

Cheap Skiing Guide™

Special Adventure Edition

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January 9-13, 2005

Joy is a personal emotion embraced only by the individual who experiences it. Expressing joy is relatively easy but sharing it with those who have not experienced its source is infinitely more difficult. Joy for skiers and snowboarders is typically induced by a combination of elements: moderate temperatures, little or no wind, short lift lines (and high speed lifts), interesting or challenging terrain, and most importantly, snow—and not just any snow. It has to be light, dry, and abundant. Overnight visitors need an eclectic selection of cuisine and comfortable, clean, and affordable lodging. If all these elements exist, skiers and riders can experience ineffable joy. Without hesitation, I can honestly write that this year's special adventure location, Telluride Ski Resort, offered us joy beyond our greatest expectations.

The town of Telluride is located at the end of a box canyon in southwestern Colorado at an elevation of 8750 feet. It's not the easiest place in the world to get to but well worth the trip. The resort's main base area is located in Mountain Village, a separate municipality at elevation 9540 feet, but there are trails down to the town of Telluride serviced by two chairlifts and an eight-seat gondola. Thirteen other lifts service the balance of the mountain. Gondola service for pedestrians traveling between Telluride and Mountain Village is free and runs from 7 am to midnight (to 2 am during special events). Telluride offers terrain for all snowriders from newbies to the extremely advanced and everyone in between. My son, Dave, and I found Gold Hill an infinite source of delight with its super-steep tree terrain and knee-deep snow. Cutting first tracks through the steeps at Telluride is an experience that elicits hoots of happiness. It's a veritable proving ground for primal scream therapy. I felt very strong urges but contained any outbursts to avoid embarrassing my 20-year old son. He made no audible gestures either but back at the lift his broad smile pretty much said it all.



Looking south down the main street of Telluride.

On our first day, January 9th, Mountain Ambassador, Marc Froehlich, gave us a tour of the slopes through 4-6 inches of fresh snow. The sky was overcast but temperatures were in the mid-to-low thirties and the wind was calm. Marc abandoned his normal tour route to accommodate our quest for adventure and he pointed out some of Telluride's more challenging terrain. He also gave us a brief history of Telluride, which was founded in 1878 by hopeful gold miners. The town was originally named Columbia but because the U.S. Post Office was confusing it with another mining town, Columbia, California, the town fathers were forced to change its name. The name Telluride probably came from the word telluride, which means a binary compound of tellurium, an element that was once abundant in these mountains and usually found as a telluride of gold called calaverite. This geological explanation is the most plausible but too boring for anyone marketing the rich history of this area. A more popular folk-etymology for the name is the send-off given to prospectors over a century ago who were heading up the canyon from Montrose: "To hell you ride." Either way, the number of miners who settled here far outnumbered the current population of about 2000. Mines were shut down at some point in the early 1950's and within 20 years, Telluride was almost deserted. But, in 1972 the ski area opened exploiting another natural resource—snow and Telluride was reborn.

Marc also made many dining recommendations, all of which were probably excellent but too numerous to experience in just four days. The places we did visit offered first class cuisine and great atmosphere. "Telluride" Marc explained, "is a year-round town, not just a winter resort, so the amenities are far more extensive."

Between the 1st and 13th of January, Telluride received more than 70-inches of snow, half of which fell during our four-day visit. Snow fell intermittently our first day but that night another



Not quite first tracks but close enough.



Do you like the tree/snow combination?



Me too!

8-10 inches fell and we awoke to a fresh mountain. On the third morning another 4-6 inches had fallen before the lifts began loading and it continued snowing all day and through the night. By the time the lifts opened on Wednesday, another 19 inches had fallen and it kept snowing most of the morning.

As I stood out on the sidewalk Wednesday morning waiting for my son to emerge from the New Sheridan Hotel—a rustic looking, century old icon of Telluride that's elegantly decorated and loaded with modern amenities—a skier walked by, looked at me and said, “What are you waiting for? There are no friends on powder days.” A remarkable statement reflecting the passion most locals had for fresh snow. When we arrived at the lift, which hadn't begun loading, the long line of skiers and riders waiting patiently for a chance to glide through an unscarred snowscape was evidence of this ubiquitous enthusiasm. For powder junkies, the sensation of floating smoothly and silently on a cloud of crystalline down is pure unassailable ecstasy. Once the lifts began loading, Telluride's uphill capacity of over 21,000 per hour and its 1,700 acres of skiable terrain diluted the crowd and lift lines. Due to avalanche danger though, some of the steeper trails were closed temporarily, which created a little congestion at lifts where the remaining double blacks were open. The locals knew where to find the best snow.

We spent our last evening at Allred's Restaurant with Communications Coordinator Katie Singer and Lindsey Wilhoit who is in charge of Memberships for Telluride Ski & Golf Club. Allred's is located at Station St. Sophia, elevation 10,551 feet and offers spectacular views of the canyon and the town of Telluride. Station St. Sophia is the first (and only) stop the gondola makes between Telluride and Mountain Village. The cuisine at Allred's is world renown and the atmosphere inside the stone and hand-hewn post and beam structure is extraordinary. If you are visiting Telluride, Allred's is a culinary experience you shouldn't miss. On our gondola ride back to Telluride, we were joined by three very friendly, off-duty lift operators named Shawn, Chris, and Adam who entertained us with guitar, vocal percussion, and ad-libbed lyrics about the mountain, the town, and even the brief but unscheduled stop the gondola made. We had to laugh at their performance but truly enjoyed their spirit and fun-loving style. Riding on a gondola at night and in street clothes is an unusual feeling for this skier. I can't honestly say it was a source of joy but certainly not a disagreeable experience.

Rhapsodizing on and on may not be all that enjoyable for our readers, so to put things in perspective, the most disagreeable part of the whole adventure was flying on United Airlines. They could not seem to do anything on time or compensate for the vagaries of bad weather and scheduling. It took us six hours longer than expected to get to Telluride and on the way home we ended up renting a car and driving the last leg of our trip from Washington D.C. to Vermont. If you're planning a trip to Telluride, American Airlines flies direct from Chicago and Dallas into Montrose, Continental flies direct from Newark, Houston, and Los Angeles into Montrose, America West flies direct from Phoenix (into Telluride) United Airlines also flies direct from Denver to Montrose (and Telluride) but I'm not inclined to recommend them today. I can easily (and will for some time) recommend Telluride Ski Resort for a superb snowriding adventure. I will always remember my experience out there with a great deal of—yes, you guessed it—joy.

Telluride's web site is www.tellurideskiresort.com. If you're interested in visiting Telluride, you can book lodging and everything else on their web site or call 888-287-5016 if you'd like to speak with someone.



Some like it steep...and deep.