, our very own log cabin.

Tasteful and comfortable, the cabins are all in the process of being refurbished (two will be completed by the summer, when a new beauty spa is also due to open), using beetle kill pine –

8am-9.15am take the Breakfast Snowcat ride; 9.15am another feed sleigh; 9.30am head off on a morning horseback ride; 10.30am there's tubing in the meadow; and at 11.30am it's trap shooting.

I did the latter, which was great fun – 25 shots each in batches of five with the single-barreled Browning shotgun, while the girls in our group opted for the more genteel but just as enjoyable horseride through the snowy fields.

You may want to just sit and relax in the hot tub, but woe betide if the staff hear anyone say they're bored.

**●● We don't have any keys – the only thing we lock up is the booze! ●●**



hundreds of trees blighted by the insect infestation, now being logged and recycled as building timber.

Opened in 1919, C Lazy U is an all season attraction, offering a fabulous blend of breathtaking scenery, tranquility and almost more activities than there are hours in the day.

You can do as little or much as you want at C Lazy U Ranch – although it's hard to resist with a tempting activity schedule in your hand.

At 8am you can take a ride on the feed wagon servicing the 200-plus horses on the ranch;

There's just no excuse. There's ice skating on the pond, sledding (hurtling face down along the half mile driveway), mountain skiing...

In the summer the horses take centre stage, but there's also hiking, fly-fishing, mountain biking; you get the impression that if you can think of it, the staff will try their utmost to make it happen.

This is one occasion where you can happily tuck into a big breakfast of eggs over easy, pancakes, bacon, oatmeal etc. without feeling guilty.

You'll soon burn it off. Unless, that is, you just want to be the 'lazy' in C Lazy U...

## > FACT FILE

**Jon flew direct to Denver from Heathrow with British Airways. Flights daily. Alternatively, you can fly from Birmingham via Newark with Continental Airlines.**

### Devil's Thumb Ranch

■ 3530 County Road 83, Tabernash, CO 80478. Tel: 970-726-5632 [www.devilsthumbbranch.com](http://www.devilsthumbbranch.com)

■ Lodge rooms starting at \$210 per night (USD), luxury log cabins at \$315 per night (USD).

### C Lazy U Ranch

■ 3640 Colorado Hwy 125, PO Box 379, Granby, CO 80446. Tel: 970-887-3344 [www.clazyu.com/](http://www.clazyu.com/) [ranch@clazyu.com](mailto:ranch@clazyu.com)

■ Rates for this winter range - \$210-355 per person (includes meals and selected activities)

■ Summer rates range from \$2625-3675 per person (7 night stay)

### Winter Park Resort

For price details on tuition etc go to <http://www.skiwinterpark.com/rentalsandleasons/index.htm>

■ Lodging at Winter Park Resort starts at \$89 per night (USD), ski-in, ski-out lodging start at \$126 per night (USD).

■ [www.skiwinterpark.com](http://www.skiwinterpark.com)



## > Q&A

### CHRIS KELLY

Owner, Metro Bar & Grill



**My most recent trip/holiday was to:** Thailand – Bangkok and Khoa Lak, scene of the Tsunami at Christmas 2004. Just brilliant how the people have picked themselves up and got on with things.

**I'm next off to:** Skiing in Austria, late March with my son who makes me look like a complete geriatric!

**I always pack:** Mobile phone, two credit cards and an open mind!

**I always forget to take:** a third credit card, some de-stress pills and a cloaking device!

**My dream destination:** French Polynesia, I have the hips for a grass skirt!

**Favourite holiday memory:** The view from Victoria Peak, Hong Kong of the stunning city below! I have never been anywhere where there is such energy coupled with a 'can do' attitude.

**Favourite travel souvenir:** My Egyptian Fez. So versatile!

**I would never go back to:** Germany. So much sausage – so little time!

**Best travel tips:** Don't go on 'organised tours' – be adventurous within reason and make a little effort with the language, it goes a long way with the locals.

### MEZ PACKER

Author, *Among Thieves*



**My most recent trip/holiday was to:** Deia in Majorca

**I was there for:** My friend's 40th birthday. She organised everything, accommodation in a beautiful rustic villa, al fresco paella on arrival and walks through the hills.

**I'm next off to:** Wales, near Aberdovey, for some expansive skies and fresh air.

**I always pack:** Too many books.

**I always forget to take:** A camera.

**My dream destination:** Not so much a destination as a journey

– motorcycling from the tip of southern India to the Himalayas on a Royal Enfield.

**Dream travel companion:** My husband.

**Favourite holiday memory:** The first time I used a "pig" toilet in India. The snouts were a real shock!

**Favourite travel souvenir:** A perfectly smooth, egg-shaped stone from Okarito beach in New Zealand.

**I would never go back to:** I can't answer this one – because everywhere has at least one redeeming feature – usually the people – but what's better than great people?

**Best travel tip:** Chill out

