

Sierra eliminates the hike to resort's extreme terrain

By Kathryn Reed

Adrenaline junkies will want to head to Sierra-at-Tahoe this winter because of the exclusive snowcat-guide provided trek to and through Huckleberry Canyon.

These 320 acres of expert terrain first became patrolled with avalanche prevention measures put in place for the 2008-09 season. Now, three years later, the resort near Echo Summit is making it a bit more accessible.



Huckleberry Canyon at Sierra will be easier to get to this season.

Photo/Provided

Gate 5 is about a 1½-mile hike for the more intrepid skier or boarder. Paying \$79 (not including lift ticket) will get riders to the starting point via snowcat. The 10am-2pm Friday-Sunday excursions include lunch, avalanche beacon, probe and a guide for seven people. One cat will go out each of those days when conditions permit.

“The idea behind it is to get people out to the backcountry

for the joy of floating through powder,” Steve Hemphill, spokesman for the resort, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Some people are not sure they want to hike for their turns.”

Cliff drops, shoots, gladed trees – Huckleberry’s terrain runs the gamut.

On the other spectrum of the industry, Sierra is creating a snowboarding program for ages 3 to 6. Riglet Park, which will be operated in conjunction with Burton, will be near the base of the Grandview chair.

Hemphill said there has been a void in the industry in regards to getting the younger kids on snowboards.

The Burton Riglet Wheel looks like a hockey puck on the front of the snowboard. Instructors use it to pull the their charges.

“It gives them the feel for sliding on snow while the instructor does most of the work. It teaches them balance control and movement of what it is like to snowboard,” Hemphill said.

Robert Alward has taken over as director of the school.

With little snowmaking at the resort, Sierra depends on Mother Nature to set the opening date. Usually it’s as close to Thanksgiving as possible.

To spur things along, the annual Pray for Snow Party is Nov. 10 at MontBleu in Stateline. The free event is open to passholders at 6pm, and to everyone else at 7pm.

A variety of season passes exist, but just to Sierra. This is the first time in decades the resort is flying solo. With Northstar being acquired by Vail Resorts a year ago, the Double Whammy pass is a thing of the past. But Sierra still has its three-pack of tickets that through Dec. 16 are \$51 per ticket – which can be used any day. Then they go up to

\$54/day. This compares to the regular lift ticket of \$74 a day – \$77 during peak times.

Sierra has a slew of events planned for the 2011-12 season. Details are online.

Don't be surprised to see snowboarder Jaime Anderson cutting it up at the resort. Sierra remains her home resort. She often Tweets when she's at her home mountain.

Sierra is negotiating with snowboarder Hannah Teeter as to whether the Vermont native will keep training at the South Shore resort.

For those who aren't into strapping a plank or two to their feet, Blizzard Mountain is a snow play-tubing area at Sierra that has been expanded to include a bounce house, snack bar, fire pits, picnic tables and sledding.