

Whitefish Trip

February 21-28, 2020

Early Friday morning, 34 Great folks from the Jacksonville Ski Club (JSC) travelled to Whitefish, Montana to join over 200 more from five other Florida ski clubs. The JAX airport was sparsely populated, so no check-in problems were encountered. We flew on United Airlines into Denver and then on to Kalispell, with an on-time arrival in mid-afternoon. At the airport, our lodge representatives met us, handed out room tags by our name to put on our bags, and proceeded to deliver our bags directly to our rooms. We then boarded a bus for the approximately 30-minute ride to the Lodge. In transit, we made a brief stop for groceries/liquor.

Our destination was the Lodge at Whitefish Lake (LWL), a four-diamond resort consisting of hotel rooms and 2- and 3-bedroom condos. The condos had a beautiful view of the neighboring Whitefish Lake, while many of the hotel rooms overlooked a backyard forest. The lodge was a short 15-minute ride to the mountain and 5 minutes into town. Upon arrival at the Lodge, room keys, name badges and lift tickets were handed out, and for some, there was time to rent equipment. At the end of this long day, JSC hosted a welcome pizza party for our weary travelers.

Saturday was the first day of our ski week, and as was typical, one could choose to ride on either a hotel shuttle or the free city "SNOW" bus which alternated about every 15 minutes during the morning and afternoon rush periods. Other times were less defined, but collectively they increased the routes to accommodate the Florida crowd. The mountain greeted us with an 11-foot base of packed powder, and would ultimately add more, almost daily. Daily offerings for this and all days included morning meeting locations, twice daily free mountain tours, and an optional meeting location for lunch that changed locations during the week. Closing out day one for our club was a group JSC dinner at Loula's Café where the restaurant was reserved only for us, and finished with their famous Huckleberry Pie.

Sunday provided spectacular weather so the 360-degree views could be enjoyed from the top of the mountain. Some of these views included vistas of nearby Glacier National Park. Since the LWL was where most Florida clubs were staying, the first of club gatherings was held with a complimentary open bar for one hour, and representatives of the lodge, the mountain, and various vendors were present.

Wow! Mother Nature blessed us with 6 inches of delightful, fresh light powder, and full variety of smiles for Monday. And, like all week, we had moderate winter temperatures with the lows typically in the 20's and highs typically in the 30's. Evening brought the first of the Florida Ski Council (FSC) events which was a "Get Acquainted Dinner and Party". The dinner was a Southern Fiesta Buffet, and a DJ provided the music.

Double Wow!! Another 6-inch storm hit to put the cherry on top of super conditions. As if this wasn't festive enough, the FSC had scheduled the annual "Crazy Hat and Boxer Short Day", the

FSC Fun Race and finally an on-mountain lunch at Ed & Mully's. The fun race, as the name implies required tossing a hula-hoop at a target, doing a ring toss on Florida's Flamingos, and the like. Definitely focused on fun. Don't forget, the summit elevation is just over 6800 feet, translation... adjustment to altitude is a lot easier to Floridians and there's more fun potential.

Wednesday was an open day for scheduled events but that doesn't mean all was quiet. Every day at the Lodge, S'Mores were provided in the evening, nightly movies were shown, and live music was happening in the lounge. And, of course, downtown was a quick 5-minute ride to great restaurants, gift shops, and browsing opportunities. By the way, the snow and skiing remained great with additional dustings. Some folks took advantage of a very informative tour of Glacier National Park and the surrounding area.

Thursday was our last day on the mountain, and low cloud cover was not going to deter us from the fun. Superb snow conditions remained. This was a hurried day for JSC as we had to get off the mountain early enough to pack and get our big bags into the hallway by 6:30 for transport to the airport. That was followed by the second FSC Buffet and Party. This was a themed party where all participants were encouraged to dress in White (for Whitefish). Creative costumes were awarded with prizes. The buffet dinner was an Italian Menu and like earlier in the week, was delicious. Awards for the Fun Race were also presented at this event. Once again, a DJ provided the lively music.

Bummer Friday is the day when we headed home. It started with a 4 AM departure from the lodge, and an extraordinarily long layover in Denver due to the airline changing our flights. That would not dampen the happy glow that our travelers had from a wonderful, weather blessed and snow-filled week, complemented by great local activities.

We were proud to team up with a great planning group from the FSC, a super tour operator, over-the-top wonderful (and committed) lodge and mountain representatives, super staff at every turn, and down-to-earth, nice local folks. Unforgettable lifetime memories are here to stay.

Trip leaders,

Sonia Cardoos and Gary Smolen