

Sledding provides hours of outdoor thrills

By Kathryn Reed

SPOONER SUMMIT – Based on the smiles and whoops of joy, sledding clearly has no age limit.

“There’s nothing like this back East,” Bill Stump, 50, of Palo Alto said surveying the hill. He and his family recently moved to the Bay Area from New Jersey. They were in Tahoe for the long Veterans Day weekend.

His 13-year-old daughter, Alexandra, thought the forest they used to live in was fun, but when she talked about the steepness of the hills in the Sierra, a big smile came across her face.



Joe and Nick Cortez are all smiles as they descend the Spooner Summit sledding hill. Photos/Kathryn Reed

And she’s been at this a few years, so she knows what type of device works best. Pointing to the rectangular purple sled that has an edge a few inches high all the way around it, she said, “I like these kinds because they are easier to shred.”

Alexandra said the saucers are too hard to steer.

Steering, though, didn't seem to be an option on any of the sleds. And one that had brakes didn't work. That didn't matter to Nick Cortez.

"I liked the part where I went by myself. I put my legs out to stop like brakes," 4-year-old Nick said.

Before most ski resorts started spinning chairs people were eager to play in the white stuff. This hill at the junction of highways 50 and 28 is popular all winter. Part of it has to do with the steepness, part because it's free, part because it's at a high enough elevation to have snow when it's dirt elsewhere and definitely because it's fun.

Sledding, while seemingly a tame sport, if one can call it a sport, is not necessarily safe.

"Sledding is a lot of fun, but we see most injuries in the early season when hard objects are barely covered, [like] stumps, branches, rocks and when the snow is very hard," Warren Withers, medical director of Barton Health's Emergency Medical Services, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While objects were clearly visible and the worn path of white was showing dirt Monday last week, no one was taken to the ER. But some bruises turned up.

Withers suggests helmets be worn – just like on the ski slopes. One kid had a helmet, but everyone else was taking his or her chances.

A few parents also didn't heed the doctor's advice when it came to riding with their kids.

"Parents should think twice about going on the same sled with children too small to sled by themselves. Crashes can be bad for smaller children riding with adults," Withers said.

Everyone who wiped out seemed to do some sort of flip or at a least hard fall to one side, so it would be easy to see how a little one could be hurt riding with an adult during a tumble.

Even this early in the season bits of plastic were strewn about – an indication the hill won and the sled lost. An old-time metal saucer needed some waxing to go faster. Then there were the Body Glove sleds that worked well for those going down on their stomach. Plus, they looked durable and like they would work well on the water in another season at Lake Tahoe.

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