

Big Sky – Jan 11 – 18, 2020

On January 11, seventy-seven SJSC members converged on Philly Airport for the first western trip of the season to Big Sky. Due to the large size of the group, three separate airlines were used. Days earlier, troublesome weather had been predicted in the UNITED connection city of Chicago. The first bad sign was when six members were bumped from the American flight, but looked rosier when placed with the United group. Both the DELTA and AMERICAN groups made the trip to Bozeman with only slight delays. UNITED was late leaving Philly and then placed in a Chicago holding pattern causing the group to miss their connection. The rebooked flight later that night was cancelled a few hours later. Liam and Jillian made it to Bozeman that night by chancing standby flights. The other 13 spent the night at a nearby hotel. In the morning, through perseverance and luck, John T., Ginny N., Barb P, Miles C., Fred S., and Kristin B. boarded a morning plane to Bozeman. Joe B., Bob F, Ted R., Diane H., and Marshall M. took in some culture at the Chicago Art Museum for a few hours before meeting up with Stephanie S. and Janet M. at the airport for the rescheduled 7:45 p.m. flight to Bozeman (which did finally take off!)

For the Delta and AA groups, Sunday morning began with a fantastic breakfast buffet at the Huntley. People were excited to hit the slopes so they fueled up for a long day of shredding the snow. Angie and Frank, along with Tony, Jack and Heather hit the fresh powder trails in the cold morning temps. The afternoon warmed up and Bluebird Skies were enjoyed by all. Lauren Testa even said it was so hot skiing in the afternoon she wished she had worn less layers. It was definitely a successful opening day with people making new friends while skiing!

On Monday again prepped with a hearty breakfast, everyone was eager for adventure. Julia showed Tina how to take on the powder and practiced pole plant, steer the car and look up... as it's been a few years since she skied anything but the East Coast's icy terrain. Tammy, everyone's favorite teacher, was seen zooming around the mountain by all.

By Tuesday afternoon high winds were ripping; giving way to snow squalls and white out conditions. None of that stopped this crowd. Lauren Testa, leading a pack of roughly 20 skiers, (she doesn't like to ski behind) was a perfect tour guide. She led them all over Moonlight Basin, and they later wrapped things up at Everett's for lunch. Mike, Deb, Joe B., Jenn, Julia, Jackie, Sheila to name a few of her pupils were so impressed by her leadership they told her she should change careers! Thumbs up all around. The day was followed by gathering in the Jefferson room at the Huntley for pizza, salad, drinks and great company.

On Wednesday the sun gods were with 23 members who embarked on a 64-mile, round trip, snowmobile expedition to Old Faithful geyser. Janet M was the driver most the trip so that SJSC photographer Jack M could be passenger and capture the moments. Barb P, Cindy M, Julia E, John T, Lauren T, and Joe B ended the day with beers at Buffalo Bills and a photo with a stuffed bison. Stories and pictures of incredible wildlife and geysers were shared. Joe M our only non-skier touted the Grand Canyon of

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Yellowstone and gave reports of buffalo that refused to give the right of way, and cows that would not let anyone pass we're finally chased away by snowmobiles. The Urbans and Jim K opted to stay warm with snow coach tours. Being the coldest day, others took a day off to rest or shop.

By Thursday, Jason Tatiano (A Team Skiing Sensei) led group runs with a fall line to accommodate all ski abilities across two mountains keeping most of our group together for the better part of the day. What an awesome group we have to be able to accomplish that; with Chip guiding the front and Frank sweeping the end to make sure no one was left behind. Anyone needing tips knew Tammy's name and were extremely grateful to her for sharing her expertise. After a full day of skiing we were off to the Après' Ski event at Lone Peak Cafe in The Exchange. There we shared stories and celebrated the day. We also found talent in our group for singing. With little success to find a karaoke bar, many made their own music and closed down the cafe. But, no fear, the party continued in a crowded Montana Jacks. Not sure if the singing drew the crowd or just the awesome company.

The last day began with fresh powder, which started at 4 a.m. and continued just past 1 p.m. The weather once again was hard core in the morning, which made for a good workout, but couldn't stop this crew. When the sun shone bright in the afternoon it was on! A group of 18 well-wishers helped Julia E celebrate the "Big 60" with a B-B-Q dinner at the Gallatin Riverhouse Grill where Joe Testa played billiards and the local entertainment sang happy birthday for Julia. The night continued with karaoke where Angie raised the roof with "these boots are made for walkin". Back at the Huntley fireplace Cindy said it best with "let's not wait 4 years to do this again."

Saturday a.m. brought us to our final Huntley breakfast, then our group picture, and time to head home. Joe B worked some magic with the airlines to ensure smooth travels for our drama free return. All made it home safe and sound. Wishing Sheila and Brandon well wishes and speedy recovery.

Joe Broski and Tina Okomski would like to give special thanks to all those who helped make this trip possible, especially: Mary D for countless hours organizing and worrying; Geri B for assisting with payment collections, event ideas, and offering support all along the way; Joe H for help with the spreadsheet, PayPal collections, financial support, herding cats on the DELTA flight, and early morning "day after club meeting" finance reconciliation calls; Terri C as a cat herder; Jason T for spreadsheet development & support and as cat herder; John Testa who stepped up in Chicago spending several hours of his own time to assure the AA passengers got on their flight. Sorry if we missed anybody else.

We were just the organizers. The SJSC members made this an amazing trip.

Joe & Tina