



The Bare Market

At first glance, nudity seems like pure monkey business coupled with a hint of adrenaline and folly thrown in for good measure. It makes people feel good, no one can take himself or herself too seriously in the nude. It makes participants feel simultaneously empowered, primal and vulnerable. Nudists (or naturists) range in commitment level from those who find certain activities more pleasurable sans clothing to those who deem it a lifestyle and philosophical or political point of view. An underlying value of nudism is that nothing says “who gives a rat’s ass about your Coach bag, your Audi or your career?” like blatant nudity. But, nudism or naturism is not just skin deep. An exploration of nudism as a state of mind, rather than lack of apparel, is necessary. And a relevant conundrum exists: People want to take it all off, but only have a few places that allow it. Quality facilities and activities that offer a legal way to get naked in Colorado are few and far between.

*John DeLello & Vicky Rozenberg
Images: Adam Diaz*



The Bare Background

Typically, the need to shed clothes these days arises in the heat of the moment – whether that moment is in times of passion, in times of goofiness or in times of extreme heat. But even as far back as Adam and Eve, clothing simply alienated humans from one another. According to author Ruth Barcan, clothing when used as a symbol to portray a falling from grace, separates humans from nature, from the authentic self and from the traditional way of life. And, looking at the history of nudism, one cannot help but wonder if things may have been nicer and breezier back then.

Nudism carries with it a sense of controversy along with an underlying popularity. In Europe, in the early twentieth century, nudism held a nostalgic innocence, a faint attempt at a return to Edenic perfection (1). For some, nudism was a way to critique modernity; for others still, it was the only way to the future. Not much has changed with time.

Many Christian nudists turned to the Bible to try and understand human shame and modesty. The story of Adam and Eve sparked a starting point for discussion, leading to questions of impurity and dualism, though Jewish nudist doctor Francois Fougerat de David de Lastours rejected the idea of impurity and concluded that dualism was not a logical philosophy in modern times (2).

Nudists viewed clothes as dangerous to one's health: physical, sexual, even moral. But for many, clothing held an ambiguity. The story of Adam and Eve conveys nudity as both a sinless form as well as a shameful reminder of it. The ambiguity lies in the moral necessity of clothing while also in the representation of human sin and corruption, disguise and deception.

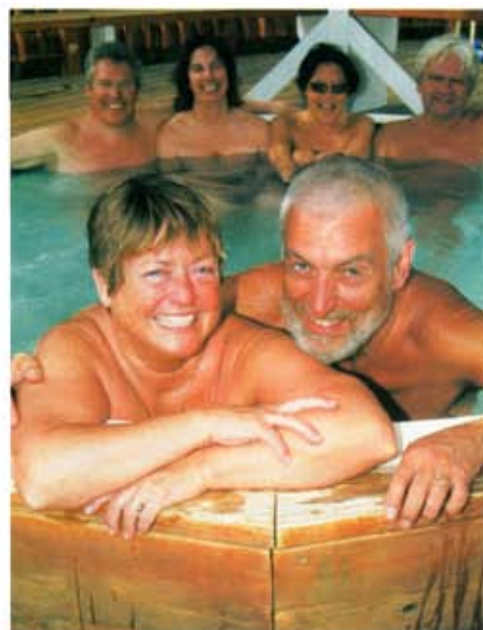
This ambiguity allowed Christians to see past the suspicions of the body to come back to viewing nudity in the light of innocence and chastity. And, of course, where there is controversy, there is conflict. The other side, the Christian moralists, focused on spreading the evil of nudism. The dichotomy dates back to the 1930s and still exists today.

Social equality was also seen as endangered in the eyes of nudists. The ambiguity of clothing played a role in this view as well, due to clothing being associated with alienation and deceit. Nudism avoided materialistic factors. It argued that a lack of clothing simplified life and lowered the cost of living. Clothes can be seen as a marker of social hierarchy, which placed nudists in an egalitarian position.

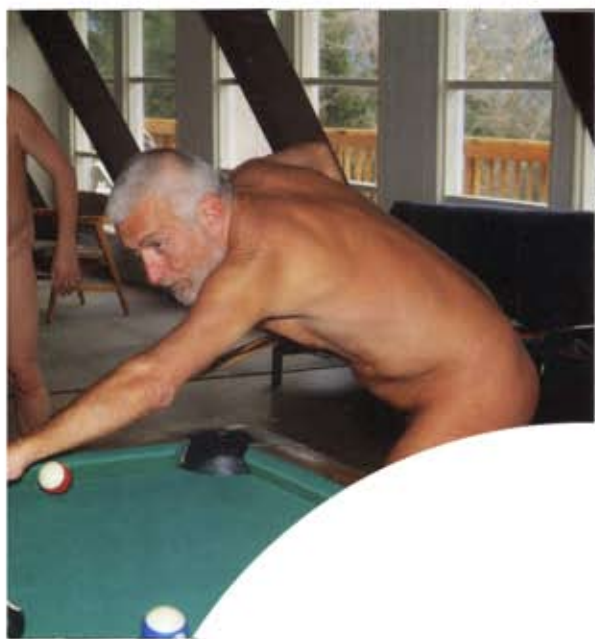
On the gender front, males dominated the nudist scene until female physician Bess Mensendieck began to advocate nudity as a means of enhancing women's body esteem, encouraging women to encompass their bodies' beauty and strength. To add to equality, nudists saw their practice as the main cure for sexual fears and obsessions. Maurice Parmelee, a medical doctor and nudist, saw concealment of the body as a hampering to childbirth and as a rise to unhealthy mental complexes for humankind (3). Incorporating the female gender was crucial, because women represent the central tenet of nudism – the naturalness of nakedness.

A general medical emphasis surrounded the lifestyle of nudism. Nudist doctors in the early twentieth century also practiced heliotherapy, advocating nude sunbathing to protect the body from diseases such as tuberculosis, rheumatism, anemia, even rickets. When prescribing treatments to infected patients, one of the items on the prescription menu was monitored exposure to sunlight.

The nudism movement was organized by well-educated people. Those involved included physicians,



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lawyers, scientists, even the clergy, but nudism's citizenry in many countries still consisted of the working poor and the unemployed. Many nudist leaders were socialists, making the lifestyle a political issue as well as a societal one. Ennemonde Boniface, a writer, predicted, for instance, that nudism would go as far as bringing an end to capitalism. Instead, nudism was integrated into the system to promote and profit from the structure that the founder of capitalism had hoped to change (4). Apparently, some held the idealistic viewpoint that nudism would solve any and all of the world's issues.

It was during this time, 1920s-1930s, that the term 'naturalism' became a popular replacement for 'nudism', especially in Britain and France. Nudists believe, even today, that the term promotes a more wholesome image of their lifestyle.

The earliest documented form of nude recreation took place among the Greeks, who performed acts of skill and strength nude during the first Olympics (5). Following in those footsteps, early nudist clubs incorporated naked exercise in the outdoors, including hiking and swimming. The first known organized nudist club, *Freilichtpark*,

opened in Hamburg, Germany in 1903.

Kurt Barthel, known as the founder of American nudism, led a group of people to a picnic, in the nude, near Peekskill, New York on Labor Day of 1929. This action led to the birth of organized nude recreation in America, titled the American League for Physical Culture (6).

The first nudist club was opened in the summer of 1930, and by 1931, the name changed to the American Sunbathing Association. The club grew from two hundred members in '31 to over fifty thousand members in present day. The name changed once more in 1995 to the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR) – a name much more appropriate in its reflection of the members' activities (7).

By the 1930s, the United States spread its wings and spread nudist clubs in all directions. Rock Lodge Club in Stockholm, New Jersey, opened in 1932. In 1935, a year-round nudism-practicing resort in

South Carolina, Sea Island Sanctuary, released an advertisement, claiming they were the oldest and largest nudist resort

around. Kaniksu Ranch in Washington, north of Spokane, opened in 1939 and is still in existence today.

The Trade Association for Nude Recreation was formed in 1987 to stimulate growth in the already lucrative business of the nudism industry.

Nudism today may appear to be separated

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from the social standard, but the irony lies in the statement made by writer Ellen E. Woodall: "By couching the activity as a right, those who are opposed to it become tyrannical. By describing it as shameless and healthy, those who do not participate become repressed and sick. Thus, participants are part of a select group who 'gets it.'" And the rest, evidently, don't.

1-3. Barcan, Ruth. "Regaining what Mankind has Lost Through Civilisation: Early Nudism and Ambivalent Moderns." (March 2004). Gale, Cengage Learning

4. Woodall, Ellen. "The American Nudist Movement: From Cooperative to Capital, the Song Remains the Same." *Journal of Popular Culture*.

5-7. *Road & Travel Magazine*: RoadAndTravel.com

Bare Colorado

With increased and overzealous police presence and the current trend to prosecute nudity as a sex crime, streaking as a passing rite of college might be prosecuted as a felony. Therefore, legally sanctioned nudity is heavily suggested. The primary options for legal Colorado nudism range from activities that a bit of a stretch to formally established organizations.

For instance, several hot springs throughout the state give the inner exhibitionist in everyone a chance to bare it all (try Conundrum Springs near Aspen or Strawberry Park near Steamboat).

Nudity-backed political statements, under freedom of expression, are often events in which nudity doesn't garner jail time, like the annual naked bicycle ride in Boulder and Denver, which protests U.S. dependence on foreign oil.

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Additionally, Colorado has a couple of non-landed groups, The Front Range Naturists of Boulder and the Rocky Mountain Naturists based in Aurora, that host monthly potlucks. But all of these opportunities aren't exactly enough to satisfy the needs of someone wishing to express themselves fully as a nudist.

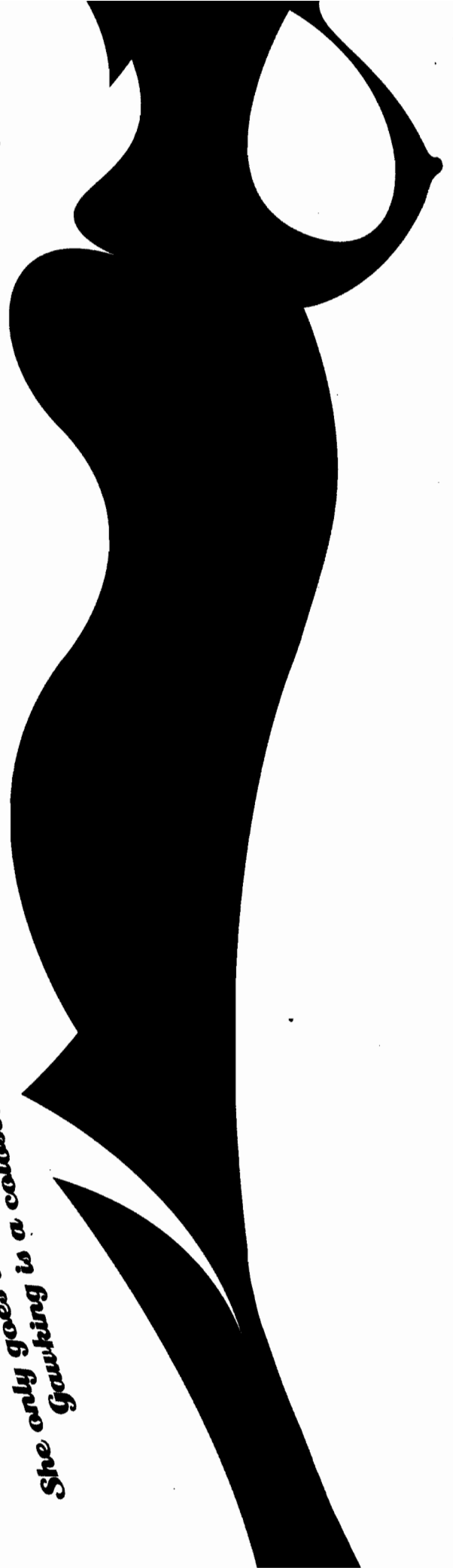
For Coloradoans who want to be able to hike, dance, socialize and play on all levels, nudist or nudist camps are the granddaddies of all that is nude. And Colorado offers one of the best in the country. Mountain Air Ranch is a comprehensive and family-friendly environment. Plus, it is an organization connected to the AANR and is in line with the original philosophy of nudism.

Mountain Air Ranch

Mountain Air Ranch sits on over one hundred acres, about a half-hour outside of Denver, under the pine trees of Indian Hills. It showcases all that can be done in the nude: horse shoes, co-ed paddle tennis tournaments, barbecues, dances, hot tubs, a pool, bocce ball, ten miles of trails and everything else that is family nudist-friendly. Children have access to playgrounds, air hockey, foosball and video games. This beautiful property was put into a corporate trust to ensure that it will be a nudist camp for perpetuity and not grounds for another McMansion foothills subdivision.

Mountain Air Ranch has a proud and rich tradition. This year will be its seventy-third in operation. But, there have been tribulations in the past. In the late '30s, the Denver Police department often raided Mountain Air when it operated under the moniker of the Denver Sunshine Club. In 1982, it had to be shifted to a Colorado corporation to secure its future.

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Mountain Air Ranch manager Bob Watzel sits behind his desk, clothed. Above the fax machine and printer, several framed photographs of members en masse nudity adorn the walls.

This is Watzel's eleventh summer managing the ranch with **five hundred** memberships. Since Mountain Air is a family nudist facility, that **translates to 2.2** people per membership, or over one thousand members, in addition to **guests** running around in the buff. A few different membership options are available and all are affordable, costing roughly the same as a gym membership.

Watzel's entry into this vocation began after reading an article about nudism. Soon after, he and his girlfriend laid out on the sand dunes and outer beaches of Lake Michigan. They ended up getting married and moving to Colorado with their two kids and became active members of the Mountain Air Ranch. Seven years later, their involvement led Bob to a full-time manager position with Mountain Air.

What he loves most about the business is the weather and the people. What he likes least about the job is also the weather. "I'm not a fan of the snow and slow season." He also concedes, "And it's a business all right."

It's a cold Saturday in the upper thirties, and more than a foot of snow covers the ground. A dozen or so members mill about. Some are taking a sauna or are in the clubhouse watching college basketball or lounging and socializing. Everyone is friendly and knows one another.

Diana, an attractive Asian woman of about forty, came to Mountain Air seven years ago. Ten minutes later, she met her current boyfriend. "It took him eleven years to find me there." She only goes to nudist camps, stating that clothing-optional facilities tend to attract gawkers. Gawking is a colossal no-no and grounds for removal or refusal of the premises.

George, a middle-aged man, joined Mountain Air in 1976 and moved out of town in the mid '80s for a decade. The first thing he did when he returned was renew his membership, citing Mountain Air as the one thing he missed most about Colorado.

In 1996 and 1997, the AANR awarded Mountain Air the friendliest nudist resort of North America honors, beating out about two hundred others.

It's not hard to see why. Membership here is like being part of an extended family. Members interact together: They build trails, remodel cabins and cook for one another. They greet one another with hugs and kisses. Bitter beer face and shirking in the corner – that's not what happens to people here. Members range in age from early thirties to seniors.

John and Jean, a lean couple in their early sixties, joined Mountain Air in 1982 after moving to Colorado from Orange County, California. "[Jean] was here ten minutes and said we've got to join." They did and then invited their kids, ages fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, to do so as well, but they all declined. "You can get a tan every month of the year up here," says John.

The scenery and the interactive social structure make Mountain Air feel like a nudist Club Med. Fireplaces, RV hookups, a campground, cabins, community kitchens, a sauna and pool are just some of the ranch's infrastructure.

Above the outdoor hot tub, a sign states the rules: Rule No. 1 – Absolutely no clothing permitted. A middle-aged man and a twenty-year-old woman are taking a soak together. They are father and daughter. She's a Fort Lewis college student, dreading the long, potentially snowy drive back to Durango. He's drinking Coors Extra Gold, practically summarizing what Mountain Air Ranch offers – a relaxed, family environment where folks who like to enjoy the finer things in life without judgment can bare it all.