

The Dallas Morning News

By DAN LEETH

Special Contributor

Published: 17 March 2011 05:38 PM

Updated: 18 March 2011 06:18 PM

ASPEN, Colo. — Atop Aspen Mountain, we clip into short, fat skis. Just over 3 feet long, these twin-tipped “skiboards” would look trendy on a teen, but that’s not us. We’re a group of gray-heads for whom the term “hip” is usually followed by the word “replacement.” For two of the next four days, we old dogs will use these short skis to learn a new trick: how to navigate Aspen’s bumpiest mogul runs.

“In four days, you’ll eagerly be looking forward to skiing bumps,” promises Joe Nevin, founder of Aspen’s Bumps for Boomers program. “I actually think skiing moguls is easier than groomed runs.”

Nevin starts us on a series of training exercises. We make zero-momentum turns from a dead stop. We practice drifting. We turn atop targets and stop on others. Slowness, Nevin insists, is the key to getting older skiers off blue groomers.

“If you’re driving down a street and you see a speed bump, unless you’re in a rental car or had too much to drink, you’re going to tap the breaks,” he explains. “In this clinic, we teach you to ski in slow motion.”

We head for some small moguls and spend the rest of the day employing these slow-and-go techniques one bump at a time. By day’s end, we’ve become fast learners of slowness.

Since I’m taking a clinic for older skiers, I splurge and book accommodations at Hotel Jerome, Aspen’s venerable hostelry. Opening in 1889, it rivaled the Ritz in Paris, and its lobby and rooms still exude

Victorian elegance. I stop in its historic J-Bar for après-ski refreshments. Favoring local microbrews, I order a Brown Bear Ale, the only beer they carry from the nearby Aspen Brewing Co.

“I’m sorry,” the waitress tells me. “We’re out. We’ll have it tomorrow.”

On our second day, we split into two groups. After reviewing techniques and tactics on easy bumps, we spend the day descending steeper and gnarlier terrain.

“This seems counterintuitive,” I suggest to instructor Alan Bush, “but with slower reflexes, shouldn’t we grizzled types be skiing greenies with grandkids instead of bashing bumps?”

“Not at all,” Bush says. “Bump runs are less crowded and safer because you don’t have those screaming nee-nees coming down at you. The snow is usually better, and if you ski them slowly, it can take less energy.”

That seems true. After bumping it up for two days, I feel fresh enough to run a marathon, or at least saunter six blocks back to the J-Bar for a brew.

“Sorry. We’ll have Brown Bear Ale tomorrow for sure,” the waitress promises.

On day three, we jettison the midget skiboards and use our own, real skis. After a review on baby bumplets, it’s off to full black-diamond divots. I slowly work my way down the runs. Old skiers never die; we just keep going downhill.

“In 1962, there were something like 4 million skier days. Lately, it’s been roughly 60 million. That growth was fueled entirely by the baby boomers,” Nevin says. “Ski areas are worried that we’re getting old and going to quit, so they’ve turned their eyes toward younger generations. But we’re not ready to hang it up yet.”

Ending the day at the J-Bar, I once again order a Brown Bear Ale.

“Nope. Sorry. Tomorrow.”

During the first three days, we skied only partway down Aspen Mountain. On day four, after some warm-ups, Bush asks if we're ready for something more adventurous. Of course, we are.

He leads us down a black-diamond trail, crosses a blue groomer and stops at the edge of oblivion. Below dives Face of Bell, a double-black-diamond plunger some consider Aspen Mountain's signature run. The descent looks steeper than an Olympic ski jump, and the exit at the bottom looks like Greenland seen from the space shuttle.

Bush leads the way, and we tailgate. Taking it slowly and staying in control, we over-the-hillers downhill the face, drifting, banking, pivoting and turning bump by bump. All too soon, we're at the bottom looking up.

"Wow, I did a double-black!" someone exclaims, beaming like a kid at Christmas.

We ride the gondola back up and do several more laps down the face. At day's end, Bush's altimeter says we've covered 14,340 feet of downhill. To celebrate the feat, we adjourn to the Ajax Tavern near the gondola.

"I'll have an Aspen Brown Bear Ale," I tell the waiter.

"Sorry," he says. "We're out."

WHEN YOU GO

Bumps clinics

Three- and four-day Bumps for Boomers clinics are held from mid-December through mid-March. The December clinic begins on a Tuesday; the rest start on Mondays. Both feature two full-day sessions on skiboards, which are furnished, followed by one or two days on your own skis. Cost is \$897 for the three-day clinic and \$1,196 for the four-day. Lodging, meals, equipment rental and lift tickets are extra. Contact: Bumps for Boomers, 970-989-2529; www.bumpsforboomers.com.

Getting to Aspen

United Air Lines (1-800-864-8331; www.united.com) and Frontier Airlines (1-800-432-1359; www.frontierairlines.com) offer commuter service directly to Aspen/Pitkin County Airport through Denver.

American Airlines (1-800-433-7300; www.aa.com) offers nonstop winter jet service to the Eagle County Airport from Dallas/Fort Worth. Cars can be rented for the 75-mile drive to Aspen, or Colorado Mountain Express (1-800-525-6363; www.riddecme.com) can provide van shuttle service.

Denver International Airport is served by a host of major airlines, and vehicles can be rented there. Follow Interstate 70 to Glenwood Springs and take Colorado 82 into Aspen. It's a 220-mile drive over one mountain pass and through another.

Where to stay

Rooms at Hotel Jerome (970-920-1000; www.hoteljerome.rockresorts.com) run \$249 to \$980 per night during winter.

The Aspen Chamber of Commerce (1-800-670-0792; www.aspenchamber.org) offers a list of lodging options, and Aspen Snowmass Central Reservations (1-888-649-5982; www.stayaspensnowmass.com) can be used to reserve lodging in Aspen, often at discounted prices.

Resources

Aspen Chamber of Commerce, 1-800-670-0792;
www.aspenchamber.org.

Aspen Skiing Co., 1-800-525-6200; www.aspensnowmass.com.

©2015, The Dallas Morning News Inc. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.dallasnews.com/lifestyles/travel/ski-snow/20110317-senior-skiers-learn-how-to-master-moguls.ece>