



Trip Leader's Guide for Backcountry Ski & Snowboard Trips at Downing Mountain Lodge

We know that stepping into the role of a Trip Leader can feel like a big task, with lots of moving pieces to coordinate. But here's the thing—there's no single "right" way to do it. Every trip leader brings their own style, and that's what makes each adventure unique. This guide isn't here to tell you exactly how to do things but rather to offer some helpful tips and structure to make planning easier and more enjoyable. Take what works for you, adapt what doesn't, and most importantly—have fun!

1. Booking Your Trip

Checking Availability & Pricing:

- Contact via phone or text John Lehrman to check available dates. (406) 531-1486
- **Group Style:** Confirm pricing based on group size, duration, and services requested. Daily rate cost includes up to 10 people. **NEW for 2026!** We are offering 2 additional people at no extra charge. That's 12 people for the same daily rate cost!
- **Hostel Style:** Are you not looking to book out the whole lodge? Do you not have 10 backcountry skiers/riders in your Rolodex? We offer hostel-style stays for groups of 4-8 participants and then mingle 2-3 groups together whenever possible.
- **Looking for additional skiers/riders for your group?** We have created a Downing Mountain Lodge Trip Builders Facebook Group. This group connects Trip Leaders with skiers and riders seeking compatible group adventures. Whether you're organizing a trip and need additional members or looking to join an established group, this is the place to find like-minded enthusiasts for your next ski or ride experience!
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/654931923792327>
- Secure your reservation with a deposit as required by the lodge's policies.

Understanding Lodge Amenities:

- Downing Mountain Lodge has self-guided/catered, backcountry lodge stays.

- Capacity: 19 guests (confirm with lodge if needed).
 - Amenities include a full-size commercial kitchen, shower and flushing toilets, sleeping quarters, sauna, cedar hot tub, grand social room, games, and more.
 - Room layout: **Room #1 (sleeps 4):** Queen + 2 singles. **Room #2 (sleeps 2):** Double. **Room #3 (sleeps 5):** Double, 3 singles (2 upper bunks and 1 lower bunk). **Loft (sleeps 8):** 4 singles, 2 Doubles.
 - Snowmobile shuttle services available for gear and food transport from parking/staging area for an additional fee, or you can bring your own snowmobile for hauling.
 - Guiding services are available for an additional fee.
 - **New for 2026!** First-time groups at the lodge will receive a **complimentary** half-day guided mountain orientation with lodge owner and lead guide John Lehrman on arrival afternoon. This optional service helps new Trip Leaders and groups get acquainted with the terrain. Unlike many other backcountry lodges and yurts that require and charge for this service, we offer it to enhance your experience. 😊
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2. Planning Your Group & Logistics

Organizing Your Group:

- Determine the number of participants and confirm commitment.
- Ensure skiers and snowboarders have appropriate equipment, backcountry experience, and avalanche safety knowledge.
- **Collect deposits from attendees as soon as possible** to secure their spots and ensure commitment. This not only confirms their participation but also helps you plan more effectively. After all, who wouldn't want to be part of an epic backcountry adventure? Securing deposits early minimizes the risk of last-minute cancellations and takes the financial pressure off you as the trip leader. By requiring a deposit upfront, you create a sense of accountability among skiers while giving yourself peace of mind to focus on organizing an unforgettable experience.

Assigning Roles Within Your Group:

- **Trip Leader:** Oversees logistics and group safety, including communication with Downing Mountain Lodge.
 - **Food Coordinator:** Plans meals, coordinates shopping, and organizes food transport.
 - **Attendee Responsibilities:** Each participant is responsible for bringing required safety and ski/snowboard equipment. Those with experience in route planning and avalanche safety should take the lead in decision-making.
 - **First Aid Responder:** Ensure at least one group member has WFA/WFR training and carries a first-aid kit.
 - **Bonus Role – Fun & Games Coordinator!** Plans theme nights, games, and other entertainment to keep the group spirit high.
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3. Arrival, Snowmobile Shuttles & Gear Transport

Equipment & Food Shuttles: You may bring your own snowmobile or skier sleds for transport, or we can provide snowmobile shuttle services.

- **Before Arrival:** Complete DML Guest Roster. Share lodge directions, parking instructions and lodge welcome letter with check-in and checkout instructions with your attendees.
- **Arrival:** Coordinate your arrival time in the afternoon with Downing Mountain Lodge. If you have arranged for a snowmobile shuttle, we will meet you at Switchback #11 to transport food, luggage, and gear.
- **Departure:** Plan ahead for a shuttle to bring your items down later morning at the end of your stay.

Personal Gear to Carry:

- Avalanche safety gear (beacon, probe, shovel)
 - Touring setup (skis/splitboard, skins, poles, boots)
 - Personal backpack with layers, food, water, helmet, goggles and gloves
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4. Food Planning & Preparation

Food Organization:

- Our commercial kitchen can handle all of your food prep needs. We have 2 ovens, large griddle, 4 propane burners, microwave, toaster oven, toasters, coffee makers, grinders, etc.
- Assign meal responsibilities to attendees.
- Use small and medium coolers and cardboard boxes for efficient transport.
- Bring extra snacks and hydration solutions.

Kitchen & Cooking at the Lodge:

- The lodge kitchen is fully equipped with cookware and utensils.
 - Cook and clean up in teams to maximize efficiency.
 - Follow lodge waste disposal and cleanup protocols.
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5. Safety & Avalanche Awareness

Pre-Trip Avalanche Planning:

- Check the latest avalanche forecasts.
- Choose routes based on current snow conditions.
- Plan emergency response scenarios.

Daily Safety Briefings:

- Review weather and avalanche conditions each morning.
 - Assign partners and discuss planned routes.
 - Carry radios for group communication.
 - Establish turnaround times and emergency meeting points.
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6. Departure & Cleanup

Final Lodge Clean-Up:

- Follow lodges' checkout cleaning list.
- Pack out all waste and recyclables.
- Return any borrowed lodge items to their proper place.
- Confirm shuttle arrangements with Downing Mountain Lodge for exit morning..

Feedback & Future Planning:

- Provide trip feedback to Downing Mountain Lodge.
 - Debrief with your group and discuss potential future trips. We give first preference for 2027 trip dates to returning guests!
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If you have any questions, please or text call John at (406) 531-1486. We're here to help make your experience great! By following this guide, trip leaders can ensure a smooth, safe, and enjoyable backcountry stay at Downing Mountain Lodge. Happy touring!