

Idaho ski sojourn

The state has great snow now and both chic and laidback resorts.

By HEATHER HUBBARD

Special to Maine Sunday Telegram

In a recent trip to Idaho we found many similarities to Maine: five-letter states, potato growers, 400-4700 parallels, population 1.3 million, area codes 207 and 208.

We found another trait these Northern neighbors share — 18 ski areas. We skied five of them on our Idaho Iditarod, from rustic ski areas to regal Sun Valley, to the new resort in the country — Tamarack. We discovered nearly vacant vertical peaks and scenery that goes on for miles (also found big smiles: The Idahoans are as genuine as the lakes and rivers that are this mountainous state. Idaho should be on every skier's map — but it's not, ending in Boise, we were just 16 miles to Bogus Basin, a community-owned area. There is nothing bogus about the 60-foot vertical terrain here; you can ski east 360 degrees from two summits that surpass 2,600 acres, with multiple faces, runs and seven lifts (two are high-speed alps). Bogus' access road is the real deal, the twenty 45-minute drive up from Boise deserves black diamond status. It scored powder our first day at Bogus. After getting our bearings on the state (Bogus' layout is breathtaking), we did steep and deep double black



Greg Deane photo

Sun Valley is famous for the world's first chairlift, and as a swank resort that caters to celebrities and Olympians.

IF YOU GO

Bogus Basin Ski Area, www.bogusbasin.org, Boise, Idaho, 208-367-4337
Shoshone Mountain Resort

Recent extravaganzas include a palatial Needle and Golf Center and an incredible performing arts prothon. Next year, a bow goddess will deliver skiers and diners to the original 1939 Round House. America's first ski-stationary lodge still serves lunch.



The Associated Press

The Conchi, or Natural Pool, is surrounded by some of Aruba's most rugged terrain. Much of the northern side of the island is wild and is part of a national park.

Aruba's island beauty offers sea and sunsets

The Caribbean island has two sides, one wild and the other with beaches.

By FRITZ FARMER

The Associated Press

Given a choice between a snowy mountain and a sandy beach, I prefer the cold. But my wife is from Miami and my infant son howls when exposed to a chill. So this year I deferred to them, and we headed to Aruba.

About 20 miles long and 4 miles wide, Aruba is carpeted in some areas with green, scrappy vegetation and a few steep hills, while the north side is rugged, desert-like terrain peppered with cacti and wild rock formations. White sand rings the

Arubi and Malenk Beaches. Schools of fish crowded around us as we swam through the clear, warm water. Parrotfish, floufish and unprint major fish prowled through the water as starfish lurked on the bottom.

But Aruba offers more than the sea for outdoor adventurers. Much of the northern side of the island is wild. In fact, about 20 percent of the island's 72 square miles lies within park boundaries. The Arikok National Park has hiking and biking trails leading up to views of the rocky north coastline. Check out the unusual rock and cave formations, including natural rock bridges eroded by millennia of waves crashing into and undercutting the rocky coast.

Idaho ski sojourn

The state has great snow and both chic and laidback resorts.

By HEATHER BURKE

Special to Maine Sunday Telegram

On a recent trip to Idaho we found many similarities to Maine: five-letter states, major potato growers, 43rd-47th parallels, population 1.3 million, area codes 207 and 308.

We found another trait these Northern states share - 18 ski areas. We eked five of them on our Idaho itinerary, from rustic alpine areas to regal Sun Valley, to the newest resort in the country - Tamarack.

We discovered nearly vertical vertical slopes and scenery that goes on for miles. We also found big smiles. The Idahoans are as genuine as the lakes and rivers that grace this mountainous state. Idaho should be on every skier's map - but it's not.

Landing in Boise, we were just 18 miles from Bogus Basin, a community-owned ski area. There is nothing bogus about the 1,800-foot vertical terrain here; you can ski almost 360 degrees from two summits that encompass 2,800 acres, with multiple runs, 67 runs and seven lifts (two are high-speed quads). Bogus' access road is the real deal too, the twisty 45-minute drive up from Boise deserves black diamond status.

We scored powder our first day at Bogus, and after getting our bearings on the frontside (Bogus' layout is befuddling), we found steep and deep double black runs off 7,590-foot Shafer Butte in the Pine Creek and Superior backside. With its proximity to Boise, Bogus Basin is a good day (and night) area to hit if your flights in and out of Boise allow. Bogus stays open until 10 p.m.

Driving 95 miles north from Boise along the incredibly scenic Payette River, we arrived in the lakefront town of McCall. This Idaho frontier celebrates the snow season with ice carvings, snowshoeing and skiing at Brundage Mountain Resort.

Brundage may be Idaho's best kept secret. It gets "the best snow in Idaho" and no crowds. This 1,800-foot vertical area is a family-owned gem, blessed with gorgeous views of Payette Lake and the surrounding Salmon River Mountains.

We lapped seven minute rides on the Blue Bird Express quad to the 7,540-foot summit, sking great cruisers like 40th Parallel and Eagle - named after try Eagon - the Olympic jumper who started Winter Carni-



Sun Valley is famous for the world's first chairlift, and as a swank resort that caters to celebrities and Olympians.

IF YOU GO

Bogus Basin Ski Area, www.bogusbasin.org, Boise, Idaho, 800-367-4397

Brundage Mountain Resort, www.brundagemountain.com, McCall, Idaho, 888-ALL-SNOW

Soldier Mountain, www.soldiermountain.com, Fairfield, Idaho, 208-764-2526

Sun Valley, www.sunvalley.com, Sun Valley, Idaho, 1-800-786-8259

Tamarack Resort, www.tamarackidaho.com, Tamarack, Idaho, 1-877-TAM RESORT

LODGING

Modern Hotel, www.themodernhotel.com, Boise, Idaho, 866-780-6012

Shore Lodge, www.shorelodge-mccall.com, McCall, Idaho, 800-657-6464

Sun Valley, www.sunvalley.com, Sun Valley, Idaho, 1-800-786-8259

by the resort.

Recent extravaganzas include a palatial Nordic and Golf Center and an incredible performing arts pavilion. Next year, a new gondola will deliver skiers and diners to the original 1920s Round House. America's first ski mountain lodge still serves lunch in Alpine style with a grand fireplace and accordion accompaniment.

We stayed at the glitzy 1906 Sun Valley Lodge, which oozes history with hallways filled with photos of Olympic skiers and movie stars. Skaters on the outdoor rink conjure Sonja Henning's scene from "Sun Valley Serenade" (which is broadcast endlessly on the hotel TV). The Sun Valley village is dotted with sophisticated ski boutiques, while downtown Ketchikan has more diverse dining, western saloons and shops.

Bringing our Idaho ski odyssey to a finale, we skied Soldier Mountain, circa 1948. Actor Bruce Willis bought this vintage ski area in 1996, but it remains humble with wide open skiing on 1,150 acres. The south side of nearby Sun Valley, lift attendants in Carhart uniforms lead two double chairs (1,425 feet total vertical). Three doom runs from 7,177-foot Soldier Peak range

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... stepped seven minute rides in the Blue Bird Express quad to the 7,648-foot summit, skiing great cruisers like 60th Parallel and Ergon - named after Cory Ergon - the Olympic jumper who started Winter Carnivals in McCall in 1934.

Brundage is an ideal family mountain, with reasonable rates and 1,500 underappreciated acres. The Brundage secret will get out soon enough.

There is no slopeside lodging at Brundage, so we stayed at the Shore Lodge in McCall. This elegant lodge (circa 1948) has lake-view rooms just steps to the outdoor Jacuzzi, and a short stride to the luxurious fireplace lobby, the mahogany lounge, the elegant Narrows Restaurant, an in-house movie theater, game room, library and the Blue Water Spa.

But we had to ski North America's newest resort, Tamarack - just 20 minutes south. Tamarack opened for skiing in 2004 on 2,100 acres of slopes served by seven lifts.

Tamarack's master plan was big and bold at \$1.3 billion. Unfortunately, Tamarack couldn't pay its debt, and the ski area was closed March 4, just after our visit.

We loved Tamarack's downhill terrain, despite its upside-down economics. Humors are running like Idaho whitewater, including one that terran stars Andre Agassi and Stef Graf, who own real estate there, could

Sun Valley. www.sunvalley.com, Sun Valley, Idaho, 1-800-731-8219

buy the resort.

Our Idaho snow show continued as we circled to central Idaho and arrived at Sun Valley - the most famous, historic ski resort in the country. Sun Valley claims the world's first chairlift, installed in 1896.

Sun Valley is as posh as I had pictured. Luxurious \$6 million timber mountain lodges cater to skiers with leather couches by roaring fireplaces, fine cuisine and magnificent marble bathrooms.

I was surprised at the steepness of Sun Valley (not just the prices). Consistently pitched, groomed bowls lead to Bald Mountain drop an unrelenting 2,400 feet. Seven high-speed quads whisk you back up, with stunning Sawtooth Mountain scenery. I imagine the bowl skiing and backcountry on a powder day would be awesome.

Sun Valley is swank, and there is an alpine arrogance at this resort. Bogner and Prada ski suits are standard, and name dropping is the norm, with Schwarzenegger and Picabo Street trails. Karl Holding, of the Sinclair Oil fortune, purchased the resort in 1974, and has updated it with the philosophy: "If it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing."

... were open skiing on 1,200 acres. The ends of nearby Sun Valley, lift mechanics in Carhart uniforms load two double chairs (1,425 feet total vertical). Three dozen runs from 7,177-foot Soldier Peak range from surprisingly well groomed cruisers to spacious bowls and glades. With unlimited powder, Soldier is a must-ski on your way to or from Sun Valley.

Soldier's master plan has four new lifts and a new lodge, but minimal skier visits don't support massive expansions. The 1960s-style lodge serves satisfying food with smiles. If you want to reach the awesome acreage on 10,000-foot Smoky Dome, Soldier has snow cat skiing. Word is Willis bought the place for this private powder.

Idaho's Soldier, Brundage and Bogus Basin offer Rocky Mountain skiing in its essence, with genuine Idaho horziness. Scenery and soft snow are featured, nothing fancier than that. If you want more glitz and white carpet treatment, head to Sun Valley.

We loved Idaho skiing. Their mountains - like their potatoes - are similar to Maine's, only theirs are bigger.

Heather Burke has been skiing since 1993. She can be contacted at heather@familyadventures.com

Cats take you to epic Idaho mountain powder

Epic: The word is so overdone. But cat skiing in Idaho is just that. Picture a private snow cat, your million-dollar mountain limousine for the day, delivering you and seven other skiers to slope after slope of open snow bowls, gorgeous, deep and steep runs amid a scenic national forest. Big fat powder skins are provided so you can float over the freshest with the least effort.

As a pink-tinted sun rises over the Salmon River Mountains, your two guides brief you about snow safety, avalanche poops and protocol. All the while, the snow cat is rumbling up steep, unskied terrain. No lifts, no lodges - just you and a few others, your ride, your expert guides and 10,000 acres of the Payette National Forest accessible from Brundage ski area's exclusive cat ski operation.

Our first few runs were about 800-foot vertical each of fluffy Idaho snow in open bowls funneling to glittery glades that we threaded down to a snow-covered lake. Our cat latched us promptly, giving us time to rest, snack and suppress our huge smiles until we climbed to another peak to repeat.

The rumble of the cat during



Greg Burke photo

Skis are packed on the back of a snow cat that takes riders to 10,000 acres of powder at Brundage Mountain, Idaho.

ascents was in contrast to the serene silence when we were left on top of panoramic Granite Mountain at 8,478 feet and stunning Fish Battle at 8,225 feet. The sweet sound of a million snow crystals surrendering under skins as we descended in deep billowing snow was occasionally interrupted by ecstatic hoots from our ski buddies.

I can't describe to you each run (there were 10 - all scoring

10), we bounced down beautiful snow-soaked backcountry slopes, some steep and deep, others wide open with pitch just perfect for powder shot turns. I didn't intend to fly off that fluffy knoll but the landing was so soft I swore - in a good way. That last 1,800-foot vertical run remains top in my memory, as do the smiling faces of my cat ski friends.

The camaraderie that devel-

oped within our cat clutch was irreplaceable. A desire for trust and a deep love of deep snow proved quick cement (OK, bad choice of words in snow country). Previous strangers thrown together in an alpine-style back miles from safety and civilization become allies in adventure and adrenaline.

Idaho's magnificent mountains are outstanding, and the cat is where it's at to ski the pristine powder beyond Brundage's ski area boundaries. The only downside to all this upcountry skiing is that snowmobilers are also stomping this snowy stash. Today's sophisticated sleds ascend vertically steep terrain. The Idaho Park Service is working to find a compromise between cat skiing and snow-machining.

Cat skiing is cool - it's "poor man's heli skiing" at \$150 for a half day, or \$299 for a full day with a catered lunch in a cozy mountaintop yurt. You can sneak a day into your Idaho ski trip without booking a big ticket heli trip.

For information on Brundage cat skiing in McCall, Idaho, go to www.brundage.com.

- Heather Burke

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