

Step Out on Snowshoes

Each step gently breaks through fine crust into powder, still fluffy days after the last storm.

Out here, there's no chairlifts running nor base area commotion. In fact we're the only ones ascending step-by-step into Bow Canyon, save for the occasional squirrel watching us with keen interest, and though we actually get a peak of Bear Mountain's eastern end including Bear Peak high above us, this experience is a world apart.

During a good winter—and for 2009-10 forecasts call for El Nino!—many people forego lift tickets and skis or snowboards for snowshoes to get their winter recreation fix. Many of the trails so popular with summer hikers make ideal snowshoe treks when they're covered in snow, like Pine Knot Trail, Holcomb Valley, and the narrowing walls of Bow Canyon.

Becoming proficient on snowshoes is as simple as strapping a pair on and setting forth on foot into the forest. Put one foot down in front of another and repeat, occasionally putting a little spring into your step...or not. Forget expensive lessons; if you can walk, you can snowshoe! It's absolutely the easiest way for the masses to get out and enjoy Big Bear winter recreation, and the learning curve is light years faster than

with skiing or snowboarding.

Snowshoers can get as aggressive as they want, bounding up and down slopes and even running...or racing, as competitors demonstrate during the annual "Snowshoe the Bear" 5K and 10K race on Feb. 13.

Produced by Equada Outfitters and Team SOLE, the event features snowshoe demos, kids race, party, swag, cash prizes and live music in the Village. Last year over 150 snowshoers of all ability levels participated and there were also exhibit booths, climbing wall, kids race, sled dog demos, product-sponsor giveaways and more.

Even if you showed up in Big Bear with no equipment whatsoever, Goldsmith's Boardhouse has everything you'll need for snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, from gear to even clothing, like ski pants and jackets. Shoes rent for \$10 per day at Goldsmith's, shoes and pole combo for \$15 at Equada Outfitters.

Big Bear Discovery Center leads snowshoe tours as well, Saturdays and Sundays beginning December 26 through March 7, plus special holiday tours on Dec. 19-20 and 28-29.



Race on Snowshoes, or Just Explore Backcountry

Experience the silence of the mountains surrounded by snow as naturalists lead guests to special backcountry locations and talk about flora and fauna encountered along the way.

Most tours are twice daily on Saturdays from 9 a.m.-noon and 1-4 p.m., along with Sundays from 9 a.m.-noon. Cost is \$35 (\$25 ages 8-16) and includes snowshoes, poles, water and snacks.

Join Discovery Center for a special "Sweethearts Snowshoe Tour" on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, during an outing from 9 a.m.-noon. Cost is \$50.

Call Goldsmith's Boardhouse at (909) 866-2728, Equada Outfitters at (909) 866-6186, or Big Bear Discovery Center at (909) 866-3437. ■

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that the issue is now managing it all. That's why the resorts bought two additional snowcats in the offseason to push snow around the slopes and build jumps.

Really though, it's not the guns that set the Big Bear resorts apart from the competition, but the ammo. Both Snow Summit and Bear Mountain have a virtually endless water supply to draw from in Big Bear Lake, drawing hundreds of millions of gallons for snowmaking, while freeway resorts must rely on limited supplies of reservoir and well water.

Snowmaking by itself is a relatively simple process. When the air is dry enough and temperatures are cold enough, nozzles and fan guns mix water with compressed, atomized air that, when blasted into the air, falls as beautiful, white snow. Nothing added, nothing fake about it—100% real snow!

When Snow Summit and Bear Mountain are both cranked up, they'll combine to blow 12,000-13,000 gpf. No other local resort comes close to that, which explains why the Big Bear resorts consistently have way more runs open, with better snow, than other local resorts during dry years.

In typical years the resorts combine to turn over 800 acre feet of water into snow—or over 270 million gallons. So if it's snow you're after, you'll find it, in Big Bear Lake...real snow, real close! ■

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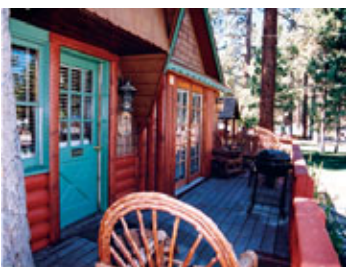
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