

South of Moab Happenings

Bluff International Balloon Festival

January 12, 13 and 14, 2018 marks the 20th Annual Bluff International Balloon Festival, one of the oldest hot-air celebrations in the Four Corners region. Flying the skies above Bluff provides some of the most breath-taking views of the Southwest.

Sponsored by the Business Owners of Bluff (BOB), this annual event attracts more than twenty balloons, pilots and crews to drift over the incomparable red rock landscape of southern San Juan County, Utah. A series of related events, including three morning lift-offs, educational programs at Bluff Elementary School, Saturday night Glow-In and featured evening activities, bring mid-winter excitement to Bluff and vicinity.

Registration for pilots and sponsors takes place at the Bluff Community Center. Early morning pilot briefings begin at 7:15 a.m. on Friday and Saturday, with flights over Bluff occurring shortly afterwards. On Sunday morning, crews will be briefed at 6:30 a.m. at the Community Center.



From there, many of the balloon teams will form a caravan to drive twenty miles south of Bluff to the Valley of the Gods to fly over that spectacular landscape.

All flights depend upon weather conditions, wind directions and other factors, with safety being the first concern for everyone.

Friday evening, January 12, includes a Bluff Elementary School Benefit Navajo Taco Supper, where parents and teachers provide a delicious meal. Late Saturday afternoon is the popular Chili and Ice Cream Social from 4 to 7 p.m., while enjoying the opportunity to view the Glow-In beginning at 5 p.m.

For further information contact www.bluffutah.org, or call Steve at 435-672-2341 or Rick at 502-432-7666.

And be sure to mention you read about it in *Moab Happenings*.

History Of Old Blue Mountain Ski Resort

Zoe Brickel

If you have ever made the journey south from Moab, you may have seen a mountain range silhouetted in the distance. These small peaks are known on maps as the Abajo's, named by Spanish explorers in the 1700s, but to locals and long time desert dwellers, they're known as "The Blues". Situated between the towns of Monticello and Blanding, they rise at their highest, 11,360 feet from the ground. Much smaller than their sister range to the north, the La Sals, which hold the second tallest mountain in Utah, Mount Peale.

Hidden in groves of aspens and evergreens lies a relic of one of Utah's greatest pastimes, skiing. Blue Mountain Resort was the first lift serviced resort in southeastern Utah, and one of the first to open post World War II. On the northern facing slopes, you will find the remnants of the old resort, views of the San Juan's in Colorado, the La Sal Mountains and the desert lands between Monticello and Moab.

Opened by Victor Schafer in the 1950's, today all that remains are two cleared but overgrown runs, a parking lot, and a dilapidated base lodge. But in its golden years, from the 1950's to 1990, it was a gem of the Four Corners, with skiers coming from Moab, Blanding, Monticello, and even as far as Colorado to enjoy the chilly slopes. Blue Mountain was able to offer ski rentals and lessons, getting people with little to no experience out on the hill. It's said by locals, "if you can ski blue mountain, you can ski anywhere." The main slope was considered pretty steep, especially for beginners. Lift tickets never rose above the cost of pocket change which made it easily affordable for families in the rural desert. With a choice of a T-Bar and an old school Polma, skiers had quite the variety.

Unfortunately for the Blue Mountain Resort, its



remote and small nature held much less appeal than the bigger resorts on the Wasatch front. In 1990, the resort spun its lifts for the last time, and the small following of Blue Mountain took their last runs that winter. Many speculate why the resort closed, but the biggest contenders were the lack of snow throughout the years and an expiring lease with the forest service. The owners and visitors tried

their best, but in the end the resort had sparse seasons, covered in deep powder some years, and others just a light dusting of snow on the ground, not enough for guests to ski on. Although the resort was North facing, which kept its boundaries frozen most of the winter, it received far less snow than other areas of the state. Lack of snow led to lack of visitation, which in turn led to financial downfall. Dedicated locals were happy to help with care and upkeep, but volunteer work only goes so far in the long run.

Families still come to enjoy the area, but for reasons beyond skiing. You will find snowmobilers ripping through icy powder, and children flying down the hill on sleds and tubes. The area has also become a popular spot for backcountry skiing, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing,



with a winter recreation club forming there, a small revival has happened. You will find backcountry skiers skinning up the steep slopes in search of powder stashes, and tree filled glades. Other winter recreation trails have opened within the vicinity, providing adventurers with a unique experience, offering serene and tranquil solitude. Regular grooming of Nordic and snowshoe trails occurs throughout the winter and the Manti-La Sal National Forest, which owns the land, even regularly posts avalanche forecasts in the winter, giving snow enthusiasts the information they need for a fun and safe time. There is even a ski hut available for rent nearby at www.roamutah.com

Hey everyone, my name is Zoe Brickel, I'm 22 years old, and am currently living out my desert dream in beautiful Moab, Utah. My total time spent here in Moab has been a little over a year, and I've loved every moment of it. My current hobbies include hiking, backpacking, canyoneering, a little bit of everything, and a lot of exploring. My love for the outdoors knows no boundaries. On a beautiful day you can find me deep in a desert canyon, high up in the La Sal mountains and just about everywhere in between. My favorite time of day is the golden hour, when the high peaks have a pink glow, and the desert puts on its nightly display of colors that you can't see anywhere else. I hope you enjoy my writing, and I would love to hear your stories pertaining the places I like to share, I know we hold all of them close to our hearts.

The Forest Service eventually removed the old lift towers and cables which had become a hazard to folks recreating in the area. Although it's been 27 years since its closing, the spirit of Blue Mountain remains very much alive among locals and curious travelers looking for a peaceful backcountry adventure. Did you grow up skiing Blue Mountain? If so we would love to hear memories of your time spent there and would treasure any photos you would be willing to share. Email us at info@moabgeartrader.com or check in at our facebook page.



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