The Rock : Newfoundland's Marble Mountain

Contributed by Adam Howard Photos Chuck Waskuch

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text Adam Howard

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We bask in our discovery as we ascend the high–speed Governor's Express Quad at Marble Mountain, the island's sizable ski area. It's Monday, and despite four to six fresh, we share Marble's 1700 vertical with only a handful of locals and a few tourists from 'up–along' Canada's mainland.

With its abrupt top to bottom pitch, trails like Corkscrew, Boomerang and Kruncher top the list of runs that drop relentlessly from Marble's summit at a sustained 30 to 40 degrees. Marble's pitch is so steep that a pair of 600-700 foot long T–bars near the parking lot service nearly all of the beginner terrain here. That's why the small core of locals love this hill, and are in turn edgy, rock solid, rippers. It's also why area marketers struggle to attract beginner and novice skiers for return visits.

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With only 1600 pass holders and an average of less than 50,000 skier visits per year, fresh lines linger, bumps are s to form and groomers don't get scoured. But despite endless stashes there are no secrets here. Hospitality, renowned on this Canadian island, transcends to the ski hill where most natives are happy to share a smile and a tour.

"We put up 1000 rides a day," patroller Jim Vokie says before milk–run. His thicker–than–native–Mainer accent rolls toothy grin. "We can do 5000. So we're cool sharing the place with 2000- 3000. We'll still get fresh lines."

Mild maritime weather patterns dump an average of 200 inches here annually, but this year it feels like more. Even after an abnormal midwinter thaw, Marble maintains much of its 80 inch base from a week ago, two to three times that of mainland eastern resorts this season.

A ten–minute drive from Corner Brook, western Newfoundland's largest city with 20,000 people, Marble sits above t bottom third of the Long Range Mountains. Stretching up the west coast of the Texas–size island, these northern most summits of the Appalachian chain bust from sea level to 2000-3000 feet. The result of a continental plate collision, they are a rare example of the earth's mantle, exposed. Home to limited vegetation, the range hosts endless backcountry terrain.

We get off the lift, check in with patrol and begin a ten–minute hike toward Marble's summit, an above treeline area k as the Governor's Nuts for a pair of matching prostatic boulders near the top. Here, lies a playground of 200-300–foot shots through rocks that can be duplicated by laying in a skin track or a boot pack. Locals traverse the bald rolling summit that lays out for miles, travelling all the way to Massey Drive at Corner Brook, the location of the Corner Brook Ski Club's first tow.

The ski club moved the lift to Marble in the 1960s, running the hill until 1993. But with capital improvements badly needed, the club relinquished ownership to the government nearly ten years ago. Quickly, a plush, monstrous base lodge replaced the old doublewide trailer at the bottom. A high–speed quad went in, and snowmaking was enhanced.

"I'm sure there is some cynicism about the government taking over," 29–year–old chair of Marble's board of director Vansen says. "I think it took locals a few years to except the change."

But for most devotees here, like Vansen, a lifelong local, the politics at the mountain is far less important than the sl "I have a lot of passion for this place," he adds. "We've got a really unique product for experts."

With talk of new glades and other improvements on the way, nearby back country access to above treeline chutes a bowls, and a thriving snowcat skiing operation below Corner Brook, Marble and the west coast of Newfoundland are truly one of skiing's New Worlds.

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Marble Mountain

skimarble.com

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