

HIDDEN SCHweitzer



PHOTO BY WOODS WHEATCROFT

“Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look beyond the Ranges – Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!” Kipling’s poem “The Explorer,” goes like that, and it’s what came to mind when the editor said, “Tell us about ‘the hidden Schweitzer.’ You know ... secret places you have to ski Schweitzer at least 10 years to find.”

Yes, I do know. But the trouble with secrets is in the telling. They dissolve then into common knowledge and leave the sanctuary of inner hearing for the wider world where everyone knows them. Like a famous recluse come to public life, they lose their mystery and, thereby, their appeal. And the likelihood of first tracks decreases in indirect proportion to my chances of losing friends for giving up their stashes.

Schweitzer has plenty of hidden places. An area as big and

diverse as our mountain has as many hidden gems as it has acres, 2,500 or so. Each has its own fall line, exposure, slope. Many contain some small spot a Schweitzerite considers theirs, a line through the trees in the Schweitzer Bowl, a four-turn stash to the right of Kaniksu, a tiny clearing in the Outback Bowl that guarantees privacy to anyone intrepid enough to ski the line required to get there. But the keys to the mountain are not easily gained, and once acquired, they are closely held.

Ask the holders of these secrets to share, and it is as if you have asked them to bring their firstborn to the altar. They shuffle, jive and dive for cover, stutter, sputter and finally tell something else completely. In a recent survey of Schweitzerites, no speck of information regarding terrain was willingly provided. But they all wanted to tell something, so each gave a clue, directions to deeper truths – and deeper powder – that can be divined only by dwelling in their presence, moving through them, visiting them again and again. Like 10 or 15 or 30 years in a row. These clues give the uninitiated an opportunity to learn to see, and thereby find, the smaller lines that hide among the larger lines anyone can find.

So, we will go about this creatively and tell without telling. If you wish to ski between the lines, snowhopper, and find a place to call your own, you must read between the lines.

We will begin with a sibylline clue provided by Schweitzer Snowboard School head Caleb Carlson. “To ski at Schweitzer,” he said, “you must remember that skiing is a sport and not an amusement park ride.” Translation? The best skiing on the mountain is not accessed by the biggest, fastest, fanciest lifts. Slow old Snow Ghost, née Chair 6, leads to my favorite terrain on the mountain. Carlson also confessed that the most vertical for the minute is the ride from Midway to the top of Chair One. This is about the clearest clue I can give and still face my friend.

Leila Olson, who has skied between the lines at Schweitzer for 22 years, had a secret that is not so much to do with any certain place as with how to get there. “Look where you want to go,” she says. “Look at the holes between the trees, not the

By Sandy Compton

they all wanted to tell something, so each gave a clue, directions to deeper truths and deeper powder that can be divined only by dwelling in their presence

trees themselves.”

If you apply Leila’s secret, you will stop running into trees ... and small marvels of hidden terrain will be revealed. For instance, for a little downhill delight in the Outback Bowl, look right through the trees at Tower 19.

Leila’s husband John, who is a ski patrolman and has skied Schweitzer since season passes were \$50, told me his clue after waiting and watching me flounder down Stiles a few years ago, instead of just skiing off in disgust. For free, he gave me Olson’s

secret, Steve. Sundance, first major run to the right as you get off the Quad, sticks out like a sore thumb. Steve’s is good advice for a rider looking for some ungroomed practice with a sweet reward at the end. But turn right before the lesson begins or just after, and your reward may start early, especially on a powder day.

I did get a good secret out of dentist Phil Gervais. I asked while I was in the chair and had no chance to interrupt him. He told me that the last, best spots on an otherwise skied-out day are found by skiing with an 11-year-old, tapping into the web of



PHOTO BY DOUG MARSHALL



PHOTO BY WOODS WHEATCROFT

Wondrous 19-Word Ski Lesson: “Compton,” he growled, “if you don’t get your hands out in front of you, I’m going to kick you in the butt.”

“Compton” does not count as one of the words.

Keeping my hands out in front of me has served me well, and I now love being left on Stiles, especially on a spring day when the snow is creamy and the sky is blue.

Many had hints similar to Leila’s and John’s. Steven Schultz, artist and 15-year Schweitzer vet, said, “Sundance is my secret. The upper half is a lesson, the lower half is pure fun.” Some

knowledge that permeates that age group.

“Be prepared to go through tiny holes in the trees,” Phil said. “They’re not afraid to go anywhere.”

I knew this. Skiing with my then-11-year-old nephew Jonathan, I discovered hidden lines left in the Outback Bowl on Snow Ghost and Kathy’s Yard Sale and one right beside No Joke that we named Something Stupid, as in “Let’s go do Something Stupid.” It’s our little secret. And now, you know, too.

Photographer David Marx just looked at me in horror when I asked, but his wife Cindy said, “Turn off your cell phone.”

http://sandpointonline.com

Good idea. Better yet, leave it in the locker. It's hard to watch for little stashes from the chair if you are talking to the office. If you came to go skiing, go skiing. The world will wait while you are looking right or staring straight ahead at the top of Sunny Side Chair.

And here are my own clues. Go north, young skier, or 'boarder, and have fun. On a mountain as big as Schweitzer, even on a crowded day, there is always a place to be alone with the snow.

Learn geography. Where is Siberia? Learn your alphabet. Where is A, B, C and D? Remove yourself from the madding crowds. Mondays and Thursdays, and the days in between, you can own the mountain. Make friends with a Primetimer, one of those 55-and-over folk who ski their age every year. This is like skiing with an 11-year-old with 35 years of experience. Elwood Werry is 70-plus, yet he led me right down Gladiater and taught me to ski with my hands in the praying position, so as to part the branches in front of my face.

If you came into this thinking it would be easy information, snowhopper, it pleases me that you have come this far. Skiing is not a spectator sport any more than it is an amusement park ride. If you

want to know, you have to go. The opportunity to make part of the mountain your own is also the opportunity

to learn who you are. It is in discovery that we discover ourselves.

Last clue: Don't leave your explorer in the parking lot. Get a trail map. Study it. Schweitzer has a great guide, and some secrets are no secret after all. Hidden places practically scream to be found. You only need to know they are there.

"Something hidden. Go and find it. Something lost behind the Ranges. Over yonder! Go you there!" ❄

Sandy Compton, who skis better than most poets and knows better than to give up his stashes directly, is happy to go exploring with anybody. His book, Jason's Passage is available online at www.sandpointonline.com.

be prepared to go through tiny holes in the trees. they're not afraid to go anywhere

PHOTO BY WOODS WHEATCROFT

secrets of the après-ski

In the Schweitzer Village, with lifts rising to the sky, and restaurants, shops and lodging just through the doors in the Selkirk Lodge, Lakeview Lodge and the White Pine, it seems all you need for a great time is right there. But hidden around are many things to expand your experience on the mountain.

Just down hill at 230 Northwest Passage is **The St. Bernard** with Chef Elissa Robbins, purveyor of fresh seafood, steaks and special entrées Thursday through Sunday, beginning when the lifts close.

In the Lazier Building, **Thor's Pizza** serves killer Italian pies and a big variety of brews beginning at lunchtime.

Also in the Lazier Building, the **Alpine**

Shop and **Groundzero** offer equipment, clothing, repair and good advice about good riding.

In a small building at the top of the Quad, Kirk Johnson and **The Source** offer demos on fine Rossignol skis for just \$10. Ski them to believe them.

All About Adventures fun guru Ken Barrett also waits at the top of the Quad with his

snowmobiles, ready to show riders the backcountry that runs up to the ski area boundary. www.allaboutadventures.com

Schweitzer also has an extensive series of cross-country trails that begin in the Village, ready for skate skiing and slide-and-glide. Or you can trek on the snowshoe trail on some high-tech snowshoes. Rent them from The Source if you don't have your own pair. www.schweitzer.com

And last, but hardly least, there is **Sandpoint**, that not-so-hidden gem at the bottom of the hill, where lodging, restaurants and shops abound, including Coldwater Creek's flagship store. Call the Sandpoint Chamber at 263-2161, or check the listings in the *Travel Planner* pages 35-45. ❄