

North Carolina Skiing and Snowboarding: Know What to Expect!

As winter gets into full gear, people from all around the south are tuning up their skis and pulling out their snowboards in anticipation of a weekend ritual of winter fun on the slopes of North Carolina. This year promises to be a good one, as temperatures remain consistently cold, and Mother Nature is being generous with the real stuff!

Some of the highest peaks in the Blue ridge Mountains are located in the northwest corner of North Carolina, standing guard over the quaint little resort town of Banner Elk in Avery county. Just east of the continental divide is Grandfather Mountain, the highest peak in the Blue Ridge, and to the north west of Banner Elk looms Beech Mountain, which boasts of being the highest ski area in eastern North America. Sure Mount Mitchell is higher, but it's in the Black Mountains, a sub range of the Blue Ridge, and there's no skiing there.

Although the elevation is high, and our slopes are vast and challenging, skiing in North Carolina does have its ups and downs. This is still the south, and annual snowfall comes nowhere near to that of New England, where lake effect snows keep the ski slopes blanketed pretty much all through the winter. Our best scenario for natural snow is when moisture from an Atlantic storm system collides with the polar jet stream dipping far into the south east Appalachians - a phenomenon that happens far too seldom to run a profitable ski resort throughout the season.

Undaunted by Mother Nature, the fine folks of this northwestern chunk of North Carolina saw these huge mountain slopes and their lack of natural snow, and decided to do something about it! Sugar Mountain, Beech Mountain, and even Hawksnest ski resort in Seven Devils became early pioneers in snowmaking technologies. Today, man made snow supplements ski resorts even in regions of the heaviest natural snowfalls. In North Carolina, the roar of the snow guns can be heard throughout the valley any time the temperature dips around freezing. Thanks to modern day snow making capabilities, our North Carolina ski resorts are able to remain open pretty much all through the winter - as long as it freezes of course!

The best conditions for skiers and snowboarders exist when there is a healthy combination of natural snow and the man made stuff. When this happens, skiing and snowboarding on our vast mountain trails is an experience that rivals any of the east coast ski resorts. For the times when Mother Nature isn't so cooperative, there are some conditions that arise that every south eastern skier and snowboarder should be aware of.

As the season progresses, daytime temperatures rise above freezing and the sun shines stronger on the slopes. In these conditions snow (man made or not) will have a tendency to melt, providing for a wet, slushy skiing experience - in itself something to get used to. Symptoms of this condition include a sudden slowing down and an inability to make a successful cut, or turn. A well waxed ski may allow you to glide more easily through these "slush puddles", but as far as turning goes, it's best not to even try.

Conversely, as nighttime temperatures fall below freezing, and the snow blowing starts, the snow that turned to slush during the day turns to ice a night. Ice patches can be highly dangerous, causing one to speed up uncontrollably, feeling kind of like your feet slipping out from under you on a frozen pond. A well tuned pair of skis with sharp edges digging into the ice is your best bet for slowing down. Patches of ice can sometimes be hidden under a cover of fresh blown snow, which can really be an unexpected surprise. Any large patches of ice are usually well marked, and snow cats can help break up the ice, grooming the surface to make for a safer, more enjoyable skiing experience. Repetitive days and nights of these conditions can cause large patches of ice, and will eventually lead to the closing of trails (and the entire slope) as the season progresses.

To be sure, these conditions exist at all ski resorts, and are a natural progression of the season. It just seems to be more exaggerated in the south! Rest assured that the North Carolina Ski Patrol vigilantly checks all trails, marking bare spots and patches of ice, and will not hesitate to close trails where hazardous conditions persist. State of the art snow grooming equipment and the ability to generate a fresh cover of snow gives the North Carolina ski resorts just the edge they need to provide for a more uniform surface condition, allowing for a fun, longer and safer ski season.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Michael Talbert, a former resident of Banner Elk, has spent many of days and nights on the slopes of North Carolina, and is living to tell about it! Visit his website "Banner's Elk Outdoor Living" at <http://BannersElk.com>