

Steamboat – It's a First

The Steamboat trip of 2009 was a trip full of firsts. Thanks to some encouragement from Roger and the tireless efforts of Hope, the first Springfield / Bloomington-Normal Ski Trip became a reality.

Unfortunately, the trip got off to a rather inauspicious start. Twenty-one members of the group were scheduled to fly American Airlines from Peoria to Dallas and finally into Hayden with a short bus ride to Steamboat. After boarding the plane we were informed that one of the engines would not start and that we should return to the terminal while maintenance was called. Multiple backup plans were arranged but eventually the flight was cancelled. At the same time, eight others from the group flew United from Peoria through Denver into Hayden, arriving in Steamboat on schedule. Back in Peoria, our group waited patiently while new flights were arranged. Eighteen were bussed to Bloomington for a flight to Dallas, while three remained in Peoria for a later flight.

Those three included John, Michael and Natosha. For Michael and Natosha, their first Ski Club trip literally became a religious experience. With a four hour wait before their flight, they decided to go to the Shoppes at Grand Prairie to do some browsing. A gentleman offered them a ride, but instead took them to his church where they ended up attending a 90 minute church service. At this point the story only gets more unbelievable and you really need to hear Mike and Natosha tell it.

Eventually all twenty-one met up in Dallas and flew to Denver. Arriving too late for any flights to Hayden, we faced a four hour bus ride to Steamboat. Most of the ride was uneventful as most everyone tried to sleep. Nearing Steamboat we had to go over Rabbit Ears Pass where the wind and snow picked up and we found ourselves in an all out blizzard. Visibility was near zero. Travel was at 0 – 15 mph. Our excellent driver (who Cindy quite appropriately nicknamed “Hagrid” for all you Harry Potter fans) persevered and we arrived in Steamboat at 3:30 a.m. – almost exactly 24 hours after everyone had begun their travel odyssey. I believe it was Terri who put it correctly as she relaxed in the hot-tub at our condos (having been one of the lucky 8) when she said “it sucks to be them”.

With everyone finally in Steamboat, the rest of the week went great (or almost everything, more on that later). With great snow remaining from a huge storm a few days before, the week dawned with gray and cloudy skies but cleared to bright beautiful sunshine by week's end. While the Springfield Rebels and many others on the trip were on return visits to Steamboat, several others were enjoying their first visit to the resort. In fact, Gerry was strapping on the skis for his very first time. After taking a lesson on Monday, he took to the snow like a natural and he and Ann were soon seen further up the mountain enjoying the many blue cruising runs. Vito was also on his first ski trip and says he couldn't have asked for better condo mates; Rick, Alan and Mike were the best (but we already knew that).

Barb found ‘the perfect’ blue run and was kind enough to share it with the rest of the group. Want to know what it was? Sorry, you'll have to join us on the next Steamboat trip. Gloria and Terrie had a boot mix up which was discovered when they tried to click into their skis. Gloria said ‘that explains why I needed a crowbar to get into the boots’. They both recovered from their blond moment and were seen cruizin' blues. Karl was very proud of his wife's skiing ability and has the picture to prove it. Alan had his skis go “missing in action” while we were waiting at the base of the gondola only to have them reappear later. We assume they decided to take a warm-up run without him. Rich lost his ski watch. The good news is that it was found by, amongst others, his roommate (me). The bad news is that we didn't know it was his and turned it in to an employee who took it with him to Oklahoma the next day (who leaves Steamboat to go to Oklahoma?). Anyway, rumor has it that Rich may yet get it returned.

Roger introduced Jerry, Mark and Emily to tree skiing. Having skied with Roger in the past, Byron declined to follow. Apparently, this little taste of trees wasn't enough for Jerry, because he later struck out on his own and had quite an off piste adventure. Tree hugging may have been involved. Again, Byron declined to follow.

Later, skiing with Cynthia, Rick and Steve, Byron split before the other three headed off into the trees. This Byron is a pretty smart cookie.

The Morningside area (where most of the tree skiing took place) featured a variety of blue runs, snow covered trees and soft powder. Even the animals were friendly – or lazy. While riding the lift, I had a bird land on my poles and take a short ride up with us. Hopefully, skiing this majestic area helped Mike forget about the “pampering” he had on the flight out to Steamboat. It seems Mike was treated to a dirty diaper in the seat back pouch in front of him on one of his flights.

Mid-week saw several people trying their skills on the NASTAR course. Roger and Hope, Lance, Lisa and Amanda, Jim and Steve all gave it a run (actually 5 or 6 runs). The friendly competition led to plenty of good natured trash talking. I'll let the participants reveal who talked and who rocked.

Group gatherings in the morning and at lunch gave everybody a chance to meet up and find ski partners for the day. Happy hour at the Mahogany Inn in the evening proved to be a popular meeting spot as well. Group dinners included a family-style “all you can eat” feast at the Steamboat Smokehouse on Thursday and a Pizza Party on Friday, complete with a slide show provided by Jerry. Following the Pizza Party, several people headed down to the Ski Jam Festival where they listened to Sam Bush and mingled with hundreds of other ski bums. Cindy and Gloria got some informal instruction on the benefits of medicinal marijuana from a guy who, from the smell, practiced what he preached.

Our condos were very nice, spacious and with an excellent front desk staff and convenient shuttle service. The rooms were fully equipped with nice amenities like bath robes and in Carolyn's case, even an open box of condoms.

Dinners at Mambo Italiano, Mazzola's (Italian), and the Ore House (steak) by various groups all received glowing reports. Others got to enjoy local home cooking. Ken, Wanda and John enjoyed an evening meal at the home of a daughter of fellow Ski Club members Charlie and Barb.

Bill decided to try out a new pair of demo skis and ended up buying a pair. I'm sure he's looking forward to trying them out on the SKI Ogden trip. For Tom and Roger, Steamboat was merely the first stop in their ski marathon. Following Steamboat they were headed off to Winter Park and then to Ogden to meet the SKI group there. Envy hardly begins to describe my feelings. Bloomington's own “Rebels”, Mark and Connie were vacationing with friends Keith and Laurie and joined us on the slopes.

On Friday we learned that Carolyn had suffered the year's first ski injury. Continuing pain from a fall on Tuesday prompted her to see a doctor and she was diagnosed with a broken shoulder. A reaction to pain medication caused her to become extremely ill on Saturday for our trip home. With Diane by her side, she bravely endured the trip. Carolyn reports that she faces a 6 week healing process but fortunately sans surgery. I guess next trip we'll have to provide her with even more “protection”.

Despite our travel ordeal and the season's first injury; everyone who was on their first Ski Club trip, those trying skiing for the first time, those visiting Steamboat for the first time and everybody else on our first combined Club trip, reported that they had a first-rate good time!!! Thanks to everyone for a great trip and I hope to see you on the slopes again soon.

My many thanks to Hope for her contributions to this report and for her help in making the trip a huge success!!!