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# WEEKEND BREAK



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## 'THE MOUNTAIN IS OUT'

Grace Hunt's  
 run down the  
 hill at Mt. Hood.  
 Ed Hunt photos

## Mt. Hood and other gods of the Pacific Northwest

By **ED HUNT**  
 For *The Daily Astorian*

**T**here is a Northwest saying on a bright and cloudless day: “The mountain is out.”

It means you can see your local mountain — perhaps Mt. Hood or Mt. Adams, maybe even St. Helens.

Our volcanic peaks are majestic gods that lie in repose among untamed forests rather than jagged ranges crowding far-off horizons. Our mountains are mighty things that shine when the curtain of clouds lifts to reveal their eminence. They seem personal and singular, close enough to touch.

We knew nothing of mountains when my family moved across the country and planted roots between Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams. From the hill above our home we could see them shining at twilight.

Two mountains with very different personalities.

Adams, like most of the north side of the river, is more rural, more primitive. To this day there is not a single ski lift on its slopes. Like St. Helens before she blew her top, the mountain is tolerant of human incursions but untamed and unbothered by our activities. Adams is still wild country. A mountain as a mountain should be.

Mt. Hood seems attached to the big city of Portland, the old Barlow Road encircling its southern slope like a possessive arm around its shoulder. It is this southern route that Portlanders caravan up on weekends in the winter, their Subarus and SUVs racing up to the massive parking lots of Ski-bowl, Timberline Lodge and Mt. Hood Meadows.

### ‘See you at the bottom’

Growing up, I spent many days on Mt. Hood as a scrappy low-budget ski bum.

I learned to ski at Cooper Spur, a well-kept secret on the mountain’s north side. I was probably just 11 when I learned to ski. One quick lesson at the rope tow before my stepfather brought us over to the T-bar, which dragged us to the top of the only hill. He led us over to a tree-bordered run and said, “I’ll see you at the bottom.”

We crashed on our way down, falling at first with each attempted turn. By the time we reached the bottom, we were skiers. Not in the sense that we were any better, or by any means competent. Rather, we had lost the fear. We felt the mountain had done its worst to us, and we had survived.

So we clambered over to the T-bar, ready to go again.

I love any excuse to get on the mountain, to turn at the top of the lift and see the blanket of treetops stretch away below. I love being above the clouds and to catch the other mountains peeking their white heads up to be painted purple, pink and orange in the setting sun.

Cooper Spur is the perfect place to learn. The runs are relatively short and uncrowded. The trails are simple and clearly marked. Simplicity is something you only really appreciate when you are much older. My brother and sister and I soon outgrew this little ski resort and found more challenging experiences higher up the mountain.

Skiing was a rich man’s sport even 30 years ago, but we managed. We cobbled together used skis and hand-me-down ski pants. I have never owned a new pair of skis in my life.

As a kid growing up in the Gorge, we skied at night and whenever we could get a deal; weekends and day skiing were too crowded, too expensive. We kept our skis in the car and



Grace Hunt, left, and Lindsay Hunt cross-country skiing.



Cooper Spur Lodge at Mt. Hood is one mile from downhill skiing.



Ed Hunt, foreground, and Grace Hunt.

after school in the bed of our truck, sliding around under the canopy with skis and poles.

We never became good skiers, but we got so that there was no slope that could deter us — even the cheese-grater moguls of “Elevator Shaft” at Meadows or the icy glacier at the top of the Texas lift.

We started skiing after Thanksgiving and didn’t stop until summer. I went skiing the day after graduating from high school. We skied in freezing rain and fog and the blinding, icy slopes of spring.

### Something for everyone

After college, marriage and kids, it took a while to get back to skiing. My wife, Amy, and I tried cross-country and loved it — no lift tickets, no crowds. We took the girls up Mt. Hood every year for sledding.

Yet it took a while before they were old enough and I was brave enough to shell out for rentals and lessons.

could be on the slopes an hour after the school bell rang. Mt. Hood Meadows had Franz Bread nights in the 1980s. A

lift ticket was just a couple of bucks if you had a Franz wrapper.

I remember riding up the mountain

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