



Correspondent photo by BRIAN GOETZ

A skier enjoys the snow at Mount Prospect in Lancaster.

Wonderful Prospects

Small hill offers big experiences

By PEGGY NEWLAND
Correspondent

You’ve got to get Oilman gloves and wet ’em down,” the liftie tells me. “That way, the leather sticks to the rope.” I stand at the base of Mount Prospect, a ski hill with one rope tow going up to the tip of a powder-filled ridge. The rope slithers at my booted feet. “I don’t have Oilmans,” I tell him. “Let the rope slide over first, then grab on,” he tells me. I pick up the rope. “Is there any easy way up?” a kid asks as she waits behind me. “Nope,” the liftie says.

Located at the base of Weeks State Park in Lancaster, Mount Prospect rises to a 2,059-foot summit. From the stone observation tower, the views are spectacular. Built in 1912, the tower is listed in the National Historic Lookout Register, and from the summit, or even halfway up, you can see the Presidentials to the southeast, Franconia to the south, the Kilkenny Range to the northeast, the Green Mountains and Percy Peaks.

John Wingate Weeks, one of New Hampshire’s many conservationists, had a goal to make the views of his private summer estate available to all, not just to the select few owning land.

There’s something exhilarating about holding on for dear life – the wind on your cheeks, the strain of your arm muscles as you grip bare rope and the goal to stay upright. I find my-



Correspondent photo by BRIAN GOETZ

A sign greets visitors to Mount Prospect in Lancaster.

self screaming, not because I’m frightened, but because this is really, really fun. It brings out the kid in you. The kid you forgot you still had inside.

I scream and smile as my non-Oilman gloves slither and slide.

A man at the top of the ski tow cheers me on. “You can do it,” he shouts.

His encouragement gives me just the right amount of perseverance to heave myself off the tow at the top.

Bill Ghelli “runs the rope,” as he tells me. He sits in a wooden ski shack next to a 1957 Chevy engine – the juice behind the ski tow.

Closed for more than 13 years because of the pull of large ski resorts with the capacity for snowmaking, apres ski and mega-trails, Mount Prospect became one of the Lost Hills. Abandoned almost by time, but not forgotten by the locals and those who grew up skiing “the hill” (as it was

called), Mount Prospect came back in 2008 by sheer force of remembrance and a need to reconnect past to present.

“Our tow is operated by volunteers,” Bill tells me. They’re known informally as the Mount Prospect Ski Club. Members help out by volunteering to “work the rope” down mountain or up, donate wood for the wood stove or gas for the Chevy engine, hang out at the warming hut, sell fundraising T-shirts for \$20 or maintain the hill by skiing it and picking up broken branches.

There’s even a need for driving the Packmaster, the groomer that packs down snow, or operating the rope tow engine.

“The kids start skiing here and soon, they feel like they own the mountain,” Bill says as two pole-less kids whiz past, heading for one of the five trails.



Photo courtesy of MOUNTAIN VIEW GRAND HOTEL

The Mountain View Grand Hotel in Whitefield is shown. Just 20 minutes away from Mount Prospect, the hotel is a bit of luxury after an afternoon of low-cost skiing.

Prospect | Be prepared: There are no rentals, ski packages or cafeteria

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The front trails, named Lift-line, Weeks Way, South Slope and North Slope, can easily hold your attention, especially because the Packmaster has left a lot of wild in the powder. There's no ridged flatness, no tamed tracks, to become bored with here. It's packed and powder and it keeps you moving.

"Suicide" is the backwoods tree run. Jutting over a cliff and through pine glades, this trail is for the purist. Pockmarked with stump and filled with fresh powder, the trail gives you a sense of lumberjack delight. There's no ski map, no trail guide, no one telling you no, it's just a split-second decision and a mogul run down.

The tow up the mountain becomes mesmerizing. How many times can I make it up before my arms fall off? Can I stop screaming each time the rope jolts me upward? Will my skis stay in the rutted tow line?

"Last time up, last time up," I say to myself on the way up to Bill's hut, over and over again. I keep on going.

There are no rentals or ski packages. Tickets are \$5 for skiing 1-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. There's no cafeteria or lounge. Mount Prospect is purely BYOB and BYOS,

meaning bring everything yourself.

In the warming hut at the bottom, the wood stove is chock full and glowing. One boy eats the remains of his PBJ sandwich while his mother drinks from a Thermos. I lean back on my wooden bench and stretch my worn-out muscles.

Outside, the sun turns the rolling farmland and granite peaks a dusky pink and the trees are shadowed blue. It's time to head back to the hotel.

Because I haven't paid the usual \$75 for a full day of resort skiing, I feel entitled to stay at the Mountain View Grand, a hotel that's on the National Trust of Historic Hotels of America. Just 20 minutes away from Mount Prospect, in quaint Whitefield, the Mountain View Grand is perched on a hill like a gracious grand dame.

Established in 1866 as the Mountain View House and previously owned by the Dodge family, the resort is still as much part of the landscape as the view. Overlooking a full slice of the Presidential Mountain Range, with Mount Washington covered in blowing white, this is a place to sink into and stay.

Although the wraparound front deck is covered in frozen

deck chairs and ice-covered wicker, I stand and stare as the sun sets to the west, leaving shadowed peaks and rolling valleys of pine.

Inside, a fire crackles, as a family of cross-country skiers lugs skis and poles through the lobby. Everyone is rosy faced and wearing winter boots, and there isn't an ounce of attitude or Spandex anywhere.

Hot chocolate, tea, and stronger libations beckon from the intimately cozy bar where fireplaces warm and faces thaw out.

I flop in an overstuffed chair and try to read the menu without reading glasses. The manager notices my squint and hands me his.

"Here," he says. "I usually have to borrow my wife's, and she has rhinestones on hers."

The selections of wine are plentiful, the appetizers tempting, and I let my mountain-weary body soak up the ambience of a day spent well.

"Did you go skiing today?" the bellman asks.

I tell him about Mount Prospect and his eyes light up. "I learned to ski there," he tells me. He talks of building jumps and having ski competitions with friends from school. They'd meet there, even when it was closed, and hike their way back up the hill. "I love

that hill."

Sitting here feels good. I've earned the time sitting by the fire, with the promise of a bubbling hot tub and sauna. I've already seen the room, and it has a feather quilt and multiple pillows. Outside, it snows. Flakes pile on the window sill.

The next morning, it's a front-row breakfast with mountains. Fresh strawberries, blackberries and made-to-order waffles compete with

Mount Washington's castle of white in the distance. I sip endless coffee as a mother and daughter ski down a meandering trail through birch and snow-covered pine.

The bellman tells me of another small hill called Abenaki Ski Tow. It overlooks the lakes of Wolfeboro. He has also heard of one in South Berwick, Maine, called Powderhouse Hill.

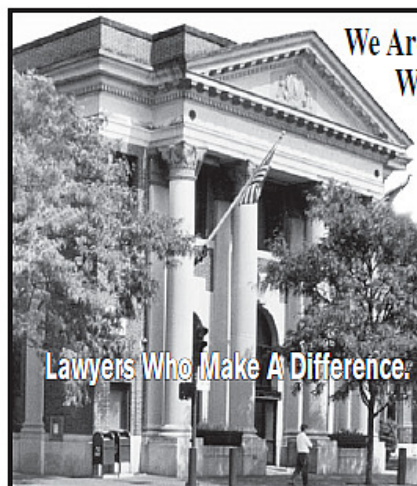
"They're coming back," he says. "The small hills."

We nod and smile.

There's something about simplicity. Maybe it's how your windblown face feels at the end of the day. Or the lack of electronic noise in the great rooms of a historic inn.

Or maybe it's the sound of skis on fresh powder followed closely with a child's laughter.

The search for simplicity is often elusive, but if you point yourself north and look for a sign called Mount Prospect, you just might find it.



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