

THE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

FIRST TRACKS: SAVORING FRESH POWDER

By TONY CRESPI, SKIER NEWS' TECHNICAL EDITOR

There is nothing like fresh powder.

Clearly, Western resorts often enjoy major powder storms. Still, in New England there are powder days. Honestly, whether enjoying six inches of fresh powder at Burke Mountain in Vermont or a midwinter escape to Steamboat in Colorado, skiers of all levels smile when the mountain offers light, untracked, powder. Late last season I enjoyed a spectacular day at Stratton in Vermont. By mid-morning however, I spotted many skiers calling it quits. What was happening? It was still snowing. The snow was still ideal, although tracked, and the lift lines were non-existent as it was midweek.

Taking a brief respite, we listened. Many skiers, it seemed, were simply not pleased to ski "tracked" snow. Yet, we noted to each other, when encountered off the mountain many skiers talk up quite a storm about skiing deep powder. Is it bravado? Why were these people stopping so early?

Unloading the next lift, my wife took the lead. In a few inches of tracked snow, she set the pace. Heading toward the side of the trail, she headed into lumps of tracked snow. Whooping with glee, she left a billowing cloud of fluff as she partially blinded me.

I followed, but I was becoming winded as I executed two or three times as many as her turns. I tried a longer, wider turn, and turned less and enjoyed the snow.

The question remains, why do people retreat from these moments?

Inside the mid-mountain lodge, a table of skiers we saw captured it best. "This is exhausting," said one fellow.

In fact, tracked snow, the kind we encountered much of the day, demands precise skills. Following PSIA Examiner Charlie Rockwell over the years, I have learned to adjust technique to the changing conditions. As Charlie emerges in the East from soft snow onto slick ice scraped clean in the afternoons, we have learned to plan to apply our edges. It is hard sometimes. The snow can turn from soft to hard and modifying our skills is also hard. As the snowfall becomes less and as the snow often is pushed into piles, we must balance our edges and work more deftly.

"It's fun!" said Rockwell. "It doesn't get any better."

With my wife, we hit the sides of the trails as we know the sides are often better in the afternoon. The powder is better than the middle where it is scraped off.

Okay, some folks can soar on these days. Still, they did not become masters in a day. It took time and practice as well as knowing what to practice. Here is the good news.

There is another powder day in the future. But, will you be ready? Are your skills tuned? Do you know what skills and drills can help to prepare you for fully enjoying the vast array of changing snow conditions which can be experienced on the mountain? Interested in learning three drills to refine your powder skills, East or West?

Welcome to Our Powder Clinic.

Pointer #1: Stand Balanced.

The muscles on your fore legs play a great role in balance. The person who is afraid tends to grip downward with their toes. It is like having a pair of claws. It actually pulls you back on your heels though. Ideally maintain a flexed forward position.

Too often intermediate skiers think powder is best skied sitting back. But black diamond experts stand square. In fact, pros can move from powder to crud to hard pack with little change in stance. But it demands rock solid balance.

Good fore and aft balance is crucial.

Don't grip with your toes. Keep your toes up and steer with your feet. It is especially important in powder. To develop your balance, take a run on moderate terrain. Then, while traversing the hill, practice taking small hops off the snow. As you hop emphasize a centered position. That is the goal.

Hopping is one way to test, and refine, your balance. But, that is just a drill. Do not ski that way. When you're skiing, your body should be square, centered and facing down the hill.

You must have a tight zone of balance. Too far forward and your tips dive. Too far back and your skis will jet out-of-control.

Develop your balance.

Pointer #2: Explore Different Conditions

Learn to relax. Learn not to rush your turns. Learn not to tense your legs. Enjoy the changing conditions.

Becoming an expert demands versatility. That is key. No matter how much you may talk about skiing, you have to ski different snow conditions in order to truly develop your adaptability. That means taking turns on hard snow, on soft snow, and on every snow condition in between. But you do not have to ski the toughest trail on the mountain. Instead, practice mastering the snow on places where you do not have trouble mastering the mountain.

Find trails you can really enjoy. Test different trails.

Frankly, it comes down to expanding your comfort zone.

Skiing varying snow improves balance. And that is the key to improving skiing. Do not go over the limit but do it within reason. By going out and getting used to it, you are better prepared the next time.

Some days, of course, we try to find the best snow on the mountain. On those times we try to traverse, explore and wander from slope to slope, always trying to balance skier traffic, weather and luck. Part of each day, though, we mistakenly may find the toughest snow on the mountain. We take a few runs in the junk, ice, crud and even wet, heavy powder either natural or machine made.

Diversity builds technique. It makes us better skiers. It builds adaptability. It makes us ski the packed powder and untracked powder with greater ease. But, to become more proficient it helps to take one challenge out of the mix. So, choose less demanding terrain, but more demanding snow.

Build your skills. Explore different snow conditions.

Pointer #3: Explore Less Traveled Routes

Watch, as you ride the chairlift, where folks are not skiing. The road less travelled can build versatility.

I think in terms of improving, if you do not present moderate challenge, you do not push development. Honestly, what once did not look like fun can become fun. You can learn to accommodate and handle what comes at you. By expanding terrain selection you can build skill and ability.

Consider the road to improved adaptability and versatility and you will enjoy powder days.

Pointer #4 Consider These Points for Snow Versatility

1). Ski the edges of the trail; everybody takes the middle road.

2) Ski the center line, but, also ski the mounds, and drifts. Adjust for the changes from clumps to hard pack.

3) See how many different ways you can ski the same trail. Never stop in the same place twice.

4) Ski late. Most everyone will tell you the best snow can be found in the early morning. But, the crowds will thin by late afternoon, and if you are refreshed, especially if you took an early afternoon break, the snow can be challenging and fast.

Be Aware. Ski with Care.

Develop Your Skills in Powder.

Technical Editor Tony Crespi has served as both a Ski School Supervisor and Coach. He is a frequent contributor to publications throughout snow country and his pointers are published throughout the season.

ASPEN SNOWMASS UPGRADES, EXPANDS, IMPROVES the FUN

Infrastructure and terrain offerings among the improvements at each of the four mountains and resort-wide

ASPEN SNOWMASS, CO – The Aspen Snowmass app provides bigger rewards while it offers a convenient way for guests to access the conditions at their four mountains and track your skier days. You will find interactive mapping of a guest's movement, year-over-year stats for vertical feet and Highland Bowl laps, as well as information about activities, lift tickets, lessons and more. New in 2019-20, the app offers bigger rewards. The benefits include a \$15 food and beverage credit valid at on-mountain restaurants, \$10 credit at Four Mountain Sports, and \$25 off Ski and Snowboard School lessons as well as exclusive access to all things Aspen Snowmass.

Give a Flake

What does it mean to Give a Flake? It means caring enough to back up our beliefs with action. Therefore, when Aspen Snowmass business depends on the wonders of the natural world, they defend them. When their employees and guests are diverse in their ethnicities, sexual orientations, and belief systems, the resort stands up for tolerance.

Please check out how it is making a difference at www.aspensnowmass.com/inside-aspen-snowmass/give-a-flake The Ikon Pass

The Ikon Pass is the new standard in season passes, connecting skiers and riders to some of the most iconic mountains across the globe with access to more than 84,000 acres of terrain at 41 premier ski and ride destinations. Aspen Snowmass is pleased to be a part of the pass product with 7-day combined access when purchasing the Ikon Pass (no black-out dates), and 5-day combined access when purchasing the Ikon Base Pass (blackout dates included). New this year, the Ikon Pass added Arapahoe Basin Ski Area, Colo., and Zermatt, Switzerland, to its list of ski resorts. Additionally, all 2019-20 Premier Adult, Chamber, Senior, and Parent Passes include a complimentary Ikon Base Pass.

What's New at Snowmass:

Sam's Smokehouse Update

Sam's Smokehouse is no more, replaced by an elegant modern Italian restaurant on top of Sam's Knob on Snowmass.

The revamped Sam's underwent a \$2.5 million remodel including a live-action kitchen and stylish deck. Guests can remove their ski boots and put on a comfy pair of slippers in the slipper room before sitting down to antipasti platters, including burrata and prosciutto di parma followed by pasta made in-house daily paired with a negroni spritz.

Snowmass Base Village Growth

Located at the base of Snowmass Ski Area in the heart of Snowmass Village, Colo., Snowmass Base Village (SBV) is a \$600 million mountain-resort development. This approximately 10-year project added lodging, residences and amenities to the world-class resort, including the Limelight Hotel Snowmass, ski-in/ski-out residences, a public events plaza with ice skating rink, and community building. This winter, The Collective, a new community center, opened in December 2019 with a new restaurant and bar as well as a community and game lounge. The new One Snowmass building includes additional retail and dining options such as JUS Snowmass, King Yoga, Eye Pieces and Straight Line Studio.

The Limelight Snowmass

Aspen Skiing Company (ASC) unveiled the new Limelight Hotel Snowmass on Dec. 15, 2018. The new hotel features 99 hotel rooms and 11 ownership condominiums, plus a new restaurant, a children's game area as well as a five-story climbing wall that is open to the public (and the largest of its kind in the Colorado). Modeled after the company's existing properties in Aspen, Colo., and Ketchum, Idaho, the hotel is located adjacent to Snowmass Mountain's Elk Camp Gondola, providing ski-in/ski-out access. The new hotel property remains consistent with the Limelight brand featuring amenities and extras such as an expanded continental breakfast, après ski deals in The Lounge, live music, adventure activities such as First Tracks and Inside Tracks, a ski concierge as well as pet-friendly rooms. Stonehill & Taylor, based out of New York City, designed the interior, with a continuation of the Limelight's contemporary yet casual design theme. The hotel is pursuing a LEED certification.

Snowmass Mountain Club

ASC is excited to welcome a new year-round club to Snowmass. Located inside the new Limelight Hotel Snowmass, nestled in the heart of Snowmass Village, the Snowmass Mountain Club balances exclusivity with an approachable personality. Member benefits include private garage parking directly below the Club, ski-in access and access to the hotel's fitness facilities and hot tubs. Steps away from Elk Camp Gondola, Snowmass Mountain awaits you.

What's New at Aspen Mountain:

The Little Nell Remodel and 30th Anniversary Celebration

The Little Nell is Aspen's only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond, ski-in/ski-out hotel located just steps from Aspen Mountain. Recently, the illustrious hotel underwent an interior renovation of the living room, lobby and the après-ski

bar called Chair 9. The renovation, which took place in the spring of 2019, created a modern, art-centric aesthetic from international renowned design firm Champalimaud. Simultaneously, Ajax Tavern, a ski-in/ski-out restaurant located inside The Little Nell, was renovated by Rowland + Broughton, an architecture and interior design firm based out of Aspen/Denver. It resulted in brightening the bistro interior and upgrading the patio. This past Thanksgiving 2019, The Little Nell celebrated its 30th anniversary. Commemorative events and happenings will take place throughout the 2019-20 winter season in honor of the 30th anniversary.

Audi FIS World Cup Finals

The International Ski Federation awarded Aspen Mountain the 2017 Audi FIS Alpine World Cup Finals, which were March 15-19, 2017. The historic and successful event marked the first time it had been held in the U.S. in 20 years with men's and women's events in downhill, super G, giant slalom and slalom. Take your World Cup Run from the top of Ruthie's Run high-speed triple chair and gently follow the course down to the Aztec Trail arriving at Lift 1A, aka Shadow Mountain.

What's New at Buttermilk

New Fort Frog Children's Play Structure

A new wooden, frontier-style fort was constructed in the woods of Buttermilk. The kid's play structure includes look-out towers, a jail, a swinging bridge, a snowball launcher, a turbo twister slide and more. The fort was named after Greg Fortin, a long-time ski instructor at Buttermilk in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and is a memorial to his legacy. The newly constructed fort opened this winter.

Full Moon Dinners at the Cliffhouse

In winter 2017, Aspen Snowmass added a new evening activity to its roster, with Full Moon Dinners at the Cliffhouse atop Buttermilk. Diners ski uphill (aka "skinning") or hike up to the restaurant on full-moon nights for free hot chocolate, a roaring fire and à la carte dinner options, snacks and a cash bar. The Cliffhouse's signature Mongolian BBQ as well as grilled trout, salmon and roasted duck with roasted potatoes and mixed vegetables were well received month after month. Note: There is no lift or vehicular access for this event. The 2019-20 schedule will be made available soon.

For more, including info on their fourth mountain, Aspen Highlands please log on to: www.aspensnowmass.com

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