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WHERE NOW

Tamarack, Idaho

It's a ski hill. It's a country club. It's a summer retreat. The nation's newest resort wears more than just a ski hat.

■ By Christopher Solomon

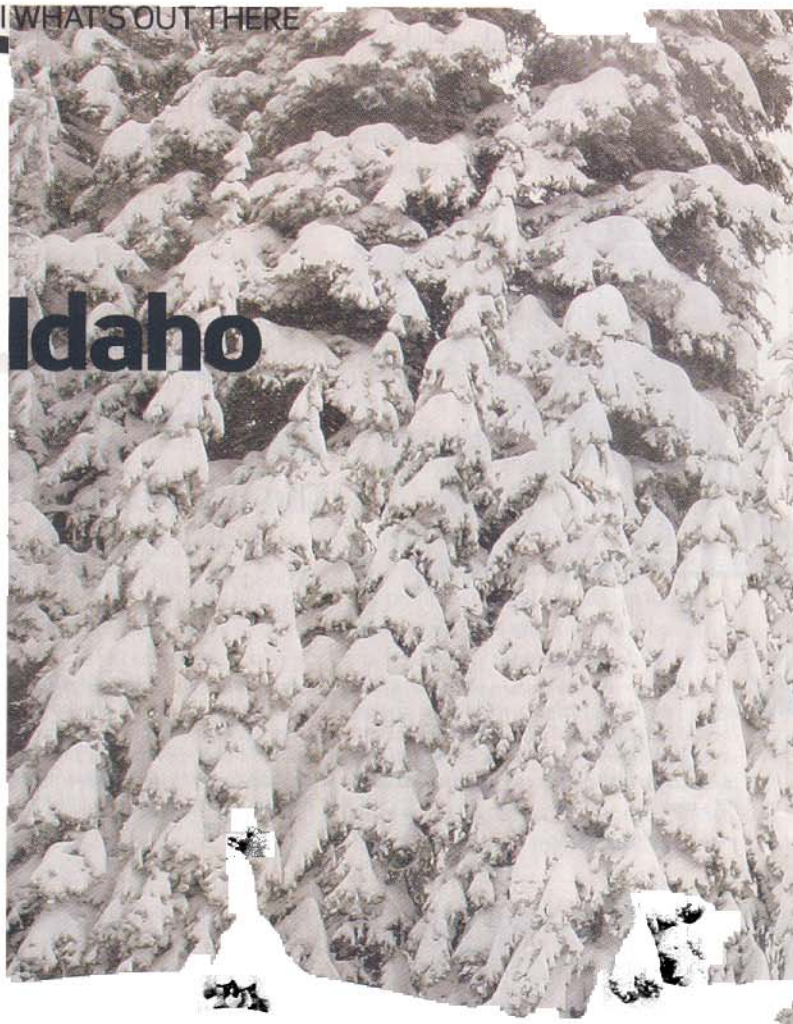


WHEN JEAN-PIERRE BOESPFLUG

invites you to tour the first U.S. destination ski resort built from scratch in more than two decades, it helps to pack your imagination. Boespflug—who's 51, with hooded chestnut eyes, a heavy French accent and a goatee salted with white—stops his SUV on a snowy road in ranchlands 90 miles north of Boise, Idaho, and points to a patch of Douglas fir and spruce. "Here we have some buildings on the left—see the red stakes?" he says. "And another in violet?" Not far away, a lonesome green marker stands buried to its knees in new snow. That, says Boespflug, is a hotel.

This could easily seem like a guided drive through a rich eccentric's pipe dream, except that just beyond the SUV's window are Boespflug's bona fides: skiers porpoising through powder on the new 2,800-vertical-foot ski mountain, complete with high-speed lifts, that is the centerpiece of freshly minted Tamarack Resort.

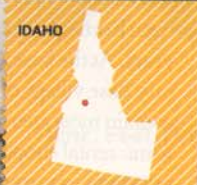
After a torturous, two-decade gestation that involved lawsuits, wrangling with the federal government and the bankruptcy of its first developer, Boespflug's baby was finally born last winter and is already





FRESH TRACKS
In its second season, Tamarack serves up 840 acres with a 2,800-foot vertical drop.

Tamarack Mountain
44° 76' 67" N
116° 11' 77" W





growing fast, counting as its main attraction an intermediate's dream of a ski area, with seven lifts and 35 runs spread across 840 acres, rising above snow-covered Cascade Lake. A midmountain cafe was added last summer. The 44-unit Member's Lodge and Spa opens in December, and townhomes and several neighbor-

'THIS PLACE REALLY SKIS BIG, EVEN THOUGH IT'S A SMALL-TO MEDIUM-SIZED SKI AREA.'

hoods comprising more than 60 cottages and chalets (many of them rentals) have risen from open land in less than two years. At the base, guests will find a temporary base village of tent-like structures that contain most everything a skier could want: rental shop, cafeteria, children's programs, gourmet grocery store—even a

ROME WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY Neither was Tamarack. But the mountain's temporary tented base has all the mod-cons a skier expects in a luxury resort, from good food to a high-end ski shop. The first permanent building, the Member's Lodge and Spa, will be finished by the 2005–2006 season.

fine-dining restaurant and an espresso bar. There's also a medical clinic with a doctor on duty. For skinny-skiers, a 20-mile nordic ski course with snowmaking just opened on the newly completed Robert Trent Jones II golf course.

Not surprisingly, however, Boespflug's starry eyes hold a much grander vision for the place—only one component of which is the skiing. Long-term plans for Tamarack call for a \$1.5 billion all-season destination resort on the apron of land where 7,700-foot West Mountain meets the turquoise water of Cascade Lake. The resort, Boespflug hopes, will become a summertime sailing, mountain biking and hiking spot which, in the winter, will feature a ski area that will grow to about the size of Aspen Mountain, with 60 runs, 11 chairlifts and 2,100 acres. Those roadside stakes will become a base village big enough to merit its own zip code and constructed in timber-and-stone National Park-style “parkitecture.” Some 2,043 hotel rooms, condos,

townhomes and lots will top the village and pepper the surrounding landscape.

Despite these growth plans, the vision for Tamarack is still one of a “boutique” resort tailored to high-end guests and skiing families who will be both vacationers and real estate buyers. “If you give them too much concrete you go bankrupt. What you need to give them is attention to detail and good service,” says Boespflug, Tamarack's majority investor and a former computer guy who made millions in the Internet's early days. To help foster that “high-touch,” clubby feel, Tamarack limits the number of skiers on the slopes to 1,500 per day, a la Utah's Deer Valley. (As ski terrain grows, that threshold will rise to 3,000.) But Boespflug isn't shy about admitting that real estate will be Tamarack's bread and butter. Property sales have already hit nearly \$200 million. And homeowners who pay the \$45,000 initiation fee (and \$425 per month) can join the Club at Tamarack, which gets them line-



CRUISE CONTROL Tamarack's main course is its bevy of groomed, nearly top-to-bottom runs.

cutting privileges, early access to the lifts on powder days and such non skiing benefits as concierge services and seating priority at the resort's restaurant. Boespflug also envisions a future "medical spa" where visitors can go for a few morning runs then check in for a quick nip/tuck.

As settings go, Tamarack has chosen a plum spot. To the west, the Cascade Mountains and the high desert of eastern Oregon wring much of the excess moisture from Pacific storms, so about 300 inches of talcum snow falls on Tamarack's east-facing, wind-shielded slopes. Those slopes descend gradually into the rural Long Valley, where the mountain dips its feet in a massive reservoir, Cascade Lake. If the body of water were not snow-covered, the view would recall Tahoe.

The skiing, however, brings Colorado's Steamboat to mind. This is a moderate's mountain, with a marquee run to match—Bliss, a nearly top-to-bottom double-blue that begins on the mile-long, treeless ridgeline that crowns Tamarack. After heading into a modest bowl, Bliss doglegs and drops into the thick forest of spruce and fir that covers the resort's lower two-thirds. The run narrows, shim-mies, bucks and cascades down the mountain. When you're mach-speeding downhill, Bliss keeps you guessing. If the run has competition for the title of Tamarack's signature, it's Showtime, a true

peak-to-base run that's buffed for novices and the perfect place to pretend you're the next Bode. What this resort lacks, however, is the breadth of a Steamboat—an intermediate with solid legs and a belly full of muesli can sample every non expert run by lunch (which is a testament, too, to how uncrowded young Tamarack is).

As an advanced skier, I look to the expert runs that spill from Tamarack's corniced ridgeline and lick my chops. Runs like Adrenaline, however, soon come to symbolize my frustration with this freshman resort. Labeled a double black diamond, Adrenaline slips over the cornice and drops into a tilted powder field. So far, so good. But the angle drains away almost immediately. Ditto with fellow double-black comrades Me First and After You. A pattern emerges: Tamarack teases the advanced skier with steep pitches that seem to lose their nerve just as they're getting fun. For the expert, the skiing here feels more like a nice amenity, more like a decked-out fitness center or a celebrity chef-run restaurant than a compelling reason to fly to Idaho.

At least for now. The next day we join ski patrollers to sample some of the ski area's approved expansion terrain on state land. Near the future Wildwood Express and Overlook Express chairlifts, the trees grow tighter and the fall lines steeper and longer than elsewhere on the mountain. Now this I'd fly for. Thinning and brushing will open up some very entertaining tree skiing. The Wildwood will be up and running for the 2005-2006 season, but as of yet, no date has been set for construction of the Overlook lift.

In the meantime, skiers with avalanche savvy can leave the resort behind and sample the out-of-bounds possibilities in the national forests that bookend the resort. One afternoon I duck the southern boundary rope with Tim Wolfgram, Tamarack's director of recreation. We hike for five minutes into Boise National Forest and drop into long treed runs that still have 18 inches of untouched powder late on the afternoon after a storm. "This place really skis big—even though it's a small- to medium-sized ski area," says Wolfgram, one of a crew of crackerjack ski-industry veterans from places like Deer Valley, Utah, and Copper Mountain, Colo., that has been hired

to get Tamarack up and humming. Across the resort, in Payette National Forest, steeper bowls and more exciting and more dangerous terrain await. The potential is immense. So is the imagination—and the pocketbook—of John-Pierre Boespflug. ♦

Signpost

Tamarack Resort
840 skiable acres in-bounds; 2,800 vertical feet; base elevation:

4,900 feet; summit elevation: 7,700 feet; 300 inches annual snowfall; 35 runs; seven lifts, including three high-speed detachable quads. Tickets: adults \$55; kids 7-17 \$28; children 6 and under free.

Lodging This season, Tamarack offers rooms in the new Member's Lodge, cottages, homes and chalets for rent. Prices range from \$240-\$1,230 per night; 877-826-7376. In McCall, the high-end hotel is Whitetail, a 77-room resort on the shore of Payette Lake; from \$205 per night; 800-657-6464; whitetailclub.com.

Dining The Epicurean, in the Hotel McCall downtown, serves some of the valley's best food, with a global twist—like nut-encrusted mahi-mahi with seared bananas and sweet potato cakes topped with a red curry sauce; 208-634-8188. Though it's housed in one of the base village's temporary structures, Morels, Tamarack's only nighttime dining option, serves lunch and dinner daily. On the menu: entrees like citrus-basil sea bass seared with melted leeks and rock shrimp fricassee; 208-325-1013.

Don't miss Brundage Mountain Resort, a locals' ski hill eight miles from McCall, has a nice hometown-hill vibe, cheap lift tickets, great views west to Oregon's Eagle Cap Wilderness—and it skis much bigger than its 1,800 vertical feet; brundage.com; 800-888-7544.

Getting there Most major airlines fly into Boise, about a 145-mile drive from Tamarack. Sun Valley Express offers daily shuttles to the resort; \$49; 877-622-8267; sunvalleyexpress.com/tamarack. Tamarack also offers a charter air service into nearby McCall from several major U.S. cities on its own aircraft; 877-826-7376.

Information Tamarack Resort: 877-826-7376; tamarackidaho.com. McCall Area Visitors Bureau: 800-260-5130. Cascade, Idaho Chamber of Commerce: 208-382-3833; cascdechamber.com