

‘Snow
Camp’
tradition
lives on

As the rest of the state alternately laments or celebrates the arrival of some genuine winter weather, the Holyoke clan has headed to the mountains to renew a longstanding tradition we call “Snow Camp.”

It’s a ski trip, of sorts, though calling it that diminishes exactly what this trip has come to mean to us.

Once a year, we all (and by all, I mean brothers and sisters, nephews, nieces, significant others and assorted pals looking to crash on a floor so that they can ski all week) head to Sugarloaf. We (and by “we,” I mean my mom) rent a condo, and then we all proceed to eat too much, ski when we want to, play cut-throat games of “Apples to Apples” and other games, and have a ball.

According to our family historians, the tradition began with my sister-in-law’s family. After a few years of that, about 25 years ago, the Holyokes adopted the yearly trip as their own.

And we’ve been going back every year since.

Some years, we’ve had more than 20 people in camp. This year, that number’s a more manageable 16.

But one is missing. And it hurts.

Some of you know my dad. Many times, during the outdoor expos that we staff throughout the year, I run into you, and you always ask about him. For that, I’m grateful.

My dad, you see, was always a talker. Some say I’ve benefited (or been plagued) by the same trait. Simply getting up to walk out of a restaurant with my dad often turned into a 10-minute affair because he always saw someone he knew, and he had to stop and chat on the way toward the door.

He knew a lot of people. And through his work at the University of Maine, he traveled to nearly every town in Maine, it seemed, and always had a story to tell about the people who lived in Wypitlock, Van Buren, Masardis or Brooks.

And for the second straight year, Dad isn’t here with us at “Snow Camp.”

And it’s different.

I’m not asking for sympathy. We’re lucky, as a whole. Dad is still alive and kicking at age 81, after all.

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JOHN HOLYOKE



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Skiers and snowboarders make their way down a trail at New Hermon Mountain ski area Wednesday afternoon. Co-owner Bill Whitcomb said the facility finally was able to open several trails this week, using man-made and natural snow.

Ski season warms up

Lack of snow delays
launch for most
Maine resorts

BY NICK SAMBIDES JR.
BDN STAFF

Business was looking frighteningly bad to Hermon Mountain Ski Area owner Bill Whitcomb about a week ago.

Skiing in Maine, he said, usually begins in mid-December, with a good season starting on Dec. 1, offering plenty of time to groom trails for this week’s Christmas school vacation. Only this year, two things were missing — snow and, especially, cold weather.

“We had a trail half-done on Nov. 29. We started early thinking this was going to be a good year,” Whitcomb said Tuesday, “but it just warmed up.”

The unseasonably mild temperatures and lack of snowfall delayed the opening of Hermon Mountain until Dec. 26, its latest start in 30 years. Most of the 18 Alpine ski areas that are members of the Ski Maine Association reported similar delays.

Tuesday’s snowstorm, which dumped six to 10 inches of the white stuff between Lewiston and the Canadian border, will help save Christmas vacation, one of the industry’s busiest times, Whitcomb and other ski area owners said.

Still, most of them have only part of their trail systems online so far.

“Everybody, even the big places like Sugarloaf and Sunday River, is struggling this year,” said Landon Fake, general manager of the municipally-owned Camden Snow Bowl.

“Last week we needed to make snow for Christmas week, and we couldn’t,” said Scott Shanaman, owner of Lost Valley ski area in Auburn, which opened Wednesday. “Missing half of Christmas week is not the start we wanted.”



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

People get on the ski lift at New Hermon Mountain ski area Wednesday afternoon.

Being a week in which schools are closed, the time between Christmas and New Year’s Day is important to the state’s ski areas.

Only the mid-February winter vacation for schools draws more skiers, owners said.

Tuesday’s snowfall was important in a subtle way, said Bill Getman, general manager of Bigrock Mountain ski area of Mars Hill, which opened on Monday. It reminded people that ski season has arrived, he said.

“When people don’t see snow in their yards, a lot of them don’t think about winter sports at all. Snow piques their interests to go see what’s out there,” Whitcomb said.

Last year was similarly balmy in December through Christmas 2014, when it was 55 degrees and raining in much of Maine, Whitcomb said. This year, ski area owners hope for heavy snowfall right into March to make up for lost time.

“If we hadn’t been through the same thing last year, we would have been panicking. Last year we were,” Whitcomb admitted. “It turned out to be a good season because while it started late, people skied late, so we know it can turn out well.”

Although a big blanket of snow, like what Tuesday’s storm provided, is certainly welcomed by the state’s smaller ski areas, the snow that really counts is the stuff they make themselves. There typically isn’t enough natural snow to make good skiing trails, so manufacturing it allows mountains to create better trails and pack them down. Of the 18 Ski Maine Association members, only three — Baker Mountain in Moscow, Mount Jefferson in Lee and Quoggy Jo in Presque Isle — rely entirely on natural snow.

Manufactured snow allowed Sugarloaf, the state’s largest ski area with 146 trails, to have 20 trails open on Wednesday, up from 11 the week before, workers there said. The state’s second-largest, Sunday River, had 34 of its 129 trails open on Wednesday, with expectations to open 11 more by the weekend.

The need to make snow this year has been costly to Whitcomb, who estimated that he spent \$15,000 making snow through Dec. 26 — to little effect, given the warm temperatures.

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1-Minute Hike:
Demonstration Forest

Difficulty: Easy to moderate, depending on how much of the trail network you choose to explore. The trails total about 2.5 miles.

How to get there: From Route 11 in downtown Brownville, turn onto High Street, which might not be marked with a sign but is across the street from Church

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Street and Robinson’s Mobil store. On High Street, drive 4.4 miles. You’ll travel up Brown Hill and past the Moses Greenleaf monument, and the road will change to Williamsburg Road. At 4.4 miles, the pavement ends and a road veers off to the right. Stay straight, continuing on Williamsburg Road (now dirt) for about 1 mile to Piscataquis Community Demonstration Forest parking area, which will be on your right.

Information: The 180-acre Pis-

cataquis County Demonstration Forest is a certified tree farm in the American Tree Farm System and features more than 2.5 miles of interpretive trails open to the public year round. Among the many highlights of the trail network are the remains of two large home-

steads, a beautiful stand of tall red pines and a canyon formed by a glacier thousands of years ago. Located in Williamsburg Township, the forest is maintained by the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District, which leads tours on the property about forest management practices, soil and water conservation, vernal pools and other topics, according to the Piscataquis County Tourism Development Authority. The trails on the property are



AISLINN SARNACKI



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An interpretive display about the Larson and Decker Homestead, built in the 1860s, is one of the many interpretive displays located along the trails of the Piscataquis County Demonstration Forest in Williamsburg Township. All that remains of the homestead is the stone foundation.

fairly wide and smooth, forming three loops great for hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Throughout the network are many colorful displays about forestry practices, local wildlife and the history of the property. These displays include old photos pro-

vided by the Brownville Historical Society and illustrations by local children.

From the forest’s small parking lot, a wide path leads to the trailhead kiosk, where a detailed trail map and harvest-type map are lo-

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Parks work
to boost
winter use

State lands bureau
increases public outreach

BY AISLINN SARNACKI
BDN STAFF

In an effort to get more people visiting Maine state parks year-round, the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands is ramping up its programming and public outreach this winter.

“There’s lots of fun things to do at state parks in the winter,” Gary Best, Regional Manager of Maine State Parks and Historic Sites, said.

This winter, the state is launching its second Maine State Parks Ski and Snowshoe Trailer, a mobile rental shop containing cross-country skis and snowshoes of all sizes. This trailer will travel to state parks throughout Maine, offering free equipment rental to

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