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Donner Ski Ranch: Gem of Donner Summit

"Donner Ski Ranch's simplicity and affordable costs continue to make it a little gem of Tahoe ski resorts with terrain that features a balanced variety of steeps to rolling shoulders."

– Excerpt from "Mountain Dreamers" by Robert Frohlich

By Nicole Cheslock

Imagine, for a moment, that your backyard is one of the original ski hills in the Tahoe-Truckee region. It's your pride and joy, it's your livelihood and it's your passion. Welcome to the life of Lincoln Kauffman who lives in a house nestled into the hill near Chairlift 1 at Donner Ski Ranch.

Purchased out of bankruptcy by Janet and Marshall Tuttle in 2004, Donner Ski Ranch has been undergoing small improvements and upgrades since then. During their first year of ownership, new controls were installed for the fixed two and three-seater chairs and additional upgrades were made for safety and reliability. Two new groomers, a huge investment, were recently purchased, and next season two warming huts will grace the backside, welcoming skiers and riders with an expansive sun deck and relaxing place to share stories over snacks and lunch.

Donner Ski Ranch
Monday-Friday: \$25 adults, \$10 child
Midweek rentals plus lift ticket: \$40 adults, \$35 child
Group lesson: \$8
Weekend rates: \$42 adult, \$34 ages 13 to 17, \$13 ages 7 to 12

Kauffman, the General Manager, has known Marshall since he was in second grade and explains, "We're keeping it a cool place. It is all about accessibility. Skiing shouldn't just be for the rich."

With the midweek and season deals offered at Donner Ski Ranch, it is no surprise that tens of thousands of people learn to ski and ride at this Tahoe-Truckee gem. Spring deals include \$25 lift tickets for adults and \$10 for children.

Owners of the Rustic Cottages in Tahoe Vista, the Tuttle's embrace the old world charm and simple pleasures of Tahoe's yesteryear while offering modern day skiing and riding with enchanting views of Sugar Bowl and Donner Lake.

Experience

John Nitenson from Pacifica knows the treasures on Donner Summit. He stays at the Vikings Ski Club Cabin just across the street from Donner Ski Ranch. The cabin was built in 1948 and originally served as a World War II surplus Quonset hut. Today, the cabin sleeps up to 36 people at affordable rates. It's a perfect place for Nitenson and his two sons to enjoy weekends in the Sierra Nevada.

His other treasure is the sheer number of powder runs that he enjoys on frequent trips to Donner Ski Ranch. Since the resort most often attracts families and those learning to ski, he and his sons get fresh tracks run after run and day after day. A season passholder for six years, he loves the mom and pop feel of the old ski resort.

It's also a great place for children and teens to explore on their own. The runs on the front side funnel to the lodge and signage is excellent. After a weekend or two at the resort, most young teens will have no problem navigating from one chair to another and meeting up with parents after a few runs.

Staff expands from 12 full-time employees to 135 during the height of the season. The international flags that greet visitors as they pull into Donner Ski Ranch's parking area from historic highway 40 show the countries of origin of the winter staff, many of whom return year after year from South America and Europe to their "Donner ski family."

Terrain

Donner Ski Ranch has six chairlifts that access more than 500 acres. The front side is across the street from Sugar Bowl and the backside faces the back of Boreal and the.

Hop on to Chairlift 1. If you're just starting out, exit the chairlift at the first stop. If not, as the chair climbs, take a look over your right shoulder and take in the panoramic view of Donner Lake. South Bowl Road, a

gentle, winding path with mellow curves, is the easiest way down. North Trail, an intermediate run to the right offers more pitch and links to a variety of advanced runs. There are options for groomed and off-piste skiing all over the front side. Beginners and intermediates will enjoy riding Chairlift 4 together, turning to the left or right depending on their skill level, and meeting at the bottom.

Chairlift 3 offers a lift out of the backside, which offers dozens of classic Donner ski trails running through the trees. The modernized Sierra Club warming hut and new lodge will be welcome additions next winter.

There really is something for everyone – magic carpet accessible beginner skiing to intermediate and advanced runs on the front and back sides, as well as a steep rock face right under Chairlift 1 that sometimes attracts skiers and riders on big powder days. Currently, buried under a few feet of snow, there's a magic carpet for the new tubing area.

I really can't imagine a friendlier environment or better terrain for families to pursue a lifelong journey on the snow. Donner Ski Ranch caters to new skiers and riders, as well as powder hounds looking for days of fresh tracks after the storms. It was the first in the area to offer night skiing (1958) and welcome Telemark skiers, as well as snowboarders.

With tons of snow and a welcoming atmosphere, Donner Ski Ranch will be serving skiers and riders well into the summer. No doubt they'll also be attracting everyone seeking simple, affordable, winter pleasures for decades to come.

As far as this season's closing date, Kauffman says, "We'll be the last one standing on the summit."

For more information on Donner Ski Ranch, call (530) 426-3635 or visit www.donnnerskiranch.com.

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