

# Sad days for nordic skiing

Mark Morical Published Jan 21, 2015 at 12:11AM

Not a single car was parked in the newly enlarged lot, and swaths of brown dirt were overtaking the thin coverage of snow at the trailhead.

Yes, Virginia Meissner Sno-park, southwest of Bend, was a sad site last week for cross-country skiers. A season that started early, in mid-November, was halted in the middle of winter after several weeks of little snow.

After checking out the Meissner situation last week, I drove to Swampy Lakes Sno-park, which is a bit higher in elevation than Meissner. I figured I could actually get some classic skiing in at Swampy Lakes.

While there was enough snow to make skiing possible, in several spots the classic tracks gave way to dirt, and the sides of the trail were bare along much of the route.

I skied from the trailhead to the Nordeen Trail, which is sort of a singletrack ski trail through the trees. After a couple of miles, I turned around and headed back the way I had come, covering about 4 miles. I wanted to keep it easy on my first nordic outing of the season, as my legs were noticeably wobbly.

Although several cars were parked at Swampy Lakes, I saw no other skiers on this cold, cloudy day.

It was a relatively short outing, but because of the full-body workout that nordic skiing provides, it felt like a decent burn. And it served as a means to get out and explore — expelling some of those winter doldrums.

Swampy Lakes, Meissner and Wanoga sno-parks offer free cross-country skiing, though a sno-park pass is required. As of Monday, Meissner and Wanoga were both lacking sufficient snow for skiing, so if nordic skiers are hoping to ski at no charge, Swampy Lakes is basically the only option near Bend as of Tuesday.

Local nordic skiers can also head to the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center, which is located at a higher elevation and is not hurting for snow. Daily trail passes there cost \$17 for adults.

Meissner Nordic, the nonprofit club that grooms and manages the trails at Meissner, has been dealing with low-snow issues for the past several years.

Last winter, the Meissner Sno-park did not have sufficient snow for skiing until about mid-January. This season started early but is now losing momentum. The club ceased grooming of the trails Jan. 10 due to the lack of snow.

A storm Friday that brought 8 inches of snow to Mount Bachelor brought about 6 inches to Meissner, which has trails located between 5,000 and 6,000 feet in elevation just off Century Drive. It was enough snow to be groomed and made skiable for a couple of days, but rainfall changed that quickly.

“It promptly turned to rain and washed out the snow we had available,” said Michael Coe, Meissner Nordic president. “Right now we’re waiting for the next storm to come in and deliver.”

Until then, grooming is on hold at Meissner.

“Our plan is that we are not going to groom until we get another storm, a real storm,” said Shawn McFadden, operations manager for Meissner Nordic. “There’s no point.”

Taking a Sno-Cat or snowmobile groomer over the trails can turn a 10-foot bare spot into a 30-foot one, McFadden explained.

He added that the difficulties with low-snow levels at Meissner might just be the new normal.

“I’m not a weather-predictor, but I don’t see it going back to the way it used to be, when come Nov. 5 you had enough snow to last you the whole season and you kept getting dumped on,” McFadden says. “Maybe we’re just in a cycle, but it’s rough. It’s really frustrating.”

Although dedicated cross-country skiers will pay to go at the Bachelor Nordic Center, many other casual nordic skiers wait to ski at Meissner when they can. That complicates the problem, McFadden explained, because then many come to the sno-park all at once.

“When we do get good snow, there’s such a pent-up demand that we get swamped and it just trashes the trails,” McFadden said. “Instead of 100 people in a day, we’ll get 1,000 in a day. And it just beats the crap out of the snow, pushes it off the trails, thins it out faster, melts it. You can’t recover from it.”

Coe said they need about 2 to 4 inches of snow to groom with a snowmobile and an additional 4 to 8 inches to groom with the Sno-Cat.

For now, Meissner Nordic and local skiers will keep doing their snow dances. Skiers can check [www.meissnernordic.org](http://www.meissnernordic.org) (<http://www.meissnernordic.org>) for updates.

“We just need to hope we get one of those rolling storms of three to five days, and it dumps a foot every day,” McFadden said. “And when that happens, we get on it, we manage it, and we make it last until April.”

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Mark Morical / The Bulletin Meissner Sno-park features a new building for skiers at its parking lot, but the area needs some more snow.



Mark Morical / The Bulletin In some areas near Swampy Lakes Sno-park, the skiing was less than desirable last week but better than at Meissner.



Mark Morical / The Bulletin The Nordeen Trail cuts through the Deschutes National Forest near Swampy Lakes Sno-park.



Mark Morical / The Bulletin The trailhead at Meissner Sno-park on Thursday shows scarce snowfall.