

In the Berkshires, community is king of the hill

► **SKIING**
Continued from Page M7

So, one Saturday morning earlier this month, I arrived to lightly falling snow. By all appearances, the mountain looked just as I had left it — and, to the untrained eye, it doesn't look all too impressive. In fact, some might say calling Blandford a mountain is a disservice to rocky peaks everywhere. At only 465 vertical feet, the ski area cannot boast mile-long runs. But it does offer enough diversity and personal touches to counterbalance any perceived deficiencies in elevation.

I took one of three double chairs to the summit and soon laid claim to my own stretch of freshly groomed corduroy. By my side was my cousin Bill, who shared many of my childhood skiing exploits and who, like me, hadn't carved a turn at Blandford in the new millennium.

Like so many club members, we chose Broadway for our first run of the day. It's the longest and widest of Blandford's 22 trails and is perfect for cranking giant slalom turns. Stopping halfway down the gently rolling slope, we both noticed something remarkable. The view from the trail remained unblemished. There were no resort condos to be seen, no blinking cellphone towers, only a sea of white-capped hills extending to the distant horizon.

Not to be outdone by the panorama, Blandford exudes an authentic flair at nearly every turn. The trails at the center of the mountain are wide and preserved from the club's earliest days, when the base was nothing more than cow pastures that were groomed by wandering cattle in summer and leased by the farmer to intrepid skiers in winter.

As one goes up the mountain and toward the right, the trails become increasingly narrow. There were days that Bill and I would ski these almost exclusively, alternating between Yodeler, which slices through the forest at the top of the mountain, and three steeper runs that comprise the north slope. These trails, along with Put's Peril, arguably the hill's most iconic run, have for me always defined Blandford's terrain and history.

As a true ski club, the trails were all cut by volunteer hands. Club members would arrive for "work parties" in the summer and fall and carve out idiosyncratic little runs shaped by the mountain's natural contour. Their handiwork can also be found alongside Glade, the hill's first trail. Among the pines are the wheels of a long abandoned ski tow, its predecessor powered by an old Ford motor that club members salvaged from a local junkyard.

The volunteers still come, said club president David Schoen. More than 300 volunteers do nearly everything: paint chairlifts, mow lawns, maintain snow-making equipment, and repair Blandford's two lodges.

"What keeps them returning," Schoen said, "is a sense of community you don't find anywhere else. Generations learn to ski together at Blandford and return year after year for the camaraderie. If you don't know the names, then you know the faces and that's what makes a small mountain special."

When Bill and I entered the old lodge for lunch, too much time had passed for us to recognize any faces, but the ambience in the rustic building, built in 1941, was more than familiar. "It's like we were just here yesterday," said Bill, echoing my thoughts.



PHOTOS BY PIERRE CATELLIER

Family skiing and youth and adult racing programs are popular at Blandford Ski Area, where narrow, winding runs are reminiscent of the early days of New England skiing.



Families were eating together on long, gray picnic tables as wood crackled in the oversized brick fireplace. On the mantle were old hickory skis and the club's famed "bunkhouse trophy," a porcelain bowl that dates to the 1950s. The scent of dozens of home-cooked meals filled the air. While Blandford has a cafeteria in the new lodge, the ski area allows families to plug in slow cookers along the walls, so they can enjoy their own chili or pasta e fagioli for lunch or during impromptu après-ski festivities.

Blandford seems to embrace tradition in all its forms. In early February, it holds a longstanding cardboard box race, during which participants slide down the mountain in a variety of surprisingly sophisticated contraptions. Later in the month, the area holds its annual jubilee, which includes a torchlight parade on skis, dinner and dancing, and liberal portions of glühwein, a hot, spiced wine.

But that's not to say Blandford

Center. The couple put in 12- to 14-hour days on Fridays and weekends and are part of a team that also organizes instruction for nearly 600 elementary schoolchildren each week, offers ladies-only ski classes, and provides training assistance to Special Olympians who practice here.

Families come to Blandford each weekend from as far away as Brooklyn, N.Y., most for the same reasons that make the Masciadrellis fixtures on the mountain. "I love those coveted chairlift rides with my kids," said Lisa, "where I can share time with my family and enjoy what's important in life."

It was my first day back to Blandford since I was a teenager, but riding up the chairlift with my cousin I couldn't help but feel the same way. Apparently, you can go home again.

Matthew Bellico can be reached at matthew.bellico@gmail.com.

Berkshires



Artful Accommodations

the **PORCHES** inn
at MASS MOCA

Romance 101

February's Special

Get a 1-bedroom suite w/ breakfast, local chocolate, & a bottle of red wine from \$140 Sunday–Thursday

North Adams, MA—the Berkshires
413 664 0400 | porches.com

Gearing up

Soothing tunes for furry friends

Whether you travel with your pets or leave them at home, you can help minimize their stress with music. Pet Acoustics, based in Washington Depot, Conn., has produced music CDs for dogs, cats, and horses. Musician and pet behavior specialist Janet Marlow, who cofounded the company, has created upbeat instrumentals at modified frequencies and decibel levels that have a calming effect on animals. The soothing sounds aim to alleviate everything from separation anxiety and travel jitters to thunderstorm nerves. You can purchase Relaxation Music for Dogs and Cats and other similarly themed CDs for \$13.99 each at Pet Acoustics (866-228-3013, www.petacoustics.com), or through iTunes.

KARI BODNARCHUK



PET ACOUSTICS

IT'S MORE THAN A VACATION. IT'S A GRAND ADVENTURE.

Come for award-winning skiing at Bretton Woods, the state's largest ski area and discover 30 new acres of backcountry glades on Mt. Stickney. Stay for the sense of wonder, excitement and adventure. Enjoy a variety of winter activities, including a year-round canopy tour, full-service spa and much more. Reserve today and experience our grand \$60 million renovation.

OVER 11 FEET OF SNOW THIS SEASON!
Stay Here. Ski Free.

from
\$99*
Sunday - Thursday

Stay at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel or Omni Bretton Arms Inn and ski or ride for FREE at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire's largest ski area!

800-843-6664
omnimountwashingtonresort.com

OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS
mount washington | new hampshire

Bretton Woods

*Rate is per person per night based on double occupancy. Some restrictions and blackout dates apply. Valid through the 10/11 ski season. Subject to tax and resort amenity fee. Two complimentary tickets per room. Subject to availability. Cannot be combined with any packages or additional discounted offers. ©2011 Omni Hotels & Resorts

Blandford Ski Area

41 Nye Brook Road
Blandford
413-848-2860
www.skiblandford.org
Full-day weekend adult lift ticket \$47. Springfield Ski Club adult membership \$349 and includes a season pass. Open Fri-Sun days; Mon, Wed, Fri-Sat nights.

The ski area is about a two-hour drive from Boston. From the Mass. Pike, take exit 3 to Route 10-202 south to the center of Westfield. Turn right onto Route 20 west. Go 8 miles to the Russell State Police barracks. Turn left at the barracks onto Blandford Stage Road and follow the signs.

Maine



Enjoy a Valentine's Day Getaway in Ogunquit!

Getaway for Champagne, Music & Romance

February 4-6, 2011 or February 11-13, 2011

Package includes Champagne & Strawberries, 2 nights lodging, 1 dinner for 2, live music, plus hearty Maine breakfast each morning and more.

Heated Indoor Pool • Indoor & Outdoor Hot Tub
Luxury Suites • Fireplace Rooms • Family Suites
Health Club & Spa • West Meadow Pub
Visit Online for Spa/Yoga, Wine Weekends,
Stonewall Kitchen Packages & Winter Specials



The Meadowmere
RESORT

PO Box 2347 • Ogunquit, ME 03907 • www.meadowmere.com • 1-800-633-8718
Weekend Packages Start at \$219.95 pppo Tax & Gratuity Not Included
Higher Rates on Holiday/Special Event Weekends – Rates Vary by Room Type

Cape Cod

Winter getaways!

Great Package Savings

CapeCodPlymouthDeals.com

Valentine's Packages

Suite Deal & Beach Plum Spa Romance
Packages at all 3 properties

Fire & Ice 1 night package
starting at \$139 at John Carver & Cape Codder

Sweetheart & Amoré 1 night packages
starting at \$160 at Dan'l Webster
(rates & packages vary per property)

Family Vacation Package*
2 nights for a family of 4 plus up to \$40 in meals and admission to our exciting Indoor Theme Pools!

Dinner Theater Package*
Starting at \$110/person includes one overnight, dinner buffet and an incredible show!

Friends & Family Discount
Buy 1 room & get 50% off the 2nd!

• Cape Codder Resort & Spa, Hyannis
• John Carver Inn & Spa, Plymouth
• Dan'l Webster Inn & Spa, Sandwich
*available at John Carver & Cape Codder only

CapeCodPlymouthDeals.com

New Hampshire

IT'S MORE THAN A VACATION. IT'S A GRAND ADVENTURE.

Come for award-winning skiing at Bretton Woods, the state's largest ski area and discover 30 new acres of backcountry glades on Mt. Stickney. Stay for the sense of wonder, excitement and adventure. Enjoy a variety of winter activities, including a year-round canopy tour, full-service spa and much more. Reserve today and experience our grand \$60 million renovation.

OVER 11 FEET OF SNOW THIS SEASON!
Stay Here. Ski Free.

from
\$99*
Sunday - Thursday

Stay at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel or Omni Bretton Arms Inn and ski or ride for FREE at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire's largest ski area!

800-843-6664
omnimountwashingtonresort.com

OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS
mount washington | new hampshire

Bretton Woods

*Rate is per person per night based on double occupancy. Some restrictions and blackout dates apply. Valid through the 10/11 ski season. Subject to tax and resort amenity fee. Two complimentary tickets per room. Subject to availability. Cannot be combined with any packages or additional discounted offers. ©2011 Omni Hotels & Resorts