

Squaw redefines ski season with summer schussing



So much snow remains at Squaw Valley that the ski season may never end. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – Warmth and skiing are seldom two words that go together. But these are not ordinary times.

The abundance of available terrain at Squaw Valley is astounding. There is so much snow that resort officials hope the 2016-17 ski season blends into the 2017-18 season without interruption. If this happens, it could be the first time anywhere for a resort to never close.

With a high of 69 degrees last Monday, one might think it would be more slush than snow. Not true. It was spring skiing, for sure. Soft, with patches that grab and a few slick spots. No corn snow, though.



From two wheels to a mono ski. Photo/Kathryn Reed

What was most impressive about the runs off Siberia, Shirley Lake, and Gold Coast was the coverage. No rocks, no obstacles of any kind.

It was shocking on May 29 to be able to ski from the top of Siberia Ridge to the village. With the mountain run open, no need to down lift – at least for now. There are spots on the lower part where dirt is visible, and even a section where it's about 8 feet wide. But, still, the coverage is better than it was at times at other resorts in the middle of winter during the drought.

“Through the strategic movement of snow using grooming machines, Squaw Valley mountain operations team members will transport snow from areas with ample snow to areas with lower amounts of snow, effectively maximizing the snowpack long into summer,” Liesl Kenney of Squaw Valley told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The Shirley zone also benefits from a northwest aspect, limiting sun exposure and snow loss due to melting.”

Squaw is redefining spring skiing – especially with summer just days away.

And people are dressed for the weather – with varying degrees of undress.



The terrain crew at Squaw is ready to keep the features in pristine condition. Photo/Kathryn Reed

On Memorial Day the base was about 192 inches. This is what's left after the resort received a record 724 inches of snow. Depending on what Mother Nature does, those numbers could increase and there might even be a summer powder day.

There is so much snow that the resort has a half pipe and terrain park open. The park crew is busy even during the day keeping the features up to par. One guy is known as the salt monkey. He has what resembles a leaf blower on his back. It's really a salt blower, which helps keep things slick. Rakes and other tools are employed by the rest of the gang.

Skiers and snowboarders are appreciative of their efforts as they fly over the ramps, doing tricks in the air.

For Tim DeGraff of San Francisco he is more interested in the

moguls off Siberia Express.

"I skied here last year on July 3. It was nothing like this," DeGraff told *Lake Tahoe News*. That's because there is so much more snow and the conditions dramatically better.

Adjacent to what DeGraff is on is a mogul course constructed for the junior ski team. Their agility looks like they could be ready for PyeongChang, South Korea, in 2018.



Top to bottom skiing is made possible by the grooming team. Photo/Kathryn Reed

This will be the fourth time Squaw has been open on July 4, but it will be the first time it has been open beyond that date. Mother Nature will help dictate if and when the resort closes.

“It will all depend on how the snow pack holds up. It’s typically a week to week decision,” Kenney said of deciding if and when to close.

While the upper mountain is awash in the white stuff, it really does seem like spring-summer at the base.

Through June, Squaw will be open on weekends. The resort will be open July 1-4. After that it, it’s all uncharted terrain and snow-weather dependent. What will be open remains to be seen. The plan is for the Shirley Lake area to be open, even if it means having to walk there from High Camp.

It is possible to create a Tahoe-Squaw triathlon of sorts by skiing/snowboarding, then adding on swimming, hiking, roller skating, snowshoeing, or cross country skiing.

The pool at High Camp opens this month, with the hot tub having opened in May.

“We are planning to renovate High Camp this summer. Snow is not impacting those plans yet,” Kenney said.

Check the resort’s website for up-to-date info, as well as special events like the **Freedom Festival** from July 1-4.