

Skiing at Eldora

A novice doesn't have to drive too far to learn the slopes

BY FELIX WONG

For Fort Collins Now

It only took one green ski run—all 30 seconds worth—to confirm what I had suspected all along. Skiing is not like riding a bike, and in the three years since I had last been at a downhill resort, I had forgotten how to ski.

"Phew," I sighed at the bottom. Actually, I muttered some other four-letter word. Although I somehow managed to stay upright during that run, my marginal turning and braking skills meant that I had just descended the hill the "fast way," as in the straight-as-an-arrow approach. By the time I had come to a stop, my heart was thumping like a drum and my palms had broken out in a cold sweat. It took another minute for my labored breathing to slow down and for adrenaline levels to return to normal.

It turned out to be a good idea, then, to come to the Eldora Mountain Resort to fine-tune (OK, relearn) my ski skills before I hit the backcountry to do some alpine touring later in the season. Eldora—in Nederland west of Boulder—is the closest downhill ski resort to Fort Collins at about 75 miles southwest. The drive is fairly straightforward going down Interstate 25 and the Diagonal Highway until Colo. 119 past Boulder, where the road winds through a steep, narrow canyon with curves galore. It's a great drive for sports cars in the summer, but a white-knuckled affair in frigid temperatures when snow and ice pose a threat.

At least there is an inexpensive, less terrifying way to get to Eldora—taking the RTD bus from Walnut and 14th Street in Boulder to the resort's main lodge. A ride is \$3.75 and buses run roughly every two hours.

After I arrived at Eldora and purchased a lift ticket (\$59 for a full-day adult ticket when purchased on site or \$51 from Safeway or King Soopers), I noted that because I had arrived at Eldora on a weekday, the crowds were pretty sparse. This was good for me as it meant fewer people to evade while going down the slopes.

Eldora has a Nordic Center for cross-country skiing and about 10 green (easiest), 28 blue (intermediate), nine black (difficult) and eight

double diamond (most difficult) downhill routes. Being a novice, I was perfectly content with sticking with the green routes that had names such as Easyway, Snail, Foxtail, Bunnyfair, and Ho Hum.

My first ski run, as I mentioned, was anything but ho-hum—even if I managed to stay vertical. After that, I decided the first thing I should work on was speed control. "Plow, plow, plow" became my mantra—especially since I wasn't very good at turning yet—as I descended with the skis pointed inwards like a wedge.

After my first dozen runs, I decided to work on parallel turns. Keeping my knees bent and the skis perfectly aligned about six inches apart, I began transferring pressure to the outside ski for the turn—and promptly fell on my butt. I got up, skied another 200 feet and successfully did something resembling an S-turn before succumbing to a game of chicken with a rapidly approaching tree, in which the tree won as I strategically took a fall at the very last second.

"Are you all right?" yelled out another skier who had the fortune to witness my out-of-control antics right in front of her.

"Great," I replied, adding under my breath, "no bruises inflicted except to the ego."

The rest of the day was mellower as it became later in the afternoon, the temperatures dipped, and the crowds thinned out further. Snow began to fall lightly, adding to the tranquil atmosphere. Perhaps as a result of being more relaxed, I did no more butt-plants into the snow and began turning at least as well as a shopping cart with three freely pivoting wheels.

I wrapped up the day after my 21st run wearing a grin of contentment, having enjoyed a day's worth of fluffy white powder along with the satisfaction of remembering how to ski after all. This is not to say my ski skills couldn't use a little more "fine-tuning" before I hit the blue runs or the backcountry. At least with the close proximity of Eldora and its reasonable prices, it will be possible to practice, practice, practice. ❄️

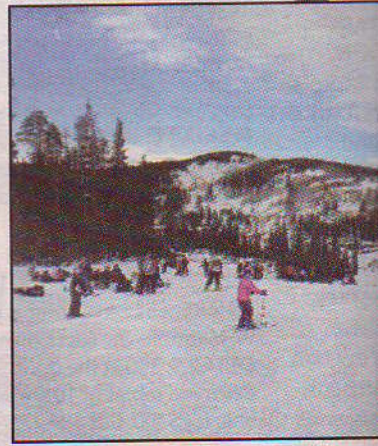
Felix Wong is an avid outdoors enthusiast in Fort Collins. His personal blog is at felixwong.com and he can be reached at fcn@felixwong.com. More information about Eldora Mountain Resort is at <http://eldora.com>.



Skiers at the base of the Bunnyfair ski run at Eldora Mountain Resort.



Skiers coming down the Ho Hum ski run at Eldora Mountain Resort.



Skiers coming down the Ho Hum ski run at Eldora Mountain Resort.