

MAMMOTH ARTICLE

On February 10, 2018, while Vermont and Denver were getting pounded with snow, 43 South Jersey Ski Club members travelled to Mammoth Lakes, California. When we first stopped in Denver and saw the snowy conditions, we wanted to jump off the plane and stay there. But we ventured on to San Jose and then to Reno. Our tour bus operator met us with the usual stupefaction over the extent of our luggage (non-skiers simply do not understand how equipment intense skiing is), but we made it all work.

We had a perplexing welcome from the Mammoth Mountain Inn when we arrived just past 11:00 p.m. after too many hours of travelling. The Inn's bellmen would not show us to the lobby and told the Trip Leader to just give out the lift tickets, gear gift cards, and room keys in a hallway that was undergoing construction. At that point, some travelers were starting to resemble the mob in Frankenstein, but we sorted all that out and settled down to dream of epic skiing.

Mammoth Mountain ski area, located in eastern California along the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range in the Inyo National Forest, has more than 3500 skiable acres serviced by 28 lifts. Mammoth Mountain was formed in a series of volcanic eruptions that ended 57,000 years ago, and is a lava dome complex whose volcano is still active with minor eruptions. A lava dome is a roughly circular mound-shaped extrusion of viscous lava from a volcano. It made for some beautiful and surreal landscapes. We learned that Mammoth Mountain Ski area was founded by hydrologist Dave McCoy in 1953, and it was fascinating to watch the dvd and read the books about the Mountain, provided by the Inn to our hotel rooms, of how the ski area was practically hand-made and built up through the years.

Mammoth Mountain Inn is a ski in-ski-out hotel just steps from several lifts. On Sunday, our first day of skiing, several mountain hosts took members on complimentary guided mountain tours. We were told by the mountain guide that when the Mammoth winds whipped up, it was like "nature's dermabrasion." On Monday, we got a little fresh snow, but for most part we skied hardpack, ice, and icy crud. On Wednesday, the mountain closed the lifts at 1:00 p.m. because of 75 mph winds. Those challenging conditions and the many signs of "hard fast snow"

throughout the mountain did not prevent a number of our best skiers from purchasing extra lift tickets at a discounted price.

Southern California native and expert skier Jason T. served as tour guide to the Double Black Diamond Crowd, Chip S., John S., Kristan B., Ed G., Steve R., John Mc., Steve W., and Rich K. (skiing and snowboarding!), all throughout his former home mountain, with many runs down Climax and Cornice Bowl. Throughout the week, John P. and Tony C. appeared like two flashes of lightning all over the mountain. Who could keep up with these two expert skiers?! Most of our skilled skiers and snowboarders, like Bill W., Jeff S., and Eileen G. were undaunted by the conditions and tore the mountain up every day. Lucky Laura C. was given lessons by her partner and legendary ski expert, Bill C.

We had many family and friend reunions on the trip. Dean A., Rich K., and Rich R. enjoyed skiing (really well) together and having peanut butter sandwiches and Tito's apres-ski. Murray G. joined the 80-year-old club to ski free at Mammoth, and Murray G., Pat G. and Allison I. enjoyed a skiing family reunion with their nephew and family. Trip leader Geri B. enjoyed skiing and sushi with her son Mike T., future daughter Rachel L., and nephew Georgie B.

On Sunday night, we had a Welcome Reception at the Sierra Room at the Mammoth Mountain Inn that was deejayed by Jason T. While enjoying different pizzas and hors d'oeuvres, we welcomed new members Mike F., Marshall M. (who had a great time in the glades all week), and Anthony S., who explored Mammoth Village on his day off. Ski buddies Dave P. and Stuart F. enjoyed renewing their friendship. Stephanie S. and Janet M. also enjoyed catching up with each other and fellow near-the-Shore member Brian C., and Janet met a guy from the United Kingdom who asked whether she had ever thought about becoming a mermaid.

On Monday, we had some fresh snow. Ski friend and travelling nurse Jess S. joined us in a welcome reunion on the slopes. Tuesday was another fun day of hard fast snow. Experienced skiers like Jack M. and Janet M. knew to go out each day a bit later to maximize the ski conditions. On Wednesday, Valentine's Day, lovebirds Lee G.M. and John Gabriel and Eileen G. and Jeff T. (the latter couple celebrating their anniversary!) had a lovely dinner at the Tamarack Lodge. Connoisseurs Joe B., Mary D., and Cindy M. enjoyed several evenings of fine

dining after great days of skiing. Throughout the week many friends had their pictures taken with Mammoth Mountain's mascot, Woolly the Mammoth.

Every day of the trip we had a happy hour get together at the slopeside Yodeler Restaurant and Bar, the Inn's Mountainside Bar & Grill, or at Tusks (as in the tusks of the woolly mammoth). This enabled everyone to meet up at the end of the day, share ski stories, and make dinner or hot tub plans. Old and new friendships were kindled by the apres-ski fun. At the Yodeler, Jeff T. bought Bavarian Pretzels, and they were big enough to feed the entire ski club!

On our last ski day, the sun shined and warmed the "hard fast snow" and we all skied the great conditions. T.J. M. met two 20-something Los Angeles snowboarders who took him to all of their sweet spots on the mountain. After skiing, it was warm enough to gather at the Tusks Bar deck to enjoy apres-ski and to share great memories.

On our departure day, we all gathered at the Inn staircase for our group picture by our resident artist-photographer Jack M. and were then off to Reno. As is so often the case, after we departed, Mammoth got pounded with epic snow (and even experienced an avalanche two weeks later), but the journey of the skier is always shaped by the vagaries of Mother Nature. The most important thing is that everyone came home safe and sound with great Mammoth Mountain ski memories.