

BONE-CHILLING SKI ESCAPES

Explore the ghoulish side of four Oregon winter playgrounds

BY ALEX NOTMAN

SNOW ENGULFS
OREGON'S FAMED
TIMBERLINE LODGE

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Noises in the night. Beds shaking. Lights flickering. Rooms flooding. Strange Victorian women. This is not your average relax-by-the-fire-with-a-cup-of-cocoa-after-a-day-on-the-slopes kind of ski getaway. You're going to need to bring more than your best long johns, hand warmers and whiskey to keep the chills away. You'll need a flashlight and nerves of steel because this is a different type of trip — a trip down the mountain and into the unknown. Here are four Oregon ski spots where you can whoosh through powder by day and seek out the paranormal by night.

MT. BACHELOR

Snow bunnies have been flocking to Mt. Bachelor Ski Resort and its 9,068-foot-high stratovolcano for more than six decades. A quick jaunt from Bend, Bachelor boasts dry snow, 12-plus trails and more than 3,500 acres of ski-able terrain. Rest your weary bones in town at McMenam's Old St. Francis School (mcmenam.com) and you might hear some bone-rattlin'. "I'm not saying it's haunted," property manager Jared Prince says, "but it's odd." Prince describes lights turning on and off by themselves, books dropping off shelves and even one couple who checked out of the Nunnery Cottage in the middle of the night. "All they said was the place is haunted, and they left," he says. And then there's the theater building, formerly a gymnasium, where "odd things happen," like a puzzling flood, inexplicable noises and fire alarms going off. "It's been an Irish-Catholic school since 1936," he says, laughing. "I'm sure if these walls could speak there would be some interesting stories." Looking for more haunts in Bend? Rumor has it that the blue orbs hover in Pilot Butte Cemetery and ghosts frequent the Old Mill District.

MT. ASHLAND

With 23 runs and a vertical drop of 1,150 feet, the non-profit Mt. Ashland Ski Area is one of the best skiing spots in southern Oregon. After a "twilight" skiing session under the stars, head over to the Black Swan Inn (ashlandsblackswaninn.com found through HauntedBnB.com — Airbnb.com's macabre cousin) and warm up next to the fire. Local Black Swan Inn keeper Tracy Eagen had heard the tales before she bought the property in 2003. The ghost of Helen Silsby, wife of Civil War Col. William Silsby and original owner of the house in 1896, has never really moved on. "I've had people come to the door over the years and say they had been shaken out of their beds," Eagen says. "There are people who come in who say there is a Victorian woman in the front parlor." Guests also often describe having intense spiritual dreams. Though Eagen is not entirely convinced about the inn's spook status, she does try to appease the Silsbys just in case. "I try to redecorate very, very carefully," she says. "I bought her husband's Civil War letters that he wrote from the battlefield and I do visit their gravesite and put flowers down."

ANTHONY LAKES

With the likes of Mt. Bachelor, Mt. Hood, Hoodoo and Willamette Pass, the Eastern Oregon ski resort of Anthony Lakes often gets overlooked. However, it's worth the seven-hour drive. With a 7,800-foot base elevation in the Blue Mountains, the snow falls in a dry powder and the lift lines are miniscule compared to its western competitors. There are two more reasons to make the trek: La Grande's Hot Lake Springs Hotel (hotlakesprings.com) and Baker City's Geiser Grand Hotel (geisergrand.com). Hot Lake Springs, once known as Hot Lake Hotel, was featured in Fox's "Scariest Places on Earth," was the set for Portland

musician Laura Gibson's spooky "La Grande" music video and has drawn a cult internet following. Perhaps it's the eerie swirling steam from the hot springs or perhaps it's the hotel's former life as a sanitarium, but the hotel's staff is skeptical. "If I did experience something I'd be the first one running out of here," says one Hot Lake Springs employee. In neighboring Baker City, owner Barbara Sidway is proud of the Geiser Grand Hotel's haunted history. "It's the only hotel in the country that facilitates paranormal investigation with our guests," Sidway says. And there are a number of things to investigate: the Lady in Blue who haunts the bar, the "party" ghosts that can be heard cavorting in the dining room in the middle of the night and the otherworldly "guests" that frequent the third floor. "None of them are scary or axe-wielding murderers — which disappoints a lot of people," Sidway says. "They are people who are having so much fun they don't want to go to the afterworld so they stay here."

MT. HOOD

A story about Oregon's scary ski escapes is not complete without a mention of Mt. Hood's Timberline Lodge (timberlinelodge.com) à la *The Shining*, but fans and ghost seekers might be disappointed. "Timberline is not haunted," lodge spokesperson John Tullis says. Timberline, Tullis points out, was only used in four exterior shots in the film. "[Director Stanley Kubrick] built a sound stage outside of London that was a full-scale façade of Timberline," he says. Even so, the lodge did have the foresight to request that the film use room numbers that Timberline does not have, like the infamous Room 237. So, future guests, enjoy the *après-ski* scene and don't expect to find any ghost ladies in your bathtub. At Mt. Hood, you will have to get your chills the old-fashioned way — on the slopes. ■