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# Late snow should make for ideal cross-country skiing conditions well into spring

## Meissner Sno-park a good option for spring breakers



With several inches of snow over the last few weeks many of the popular cross-country ski areas around Bend should stay open later into the season this year. (Ryan Brennecke/Bulletin photo)

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### VIRGINIA MEISSNER SNO-PARK —

It is officially spring, but those in Central Oregon looking to squeeze every last opportunity out of winter can certainly do so this year.

The record snowfall that blanketed the region in late February is sticking around for Oregon's spring break, which starts on Saturday. Cross-country skiers at area sno-parks, such as Virginia Meissner Sno-park west of Bend, should be able to enjoy prime conditions well into spring.

This past Saturday I made the short drive from Bend to Meissner for a late-morning ski. After setting out from the somewhat crowded parking lot and trailhead, I did not need long to find solitude on the 40 kilometers of groomed trails in the Meissner area.

Linking together the Tangent and Bitterbrush trails, I tackled a 7-mile route in just under two hours on my classic skis. I surged along the classic tracks under a bright blue sky as the sun began to soften the snow.

Between the trees here and there were dramatic views of Broken Top, South Sister and Tumalo Mountain.

“We have a ton of snow,” said Larry Katz, the operations manager for Meissner Nordic, the nonprofit that grooms trails at the popular sno-park each winter. “We’re going to keep grooming right through to the end of the month.”

Katz said trails are being groomed six days per week (every day but Monday) and plans call for grooming every day during spring break.

Enough snow fell this winter to allow grooming to start on Dec. 1 and continue through March 31, and possibly longer.

Last winter, by contrast, Meissner had only enough snow for groomed trails for about a five-week period from early February to early March.

Meissner, which is groomed for both skate and classic skiing, is located at an elevation of about 5,400 feet about halfway between Bend and Mount Bachelor. Katz said trails at higher elevations near the sno-park have about 4 feet of compacted snow. Lower-elevation trails have about 2½ to 3 feet of compact snow.

“We won’t run out of snow,” he said.

The recent freeze-thaw trend with temperatures dipping below freezing overnight and reaching into the 50s during the day means that waiting until late morning might be the smart choice for nordic skiers looking to avoid icy conditions.

“As soon as the sun gets high enough in the morning it loosens up the snow a little bit,”

Katz said. “Trails that are in the direct sun get a little wet and the stuff in the shade is still nice and powdery. So it’s a mix. If you go real early you’ll hit some ice conditions. And the groomer can break up some of that but it’s still. ... On days it’s been 50 and then freezes overnight, the sweet spot is probably around 9:30 or 10 (a.m.) to start.”

After the record snow dump in late February, cross-country enthusiasts could be seen throughout Central Oregon skiing through neighborhoods and city parks. Now that those areas have turned into the browns and grays of a city snowscape, taking to area sno-parks is the best option for nordic skiers.

While Meissner’s grooming contract with the U.S. Forest Service extends through March 31, plenty of snow is likely to remain for cross-country skiing in April and May. Those who seek groomed trails later in the spring can ski at the Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center, where it costs \$21 for an adult day pass. Trails emanating from the nordic center typically remain open until mid to late May, when the U.S. and Canadian national nordic ski teams come for their annual spring camps at Bachelor.

Crust cruising is also an option at area sno-parks. Crust cruising is possible for skate skiers after enough free-thaw cycles to make for an unbreakable crust on the snowpack.

“You just get this hard-pack crust on top, and it can be a little icy, but if you catch it at the right time ... it’s kind of like downhill skiers trying to catch the corn snow at the right time,” Katz said. “There’s a clearcut at Wanoga (Sno-park) that is a great place to crust cruise. You can just go anywhere, any direction ... you can go up and down hills. It’s almost like a groomed trail because it’s flat and hard. It takes about a week of freeze-thaw before you have a crust that you won’t break through.”

Katz said that April is usually a good time for crust cruising in Central Oregon.

And there will likely be plenty of snow lingering deep into spring, giving winter sports enthusiasts a chance to extend their season.

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