

Winterlife

2015-16 WINTER GUIDE for Santa Fe and Northern New Mexico

The Essential Season

SLEDDING
where & what

PUEBLO DANCES

SEEKING Soups
(and Stews)

Ski Resorts
guide

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Sledding & Tubing Santa Fe

BY CRISTINA OLDS

Meteorologists are predicting a snow-filled winter in New Mexico this year, to the joy of outdoor enthusiasts young and old. When the snowflakes fly in Santa Fe, the easiest and cheapest way to get out and play in the snow is to simply head to a nearby hill with a piece of cardboard and go sledding.

With a minimal amount of preparation and planning, a sledding outing can be fun for the whole family and a great way to get everyone outdoors in the wintertime. Let's look at sleds, clothing and safety precautions and where to hit the sledding slopes locally.

Where to sled

The top spot for large-scale sledding in Santa Fe is Hyde Memorial State Park's designated sledding area behind the stone lodge and Cottam's Ski Shop, 8.5 miles east of town toward Ski Santa Fe on Hyde Park Road (N.M. 475). Fencing around the area keeps sledders contained, and slopes of varying steepness allow kids of different ages to have fun. There is a \$5 day-use fee, and carpooling for larger groups is recommended given the limited parking space.

"The Sangre de Cristo Mountains provide the ideal terrain for a sledding adventure at the popular Hyde Memorial State Park set in a forest of pine trees along Little Tesuque Creek," says John Feins, Santa Fe Tourism's public relations manager. "A little further up Hyde Park Road are more good sledding locations, such as Aspen Vista."

The bumps on the Hyde Park hill can get large. Although it's fun watching wipeouts, those with small kids should stick to the gentler slopes found at Black Canyon, just a few hundred yards below Hyde Park hill. Black Canyon campground is a multiuse area with cross-country skiing and winter hiking. Farther up N.M. 475 is Big Tesuque Picnic Area, with gentle to steep options and better snow coverage than Hyde Park.

Sledding is not permitted on Ski Santa Fe's slopes during its hours of operation, but a nice bowl beside the ski area parking lot near the top of the Windsor Trail is a safe and convenient sledding destination; sledders can warm up in the ski lodge a short walk away.

For a winter birthday celebration, one Santa Fe parent organized a sledding party to Black Canyon, complete with a barbecue, hot cocoa, cupcakes and a piñata. Fifteen of her 7-year-old daughter's friends and their families joined the fun. She had initially planned to hold the event at Hyde Park Memorial State Park's area, but it was closed, as conditions were less than ideal. The rangers will decide if the snow is too sparse for safe sledding, so call ahead or have an alternate location in mind.

If El Niño brings the big dumps of powder as predicted, sledding options will be plentiful within the city of Santa Fe as well as on the mountain. Any hill with a fresh dusting of powder will give sledders a good ride, but a few hot spots that provide consistent fun

Slip Sliding Away



JANE PHILLIPS

From left, Luc Hatler-Ries, Jasper Rasmussen-Flint and Luc's twin brother, Sebastian, enjoy an afternoon of sledding at Patrick Smith Park after a storm last year.

are Patrick Smith Park (1001 Canyon Road), Frank S. Ortiz Dog Park (1160 Camino de Las Crucitas) and E.J. Martinez Elementary School (401 W. San Mateo Road).

Safety first

When it snows here in the high desert, it usually melts quickly, so any slope in the city with fresh snow on it is fair game for the enterprising sledder. But choose your slope wisely, as sledding accidents are common and the sport can be a dangerous one.

For some, part of the fun of sledding is the aspect

of hurtling down a snowy hill out of control. For the parents of these individuals, some safety tips should be established before the sledding shenanigans ensue.

- As with any high-speed sport, helmets are advised. Bike or snowboard helmets work perfectly.
- Before cutting loose, establish which areas are for sledding and define a path for hiking back up the hill to avoid crashes.
- Be aware of surface conditions if you're using a thin, unpadded sled, and stick to deeper snow.
- Scope the terrain for a clear path down the slope away from trees or other obstacles.

- Check that the run-out area at the bottom of the slope is long and, ideally, curves upward to slow the sled.
- Head down the hill feet first for safety, and consider dropping a foot to the sides of the sled for steering and braking.

What kind of ride

Sleds come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from one-person plastic or aluminum saucers to long, wooden toboggans for two or more or even inflatable rubber inner tubes. For the typical New Mexico snow play, when there may be just a couple of inches of snow on the ground, plastic or rubber sleds are the most popular option. With a little ingenuity, the appropriately slippery seating surface can be homemade from a plastic sheet, garbage bag, real estate sign, cafeteria tray or piece of cardboard.

Visit any local outdoor store for an extensive selection of affordable formed-plastic sleds in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes. Handy extras might cost a bit more; these include simple hand brakes, inner tube handles, padding and attached ropes for pulling the sled back up the hill. Steering wheels are more for pretend playing than any real control, but some side brakes allow slight turning. Specialty sleds include connecting saucer sleds that allow groups to link their rides, inflatable toboggans and frame sleds with skis. Check the manufacturer's recommendations for age appropriateness and best snow conditions for any sled.

The nostalgic metal-runner, wooden-slatted Flexible Flyer sled, first manufactured by the Quakers in Pennsylvania and famously featured in the classic film *A Christmas Story*, is more suited for snowpacked roads, a rare occurrence in these parts. The long, curved-front, wooden toboggan used as traditional transportation by Canadian First Nation tribes (and favored by cartoon characters Calvin and Hobbes) is less common today as a functional sled.

Winter togs

When we do get those big snowstorms, make sure you have your winter gear on hand for a quick dash out the door to the slopes. Good boots are the most important piece of clothing, and layers that can be removed as sledders heat up should include hats, gloves, coats and scarves. Now bundle up, grab your saucer and launch down the sledding hill.

Cristina Olds (www.oldscreative.com) was lucky enough to grow up where she, her brother and neighborhood kids sledded on giant piles of snow left by snowplows on all the street corners of her small town of Red Lodge, Montana. She's a freelance writer and graphic designer living and recreating in Los Alamos.

Resources

Hyde Memorial State Park

740 Hyde Park Road
www.ornrd.state.nm.us/SPD/hydememorialstatepark.html

Cottam's Ski Shops

740 Hyde Park Road
www.cottamsskishops.com/location/santa-fe/rentals

Rents jackets, pants and helmets.

Ski Tech

950 S. St. Francis Drive
www.skitechsantafe.com/index.html

Rents jackets, pants and helmets.

Discount Tire

1366 Carrillos Road
and 4316 Carrillos Road
www.stores.discounttire.com/nm/santa-fe/hms-01/

Sells inner tubes.

REI, Sports Authority, Big 5, Target

All sell sleds, tubes, and outdoor winter clothing and boots.