

TRAVEL



SKIING, FULL STEAM AHEAD

STEAMBOAT RESORT IN COLORADO GOT A GRIP ON CLIMATE SWINGS EARLY ON. ITS “CHAMPAGNE POWDER” MAKES SCHUSSERS OF ALL AGES HAPPY.

Twilight, downtown Steamboat Springs, Colo. STEVE HAGGERTY / ColorWorld

SKIING 2014 | STEAMBOAT SPRINGS

By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty
FOR THE INQUIRER

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, Colo. — For the last few years, ski resorts in cowboy country — and the skiers who love them — have been riding a bucking bronc.

Huge dumps of snow blanketed slopes in the up years; in down years, late snow and warmer days cast a pall over the industry. At Steamboat Resort, in western Colorado, hard-core skiers were over the moon in 2008 when monster storms dropped 433 inches of snow on the slopes. But disbelief followed when the next winter brought fewer, weaker storms and half as much snow.

See **STEAMBOAT** on N3

Ghosts of Cold War in Berlin

25 years after Wall's fall, you can find hulking reminders of division.

By Michael Milne
FOR THE INQUIRER

I was strolling along Bernauer Strasse during a foggy night typical of Berlin. The low-lying mist shrouded the streetlamps, casting sepia shadows on the neighborhood. The hues were reminiscent of old newsreels

from August 1963, when this street became a last-gasp escape route for those seeking to flee over the Berlin Wall, a structure that was erected overnight in its initial crude form of concrete blocks and barbed wire. It encircled West Berlin to keep East Germans from escaping to

the lone outpost of freedom behind the Iron Curtain.

Within years, the Berlin Wall (the “anti-fascist protection barrier” as it was named in Orwellian fashion by the East German government) grew more sophisticated in its ability to trap See **BERLIN WALL** on N4



At the East Side Gallery in Berlin, people get a close look at a painted, preserved section of the Berlin Wall. Nov. 9 marks the 25th anniversary of its fall.

GORDON WELTERS / Washington Post

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Nearly there: Skiing back to the base area at Steamboat Resort. Part of the ski experience is exploring Steamboat Springs, founded in 1865 and still a rustic ranch community. For a trip back in time, don't miss the Tread of the Pioneers Museum, in a vintage house. **STEVE HAGGERTY**

At Steamboat Resort it's full ski ahead

STEAMBOAT from N1
 And so it went until last season, when 308 inches of Steamboat's "champagne powder" dusted the peaks at regular intervals, a regular fairyland redux. Waking up to a glittering white world, skiers crazy enough to rise at dawn to ski "first tracks" were on cloud nine.

"Mother Nature was especially bountiful in February," exulted Steamboat spokeswoman Lauren Kasten, who didn't go a day without checking the weather forecast.

Some ski resorts never get ahead of the game early on. Determined not to be caught with its boots off, the resort updated and expanded its snowmaking system before the first snowfalls blew through. Since then conditions have been good enough to keep everyone happy. Even Billy Kidd, former Olympic medalist and forever upbeat, kept the faith.

When Billy — everyone calls him that — retired from competition and decided to put down roots, Steamboat's "champagne powder" was one of the reasons he hitched his star to this laid-back cowboy town. If there's a flurry within 100 miles, it finds its way to Steamboat Springs, in the Park Range on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains.

In past decades, light, dry snowfall has been so consistent that even climatologists have studied the phenomenon to see just how those featherlike flakes are formed. But the new normal, cycling between warm and cold, is anybody's guess.

"It's our location that's so unique," says Mike Lane, the resort's spokesman. "We get the south end of northern storms and the north end of southern storms. We're the first

real barricade most Pacific storms hit after they cross the Wasatch Mountains" in Utah.

Happily for visitors invited in for breakfast, Billy — good host that he is — doesn't need the real thing underfoot to feel that familiar adrenaline rush or hear the whoosh of skis cutting new powder. Two inches of fresh snow lie on his yard this morning, enough for a lesson, but he ignores it. Instead, he jumps up from a plate of eggs and bacon to show 8-year-old Dillon how he does it.

"I can improve your skiing right here in this room," says the expansive 71-year-old, reaching for a pair of imaginary poles. He bends his knees and balances lightly, poised to power-carve through a snowy glade. "You don't believe me?" he asks, without waiting for an answer. "The secret is visualization."

We'd watched Billy in action the day before at one of his free "Ski With Billy" clinics. Held at 1 p.m. at the top of the Christie Peak six-pack chairlift, the 90-minute ski-alongs are one of the mountain's most popular events.

By the time Billy showed up, wearing his signature cowboy hat with the pheasant-feather band, skiers were crowding around to meet the man whose career and ski chops have been synonymous with Steamboat for 44 years.

Some were serious skiers, hoping for a ray of enlightenment. Others were Olympics fans, on hand to gawk or snap a photo. But few could resist Billy's high energy and enthusiasm. After the run down to the base area, even the novices were convinced that sliding downhill on greased sticks was as natural as walking.

"Imagine it, believe it, and you're halfway home" is the mantra at Steamboat's Kids Mantra School, one of the nation's top-rated programs. Snow is essential, certainly. But families planning an annual ski vacation and ski school for

the kids don't really need "champagne powder" as much as they need instructors who make learning easy and fun.

Steamboat, a pioneer in offering "kids ski free" programs, believes that children who learn young will love the sport and the outdoors, and want to ski better and often throughout their lives.

How does it work? For every adult (parent, grandparent, or friend) who buys a five- or seven-day lift pass, a child 6 to 12 gets the same lift pass free. And every adult child's rental. When airfare and lodging packages are added in, it's a blockbuster deal. (Information: 1-800-922-2722.)

For adult skiers, the Billy Kidd Performance Center offers one-, two- and three-day ski camps based on "building the basics." Billy's methods, a combination of Olympic-style coaching, with an emphasis on positive thinking and winning strategies, use video sessions to teach self-visualization.

Though Steamboat has some expert-rated terrain, this is intermediate country, the trails ideal for practicing Billy's self-visualization techniques. The man himself, raised in Stowe, Vt., near the ski area in the Green Mountains, grew up on skis. When his schoolmates elected basketball or track, Billy chose ski classes. And when he wasn't skiing, he was thinking about it.

"I realized I could sit in the classroom and build muscle memory by imagining how to turn," he said. "When I got older, I watched films and analyzed what the skiers were doing. You get those mental images in your head, then you just let it happen."

And after a winning career, where did he want to be? On 10,565-foot Mount Werner, the resort's highest point. Viewed from the town, it resembles a cone. Seen up close, it's just one of a half-dozen smaller peaks flanked by lift-served meadows, ridges, and glades. Skiers can go off-piste or stay on 165 signed trails. The most recent resort upgrade included updated lifts and redesigned terrain.

For a special evening, book a reservation at Hazie's, on top of the mountain. The night ride up in the gondola is magical, with the resort's lights below and stars twinkling above. The restaurant, cozy after being outside, serves chef-prepared three-course dinners, with candles and a choice of wine. Or dine in town,

where restaurant styles run from pizza and hamburger joints to first-rate restaurants.

Part of the ski experience is exploring Steamboat Springs, founded in 1865 and still a rustic ranch community. The center of town between 1940s diagonally marked parking spaces and sidewalks lined with two-story brick buildings. Stores, cafes, and small businesses operate out of ground-floor

spaces; wood-frame houses line the adjacent streets.

A real old-timer is F.M. Light, the town's century-old "dry goods" store. Though it no longer sells 10-pound bags of flour, it does a land-office business in new and retro ranch gear: jeans, work overalls, leather belts, boots, gloves, shirts, and hunting knives. A display of Stetson felt hats, near the front window, shows off a half-dozen cowboy

styles, including Billy's favorite model, a Swiss coffee cream color with a slightly rolled brim.

For a trip back in time, don't miss the Tread of the Pioneers Museum, in a vintage house on Oak Street. Like Steamboat's itself, the contents — furniture, knickknacks, kitchen ware, bed linens, and framed prints from magazines — are a reminder that even when the weather changes, the good things remain.



Kids ski free with their parents at Steamboat Resort, a pioneer in offering such programs.

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