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Travel



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Plenty of powder basic to appeal of quirky New Mexico ski resorts

By ANNE Z. COOKE
For the Journal-Constitution

Taos, N.M. — Patience is more than a virtue at Taos Ski Valley in northeast New Mexico. It's a lifestyle.

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Welcome to the Sangre de

Cristo Range, in the southern Rocky Mountains, home of the country's most original ski areas. Taos, Angel Fire, Red River and Santa Fe resorts may belong to the same species as their corporate-owned kin in Colorado and California, but they've evolved quite differently.

Skiing in New Mexico is a home-grown experience, as quirky as Georgia O'Keeffe and as hot as a chile pepper. As for

► Please see **NEW MEXICO, L5**



STEVE HAGGERTY / ColorWorld

New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Range is home to several resorts, each with a distinctive character. This is Taos Ski Valley.

New Mexico: After skiing, consider Santa Fe arts scene

► Continued from L1

great snow, this season looks to be the best in a decade. Blizzards dumped 3 to 5 feet of powder at the beginning of January, and more is predicted. Looking for an original ski destination? You'll find it here.

Taos Ski Valley

Eighteen miles from Taos, Taos Ski Valley is an American classic with an international reputation, a Swiss-style ski village in an alpine-style valley, with historic hotels and haute cuisine. And this ski resort has an attitude.

Snowboarding is not allowed, and there are no plans to upgrade the area's chairlifts.

Period.

Four quads, a triple and five doubles are plenty, the management says, enough to move customers around the mountain.

"We don't support the kind of expansion that turns ski resorts into a zoo," spokesman Chris Stagg said. "It's ski culture that we're supporting here, even if it means some snowboarders decide to stay away."

In fact, few boarders do, switching instead to skis for the privilege of sampling the ski terrain, from the 9,207-foot base area to the top of the highest lift, at 11,819 feet. And you can hike beyond to the top of 12,481-foot Kachina Peak for a black-diamond (expert) plunge down Main Street's vertical powder, plus thrills and chills off the steep rear ridge.

Plenty of groomed blue runs near the top of the mountain attract intermediate skiers, but trails for first-timers are limited. Still, Taos' ski school, and its high-intensity Ernie Blake Ski Weeks, are unrivaled. Come and you will learn. Tubing is offered on the beginner hill Wednesdays through Saturdays. 1-800-776-1111, www.skitaos.org.

Angel Fire Ski Resort

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About the weather

New Mexico winters are a study in contrasts. Overcast and gray days are cold; sunny days range from warm to brisk. Wear layers and drink plenty of water, especially at higher elevations.

skiing at mid-20th century.

Better yet, the resort's 445 skiable acres are self-contained and safe so that older kids can roam by themselves and even younger kids can ski with minimal supervision.

Angel Fire has two high-speed quad lifts and three double chairs for quick access to winding cat tracks (those narrow trails that usually run sideways on a hill, connecting one downhill run to another), roller-coaster dips, small bowls and broad, groomed ski trails. Though many runs are close to each other, thick strips of forest hide one from another, so you feel alone.

Angel Fire courts snowboarders with lessons and dedicated terrain parks with catchy trail names like Fat City, Hells Bells and Fire Escape. Expert downhillers will want to head uphill to Minder Binder, Charisma, Detonator and Bada-Bing.

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call "toys": trucks, dollhouses, video games and crayons.

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Red River Ski Area

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When the snow flies and the same folks show up to ski, the preferred après-ski wear leans more toward cowboy boots than designer fashions.

The town is tucked into a small valley, with the resort's chairlifts — two triples and four doubles — climbing the slopes above it. You can ride up to the 10,353-foot summit on two long lifts that start in town, or park at the Ski Chalet base area and ride up from there.

Most of Red River's front-slope trails are marked in blue and rated for intermediates. The expert runs — Cat Skinner, Chicken Run and a couple of other challengers — drop off the front. The beginners get all the luck, with the bunny slopes on the back of the top, great views and the easiest trail back to the base, Cowpoke Cruise, starting there and looping back to the bottom.

Red River has a Summit Cafe, ski school, rentals and child care.

Half the fun is eating in town, where you're sure to find fiery-hot peppers on the menu. Nibble them without blinking and your welcome rating rises significantly. Swallow and they'll think you're a native. 1-800-331-7669, www.red



STEVE HAGGERTY / ColorWorld

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After the lifts close, explore Santa Fe, founded in 1619. It's at the end of the Santa Fe Trail. The cultural heart of the Southwest, it's a vibrant center for Western and Native American art. Bring your checkbook; it's hard to say no to Pueblo pottery, Zuni and Navajo silver jewelry, Navajo woven rugs or Western oil paintings. The Spanish Colonial and Pueblo architecture set the standard for both styles. Information: www.skisantafe.com; Convention and Visitors

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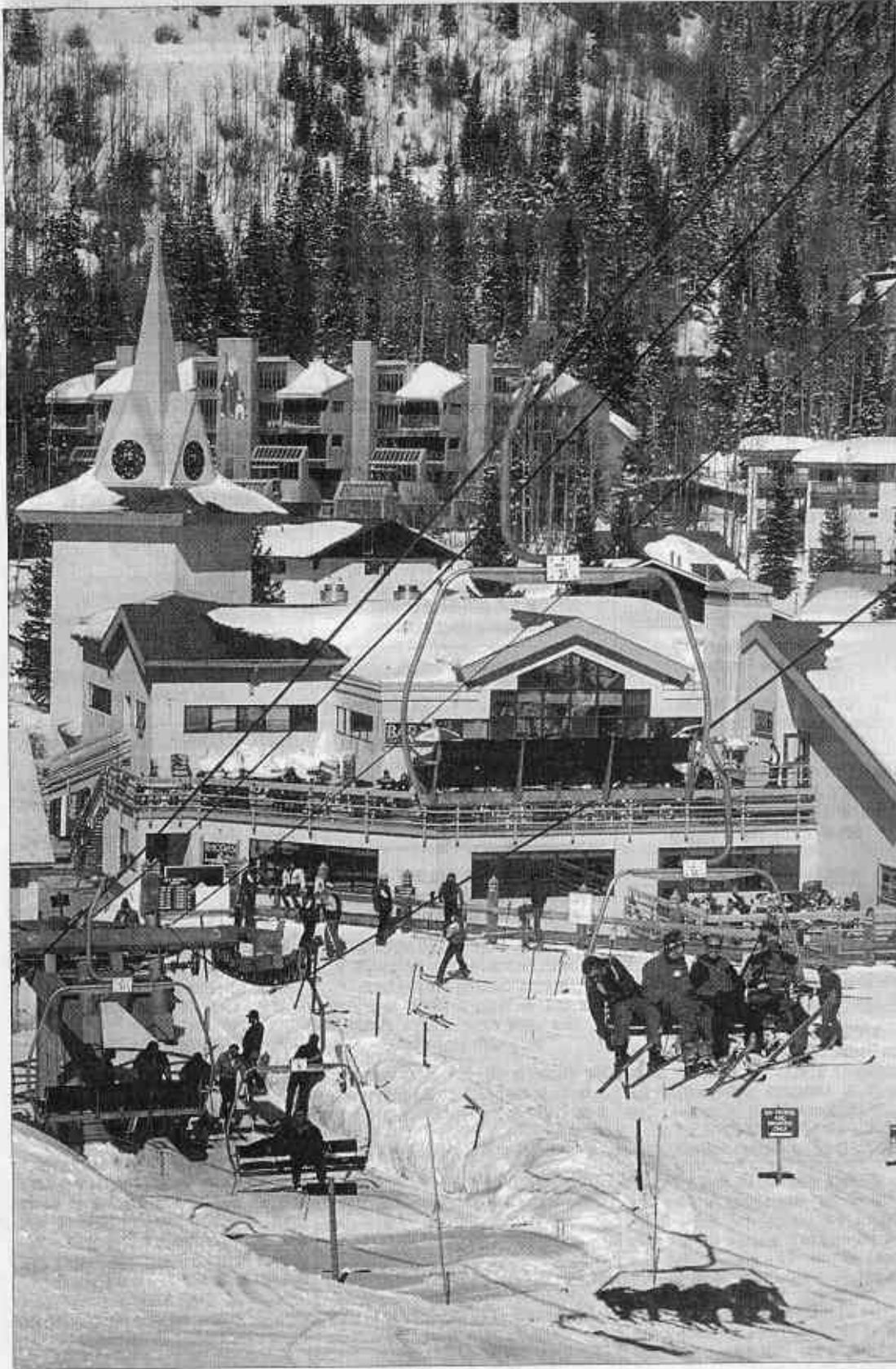
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riverskiarea.com.

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Bureau: 1-800-777-2489,
www.santafe.org.



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By ANNE Z. COOKE
For the Journal-Constitution
Published on: 01/28/07

- What to know if you go



Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld
(ENLARGE)

Angel Fire Ski Resort's Chili Express chairlift is one of two high speed quads at Angel Fire.

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