

Easy to escape the masses at snowshoe park atop Colorado ski resort

By Kathryn Reed

BEAVER CREEK – Debris is falling from high up in the tree, creating a mess of sorts at the base. That was the work of a porcupine, that while not easily seen, was obviously sitting high atop a branch in what she thought was an isolated spot.

On this particular Friday a group of snowshoers is taking in a small slice of the 32 kilometers of trails through Beaver Creek's McCoy Park Nordic Center. We don't seem to interrupt the chomping above us.

Guide Laurie Hardmeyer points out other signs of wildlife.



Naked aspens provide a surreal landscape at Beaver Creek on a cloudy day.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Coyotes, fox and black bears call this terrain at 10,000 feet home. So do ermine, which are part of the weasel family. We see their tracks in the couple inches of fresh snow that has fallen overnight.

“They dive under the snow and eat their weight in mice and voles every day,” Hardmeyer says. “Under the snowfall there is this ecosystem.”

Our leader says she saw eight ptarmigan (a medium-size bird) on the trail earlier in the season, which she said was unusual.

Elk chew on the aspens that fill the landscape. It’s a natural analgesic. She jokes that if we get sore on our trek, we can start gnawing on one of the trees. No one tries. After all, we know soon enough there will be plenty of wine to be had to ease any aches.

This excursion is part of the annual Beaver Creek Food + Wine event. (Alex Seidel was the featured chef with Grouse Mountain Grill Executive Chef Gutowski at the Snowshoe & Gourmet Lunch at Gutowski’s restaurant inside the Pines Lodge.)

This land wasn’t always about luxury. Early settlers grew vegetables in the mountains. McCoy, after whom the park is named, was a lettuce grower.

The Nordic center is all about getting people on snowshoes, cross country skis or skate skis. Equipment may be rented, lessons taken or day passes bought for those who come equipped. The trails are accessed via Beaver Creek’s Strawberry Park Express chairlift.

Hardmeyer talks about the views that a sunny day would provide. But there is no evidence of the Sawatch Range, Gore Range or back bowls of Vail. Instead, we are treated to what appears to be a mystic fog that floats through the barren aspens.

Besides the aspens, groves of mostly lodgepole pine dot the landscape. Colorado blue spruce and Engelmann spruce are part of the mix.

“When you need peace and quiet, this is the place to come,”
Hardmeyer says.

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