

We arrived at Taos Ski Valley just before 6PM Mountain Time and were welcomed with a nice Wine & Cheese event during which we were told where to find breakfast, ski lessons, hotel services and much more than we could possibly remember after leaving home at 4:00AM, flying across the country, driving to Santa Fe for lunch and driving to Taos in the twilight. We were ready to crash! So it was with some surprise that I awoke at 1:00AM with all the symptoms of altitude sickness. I had never experienced altitude sickness before and was about to learn all about it!

Fortunately, Mogul Medical was right next door to our condo. They clipped a sensor to my finger tip and ordered oxygen when they saw the reading of 83. Apparently, you should have at least a 90 reading at 9000 feet. According to Dr. Peterson, sleeping at an elevation over 9,000 feet on the same day as flying in from sea level is a sure way to invite some pretty unpleasant side effects. So he prescribed Diamox and Dexamethasone. According to "*Medicine for Mountaineering*", Diamox reduces the severity of symptoms (AMS) in individuals ascending from Sea level to 12,000-14,000 feet without the proper time for acclimatization. Additionally, it promotes acclimatization. Preventative dose is 250mg orally every 12 hours one to two days prior to ascent, continuing for three to five days after arrival at altitude. Dr. Peterson further stated, it's the sleeping altitude, not the altitude of the ski slope that causes the problem. That's why many skiers sleep in Taos for a few nights to acclimate because it's 2100 ft. lower than Snakedance condominiums and shuttle service is readily available.

Three of the four people in our condo ended up at Mogul Medical with low blood oxygen levels which were serious enough to be given oxygen and prescriptions for Diamox and Dexamethasone. Two of them needed to wear oxygen masks all Sunday night while sleeping. Many PSC members experienced headaches and shortness of breath. The doctor told us to stay off the mountain on Sunday. It was unlikely we'd have tried skiing anyway since we were having trouble walking around the base area and breathing.

On Monday I was feeling much better.

I attended the morning ski lesson with Steve, our instructor. There were about seven skiers in my class and we all had a good time remembering how to ski and getting used to the excellent ski rentals from Terry's Sports. After lunch, I had my O2 levels checked – a free walk-in service at Mogul Medical – and decided to call it a day as I felt out of breath after lunch.

Tuesday morning, I skied White Feather, a very long green trail, and after 45 minutes found that I was short of breath again. With the best part of 4 days down and 3 left in New Mexico I decided to try something new. I got refunds on my ski rentals, lessons and lift tickets. That night we ate at the Bavarian, a real treat, and one of the top 100 restaurants in the world!

Wednesday morning at 9:10 AM I took the 50 cent bus into Taos to see what was doing on. The bus comes to TSV several times a day. It cost 50 cents to get on no matter how

far you go. There are several pick up points in Taos; Kit Carson Park was less than a block from the Plaza, where the PSC enjoyed a great meal on Sunday night. Snakedance Condos also ran a free shuttle with a signup sheet.

The bus driver was friendly and very informative. This is not Virginia! Houses are made from adobe with soft rounded edges. The landscape is huge and full of history.

I learned that Taos' first European visitor was Conquistador Hernando de Alvarado in 1540. The Pueblo people united and drove out the Spanish in 1680's, but in 1696 Don Diego de Vargas of Spain came back and resettled the area around Taos Pueblo, Taos Plaza and Ranchos de Taos. Taos Plaza was my 1st destination for my own exploration of Taos!

By the early 1800's Taos became the headquarters for mountain men, such as Kit Carson and there's a museum there that bears his name. In fact, my first drop-off point was Kit Carson Park!

In the early 1900's artists Bert Phillips and Ernest Blumenschein stopped to have a broken wagon wheel repaired, became enchanted with Taos and decided to stay. This event starts an immigration of artists that continues today. It was encouraged by socialite Mabel Dodge Luhan who arrived in 1917 and eventually brought creative luminaries such as Ansel Adams, Willa Cather, Aldous Huxley, Carl Jung, D.H. Lawrence, Georgia O'Keeffe, Thornton Wilder and Thomas Wolfe.

The artist colony was born! Their works and influence are seen in Taos' art galleries to this day. The works of sculptors, weavers and painters are on display everywhere. Going from gallery to gallery was a great way to enjoy my day in Taos before returning to TSV.

It wasn't until the 50's, Ernie and Rhoda Blake opened Taos Ski Valley. The first lift went up Al's Run for 300 vertical feet and was 1,000 feet long. TSV has grown considerably since then.

By the 60's the second highest suspension bridge in the U.S. highway system is built spanning the Rio Grande Gorge. It was called the "bridge to nowhere" while it is being built, because the funding didn't exist to continue the road on the other side.

On Wednesday night we saw this bridge and the tremendous Rio Grande Gorge on our way to our host's private home for a delicious evening of Southwest food and hospitality.

Thursday morning I jumped on the "Chili Line" and went to the Taos Pueblo.

This is another 50 cent bus line which is subsidized by the Taos Merchants Association. Since no one else was on the bus driver took me directly to the Pueblo.

The Pueblo de Taos is an ancient pueblo belonging to a Taos (Northern Tiwa) speaking Native American tribe of Pueblo people. It is approximately 1000 years old and lies about 1 mile north

of the modern city of Taos, New Mexico, USA. The Red Willow Creek, or Rio Pueblo, is a small fast running stream which flows through the middle of the pueblo from its source in the Sangre de Cristo Range. A reservation of 95,000 acres is attached to the pueblo, and about 1,900 people live in this area.

This place really transports you to a different world. Tours are available for \$10. A resident gives the tour of the reservation. There is no running water; it must be carried from the red willow creek. There isn't any cement anywhere either, everything is adobe and the ground is hard from centuries of foot traffic. Some of the residences are artists and if there's an open sign on the door you're welcome to go into the pueblo and see their work and make purchases without paying the state sales tax. The Red Willow Creek provides willows used in basket making.

In 1540 Conquistador Hernando de Alvarado followed the Rio Grande north to Taos Valley. When he saw the sun shining on the straw in the adobes at Taos Pueblo, he believed he found the famed Cities of Gold. It was a sparkling blue skied day when I arrived at the pueblo, and indeed, the straw in the adobe does shine in the walls of the church.

Taos Pueblo is a member of the Eight Northern Pueblos. The Taos community is known for being one of the most secretive and conservative pueblos. There is a Christian church there. The services are not generally open to the public, but we did get to go inside. We were told of an interesting blending of the Spanish Virgin Mary belief and the Mother Earth idea of the earlier pueblo dwellers. The two religious traditions have been blended together. At the center of the altar area is a statue of a woman. She is wearing a white satin dress for winter; we were told the dress color is changed for the four seasons. The wall around her is painted with ears of corn. The wooden beams are massive and hand hewed.

Taos Pueblo's most prominent architectural feature is a multi-storied residential complex of reddish-brown adobe divided into two parts by the Rio Pueblo. It was probably built between 1000 and 1450 A.D. It was designated a National Historic Landmark on October 9, 1960, and in 1992 became a World Heritage Site. As of 2006, about 150 people live in it full-time.

Friday is here before I know it

and there's just time to make a few last minute stops in Taos.

Taos was quite the hippie hang out in the 1960s & 1970s. Many of the hippies stayed and became part of the lively modern cultural scene of Taos. It was my experience that whether on a bus or in a cafe, the local people you meet in Taos are friendly and willing to engage a traveler in some very interesting conversations!

Taos seems to exist in its own time zone, too. There may be set store hours on the door to various shops, but they are no indication of when or if that store/shop will actually be open! Shoppers just need to go with the flow!

I found tapestry galleries and hand- weaving studios specializing in Southwestern and contemporary designs. Hand-dyed yarns and weaving supplies were available and supported the needs of store's scheduled weaving classes.

Many of the stores were cooperatives, staffed by the very artists whose work was for sale. So I made a few purchases: earrings by Arland Ben, a Navajo, Arnie Montoya, also a Navajo and Greg Nasysac who is Taos/Hopi. I headed back to TSV with my treasures.

Back on the bus, we drove past Taos Mountain, the old trucks and crazy colorful roadside stores that had become familiar to me over the last couple days, slowly winding up the 2100 feet of elevation that separates TSV from Taos. I don't think I'd ever get tired of this expansive landscape, although the scene completely changes by early June when the entire high dessert explodes in color after the spring rains. Wild irises and a thousand other species bloom, covering every inch with color. The gray sagebrush is banished!

My bus driver says I need to come back then and drive the "Enchanted Circle". I tell him I'll have to do that someday as I get out at the TSV guard house and wave goodbye. I meet up with friends who are still wearing their "just off the mountain smiles" and we share an IPA on the deck of the Stray Dog in the last rays of sun.

I realize that it's been a good trip, even if it wasn't spent entirely on the slopes and I'd like to return again someday, with the right meds and without a helmet!

Christine Petersen