



Firsthand Report: Massanutten, Feb. 17, 2007

By Connie Lawn, DCSki Columnist

February 19, 2007 — As an adopted Virginian, I love skiing on trails named “Southern Comfort, Rebel Yell, Dixie Dare, and Yee Ha.”

Massanutten may be the seventh wonder of Virginia (don't ask me about the other 6). It is a terrific ski area, located near the Shenandoah River Valley and the Blue Ridge Mountains, near Harrisonburg and Elkton, Virginia. It is about a two and a half hour drive from Washington, and is well worth the trip. It is especially wonderful if you can spend the night at a condominium in the 7,500 acre resort. In addition to superb skiing, boarding, and tubing, Massanutten has a new 33 acre water park which is about the most exciting complex I have seen outside of Walt Disney World. Some of those slides, tubes, and wave rides are really thrilling, and are too much for me. They appeal to the brave souls who do their jumps and flips in Terrain Parks in the snow. But, there are also gentler sections of the park.



View of the Shenandoah River Valley from the Paradise trail at Massanutten.

Photo provided by Charles Sneiderman.

It is amazing to go from winter slopes and cold to this complex with a huge winding swimming pool, enormous slide towers, wave rides, wave pools, and a sumptuous buffet. Guests shed their snow clothes, put on bathing suits, and splash and “sunbathe” in view of the snow covered slopes. In the summer, the area opens up to outdoor slides and pools. Massanutten even has off season snowtubing down slides without snow, but with an artificial surface. There is a buffet area in the water park building which offers an impressive variety of American fare at very reasonable prices every day for lunch and dinner with a gorgeous view of the mountains.

These innovations make for smart business, especially in times when the snow was scarce as it was at the start of the season. It also keeps the resort functioning all year, but there are the other traditional pastimes of golf, horse riding, fishing, hiking, and biking. For those who combine business with pleasure (as most of us do), the entire complex is becoming a wireless hot spot, so you can take your cell phones and computers, and put them to work, from the mountains to the water park. If you are silly enough to take them in the water, it is your fault!

Lack of snow was not a problem when we were there. The slopes were well-covered, and beautifully groomed. My husband Charles and I wondered how they managed to keep powder on the mountain - an ice storm and wind had hit the area a few days before (as it did much of the country). It was the most crowded weekend of the season, but the waits on the lifts were only on the bottom, for the beginner and intermediate areas. Once you got to the top, the two lifts to the diamond areas ran fast and smooth, and there was no wait. We made a quick series of runs on Paradise and Diamond Jim until our legs gave out. A snow storm was moving in and the light was growing flat. It was sad to say farewell to the Blue Ridge mountains in the

distance. Hawks were soaring close overhead and seemed stationary; I've never seen large birds that close since the kia parrots at Treble Cone in New Zealand! They seemed to mock us for being tired and leaving their mountain realm.

While on the mountains, we enjoyed all the runs. The most popular diamonds were Paradise and Diamond Jim. My favorite was Upper Dixie Dare, which had gentle moguls and was narrow enough to force me into just the right amount of turns.

Crowd control was good, with plenty of patrol on both the slopes and in the parking lots. We were impressed with the ski patrollers standing by signs at the end of the runs. The signs read: "Slow - space not speed." The patrollers enforced that rule, and everyone appeared to be controlled and well behaved.



Mark Andrews, head of Therapeutic Adventures and adaptive snowsports at Massanutten. Photo provided by Charles Sneiderman.

While at Massanutten, we had visits with two excellent leaders. One was longtime general manager, Steve Showalter, who has been there for 30 years. He is a high energy, hands-on executive (that seems to be a common trait among managers) and is justifiably proud of his resort. He said about 3,800 skiers and boarders were expected during the day we were there, and 1,200 tubers. They handled it well, and the full mountain was open from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m. The other man we met was Mark Andrews, head of adaptive skiing programs and therapeutic adventures. He had a group of brave skiers with him that day - some were young children, one girl was blind, and others were disabled service veterans. The next day he had more veterans, children, and a man recovering from a stroke. He said Massanutten has been running its adaptive programs for 28 years, and he has been a guiding force behind it. Mark says discounts and scholarships are available for all participants, and no one is turned away for lack of funds. Like all the adaptive programs, they count on fundraising and volunteer

efforts. He would like those who want to learn more to look at their website at therapeuticadventures.org.

We had a great day at Massanutten, and we cannot wait to return again, in any season. As we drove away, I thought to myself, "Virginia is for all lovers - outdoor and indoor ones."

About the Site

DCSki is an award-winning independent on-line publication covering outdoor recreation in the Mid-Atlantic region, including the states Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. During the winter, DCSki focuses on skiing and snowboarding. In the summer, DCSki covers activities such as mountain biking and hiking.

DCSki's history dates back to 1994, when it was distributed via e-mail. DCSki hit the Web in the summer of 1997, and over the past decade, countless skiers and snowboarders have become regular readers, trusting DCSki to provide accurate and balanced reporting.

DCSki is full of useful features such as an event calendar, interactive message forums, weather, resort profiles, listings of area ski clubs, and much more. Hundreds of original articles are published each year, providing tips on skiing and reviews of far-away resorts. Plus, you can find out what ski conditions are really like. (We'll let you know when that "mixed precipitation" is really rain.)

But DCSki is much more than a comprehensive snowsports publication -- it is also a community of winter sports enthusiasts. Readers have posted over 40,000 messages on a wide range of subjects: commenting on articles, providing firsthand trip reports, or offering reviews of ski areas. DCSki's readers come from across Mid-Atlantic to the far reaches of the globe, from a variety of backgrounds but with one common trait: a passion for skiing or snowboarding.

Please note: DCSki is not a ski club -- it is an independent on-line publication that is not affiliated with any specific ski club.