

Treasure Hunting on the Slopes

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You wouldn't believe what some guys do for free sun screen...

BY PETER MORAN

I was raised in Massachusetts and schooled in New Hampshire, and am proud to consider myself both a ski fanatic and a cheap Yankee. One of my secret delights that combines these personal characteristics is taking late season ski tours at commercial ski areas after the chairlifts have closed, doing what I call *treasure hunting*.

My tours are self-propelled, on telemark skis using climbing skins. The point is to climb underneath the path of the chairlifts in search of things that people drop. Pure folly, you might think, but you'd be surprised. Downhill skiers (myself included) can be generalized as a careless lot. We drop stuff out of our pockets or gloved hands all the time.

So I combine my love for sliding on snow and my need for exercise with the hopes of scavenging the losses of others. The normally tedious climb up the mountain is enlivened by the prospect of finding useful stuff, or perhaps even something of real value. On the way up, the normal route-finding techniques employed while ski touring such as following the terrain in pursuit of the path of least resistance and avoiding avalanche paths are completely abandoned, in pursuit of hidden treasure.



My latest treasure hunting tour was in mid-May at the shut-down Sugarbowl resort at Donner Pass. OK, here's the beef. My finds on the way up included:

- ✚ One *croakie*—new condition
- ✚ One *Mini-Mag Lite*—fully operational (why was someone carrying this?)
- ✚ A rescue whistle from Aetna Insurance—a potential life-saver
- ✚ Three cigarette lighters—all operational and occasionally handy
- ✚ Numerous bottles of sunscreen—a lifetime supply

- ✚ 2 sets of car keys—no cars attached
- ✚ One hat—*Darn Fine* brand (no kidding)
- ✚ One neck warmer—Vermont Woolens brand, good condition
- ✚ One bungee cord
- ✚ One Phillips screw driver—handy for tightening bindings
- ✚ One Bic pen—yes, it worked the first time
- ✚ One bar soap—don't ask why. At first, I thought it was ski wax, and “waxed” my skis with it. No difference, but no harm, and now I know my ski bases are real clean.
- ✚ 36 cents in change—normally much more.
- ✚ Some copper wire—which came in handy later in the day.

I also came across some bolt cutters—since they were heavy and of limited use, I left them behind. Same for the dozens of lip balm tubes (I have some standards).

Most of the “treasures” are usually found higher up on the mountain, under the lifts servicing the more advanced terrain. I suppose the junk dropped on the bunny slopes is quickly retrieved.

One trend I noticed on my last sojourn is the numerous cigarette butts littering the last hundred yards under the chairlifts before the get-off point. With all the anti-smoking sentiment in our society these days, smokers can take pleasure in knowing that they can still light up while skiing, and that most chairlifts are JUST long enough to get a good lungful of smoke and a good nicotine buzz before they have to resume their athletic activity.

On the going downhill side, I had the place to myself, and under sunny skies, carved pretty turns down three parts of the area. The late season snowpack, being covered with dirt, dust, and pollen, showed fresh tracks extremely well, and I was able to pridefully observe my downtracks from afar.

I'm not the only one who is onto treasure hunting, as the parking lots at places like Mammoth Mountain and Mt. Bachelor are rumored to be full of RVs in June and July containing gray hairs who use metal detectors on the rapidly melting snowpack in search of buried treasure. But you can't really call a gray hair with a metal detector a fun pig. (*Why not? -Ed.*)

The best part of treasure hunting on the slopes is that the day's exercise, the finds, and the fun are all **free**. I figure all my finds, while modest, probably paid for my gas that weekend. Must be the cheap Yankee in me. Anyhow, treasure hunting is a great way to *get out, have fun.* 🐷

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The author—
ski fanatic, cheap Yankee, fun pig.

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