



## an outdoor woman's Love Affair with Powder...

**AS A NORTHWEST WOMAN, I'M NO STRANGER** to adventure. When it comes to winter sports, however, I realized that I seldom take the time to look into new locations. It was this realization that led me to the Western Pleasure Guest Ranch, Schweitzer Mountain Resort and 49°North Chewelah Peak Mountain Ski Resort.

Western Pleasure Guest Ranch, located a few miles north of Sandpoint, Idaho, is hosted by the Schoonover family. Roley and Janice provide the family hospitality that guests treasure and return for year after year. The 960-acre ranch is open year-round and offers the perfect retreat for any escape. I stayed in the hand-hewn log cabin aptly named "Wrangler." This private cabin accommodates up to 6 guests, but was incredibly cozy for two. Each cabin includes one bedroom, a loft, furnished kitchen and wood stove heat. Not to mention, Star (the Schoonover family's border collie) decided to spend the afternoon with us, as long as we indulged her in endless games of fetch.

Winter activities at the ranch include horse drawn sleigh rides, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing. Wrapped in blankets, we went for a 2-mile sleigh ride, completely in awe of the winter wonderland speeding by us. After the sleigh ride, we retreated to the lodge to warm up by the fire, enjoy some popcorn, a hot cup of coffee, and conversation with other guests. The 10,000 sq. ft. lodge is home to six comfy guest rooms, the main dining area, recreation room, an outdoor hot tub, and a gigantic Alas-

kan white moose.

Dinner consisted of natural, ranch-raised prime rib of beef (cooked to perfection!), savory basil mashed potatoes, crisp green beans, and a spectacular green salad. Chef Damon Catlan serves up hearty ranch-style food with his own gourmet touch. We went for a walk around the lodge before retreating to our cabin to play some Scrabble and get a good night's sleep before a long day of skiing on Sunday.

After a stick-to-your-ribs breakfast, I took a few last photos and loaded into the car. Just a 40 minute ride to Schweitzer village, we checked into the Selkirk Lodge and toured the village before gearing up for an afternoon of skiing. The village is home to several eateries and five different shops, including specialty clothing, outdoor outfitting, art and even groceries.

Rated one of North America's top 25 ski resorts, by Skiing magazine, the 2,900 acre mountain was also rated #3 for tree skiing (October 2007). According to Jennifer Ekstrom, Schweitzer Communications Manager, recent lift improvements increased hill capacity by 28%. Schweitzer welcomes skiers and snowboarders from all walks of life, but a stop at the Activity Center taught me there's much more to Schweitzer activities. Paulie Cohen, Activities Manager, explained their mission simply, "We basically do everything that doesn't include hard boots and sharp edges." The Activity Center caters to those guests who are staying on the mountain for a few

days and also offers dog sledding, tubing, snowshoeing, on-mountain photography, snow cat skiing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing and even luxurious spa treatments in the Solstice Center of the Healing Arts.

At the top of the Outback Bowl, my friend and I paused for a photo opportunity and marveled at the pristine Lake Pend Oreille and community of Sandpoint seemingly at the foot of the mountain. We had a full afternoon skiing, laughing and enjoying the first-rate North Idaho ski conditions. We even stopped for a cold microbrew at the Outback Inn, Schweitzer's day lodge on the backside of the mountain, before heading back to the Selkirk Lodge. Our room was spacious, comfortable, and complete with a charming view of the ski hill. After a soothing dip in one of Selkirk Lodge's three outdoor hot tubs, we were famished and ready for dinner.

The Chimney Rock Grill hosted us for the evening, seating us in a cozy location near a roaring fireplace. I was impressed with the wine list of over 130 selections, showcasing extraordinary wines from Washington, Oregon, California, France and New Zealand. Although difficult to choose, we decided to stay local and selected a bottle of Pend Oreille 2004 Syrah. Supple with berry flavors and soft tannins, the wine paired famously with our appetizer of Baked Brie drizzled with huckleberry sauce. For dinner, I ordered the succulent Crusted Filet Mignon, delicately topped with gorgonzola, horseradish and drizzled with a balsamic reduction. The intense flavors of the horseradish surprised me, but Chef Michael Williams' brilliant composition on this classic



favorite delighted me. My friend's Pasta Del Mar, was equally impressive, with seared prawns and salmon, tossed with cherry tomatoes, spinach and alfredo sauce.

### **A Day-trip to the New 49°North**

The northwest provides prime locations for outdoor winter sports and as a lifelong skier, I was anxious to check out a few locations in my own neck of the woods. Since I frequently ski with my two children, the family-friendliness of 49°North in Chewelah Peak, Washington was paramount in choosing the right mountain. Since it's less than an hour north of Spokane, Washington, 49°North won the toss-up for a day trip with my two children, Emma and Freddy. Bundled and anxious to test their ski gear, my little powder hounds chattered non-stop on the drive to Chewelah.

We stopped for a latte before the 10 mile trek to the ski hill at Dad's Espresso, a locally owned barista owned by Clyde

and Nancy Miller, longtime residents of the tight-knit community. Dad's Espresso prides themselves on their high quality beverages and top-notch service. Dad's is the first barista that travelers encounter on the way into Chewelah and right off Hwy 395.

Although 49°North continues to undergo major changes and expansion to the mountain and facilities, they never want to lose the homey feeling of a local ski resort. The resort has much in store for the future of winter sports, with plans already in the works for ski-access condos. According to Josh King, Marketing Director, "We still want this to be your mountain!"

49°North also prides itself in their learn-to-ski/snowboard packages and kids programs. Equipped with packages for every level of enthusiast, their Multi-Week Miner Packages allow parents to get the professional instruction necessary to develop young skiers and boarders. When I asked Josh about whether or not parents should try to teach their own children to

ski, the young father laughed and said, "It's a horrible idea! It's hard to get the response you need when you're close to someone. Kids always listen better to someone else." Referring to 49°North's ski school professionals, he said, "It's also much safer to have an instructor... it's what they do."

Needless to say, we were not disappointed with our day adventure and skied all over the terrain, including the resort's new East Basin, and enjoyed the perfect powder that's become a trademark of this winter hot spot. As my children slept in the car on the way home, I sipped on my second Dad's Espresso latte and realized how lucky I was that my little ones also developed their own love affairs with powder...

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