

Tahoe Tales

21-23 February and 22-25 March 2009

Lake Tahoe, California

Sierra Springtime



Gordon, Emily, Julian Claudino and Jody skiing at Northstar at Tahoe on March 23.

For our family, the biggest ski season in years

It's been so long that we don't remember how long ago it was. Maybe five years, maybe more.

But this spring is the first time in a long time that Emily, Gordon and I have taken several days off to ski together. We've done a lot of eight-hour roundtrips to

Tahoe to squeeze in a day on the slopes. Sometimes we'll spend a night near the mountains on the way up to get a day of skiing in.

But this week – Gordon's spring break – we strung together three straight days
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The biggest ski season in years for our family

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with our friend David Claudino and his son Julian from Palo Alto for one of those ski trips where, at the end of the day, we all sit around in our longjohns talking about our favorite runs in front of the condo fireplace rather than stuffing gear into the back of the SUV for the drive to San Jose.

We needed it, and we had fun, staying and skiing at Northstar, a nice ski area just outside the town of Truckee.

Gordon also had a ski weekend earlier this season at Tahoe because it's just a couple of hours from UC Davis, and he may squeeze in one more in April.

I also made a trip in February when a friend, Tom Mertens, included me in the group of guys he invites each winter up to his Rubicon Bay cabin on Tahoe's California side. On that trip we skied at Homewood Ski Area right on the shore of the lake.

Snow and skiing have always been an important part of our family life. Emily and I honeymooned at Lake Tahoe in February 1984.

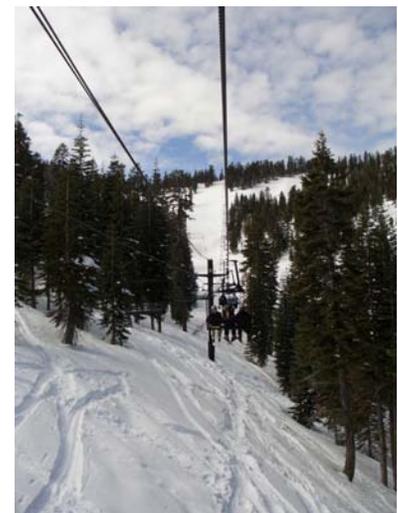


Of all the lunches eaten Feb. 20 by the billions of people on Earth, my hotdog and a Coke at the mid-mountain restaurant on Homewood's Rainbow Ridge run was the best.

Gordon started in ski school as soon as he was out of diapers. The Claudinos have accompanied us on several ski trips to Colorado including one when we took Amtrak's *California Zephyr* to Glenwood Springs, Colo., to ski at Snowmass (see story on next page).

We've skied in the spring before at Tahoe when the weather was too warm and the snow was slushy and difficult. But the weather was pleasantly cold on this trip and the snow, refreshed by a storm last weekend, was very nice and squeaky.

Normally I'd write this newsletter after our last day of skiing tomorrow, but you already know how this story turns out. We're all going to live happily ever after.



Riding the Ellis Triple Chair to the top of Homewood at 7,800 feet.

The Transcontinental Railroad, *California Zephyr* and Tahoe skiing

Only a country that calls its national baseball championship the World Series and the worst football game of the season the Super Bowl would call a rail line from Omaha, Neb., to Sacramento, Calif., the Transcontinental Railroad.

Silly as the name is, though, it's still vital history to California and the nation. When Tom Mertens invited a group of men up to his Tahoe cabin near Truckee for the first ski weekend in this newsletter, several guys – including Tom – correctly concluded the only historically proper way to get there was on Amtrak's *California Zephyr* on this route.

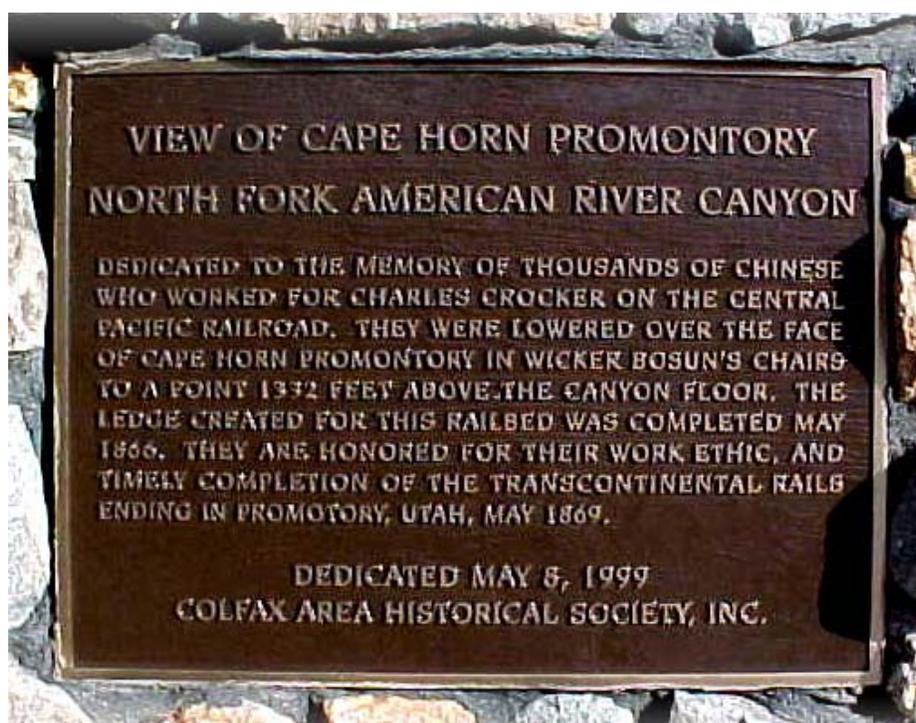
Emily, Gordon and I have taken the *Zephyr* to ski in Colorado. I took its full run in 2003 from Chicago to Emeryville, near Oakland, which is a three-day, two-night journey. The *Zephyr* is the descendant of one America's most famous transcontinental trains (for Americans who think they've crossed the continent by going from the Bay Area and Chicago).

The United States' first Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869.

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Painting of Chinese workers building the Transcontinental Railroad across the Sierra Nevada. A plaque in their honor was erected along the route in Colfax, Calif., at a particularly dangerous section called Cape Horn.



The Transcontinental Railroad, *California Zephyr* and Tahoe skiing



Amtrak's *California Zephyr* climbs toward Donner Pass with our March ski group.

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The Union Pacific pushed west from Omaha across Nebraska and Wyoming to Utah using Civil War veterans and Irish immigrants as labor. The Central Pacific imported 15,000 Chinese workers called "Celestials" to build east from Sacramento over the Sierra Nevada and then across the Nevada desert to Utah.

The 120 miles of railroad from Sacramento to Truckee climbs 7,000 feet to get over Donner Pass, which receives about 40 feet of snow in winter ("*sierra nevada*" is Spanish for "snowy mountain

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The *City of San Francisco*, stranded at Yuba Gap by a Sierra blizzard in 1952.

The Transcontinental Railroad, *California Zephyr* and Tahoe skiing

The original *California Zephyr* with its Vista Dome cars.



– *Continued from previous page* range”), which is why today the region is packed with ski areas. For a dollar a day – half the wage the Union Pacific paid its workers building across the Great Plains – the Celestials blasted a route with black powder and nitroglycerin through solid granite and made progress that was sometimes measured in inches per day.

For their role in cutting transcontinental travel time from months to seven days, the Chinese received America’s traditional thank-you to imported nonwhite workers: California banned Chinese from testifying in court, barred them from voting and the federal government prohibited Chinese from obtaining citizenship until 1943.

The Union Pacific’s last, and best, passenger train on the route was the *City of San Francisco*, inaugurated in 1936. On Jan. 13, 1952, during a Sierra blizzard with 100-mph winds, the *City* was trapped in a snow drift, and it took three days for rescuers to reach the 196 passengers and 20 crew on foot.

The *City*’s competition between Chicago and Oakland was the *California Zephyr*, a cooperative effort of three railroads – the Burlington, Rio Grande and Western

Pacific – over a parallel Chicago-Oakland route. Beginning in 1949, the *Zephyr* ran through Denver and Salt Lake City, which the transcontinental railroad had bypassed in favor of flatter terrain through Wyoming. The *Zephyr* entered California through the lowest pass over the Sierra, 5,200-foot Beckwourth Pass, which receives much less snow than Donner. The *Zephyr* also pioneered Vista Dome passenger cars, which became commonplace on major western rail passenger routes for sightseeing.

When Amtrak took over most American passenger train service in 1971, it operated a train called the *San Francisco Zephyr* over the former *City* route. The Rio Grande operated the *Rio Grande Zephyr* between Denver and Salt Lake until 1983 when it, too, joined Amtrak.

At that point, Amtrak moved its Chicago-Bay Area train to the more scenic Rio Grande route through the Colorado Rockies and renamed it the *California Zephyr*. Unlike the original *Zephyr*, however, it enters California on the original transcontinental railroad over Donner Pass, which makes it good for skiers who appreciate the proper way to travel.

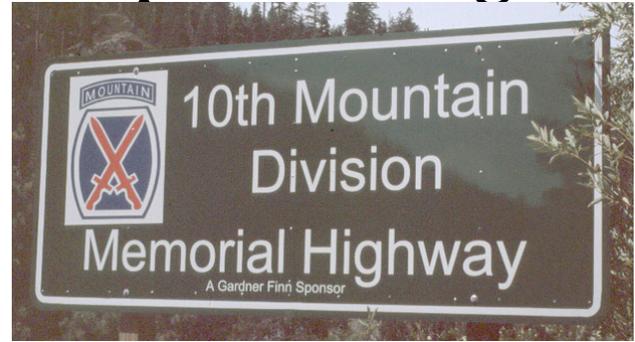
U.S. fell for skiing at the point of a gun

California Highway 89 links the town of Truckee to Lake Tahoe and is known as the 10th Mountain Division Highway, remembering the U.S. Army's link to the birth of skiing as a widely practiced sport in the United States.

The division was formed in 1943 and trained at Camp Hale, Colo. to fight in the Alps on skis. When World War II ended, the returning soldiers figured in the development of virtually every ski area in the United States.

Thirty-four former 10th Mountain soldiers are members of the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame including Friedl Pfeiffer, founder of Aspen Skiing Co., and Pete Seibert, founder of Vail.

Brothers Werner and Rupert von Trapp of *those* von Trapps (in *The Sound of Music*,



Werner was called Kurt and Rupert was Friedrich) fought with the 10th Mountain Division in Italy after the von Trapps escaped from Austria. When they brought their family singing act to the United States, the von Trapps built a ski lodge in Vermont. A daughter of Rupert – granddaughter of Maria von Trapp, Julie Andrews in the movie – was Gordon's ski school teacher for two winters when we skied at Snowmass, Colo., which is part of Aspen Skiing.

Californians: We are water snobs

It's not just that we order a bottle of water for \$3 when the restaurant is willing to give us a glass of tap water for free.

It's that as desperate as we are for a reliable supply of water – it only rains here between November and April – we're ridiculously persnickety about the conditions under which we'll accept H₂O.

Not in the summer. Ranchers and farmers, who use 80% of the state's water supply, complain because rain



I-80 east at Yuba Gap, elevation 5,500 feet, and climbing toward the deep snow along the Sierra crest.

ruins many crops and spoils the harvest.

Only in winter. And only as snow. There aren't enough reservoirs in California to store sufficient liquid water, so if there's a winter warm spell and rain melts some Sierra snow, we lose that water to the ocean.

We depend on 40 feet of dense, wet snow each winter that lasts at least until October. The Sierra snowcap is California's state reservoir.

After a slow start to this snow season, we've gotten several storms that have brought us to 80% of normal water for the Tahoe basin.

Where we've skied together

Ski area	Jody	Emily	Gordon
North Carolina			
Cataloochee	X (1st lesson)		
Beech Mountain	X		
Sugar Mountain	X	X (1st lesson)	
Colorado			
Aspen	X	X	
Aspen Highlands	X		
Buttermilk	X	X	
Snowmass	X	X	X
Steamboat	X		
Keystone	X		
Breckenridge	X		
Copper Mountain	X	X	
Vail	X		
Crested Butte	X	X	
Utah			
Park City <i>Alpine skiing, 2002 Winter Olympics</i>	X	X	X
California			
Squaw Valley <i>All sports, 1960 Winter Olympics</i>	X	X	X
Alpine Meadows	X	X	X
Northstar	X	X	X
Homewood	X	X	X
Heavenly	X	X	X
Kirkwood	X	X	X (1st lesson)
Sugar Bowl	X	X	X
Yosemite National Park, Nordic skiing (X-country)	X	X	
Kirkwood, Nordic skiing (X-country)	X		
Royal Gorge, Nordic skiing (X-country)	X		
Canada			
Whistler-Blackcomb, British Columbia <i>Alpine skiing, 2010 Winter Olympics</i>	X	X	
Kananaskis, Alberta <i>Alpine skiing, 1988 Winter Olympics</i>	X		
France			
Meribel <i>Women's Alpine skiing, 1992 Winter Olympics</i>	X		

Picture pages

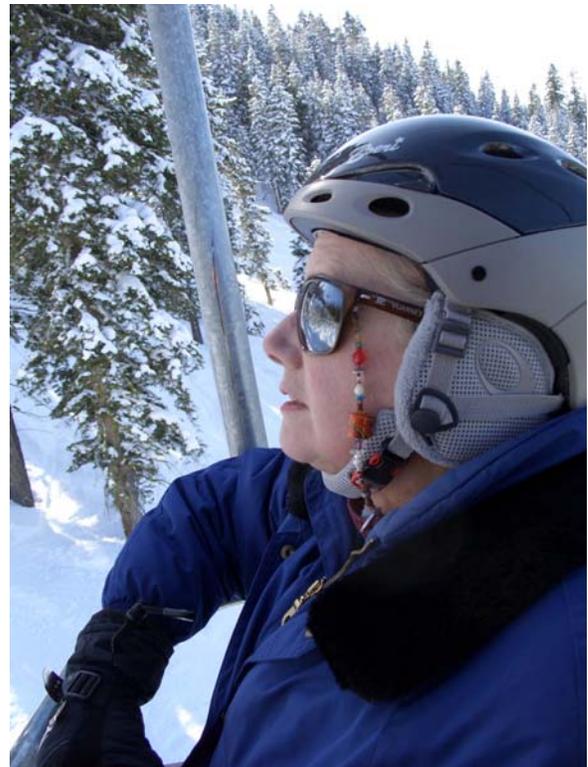


Top of Hidden Vein run, 7,800 feet, at Homewood Ski Area, Feb. 20. Lake level is 6,200.



Emily on Northstar's Martis Camp Express lift, March 23.

<<< Skating rink in the Northstar village, March 22.



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The Transcontinental Railroad (Union Pacific) crosses Donner Pass at the right edge of this photo and descends east (right to left) across the face of this mountain protected from avalanches by a concrete snow shed.

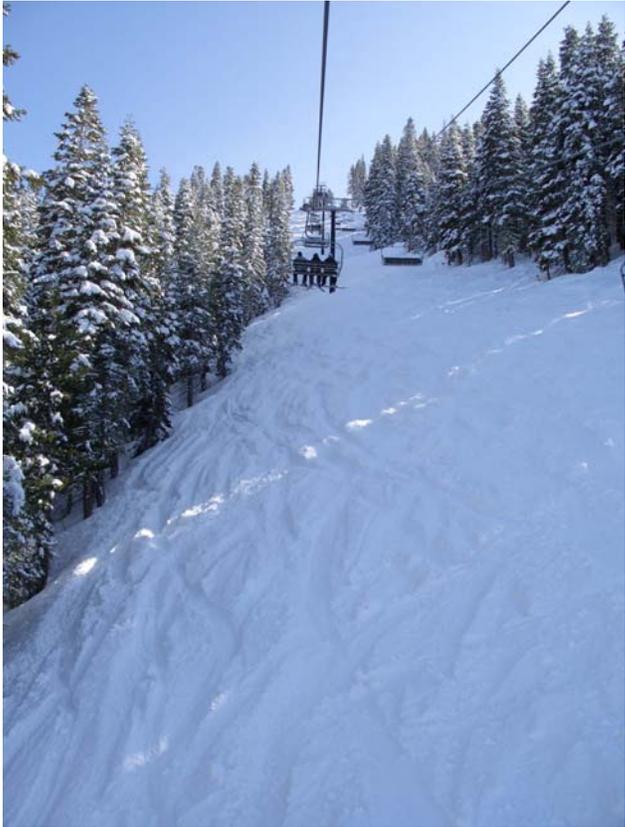


OK, so Homewood's Rainbow Ridge is an easy green run. It's still fun. Feb. 20.



<<< Our condo at Northstar, March 22.

Riding Northstar's Martis Camp Express lift, March 23. >>>



<<< David Claudino and Emily on Lower Pioneer run, Northstar, March 23.