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SKI WEDNESDAY

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**POWDER SHOTS;**  
**Finding a new friend in**  
**Burke; Vermont mountain**  
**has plenty to offer**

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**M**y good pal Maura is one of my favorite friends. We meld perfectly: our wry and dry humor, our love of literature, and our endless knowledge of Grass Roots lyrics. But here's the funny thing: even though we grew up within a few streets of one another in a relatively small town, we didn't even meet until we were 18.

My visit to Burke Mountain, Vermont made me think of Maura this weekend. Because, while I've skied just about everywhere and Burke is an easy three-hour, straight-shot from Boston, I'd never skied there before. And in the icy-clear cold of Saturday morning, by my third run, I knew this was my kind of place. Like the summer weekend I met Maura on the beach, I was thinking "How could we not have met before?"

I enjoy a mountain with a sense of history, and Burke has plenty of that. Born in the early 1950s, Burke still has that wonderful feel of a truly unique New England resort. Many trails are narrower and winding; I'm not sure you could even do all the tree skiing available in one day. The mid-mountain lodge is so distinctly mid-20th century New England skiing it could serve as a movie set. But I like a mountain that nods its head to the modern era, too. Burke's new base lodge is plush and comfortable, and the new slopeside lodging going up is not only eco-friendly, it's just plain beautiful.

I think of it this way: If Cannon and Bretton Woods had a love child – one they treasured and pampered and raised to be its own wonderful self – that child would be Burke.

Our ride up Friday afternoon was stunning to me. First, it's always a treat to drive through Franconia Notch, and we'd managed to get out early enough to cut through there right at peak alpenglow time. The next part was a surprise though: as we veered off to the left instead of my usual right (to take me to other parts of New Hampshire), I expected to be driving for an eternity. Guess what? It's one quick (and pretty) ride up to Burke. We were there in a heartbeat, it seemed.

I started my ski weekend Saturday morning by simply walking out of my Bear Path Condo and clicking on my skis, then gliding to the resort's only high speed lift, a quad at the base that only takes you part way up. The first man I rode the chair with told me he was from Needham and was in his second year of holding a season's pass with his family. So why Burke? "No crowds," he said simply. "No crowds at the base. No crowd in the lift line and no crowds on the runs." He told us a great first run to take was Big Dipper, so we chose that as our first Burke run ever.

The brittle cold had made the surface hard, but Burke's groomers clearly know how to work a surface. We were able to easily dig our edges in and carve nice GS turns down the semi-open slope. Around the second corner, though, we had to stop. Because in the kind of clear sunshine you only get on days that cold, it seemed we could see forever.

Burke is an Amonadnock mountain, meaning it is not part of a range, but rather stands pretty much alone. And the views are spectacular. In this case we can look one way and see the entire Presidential range, another way and see all of Vermont (and even part of Canada, or so it seems) and another and see the unique Willoughby Gap. After taking it in we head down and grab the lift to go to the top again and try a trail we'd spotted on our way up.

Here's one thing about Burke that could be spiffed up: the solitary quad chair to the top is a little slow. About an 11-minute ride up, it does cut down on your total runs somewhat. The resort has near-future

plans to replace it with a faster lift, but are taking pains to make sure they do it in a way that does not negatively affect the downhill experience (read: put too many people on the trails). I appreciate that. Sometimes, a little wait is just what you need, and your legs can rest up. If you want to just ski the lower mountain, which is a lovely refuge for beginner skiers and lovers of gentler terrain, you can stick to the high-speed. But to get up to the steep stuff, you need to take this lift. That's OK for now, and it will change.

Our next run, we zipped down an extremely narrow trail called Shoot, then turned our way down Foxes Folly, a narrow under-the-chair trail that features double fall lines, dips and lips and all kinds of fun. The conditions, despite a recent massive rainstorm that drenched all of New England, are an A-plus. Toward the end we cut over and finished the run on Warren's Way, a Steep (capital S earned there) trail that burns your thighs. This was my favorite Burke trail combo.

To catch a break from the below-zero temps, popped into the Mid Burke Lodge to warm up. We settled down next to the fire and had barely unbuckled our boots when a personable older man in a screaming orange hat pulled up a chair, rubbed his stomach and announced: "Glad you're warming up. You are gonna want to come back here later for happy hour, too, though. Long Trail's doing it today." The man was Paul Gallant, the town's constable, resort's handy man, a poultry farmer on the side and a musician to boot. Paul, who likes to point out that he knows everyone, is sort of a self-proclaimed resort ambassador. That he noticed we were new to the place surprised me. But then again, it didn't. Because Burke's sense of community, from the locals to the weekenders to the staff, is the kind that truly makes a resort special.

The mountain love child of Cannon and Bretton Woods seems to be related to the Cheers bar as well.

Saturday night we had dinner at the newer Tamarack Restaurant at the base. The service, setting and food rival even the best Boston restaurant. That this is pulled off way up north and in such a kicked back way is a marvel. And we're pretty sure the chef was the same guy who flipped our burger downstairs earlier in the day and our waitress poured our draft in the mid-mountain lodge.

Sunday we looped back to ski some favorite trails and tried a few new ones. I love Willoughby from top to bottom, the perfect upper intermediate blend of not-too-wide but wide enough, steep enough but with some breathing spots (but no poling needed) and a nice way of winding. We also took the time to hike a tiny bit (on skis) over to East Bowl. It does take a little extra work to access this trail but when you get out to it, you feel like you're in another world. My husband and I stopped for a moment on the winding ungroomed trail and listened. Nothing but nature. We had a ball making our way down and then came back to the main mountain again, taking two long full runs on Warren's to make our quads burn once more before the ride home.

We went back to our Bear Path condo and wished we could have sat by the fire and looked out at the views for one more day. But life called, and we had to head home. We knew it would be a quick ride home, and we knew we'd be back.

It's hard to spend too much time away from a new friend as great as Burke.

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