

FALL IN LOVE WITH SNOWMASS

BY KRISTEN LUMMIS

Over fifty years ago, Snowmass opened and quickly became Aspen's family mountain. Upgrades and expansions through the years have made the skiing and riding more challenging and diverse. But at its heart, it's still a place for families, of all ages.

I first fell in love with Snowmass as a child.

Born and raised on Colorado's Western Slope, Snowmass was our big mountain, the place we went for long weekends and mini-vacations. As young skiers, my brother and I loved exploring the glades bordering the easiest trails, where we could wander, dream and imagine.

As we grew older, the mountain grew with us. Our skills increased, and we graduated from the greens of Fanny Hill to the famous rolling blue groomers of Elk Camp. By the time we were in high school Snowmass was a place to rendezvous with friends, staking a claim to the top of the world, shown on trail maps as The Big Burn.

The Snowmass of my childhood enjoyed a reputation as Aspen's family mountain. If Buttermilk and Ajax were joined together as "teaching" mountain and the mountain for "real skiers," Snowmass was a destination of its own.

Organized skiing at Snowmass began in 1963 when commercial snow cats carried skiers up the mountain for untouched, unmapped adventure. Four seasons later, in 1967, chairlifts were installed and the resort officially opened.

While the resort of my childhood was world famous for extensive intermediate terrain, there were greater challenges to be found, even at that time. Sam's Knob was the spot for short shots of deep bumps, while my parents claimed that the long, constantly changing fall lines of Campground were where the real skiers hung out.

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And while these original trails still form the heart of Snowmass, changes in the last two decades have expanded the mountain and its reputation. Today, the top of the world extends beyond The Big Burn, rising high above tree line along the windswept Cirque.

Accessible by a modest Poma lift, the Cirque changed Snowmass from a family destination to a world-class destination. From the summit at 12,510 feet, skiers and riders have their choice of dropping down the Cirque headwall, jumping into challenging north-facing chutes or traversing across the summit to Hanging Valley, with its endless wall shots and glades.

As our family has grown, Hanging Valley has become our go-to spot, with deep powder, tree skiing and steep moguls. It's one of our favorite places to ski, not just at Snowmass, but anywhere.

Which brings me to the second time I fell in love with Snowmass.



By now, I was older and had children of my own. Our youngest son was just 3 and completing his first season on skis. Our older boy was only 6, but could ski most intermediate runs.

This was the first time our boys had been on a big mountain, away from our local area. Just like childhood me, they were thrilled by the countless lifts (now high-speed quads) and the kids' trails through the trees (now official kid-terrain with signs, tunnels, mine shafts and more). To them, this was adventure. This was skiing.

And just as our sons have grown, Snowmass continues to grow, too.

The past ten years have seen a new base village, complete with the Treehouse, a comprehensive children's center, for lessons and other youthful delights, and a pulse gondola connects this base with the original Snowmass Mall, which is also perpetually upgrading.

New slope side lodging, including the ski-in/ski-out Westin and it's funky sister property, The Wildwood, along with the ne plus ultra Viceroy, have opened, along with additional restaurants, giving visitors even more reasons to stay slope side, nine miles from downtown Aspen.

The Elk Camp gondola broadens the options from the base, giving visitors easier access to the east side of the mountain, while the beautiful Elk Camp Lodge provides greatly enhanced dining, as well as a focal point for new mid-mountain beginner teaching terrain.

The Lodge is also base camp for Ullr Nights, a Friday night



winter celebration complete with live music, ice skating, snow biking, snowshoeing and tubing on a "new-this-season" 4 lane hill.

In 2013, Snowmass opened Burnt Mountain, a former backcountry area about a ten-minute climb from the top of the Elk Camp quad. Three new runs, Split Tree, Rio and A-Line, were minimally cut amongst the glades to augment Long Shot, a popular 4 mile intermediate run. This 230-acre addition brings the total skiable acreage at Snowmass to 3,362 acres, making it the second largest resort in Colorado.

In addition to expanded skiing and infrastructure, Snowmass is now a year-round adventure destination. In summer, the Elk Camp gondola serves downhill biking trails, including the expert-rated Valhalla trail, while in both seasons, the lodge is the on-mountain place for dining and special events.

Through it all, the many expansions and enhancements, Snowmass remains an amazing family mountain.

Kevin Jordan, the Snowmass Children's Coordinator and Bike Snowmass Mountain Biking Coordinator sums up the mountain this way.

"Snowmass offers something for everyone, from Elk Camp Meadows, a beginner's paradise at 10,000 feet, to extreme terrain in the Cirque and Hanging Valley Wall.

"Intermediate and advanced skiers and riders can try skiing or riding from one side of the mountain to the other. It will take you at least a couple of days," he says, adding that even then you won't cover the entire resort.

"I'm still learning new lines here in some of the extreme terrain."

For me, it's all about falling in love, with the mountain, with skiing, my family and with the new lines we'll surely find. Enjoy Snowmass!

Kristen Lummis is the owner, writer and head ski tech at www.braveskimom.com. The mom of two boys in a busy outdoor family, Kristen writes about skiing all year round, tossing in some biking, hiking, parenting and even a bit of reflection during the off-season. While her recreational passion is for all things snow, her real passion is for her family.

In addition to writing for MTN Town Magazine, Kristen also publishes at Aspen Magazine, Women's Adventure Magazine, Club Colorado - The Colorado Ski Country USA Blog, and Liftopia.com. She is a brand ambassador for Mountain Khakis and FERA and the moderator of the Skiing and Snowsports Community.

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