

Squaw Valley creating on-mountain dining experience to match its legendary terrain



Dining with a view is what the Terrace at the top of the Squaw's tram is all about. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – November skiing is always something to be thankful for in the Sierra because Mother Nature seems to be so fickle in the fall.

Out of the last five years, this is the most terrain Squaw Valley has had open this time of year. It's obvious there has been a ton of natural snow coming down based on what is in the trees and the rocky chutes. Snowmaking guns are keeping the

more popular routes open so they don't get skied off in between storms, and until there is a solid base.



All the runs off Shirley Lake are open. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Over the weekend it was a bit like spring skiing with the conditions being slick in the morning and softening up as the day progressed.

While the mountain isn't open top-to-bottom just yet, there is a mix of terrain available to satisfy all ability levels. Eleven lifts give access to 39 trails and 16 groomed runs. Tracks could be seen where skiers went off-piste. A small terrain park is open, too.



Squaw Valley's rugged terrain is complemented by picturesque views of Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

High Camp, at the top of the tram, is going through a \$1.8 million renovation that is expected to be finished by Christmas week. The last time any of the facilities here were updated was in 1991 – and it was showing in wear and dated offerings.

The Marketplace is open. This is where people can get grab-and-go food items – some healthy, some not as much. Courtney, the pastry chef, makes sweets fresh on a daily basis. Organic items are available, as well as edibles for vegetarians and those with wheat allergies. Gloves and goggles – items people may have left in the car or condo – may be purchased there as well.

This area used to be a larger retail area.



The Marketplace at High Camp offers prepackaged food, espresso and some retail.
Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

One level below is a space that had been underutilized, with few people knowing there was retail there. On Saturday it was packed with people eating food they had bought upstairs or had brought from home. Traditional tables are mixed in with more relaxing sofas. There's also a small alcove for little kids to play in.

Behind this area is the Terrace Buffet and Bar with its

expansive views down to the village and out to Lake Tahoe. The multitude of windows beckons photo opportunities. The 180-degree seating – which is still in pieces – is the most scenic dining spot on the mountain.



Comfortable seating has been added as a place to chill or eat without being in a restaurant. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Gone are the half booths. In their place will be round tables near the windows, with seating for four and two at rectangular tables. The old green carpet is gone. The flooring is now shades of brown.

The wood has been refinished to the point it looks new. A couple of the old brass railings have been made to look antique-ish.



Lance Crafts is in charge of the entire High Camp lodge. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The bar is the focal point. With it dropping down, the bartenders and their bottles don't impede the view. Lance Crafts, manager of High Camp, said the smoked old fashioned is something to experience.

The portable buffet stations will offer a variety of food choices – some hot, some cold.

Chef Andrew Gregory, who is in his second year at Squaw, oversees the various kitchens. He said the renovation of the entire High Camp operation is energizing him as well as his team.



Chef Andrew Gregory wants to do more than provide skiers and snowboarders with delicious food. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“We are going to elevate the food and the service,” Gregory told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While burgers remain one of the most popular entrees, don’t expect only traditional ski resort grub. Gregory was raving about a pappardelle pasta dish as well as the Sierra cassoulet and the authentic po’ boy sandwich.



The granite bar at the Granite Bistro looks out onto the pool area. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Nearby is the Granite Bistro, which replaces the poolside restaurant. The footprint is the same – as is the location – but the interior will make it look like it's been built from scratch. This dining/drinking spot will be the last to come on board. It's been gutted pretty much to its foundation and supporting beams.

The old wood bar has been replaced with granite. A stack of granite tabletops is one corner. This gray motif matches perfectly to what's out the windows – Squaw's rugged mountains and the Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

The food here will be served more family style, and the space allows for people to bring in their own food. The smoked pheasant soup is returning and is recommended. This is where the burgers are, as well a salmon, steak, charcuterie and cheese boards.



The Granite Bistro should be open by Christmas. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Two chairlifts will be installed to bring ambiance and a unique place for people sit and eat.

However, cooking just for skiers or those sightseeing via the tram isn't enough for everyone.

"The chef and I are pushing for nighttime dinners. It's such a magical, unique place," Crafts told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Having on-mountain evening dinners would elevate Squaw's dining experiences to a level that is rare for Tahoe area ski resorts. Most close the doors when the lifts stop running. CEO Andy Wirth hinted their dream might be realized.