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## HAPPY TRAILS: WHEN THE FAMILY SKIS TOGETHER

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services,  
[World's Fare](#)

LAKE TAHOE, CA -- "It's a whole different world," said Jason Willard, knocking the snow off his skis and pausing to reminisce about life back in the day.

Before Emily came along, he and his mates were as free as birds, hucking off windswept ridges and chasing each other through deep powder on slopes from Colorado to California. On sunny, late-season afternoons, they stripped to their shorts and raced down the bump runs, the loser buying a round of beer. "We were liberated," he said, smiling at the thought.

Now this buff six-footer from Chicago was sideslipping down a bunny trail with a pert, redheaded 7-year-old. He watched while she took her first 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 guess I'm getting rusty," he said. "But I wouldn't trade Emily for anything. My family's what matters now."

In fact, if Emily's a typical ski school student, cautiously snowplowing through every turn, she'll be catching up with her dad before he knows what's happened. After a single week of lessons, most young beginners ride the chairlifts with aplomb, confidently following their instructors through the woods and down all sorts of intermediate slopes. After another season, they're staying up with their parents, and trying a few bump runs, too.

It's a scene being played out every day at America's ski resorts, where Willard is just one of dozens of dads skiing with the little nippers. Parents who learned to ski when they were young, want their kids to learn, too, hoping they'll soon be able to ski together. With demand up, especially during Winter Break and Spring Vacation weeks, most ski resorts have revamped their ski schools to make lessons more fun and more effective.

"Eight and 9-year olds who start ski school on Monday and stay all

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week will be making 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."

And they can stay up with mom and dad after the lessons are over. Where are our favorite family ski trails? Some of the best are at Winter Park Resort, Colo., Keystone Resort, Colo., and at Heavenly Resort, in California and Nevada (the resort straddles the state line). Here's why:

#### **BIG DIPPER, AT HEAVENLY RESORT, CALIFORNIA/NEVADA:**

The "blue" intermediate runs at Heavenly Resort, overlooking Lake Tahoe's South Shore, are the kind of groomed slopes that skiers dream about. Broad highways, they make it easy for skiers to carve big round c-turns and stay in the slow lane at the same time. At this resort, most of the best blue runs are on the upper mountain, where deep snow and long-range views of 22-mile-long Lake Tahoe are just part of the package. And Heavenly is huge, with 4,800 skiable acres and 95 named trails, with 45 percent rated for intermediates and 20 percent for beginners.

To reach the Dipper Express chairlift, board the Gondola up from Heavenly Village, on the California side, and ride it to the top. Check out the Trail Map for important arrows showing which way each slope falls. At the top on the Gondola, follow signs to the Sky Express, which takes you up to the Skyline Trail, an intermediate ridgeline trail to Dipper Knob, and the Big Dipper, our favorite group of intermediate trails, served by the high-speed quad chairlifts, the Dipper Express and the Comet Express. To return to the Village, ski back to the top of the Gondola via California Trail and Cascade.

Heavenly's top elevation, 10,067 feet, is relatively moderate, and easier for sea-level skiers to handle. For ski and lodging information: 1-800-HEAVENLY, [www.heavenlyresort.com](http://www.heavenlyresort.com) or [www.tahoechamber.com](http://www.tahoechamber.com). Heavenly is at South Lake Tahoe, in Stateline, Calif.

#### **ALLAN PHIPPS AND LONESOME WHISTLE, AT WINTER PARK RESORT, COLO.:**

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 go on forever. Bear right at the top of the Zephyr Express, and follow signs to March Hare and Allan Phipps. Glide down Allan Phipps to the crest of a rounded hill, a good place to stop for views of the bowl below and Vista Dome in the distance.

Continue down on Allan Phipps or Cranmer Cutoff until you reach Snoasis, the recently renovated on-mountain lodge and restaurant. To ski the same runs again, ride up Eskimo Express, located below Snoasis or take the Prospector Express to the top of Vista Dome and ski down Butch's Breezeway.

A second great area is below the top of Mary Jane, on Lonesome Whistle, an easy Green trail to the Olympia Express, where it becomes a super-cruising intermediate run. A half-dozen easy "Alice In Wonderland" runs offer lots of variety here. Winter Park has condominium and hotel lodging at the base area, and a lot more in town. Call Winter Park Central Reservations at 1-800-979-0332 for lodging and packages. For skiing, call 970-726-5514; or go to [www.winterparkresort.com](http://www.winterparkresort.com). Winter Park is 67 miles northwest of

worldwide. Go to [TMS Licensing](#).

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SCHOOLMARM, AT KEYSTONE RESORT, DILLON, COLO.:

Keystone's three mountains and 3,148 acres are famous for family skiing, with two base areas and half of all trails rated for beginners and intermediates. Two trail maps, drawn from different views, show all the terrain in proper perspective. Before you head out, check the views on the map to plan your day.

Schoolmarm, 3.5 miles long from top to bottom, is always a family favorite. Starting from the River Run base area, ride up the River Run Gondola to the top of Dercum Mountain, and follow signs on the right for Schoolmarm. Snap some pix of the peaks and then head down the run, a smooth, wide highway of snow.

The first time you ski it, follow it to the bottom, where Ina's Way forks to the right. Follow Ina's Way back to the Gondola for a repeat trip. The next time around, ski some of the runs that parallel Schoolmarm but wind up in the same place at the bottom. Silver Spoon, Schoolmaster and Last Chance are Green (easy) runs, or you can try Paymaster, a big swooping Blue trail, always easy when it's groomed.

Later, ski from the top of Dercum Mountain down Mozart, into the far valley. Don't turn on Diamond Back or Mine Shaft, but stay right at the bottom and ride back up on the Ruby Express.

Keystone is a destination resort with hundreds of rental condominiums; there's no real town at the base. For the ski area, ski school, dining and lodging, call 1-800-222-0188, or go to [www.keystone.snow.com](http://www.keystone.snow.com).

IF YOU GO:

DATES/GENERAL INFORMATION:

The most up-to-date information on snow levels, ticket prices and opening dates are available on ski resort Websites. Start your search there, entering the resort name into your search engine. In general, however, most ski resorts open just after Thanksgiving and close around April 10, depending on the weather and snowfall.

RENTALS:

Skis, boots and poles are available at all nearby towns and resort base areas. Reserving in advance ensures that you'll get what you want.

PRICES:

Lodging is most expensive over Christmas and spring holidays. Early December and April are the most affordable. Before the season starts, look for value-priced package vacations listed in travel sections, skiing magazines or on the Internet. Starting in February, most resorts discount prices and packages.

(Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif.)

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**ACTIONS**