

SUNDAY Travel

D14



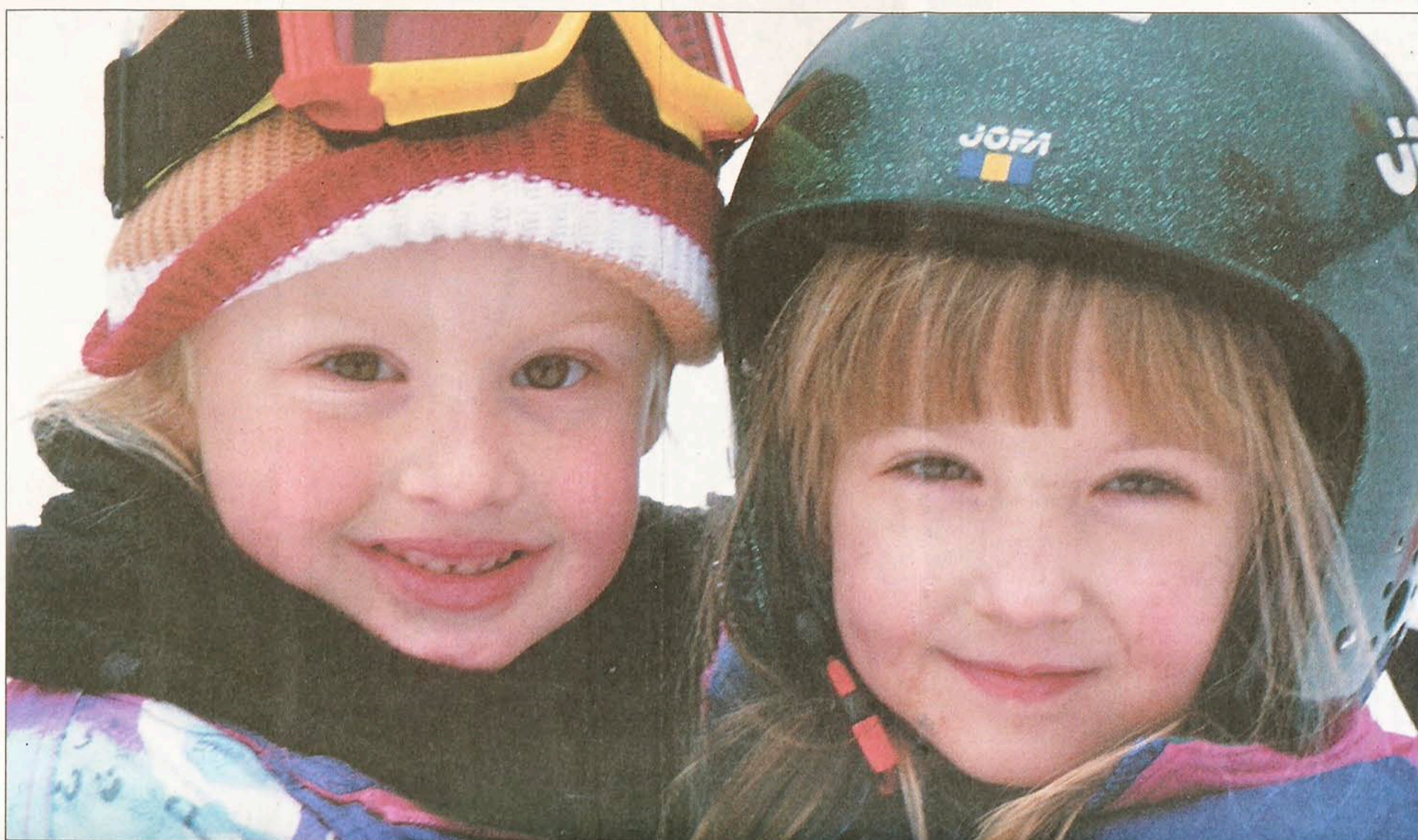
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You're never too young to enjoy the snowy outdoors of the West Coast ski resorts.

STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTO

HAPPY TRAILS: Family friendly!

By ANNE Z. COOKE and STEVE HAGGERTY
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENTS

LAKE TAHOE—"Skiing isn't quite the same," sighed Rob Baker, spreading sun screen on an already-burned nose and pausing to reminisce about life with Emily.

Not long ago, he explained, he and his buddies were "cool dudes," spending their weekends hucking off ridges on double-black diamond heart-stoppers at ski resorts from Colorado to California. On sunny March afternoons, they stripped down to shorts and t-shirts and bounced down the bumps without a care. "Those were the days," he said, smiling at the thought.

Now this buff six-footer from Chicago was slip-sliding down an easy green run with a pert, red-headed seven-year-old. He was there when she took her first group lesson, he took her up on her first chairlift ride and when she fell down in tears, he brushed off the snow and wiped her nose.

"I know I'm getting rusty," he said. "But I wouldn't trade Emily for anything. My family's the center of my life."

In fact, in a year or two Emily could be keeping pace with her dad on the blue (intermediate) cruising runs. At the moment, she was still snowplowing around the corners. But after a week of lessons, most motivated grade-schoolers are confident enough to ride up on the chairlifts and ski—if a bit more slowly—the same intermediate cruisers their parents have skied for years.

Baker, 45, isn't the only dad skiing with the little nip-

pers. With more couples having kids later in life (and baby sitters getting harder to find) skiing has become a family sport. Most ski resorts, anticipating the demographic shift, are building longer, wider runs so the whole family can ski together.

"Eight and nine-year olds who spend five days in ski-school will be starting to make parallel turns by Friday," said John Buhler, Ski School director at Breckenridge Ski Resort, in Colorado. "The kids aren't afraid and their learning curve is shorter. When you show them something new, they're quicker to try it."

"Kids learn fast," agreed Mary Nichols, a former instructor with the Children's Center at Winter Park Resort, west of Denver. "When you're six you're not thinking about how breaking a leg can hurt. You're only worrying about right now, about being cold or having fun."

Where are our favorite "happy trails?" At Winter Park and Keystone Resort, both in Colorado; and at South Lake Tahoe, in California & Nevada (the ski area straddles the state line). Check them out, below.

BIG DIPPER, at Heavenly Resort, California/Nevada:

The best intermediate runs at Heavenly Resort, on the peaks overlooking Lake Tahoe, are truly a skier's white dream. For starters, most of these blue runs are on the upper mountain, where the views are stupendous and the snow is the best, averaging 30 feet of the white stuff annually. And Heavenly is huge, with 4,800 skiable acres and 90 named trails, with 45 percent rated for intermediates and 20 percent for beginners.

Heavenly's runs, the blue ones especially, are the kind you'll find only in the West. No mere trails, these are wide, swooping and groomed nightly, highways that make it easy to practice your carving with big round half-circles and stay in the slow lane at the same time.

As for the views, bring your camera. To the front there's Lake Tahoe, 22 miles long and 1,645 feet deep in the middle, a saturated azure blue. To the rear is the desert, a pastiche of browns and golds, shimmering in the distance.

To get to the Dipper Express chairlift, and our favorite group of blue runs, take the Gondola up from Heavenly Village, on the California side, and ride it all the way to the top. (On the way, familiarize yourself with the Trail Map, which—at last—includes directional arrows wherever the topography isn't clear.) From the top, look for signs to the Sky Express, and head in that direction. Now ride up the Sky Express and from the top, follow the Skyline Trail, a sometimes narrow intermediate trail along the ridge, until Dipper Knob forks off to the left. This connects with Big Dipper, one of a half-dozen blue runs that funnel down to the base of the Dipper Express and the Comet Express, both high speed quad chairlifts. When you've done them all, ski back down on California Trail and Cascade to return to the Gondola and ride back down to the village.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

This year's snowboarding and skiing season is getting off to a healthy start this weekend—in part because of snow-making machines.

Snow machines blazing for holiday

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO, Nev. — Lake Tahoe ski resort operators were cranking snowmaking machines into full gear as they prepared to open ahead of this Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

Boreal on Tuesday became the first Lake Tahoe resort to open for the season, while Heavenly and Alpine Meadows were opening Friday.

Strong winds ushered in a new Pacific storm Monday, but some Sierra ski resorts aren't counting exclusively on the inches of fresh snow forecast to fall in the high country.

Instead, a string of resorts opening for business this weekend were relying largely on the snow they make themselves.

"We've made a boatload of snow," said Russ Pecoraro, spokesman for the Heavenly Lake Tahoe ski resort in South Lake Tahoe.

The first ski area to open, Boreal Mountain Resort atop Donner Summit, opened Tuesday on a limited basis. Northstar-at-Tahoe opened Saturday. The skating rink and other

high country amenities opened Friday at Squaw Valley USA but the opening of the slopes there isn't scheduled just yet.

Up to a foot of fresh snow was expected by today in some mountain locations, said Scott McGuire of the National Weather Service office in Reno. And with Thanksgiving and the start of the ski season, that's good news for resorts following a mostly warm and dry fall, he said.

At Mount Rose/Ski Tahoe, temperatures have been cold enough to allow for only about three days of snow making, resort spokesman Mike Pierce said.

As of last week, Mount Rose had between 1 and 4 inches of snow on its slopes, depending on location. The resort needs a packed base of 1 inches before it can open. No date has yet been set, Mr. Pierce said.

A good dose of snow would be nice, but absent that, temperatures cold enough to make more of the stuff with the resort's snow guns would be welcome too, Mr. Pierce said.

"All that really matters is if it gets cold enough," Mr. Pierce said.



STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS

Above: At the top of the Alice-in-Wonderland trails at the Winter Park Resort. Below, the summit of North Peak, Keystone Resort.



Please see FAMILY on D16

Best of the slopes for you and the kids

■ FAMILY

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Heavenly's top elevation is a moderate 10,067 feet, easier to get used to if you're coming from sea level. For resort information, skiing and lodging, call (800)HEAVENLY, or go to www.heavenlyresort.com, or (for lodging) www.tahoechamber.com.

LONESOME WHISTLE, at Winter Park Resort, Colorado:

Plenty of great blue runs crisscross Winter Park's 1,848 groomed acres (another 1,212 acres are within bounds but off-piste), but Lonesome Whistle and Allan Phipps seem to go on forever. Take the Zephyr Express from the base area, bear right and follow the signs to March Hare and Allan Phipps. Stay on Allan Phipps, gliding down until you reach the crest of a rounded hill. Stop here to admire the wide treeless bowl below and a small mound in the distance named Vista Dome. From here you can sail straight down, or double your ski time by carving big round C-turns. Continue down on Allan Phipps or alternatively, Cranmer Cutoff, until you reach Snoasis, one of Winter Park's on-mountain lodges. To go up again, board the Eskimo Express, located below Snoasis. Or take the Prospector Express to the top of Vista Dome and ski down Butch's Breezeway.

If the kids are feeling confident (and you are, too), ride up to the top of Mary Jane and ski down Lonesome Whistle, an easy Green trail until it reaches the top of the Olympia Express and becomes a super-cruising intermediate run. A half-dozen easy "Alice In Wonderland" runs offer lots of variety here, from March Hare to White Rabbit and Jabberwocky. Both the High Lonesome Express and Olympia open up all kinds of interesting but easy terrain.

Winter Park has some hotel and condominium lodging at the base area, and a lot more in town. Call Winter Park Central Reservations at (800)979-0332 for lodging and packages. For the ski resort, call (970)726-5514 or go to the company website

IF YOU GO

Skiing Tips: Nearly all ski areas rent skis and boots either at the resort or nearby. If you ski a lot, buy your own boots. But renting skis is easier and let's you try out the newest technology in ski design. For best prices for lodging and lift tickets, look for value-priced package vacations listed in travel sections, skiing magazines or on the internet. By late February resorts start advertising discounted packages. To save on lift

www.winterparkresort.com. Winter Park is 67 miles northwest of Denver.

SCHOOLMARM, at Keystone Resort, Dillon, Colorado:

Keystone's three mountains and 3,148 acres are famous for family skiing. So it's no surprise that about half of the trails are rated for beginners and intermediates, with lots of variation between the two. In fact, Keystone is so big they need two trail maps, drawn with different views, to show the terrain properly and in perspective. If you're a skier, the mere act of looking at all those curvy blue and green lines is better than being the proverbial kid in the candy store.

But if we had to pick one noteworthy

intermediate run, it would be Schoolmarm, 3.5 miles long from top to bottom. If you're staying near the River Run base area, ride up the River Run Gondola to the top of Dercum Mountain and look toward the right for signs to Schoolmarm. First stop to inhale the view of a sea of distant snowy peaks, and then head down the run, a smooth, wide highway of snow, perfect for practicing those C-turns.

The first time you ski it, stay on it all the way down until it takes an abrupt left, and Ina's Way forks to the right. Follow Ina's Way back to the bottom of the Gondola for another ride up. The next time around, try some of the alternate runs that parallel Schoolmarm, but wind up in the same place at the bottom. Silver Spoon, Schoolmaster and Last Chance are all Green (easy) runs, or you can try Paymaster, a big swooping Blue run. Paymaster looks steep in places, but as long as it's groomed you'll love it.

After you've got your ski legs, try skiing Mozart, a blue run also from the top of Dercum Mountain, into the far valley. Be sure to stay on Mozart all the way (avoid Diamond Back and Mine Shaft), and bear right at the bottom to ride back up on the Ruby Express.

Keystone is a destination resort with hundreds of rental condominiums, and no real town except for the base area Village. For the ski area, ski school, dining reservations and lodging, call (800)222-0188, or go to www.keystone.snow.com.

tickets, purchase multi-day passes. Recommended Reading: Try "Skiing America" written by a team of writers and edited by Charles Leocha, World Leisure Corporation, \$24.95: ISBN 0-915009-81-8.

The guide reviews America's ski resorts with an unbiased eye, noting the pros and cons and describing the location, trails, lifts, grooming, lodges, adult and kids' ski schools, other snow sports, child care, restaurants, lodging and prices. The only things missing are photos and trail maps. Order at www.worldleisure.com.