

Plenty of snow, people cover Heavenly's slope on Day 1

By Kathryn Reed

"The snow was truly epic."

That's how season passholder Michael Brown of Stateline described opening day at Heavenly Mountain Resort.



California
Trail at
Heavenly on
opening day
Nov. 20.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

He wasn't at the gondola in time to get "first chair" – he had to settle for the second car. But he beat the snowboarders in front of him who had to lock in to their bindings to be the first one on California Trail this season.

Heavenly had to delay the start of the season a day because Mother Nature was whipping up winds that made it unsafe to fire up the lifts Friday. Not the case a day later – Nov. 20.

What started off as a sunny, blue-sky day Saturday at lake level gradually turned to partly cloudy and was back to winter conditions by early afternoon. It was much the same on the

mountain.

Charlie Smith of South Lake Tahoe was taking advantage of having bought a Double Whammy pass to ski Sierra and Northstar and being able to turn it in for a Vail Resorts' Epic Pass. This is all possible only this year because of Vail's purchase of Northstar last month.

He took one run before needing to warm up in the Umbrella Bar at the confluence of the gondola debarkation, Tamarack lift and Adventure Peak Grill. He said the run was great. In the bar he did wince a bit at the \$9.41 for a shot of Bushmills whiskey.

Others were happy to have a flask of peppermint schnapps in their pocket to add to hot cocoa. Still others parted with \$8.85 for a Stella.

The gondola started running at 8:30am, with a line of eager skiers and boarders. People were already heading home before 10am. Passholders often just ski a couple hours, but with only run open and it starting to get busy, it was enough to chase some people off the mountain.

For those who paid the \$62 to ski one run, well, it's debatable if it was worth it. Though, there's always something special about opening day at any resort.

Daily prices will keep going up. Go to Heavenly's website, put in the date you plan to be there and the price comes up. Still, like all resorts, a season pass is the best deal as long as you don't want to ski on the blackout dates.

California Trail, though covered without an obstacle to be seen, was littered with bodies. To the skiers' left was a mini terrain park that was getting substantial traffic on its various features.

More trails will open as conditions permit – which Heavenly

officials say will happen today. Dipper Express will be open, giving access to Orion and Bigger Dipper trails. This will greatly spread people beyond Tamarack chair. East Peak Lodge will also be open.

At the base of the Tamarack chairlift is the Tamarack Lodge that from the outside looks ready to serve the masses. Heavenly's multi-million dollar lodge will open in February.

An unfortunate sight was a dad yelling at his daughter who was about 7 to turn her snowboard like his. This "Little League parent" behavior is always sad to see, but really, did he need to do this on Day 1 and in cold, snowy weather – especially when staff at the base of gondola urged beginners to come back another day.

Another piece of advice – put the bar up on the chairlift before the skis hit the snow at the end of the lift. And don't hold the bar down again, buddy. It's a good thing you skied off fast.

One guy visiting from Michigan decided on the offhand chance Heavenly opened he'd have his ski clothes with him. He was making the most of it under gray skies and windy weather. He was ecstatic to be on the lift no matter the weather.

A foursome from Vegas ventured up to the Umbrella Bar to check things out. They, unlike another group of lookiloos, were dressed for the weather. The other group showed up in tennis shoes.

Staff was on top of their game on Day 1. The guys at both ends of the gondola, coming and going, were super cheerful and eager to put skis and boards on/off the cars. Missy at the Umbrella Bar was handling the crowd as people wanted to drink and beverages weren't quite available because the bar and portable food station had to be dug out and stocked before service was available.

Heavenly's website will keep listing what lifts and runs are open. With the winter storm warning in effect through 4pm today, powder day is likely what people will experience today.

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