



View of Mt. Hood from Timberline Lodge – photo by Deston Nokes

Timberline Lodge: Warm and welcoming Historic structure is ‘Oregon’s Mountain Home’

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By DESTON NOKES SPECIAL TO THE P-I

TIMBERLINE LODGE, Ore. — The enduring, sad news has been that little snowfall has delayed the opening of Washington and Oregon’s ski resorts, many of which have little more than craggy rocks jutting up where sweet, smooth, deep powder should be.

Until recently, all the region’s resorts have been shuttered except for Timberline, which rests at treeline on Mount Hood. For decades, riders and skiers in the know have taken advantage of Timberline’s year-round snow, and this early winter season Hood’s groomed, wide face has been providing the perfect relief for people suffering from downhill deprivation. “Lately, you either ride Timberline, Whistler or ... maybe Chile,” observed Ryan Falk, who works at Windells Snowboarding Camp, near Sandy, Ore.



Looming above Timberline Lodge, Mount Hood glows in the early morning light. (Joshua Trujillo / P-I)

Mercifully, Timberline had received a 10-inch dusting of snow the day before I arrived, bringing the depth to 14 inches at Timberline Lodge's 6,000-foot elevation. Not a deluge, but it was enough to take some runs. In order to ski, we had to walk to the Miracle Mile lift, and then transfer to the Palmer lift for the ride up to the 8,000-foot level.

At the top of the Palmer lift, which primarily operates for spring and summer skiing, we had clear views beyond Mount Jefferson, even to the Three Sisters and Broken Top in Central Oregon. Behind us was the mountain's summit, fully visible in the late-fall sun.

While skiing the Palmer Snowfield may not offer as much terrain variety as the rest of the resort, the intermediate-level run was steep and deep enough to relish carving down its well-groomed face. There was plenty of room for the snowboarders to blast past me, kicking up cold wakes of white. Meanwhile, below the lodge, Timberline was making enough snow for its short Bruno run for young children and beginners.

Normally, Timberline Resort has plenty of skiing, snowboarding, cross-country and snowshoeing options, with 1,430 skiable acres on 32 trails. Last year it opened eight new trails in its Still Creek Basin, and made other improvements including

better signage, trail upgrades and additional congregating space at the Jeff Flood Express Chairlift.

But on this trip we were relegated to the two open sections of the mountain. It was terrific being there on a weekday and having the mountain almost to myself. I took as many runs as my out-of-condition thighs would tolerate before steering my tips back down to Timberline Lodge.

If having year-round skiing isn't wonderful enough, getting to spend a night in Oregon's only slope-side, ski-in/ski-out resort cemented the deal for me.

Just the very idea of being able to spend a day getting worn out on the slopes and not having to face a lurching parade of traffic back down the mountain is nothing short of heaven.

With 1.9 million visitors a year, Timberline Lodge is second only to Multnomah Falls as Oregon's most visited site. A recent survey also named the lodge as the state's most romantic destination. But those expecting polished elegance will be disappointed. This is a mountain cabin on a grand scale: decidedly rustic, warm and cozy beyond measure.

“When Timberline was built during the Great Depression, the concept was to create a place for all of the people,” said Jon Tullis, a Timberline spokesman. “The idea was to create ‘Oregon's Mountain Home,’ and that feeling hasn't changed one bit.”

In 1926, the U.S. Forest Service had plans to build a lodge at the timberline level, but those plans were placed on hold when the Great Depression hit. In 1935, a group of skiers and developers persuaded the federal government to make Timberline a Works Progress Administration project, one of the “make work” programs created during the era.

“Franklin D. Roosevelt put people to work instead of simply throwing money at the problem,” Tullis said. “The project hired 350 skilled and unskilled laborers, who worked side by side for 90 cents an hour. Workers got money to send home, and some for their pocket. It also gave them a chance to learn a trade.”

Built in 1937 over just 15 months, Timberline isn't indicative of the technology available at that time. The idea was to recall an earlier era of mountain lodges. The lodge's central, cathedral-like lobby is supposed to mimic the mountain summit, with its hallway wings representing Mount Hood's shoulders.

Big columns, tight deadlines

The lobby's massive Douglas-fir columns are the first things you'll notice upon entering the hotel. Taken from the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington, the immense timbers were hand-hewn into shape with axes for \$25 per column, and were erected in less than a week. The workers were in a hurry to close the building before heavy snowstorms hit. Once they did, workers had to cope with blizzard conditions, sometimes using ropes to get from the trucks to the hotel.

Workers then didn't have the benefit of the massive stone fireplace that anchors the center of the great gathering room. Surrounding the fireplace column and sprinkled throughout the building is simple, wood furniture crafted by cabinetmakers. To make the columns for the oak staircases, telephone poles were cut up and carved with animals and birds on top. Blacksmiths were hired to do the ornamental ironwork, some of it in the shape of animal faces and plants. In nearby school basements, 200 artists and craftspeople created the fabrics, mosaics, paintings, carvings and glasswork that still adorn the lodge.

"I love every detail, from the carvings, woodwork textiles and iron. ... It's like a castle for a mountain girl," said Julie Westman, a former Timberline ski instructor.

After World War II, Timberline closed and fell into disrepair. Richard Kohnstaam, who died in 2006, is credited with saving the lodge. He put in a bid in 1955 to operate it, and was fortunate enough to benefit from the increased popularity of skiing in the late 1950s to help him turn a profit. Today, his son, Jeff, has taken over operations.

One of the benefits of Timberline is its year-round activity. It's the only resort in North America with skiing all year, which attracts athletes worldwide. I'm told that the quiet winter lodge gets pretty animated during the summer. Plus, having a year-round crew has helped improve the level of maintenance.

"At Timberline, they seem to pay greater attention to keeping the runs groomed," said snowboarder Adam Fleck, who works as a freelance videographer in Welches, Ore. "Of course, they have a tight crew that works it all year, while other resorts have more seasonal help."

The lodge also benefits from the numerous photo and film shoots that take place throughout the year. When I arrived, the filming of a Volvo ad was just wrapping.

"Having snow in August makes this a popular destination for companies who need to shoot their winter catalogs," Tullis said. "We often get Eddie Bauer, and the Victoria's Secret photo shoot generated quite the buzz."



A snowboarder threads his way through a boulder field on thin snowpack near Timberline Lodge. (Joshua Trujillo / P-I)

Paging Jack Nicholson

No article on Timberline can escape at least one mention of “The Shining.” Even though very little of the lodge was used in the Stanley Kubrick film (the front exterior was used, but all the interiors were filmed in England), people still ask about the haunted Room 237 (a number that doesn’t exist at the lodge).

Despite its horror movie detour, Timberline Lodge remains securely a family-oriented destination. In the evenings, families congregate in the gathering room to play games before and after dinner.

The second level is for those who want to gather and enjoy libations in the Ram’s Head Bar, or folks can go below into the cavernlike Blue Ox. Don’t leave the lodge without ordering a famous Snowcaps Dream, a creamy hot cocoa wonder that can be stiffened with an optional shot of booze. It goes best with a slice of Caramel Apple Granny pie.

“Timberline is perfect for everybody, and it’s such a great family place,” said Joe Schuberg, manager of Timberline’s Ram’s Head and Blue Ox bars. “Even on a cruddy day, you can ski off the mountain, come into the lodge and sit by our fire. Plus, if someone has a little too much skiing and revelry, they can stay over instead of driving back.”

Speaking of driving, you’ll want to carry traction devices to navigate the sometimes-slick road to the lodge.

Another Timberline treasure is its Cascade Dining Room. Executive chef Leif Eric Benson and restaurant chef Matthew Grimsley emphasize fresh Northwest meats, cheeses and produce. The wild, herb-encrusted salmon was fresh and moist, and the pear and bleu cheese salad featured fixings from nearby Hood River. There

also is plenty of tasty fare that can be ordered at the upstairs bar or over at the day lodge across the parking lot.

In the evenings, the hotel enforces a quiet time between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. so things don't get too rambunctious. In fact, you could have heard a door squeak the night I was there.



Playing a game of Clue in the lodge's lobby are, from left, Marina Odegaard, 11, her sister Amelia, 8, and their mother, Shondell. Simple wood furniture by Depression-era cabinetmakers is sprinkled throughout the building. (Joshua Trujillo / P-I)

Timberline's rooms are serviceable, not spectacular -- again, think mountain lodge. There are small televisions: Don't forget to watch the history of the lodge that comes up as soon as you turn on the set, and in many rooms, look out the window for an amazing view. The furniture is simple and you have to wait a bit for the room to warm up. The feather beds provide cloudlike comfort. Rooms vary between lower-priced bunkrooms (with a

bathroom down the hall) for \$110 per night, to fireplace rooms for \$290 per couple. Children under 12 stay free in the same room as their parents, while additional people over 12 are \$25 each per night.

For those with a little cabin fever, nearby Government Camp has blossomed into a hopping little resort town, with shops, taverns and restaurants. My snowboarding friends recommend starting out at Charlie's Mountain View tavern, moving on to the Ratskeller, and then finishing up with pancakes and coffee at the 24-hour Huckleberry Inn.

Also nearby is Mt. Hood Brewing Co., Ski Bowl (which features the largest night-skiing resort in the country), and Summit, which has a great bunny hill for beginners. The small town also has lodging such as the Mount Hood Inn and Collins Lake Resort in case Timberline is sold out.

However, after spending a dawn looking out my lodge window, watching the pink alpenglow on Mount Hood's face, I'd probably just wait until a room at the lodge opened up.

IF YOU GO

Getting there — From Seattle, take Interstate 5 south to I-205; take I-205 south to I-84 exit (The Dalles) and go east to Exit 16 (Wood Village). Turn right at stop sign, onto 242nd. Follow 242nd to Burnside (about 3 miles). Turn left on Burnside (U-Haul on the corner). Burnside turns into U.S. Route 26 East at the Newport Bay restaurant. Follow U.S. 26 east to the Timberline Road turnoff (about 40 miles), pass through the towns of Sandy, Welches and Rhododendron. Turn left on the Timberline access road; follow the road to Timberline (6 miles).

Information — General, 503-622-7979; ski report, 503-222-2211; Timberline Lodge reservations, 800-547-1406, Timberlinelodge.com

Notes — Sno-park permits are required for state-maintained parking areas in recreational areas. They can be purchased at the lodge. Carry traction devices at all times. They often are required on the drive from Government Camp up to Timberline Lodge.

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