

Aspen, Colorado 1/09/2021-1/16/2021

Twenty-seven members of the South Jersey Ski Club embarked on the first trip out west for the 2021 ski season. The destination: Aspen, Colorado. The duration: one week, January 9 – 16.

Being the first ski trip to navigate air travel with such a large party amid a pandemic, the first day of travel on Saturday, January 9th, went smoothly and for that we are extremely grateful! The morning started nice and early with an American flight out of Philadelphia at 8:30 a.m. followed by a quick layover in Dallas and a flight into Aspen. We stayed at the Stonebridge Inn in Snowmass and luckily the bus ride from the airport was only 15 minutes. All luggage and persons made it to the hotel around 3:30 p.m. From there everyone was able to settle into their rooms and explore.

Sunday morning, everyone woke up excited and ready to get onto the mountain! A delicious, daily complimentary breakfast was served at the Artisan restaurant, conveniently located in the hotel. After getting fueled up, Chip led a group out to be the first ones on the lift at Snowmass. Another group led Joe Broski met up to take the gondola. Both groups merged and became a group of about 15 members. Chip, Ralph, Nancy, Tammy, Rish, Joe Broski, Bob Super, Marshall, Gary, Marianne, Sofia, Ed, Barb, Ginny, Kat and I were able to take a run together. We ended up breaking apart after that first large group run and we took off to explore on our first of many bluebird days.



On Monday, Ginny woke up to the perfect birthday, skiing a bluebird day! A large number of the SJSC met in the lobby to ski Snowmass. The mountain's terrain is vast and only a 2-minute walk from the hotel, making it an easy choice to stay and explore some more. Another group including Gary, Marianne, Rish, Eileen and Jeff went to Buttermilk for the day and said it was an ideal mountain for intermediate skiers with very wide and nicely groomed runs. Every evening at the hotel, members of our group headed to the outdoor hot tub and spa to soak their tired muscles. The staff was wonderful about maintaining social distance and keeping safety a top priority.

Tuesday, we headed into Aspen to ski A-Jax (Aspen). This mountain was on the smaller side, comparably, and icy, so most of the day was spent on the left side where they had some great black and double black diamond runs and the conditions were a bit better. Because we were early on in their season, they didn't have a lot of snow for ideal conditions. Après ski more than made up for the conditions as the town of Aspen was beautiful! It was lovely to walk around and check out all the different shops and art galleries. There was also a great selection of restaurants we were able to choose from.

Wednesday, the SJSC woke up to another blue bird day! Again, the Artisan breakfast did not disappoint, and we took off to explore Aspen Highlands. Most of the feedback I received was that the conditions were not the greatest for the beginner and intermediate groomed runs.

However, the best snow conditions along with the steepest and most challenging terrain was found after walking up to the Highlands Peak! Personally, this was my most memorable day. After unsuccessfully trying to convince SJSC members to take the tour, I took the Loge Peak lift and started my ascent with two guides and three strangers. After climbing 782 sweaty, why-am-I-doing-this, vertical feet, I was the first and only human at the top of the mountain, surrounded by a herd of rams. There were at least 30 of them, the most the locals have ever seen! I was able to get about 15 feet away from some of them. I ended up going back on Friday to experience it again. Aspen Highlands was the furthest distance from the hotel, about a forty-five-minute bus ride. I had to take two different shuttles, but it was worth it.



Thursday and Friday were our last two ski days in Snowmass. With four very different mountains all near the Stonebridge Inn, members had the option ski the mountain of their choice. The transportation system in Pitkin County was impeccable. The buses were prompt and hygienic. They ran at 50% capacity to promote social distancing.

On Saturday, our departing flight wasn't until 12:30 p.m. Everyone had time to enjoy breakfast and get organized for the trip home. Again, we flew with American out of Aspen with another short layover in Dallas. Our flight arrived early, landing in Philadelphia around 8:30 p.m.

All in all, we had a fantastic trip while juggling all of the different protocols in place! Restaurants and shops had to close early to coincide with COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions, making for early nights during this trip, but everyone came back happy and safe! The day that we left Colorado, Pitkin County shut down indoor dining and hotels can only accommodate families, not groups like ours. So, we lucked out! I would like to extend my thanks to the people who made this trip possible and to everyone on the trip, I could not have done it without you. Thank you.

