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Glenn Oakley

Nordic skiers warm up at a Tamarack Resort trailside hut.

preservation of the stars of the town's 40-year-old Winter Carnival: more than two dozen snow sculptures competing for the festival crown.

"If the weather cooperates, it goes a lot quicker," says Ben Colley, who has helped build McCall Memorial Hospital's artistic submission in each of the last six competitions. Last year his homage to The Lion King, inspired by the carnival's movie theme, took his crew about two weeks to finish, a typical amount of time, barring slush-creating sunshine slowdowns.

McCall is a lakeside resort community that's a 100-mile drive past slopes of snow-edged pines along the Payette River north of Boise. The city's 10-day winter revel, held January 28 through February 6 this year, is a call to both visitors and locals to get out and enjoy the cold, with dogsledding demonstrations, snowshoe golf, parades, a hairy-leg contest, dances, ice-skating, hockey, and the Idaho Snow Sculpting Championship. Locals and professionals compete in the two-round competition, which climaxes with a 24-hour sculpt-off.

But whether or not the weather holds for the festival, the stars have aligned to provide central Idaho visitors with expanded winter recreation options. The big news is the opening of Tamarack Resort (2099 W. Mountain Rd., Donnelly; www.tamarackidaho.com or 208/325-1000), about 18 miles southwest of McCall. In December, Tamarack fired up its five new lifts (\$55 per day) after a soft opening last season for snowshoeing and nordic skiing (\$10 per day).

The massive resort, which will have cost about \$1.5 billion when fully complete, currently includes 25 downhill runs that drop a total of 2,800

Winter fun in McCall

Test your skiing and snow-sculpting skills in central Idaho

by Lisa Taggart

Everyone's hoping for a cold snap this month in McCall, Idaho. Not because they're fans of frostbite, but because subfreezing temps will keep the powder dry on the just-opened ski runs at the region's new Tamarack Resort. And chilly days will aid construction and

feet, 20 miles of nordic trails, 6 miles of snowshoe trails (including a section open to dogs), a ski school, and six restaurants. Lodging is available in 62 rental houses (from \$350 per night); a hotel is scheduled to open at the end of the year. Planners hope to draw as many as 70,000 skiers a season to the icy shores of Lake Cascade.

"The skiing here is phenomenal. It's going to be huge this winter," says Steve Fredriksen, a Boise insurance broker and avid skier who owns a vacation home nearby. "The runs have a lot of variety — there's some technical and some powder up top. And the hike and ski opportunities are some of the best anywhere in the state."

Tamarack adds to the area's existing ski and snowshoe options. Operating for 44 years, Brundage Mountain Resort (\$37 per day; www.brundage.com or 208/634-4151) is the largest, with 43 lift-served trails 8 miles north of McCall. Closer to town, the Little Ski Hill (nordic \$6 per day, alpine \$8 per day; 3635 State 55; 208/634-5691) is a good bet for families. In town, alongside Payette Lake, 1,000-acre Ponderosa State Park (\$2 trail fee, \$4 per vehicle to park; Miles Standish Rd. off E. Lake Dr., McCall; www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/parks or 208/634-2164) has nordic and snowshoe trails.

Opened in 2003, and also near Payette Lake, the Manchester Ice & Event Centre (from \$5.50; 200 E. Lake St., McCall; 208/634-3570) is an indoor rink that offers hockey and ice-skating. McCall makes a convenient base, and downtown's Hotel McCall continues to provide a classy place to spend the night. But with tourism numbers expected to increase, area lodging choices are expanding as well. There are the rental houses at Tamarack Resort, of course. Plus, in the nearby town of Cascade, the Ashley Inn opened in late 2003 with more than five dozen rooms — all with fireplaces. Just the thing to get you through those cold nights.

Snow time

For information contact the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce (www.mccall-idchamber.org or 800/260-5130).

Lodging

The Ashley Inn. The hotel, in Cascade's small downtown, has 67 large rooms. From \$125. 500 N. Main St., Cascade; www.theashleyinn.com or 866/382-5621.

Hotel McCall. The 101-year-old hotel is in the heart of McCall's downtown, at the edge of Payette Lake. It has 34 rooms, some with views, and a stately lobby. From \$60 with a shared bath, \$93 with a private bath. 1101 N. Third St.; 208/634-8105.

Dining

Bistro 45 Wine Bar & Cafe. Light meals and a nice wine selection. \$. 1101 N. Third (across the courtyard from Hotel McCall); 208/634-4515.

Epicurean. Hearty gourmet dishes in Hotel McCall. \$\$\$; dinner Wed–Sun. 1101 N. Third; 208/634-8188.

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