

GET OUT!

UNION LEADER

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Vail of the East

Sunday River offers 131 trails to ski

SUNDAY RIVER in Newry, Maine is huge by eastern standards and skis like a Vail without having to travel to Denver.



FIRST TRACKS

Paula Tracy

With 667 acres to ski over eight interconnected mountains, you can spend days and still not cover it all.

Sunday River is also likely to be one of the last ski areas to close in the East, this year.

A sunny midweek day at the resort in early April might be just what you need to finish off the season in grand style.

Last week, I spent four days at the resort, which is about a half hour from Gorham, N.H., through the gorgeous Shelburne Birches and over the state line. I was able to get there via I-93

from Plymouth in less than two hours with little traffic Friday night at 5.

Once there, I never got tired of the mountain's variety of terrain, new places to explore and tremendous views.

I probably only skied on a quarter of the 131 trails, but I did managed to visit every mountain peak: White Cap, Locke Mountain, Barker Mountain, Spruce Peak, Aurora Peak, North Peak, Oz and Jordan Bowl.

I could not ski in Oz because it was crusty, but I will be back to do the trees someday when the ropes are off.

The lift system here is phenomenal. Most of the 18 rides up are high speed, which is unfortunate for my legs. They can't keep up.

There are bumps that go long and deep here, reminding me of Colorado's Arapahoe Basin. The tree skiing looks phenomenal, and open cruisers are groomed to perfection. There are parks and pipes all over the place.

The difference between the crowds on a weekend and

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Loon adaptive instructor Dave Micalizzi makes his way toward the birch forest on Sunday River's Jordan Bowl on Monday, March 19. Below is a courtesy aerial photo of Sunday River, showing the vastness of the Maine resort's skiing trails.

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weekday is night and day. If you go on a weekday, you'll have the place to yourself.

It snowed when we arrived Friday night and kept falling into Saturday. By the end, it had dumped about 16 inches of heavy snow on the summits, finishing off as fine ice and a bit of rain.

With the rain, it made for tough skiing on Saturday afternoon when I got out.

Huge piles of snow were being pushed around, with a firm base underneath, and no one seemed able to ski or board in it, including me.

Boarders and skiers were out in force, however. They would take three or more turns and then stop to rest or to smear off the wet ice forming on their goggles.

I found the goggles totally useless and squinted in the rain to find my way through the mashed potatoes. The shortest distances made my legs burn, even on the easy trails. I was dripping wet in one run. It gave new meaning to the trail's name, Lazy River. I felt I had been through the rapids.

Sunday was better — cold temperatures and the mountain's impressive grooming fleet working their wonders the night before.

Twelve cats prowl these trails during the night. You could see their lights out there smoothing all that snow Saturday night as the temperatures fell and a fire-works display showered down, illuminating Barker Mountain in greens and reds.

In the morning, the sun came out, and I spent most of it on trails at Locke Mountain and Barker. I liked the trail Upper Sunday Punch. But if truth be told, I spent most of the day standing in my ski boots watching the USSA Whistler Shoot Out on the Monday Mourning race trail. It is near the base of Barker.

My 13-year-old daughter, Eliza, was racing. She had quite a good day, with lots of smiles and goals accomplished, a great way to end what was a fabulous racing season for her and her friends. And they were having a blast.

On Monday, another fabulous sunny day, I was determined to ski every peak and get as much vertical in as possible.

Fellow ski parents Dave, Mary and I left Barker Lodge about 10 a.m. We began to try to see how far we could traverse in one direction, toward the Jordan Bowl.

We got on the Three Mile Trail, which went forever, a tunnel through snowy balsams. I couldn't believe the distance we were traveling over Spruce, North and Aurora peaks. We could see where we came from, and it looked far away. We got on the Aurora Peak Quad and skied Northern Lights, which was buffed and empty. Big cruiser turns. We took another



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Sunday River's Jordan Grand Resort Hotel slopeside.

run off the Aurora Peak Quad to Cyclone, where we skied past the chair at Oz, which was not operating.

We watched some of the 160 kids in the Future Stars event my daughter was in come through the bumps.

They took the kids in groups of eight all around the mountain on a scavenger hunt, finding cartons with instructions on different skills to hone at each station. Even tough bump skiing was one of the more than 23 runs the kids got that day... Did they ever sleep well that night!

To me, the bumps were deathly. I looked right at them and said "no." I needed my knees for work.

The Jordan Bowl was finally reached about 11:15, and it was my first time seeing the beautiful Jordan Grand Resort Hotel, nestled in what appears to be a wilderness area. The Barker and South Ridge Base area is packed with slopeside housing. Not at Jordan. It looks like it is in the middle of nowhere.

We got off at the summit of the Jordan Bowl and could see the New Hampshire Presidential Range off to the skier's left on Excalibur.

We skied another run on Rogue Angel.

The next run off the Jordan Bowl chair took us into Oz, where we took the Kansas traverse, peering down into double black diamond territory. It looked like the Wicked Witch herself had been there.

The red ropes were up, and I was feeling sort of relieved. It was icy. We took Lights Out to the North Peak Lodge for some lunch. I like this lodge for its huge windows and unpretentiousness.

Dave headed in to have lunch with his wife, Kallie, while Mary and I continued on looking at the map to be sure we got over to White Cap, the farthest point in the other direction from where we had come.

We skied Downdraft on Spruce Peak and took about three runs in this area. They were moderately steep and groomed. There is a great view here of the Mahoosucs and Grafton State Park.

We moved from there to Barker and on to the Locke Mountain Triple. We skied down Tempest to the White

Cap Lodge and took a lift which brought us down to Heat's On, where we picked up the White Cap to the White Heat Quad.

The final little lift in our series of peak bagging was the Little White Cap Quad which went past the Grand Summit Hotel and above its pool and hot tub. They looked inviting. My legs were getting beat. We started making our way back to South Ridge, and we called it a day about 2 p.m.

It had been a very good day.

Sunday River's Parrot Head Festival and the 20th annual Bust 'n' Burn mogul competition are this weekend, and Easter weekend is full of family activities.

The multi-day festival this weekend raises money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Maine.

The Parrot Head Festival is the resort's biggest party of the season.

The ski resort will be transformed into a tropical paradise with outdoor festivities at the White Cap base area, including Jimmy Buffett cover bands, a margarita mix-off, pond skimming, a Key lime pie-eating contest and more. White Cap Lodge will also host Jimmy Buffett tribute bands tonight and tomorrow evening.

The Bust 'n' Burn mogul competition has long been a proving ground for amateur skiers of all ages. Up to 225 competitors race down Tempest, with spectators looking on from the White Cap base area. The top 32 will move on to Sunday's contest, and the top three in each age category and the top 32 overall will take home prizes valued at more than \$20,000, including plane tickets courtesy of American Airlines. Participation is open to all, and registration will begin at 7:30 a.m. on the day of the event at the Shipyard Brew Haus in White Cap Lodge.

Each year's Parrot Head Festival at Sunday River raises approximately \$10,000 for Maine's Make-A-Wish Foundation. More information on the Parrot Head Club is available at www.phcof-maine.com.

Further information on these and other Sunday River events and lodging specials is available at www.sundayriver.com, or by calling (800) 543-2SKI.