



Dashing DOWNHILL

Cold wind in your face never felt so good.

WRITTEN BY DALE LEATHERMAN



RICK LEE; NIKKI BOWMAN

CLOCKWISE
Winterplace Ski
Resort (left) and
the Silver Creek

area at Snowshoe
Mountain are
snow tubing musts
in West Virginia.



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ubing is a great way to have fun in the snow at a ski resort without spending a lot of money,” says Brenda Maupin of Snowshoe. “What we like best is that all ages can enjoy the same activity without having to have lessons or special equipment. We have a grandson turning 4 in February, so this Presidents’ Day we will take him tubing for the first time. The tubes go really fast, and everyone loves the speed, but mothers and grandmothers like me are delighted that it’s also a very safe sport.”

Back in the day, kids who didn’t have sleds would get their hands on an inner tube from a truck or tractor and head for the steepest hill in the neighborhood. The rubber surface of the tube creates little friction on the snow, so riders could really fly. It was exciting—but also problematic. Unlike

It a sled, tubes had no steering mechanism. Dragging a foot would likely send you spinning like a top. The only way to stop was to fall off or run into something. And then there was the climb back up the snowy hill, dragging your heavy tube.

Having originated in the Alps in the 1820s, tubing didn’t change much until the modern era, when ski areas began to revolutionize the sport. Carving the snow into set lanes with safe run-out areas at the bottom has eliminated the danger of crashing into trees. It’s easier to get back to the top of the hill via mechanized tows or “magic carpet” conveyors. Tubes have changed a bit,



too. The “doughnut hole” is enclosed so you don’t drag your clothing on the snow, and there are handles to hold onto. All you have to do these days is dress warmly, wear sturdy shoes, and let gravity do the work.

Snow tubing has increased in popularity in the past decade, according to the National Ski Areas Association. “Resorts see it as a good, entry-level snow sports experience, with no equipment or training needed,” says NSAA spokesperson Laura Lewis. “Eighty-three percent of the ski areas in the Southeast offer tubing—the highest percentage of any of the regions.”

Three West Virginia ski resorts have embraced tubing in a big way. Here’s what they have to offer:

Canaan Valley Resort State Park, Davis

Canaan Valley Resort’s eight-lane Tube Park has the longest runs in the Mid-Atlantic—a whopping 1,200 feet—with a magic carpet back to the top. In a two-hour tubing session riders can get in about 24 runs, according to Marketing Director Cary Sponaugle.

Sponaugle points out that the facility was relocated to the ski area last season in order to provide more parking and longer tubing runs. During the 2013–14 season (95

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Height Requirement: 42 inches tall, 4 years old

Season: December 25 through March, weather permitting

Hours: Sunday to Thursday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Friday, Saturday, and holidays 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Prime evening sessions: Friday, Saturday, and holidays 4:30 to 9 p.m.

Rates for two-hour sessions: Monday to Friday, \$18; weekends and holidays, \$25

CLOCKWISE Winterplace Ski Resort has 14 to 16 lanes and countless adventures. Make new friends at

Ruckus Ridge Adventure Park in the Silver Creek area of Snowshoe Mountain (bottom).



days), it drew 12,700 participants. The new location features a warming hut with a fireplace and viewing area, along with ticketing, snacks, and restrooms. Outside is a large fire pit with seating.

“Tubing is a very popular attraction here at the resort,” says David Herscher, the resort’s general manager. “Without fail, whether you’re an avid skier or snowboarder or just a casual winter adventurer, our tube park brings out the kid in everyone. Even those who choose to simply observe can enjoy the beautiful timber frame warming facility and inviting outdoor fire pit. It’s truly a great family activity.” 800.622.4121, canaanresort.com

Snowshoe Mountain, Snowshoe

Located at the Ruckus Ridge Adventure Park in the Silver Creek area of the resort, the Coca-Cola

Snowtubing Park has five lanes dropping more than six stories to the bottom, where a handle tow lift scoots riders back to the top. Tubers average 12 to 18 runs during a two-hour session.

“Tubing is very popular for families and groups who want easy, outdoor playtime in the snow,” says Resort General Manager Frank DeBerry. “As opposed to the ski experience, where very often families or groups split up for the terrain that appeals to them, the tube park is a ‘play together’ experience. The Coca-Cola Tube Park is just steps away from slopes at Silver Creek, but feels like it’s on its own friendly little mountain. No skills or experience required, just bundle up, grab a tube, and go. It’s especially fun when the lights come on for sunset tube rides or with festive music and tubing after dark, with hot chocolate waiting just steps away inside the Silver Creek lodge.”

304.572.1000, snowshoemtn.com

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Height Requirement: 36 inches tall or 4 years old, no ski boots permitted

Season: Mid-December through mid-March, weather permitting

Hours: Sunday to Thursday 1 to 7 p.m.; Friday to Saturday 1 to 9 p.m.

Rates for two-hour sessions: Monday to Thursday, all ages \$15, family four-pack \$50; Friday to Sunday and holidays, adult (over 13) \$20, child \$17, family four-pack \$65

Winterplace Ski Resort, Ghent

Whoop-de-doo! Home to the largest tubing park in the Mountain State, Winterplace Ski Resort in Raleigh County offers tubers 14 to 16 lanes and two “Super Carpet” lifts to get back to the top.

Buy a ticket for a two-hour session and you’ll get in about 10 to 15 runs, depending on the crowd. On a busy weekend, you can expect to see 500 to 1,000 people enjoying the tubing park at any given time, according to Resort Marketing Director Lauren Snyder.

The park is located behind the MountainHouse, convenient for tubers who are looking to take a much-deserved break and warm up with a cup of delicious hot chocolate. The mid-mountain facility includes a food court, ski shop, and large deck with a stellar mountain view. It’s also a great place to curl up by the natural stone fireplace for a quick rest after many hours of outdoor adventure. Call about sleepover packages for groups of 15 or more. 800.607.7669, winterplace.com

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Height Requirement: 44 inches (the Kiddie Park is available for smaller children for \$5)

Season: Late November through March

Hours: Monday to Friday 1 to 10 p.m.; weekends and holidays 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Rates for a two-hour session: \$28.50 to \$40; \$14 as a ski pass add-on

Rental insulated ski bibs: \$9



Canaan Valley Resort State Park has eight lanes, offering hours of fun.