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Outdoors: Brundage Ski Resort no small potatoes

Outdoors Dave Sartwell Feb 3, 2017



Courtesy Photo/Dave Sartwell Playing in the Brundage powder with Mark Poore.



McCall, Idaho— The tiny snowflake dropped out of the Idaho sky and caressed my face with affection. It joined the billions of other sparkling crystals on the surface of Brundage Mountain to provide a deep base that, on this cold day, was squeaky under the ski. Our guide, Mark Poore, led us to the top of a run called the 45th Parallel. With a wave of his arm he beckoned us to follow him into a narrow, tree-lined winter playground.

Down we dropped, the soft groomed snow underfoot yielding to the sharp edges of my skis as I rolled my ankles, trying to find the perfect arc. Pressing my weight forward to initiate the turn, I felt the wide tips engage and the ski bend under pressure while the rest of the board followed. In a year of massive snow drops out West, we were right in the heart of Idaho snow country, skiing on a surface that only comes along every few years.

I love the feeling of the wind blowing over my scalp (I would have written through my hair but that train left the station a long time ago)! It was cold, but given the steepness of the trail and the speed at which we were skiing it did not take long for the heart to pump warm blood out to the extremities. Down...down...ever-dropping through the tall pines that lined the narrow run, 1,900 vertical feet of pure joy. Mark didn't believe in slowing down and none of us complained. How could you not enjoy this pleasure vein that twisted along the top of a ridge and then curled just under the lip, a high-speed carving run that just called out for acceleration.

Along the edges of the trail there were little stashes of untracked powder that led into the woods. Every once in a while one of my companions would disappear for a minute, only to soon burst out of the greenery, snow flying and grins appearing from the freedom only tree skiing provides.

Sliding over to the edge of the run I concentrated on a little six-foot wide lane that I artificially confined myself to. Here I just tried to see how many turns I could execute at speed. It forced me to really concentrate on edging and quick release. Over and over...edge to edge...dropping, ever dropping. On the lower one third of the trail we all switched to long swooping arcs that took up the whole trail. The eight of us looking like a long train, switch-backing down the side of a mountain. The Centennial Lift quickly hauled us back up the hill where we were forced to do it all over again.

The next adventure was a short catwalk glide toward the Northwest Passage and Hidden Valley. Here is where the expert skiers can play to their hearts content. This area of the mountain is where those who have spent years learning the sport can put all of their skills to the test. The tree skiing in here is steep and as they used to say "totally awesome." It is the kind of pitch that you should never ski alone. First because it is not safe to do so, but the real reason is you need to share this experience with others because no one would ever believe you when you told them how cool it was unless you had a witness.

Brundage is located just eight miles from McCall, Idaho on scenic highway 55, about 100 miles north of the capital city of Boise. The top elevation is 7,803 feet, with a vertical drop of 1,921 feet, with trails covering 1,920 acres. It receives about 350 inches of snow a year, but this has been a banner year. It has 46 named runs of which 30% are expert, 50% intermediate and 20% beginner. There are very few straight shots on this hill. Almost all of the trails feature rolls in them that keep you on your toes.

For those who like the backcountry, Brundage offers a snowcat adventure for "just a handful of thrill-seeking souls". You will be out on 18,000 untracked acres that contain three mountain peaks, with two expert guides for a day you will never forget. They also offer snowmobile tours and rentals. You can go on guided trips or just rip off on your own into the Payette National Forest where you will be blown away by the views of the Goose Creek drainage, Salmon River Mountains, and wilderness lakes.

We were lucky enough to stay in the beautiful Holiday Inn in McCall. It features 85 large rooms, free wifi, a pool, whirlpool, workout room and a free full breakfast (plus cookies at night). You do have to go to the fabulous Pancake House across the street or downtown to the brewery. In addition to the Brundage Mountain Resort, the equally charming Tamarack Ski Resort is only about 15 miles away.

For those looking for that small, ski-town feel with a wonderful mountain that has enough adventure to please the whole family, Brundage is your ticket. It is never crowded, the snow is often untracked, and the people there are incredibly skier friendly.

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