Ski areas in Maine ready for another great season

BY DAN CASSIDY
Ski Tracks Columnist

If you were a ski enthusiast last year, then you remember what a great season it was on the slopes.

Sugarloaf Mountain recorded the largest annual snowfall total in 15 years, according to Karl Strand, Sugarloaf General Manager.

“Here’s a recap of last year; it was a great season, and there’s no secret in the ski business – it’s all about snow,” Strand said.

Strand said during the 2016 season, a 30-inch storm fell on December 30, 26 inches on February 26 and a 21 inches on March 15, adding to smaller storms, making a grand total of 225 inches for the season.

Snow equates to big business in Maine, and the ski areas are preparing for another great season with upgrades to their snowmaking equipment, lifts and snow cats.

Baker Mountain – Located in Moscow, just north of Bingham on Route 201, the mountain has a vertical drop of 460 feet. Volunteers run the ski area and the cost of skiing is just $10 per day. Ski and snowboard rentals are also available. Hours are Saturdays 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sundays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. They also offer sliding at no charge. Lift service is by one T-bar. There are two green (easy) trails, three blue (intermediate) trails, but no expert (black diamond) trails. The mountain depends on natural snow for skiing. Call 717-0404 for additional information.

Big Rock Mountain – Located at 20 Barnestown Road in Camden, this picturesque mountain has an 850 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one triple chair, one double chair and one conveyor carpet. There are two green (easy) trails, eight blue (intermediate) trails and one handle tow. There are six green (easy) trails, seven blue (intermediate) trails and five black diamond (difficult) trails. The mountain has a terrain park and glade skiing. Lifts consist of one double chair for skiing, one tow for snow tubing. There will be increased snowmaking and grooming. Night snow tubing will also be available this season. For services, there is a snack bar in the base lodge. For additional information, call 364-8977 or log onto: skibigrock.com

Camden Snow Bowl – Located at 20 Barnestown Road in Camden, this picturesque mountain has an 850 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one triple chair, one double chair and one conveyor carpet. There are two green (easy) trails, eight blue (intermediate) trails and 13 black diamond (difficult) trails. There are two terrain parks, glades, night skiing and snow tubing. Snowmaking covers 80 percent of the mountain. For additional information, call 236-3438 or log onto: camdensnowbowl.com

Eaton Mountain – Located at 89 Lambert Road in Skowhegan, this local snow tubing and ski area is planning to open for the season as weather permits. The mountain has 225 ft. vertical drop with 12 trails. The longest run is approximately one mile. The mountain has a terrain park and glade skiing. Lifts consist of one double chair for skiing, one tow for snow tubing. There will be increased snowmaking and grooming. Night snow tubing will also be available this season. For services, there is a snack bar in the base lodge. For additional information, call 474-2566 (note: phone answered only during hours of operation). Log onto: eatonmountain.com or e-mail info@eatonmt.com

Hermon Mountain – Located at 441 Newburg Road in Hermon, the mountain has a 350 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one double, one T-bar and one handle tow. There are six green (easy) trails, seven blue (intermediate) trails and seven black diamond (difficult) trails. There is one Terrain Park, night skiing, snow tubing and snowmaking covers 100 percent of the terrain. For additional information, log onto: skithermonmountain.com

Lost Valley – Located at 200 Lost Valley Road in Auburn, the mountain has a 500 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one T-bar and one J-Bar lift. The mountain offers night skiing and snowmaking covers 60 percent of their terrain. For additional information, call 784-1561 or log onto: lostvalleyski.com

Mt. Abram – Located at 308 Howe Hill Road in Greenwood, the mountain has an 1150 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by two double lifts, one T-bar, one surface lift and one carpet.

There are 10 green (easy) trails, 21 blue (intermediate) trails and 13 black diamond (difficult) trails. The mountain offers three terrain parks, glades, night skiing and snow tubing. Snowmaking covers 85 percent of their trails. For additional information call 875-5000 or log onto: mtabram.com

Ski Mt. Jefferson – Located in Lee, the mountain has a 432’ vertical drop and is serviced by two T-bars and one rope tow. There are three green (easy) trails, six blue (intermediate) trails and three black diamond (difficult) trails. For additional information call 738-2377 or log onto: skimtjefferson.com

Powder House Hill – Located at Agamenticus Road in South Berwick, the mountain has a 150 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one rope tow. There are two green (easy) trails and one blue (intermediate) trail. They also have night skiing. For additional information call 384-5858 or log onto: powderhousehill.com

Quoggy Jo Ski Center – Located in Presque Isle, the mountain has a 215 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one T-bar. There are two green (easy) trails and three blue (intermediate) trails. There is also a terrain park. For additional information call 764-3248 or log onto: skiquoggyjo.org

Saddleback Mountain – Located at 976 Saddleback Mountain Road in Rangeley, this mountain has a vertical drop of 2,000 feet and is serviced by two quad and two double chairlifts and one T-bar.

There are 66 trails from gentle beginner slopes to rugged double black diamond in the Kennebeco Steeps, the largest steep skiing and riding facility in the east. There are also wonderful challenging glades, and more than 8,000 acres of high alpine peaks and forest. Top lift elevation is over 4,000 feet, with a vertical drop of 2,000 feet of skiing and riding.

More SKI AREAS, PAGE 3
**WinterKids celebrates 20 years**

**BY DAN CASSIDY**

Ski Tracks Columnist

This is Passport’s 20th anniversary for WinterKids. “Our Passport for all Maine 5th, 6th and 7th graders is their ticket to winter fun,” said Rob Wilber, Marketing and Communications Manager in a press release. “To help us celebrate our 20th anniversary year, you can order the WinterKids Passport for just $20.”

If your child is too young for the Passport, WinterKids also offers a FunPass for children in pre-school through 4th grade. For the first time this year, the Passport includes discounts to go sleigh riding and horseback trail riding according to Wilber.

Two New Hampshire partners will provide for sleigh riding and ice skating this year, and another first, is dog sledding. Passports can be used all winter long to get free admission to all discounts tickets, lessons and rentals at 50 winter recreation areas in all. It’s a value of more than $3,000.

WinterKids has helped more than 100,000 Maine children to be active outdoors in the winter through unique education programs statewide. Their mission is to help children develop healthy lifelong habits through education and fun outdoor winter activity.

Whether you’re new to winter sports or a seasoned “pro,” the WinterKids Passport will help your family get outside and be active more often in the winter, with free and discounted tickets, lessons and rentals at 50 areas all over Maine.

In addition to receiving deeply discounted tickets, lessons and rentals at 50 of Maine’s best winter sports areas, WinterKids Passport families can also enjoy special Passport events throughout the season.

Their popular WinterKids Family Days offer immediate family members accompanying the Passport holder deep discounts on lift tickets and rentals.

Since 1997, WinterKids has introduced more than 75,000 Maine kids to winter sports.

For additional information about WinterKids programs, call toll-free 855-832-3399 ext. 106, or (207) 871-5700, or check out their website at: winterkids.org/kids-and-families/passport/

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**Ski Areas**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The Mountain has been closed for two years, however, it has been sold to Majella Group of Brisbane, Australia. Sebastian Monsour, CEO of Majella Group said that during a tour of the U.S. in 2011, his family found Saddleback and spoke about plans to reopen the mountain and turn it into a year-round resort. The resort was owned by Bill and Irene Berry of Farmington, but had been closed for two years as they were in negotiations with interested buyers. The Majella Group purchase includes all holdings of Saddleback Mountain Resort: the resort, base lodge, ski lifts and surrounding timberland, totaling 6,337 acres.

Fast forward to October when a news release indicated that Saddleback personnel were hard at work in preparing the mountain to open for the upcoming season. However, as Saddleback was getting a coat of new snow on the trails recently, Monsour announced on the Saddleback Facebook page that the replacement chairlift would not be installed until next season.

“We have encountered delays that have impacted our timelines.”

Monsour said that a new detachable quad chairlift is in the plans but “This will not be a full opening, rather a limited operation that will allow Saddleback skiers and families to return and enjoy the Mountain.”

For additional information, contact info@saddlebacklodge.com

Shawnee Peak – Located at 119 Mountain Road in Bridgton, the mountain has a 1,300 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one quad, two triples, one double chairlift and one carpet. There are seven green (easy) trails, 23 blue (intermediate) trails and 14 black diamond (difficult) trails. There are two terrain parks, glades and night skiing. Snowmaking covers 96 percent of the terrain. For additional information call 647-8444 or log onto shawneeppeak.com.

Sunday River – Located at 15 South Ridge Road in Newry, the mountain has a 2,340 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by one Chondola (part chair/part gondola), 4 high-speed quads, five quads, three triples, one double and one surface lift. There are six terrain parks, glades, night skiing and snow tubing. Snowmaking covers 96 percent of the terrain. The mountain has over 2,000 snow guns and 80 miles of snowmaking pipe. According to Darcy Lambert, Director of Communications at Sunday River, the resort is investing $4.7 million in improvements for the 2017-2018 winter season. There will also be improved snowmaking equipment, expanded outdoor restaurant seating and the launch of Dream Maker Lodge, part of Sunday River’s newest real estate development. Also new is the $2.2 million dollar Spruce Peak Triple Chair lift. It is a three-passenger fixed-grip chairlift that will replace the resort’s original Spruce Peak Triple and serve as the primary chairlift on Spruce Peak. This is the primary chairlift on Spruce Peak that interconnects Sunday River’s eight mountains that are noted for intermediate and advanced terrain.

The chairlift’s modern technology will shorten ride time from approximately 11 to eight minutes. For additional information call 1-800 543-2754 or log onto: sundayriver.com.

Titcomb Mountain – Located at 180 Ski Slope Road in West Farmington, the mountain has a 940 ft. vertical drop and is serviced by two T-bars and one handle tow. There are four green (easy) trails, five blue (intermediate) trails and six black diamond (difficult) trails. There is a terrain park, night skiing and snow tubing. Snowmaking covers 75 percent of the terrain. The mountain plans to host the U16 Nordic races, March 10-12, 2017. They will also have four Fridays in February as free skiing and riding. For additional information call 778-9031 or log onto titcombmountain.com

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Look to Rangeley for fun-filled winter days and evenings

BY VALERIE TUCKER
Correspondent

The western Maine town of Rangeley has packed the 2018 winter months with action that won’t strain family budgets.

SNODEO, CHILI & CHOWDER
From Jan. 18-20, the Rangeley Lakes Snowmobile Club will hold its annual Snodoxo celebration. The three-day event kicks off at 7 p.m. on Thursday with Casino Night at Bald Mountain Camps in Oquossoc. At 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Larry Koob will lead the annual Chili & Chowder Cook-off. For information or to buy tickets, contact the Champlain Club. For more information, call 864-5571.

LOPPETS & SNOWSHOES
The Rangeley Lakes Trails Center usually can count on an annual snowfall up to 200 inches. Their meticulously groomed Nordic skiing trails challenge novices to experts, and the facility continues to develop a growing network of scenic single-track trails for snowshoeing and biking. Winter events include Loppets, an interesting word for the uninitiated. The word originated in Scandinavia and refers to any long endurance race over varied terrain. RLTC director Beth Flynn said the facility will host a fat-tire bike Loppet on Jan. 28. The course will incorporate wide straightaways, gradual ascents and descents and some aggressive hill climbs and descents.

Spectators can enjoy the facility’s comfortable yurt lodge or watch competitions from points on the trail. On March 3, the RLTC will host the 23rd annual Rangeley Lakes Cross Country Ski Loppet for racers of all ages. Divisions include 25K and 50K-Free Style, 25K Classic, and 25K Touring. The staff takes great care to ensure the safety of all participants, as these Loppets do present endurance challenges, she said.

“We have plenty of support for those who might decide the full marathon is too much,” Flynn said. “We often see local participants out on the trails during the months prior to the race to build up strength and skills.”

On March 11, the RLTC will host the 9th Annual Rangeley Moose Dash Snowshoe Race, a shorter version of the ski and bike loppets over varied terrain. Age groups include 25K-Free Style, 25K Classic, and MTB. The staff takes great care to ensure the safety of all participants, as these Loppets do present endurance challenges, she said.

POND HOCKEY
From Feb. 2-4, the 11th Annual New England Pond Hockey Festival will be a weekend of socializing and competition for amateur hockey players, their friends and families and spectators. The event has grown, according to organizer Linda Sikes, because word has gotten out that it is such a great time and that all players bring their best. Volunteers build 12 rinks on Haley Pond. Each one is the 75’x150’-universal size, Sikes noted. Participants are organized into seven-member teams, each with four players and three standbys. Those arriving without a team are matched with players of equal ability. There are no “ringers,” she said.

“We’ve had one woman who skated in the Olympics, for example, so she played on the men’s team,” Sikes said.

According to Sikes, everyone comes to the festival to have fun, and she expects some very spirited competition in 2018. Some teams have played together for more than a generation. Others played in high school or college, and they travel from as far as Minnesota, California and British Columbia. Sikes said the weekend starts with a Friday welcoming gathering at the Rangeley Inn. Players will meet again at the Inn from 4-7 p.m. on Saturday to share the day’s stories and highlights. The winning team’s trophy remains on display at Sarge’s Restaurant and participants take home a
On January 18-20, thousands of competitors and visitors will come to Rangeley for the annual Snodeo. On Saturday afternoon, the Rave-X Outer Limits Tour freestyle show next to Boss Power Equipment on Main Street, always draws a crowd. At the airport, Rock Maple Racing’s Cross Country and Tame the Track Vintage Series.

On January 18, the 11th Annual New England Pond Hockey Festival brings amateur hockey players, their friends and families and spectators, to Haley Pond in Rangeley. Volunteers build 12 rinks on Haley Pond, and each one is the 75’x150’ universal size. Team registration (ends on Jan. 10).

The Rangeley Lakes Trails Center meticulously groomed Nordic skiing trails challenge novices to experts, and the facility continues to develop a growing network of scenic single-track trails for snowshoeing and biking.

Donations and funds raised will support the Rangeley Lakes Chamber of Commerce and the Rangeley Skating Club. As events and activities are finalized, they will be posted before the Winterpaloozah! Weekend. Check the Winterpaloozah! schedule on Facebook or the Rangeley Chamber of Commerce’s website at rangeleymaine.com for information; call 864-2771 or email Dexter at eco707@icloud.com.

Winterpaloozah!

On Feb. 18, Rangeley’s 3rd Annual Winterpaloozah! will be a day filled with fun outdoor activities, according to organizer Linda Dexter. Curling has become quite a popular sport in the area and people have generated enough interest to host a Bonspiel, a series of curling competitions that ends with a top-place championship team. Although the Winterpaloozah! organizers still are in the planning stages, they will offer fat-tire bike demos, ice golf, snow kiting, snowshoeing and a big campfire with marshmallows to toast.

“We’ll maybe have a barbecue going, with hamburgers and hot dogs,” Dexter said. “We’ll have hot chocolate, too.”

Another event will be kick-sledding, very common in Scandinavian countries and becoming more popular in the United States. The sled is usually a wooden chair mounted on the front of long runners. One person pushes with short rapid kicks, while the other rides. This type of sled is great exercise for winter enthusiasts and fun for children.

“Another event we’re thinking about is a keg pull for dogs. The dogs would be harnessed to pull something matched to their weight and size, and it could be a lot of fun,” Dexter said.

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Cure winter doldrums by taking a tour

BY KATE CONE
Correspondent

There comes a time, especially after the holidays, when snows pile up, wind whips, and Old Man Winter seems to be out to get you. “Cabin fever” doesn’t even begin to describe the feeling. And so many remedies: exercise, meditation, and all the et ceteras. And those are all okay. But an activity that combines movement with social interaction, food and drinks can’t be beat for shedding the winter blues.

Enter the Maine Brew Bus, the Growler Bus, Maine Foodie Tours and Wine Wise walking tours. There is also the Maine Beer Trail and the Maine Winery Trail, which are self-guided tours for when you want to go on your own and perhaps bring the under-21 folks. You can even tour individual breweries and wineries with a bit of planning ahead of time. The state of Maine is your winter playground, even if you don’t ski, own a snowmobile or go ice-fishing.

In its fifth year, the Maine Brew Bus is the granddaddy of vehicular organized tours. It is always at the top of TripAdvisor’s “best” list, and for good reason. They have brought 20,000 people to scores of breweries, wineries and craft spirit distilleries on Lenny the lime-green tour bus. Need was so great, Mabel, Lenny’s twin, was added to the fleet a few years ago. Most tours leave from the office on Commercial Street in Portland, and go all over southern Maine, including new breweries. Tour-goers often get to taste the beer before it has been poured and tasted by the public, giving them VIP status.

If you like basketball, there is the Hops and Hoops tour. In collaboration with the Maine Red Claws, the tour will leave from the Portland Expo before every Thursday and Friday home game. This 3:30 tour will bring guests to three local breweries, distilleries and/or wineries. Sampling the products is the whole point here, but then there is meeting the owners, your fellow tour-goers and learning about each business.

If north of Augusta is your desire, try Gene Beck’s Growler Bus. Gene, owner of Nocturnum Draft Haus in Bangor, decided to take his customers and beer-lovers out of the bar and onto the bus. In addition to touring the beer scene in the greater Bangor area, his tours include Acadia and the Midcoast. Some are season al trips, so check the website to see what’s on offer. The Growler bus also caters to company trips (think team-building over a brew), bachelor and bachelorette parties, college reunion or homecoming trips. You name it, a private event can be arranged. Water and snacks are provided on the bus and you’ll get a chance to show off your knowledge with beer trivia quizzes.

Craft beer lovers tend also to be fond of wine and spirits. Sommelier Erica Archer treats the ancient nectar of the gods seriously. Her foot tours of Portland include focused talks on certain types of wines, and she pairs them with foods, giving guests an opportunity to build their wine knowledge and tasting experiences.

Love oysters? Celebrate the new year with the New Year’s Eve Wine and Food Walk in Portland, featuring those luscious mollusks paired with appropriate wine. Her tours sell out fast, so hop on the website and get ticket as soon as you see a tour that appeals. In 2018, Archer will lead a group to Tuscany, Italy for six days of wine immersion. It’s a bit pricey, but this will also go quickly, as do the trips to Napa Valley and Burgundy, France. In season (not winter), Wine Wise can also take you sailing. But hunker down for now and enjoy the foot tours. And wear your Fitbit… these steps count.

On to food, more glorious food. In 2009 Pamela Laskey saw an opportunity to show off Maine’s burgeoning food scene by starting her own business and Maine Foodie Tours was born. And it paid off. Her company tops the TripAdvisor and Yelp review websites for excellence every year. And in 2017 Maine Foodie Tours was chosen by the Small Business Association as the Woman-Owned Business of the Year. For winter, you might choose the Old Port Culinary Walking Tour, led by history-loving guides who will trek with you to several iconic eateries. Samples are handed out (Dean’s Sweets gives out chocolates, you’ll hear mini-talks about the city’s history (the fire of 1866 wiped out most of the city, hence the brick buildings that came afterwards) and you’ll meet nice folks from all over the world.

It’s essential that you check the companies’ websites to purchase tickets ahead of time. All of them operate that way. And it doesn’t hurt to also “Like” their Facebook pages. You’ll hear about upcoming events and tours right in your social media feed. Don’t forget to suit up for the weather. Hats, gloves. You know the drill. It’s winter in Maine, after all.

Kate Cone is the author of “What’s Brewing in New England: A Guide to Brewpubs and Craft Breweries.”

Cure winter doldrums by taking a tour

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Want to wander wider? Try the Mass Brew Bus for Boston area and the ever-hot beverage and food scene.

Maine Foodie Tours ends the Old Port Culinary Tour at Gritty McDuff’s Brewpub, Maine’s first brewpub. Sample delicious brews as part of the package.
Dean's Sweets is a stop on the Maine Foodie Tour of the Old Port.

Maine Foodie Tours at Vervacious. Sample the many exotic spice blends and receive 10% off.

To do some touring on your own, check out the Maine Beer Trail, Maine Wine Trail and Distillers Guild. Print a map from their websites and travel around the state meeting the dedicated vintners, brewers and spirits-makers who have elevated the Maine beverage scene to great heights. In one fell swoop, visit a winery, brewery and distillery all in one location.

At Thompson's Point, Portland, visit Cellardoor Winery, Bissell Brothers Brewery and Stroudwater Distillery.

Food trucks will provide the noshes.

For information on tours:

- The Maine Brew Bus
  79 Commercial Street
  (Old Port Spirits)
  Portland, 200-9111
  www.themainebrewbus.com

- The Growler Bus
  At Nocturnem Draft Haus
  35 Broad Street
  Bangor, 307-6666
  www.thegrowlerbus.com

- Wine Wise
  207-619-4630
  www.winewiseevents.com

- Maine Foodie Tours
  227 Commercial Street
  Portland, 233-7485
  www.mainefoodietours.com

- Maine Beer Trail www.mainebrewersguild.org
- Maine Wine Trail www.mainewineryguild.com
- Maine Distillers Guild www.mainedistillersguild.org

To protect your pets this winter:

- Pets who spend a lot of time outdoors need more food in the winter because keeping warm depletes energy.
- No matter what the temperature is, windchill can threaten a pet’s life. Exposed skin on noses, ears and paw pads are at risk for frostbite and hypothermia during extreme cold snaps.
- Rock salt can irritate the pads of your pet's feet. Wipe all paws with a damp towel before your pet licks them.

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**PROTECT YOUR PETS THIS WINTER**

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Sanctuary: Providing one for birds enriches life

BY SUSAN VARNEY
Correspondent

What is sanctuary but a place of safety, a refuge. Birds seek an oasis as their habitat continues to shrink, especially in winter when the weather is unpredictable and food more difficult to find.

Providing a safe haven for migrating and non-migrating birds and other creatures adds beauty and entertainment to our lives. Getting to know the voice of the birds coming to the feeder is a challenge. The piercing call of the cardinal from the tree tops to the gentle chickadee seen of chickadees, nattering of the nut hatch, juncos, titmice, the cheeping of sparrows, wrens, and finches, the shrieking of blue jays, the mewing of cat birds, the warbling of warblers, cooing of the mourning doves. They all add to the color and interest of our environment.

There are any number of choices when it comes to bird feeders, from recycled milk jugs and soda bottles to wooden, glass and Lucite concoctions built to repel or resist squirrels. I have a friend who has several bird feeders and there is one that she devotes to squirrels set up away from the others.

Both birds and squirrels love neighborhoods without through traffic and with oak, pine, spruce, fir, yew, cedar, black walnut, butternut, apple, crabapple, mountain ash, birch, maple, and ash trees as well as dogwood and alder, hawthorn and rhododendron along with a natural source of water and few cats. Cats are a constant danger to birds, especially during breeding season when birds are busy feeding and rearing their young.

Planting shrubs and trees both evergreen and deciduous, give shelter, provide food and nest-building materials.

The local Agway has plenty of feeders to choose from - expensive as well as economical. Jon Smith, manager at Campbell’s Agway & True Value Hardware, on Garland Road in Winslow says, “If you start out with small and inexpensive, you learn it’s better to get something that will last longer or you will be replacing your feeder often.”

“The most popular feeder is medium sized, colorful and moderately priced,” said Smith. Most people have more than one feeder in order to attract more birds.

There are blue bird houses and purple martin houses and gourds as well as hummingbird feeders for next year. This is the time of year to think about providing for the birds passing through and the year-rounders. Squirrels are beautiful, entertaining and very clever. They can wipe out the birdseed in short order. They will go through all kinds of gyrations to defeat the squirrel bafflers, twirlers, skirts and feeders that shut down.

If you have a squirrel baffle skirt they will leap from a nearby tree; if you have a feeder that shuts the access holes under the weight of a squirrel, they will put a paw under the bar to keep the holes open; if you hang a feeder on a clothes line they will hang upside down to work their way to the feeder. The favorite food of squirrels and birds is “black oil sunflower seeds,” said Smith who offers 40-pound bags. The wild bird food mix has mixed grain, millet, corn and sunflower seeds. Finches like Nijer thistle seed, which needs its own feeder, either a sock or a fine mesh metal container. Campbell’s has a bulk birdseed area for those who wish to select and make their own mixes.

Campbell’s has four locations in central Maine: Farmingdale, Skowhegan, Madison and Winslow where they sell plants, trees, shrubs, landscape items, hardware items, canning items for the home preserver as well as bird feeders and food. Each store offers much the same merchandise and the Madison store also has lumber.

Longfellow’s Greenhouse in Manchester also has Droll Yankee bird feeders, a quality product offering a lifetime warranty on most products and recognized as one of the best.
The Quarry Road outdoor recreation area just two miles from downtown Waterville, has developed into a four-season recreation destination for all kinds of activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, biking, walking, hiking, running and paddling.

The facility also has a trail lighting system and a multi-purpose community building where regional events can be held. Events from cross-country ski competitions to winter carnivals and other festivals can be enjoyed throughout the year.

“We’re also reconfiguring, grading and banking several key corners of the competition trails,” said Dave MacLeay of the Friends of Quarry Road Board of Directors.

“We added more than a mile of new single tracks this summer,” he said.

MacLeay said that the Central Maine Ski Club is kicking off its 10th year of youth programming at Quarry Road. “High School and middle school teams start practice in November and December respectively, and the pre-k-through 8th grade after-school program will run January 3 through February 15. We’ll be hosting the Colby Carnival and several high school and middle school races.”

According to Matt Skehan, Director of Parks and Recreation, this facility is for people from all walks of life, ages and abilities to enjoy the outdoors with families and friends. The facility offers 10.4 km (6.5 miles) of world-class groomed Nordic ski trails and additional miles of backcountry snowshoe and hiking trails. Snowmaking helps to ensure an early start to the ski season and reliable snow conditions throughout the winter months.

Season passes are available and day ticket or a season pass is required for use of the groomed ski trails. No ticket is necessary to use the snowshoe trails or other ungroomed backcountry areas.

For additional information about Quarry Road Trails, call (207) 314-0258 or log onto quarryroad.org and centralmaineskiclub.org.

Quarry Road Recreation Area is owned and operated by the City of Waterville Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community Ski Free Days

For 2017-2018 we’ve spread free winter fun over three “community ski free” days throughout the winter. We hope that this means fewer lines and more fun for everyone.

Saturday, December 16: Free Skiing and Learn-to-Ski Clinic. Free day passes, free equipment demos, and free lessons available to all. If you’ve never skied, or are new to the sport, this is a great way to get started.

Saturday, January 27: Community Ski Free Day. Ski free with your own equipment; rental equipment available at reasonable rates. Free snowshoes to use.

Sunday, February 19: Winter Fun Day. Celebrate the Great Maine Outdoor Weekend with a full day of fun winter activities and free access to the ski trails. Ski free with your own equipment; rental equipment available.

Community Ski Free days are hosted by Waterville Parks & Recreation in collaboration with Friends of Quarry Road, Central Maine Ski Club, Central Maine NEMBA, and Kennebec Messalonskee Trails.

Many local businesses and organizations provide sponsorship support and dozens of volunteers for this community event.

Thanks especially to our 2017 season sponsors: Central Maine Motors, Inland Hospital, Kennebec Federal Savings, MaineGeneral Health, Wallace Events, Fortin’s Home Furnishings, Marden’s Surplus & Salvage, and Sappi North America.

If you’re interested in helping out, please call 680-4744 or email volunteer@quarryroad.org.
Ski helmets are more than just a brain saver

BY DAN CASSIDY
Ski Tracks Columnist

Ski helmets have been around for more than 20 or 30 years now. I remember my first time trying one on at Sugarloaf Mountain. There was a demo vendor tent with several “lids” on a table. They all looked the same, black, kind of cold and boring looking. But I had been toying with the idea that I should at least try one on.

That day changed everything. Although I found it a little cumbersome, just maybe I could get used to it. That was then, this is now … I’ve been wearing one ever since that cold day on the mountain. It didn’t take long to get comfortable wearing it, especially after I bought a head liner, a polar fleece type hat that covered my head, chin and neck.

That day changed the way I skied. Since then, I have taken several falls on trails where if I had not been wearing a helmet, I most likely wouldn’t be skiing today. It took several falls, one while taking a snowboard lesson, and a couple headshot falls on icy slopes that made me a believer of helmet safety. I now sign off my ski columns with: Ski and ride safely. Use your head and don’t forget to wear a helmet.

That same year, I traveled out to Lake Tahoe, California to ski some of the High Sierras for a week. The snow was deep, the weather was sometimes snowy and other times just fantastic. While standing in the lift lines, which were six to eight skiers wide and about 50 to 60 deep, I overhear some skiers making comments about the “lid” on my head and making subtle remarks about the “Space Cadet.” At the time, these California dudes were either wearing bandanas, baseball hats or letting their goldilocks wave in the wind, having nothing protecting their heads.

That was then, this is now … there hardly is a skier or snowboarder on the slopes anywhere today who is not wearing a helmet. This may be because there have been some high-profile celebrity deaths such as Sony Bono at Heavenly, Michael Kennedy at Aspen and actress Natasha Richardson at Mont Tremblant. Those skiers were not wearing a ski helmet. One of them was in fact tossing a football when he crashed into a tree, while another was reportedly skiing too fast.

Helmet policy at Maine Ski resorts
Sugarloaf’s General Manager recently spoke about a new policy at all Boyne resorts that requires all employees who work outside during winter months to wear a helmet as part of their uniform. Last season a Sugarloaf employee died after falling and hitting his head while preparing a ski competition course. He was not wearing a helmet at the time.

A helmet isn’t going to prevent all deaths, but they can prevent some fatal accidents on the slopes.

Other things that can be done to prevent ski accidents:
• Take ski lessons by a certified instructor.
• Make sure your equipment, (bindings) are properly adjusted and that your settings are correct for your weight, height and ability.
• Ski within your ability.
• Always wear a helmet, always stay in control, do not stop where you will obstruct a trail, stay off closed trails, do not go out of bounds and make sure you know how to load and unload lifts.
• Know the Skier’s Responsibility Code. These are important rules that are essential to safety on the slopes.
• Do not drink alcohol while skiing and riding. There will be plenty of time after a day on the slopes.

Choosing a Helmet
When considering a helmet, spend some time checking out several. Talk with a store employee about helmets and try several on. When trying them on, bring a helmet polar fleece liner, goggles, eyeglasses and earphone buds if you’re going to be using them. Make sure the helmet is comfortable on your head.

Some helmets have features that can be adjusted with changing weather. If it’s very cold or warm, there are vents that can be opened or closed. Some helmets have ear covers that can be removed.

Ski and ride safely. Use your head and don’t forget to wear a helmet.
Less light in winter can trigger symptoms of depression

BY WANDA CURTIS
Correspondent

With winter approaching and the days getting shorter, many people will soon experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). The medical director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for Maine General Health System Dr. Robert Croswell said that SAD is a type of depression which is most common in northern climates. He said that it comes on predictably every year around the time of the autumnal equinox, or within the next few weeks. He explained that with individual patients the syndrome begins within about 2 weeks of the same date every year.

“Symptoms of seasonal affective disorder could almost be likened to a human hibernation syndrome,” said Croswell. “Typically the sufferer experiences a loss of interest in usual activities, low energy level, excessive sleep and oftentimes weight gain. Symptoms can vary in severity from a mild case with minimal impairment in function, to severe cases which can result in significant incapacity in handling activities of daily living, family responsibilities or employment. In selected cases, the functional impairment or associated suicidal preoccupation can be so severe as to require inpatient psychiatric hospitalization.”

According to Croswell, the classic treatment for SAD is phototherapy. He said that “light boxes” can be purchased at medical supply stores and provide a certain type of light (10,000 lux) which is most effective when used during early morning hours just before dawn.

He said that it’s important for the user to be within a 10-foot radius of the light and to have their eyes open.

“Oftentimes people like to have the light on while they fix breakfast or read the newspaper,” said Croswell. “People generally start using the light approximately the first of October in the northern hemisphere, and stop using it approximately the first of April, when spring arrives. It appears that the artificial sunlight tricks the body’s pineal gland into acting as though winter is not upon us, therefore the urge to hibernate is mitigated.”

Crosowell said that it’s also important to remain active during the winter months, especially in outdoor activities like cross-country skiing, walking, or snowmobiling. He said that both the physical activity and exposure to sunlight can help to prevent the symptoms of SAD.

In more severe cases, Croswell said that it may be necessary to prescribe an antidepressant, particularly one that can stimulate activity such as Bupropion. He said that the use of medication should be initiated and monitored by a medical practitioner.

Family nurse practitioner Holly Desmarais, who treats SAD patients at Inland Family Care in Oakland, said that it’s also important to practice good sleep hygiene. She said that involving establishing routines which facilitate the ability to sleep better such as going to bed at the same time each night, sleeping in a cool dark room, getting stress and/or worries off your mind. She said that it’s also important to limit exposure to blue light from cell phones, computers, and TV about two hours before bedtime.

“These things help your mind and body get ready for sleep,” said Desmarais. “Limiting blue light allows your brain to recognize it’s time to sleep—lights confuse circadian rhythm affecting rest and sleep.”

Desmarais also stressed the importance of exercise. She said that exercising not only helps a person to sleep better but it also causes their body to produce chemicals which improve their mood.

“It causes our body to produce endorphins which help us feel happier and better,” Desmarais said.
Two businesses with decades of experience say they can help both experienced and novice snowmobile owners keep their sleds in tip-top shape and trouble-free.

Today’s sleds are tailored for a variety of needs, whether for long tours, rugged terrains, utility work or easy local trips. These sleds are a big investment, so maintenance is the key to extending the machine’s life and having safer and more enjoyable adventures. Also, a clean rust-free sled in top mechanical condition will have a higher resale value.

Keeping a snowmobile in good working order isn’t that difficult, according to Central Maine Power Sports owner Craig Anderson. His Lewiston business carries new and used Yamaha, Polaris and Honda machines, accessories and clothing. He and his well-trained staff advise customers to follow a few simple tips to keep the machine in good mechanical condition. To take that effort a step further, he hosts popular and free Garage Party gatherings for customers and the public.

“Our events are publicized as “everyone’s invited,” but our customer base gets a personal invitation through email or by telephone,” Anderson said.

For more information about Central Maine Power Sports, visit their store at 845 Main Street in Lewiston, call 689-234, and visit centralmainepowersports.com or their Facebook page. They are open weekdays from 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m. and from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays.

Further north, Doreen and Dave Jones of Jackman PowerSports agree that regular maintenance is the key to a snowmobile’s long and trouble-free life. They carry a full line of Arctic Cat, Polaris, Ski-Doo, and Yamaha snowmobiles and ATVs, and they know that maintenance can be easy to forget or overlook.

“Whether the owner does the service or hires us to do it, we stress following a regular schedule,” said Doreen.

Regularly check components that could be more subject to wear and tear and cause breakdowns that can ruin any day’s ride. Check bolts and fasteners and clean the clutches regularly. The company also offers to do the break-in routine for new machines and rebuilds old machines. Even a simple tune-up can make a sled run more smoothly and efficiently. Even though winter is a challenge, washing the sled regularly will prevent rust and corrosion.

“We have a full service department and can find parts for most machines,” she said. “With our new heated storage building, we can have customers’ sleds serviced and waiting for them when they are ready to ride.”

The snowmobile manufacturers frequently offer steep discounts, so she suggests checking jackmanpowersports.com regularly for the latest closeouts and discounts. They also carry high-quality tow-behind toboggans for pulling gear on camping and ice fishing excursions, which can mean making one less trip back to the car or truck on an outing.

“We are the only elite dealer for Equinox Boggans and trailers,” Jones said. “We also carry Mission trailers, which are extremely well-made and very popular.”

They also carry a line of high-quality Klim outdoor clothing for men, women and youth. The company is on 549 Main Street/Route 201 in Jackman and is open 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Until March 31, they also will be open from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on Sundays. Call (800) 287-7669, 668-4442 or visit jackmanpowersports.com and their Facebook page.
How to keep pets safe in winter weather

The arrival of cooler temperatures sparks various changes. Chilly air and precipitation can be dangerous, especially to pets that are unaccustomed to extreme changes in temperature. Pet owners may be well aware of the hazards of warm weather, including the threat of leaving pets in hot cars. But cold weather also has its share of risks. Heed these tips to keep pets safe and secure.

• Schedule a well visit. The American Veterinary Medical Association suggests scheduling a visit with a veterinarian to check for any medical issues. Cold weather can aggravate symptoms of certain conditions, such as arthritis. A thorough examination can shed light on potential problems.

• Keep homes humidified. Going in and out of the house and moving from cold air to dry indoor heat can affect pets’ skin. Itching and flaking may result, causing pets to scratch at such areas. Maintain humidity in the home for comfort. The ASPCA also says to reduce bathing to help preserve essential oils on the skin.

• Protect paws outdoors. Pet paws are sensitive to sand, ice, snow, and chemical ice melts. Massage petroleum jelly or another protectant onto paw pads, or consider the use of pet booties.

• Keep pets indoors more often. Pets should not remain outdoors for long stretches of time in frigid temperatures, even if they are accustomed to roaming during other seasons, advises The Humane Society of the United States.

• Provide options for sleeping. Come the winter, cats and dogs may need new sleep spaces to avoid drafts and stay warm. Give them other spots they can call their own.

• Consider a sweater or vest. Some pets are more tolerant to the cold than others. However, some dogs and cats may benefit from a sweater, vest or coat designed for pets to offer a little more insulation.

• Update identification and contact information. Snow and ice can mask scent cues that help pets find their way home. Update contact information and make sure pets’ collars are on tightly.

• Keep coolant and antifreeze locked away. Coolant and antifreeze are lethal to dogs and cats and should be kept out of reach. Clean up any spills from vehicles promptly.

• Provide fresh food and water. Pets may burn more calories trying to stay warm. Be sure the animal has a little extra food and plenty of water to stay sated and hydrated.

Winter weather requires pets owners to make changes so pets can remain happy and safe.
Toad in the Hole — an old English classic

BY SUSAN VARNEY
Correspondent

I don’t go out much, especially in winter. I like to cook. I love being home surrounded by the river, books, artwork, friends (yes, I have a couple who have liked and put up with me for years), and neighbors in my little dead end neighborhood. My heartwaves are aroused by books, films, food, Martinis shaken not stirred, rivers and crows . . . I have two large projects: family genealogy and compiling my favorite recipes, which includes converting family favorites to gluten-free.

Do you think maybe some of the food we are told is safe really isn’t? Like GMOs and conventionally grown fruits and vegetables doused with Round-up and other terribly toxic chemicals. I’ve always posited that if what you are using to kill other creatures, weeds and undesirables is probably moving up the food chain killing off the rest of the planet including us at the top. And some think we don’t need the EPA.

Growing up on a farm I loved the woods, fields, crops and creatures and have always thought of myself as a farmer even when living in the city and farming in pots, planters, window boxes and tiny plots of once lawns. My younger brother got the farm, he was the boy after all, I got out and explored the world.

Give me wild flowers mixed with the kale and cabbages, irises with the zucchini, pole beans and peppermint, lettuces and sunflowers . . . Violets and pear trees, peppermint, lettuces and sunflowers . . . I run out of space to grow herbs like parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme. What I can’t grow I have to pile pots about for fiddlehead ferns and apple trees, flowers . . . Violets and pear trees, peaches and bee balm, garlic and thyme . . . I have two large projects: family genealogy and compiling my favorite recipes, which includes converting family favorites to gluten-free.

TOAD IN THE HOLE

4 sausages, cooked
1 c. Bob’s Red Mill 1-to-1 Gluten-Free Flour
3-4 large eggs
1 1/4 c. milk
2 tbsp. oil
Salt & pepper
• Preheat oven to 400° F.

Cook sausage, remove from pan and keep warm.

Use 2 tbsp. oil in pan or divided skillet and heat in oven 5 minutes.

• Meanwhile, beat eggs 30 seconds with mixer. Add milk, beat 15 seconds.

• Add Flour, salt & pepper, beat 2 minutes, until smooth.

• Pour batter over hot drippings in pan and add sausages.

• Bake about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile prepare onion gravy.

Onion Gravy
2 Tbsp. butter
1 onion, chopped
2 tbsp. Bob’s Red Mill gluten-free 1-to-1 flour
1 c. chicken, beef or vegetable stock
Salt and pepper

Fresh thyme

Heat 2 tbsp. Butter in skillet. Add onion, sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cook onions until starting to brown, about 10 minutes. Stir in flour and mix on low heat until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add stock. Whisk and simmer until gravy is smooth and thick, about 2 minutes. Keep warm and serve with Toad in the Hole hot from the oven.

Garnish with fresh thyme.

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Prepare vehicles for harsh weather

As the seasons change, motorists must take steps to safeguard their vehicles, especially when the season changes from fall to winter. Each winter, many vehicles are subjected to sub-zero temperatures, snowfall and icy roads, and such conditions can take their toll on vehicles over time. Taking steps to prepare vehicles for winter weather is a vital step that can make cars and trucks safer for drivers and their passengers.

Battery
Old batteries should be replaced before winter begins. Without a strong, properly functioning battery, engines cannot turn over. Most batteries last between three and five years. However, extreme cold can compromise batteries, especially those that have been around awhile. Batteries are made up of acid and water, and cold temperatures can freeze the water, thereby affecting battery performance. According to AAA’s Automotive Research Center, at 32°F the average battery loses 35 percent of its strength.

Newer batteries can be protected by starting the vehicle each day to warm up and recharge the battery. Let the car run for at least 10 minutes if you cannot take an extended drive.

Exterior maintenance
Keeping a car waxed and sealed can help maintain a durable exterior finish. This includes not only the paint, but the rubber and vinyl parts of the car’s exterior.

Winter is a good time to switch to a heavy-duty synthetic wax that can shield against water and road salts. High-quality sealants can be used on bumpers, trim and rubber door seals as added protection. Speak with an automotive retailer or even the car dealership if you are unsure which products will make your car’s parts most durable for winter weather.

Do not stop washing your car just because the weather is cold. Shiny, wet roads and snow-melting salts can speed up the formation of rust or other decay on the undercarriage of the vehicle. These materials will need to be periodically cleaned off. Flush the underside of the vehicle whenever possible, taking advantage of any dry, slightly warmer days.

Tire pressure
According to the automotive retailer Pep Boys, vehicle tires lose a pound of air pressure for every 10-degree drop in temperature. Many modern cars will alert to changes in air pressure, and drivers should be diligent in maintaining the proper tire pressure. Fuel economy as well as handling ability can decline when tires are not inflated properly.

Tires can be refilled at many gas stations for little cost. Wipers
Visibility is key in hazardous weather conditions, and keeping the windshield clean is a priority. This means ensuring there is enough windshield wiper fluid in the car and that it is a product that will not freeze. Wiper blades can freeze and crack in the winter. Older blades may be more susceptible to damage. It’s a worthy investment to replace existing wiper blades at the start of each winter. When vehicles are parked, pull the wipers off of the windshield to safeguard them from sticking and cracking.

Cold weather requires drivers to amp up their vehicle maintenance routines. Consult with a mechanic or automotive retailer for more ideas and products that can help your vehicles operate safely and efficiently this winter.
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