Lift technology opens mountains to kids, disabled

By First Tracks

KLOSTERS, Switzerland – The Swiss Alps offer breath-taking panoramic views and year-round adventure. Yet, the challenges of making the mountains accessible require monumental feats of engineering expertise.

A new ski lift for children and handicapped persons will enable them to enjoy remarkable mountain scenery and activity. ABB is powering the new six-seater chairlift in the Klosters-Madrisa mountain resort, one of the most popular ski and mountain regions in the Swiss Alps.

“I am a person like everyone,” said eight-time Paralympic medalist Edith Wolf-Hunkeler. “I want to be free. I don’t feel handicapped. If you can go skiing with your family and you are together all of the time, that’s what makes it an experience.”

Read the whole story

Tahoe resorts score in Liftopia awards

Several Tahoe area ski resorts made Liftopia’s inaugural Best in Snow Awards.

Winners were compiled in five regions: Northeast, West Coast, High West, Southeast and Midwest.

Magic Mountain in Vermont came out on top as the Overall Best in Snow winner in North America, with customers saying it's "the best kept secret in the Northeast" and "a true skier's mountain" that is "steeped in tradition" and "never overcrowded" with a "great community and old-time, retro vibe," "a large amount of natural snow that is never over-groomed," "awesome terrain," "challenging runs," and "the best staff in the business."

"For years consumers have told us they wanted a ranking system that wasn't based simply on which resorts were the biggest or relied on a handful of 'expert' opinions or even pay-to-play advertising dollars. They wanted to know which ski areas had the most passionate customers and which ones they should try as they searched for their next favorite," Evan Reece, co-founder and CEO of Liftopia, said in a press release. "We crafted the Best in Snow Awards with details from a consumer survey and normalized the results with our proprietary data to uncover the ski areas people love the most, all over North America. We are excited that the findings show what we already believed to be true: consumers do have amazing passion for ski areas of all sizes."

Here are the West Coast results:

Beginner-Friendly Ski Areas

1. Anthony Lakes, Oregon

2. Diamond Peak

3. June Mountain

4. Boreal Mountain

5. Tahoe Donner

6. Bear Valley

7. 49 Degrees North, Washington

8. Snow Valley

9. Homewood

10. Donner Ski Ranch

Most Challenging

1. Kirkwood

2. Kicking Horse, British Columbia

3. Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows

4. Revelstoke Mountain Resort, British Columbia

5. Crystal Mountain, Washington

6. Mammoth Mountain

7. Alyeska, Alaska

8. Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia

9. Red Mountain Resort, British Columbia

10. Mt. Baker, Washington

Family-Friendly Ski Areas

1. Tahoe Donner

2. Diamond Peak

3. Snow Valley

4. Boreal Mountain

5. Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe

6. Mammoth Mountain

7. Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows

8. Sierra-at-Tahoe

9. Sun Peaks Resort, British Columbia

10. Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia

Best Snow Consistency and Quality

1. Kirkwood

2. Mammoth Mountain

3. Whitewater, British Columbia

4. Revelstoke Mountain Resort, British Columbia

5. Mt. Baker, Washington

6. Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows

7. Sugar Bowl

8. Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe

9. Alyeska, Alaska

10. Whistler Blackcomb, British Columbia

Least Crowded

1. Anthony Lakes, Oregon

2. June Mountain

3. 49 Degrees North, Washington

4. Red Mountain Resort, British Columbia

5. Homewood

6. Kicking Horse, British Columbia

7. Revelstoke Mountain Resort, British Columbia

8. Powder King, British Columba

9. Alyeska, Alaska

10. Panorama Mountain Resort, British Columbia

Best Value

1. Anthony Lakes, Oregon

2. Kirkwood

3. Revelstoke Mountain Resort, British Columbia

4. Kicking Horse, British Columbia

5. Alyeska, Alaska

6. Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows

7. 49 Degrees North

8. Tahoe Donner

9. Crystal Mountain, Washington

10. Diamond Peak.

Homewood ski resort to reopen Thursday

Homewood Mountain Resort plans to resume normal operations on Thursday after a fire ravaged a base lodge on Dec. 28.

Top-to-bottom skiing will be available starting at 9am. Access

to the upper mountain will be via Madden Chair, which is located at the North Lodge.

Ski school, rental shop, retail store, and food and beverage venues will be available at the North Lodge from 8am-4pm.

The South Lodge was destroyed by fire in the early morning hours of Dec. 28. The cause is still under investigation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

History stroll at Sand Harbor

Nevada State Parks is putting on a holiday-themed presentation that will also include historic Christmas scenes from around Northern Nevada and mining towns, including Virginia City and Tonopah.

People may sip hot chocolate and enjoy holiday treats while learning about the origins of traditions like Santa Claus, candy canes and Christmas trees. This event can be combined with a sleigh ride or a walk around the 3-mile nature trail at Sand Harbor Visitor Center.

The Dec. 31 event is from 10-11am. It is free, though it costs $7 to enter the park. There is a $2 discount for Nevada residents.

Advance reservations and separate fees are required for the sleigh rides – 775.588.2953.

No reason to eat twigs in backcountry emergency

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

There are safer ways to achieve fame than starring in your own survival story.

That’s a lesson a Pennsylvania woman learned recently after a trip into the Arizona backcountry with her husband and 10-year-old son went awry.

Karen Klein spent roughly 24-hours in the snowy wilderness during a desperate, 26-mile hike to search for help after the family’s car got stuck near the Grand Canyon.

When Klein’s sister told a news outlet the survival trek included eating twigs and drinking urine those details propelled the tale to the top of the national news cycle.

Read the whole story

2017 expected to start out with fresh snow

By Lake Tahoe News

Plan on New Year’s Day being a powder day.

A storm is brewing that should land in the Lake Tahoe Basin on

New Year’s Eve.

“The position of the low is bouncing back and forth,” Tony Fuentes, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Because of this the amount of snowfall is not being predicted as of today.

While it has been cold in the region, no records have been broken. Isolated pockets came close though. The record for Bridgeport is minus 21 degrees, and it got down to minus 20 in the last week.

Expect 2017 to start off with the cold returning, so enjoy this week as the highs in the basin sizzle in the 40s.

Lake Tahoe area ski resorts keep opening more terrain. The latest storm brought soft, fluffy powder to the slopes.

For those going into the back country, be sure to check with the **Sierra Avalanche Center** for conditions.

Fat tires allow cycling year round

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

In years past winter was when Sierra Nevada backcountry cyclists were forced to pack away their bike gear and wait for the snow to melt.

No more.

The proliferation of fat tire mountain bikes in recent years is getting more bicyclists than ever into the mountains despite a healthy snow pack.

Fat bikes, generally defined as mountain bikes with tires with a width of at least 3.5 inches, have been around more than a decade but their popularity has surged in recent years.

Read the whole story

Not all Tahoe bears will hibernate in winter

By Sarah Hockensmith and Will Richardson, Tahoe In Depth

Have you ever seen a bear print in the snow? How about a bear walking through your neighborhood during the winter season? At such times, many might ask themselves “shouldn’t this bear be asleep right now?” Others might be compelled to ponder “do bears really even hibernate in the Tahoe region?” The most curious among you may go on to ask “what exactly is hibernation, anyway?” These are great questions, and commonly asked, partly because hibernation is complicated.

Here in the Sierra Nevada, we experience the complete four-season cycle during the calendar year, including winter. Animals that breed in the Tahoe region have adapted three main strategies to cope with these seasonal changes. The first strategy is migration, where animals come to Tahoe during the summer months to take advantage of abundant resources, the mild climate, and long periods of daylight hours.

During the winter, these animals, which include deer, many

birds and bats, and even insects, must retreat to lower latitudes and lower elevations.

Staying through the winter

A second strategy is where animals have evolved to stay put in Tahoe and stay active, somehow managing to balance their energy output, withstanding the freezing temperatures, and maintaining the ability to find enough food in a snow-covered landscape. This strategy is for the hardiest creatures, but it works for a surprisingly large diversity of animals.

The last strategy that animals have adopted to get through seasonal periods of difficulty, and the strategy that is perhaps least intuitive, is the process in which an animal simply goes to sleep for a period of time to wait for better conditions. By reducing their metabolism and body temperature, animals are able to greatly reduce the “expense” side of their energy budget and make it through such periods. This tactic is commonly known as hibernation in the broad sense.

Among the scientists that study such things, the term “hibernation” has been applied somewhat strictly, reserved only for certain types of hibernation, and that has led to considerable confusion over the years. The experts hold competing ideas about hibernation strategies and patterns among bears and other animals, but some of the debate falls on very fine distinctions and technical definitions.



If food – including human garbage – is readily available, bears in the Tahoe area may forego hibernation. Photo/Will Richardson

Types of hibernation

There are many terms that refer to different, often very precise, types of hibernation. For example, brumation is a type of hibernation among reptiles, but different metabolic processes are involved. Unlike mammals, reptiles are cold-blooded and cannot control their body temperature; thus, brumation allows reptiles to handle temperature extremes.

Aestivation is a type of hibernation utilized in the summer to protect an animal (e.g. insects and amphibians) from long hot or dry periods. The term "torpor" often refers to a type of short-term hibernation where a reduction of body temperature and metabolic rate occurs during an inactive part of a daily cycle. We can often get frost in mid-summer, so consider the dramatic metabolic swing a tiny hummingbird must undergo not to burn through their meager reserves getting through such a night.

For the average person, it is unnecessary to get hung up on the finer distinctions of these technical definitions, and there is much debate among the experts anyhow, so we at the Tahoe Institute for Natural Science prefer to focus on the broader concepts and implications of seasonal dormancy.

For some animals, seasonal dormancy is a "facultative response" – only occurring if the conditions demand it for survival. Some of our short-distance migrants are similar in this regard. In other species, hibernation has been locked in as an obligate part of the annual cycle, regardless of weather and resource availability.

Programmed to sleep

A local example on the obligate side of the dormancy spectrum

is the Belding’s ground squirrel (Spermophilus beldingi), which experience a long hibernation period for eight to nine months. Even if there are ample grasses and warm temperatures to find food in the late summer and early fall, these squirrels go to sleep as soon as they have enough body fat to survive the winter, often in late August.

Winter a hardship for most animals

This brings us back to the initial question, “Do bears hibernate in the Tahoe region?” Again, winter in the Tahoe region is a time of hardship for most animals, including bears. Food is scarce and hard to find, temperatures are dipping below freezing for long periods of time, and snow is covering the ground, making travel and foraging energy intensive.

The American black bear (Ursus americanus), inhabits an enormous range across the North American continent and has evolved as a facultative hibernator. In Florida, you can find male black bears active year-round, but if you were to study populations in the coldest parts of Alaska, you would find that these bears are sleeping for up to sevent months out of each year.

Studies from the southern Sierra Nevada and elsewhere have demonstrated that onset of bear hibernation and denning behavior is driven by two factors. The first factor is whether the bear is pregnant. A pregnant female must den up for a period of time regardless of weather, and typically these family groups will remain in the den longer than individual bears given the same conditions.

The second factor determining when (or if) a bear decides to hibernate has to do with food availability. A large and readily accessible pine seed crop may keep bears active and feeding. Unfortunately, this applies to garbage as well as natural food sources, and if either are available throughout

the winter, you are likely to find black bears awake and active.

Getting a wake-up call

Unlike deep hibernators, bears occasionally wake up and shift positions inside the den, helping to prevent sores and better conserve heat. During their dormancy they lower their body temperatures 8 to 12 degrees Fahrenheit, break down fat reserves for energy, and recycle wastes to eliminate the need for urination, defecation, or drinking water. Amazingly, they wake with almost no appreciable muscle atrophy and are capable of fine motor skills almost immediately.

Clearly, hibernation is a complicated subject. It has proven to be a successful strategy of saving energy during hard times and is utilized by many animals of the Sierra Nevada. “Do bears hibernate in the Tahoe region?” The answer is “yes and no, sort of. It depends.” When, if, and for how long an animal hibernates depends on whether that species is an obligate or facultative hibernator, may depend on the sex of that individual animal and how that relates to energy demands, and often depends on weather conditions and food availability from year to year.

Sarah Hockensmith is the outreach manager and Will Richardson is the co-founder and director of science and outreach for the Tahoe Institute of Natural Science. This article first appeared in ***Tahoe In Depth****.*

One final day on the slopes

with my dad



The view on Dec. 25 from the top of Happiness Is at Kirkwood. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

KIRKWOOD – It had been a number of years since I spent Christmas with my dad. But that's just what I did yesterday.

Spending a holiday with a parent isn't all that remarkable. Only in this case my dad died in April 2010.

Kirkwood Mountain Resort was always my dad's favorite ski resort. As a kid I remember day trips to the mountain from our home in the Bay Area. The back bowl was his favorite. The wide-open expanse, surrounded in wilderness. He was happy to take lap after lap on the groomers, mostly blues, but he didn't shy away from the blacks.



Don Reed in 1982.

My parents learned to ski when they were in their 40s. Being the youngest of four kids, I benefited the most from this new found sport by being taken on wonderful ski vacations that my two oldest sisters never experienced.

I grew up skiing at Northstar and Squaw. For years every February we rented a house right on the slopes of Squaw with two other families. Those are some of my most cherished childhood memories.

My dad’s last day on skis is still etched into my memory, but in a sad way. It was me, dad and my sister, Pam, at Sierra-at-Tahoe. Dad was having a hard time turning. He couldn’t tell his feet what to do. He kept falling.

Neuropathy won that day. This was one of the lingering effects of chemotherapy. He survived colon cancer, but not unscathed.

Dad had to be taken down in a toboggan by ski patrol.

My dad was a strong, prideful man. To see him in this weakened state was hard. I can only imagine what it did to his pride. It was good Pam was there; dad listened to her. And as a nurse practitioner she could explain to the ski patrol what was going on.

I took some of my dad’s ashes with me to Kirkwood on Sunday. We rode a couple lifts together. He was protected in my inside jacket pocket. We skied a run together off the Sunrise lift.

Then it was time to say goodbye again. A little part of him is at the top of the Happiness Is run.

It was one of the best days I ever had skiing with my dad. And now my last day of skiing with him, while still sad, is mostly happy in knowing that his ashes are part of the mountain that brought so much joy to him while he was alive.

Potential growth in pari-mutuel based fantasy sports

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Vic Salerno’s bid to fill the gap created by the absence of daily fantasy sports play in Nevada has grown exponentially during the football season and is making even greater strides outside the state.

Salerno, president of USFantasy and a 38-year veteran of the gaming industry, said handle has grown roughly 10 percent a week through the National Football League season. The company hasn’t publicly reported handle figures.

Salerno’s version of fantasy sports is different from the more conventional fantasy versions offered by FanDuel and DraftKings, companies that have tried and failed to convince the state’s gaming regulators to allow them to operate in the state.

Read the whole story