



MULTISPORT CALIFORNIA

We'll Always Have the Sierra

by Megan Michelson

Cody was one of the many Vermont transplants who'd moved to Lake Tahoe after college to live the dream. They were easy to spot—green license plates on their Subarus, Phish bumper stickers, and UVM hoodies. Although I grew up just an hour away in a small town in the Sierra Nevada foothills, I had moved to Tahoe after college for many of the same reasons as the Vermonters: to spend as much time outside as possible.

I met Cody in April when he was bartending at an outdoor grill along the Truckee River. He made me a salty margarita and asked for my phone number. The next week, he invited me to go camping. The spring snow was just beginning to drip from the mountains into the lakes and rivers. At dusk, we piled into his red Tacoma truck and drove to a dirt road on Lake Tahoe's west shore. We loaded our backpacks with gear and set off on a trail in the dwindling daylight. A few miles in, we found a level perch and set up our tent by headlamp.

In the morning, I unzipped the tent and looked outside, my first glimpse of our campsite in the daylight. Although there was snow on the peaks above us, wildflowers sprouted on the valley floor. The sun rose brilliantly, like it can only do in the state that created "Baywatch" and the Beach Boys. We cooked oatmeal while looking out at Lake Tahoe and I thought for a

PHOTOGRAPHER MICHAEL DARTER

moment that I was falling in love.

The next week, Cody invited me to go backcountry skiing. “It’s perfect corn snow right now,” he told me. “We just need to get up high to get the goods.” To create good corn you need a combination of a dense snowpack (not the dry stuff of the Rockies), and the type of warm days and cold nights that make the Vermont maples run thick with sap back East. California’s corn snow is unparalleled. We decided to climb and ski Mount Tallac, a 9,739-foot peak and one of Lake Tahoe’s tallest.

We rose early, drove to the trailhead, and stuck skins to our touring skis. Several hours later, after following a track uphill under the rising sun, we stood on the summit overlooking the massive blue lake below us. In the distance, we could spot freckle-size sailboats and water ski boats slicing through the water.

The ski down was bliss—wide open turns on a steep and creamy east-facing aspect. We got back to the truck by mid-afternoon. There was still time to grab sandwiches and go bouldering before sunset. Cody kept a crash pad and climbing shoes in the back of his truck, along with skis, trail running shoes, a bike helmet, a bag of beef jerky, a kayak paddle, a sleeping bag, and an assortment of other necessities for springtime multi-sport adventures.

In May, we drove south to a swimming hole on the American River. He jumped off the bridge into the water and I sunbathed on the rocks. Kayakers and commercial rafts floated by. One of the last things Cody and I did together was mountain bike on a section of the Tahoe Rim Trail, 165-miles of singletrack that circumnavigates the lake. It was almost summer by then and the trails were dry and buffed. We looked up at the snowy peaks and talked about other ski missions we should attempt before the last of the corn melted. But I knew we never would, not together anyway.

By the end of our brief romance, I realized that it wasn’t Cody I was falling for. It was California in the spring. It was the sunny weather, the mud-speckled trails, the corn snow, the gushing rivers, the blossoming wildflowers, and the big blue lake that tied it all together. And once spring had thawed into summer, that was it for Cody and me.



Howie Schwartz
SIERRA MOUNTAIN GUIDES
LEAD GUIDE AND OWNER

PHOTOGRAPHER MICHAEL DARTER

GUIDES

Sierra Mountaineering

International; Bishop
Sign up for a guided rock climbing, backpacking, or backcountry skiing trip with Sierra Mountaineering International, a Bishop-based company founded by legendary guide Kurt Wedberg in 1995. [from \$85; sierramountaineering.com]

Alpine Skills International;

Truckee
Located upstairs from The Back Country mountaineering shop in Truckee, Alpine Skills International offers everything from instructional rock climbing on Donner Pass to guided high-alpine ski traverses. [from \$69; alpineskills.com]

Sierra Mountain Guides;

Bishop
Sierra Mountain Guides leads trips for climbing, skiing, and, new this year, mountain running (which involves lightweight gear and marathon distances) throughout the Sierra based on your needs and preferences. [from \$180; sierramtnguides.com]

GEAR

Wolf Creek Wilderness;

Grass Valley
Buy or rent whitewater or flat-water kayaks at Grass Valley’s Wolf Creek Wilderness, which also offers learn-to-paddle lessons and guided river trips. Then test your skills on the nearby American, Truckee, or Yuba rivers. [wolfcreekwilderness.com]

The Back Country;

Tahoe City and Truckee
With several locations around Tahoe, The Back Country shop offers new and used climbing, skiing, cycling, and paddling gear for purchase or rental. Plus, they’ll set you up with a guided trip with Alpine Skills International. [thebackcountry.net]

Truckee Sports Exchange;

Truckee
Rainy day? Head to the indoor bouldering wall at Truckee Sports Exchange. In addition to a gear shop up front, they also have a consignment gear section upstairs where you can find hiking boots for \$10. And they rent stand-up paddleboards. [truckeesportsexchange.com]

FOOD

Breakfast Club; Mammoth
You’ll need fuel in the morning if you’re heading out to climb peaks in the eastern Sierra. The Breakfast Club, in downtown Mammoth, has omelets, egg sandwiches, and a breakfast burrito that will get the job done.

Tacos Jalisco; Truckee

Ask any Spanish speaker in Truckee where the best tacos in town are and they’ll point you straight to Tacos Jalisco, a hole in the wall behind the 7-Eleven. Try three carnitas tacos and ask for a side of guacamole.

LODGING

Outside Inn; Nevada City
Each room at Nevada City’s Outside Inn has a different outdoor theme, from the Singletrack Suite (with curtains made of bike jerseys) to the Climbing Room (with a massive photo of Half Dome and a mini climbing wall). Ask in the lobby for maps, local hikes, and bike rides. [from \$75; outsideinn.com]

Double Eagle Resort and Spa;

June Lake
Just 12 miles from the east entrance to Yosemite, The Double Eagle has 16 rooms, plus 15 two-bedroom cabins with kitchens and fireplaces. But you won’t come to stay inside: The resort is located on 13 acres surrounded by lakes, skiing, and fishing. Finish the day with a hot-stone massage. [from \$174; doubleeagle.com]