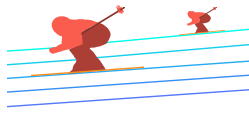




The Spring Thing



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SPRING +SNOW= FUN

April, April,
Laugh thy girlish laughter;
Then, the moment after,
Weep thy girlish tears!

Sir William Watson (1858–1935), British poet.

Well those tears may just be melting snow. You may have noticed that it has gotten warm out. There is still plenty of snow sports left including some great skiing and snowboarding.

There is really no reason to stop skiing just because it is spring. In fact this is one of the best times to go get some turns. Most of the ski resorts in Tahoe close due to lack of business, expiration of their insurance and/or lease with the forest service not lack of snow!

There are many great reasons to go up this time of year

LESS CROWDED fewer people, which means little or no lift lines. Everything is less crowded, the parking lots, the bathrooms, the cafeterias, yes even the traffic. When there is some new snow, which we get every spring, there are more freshies untracked for longer.

RUSH RUSH RUSH Generally there is less urgency in the spring, because it tends to be icy when the places open. There is generally a more relaxed atmosphere. It's way easy to get a good parking spot. Stay up late the night before and have an extra beer. That is unless it is a powder day.

THE WEATHER. This one is pretty obvious. It's spring, it's warm, it's beautiful. You probably won't need chains or 4WD, and that means a faster drive to the ski areas. You can wear less clothes work on your tan, and watch others do the same. In Tahoe we do get plenty of snow usually in March, April, and yes-even May. So be prepared if there is a system moving in.



Conditioning Most of you who have been skiing all winter are in pretty good shape by now. That always makes it more enjoyable, more endurance and a higher skill level. You can show off your toned muscles in that Hawaiian shirt.

LODGING Most resort areas vary the lodging prices in accordance with the demand. Since less people are skiing this time of year, it translates into cheaper overnight accommodations. Even the big destination resorts like Aspen, Vail, or Whistler show sharp drops in prices usually starting at the end of March. Many hotels offer lodging/lift packages at a discount.



\$\$ SPECIAL DEALS \$\$

Most ski areas start to discount ticket prices at the end of March or the beginning of April. These vary tremendously. A number of resorts offer a spring season pass for a significant discount. For example this year Alpine Meadows is selling a \$99 season pass good from April 1 until the end of the season. Last year their season ended on Memorial day weekend. Additionally you can apply this \$99 to the purchase of a pass next year. Many resorts have a deal whereby if you purchase a season pass for the following season, you *can ski the rest of this season with it as well*. Some of the ones I am aware of are: Kirkwood \$399 unrestricted, Boreal \$199, Northstar and Sierra are offering the Double Whammy pass again this year. You can get a pass valid 6 days a week (no Saturdays/Holidays) at Northstar and any day at Sierra for \$279. \$429 for an adult season pass valid 7 days a week at Northstar with holidays blacked out, valid everyday at Sierra.

Go to www.Slidingonthecheap.com , or www.snowbomb.com for a list of deals. There are always discount tickets, two for ones, or whatever. There are also other incentives like free concerts, barbecues, games, pond skimming, big air contests and other fun things.

Another way to get cheap or free lift tickets is from your friends and other ski club members who may have passes or freebies that expire at season's end. A great source of discount tickets is found by going to www.Craigslist.org and clicking on the *ticket* category. I should note that selling tickets is frowned on by the resorts and they usually have a disclaimer about resale of tickets on the back of the ticket.

Squaw Valley has a Hot tub and Swimming pool (opens Mid March) on the mountain, which normally has a separate fee. Later in the season a lift ticket (also discounted) gets you free use of this spectacular facility.

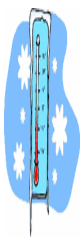


MUSIC

In The Lake Tahoe area Sierra-At-Tahoe has been putting on a big rock show, big air and freestyle competitions for the last few years called, **Boarding for Breast Cancer** this has featured pretty big name groups like Luscious Jackson and Primus. This year it is on Saturday, April 3rd. The money goes to a good cause. Be aware that if you have a free Northstar or Sierra ticket, it probably is no good for this date. A few years back Sugar Bowl last year sponsored the El Nino Festival with bands like Sugar Ray and the Specials. Alpine Meadows routinely has live bands playing on the deck on Saturdays. There is almost always live music in the California Bar (At the California Lodge) at Heavenly. These incentives help to bring more people to the mountain and create a festival like atmosphere. Pick up a local paper (North Tahoe Weekly, Best Bets, Lake Tahoe Action) to scope out the deals.

TAHOE

We are lucky to be located near lake Tahoe, which receives huge amounts of snow compared to other places. Because our snow has high moisture content it tends to stick around well into the spring, and even the summer sometimes. Big ski areas like Aspen or Vail are typically closed by Mid April when we still have lots of skiing left. Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows seem to be the two resorts that stay open the latest, and that is typically at least until mid May. Their hours are more limited than during the regular season, and they usually close by 1:30 or 2 PM. While it is usually slushy by then, last year (2003) there were times that they were closing with it snowing and fresh wonderful conditions. Occasionally on a big snow year Squaw will re-open in very limited capacity for the 4th of July. Why is spring skiing so especially good in Lake Tahoe. It relates to the high moisture content of the snow, the altitude and latitude being unique. We get what is referred to as "corn snow". This is because the snow particles freeze, melt, and refreeze forming snow 'kernels', like corn. Sometimes it seems more to me like it should be called "oatmeal snow" when it gets wet and slushy. There is a window of time in the day when the temperature is just right and this corn snow is just fabulous to ski or board on. Typically it is from about 10am-1pm. Of course this varies depending on the weather that day.



TEMPERATURE Typically the weather is warmer. The idea all the time is to stay comfortable cold or hot. Recommended is wearing a wicking, breathable shirt next to your skin. If it's very warm you may want to wear even less. It's great not having to worry about it being too cold. The Bad part is it might rain instead of snowing even at high altitude. Also the snow quality is usually not as good as winter. There tends to be ice early in the day and slush later on as it warms. This wet snow can make you soaked if you fall. Also, with the beautiful weather there is lots of sun and fantastic views. If you get too hot, guess what, you are surrounded by snow. Take a breather by laying your body down in the cool snow.

SNOWBOARDING Hey what a great time of year to try snowboarding. The slushy stuff gives you a good medium to turn in. Sometimes boarding in these conditions is far more fun than skiing. Be sure to bring waterproof pants and gloves, you **will** get wet. If you want a lesson, talk to me. If you are a boarder you are more likely to get stuck in deeper snow and on traverses. Make sure you wax.



Dress properly Wear a layer next to your skin that 'breathes'. Clothing made from materials like Coolmax, polyester, Polypropylene, and similar fabrics. . Wear an outer layer that is light enough and breathes. Many nicer jackets have vents under the arms. Also unzip if you get hot. Carry things that you can take off like neck gators or a hat if you get too hot, but that you can also put back on if you are getting cold. Keep in mind that at the summit it may be significantly colder than at the base lodge.

If you are snowboarding, you will likely get wet in the warmer weather. Bring waterproof gloves and pants. Avoid "FROSTBUTT".

Bring extra clothes with you. Sometimes the weather can change quickly even when it starts out as a nice day. Swap clothes if you get too sweaty or wet.

DRINK LOTS OF FLUIDS I don't mean wine or beer. You would be amazed at the fluid loss during a warm ski day. Drink fluids before during and after you ski. Water backpacks, like Camelbaks are fantastic. If you don't have one yet, consider buying one. I fill mine with ice cubes and then whatever liquid. It stays cool for hours and in addition to hydrating, helps to keep your temperature at a comfy level. If possible use electrolyte replacement drinks like Endura or Cytomax, which are scientifically formulated to replace your electrolytes (minerals like calcium, potassium, manganese, magnesium). This will give you less cramping and muscle soreness. If these are not available to you, drink water and/or juice. Soda pop, coffee, and alcoholic drinks are lousy substitutes and actually cause diuresis (increased peeing), avoid them until afterwards.



BE AWARE OF THE SUN



The sun is strong in the spring. The intensity on April 21 is approximately the same as August 21. Be aware of this! Do not make the mistake of thinking the temperature has anything to do with getting sunburned. You can just as easily get sunburned if it is cold out. Even though this is obvious I always see experienced people with sunburn. Protection is easy and smart.

SKIN

The ultraviolet (UV) Rays are much stronger at the higher elevations; after all you are closer to the sun! But seriously, there is a lot of reflected sunlight and fewer atmospheres to filter the ultraviolet. Use a high SPF sunscreen, (at least 15) and don't forget to apply it to those other areas, like below your chin, back of your neck, and ears. You may even want to apply it to your nostrils. You may even get sunburn with sunscreen on, be careful. Do not forget to re-apply regularly. Sweat and movement require new applications. I hope know that you can get sunburned when it's cloudy.

Also if you get Oral herpes (Cold sores) be aware that UV activates this in many individuals. Make sure that you re-apply protection to these areas regularly. Acyclovir is a prescription drug available under different names (Zovirax, Valtrex) that can really help prevent and treat these outbreaks.



EYES

The ultraviolet (UV) rays can damage your eyes. Increased exposure to these is associated with increased tendency to cataracts, macular degeneration, and other eye problems. Squinting will only contribute to 'crow's feet' around your eyes. Wear sunglasses or goggles that block UV and preferably wrap around. The sun is strong at these elevations so bring a baseball type cap or better still a wide brim hat to decrease some of the sunlight into your eyes and head. Some helmets allow you to attach a visor to them. I have seen 'stick on' after market visors, which would work. A precautionary note: if you have cheap sunglasses that do not block UV well they may increase the damage to your eyes. Why? Because the shading may cause your pupils to dilate, letting in even more of the damaging UV.

Proper Equipment Perhaps the most important thing about spring conditions is using wax and the proper wax at that. Most of us know when the snow gets warm and 'grabby'. It feels like someone is putting the brakes on. Waxes are made to be optimal at certain temperature ranges, use the right wax and you will decrease your coefficient of friction that means you will slide easier. This is especially important for snowboarders; it allows you to avoid the horrible sport I call "Cross country snowboarding". Nobody likes to take a foot out and push in a flat spot. It is always nice when a skier offers a boarder a pull or a push when stuck. Help a stuck boarder, it's good Karma. Ask you local ski shop for the best type of wax to use. I have heard that graphite based waxes work well in the warmer weather. Some people use ZARDOZ Not wax, which is a Teflon-like liquid that makes your base slick. Some people apply this substance and mix it with the wax for optimal glide .I have heard all kinds of waxing methods whereby people may wax different parts of the base with different waxes, or melt them all together. Be aware that some of this spring snow can strip that wax off your base quickly. Rewax each day if possible. It's always good to have some spray on or rub on wax if things get too sticky. The wax not only helps you slide but also helps to protect your base from the little sticks, resin, and other crud in the spring snow.

If the conditions are really crappy and there are exposed sticks and rocks, its time to whip out the old stuff. You sure don't want to ruin your really good skis do you? Also, if you are going to ski early in the day be prepared for ice. The snow melts in the daytime and refreezes at night (known as the melt/freeze cycle). You need sharp **edges** to turn more effectively. Tune your equipment; you will have a better time.

Most serious skiers and riders have several different sticks for different conditions. The proliferation of 'off piste' skis has made many choices available, which may help to optimize your spring riding. Having the right skis or board can make going through the slush or crud much easier. I have seen people avoid some of the great terrain simply because they do not have the proper skis. We snowboarders probably have some advantage because of our larger surface on this 'Sierra Cement'.

Location strategy Ski resorts vary in their location, elevation, sun exposure, facing, snow depth, winds and many other factors. Some are better in the spring because of these reasons. Ask people who have extensive experience (locals, ski resort employees)for their opinions.

In The Tahoe area Kirkwood seems to have the best snow due to its location, elevation, and massive snowfall. Other areas that generally remain open late in the season, are Alpine Meadows, Squaw, and Boreal. Typically, as the coverage diminishes the number of runs and lifts also decreases. One year I ran into a couple of boarders on the Fourth of July who had just come back from Squaw Valley. Of course if you want to go out of the Tahoe area, you can Ski Mount Hood, Oregon (about an hour outside of Portland) until Labor Day. They have one of those neat glaciers; hey we should get one too! If you still can't get enough skiing, go to the Southern Hemisphere, where our summer is their winter.

You are probably aware that different portions of the ski area have different exposures. When it tends to be icy in the morning, go to the sunny areas (generally South facing). When it gets slushy go to areas

that are shaded, or in the trees. If you snowboard, traverses are best done when the snow is not too slushy, and note the slow flat spots, they may be trouble later in the day when it warms, be aware of them BEFORE you get stuck. Most ski areas have done a lousy job of indicating to snowboarders where the flat spots are, Ask the resort employees where you may have to speed up or traverse. They usually know the best places to go on the mountain. I have also found that the Ski Patrollers are a great source of information. They usually know the terrain as good as anyone.

MULTIPLE ACTIVITIES There is no reason that you can't combine activities. Ski in the morning and early afternoon, golf or go to the beach later. Go kayaking, or hiking, the combinations are endless.

Forget about cleaning your garage or yard. Get up and go enjoy.