

Skiing

Skiing was an important part of my life, up until we moved to Santa Fe in 2019. Unlike those who learn to ski when they are three or four years old, my adventures downhill started when I was thirty.

Well, not quite true. I remember having tried it two or three times when I was a graduate student up in northern lower-peninsula Michigan. At this point I don't quite remember where, but one place might have been Caberfae ski area near Cadillac. I had to rent the equipment. And all I can say about it is that I think I ran the car off the road into a snow bank on leaving at the end of the day. With the help of my buddies, also all beginners, we pushed it back on the road and continued for home.

Maggie and I arrived in Los Alamos in the fall of 1967. I had a plaster cast on my ankle from a skateboard accident (another story, later), but when it was removed, the orthopedist said it was OK to hike or ski, as long as I could get my foot into the protection of a boot. Skiing? Hadn't really occurred to me until then.

However, near Los Alamos, actually about 20 minutes uphill from town, is a ski area named Pajarito Mountain. It was built by volunteers, some of whom were even left over from the Manhattan Project. (Pajarito means "little bird", but maybe here it referred to a wild turkey.) So, I brought the subject up with Maggie, who knew about snow from Big Rapids (dry) and Ann Arbor (damp and slushy). My enticement was, after investigation,

"Hey, for \$17 apiece we can get *season passes* on the rope tow! Shouldn't we try it? It's really right here and easy to get to."

"Ugh, snow!" Yammer, yammer, "No thanks."

A week or two later, the REI catalog arrived, and I discovered,

"Gosh, Mag, it says here that we can buy a package of wooden skis *with metal edges*, bear-trap bindings, lace-up boots, and poles for \$36 dollars apiece. How can we afford *not* to try it?"

"Ugh, snow!" Yammer, yammer, "No thanks. Really."

Another week went by, and I tried again,

"C'mon, in warm weather you like to hike. Why don't we ski in the winter time?
As I said, really cheap."

Hesitation.

“Oh, OK, but I don’t think I’m gonna like it.”

“Good. I think, since we are both new to this, we should probably also pay for lessons.”

So, we ordered the packages and bought the season passes. And eventually there was enough snow, so Pajarito Mountain opened up for skiing on Saturdays and Sundays. On Saturday we drive the Valiant to the bottom of the Ski Hill Road (gravel, also known as Camp May Road) and put on chains. Up and park, drag our equipment up to the Lodge and put on boots. Arrange for a beginners lesson with on the bunny slope in the morning. Learn how to ride the rope tow using a gripper for holding on. And proceed to learn to ski. Lots of falling down and dusting ourselves off. And up and down the rope to the place where one gets off for the beginners’ area.

Whew! Come afternoon, we are both happy but exhausted. Drive home and soon to bed, skipping supper. But with Maggie saying, “We’ve got to get up there tomorrow earlier, to avoid that awful traffic jam.” The next day, and thereafter, I had to get up earlier on weekends (and later, also Wednesdays) just so Maggie could go skiing.

We finished out the year on the rope tow and beginners’ area. Near the end of the season, our neighbor took us all the way up to the top and we were able to get down the Daisy Mae slope without killing ourselves. The next year and thereafter we bought regular season passes, better equipment, and continued to improve. And enjoy the camaradie on the Lodge deck at lunch times. And participate in the various work parties in summer and fall to improve and expand the area. Eventually it grew to have four ski lifts and a lot of slopes of different difficulties, including the Fab Four expert runs. There was even a year when Maggie was elected Secretary of the Los Alamos Ski Club.

Besides Pajarito Mountain, we have also skied at other places. In New Mexico we also went a few times to the Santa Fe Ski Area and to the Taos facility. When we were on sabbatical and on vacations in Switzerland we often went to ski areas in the Engadine and elsewhere. I think it was at Engelberg when Maggie couldn’t keep up with the rest of us – and only later discovered that her left ski had broken in two at the middle, being held together by the boot and binding. We also several times bought ski passes for places in Colorado, such as Breckenridge, Arapahoe Basin, and Vail.

Things slowed down for us when, in 2015, Maggie began a series of operations on her left hip. In the end she decided she had to give it up. And so did I, after we moved to Brookdale’s assisted living quarters in 2019.