Ski report: Lifts are open, snow is falling, roads are iffy

By Kathryn Reed

Heading into Thanksgiving weekend, skiers and resort operators definitely have something to be thankful for. There is plenty of snow to gobble up.



Heavenly, Squaw and Northstar opened this weekend. Boreal is open, too. Kirkwood is looking for a Wednesday start day, which is also a possibility for Sierra-at-Tahoe. Other resorts are planning to open Turkey Day weekend.

Here is the daily ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

In South Lake Tahoe another foot fell overnight. Meyers tends to have twice as much as what "town" gets. The North Shore, in particular Truckee, always chimes in with more white stuff than South Lake Tahoe. Reno, Carson City and Carson Valley all have gotten hit with several inches of snow from these storms.

Wind could be an issue today throughout the basin, on the slopes, and driving the mountain passes. It was whiteout conditions at times in some spots Saturday; expect the same today.

Chain controls are in effect. Highway 89 around Emerald Bay is closed. Check the state icons on the Home page of *Lake Tahoe News* for road conditions.

Whenever driving in the mountains, but especially in the winter, carry a blanket, shovel, water, food, warm clothing,

flashlight and appropriate shoes.

The National Weather Service's winter storm warning is in effect until 4 today. Today could bring 5-10 inches above 7,000 feet and 3-6 inches below 7,000 feet.

Another round of storms will blow in Monday night.

"This low pressure system is much colder and could potentially bring significant accumulations to northeast California an northwest Nevada," the Weather Service in Reno warns.

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Plenty of snow, people cover Heavenly's slope on Day 1

By Kathryn Reed

"The snow was truly epic."

That's how season passholder Michael Brown of Stateline described opening day at Heavenly Mountain Resort.



California Trail at Heavenly on opening day

Nov. 20.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

He wasn’t at the gondola in time to get “first chair” – he had to settle for the second car. But he beat the snowboarders in front of him who had to lock in to their bindings to be the first one on California Trail this season.

Heavenly had to delay the start of the season a day because Mother Nature was whipping up winds that made it unsafe to fire up the lifts Friday. Not the case a day later – Nov. 20.

What started off as a sunny, blue-sky day Saturday at lake level gradually turned to partly cloudy and was back to winter conditions by early afternoon. It was much the same on the mountain.

Charlie Smith of South Lake Tahoe was taking advantage of having bought a Double Whammy pass to ski Sierra and Northstar and being able to turn it in for a Vail Resorts’ Epic Pass. This is all possible only this year because of Vail’s purchase of Northstar last month.

He took one run before needing to warm up in the Umbrella Bar at the confluence of the gondola debarkation, Tamarack lift and Adventure Peak Grill. He said the run was great. In the bar he did wince a bit at the $9.41 for a shot of Bushmills whiskey.

Others were happy to have a flask of peppermint schnapps in their pocket to add to hot cocoa. Still others parted with $8.85 for a Stella.

The gondola started running at 8:30am, with a line of eager skiers and boarders. People were already heading home before 10am. Passholders often just ski a couple hours, but with only run open and it starting to get busy, it was enough to chase some people off the mountain.

For those who paid the $62 to ski one run, well, it’s debatable if it was worth it. Though, there’s always something special about opening day at any resort.

Daily prices will keep going up. Go to Heavenly’s website, put in the date you plan to be there and the price comes up. Still, like all resorts, a season pass is the best deal as long as you don’t want to ski on the blackout dates.

California Trail, though covered without an obstacle to be seen, was littered with bodies. To the skiers’ left was a mini terrain park that was getting substantial traffic on its various features.

More trails will open as conditions permit – which Heavenly officials say will happen today. Dipper Express will be open, giving access to Orion and Bigger Dipper trails. This will greatly spread people beyond Tamarack chair. East Peak Lodge will also be open.

At the base of the Tamarack chairlift is the Tamarack Lodge that from the outside looks ready to serve the masses. Heavenly’s multi-million dollar lodge will open in February.

An unfortunate sight was a dad yelling at his daughter who was about 7 to turn her snowboard like his. This “Little League parent” behavior is always sad to see, but really, did he need to do this on Day 1 and in cold, snowy weather – especially when staff at the base of gondola urged beginners to come back another day.

Another piece of advice – put the bar up on the chairlift before the skis hit the snow at the end of the lift. And don’t hold the bar down again, buddy. It’s a good thing you skied off fast.

One guy visiting from Michigan decided on the offhand chance Heavenly opened he’d have his ski clothes with him. He was making the most of it under gray skies and windy weather. He

was ecstatic to be on the lift no matter the weather.

A foursome from Vegas ventured up to the Umbrella Bar to check things out. They, unlike another group of lookiloos, were dressed for the weather. The other group showed up in tennis shoes.

Staff was on top of their game on Day 1. The guys at both ends of the gondola, coming and going, were super cheerful and eager to put skis and boards on/off the cars. Missy at the Umbrella Bar was handling the crowd as people wanted to drink and beverages weren't quite available because the bar and portable food station had to be dug out and stocked before service was available.

Heavenly's website will keep listing what lifts and runs are open. With the winter storm warning in effect through 4pm today, powder day is likely what people will experience today.

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Ski report: Heavenly, Squaw open today

The wind has subsided and Heavenly has made the decision – it's opening today. Squaw Valley is also calling this the first day of the season, too.



About a foot of snow fell at lake level on the South Shore overnight.



Rene Smania of South Lake Tahoe plows his driveway Nov. 20 so he can get to work. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Heavenly is reporting 18 inches of freshies. Squaw is reporting 10-12 inches of new snow.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Expect a break in the weather today – just enough time to shovel and schuss. More white stuff is expected to blanket the greater Lake Tahoe area all weekend. A winter storm warning remains in effect through Nov. 21 at 4pm. Expect overnight lows in the teens. Blizzard conditions are likely when the snow starts falling again.

Right now, though, it’s time to get the fat boys out for a powder day.

Change in hours at North Tahoe Regional Park

Beginning Nov. 22, the North Tahoe Regional Park and its facilities will be open from 7am-5pm. All vehicles must be removed from the park before 5pm.

Grooming of the trails and opening of the sled hill will begin when conditions allow. More information can be found on the District’s Park Facilities website and then navigating to the North Tahoe Regional Park page.

All other facilities that are owned, operated or managed by the district have been closed for the winter. Two heated restrooms are open daily from 9am-5pm at Kings Beach State Recreation Area.

Squaw ready to open Saturday

Squaw Valley is slated to open for skiing and riding on Nov. 20 with fresh snow from a system approaching Lake Tahoe.

The storm is predicted to deliver up to 6 feet to the Sierra at the higher elevations. Lake Tahoe has not seen a November snowstorm this large in the past six years.

Slopes will be accessed by Exhibition chairlift and Pony Tow from 9am to 4pm this weekend. Guests can also take a scenic ride up the Cable Car.

Early-season discounted lift tickets for opening weekend are $59 for adults, youth and seniors $42, super seniors $27 and kids 12 and under $12.

Ski report: Winds force Heavenly to delay opening

Updated Nov. 19 at 9:12am.

Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe, is back for the winter delivering daily ski reports each morning to readers of *Lake Tahoe News*.



Yes, it's still fall – but in Tahoe the calendar means very little when it comes to weather and outdoor fun.

Heavenly opens Saturday if the winds cooperate, Northstar this weekend and Boreal has been whisking skiers to the top of the mountain since last month.

Click on ski report for all the details.

Ski films invigorate riders

By Peter Shelton, Watch Newspapers

It works every time. The season's new ski movie comes to town in November just as snow is starting to fly, and all those dreams and memories built up over the summer come rushing out like a wind between the theater seats and the screen.



It happened last weekend in Telluride with the screening of Matchstick Production's 2010 offering "The Way I See It", starring, along with a host of new-school luminaries, 19-year-old local product Gus Kenworthy.

What Kenworthy did, with Bobby Brown and Colby West and others, on a huge jump in Alaska, requires a special language to describe, a language in which I am not fluent. They were flipping and twisting, grabbing tips and tails and spinning like out-of-control satellites off what Kenworthy called a "120-foot semi-stepdown." The village of Alyeska and the pink, sunset waters of Cook Inlet looked to be straight down below them, as they were filmed, sometimes in super slo-mo, from a helicopter flying alongside the birdmen.

This is not skiing that most of us can relate to. But that didn't stop a little voice to my right from shouting again and again, "I'm going to do that! I'm going to do that!" He was maybe 6.

Most of us aren't, of course, going to do that. But the job of the ski movie from the beginning has been to summon awe – of genius athletes in fantasy locales – awe that transports an audience to a place of visceral identification. John Jay did it in the 1940s, when his shots of the world's best skiers ripping down the glaciers of Mount Rainier inspired upwards of 5,000 American boys and men to join the 10th Mountain

Division. Warren Miller continued the tradition in peacetime with his unique brand of ski-bum, chairlift humor. In the 1970s Dick Barrymore made day-glo, psychedelic ski-movie art.

Now Matchstick and their ilk are selling the same vicarious magic, and it might be argued that the boys from Crested Butte do it better than anyone of their generation. They've won two Emmys for cinematography and *Powder* magazine's "Movie of the Year" award six times out of 10.

Read the whole story

Northstar hires COO from W. Virginia

A New York native has been hired to run the day-to-day operations of Northstar-at-Tahoe.

Bill Rock, 42, is leaving his post as president and chief operations officer at Showshoe Mountain Resort in West Virginia to be COO of the Truckee resort that was just acquired by Vail Resorts. Showshoe is an Intrawest property.



Bill Rock

At Northstar, Rock has a much bigger mountain to contend with – 3,000 skiable acres compared to 224, a 2,280 vertical drop

v. 1,500 feet, 93 trails – a 50 percent increase.

Rock has been at the helm of the East Coast resort since 2007, having been vice president and general manager before that.

“Bill led a restructuring of operations to achieve major cost savings, while improving measures of guest satisfaction in key categories,” the Intrawest website says.

He has a background in sales and marketing. He has also worked at Durango Mountain Resort in Colorado, Stratton Mountain Resort in Vermont and Bristol Mountain Resort in New York.

Before joining the ski industry 14 years ago, Rock was a lieutenant in the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division. Rock and his wife have 3-year-old twins.

Rock will report to Blaise Carrig, co-president of Vail Resorts’ Mountain Division.

– Kathryn Reed

Man-made snow allows resorts to open before holidays

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Barrett Burghart can’t cast thunderbolts or heal the Earth and doesn’t wear a frilly dress. But he does play Mother Nature.

Where nature leaves off, Burghart and his staff fill in the gap, blanketing Heavenly Ski Resort with acres of man-made snow.

Boasting the largest snow-making operation on the West Coast,

Heavenly's staff says it can cover a football field with 8 feet of snow in three hours.



Heveanly fired up its snowmaking guns in October. Photo/Heavenly

With less than one week to go before the resort is scheduled to open, this is crunch time. Three shifts of snow-makers work – weather permitting – using more than 100 emitters, or "guns," to turn million of gallons of water into snow.

Burghart and his team can create mountains – of snow – but they can't do it without help from nature. Air and water are pushed through water cannons and when the ambient temperature is cold enough, the water freezes and gently falls as snow. When it is too warm, the operation shuts down. The recent cold weather has allowed snow-making to continue around the clock.

Snow-making used to be seen as a luxury for West Coast ski resorts, but it has become essential as resorts try to open earlier and stay open during drought years.

Buoyed by more than a foot of natural snow at higher elevations, Boreal Mountain Resort and Mammoth are already open. Heavenly is planning a Friday opening. The next day, both Squaw Valley USA and Northstar-at-Tahoe are opening.

Read the whole story

Wild horse roundups to resume in N. Nevada

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

Federal land managers this week are scheduled to begin the first of three wild horse roundups aimed at reducing the number of mustangs in Northern Nevada.

The Bureau of Land Management on Wednesday plans to gather and remove about 94 “excess” wild horses from a site south of the Lahontan State Recreation Area in Lyon County, about 35 miles east of Carson City.

“We think there are up to about 150 horses in that (Lahontan) area, and there’s supposed to be about 10,” said Mark Struble, BLM spokesman in Carson City. “We don’t always know an exact number. In that area, the horses are often down under the trees along the river and can’t be seen (from airborne surveys).”

The gather is expected to be completed in two to three days. It’s part of an effort to remove up to 12,000 mustangs from the West this year.

The agency said there are too many horses on the range, and the herds must be culled to ensure ecological balance and forage for the remaining horses, wildlife and privately-owned cattle. Wild horse advocates said the BLM exaggerates the number of animals and harms the genetic viability of herds by indiscriminately removing animals.

Read the whole story