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Touring Coldstream Canyon by Snowmobile

By Charlie Good

In its 15th season in the Northern Sierra's Coldstream Canyon, Cold Stream Adventures offers a wide assortment of snowmobiling options suited for everyone from the beginner to advanced rider.

On a recent winter day, my wife Jenna and I decided to go snowmobiling with Cold Stream Adventures. Both of us had gone snowmobiling before and loved the exhilaration and the rush that went along with the experience. After meeting briefly with owner Larry Hahn to fill out the necessary forms, we were off to meet our snowmobile guide, Tim Erskine, at the loading area off Cabin Creek Road.

Tim gave us a brief, yet thorough, safety and operation talk going through the basic operation of the snowmobile, along with what to do if we were to fall off or become stuck. Having not been on a snowmobile for nearly 10 years, I made sure to ask plenty of questions so that I knew what I was getting myself into. Tim did a great job at answering all of Jenna and my questions, making sure that we felt comfortable before departing.

We started out on easy terrain allowing us to get acclimated to our snowmobiles. The most difficult part at first for me was the timing of my weight shift around each turn. Tim had told us that it was critical to start shifting your weight before a turn while "feathering" the accelerator to find that right balance of speed and stability. (The term feathering means taking your hand on and off the accelerator to adjust your speed gradually as you are turning.)

After about 3 miles, we reached our first scenic lookout. This lookout provided great views of the Martis Valley and the backside of Northstar. I am usually fairly good with directions, but quickly realized that my bearings were off. Thanks to Tim, I recalibrated my internal compass, which I soon found would be a repeated process as we stopped at each scenic lookout.

After taking a few pictures and admiring the views, we were off again continuing to climb uphill to our second scenic lookout named the first meadow. During this stretch we veered off the trail and experimented with heavier powder areas to observe how the snowmobile would handle in this type of terrain.

Having not had much experience in these conditions I took it slow, which was to my detriment since my snowmobile soon became stuck in the powder. Tim calmly and deftly revved up the engine and was able to plow through the powder to a nice clearing where I again took the driver seat. Having learned my lesson, I was determined not to be afraid of giving the engine enough power to the next powder area we came to. Also on this stretch, I mistakenly looked back at my wife and did not realize before it was too late the snow bank I was headed for. Somewhat humiliated, I waited for Tim to circle back and help me get the snowmobile out of the bank. Confident that all of my mistakes were behind me, I took control of and revved up my machine again.

Our next stop was Stanford Woods Camp, which is steeped in history and named after Leland Stanford, governor of California, U.S. Senator, railroad tycoon and founder of Stanford University. The views were remarkable of the surrounding countryside. Cold Stream Adventures also offers picnics in this picturesque setting upon request on sunny winter days. Jenna and I thought that would be a great way to spend the afternoon or even make a family outing.

Before exploring Coldstream Canyon and the wilderness cabin, we entered into a large meadow where we could play around with our snowmobiles. I decided to see how fast mine could go and nearly lifted both skis off the ground on a few different occasions. We also practiced our turns in both the packed snow areas, as well as the powder areas, so that we would be ready for whatever we

were likely to face. After many practice turns, with one or two close calls, we decided to resume the tour, but now with more confidence.

From the meadow we traversed along the ridges before beginning our descent into Coldstream Canyon. The terrain at times was steep, but manageable. Tim periodically checked back on us when we got into more difficult terrain. He also would occasionally surprise us with different off trail shortcuts through the trees, as well as some deeper powder areas.

After reaching the cabin, we were taken aback by its rustic charm. Not to mention this is not your typical mountain cabin, but a spacious three bedroom mountain retreat with private bath and shower, wood stove, living and sleeping areas on separate levels with rustic furnishings that Hahn has collected over the years, each with its own story. In addition, the cabin is close to the Emigrant Trail along with some of the best back country skiing and snowshoeing terrain anywhere. We had no problem relaxing on the balcony taking in this incredibly beautiful, pristine setting. Jenna was amazed that the only sounds we heard were those of nature, which in these days and times is quite refreshing. She and I even talked about coming back to the cabin for our next anniversary. Even though we hated to leave, we knew that our temporary catharsis had to end since it would soon be getting dark.

Driving back to the loading area off of Cabin Creek Road, we deliberately took it slower and were much more relaxed.

The wilderness cabin is also part of a 3 1/2 hour lunch tour that I would encourage everyone to take before the season is over. This tour leads you through the back country and into Coldstream Canyon and stops at the cabin for some warm refreshments and spectacular views. After relaxing and enjoying nature's splendor, the tour heads back exploring more of the picturesque areas in the Coldstream Canyon area. The cabin also can be rented for overnight stays or weekend getaways.

The Cold Stream Adventure guides do a great job at accessing your comfort and skill level while making sure to cater your trip to ensure a maximum level of excitement and fun. They will take anyone from kids to senior adults at all ability levels. If you would prefer to just take in the scenery, you can choose not to ride and instead double-up on their newer snowmobiles. All of their trails are private and groomed and they supply the helmets as well as expert and friendly instruction. I highly recommend spending a half-day or even a full day with Cold Stream Adventures it is an experience not to be missed.

Tours are available daily from November through April. Rates for the two-hour snowmobile tour starts at \$130 for a single and \$155 for a double. Tours also can be customized. Cold Stream Adventures is located at 11760 Donner Pass Road in Truckee, across from Truckee High School. For more information on any of the tours or specials, call (530) 582-9090 or e-mail coldstream@sbcglobal.net.

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