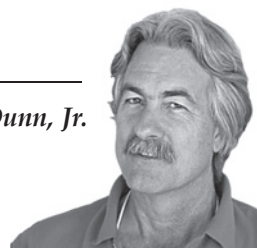


THE CURIOUS TRAVELER

by Jerry Camarillo Dunn, Jr.



Award-winning travel writer Jerry Camarillo Dunn wrote the Smithsonian Institution's historical guidebook to the Rocky Mountain states. His latest book is "My Favorite Place on Earth: Celebrated People Share Their Travel Discoveries" (www.myfavoriteplacematgeo.com)

Jackson Hole: The Old And Nouveau West



From some angles, Jackson Hole and the Teton Range look unchanged since the days of the Wild West

In early morning, not far along on our guided wildlife drive, the Chevy Suburban emerges from behind a stand of cottonwood trees. A glorious sight rises above the green river valley: a trio of serrated stone peaks, three lofty mountain gods cloaked in snow-white capes.

"What's that?" asks The Couple from New Jersey, in the back seat.

Our guide, outdoorsman **Jason Williams**, chokes slightly. "Um, those are the Tetons." (We are in Grand Teton National Park.)

I observe this exchange gleefully, being a collector of the classic questions that tourists ask: "What time do they turn off the waterfall?" "What do you do with the snow when it melts?" "When do deer change into moose?" – that sort of thing.

Behind us, the Snake River uncoils like a sidewinder through a valley where ranchers still ride the fence lines. The landscape looks like the backdrop in a classic western like "Shane" – which was, in fact, filmed in this valley called Jackson Hole. Long before that, fur trappers and frontier scouts got together here. This is the Old West.

Our guide is a spring-steel young guy who climbs serious mountains (including 13,770-foot Grand Teton) and guides summer whitewater trips and winter snowmobile adventures in the backcountry. In his time off, he likes to scuba dive with sharks. He and I are, in other words, total opposites.

I rely on Jason's keen eyes to spot wildlife. First we see a great horned owl in a tree, its sleepy yellow eyes

barely open. Two gray fledglings perch nearby – a rare sight. We pause at a creek where a log dam and some gnawed trees indicate beavers. We head down a dirt road past the old cabins of Mormon Row, where a much-photographed wood barn leans like a drunken cowboy out in a meadow, with the snow-capped Tetons behind.

On cue, a dozen shaggy bison wander by, part of a herd of 900 that spend the winter in Jackson Hole, along with 7,500 elk, and then scatter in spring. Jason offers some facts to think about: "A 2,000-pound bison can run 40 miles an hour," he says, "and it can jump a fence without a running start." The Couple from New Jersey head for the car.

Like me, they're staying in the nearby town of Jackson. As the gateway to two national parks, Teton and Yellowstone, Jackson has always been on the tourist trail of the Old West. About 50 years ago, I drove through town with my parents on a family road trip. We scouted out the town square, which travelers enter through arches made entirely of elk antlers. In a shop, my dad bought me a pint-size cowboy hat and a rubber tomahawk.

As it has done since 1957, Jackson stages a rootin'-tootin' shootout on the square six evenings a week. After all, Wild West outlaws regularly hid out in Jackson Hole; even Jesse James rode through. I stood on the square with a crowd of rubberneckers, watching blank-cartridge gunfire erupt between the "marshal" and a gang of badmen with squinty eyes and bandan-



Historic Moulton Barn in Grand Teton National Park is probably the most photographed barn in America

nas. Kids laughed and then covered their ears as the pistols popped. More authentically, Jackson holds a rodeo twice a week where real cowboys rope steers and get bucked off real broncos.

Travelers can't miss another bronc rider – the neon sign atop the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar. On a honky-tonk Saturday night in this 1930's saloon, folks sit astride barstools made of leather saddles. They bang their shot glasses down on a bar inlaid with silver dollars – YEEEE-hahh! – then do the boot scootin' boogie on the dance floor as a country band plays. The bar is a classic tourist trap, yet is also popular with locals – a good place to meet actual cowboys.

So Jackson has plenty of Old West personality. But over the last few decades, another face has shown itself: the Nouveau West. The valley has attracted city slickers who love the world-class skiing and fly fishing. Elegant resorts and restaurants have bloomed like hothouse orchids among mountain wildflowers.

Like Santa Fe, the town has become an important art market (ranked fifth nationwide in dollar volume), with some 30 galleries. Western art is featured, of course, and I saw good landscapes and cowboy art at Jackson's oldest gallery, Trailside. But contemporary work has considerably broadened Jackson's art scene. At Heather James Fine Art, I met director **Lyndsay McCandless**, a Princeton art graduate who came to Jackson eighteen years ago to ski before getting a "real job." She's been here ever since. Today she's excited about an upcoming exhibition that includes a Monet painting of water lilies. Then comes a showcase of three generations of Wyeths: N.C., Andrew, and Jamie. "I never thought I'd have the chance to get so close to paintings like this," she says delightedly, "without a museum security guard hovering around!"

All over Jackson, I saw contemporary life bump into the Old West. Atop the red stagecoach that takes tourists around the square, a cowboy and cowgirl sat at the reins. She wore



Four Seasons' pool offers summer guests scented face cloths and winter guests heated towels and hot chocolate

fringed chaps and a black hat – and was talking on a cell phone. Near Jackson's stunning \$35-million Center for the Arts (musicals, concerts), I looked up at the peeling neon sign of the funky Western Motel.

Jackson Hole's character continues to evolve. Some locals and visitors complain that the area has become "Aspenized," while others appreciate the intriguing confluence of two western streams, the old and new. But one thing never changes: the backdrop of the snowy Tetons, soaring above the valley toward heaven.

Where to Bunk

In a tourist town, I recommend two kinds of lodging: 1) a quiet location away from the action but close enough to walk to restaurants and shops; and 2) a beautiful setting well out of town.

The first type is exemplified by the Rusty Parrot, a 31-room lodge and spa tucked between a creek and a park three blocks from the square. Elegant ranch furnishings – scrollwork bedsteads, leather reading chairs, western art – combine with luxurious



Four Seasons style: natural stone and wood meet design sophistication, creating a modern take on the classic western lodge

amenities such as 400-thread-count Italian linens (I lost count at 281), down comforters, and flat-screen TVs. Breakfast is served by a fireplace in the four-diamond Wild Sage restaurant, featuring dishes such as *crème brûlée* French toast. For dinner, the exhibition kitchen prepares local game, meats, and seafood. At Body Sage, Jackson's original spa, sports massages feature oil infused with local Arnica leaves, said to ease muscle pain.

My out-of-town retreat was the Four Seasons resort, twelve miles north of Jackson in Teton Village at the foot of a legendary ski area, a good summer base for outdoor activities. A thoroughly modern take on an alpine lodge, the five-diamond Four Seasons gleams with stone and polished wood, its walls hung with museum-quality art and its windows opening on mountain panoramas. Service is ever-present and friendly; when I went to the swimming pool, an attendant was quick to offer me a spritz of Evian water, frozen grapes, or a chilled and scented face cloth.

My room (one of 156 rooms, suites, and rental residences) had a balcony with a mountain view, fireplace, down duvet and pillows, twice-a-day house-keeping, and luxurious bath stocked with L'Occitane products.

Perhaps due to the altitude, I ate lightly: for lunch a delicious shrimp-and-corn chowder in the Westbank Grill, with a view of Rendezvous Mountain. At night I went to the Lobby Lounge, the resort's casual "living room," which serves light fare and the best sushi for hundreds of miles.

The resort organizes wildlife trips (led by a biologist who researched wolves in Yellowstone), guided fly-fishing trips (with optional lunch served on white linen by the river),

bike rentals (from cruisers for the extensive bike paths to suspension models to take on the ski lift, then bomb downhill), and even geocaching (a high-tech scavenger hunt using a GPS receiver to find small treasures hidden in the outdoors). After an active day, there's a full-service spa with a lavish menu of treatments.


Grub

In Teton Village, GameFish at the Snake River Lodge & Spa (<http://snakeriverlodge.rockresorts.com>) offers a sophisticated take on Rocky Mountain cuisine, such as pulled elk quesadillas. As a vegetarian in bison-steak country, I chose the spectacularly good sesame-crusted tofu with orange-ginger mashed butternut squash and a honey soy reduction.

In town, Snake River Brewing (265 S. Millward) serves award-winning microbrews, pizzas, and meals; at night the lively bar fills with locals.



High-elevation cuisine: juniper-and-cracked-pepper-crusted venison reflects the local organic fare at the Rusty Parrot Lodge's Wild Sage restaurant



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Compass Points

Visitor information: The Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce has an excellent website: www.jacksonholechamber.com.

Where: Jackson Hole is located in northwestern Wyoming. ("Hole" was an early trappers' name for a valley.) At the south end is the town of Jackson, 12 miles from Grand Teton National Park and 60 miles from Yellowstone. Jackson Hole Airport is served by major carriers.

Things to see and do:

Jackson Hole Wildlife Safaris (www.jacksonholewildlifesafaris.com) leads wildlife and photography trips into the national parks.

National Museum of Wildlife Art (www.wildlifeart.org; 3 miles north of town); limited subject matter, but don't miss Karl Bodmer's 1830's studies of western animals.

Jackson Hole Fall Arts Festival (September 9-19, 2010); art, music, food, auction of quality western art (preview at Trailside Galleries, 130 E. Broadway).

Grand Teton Music Festival (www.gtmf.org; Teton Village, through mid-August); classical concerts.

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