Summer skiing – a rare, memorable experience



Shorts are the clothing of choice for most summer skiers at Squaw Valley. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – You know it's not an ordinary ski day when long pants and jackets look out of place.

Sometimes only a Speedo or bikini was covering certain parts. This is summer skiing. And it is very different than spring skiing – the atmosphere, the skier, the attitude, the conditions.

From the caliber of skier on the slopes off the five lifts at Squaw Valley these are die-hard, darn good skiers. It's not

that beginners aren’t welcome to the fun, but as some said, they probably aren’t going to get it.



Plenty of aerial acrobatics in the terrain park. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Yes, it’s a novelty to ski this time of year. After all, this is only the fourth time in Squaw’s history that it will have been open on Independence Day. But it’s something so much more. There’s a magic to summer skiing. Perhaps because only a few have had the opportunity to experience it this makes for an elite group.

It’s locals and out-of-towners showing up. Carly Carlson works at Squaw and was there Saturday on his day off to ski with his wife and their three kids – ages 6, 4 and 2.

“It’s a great treat. How often do you get to ski in the morning and paddleboard in the afternoon?” Carlson remarked.



You don’t have to be a skier to enjoy the pool and hot tub. Photo/Kathryn Reed

These days of summer are the icing on what was an epic, record-setting winter in the Sierra.

At Squaw Valley on July 1 it was a party atmosphere on the slopes, in the lift lines – and certainly at the pool at High Camp.

Squaw is the only Tahoe area resort still open. It will be through July 4, then Saturdays until the conditions deteriorate enough to call it a season.



Freedom Festival is bringing out lots of patriotic garb. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"If we are able to operate on July 8, it would be the latest we have ever stayed open, but not the longest season. In terms of number of days of operations, we have had longer seasons in history, but have never operated past the 4th of July," Sam Kieckhefer, spokesman for Squaw, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

On Memorial Day the base was about 192 inches, now it's 103 inches at 8,200 feet. Top-to-bottom skiing is gone. At the base, well, it's about cycling and golf. It really is a whole different world riding to the top via the funitel or tram.

Daily, crews assess the conditions to decide what to open. On what is skiable, the coverage is fantastic.



Clearly the seasons are blending as passenger vehicles and snowmobiles are needed to get around the mountain. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Each day the conditions change. That's what happens when it's 80 something degrees out.

"The heat wave contributed to a considerable amount of snow melt. Regardless, we still have a significant amount of snow," Kieckhefer said.

A snowcat at the top of Gold Coast clearly has been pulling snow from the side of the mountain to make the traverse to Shirley Lake do-able.

Once at Shirley, it's soft, manageable runs. To the skier's left of the chairlift is a GS style shoot where skiers seemed to get lost as they go through this mouse-hole of sorts. The laughter coming from there could be heard on the chairlift.



Hiking trails from High Camp are pretty short right now. Photo/Kathryn Reed

There were other unfamiliar sounds. It was coming from unusual wildlife – at least to a skier. Frogs were ribbitting in the water at the Shirley lift.

A couple from the Bay Area talked about their harrowing experiences to get to Tahoe this past winter. Sometimes arriving only to find the lifts unable to spin. They were determined to get their money's worth from their 2016-17 pass.

For some, the lift accessible runs aren't enough. Tracks are visible in various chutes. People have been hiking to Palisades. Skiing in some form might be a year-round activity in 2017.

While it's unusual to get snow in summer, it has happened. And with the amount of snow on the ground today and a possible early winter, it's not out of the question that this season

will just blend into 2017-18.



Snowcats are doing a better job covering trails than some people are covering their bodies. Photo/Kathryn Reed

—

Notes:

· The Freedom Festival continues through July 4.

· Skiing is available from 8:30am-2pm through July 4, then Saturdays from 8:30am-12:30pm.

· The pool and hot tub are open from 11am-6pm.

· Fireworks start at 9pm, July 3.