

Year-long commitment

Ski fanatics find something to do every month of the year

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By BETH J. HARPAZ
Associated Press

For skiers, the best time of year is at hand.

Arapahoe Basin in Colorado opened on Oct. 13, becoming the first ski area in the country to do so this season, followed by Loveland, also in Colorado. Mammoth Mountain in California is scheduled to open Nov. 9; Alta, in Utah, is expected to follow Nov. 16. In the East, Killington in Vermont and Bretton Woods in New Hampshire both hope to have enough snow to open in early November. Most other major resorts try to open for Thanksgiving.

But dedication to skiing does not begin in November and end at Easter. Jet-setters will chase snow around the globe long after pond-skimming parties in April end the season here.

Even those who stay close to home have to-do lists all year, from staying in shape in the offseason, to getting a season pass in the summer, to looking for sales on gear and attending ski swaps.

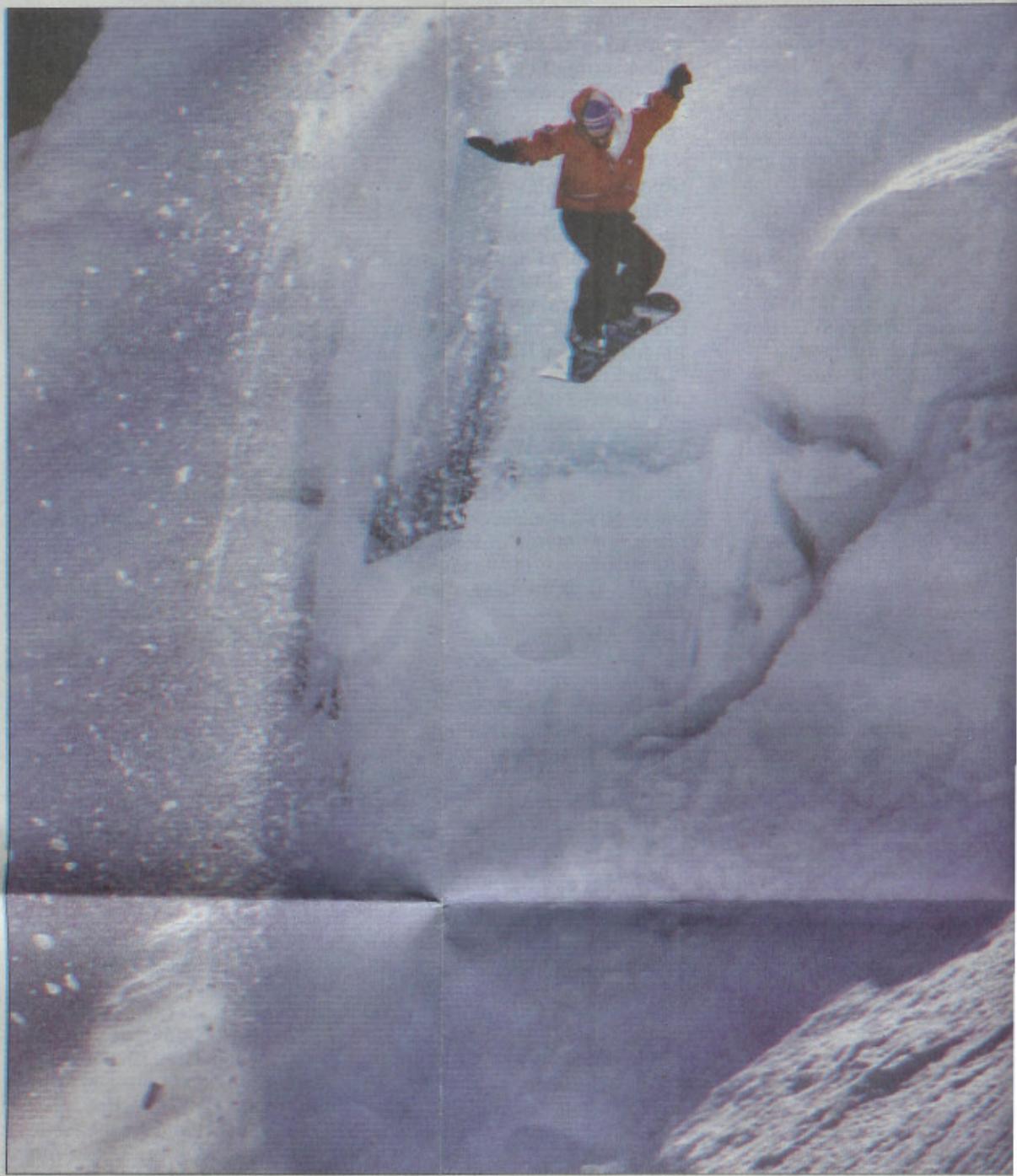
Here is a calendar for the next 12 months, beginning in November, for all those ski fanatics who live for snow, but who must find ways to feed their habit year-round.

NOVEMBER: Who cares about turkey? At most resorts, Thanksgiving weekend is your first chance to ski since spring.

Look for airfare-lift ticket deals early in the month, like packages for families in which kids fly, stay and ski for free if accompanied by two paying adults. Holiday blackout dates are typical.

It's a rite of late autumn for skiers to catch the newest Warren Miller movie, an annual feature-length film showing entertaining snow sports moments from the previous year. Miller began making the movies more than 50 years ago. This year's movie, "Off the Grid," includes footage of a skier going over a 245-foot cliff, and the World Snowball Fighting Championships in Hokkaido, Japan. For a screening schedule, go to <http://www.warrenmiller.com>.

DECEMBER: All you want for Christmas is a chance to



Patrick Cassidy of Orleans, Mass., rides his snowboard off an ice-covered cliff above the Headwall at Tuckerman Ravine on Mount Washington, N.H., in this file photo.

FEBRUARY: This month, look for clearance sales in sporting goods stores; Valentine's Day specials on the slopes; and women-only ski clinics. Beware of crowded conditions Presidents Week.

MARCH: Clearance sales in specialty ski shops start.

Many skiers consider the first half of March the best time to ski — good snow and good weather. And with peak snowpack backcountry skiing

ance your quads (muscles in the front of the thigh) and your hamstrings (muscles in the back of the thigh). If you have strong quads and weak hamstrings, you set yourself up for knee injury." Leg curls and squats can strengthen hamstrings, she adds. Densmore's book, "Ski Faster!" includes a chapter on ski conditioning.

JUNE: You can still hike to terrain skiing in parts of the West or for daredevils only,

air-conditioning will blast you so bad you'll be dying for a chocolate.

If money is no object you must be in Vail on Dec. book now. "We've seen notable increase the past few seasons in guest bookings made as early as August for peak Christmas times ensure they don't have to compromise on their favorite lodging, ski school dates and instructors," said Vail Reso

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Unfortunately everyone else has the same idea. Get ready for lift lines, lodge lines, crowded slopes, lost reservations, overbooked flights ... or spend Christmas in Mexico, and come back to the slopes Jan. 2.

JANUARY: Worst month for ski injuries, according to physical therapist Carl Petersen, author of "Fit to Ski" and director of high performance training at City Sports & Physiotherapy Clinics in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; <http://www.citysportsphysio.com>. Collisions on crowded slopes at Christmastime, icy conditions, falls and lack of conditioning all contribute. Knee injuries are the most common. "Keeping your knees healthy and a pre-ski workout can help," says Petersen. "Warm up to ski, don't ski to warm-up."

Take part in National Safety Awareness Week activities, Jan. 13-19, at your favorite ski resort.

Plan spring break in the Alps, where food and wine is as important to the ski experience as the snow.

APRIL: Clearance sales on clothing and gear at resorts start this month.

Check out pond-skimming, in which skiers try to skim across a slushy puddle at the bottom of a run. World Pond-Skimming Championships are held in Vail, Colo., on April 14, but pond-skimming events are also held at other resorts, including Killington, Vt., and Heavenly in Tahoe, Calif.

Easter is last call for skiing at many resorts, with end-of-season budget deals and parties.

MAY: Start a fitness routine for the snowless months ahead. Lisa Densmore, who has won 36 national masters titles in alpine skiing since 1991, recommends inline skating, mountain biking or trail running. In the gym, she says, "the key is to make sure you bal-

Head to New Hampshire's Tuckerman Ravine, where windblown snow on the south-eastern shoulder of Mount Washington often lasts well into the summer and can reach depths of 75 feet. The spectator sport here is watching skiers attempt the steep headwall, but the ravine can also be treacherous — more than 30 skiers and hikers have died here; <http://tuckerman.org/>.

JULY: Mammoth Mountain in California has had skiing July 4 each of the last two years, or try glacier skiing at Whistler-Blackcomb in British Columbia, Canada.

It's winter in the Southern Hemisphere. Argentina has resorts near Bariloche and Las Lenas. In Chile, there's a famous nine-mile run from the Portillo resort to a local Christ of the Andes statue. But South American slopes can be crowded in July, as schools let out then for their winter breaks.

See what your favorite resort offers when there is no snow. Lots of ski towns have summer golfing, mountain biking and festivals. Lake Placid, N.Y., site of the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, has bobsledding on wheels instead of ice.

AUGUST: Last chance to buy discount season passes for the coming winter.

Everyone you know is at the beach this month, but you can ski in August at Mount Hood in Oregon.

Care to combine summer heat with winter chills? It may be 120 degrees in Dubai, but you can rent a parka and go skiing indoors there at the Emirates Mall; <http://www.skidxb.com/>. The

spokeswoman Kelly Burdick says, "The prices are higher, but they get exactly what they want."

SEPTEMBER: Newest gear and fashions available this month. Annual SNIAGRAB — that's bargains spelled backwards — sale of ski gear in Denver, at The Sports Authority, Labor Day weekend.

Ski fanatics on <http://snowheads.com> are buzzing this month about where to go this winter. Got a question about ski destination somewhere in the world? Post a question. Chances are you'll hear back from folks who've been there, worked there or even lived there. Check the snowEvent section of the forum for some great mountain trips, especially to European resorts.

Autumn is at hand. Plan a ride on a New England gondola to see the colored leaves; imagine the landscape when all the red and gold turns white.

Start shopping for pre-season offers, especially if you don't ski enough to make a season pass worthwhile, or if you want reservations for a peak holiday period. If, for example, you need childcare at a ski resort over Christmas, find out how soon you can make a reservation. Spots fill up fast once the lines open.

OCTOBER: This is a big month for ski swaps — organized exchanges of gear you kids outgrew or that you no longer need. Check with ski clubs and nearby resorts.

Finally, as the new ski season approaches, follow the news from Colorado to see where the first skiing can be done.