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Backcountry skiing at Vista Butte

BY MARK MORICAL • The Bulletin

Tumalo Mountain, just across Century Drive from Mount Bachelor, is the best-known Central Oregon destination for backcountry snowriders.

Vista Butte is another decent option when Bachelor and Tumalo Mountain are getting pounded with wind and snow. Backcountry enthusiasts can skin or snowshoe to the top of 6,619-foot Vista Butte and ski or snowboard back down toward the sno-park. From the sno-park, reaching the summit of the butte to the northeast is a 2.5-mile trek with a 700-foot elevation gain. Most of the snowriding on Vista Butte is among the trees,

so skiers and snowboarders should watch out for tree wells, areas around the bases of trees where unconsolidated snow collects and creates potential hazards for an unsuspecting snowrider.

Directions: From Bend, travel southwest along Century Drive toward Mount Bachelor. A few miles before Bachelor, Vista Butte Sno-park is on the right side of the road.

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Mark Morical/Bulletin file photo

Two skiers skin their way toward the top of Vista Butte west of Bend.

Outdoor pick of the week: Swamp Wells Trail

"Swamp Wells" isn't the most alluring name, is it? If you were making a list of potential names for wells whose waters you would not want to drink, Swamp Wells would be on there right after Sewer Wells, alphabetically or otherwise.

Fortunately, Swamp Wells Trail is a fetching, 23-mile stretch of single-track running north-south between Horse Butte and the Newberry Crater Rim. Maintained by the Central Oregon Trail Alliance, it makes for great hiking, trail running or mountain biking. Swamp Wells is also popular with horseback riders, though you may be more likely to encounter them closer to Horse Butte or Swamp Wells Horse Camp. My eldest daughter, Caroline, and I headed to Swamp Wells a couple of weeks ago during a dry spell between stormy squalls. The trail is accessible from a few points, including Horse Butte and a quarter-mile-long spur from Bessie Butte. We opted for the latter.

Once reaching Swamp Wells Trail from the spur, we proceeded south toward Kelsey Butte, from which one can also access Coyote Loop and Arnold Ice Cave trails, probably best accomplished by mountain bike or horseback. Caroline and I just went for an out-and-back, estimated 3-mile hike, a pleasant walk in the forest.

Getting there: From Knott Road in Bend, head east on China Hat Road about 4.5 miles,



With her pet dog Kaloo leading the way, Caroline Jasper hikes on Swamp Wells Trail, in the China Hat Road area southeast of Bend.

then turn right on Forest Road 1810 and park at the Bessie Butte Trailhead. The 1/4-mile spur leading to Swamp Wells Trail is across the road from the Bessie Butte Trailhead.

— Story and photos by David Jasper, The Bulletin



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