

# Elkhorn Winter Yurt Guide

The Elkhorn yurt is conveniently located off the Elkhorn Loop trail for use by Nordic skiers and snowshoers. This yurt is the most remote of all the Idaho City yurts. You have direct access to over 27 miles of groomed and 50 miles of marked ski trails. The 270° view to the east, south and west is spectacular, especially in the evening. From the yurt you can see Jackson Peak, Wolf Mountain, Steele Mountain, the Trinity range, Sunset Peak, and Pilot Peak. The open, rolling terrain below the yurt provides off-trail skiers a chance to polish their skills. The nearby ungroomed Cougar trail provides access to a prime intermediate/advanced telemark area. This secluded telemark area is about .5 miles away and has 500 foot slopes facing all directions.

Please read the information below and all the other documents. This important information outlines the risks involved while traveling to and from and staying at a backcountry yurt. It is best practice to provide a copy to everyone in your party, particularly of the yurt code and maps.

You will receive your yurt code in a reservation confirmation email two weeks prior to your reservation date and again two days prior to your reservation date. If you make a reservation and do not receive a confirmation email, please contact the Idaho City Backcountry Yurt Ranger, Zane Patterson, at [zane.patterson@idpr.idaho.gov](mailto:zane.patterson@idpr.idaho.gov) or (208) 514-2418.

Check-in time is 3 PM MST and check-out time is 11 AM MST.

No dogs are allowed at Elkhorn Yurt from December 1<sup>st</sup> through April 15<sup>th</sup>. Dogs are welcome at the yurt the rest of the year, but please adhere to our pet policy found [here](#) and on the front page of the binder inside the yurt.

It is illegal to operate a snowmobile on the Idaho City Park N' Ski Trail system. The Boise National Forest map outlines the area as no snowmobiling. However, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation reserves the right to have a snowmobile at a yurt site for administrative or maintenance reasons.

Watch [this video](#) to learn what to expect during your stay.

## Parking

The Banner Ridge Park N' Ski parking lot (used to access Elkhorn Yurt) is about 23.5 miles north of Idaho City on Highway 21, just past mile marker 61. Please park vehicles close together on the high end of the parking lot next to the highway.

When people park improperly, Idaho Transportation Department cannot completely clear the parking lot. To help the snowplow operators efficiently clear the parking lots, we ask that overnight and weekday users park close together at the high end of the Banner Ridge lot, close

to the highway. Keep a shovel in your vehicle to dig it out in case it gets plowed or snowed in. A parking map is below for your convenience.

Park N' Ski passes are required at the yurt parking lots from November 15<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>. You can purchase a Park N' Ski pass [online](#) or with a [local vendor](#). Parking on Highway 21 is not allowed.

## **Getting to Elkhorn Yurt**

Travel to the yurts involves a significant rise in elevation from where you leave your vehicle. The elevation rise combined with the distance to the yurts and possible slow snow conditions (deep snow, breakable crust, heavy wet snow, etc.) can make your trip an all-day affair. It is highly recommended that you be on the trail no later than 10:00am. Daylight is short in the winter; sunset can be at 5:00pm. Once you arrive at the yurt, you may have to dig out the yurt and toilet.

Elkhorn Parking Lot: 44.023719, -115.605950 and 5,764 feet

Elkhorn Yurt: 44.023113, -115.587024 and 6,441 feet

Elevation Change and Distance: You will climb about 850 feet over three miles (one-way).

Difficulty: Intermediate. The difficulty of touring trails can increase in poor snow conditions and weather. The route to Elkhorn yurt includes a long steep section at the beginning. Later on, skiers can expect short, steep sections that you will have to herringbone up. Snowshoeing is the easiest method to access this yurt. If you ski in, climbing skins are recommended for those with heavy packs. You should not count on the trail being groomed, but a freshly groomed trail will substantially reduce the amount of energy necessary to get to the yurt.

The trails are marked with blue or yellow diamond shapes, called blazes, attached to trees. The recommended approach to the yurt is to take the Elkhorn Loop trail clockwise to the yurt turnoff point. At the first intersection of the Elkhorn Loop trail, just .2 miles from the parking lot, continue straight up the Elkhorn Loop trail. This will take you past the Banner trail intersection and up onto the scenic Banner Ridge. Stay on the blue blazed Elkhorn Loop. At 2.2 miles you will see the 2-foot yellow blaze that marks the Banner Ridge Yurt access off to your left, at that point you will stay right following the sign that reads Elkhorn Loop. Follow the Elkhorn loop trail that is marked by blue blazes on the trees. Follow the Elkhorn Loop trails' blue blazes through rolling terrain for one mile. At this point you will be at the second Elkhorn/Cougar trails' intersection at the base of a short steep climb. Stay on the Elkhorn Loop trail and climb to the top of the hill. You will see a 4x4 wood post with 2-foot yellow blazes that reads "Cougar Crossing". Go left into the trees, follow the 5" yellow blazes generally south and east (left) for 50 yards. At the high point in this area, you will find the Elkhorn yurt. You cannot see the Elkhorn yurt from the Elkhorn Loop trail. Routes to the yurts may not be marked well because of the difficulty of maintaining backcountry winter trails. Some sections of the trails go through large open areas where no features exist on which to attach markers. The yurts

themselves are located on decks but snowpacks can exceed the height of the decks, leaving the yurts hidden behind piles of snow and making it hard to see them from a distance.

### **Trail Etiquette:**

You access the yurts via a multi-use trail system open to skiers, snowshoers, fat-tire bikers, and hikers. Please preserve the tracks for skiers by utilizing the trail lane intended for your user group. If you are not skiing, please do not walk on the tracks.



### **Safety Information:**

Read the valuable information in this email and study the maps. The attached maps are georeferenced; if you open them in the Avenza app while you have cell service, you can use them to navigate even after you lose service.

Yurt tours are not recommended during winter storm warnings or strong winds. Check the weather forecast before you leave, but weather conditions at the Idaho City Backcountry Yurts can be unpredictable and severe. It is important to be prepared for any condition. Before departing, make sure your vehicle can withstand cold winter temperatures as low as -30° Fahrenheit. Snow chains, shovels and sandbags are strongly recommended. For a forecast, click [here](#). For snow depth, click [here](#).

Know your way and keep all members of your party together. Make sure all members of your party have their own copies of the area maps and know how to use them. Travel at the pace of

the slowest member of your party. A slow, steady pace is a time-tested safe way of traveling in the winter.

If possible, take a day trip to the yurt prior to your reservation to familiarize yourself with surrounding landmarks and learn route-finding tricks that will help you locate the yurt again. Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return home.

Be prepared for emergencies by bringing everything on the recommended packing list below. In case of an unexpected road closure, always be prepared to stay at the yurt for longer than expected. Be prepared to spend a night outside if you are unable to locate the yurt.

Bring a satellite communication device. There is little to no cell service at the yurts. There is no ski patrol in the yurt area and it's about three hours to the nearest hospital. The closest public telephone is in Lowman and the second closest is at the rest area in downtown Idaho City. Call the Boise County Sheriff at (208) 392-4411 or in a medical emergency call 911.

Highway 21 has every potential of closing during the winter snowstorms. Road closures are a possibility with any backcountry adventure, and it is why we provide so much information on the website to prepare our guests for their trip. Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is aware of our six backcountry yurts and tries to plow the roads as quickly as possible, but it may take several hours or longer. In the case of a road closure, please stay put at the yurt until you know that the road is open. The potential for unforeseen road closures is why we recommend bringing a satellite-based communication device such as an inReach or a Somewear and notifying someone back home of your trip. Using a satellite communication device, you can contact your party back home to verify if the road is open. Most importantly, if the road is closed, please stay put inside the yurt. Do not try to drive down the road until ITD clears it. For road conditions, visit ITD's online map [here](#).

It is possible that a yurt can be damaged by extreme weather conditions, which are common in Idaho's mountains. High winds, heavy snowstorms, falling branches from trees, and accumulation of snow on the yurt walls could cause rips, tears and/or partial or total collapse. It is also possible that the yurt can be vandalized, or items stolen. These possibilities point out the need to be well prepared. Please report any damage or problems to IDPR.

## **Other Guidelines**

Because of the backcountry nature of the yurts, staff cannot service them between every guest. IDPR depends heavily on guests to pack out what they pack in and to clean the yurts for the next guests. Step-by-step cleaning instructions can be found in the binder in each yurt.

It is important to keep the yurt decks clear of snow, especially to the yurt door. If snow is allowed to build up, people may not be able to get into the yurt. We ask that everyone using the yurts pitch in and help keep them snow free. Snow shovels are normally hanging on the chimney support, under the deck, or in the woodshed. Several members of your party should also carry snow shovels. Be extremely careful when using the shovel; the shovel can easily tear

the outer covering of the yurt. Do not climb on the chimney structure; it was not designed to handle a person's weight.

**Important: At the completion of your stay, replace the snow shovels on their hooks. If you leave them in the yurt, the next party may not be able to dig out the yurt door.**

In each yurt, you should find two bunk beds with covered foam mattresses, a futon and mattress (which converts to a double bed), a table, chairs, a kitchen cabinet, a two-burner propane stove, a solar panel and LED lights, a wood stove, a log rack, a tinder bucket, an ash bucket, assorted silverware, plates, bowls, cups, a plastic food storage container, assorted cooking pots and pans, miscellaneous kitchen equipment, a mop, a broom, a dust pan, a dome opener, and a fire extinguisher. Located outside, you should find an axe, a maul, a hatchet, a buck saw, a primitive toilet, a fire pit, a picnic table, and a woodpile. Because of the remote location, it may take us several weeks to replace/repair the item(s). Be prepared and adaptable enough to survive without these items.

During the winter, you can either bring your own water or melt snow for drinking water. Always boil your water for at least five minutes before drinking.

Each yurt is equipped with a wood stove for heating and a two-burner propane stove for cooking. Wood for the stove is located under the deck. Carefully read the directions for the cook-stove on the yurt wall. You need to bring at least one (1) one-pound screw in bottle of propane for each night you plan to stay.

This yurt is also equipped with solar powered LED lights. Should it be necessary, a brush is provided to remove snow from the panel. Please do not change the panel location. Use the lights when needed, turn them off when not in use and at the end of your stay.

Your safety is our top priority. If you feel uncomfortable visiting a yurt due to inclement weather, please do not hesitate to contact our Reservations Department at (208) 334-4199 to reschedule or cancel.

Visit our [website](#) for more information about Elkhorn Yurt. If you have questions about the yurts or are willing to share photos of your yurt and trail adventures, please contact the Idaho City Backcountry Yurt Ranger, Zane Patterson, at [zane.patterson@idpr.idaho.gov](mailto:zane.patterson@idpr.idaho.gov) or (208) 514-2418.

## Suggested Equipment List

The equipment listed below is included as a guide to help you prepare for a yurt. Please pass this list on to all members of the party. Come prepared to spend the night outdoors. Dressing in layers is the best choice. As you get warm you can take off layers, and as you cool down during breaks you can put them back on. The term “synthetics” on the clothing list refers to materials such as pile, polar fleece, synthetic clothing, Lycra, or polypropylene. Because you will likely sweat carrying a heavy pack to the yurt, we highly recommend synthetics next to the skin that wick moisture away. Synthetic/polypropylene undergarments will wick away sweat keeping you feeling dry and warm. Cotton socks, tee shirts, underwear and blue jeans should not be worn because they hold moisture against your skin hastening hypothermia.

### Personal:

- Skis or snowshoes
- Poles
- Large backpack and/or pulk
- Sleeping bag and/or fitted sheet for bunk
- Pillow - inflatable saves space
- Sunglasses
- Emergency whistle
- High energy trail snacks
- Large water bottle
- Compass
- Boise National Forest map
- Idaho City Area Yurt and Trail System map
- Specific yurt guide and location map
- Small knife
- Toothbrush and paste
- Personal medications
- Sunscreen lotion and Chapstick
- Headlamp or small flashlight
- Extra flashlight batteries and bulb
- Small cooler for ice
- Basic first aid kit
- Plastic tarp to serve as emergency shelter
- Avalanche safety equipment
  - Beacon
  - Probe
  - Shovel (used to create test pits, dig emergency shelters, or remove snow from around your vehicle)
- Roll of extra toilet paper
- Clothes and shoes
  - Underwear
  - Wool socks
  - Shirts
  - Shorts
  - Pants
  - Sun hat
  - Gloves or mittens
  - Wool, polar fleece, or synthetic hat
  - Polar fleece or jacket
  - Wool, polar fleece, or synthetic long sleeve shirt
  - Wool, polar fleece, or synthetic long pants
  - Windproof and waterproof shell jacket, hood, and pants
  - Watch
  - Knee-high gaiters
  - Shoes for exploring the area
  - Slippers or booties

Group:

- Park N' Ski Permit (Nov. 15 through Apr. 30). One per vehicle
- Yurt door lock combination
- 2 screw-in, one pound propane canisters for each day of your stay
- Paper towels
- Food and drink enough for the duration of your stay plus a few days
- Water filter or full water jug
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Lighter and fire starter
- First aid kit that includes:
  - First aid book
  - Moleskin
  - Gauze
  - Chemical heat pack
  - Ace bandage
  - 2" first-aid tape
  - Assorted band aids including butterfly
  - Triangular bandages and sterile pads

Optional:

- Camera
- Binoculars
- Wax for skis and scraper
- Books

- Sam splint or equivalent
- Antacid
- Ibuprofen
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Benadryl
- EpiPen
- Antiseptic wound cleaner
- Body thermometer
- Latex gloves
- Tweezers
- Scissors
- Nail clippers
- Small mirror
- Emergency repair kit that includes:
  - Small roll of duct or strapping tape
  - Stick-on nylon patches
  - Nylon cord/braided wire
  - Safety pins
  - Garbage bag
  - Superglue
- Satellite communication device