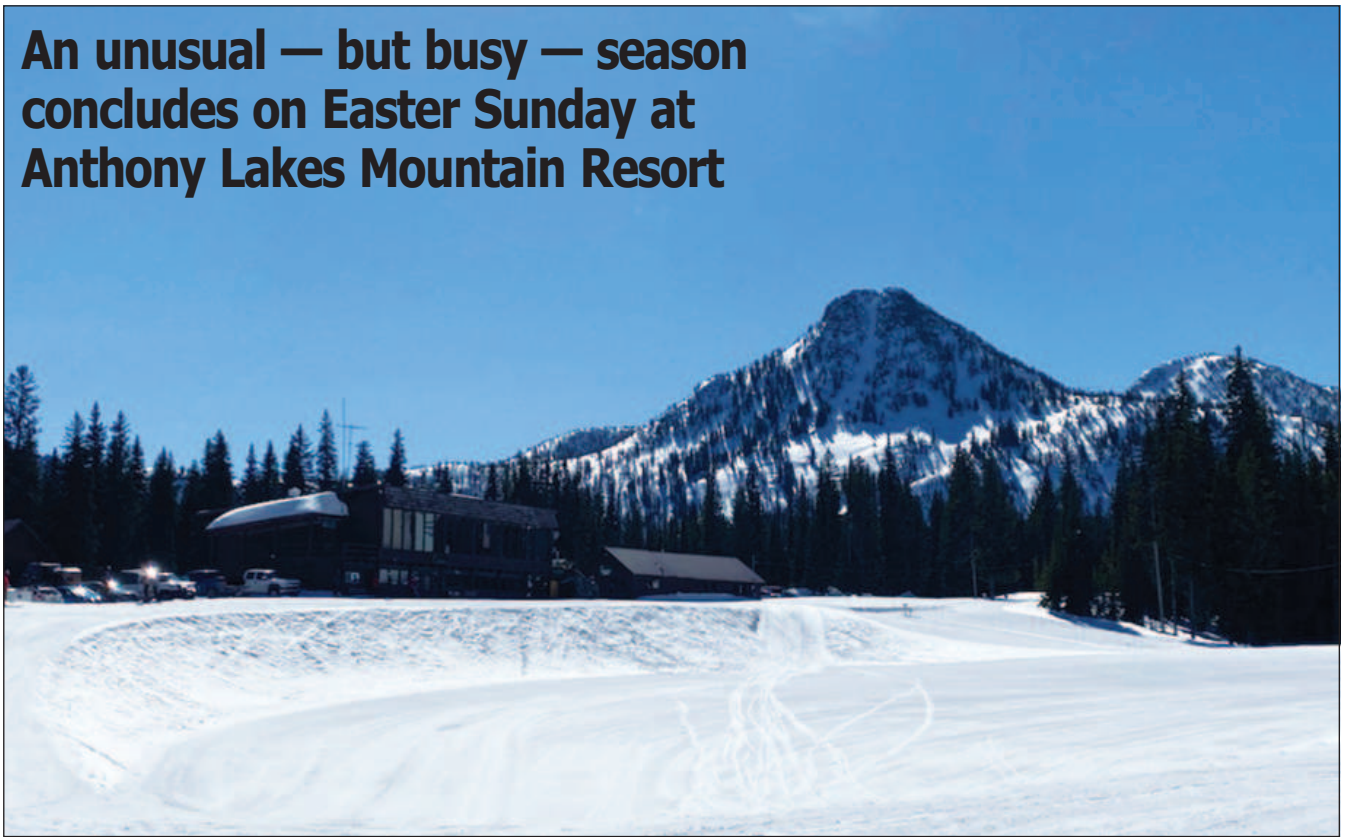


SNOW MUST GO ON

An unusual — but busy — season concludes on Easter Sunday at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort



Chelsea Judy/Submitted Photo

Despite challenges prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the closure of the lodge and longer chairlift lines than usual, the 2020-21 ski season was busier at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort than the previous season.

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

With skiers and snowboarders carving turns in fresh powder, feathery white clouds glittering in their wake, it was almost possible to forget there's a pandemic going on.

But though symbols of the viral scourge were evident this season at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, the ski area bucked trends that affected other types of businesses by welcoming more visitors than the previous year, rather than fewer, said Chelsea Judy, Anthony Lakes marketing director.

She didn't have specific numbers. "We went into it without any expectations, but I would say it was definitely a successful season," Judy said on Wednesday, March 31. "People were grateful to be able to ski through a pandemic."

The ski area in the Elkhorn Mountains, about 19 miles west of North Powder, concludes a most unusual season on Sunday, April 4.

Among the more notable differences this winter is that the ski area's lodge, except restrooms, was closed.

Visitors were still able to buy burgers and other food and beverages, and the "ski-thru" window proved popular, Judy said.

Food and beverages were also available on weekends from Creston's Yurt at the top of the chairlift.

Kcia Fletcher of Baker City, who skied about once a week this season at Anthony Lakes with her husband,

Neil, and their sons, Ethan, Dawson and Oliver, said the ski area did "a great job" with outdoor seating.

Another change prompted by the pandemic is that skiers and boarders weren't required to ride in trios on the chairlift.

Although relatives and friends could ride together if they chose, Judy said most often there were two people per chair, and in some cases only one as a skier or boarder chose to ride alone.

This inevitably led to longer lines, and longer waits, at the bottom of the mountain than are typical for Anthony Lakes, Judy said.

Still and all, she estimated that the average wait was between seven and 10 minutes, with around 15 minutes on busier days.

Fletcher said the lines were noticeable — but largely because waiting to get on the chairlift has previously been a rarity.

"We've been really spoiled at Anthony Lakes," she said. "It wasn't that bad."

Fletcher said lines were longer on weekends and on Thursdays following a heavy snowfall, when conditions were optimal.

Judy said the resort staff also followed a "zero-tolerance" policy requiring all visitors to wear face masks.

She said "nearly everyone" complied with the requirement, and that many appreciated the resort's effort to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

In any case, face coverings are



Chelsea Judy/Submitted Photo

Snow was plentiful on the slopes at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort this winter, with 160 inches falling in February alone.

often a welcome accessory at 8,000 feet during winter.

"So many people do ski with a face covering as it is," Judy said.

But none of the changes provoked by the pandemic seemed to significantly curb visitors' enthusiasm to get out in the cold, clean air, she said.

"People just want to get outside and do what they love to do," Judy said.

In preparing last summer and fall for what was clearly going to be an unusual season, Anthony Lakes staff anticipated the potential to need to limit daily visitor numbers to ensure social distancing.

But that concept was based on the idea that the lodge would be open, albeit with limited occupancy.

But in November, just before the

resort opened thanks to a series of early snowstorms, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, in response to a rising number of COVID-19 cases statewide, imposed more stringent restrictions on restaurants, including the lodge.

General manager Peter Johnson announced that the lodge would be closed, except for restrooms. The lodge is in Union County, where indoor dining was either prohibited, or limited to 25% of capacity, for much of the ski season.

Social distancing is obviously much easier on the slopes than in the confined space of the lodge.

And although Anthony Lakes officials, prior to the season, noted that it might have to limit daily visitors, and that season pass holders would have the first priority, such limita-

tions turned out not to be necessary, Judy said.

"We did not turn anyone away," she said. "Everyone who wanted to ski got to ski, which is what we're all about."

The lodge closure also affected the resort's parking lot, Judy said.

Because visitors were encouraged to use their vehicles as a sort of base camp — a place to eat, for instance — the resort didn't require people to park close together to maximize use of the lot space, as in previous winters, she said.

That meant parking space was tighter than usual. However, Judy said the new sign along the highway at the base of the mountain, warning visitors that the parking lot was nearing or at capacity, was used just a few times.

Fletcher said she and her family had to adjust to the lodge being closed — for instance, using their vehicle as a place to warm up instead.

She said she also spent more time cross-country skiing this winter than in the past, in part because it's strenuous exercise and thus a good way to get warm.

With the lodge closed, Anthony Lakes' revenue from food and drinks dropped.

But Judy said the other options, including the ski-thru window at the Starbottle Saloon, proved more popular than she expected, and the revenue dip was "slight."

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Nighttime the right time for big walleye

"There's not enough antifreeze in my blood to stay on the water for another pass," I say to my fishing partner. It is the last week in

January. Our rod guides are iced up after trolling in dense fog for three hours without success.

"Suits me," he replies. "I never figured you for a good guide."

I've caught walleye on my first cast of the day and the last cast of the evening. I've caught walleye when gale force breezes blew my boat sideways and when hail filled the bottom of my boat. I've caught walleye on Dick Nite spoons when I trolled for American shad. Two years ago, during the sockeye salmon run, I caught a 10-pound walleye on a spinner-shrimp rig. I once jigged up three eater-size walleye in 10 minutes while my buddies watched and wondered, "What does he have that I don't?"

I've also been skunked in the presence of others far



THE NATURAL WORLD
DENNIS DAUBLE

"Why all the fuss over walleye. For one, their filets are firm and flaky with a flavor described as 'delicate with a buttery flavor.'"

more times than I care to remember.

I've done all these things but hadn't fished for walleye at night until late February of this year when hero shots of large walleye populated Facebook pages, anglers with LED headlamps strapped to their forehead. My boat trailer was in the shop for repairs so I gave BT a call.

"Sounds good," he said. "My freezer is low on white meat."

We made a warm up troll along the Richland shoreline as the sun sank low on the western horizon. When darkness fell, we outfitted rods with deep diver Bandit lures and spooled out 100 feet of 15-pound test braided line. The light sticks on our rod tips winked staccato time as we trolled one mph upstream along a 20-foot bottom contour.

Time passes slowly in the dark. It is difficult to judge distance, and details of the landscape are obscured. Luckily BT had a Fishfinder GPS and sonar with bottom charts to guide the way. We bundled up in insulated bibs and stocking hats to ward off the chill. The intermittent honk of resting geese, far off sound of police sirens, and the purr of BT's kicker motor broke the stillness. As luck would have it, one hour into the moonless night produced our first strike. I grabbed the pulsing rod and felt the pull of a heavy fish.

"Put a light on my reel, will you?" I yelled to BT, when five minutes of steady cranking failed to bring the fish to the boat. BT complied. The line counter dial read "200."



Tyler Miller/Contributed Photo

Proud angler Scott Abernethy shows off a 13-pound walleye that he caught and released on an evening trip with Tyler Miller of MillerTime Fishing.

Lesson learned: Large winter walleye fight like a log. Tighten your drag, put the motor in neutral, and keep constant pressure on the fish. We eventually brought my largest walleye ever to the net: 35 inches from nose to tip of caudal fin and an estimated 17 pounds. Two more passes through the same stretch of river and BT's rod went down to a more modest size walleye. That one went into the fish box.

Why all the fuss over walleye? For one, their filets are firm and flaky with a flavor described as "delicate with a buttery flavor." For me, walleye fishing provides an excuse to get my boat out when salmon and steelhead angling is not an option.

According to Tyler Miller (MillerTime Fishing, 509-942-9044), trophy walleye season brings in a large number of out-of-state clients for trips he runs on the

Columbia River. Tyler prefers to start his fishing day a few hours before sunset. He keeps his boat on the water until the bite slows or clients get tired of reeling in fish. In addition to onboard electronics, he carries extra lighting and handheld GPS that automatically sends your location for help if needed. "Some trips I don't get home until midnight," he says.

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