

# Sierra's terrain enhances learning experience



Sierra-at-Tahoe instructors Claude Gunsch and Neal Hamilton explain the basics. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

**By Kathryn Reed**

TWIN BRIDGES – Straight-lining isn't an option for newbies learning to ski at Sierra-at-Tahoe. And that's a good thing because turning is often one of the most difficult things to learn.

A serpentine has been built into the slope of Broadway to ease first-timers into turns in a more controlled environment.

“Sometimes the most rewarding thing is when they come up and can barely walk, and they go down this and smile,” Claude Gunsch told *Lake Tahoe News*. This is Gunsch’s 28th season instructing at Sierra, something he has done part time all these years. “The serpentine gets people skiing automatically.”



Sana Pandey takes to skiing – and the magic carpet – fairly quickly. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

In many ways it is less daunting than the main ski hill where it's wide-open, full of lots of people and turning is optional. Snowplowing – or making a pizza or wedge in today's vernacular – eases beginners into the turn.

“You have the need for speed and the need for control,” Gunsch said in explaining why it's necessary to make different size wedges.

All the basics are still part of the lesson – it's just the terrain that makes this so unique.

Terrain-based learning is what it's called, and aptly so. The terrain is as much a teacher as the person in charge. It's about a 3 to 5 percent grade, a football field or longer depending on what the groomers developed.



Courtney Ceccato went through the rope instead of around the curve. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

For Sana Pandey, 14, of San Jose having ice skated before

helped her immensely with balance and the sense of gliding on snow.

“I love it. It’s so much fun. It’s different than other sports,” Pandey told *Lake Tahoe News* after descending the serpentine. Her first day on skis was last month. She was quickly getting the feel for how to maneuver the two planks strapped to her feet.

Courtney Ceccato, 24, of Sacramento was happy for powder off to the side because that’s where she landed after taking one of the turns too sharply.



Claude Gunsch helps Sinda Potluri make it through the serpentine. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“I just have to learn how to get my balance and how to stop,” she said with a smile as she was also learning how to get up after falling.

Even though it’s possible to get to the serpentine from the

Easy Rider chair, the initial route is via the magic carpet. If a group progresses well, the chairlift is an option. The advent of these “carpets” allows for more actual ski time and no longer having to walk up the slope.

This area is reserved for teens and adults, while younger kids are on the other side of Sierra’s base lodge. They, too, have contoured routes to learn on, but scaled down.



The magic carpet makes it so beginners have more time actually skiing. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

While most people might think a honeymoon is supposed to mean being locked together with your spouse, not so for Wendy Kodur. The 30-year-old from Newark was excited to be on the bunny slope.

“He got me the lesson. I want to be able to catch up to him,” Kodur said of her husband.

Sinda Potluri, 29, of Tampa might be sticking to warm weather sports. After the initial instruction of going down the smallest halfpipe ever built she was having a hard time getting the feel of the skis and balancing. And this was before the serpentine. “I keep falling,” she said, so she wasn’t sure if she liked skiing.

But as anyone who has skied knows, falling is part of learning.

With the serpentine, the theory is it’s more fun and a faster progression to more advanced terrain.