

New school on the slopes

We take to skis in Fernie to go beyond Beer

BY LISA KADANE, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 20, 2011

Riding up the Great Bear Express chair at Fernie Alpine Resort on a recent Saturday was a bit of a Hot Tub Time Machine experience for me.

For those who haven't seen the rather ridiculous movie, which was shot in Fernie, it involves a group of guy friends who drink beer and shots of Jagermeister in a hot tub and somehow get transported back to their ski resort glory days in 1986, when sport enthusiasts wore stretch pants and everyone slammed back paralyzers and Burt Reynolds shooters after a gnarly day on the slopes.

My time machine experience? I found myself sitting on a quad chair lift with two strangers who spent the ride guzzling bad beer. The duo -pals from nearby Sparwood -each pulled out a brewski from their respective parkas, cracked it open and chugged it during the five-minute ride. Talkative buddy drank an Old Milwaukee; quiet guy a Keystone Light.

"Wow, you guys are old school," I remarked, remembering my university days of skiing with a leaky wineskin and trying to look cool in the lift line while simultaneously sipping pink Zinfandel and wearing neon.

"Nah," said Old Milwaukee. "We're new school."

"New school!" quiet guy chimed in, rather loudly. They then toasted each other and downed their beers. I thought new school would have involved Fernie Brewing Company craft beer, but I kept silent on that point, marvelling on the power of beer to persevere as an apres -and, evidently, pendant -ski drink.

But I digress. This column is about apres ski cocktails. So I set out that afternoon to suss out and sample a few.

First stop: A late lunch at Big Bang Bagels inside the Snow Creek Lodge. At 1: 30 p.m. it wasn't technically apres ski, but I couldn't pass up trying a Mogul Smoker (see recipe) because of its retro name. The cafe mocha-like drink warmed me up and energized me .

Second stop: The iconic Griz Bar at the base of the ski hill. It's decidedly old school, with a dark interior, cushy vinyl booths and antiquated straight skis hanging above the bar as decor.

I was excited to see a paralyzer on the menu, but dismayed when bartender Justin Power said he only makes two or three a day. His bestselling apres ski drink is a jug of Kokanee. (When I relayed this news to a friend he said, "Just add Clamato to Kokanee and you've got a cocktail.") Instead, I tried the popular Griz Bar Caesar, refreshing and spicy thanks to Powers' Tabasco freepour and the pepperoncini pepper garnish.

Third stop: Kelsey's. Surely the younger snow bunny crowd would be ordering chocolate martinis?

"Kegs of beer -that's all they want to drink," said bartender Ryan Vincent, a Fernie native. As of 4 p.m. on one of the busiest Saturdays of the season, Vincent had filled countless jugs and mixed more than 150 Caesars, but had only shaken one martini. He informed me that those boozy coffee drinks we all associate with apres ski (the Mogul Smoker, for one) aren't all that popular.

Last stop: The Old Elevator restaurant for dinner. I'd given up on apres ski cocktails and ordered a What The Huck beer from the Fernie Brewing Company.

But not my friend. He followed up his Skinny Pirate (spiced rum mixed with Diet Coke) with a Sea Breeze and a Blackberry Mojito. Pretty bold apres ski choices for a dude, really.

Now that's new school.

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