



Photos by John Myers / jmyers@duluthnews.com

Skiers prepare to head down the mountain at Bridger Bowl ski area near Bozeman, Mont. on a sunny but brisk day last week. The area offers steep vertical slopes, tree skiing, back-country cliff-jumping as well as traditional glades and beginner runs.

## MOUNTAIN SKIING DRAWS HUNDREDS OF NORTHLANDERS WEST

### 32nd annual Ski Hut trip to Bozeman, Bridger Bowl has loyal following

By John Myers  
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Bozeman, Mont.

We had gone as far up the mountain as the chairlift system would take us and it seemed we were on top of the world.

Some harder, potentially crazier souls were walking farther up the summit, armed with avalanche beepers and shovels and a zest for vertical drop that is beyond most people's comprehension.

We were high enough already, elevation above 8,000 feet — so high that we could look down on clouds. We watched as it snowed lightly on the base of Bridger Bowl ski resort where we could see ants, no, people, scurrying about. Snow-covered mountains stretched in every direction.

"The view from up here is incredible," said Kris Madison just before she led me down into a black diamond, bowl-shaped ski run so steep it took my breath away. Or was that the altitude?

Clearly, Toto, we weren't in Minnesota any more.

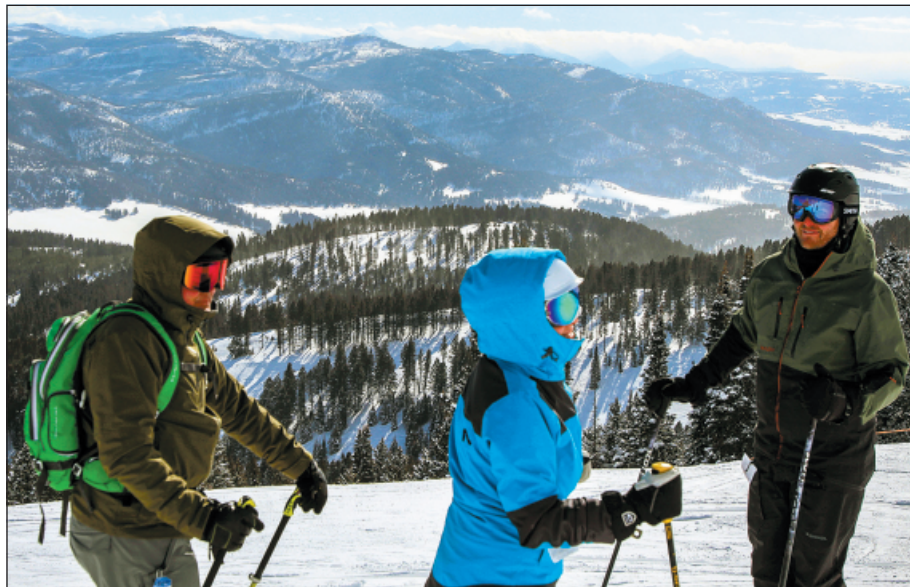
Welcome to Montana mountain skiing, but with a Northland flavor, thanks to the annual invasion of the Ski Hut ski trip that last week brought some 200 Northlanders west, including Madison, of Iron River, and her daughter, Sydni.

Every winter for the past 32 years Duluth's Ski Hut sporting goods shop has organized a trip west to Bozeman. It's a casual, low-budget affair that draws skiers of all skill levels and ages.

There's no bus or train or airplane for most; everyone drives their own vehicle. The dates are always the same — over President's Day week — which is good for families with children in the Duluth school district who get the week off for winter break.

"That's the beauty of this trip. You can come and go and ski at your own pace. If we had a bus, and tried to get everyone on the same timetable, it would be like herding cats," said Scott Neustel, a.k.a. Potter, owner of Ski Hut.

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Scott Neustel, his daughter Hanna Norman and her husband David Norman pause on top of one of the runs at Bridger Bowl ski area near Bozeman, Mont., on a brisk day last week. The Neustel family — owners of Duluth's Ski Hut stores — has organized a ski trip to Bridger Bowl for 32 years, this year drawing nearly 200 Northlanders west.



Above: Sydni Madison, left, and her mom, Kris Madison, of Iron River, ride one of the Bridger Bowl chairlifts up the mountain on a windy morning last week. The family has participated in the past five Ski Hut trips to Bozeman, Mont.

Left: A sticker on a snowboard stashed in a rack at the base of Bridger Bowl ski area near Bozeman, Mont.



### About Bridger Bowl ski area

Bridger Bowl is a nonprofit ski hill where locals started skiing in the 1940s in what is now the Custer Gallatin National Forest. A rope-tow was installed in 1951 and the lift installed in 1955. The Bozeman State Park and Recreation Association was formed in 1954 and became the Bridger Bowl Association in 1971, supported by the Bridger Bowl Foundation.

The ski area is located on the east slope of the Bridger Mountain Range. With four large natural bowls within the boundaries, the ski area offers terrain with a variety of landscapes including long, wide-open slopes, glades, chutes and gullies.

Bridger Bowl's terrain difficulty rating (beginner to expert) is fairly easy to determine based on elevation: First-time beginner slopes in the base area nearest the chalets; novice terrain across the lower middle; wide-open intermediate runs in the center; advanced expert open bowl terrain in the upper third; and extreme expert terrain coming off the ridge top.

Bridger Bowl, like the mountain range by the same name, is named after Jim Bridger, a trapper, fur trader and wilderness guide who lived from 1804-1881 and guided through much of the West.

### Bridger Bowl by the numbers

- Season:** Dec. 7 to April 7
- Vertical rise:** 2,700 feet
- Skiable terrain:** 2,000 acres
- Top elevation:** 8,800 feet; base at 6,100 feet
- Hours:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily
- Average annual snowfall:** 350 inches. So far this year: 195 inches.
- Runs:** 75, plus many unmarked areas.
- Lifts:** 1 quad lift, 6 triple chair lifts, 1 double chair lift and 3 surface lifts
- Distance from Duluth:** 995 miles, about 15 hours driving.
- Go to:** [bridgeterbowl.com](http://bridgeterbowl.com)