



The Sitzmarke

May 2004



Member
Texas Ski
Council

SPACE CITY SKI CLUB

www.spacecity.org

Vol. 37 No. 5

ADVENTURE!



General Meeting - Cadillac Bar

Everyone is Welcome!

May 17 @ 6:30 p.m.

Bring a Friend!

Follies with ComedySportz

Happy Hour - Thursday, May 27 @ 5:30 p.m .

Sam buca Jazz Café

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On our trip to Chamonix, we had some “early bird” travelers who got a head start when they flew to Nice, then toured for several days along the southern coastline of the French Riviera before joining the regular trip. **Gayle Bahler** flew in from Florida to vacation with her sister, **Pat Daugherty**. **Millie Jude**, **Donna Berglund**, **Sylvia Hudspeth**, **Ellen Eastham**, **Bill Lodato**, **Bob Tripp** and **Marda Waters** were given a first-class tour by their guide, who knew the area and history well. They toured Nice, Eze, Cannes and Monte Carlo. The group visited the palace in Monaco, saw the route of the Grand Prix race and won some coins at the casino in Monte Carlo. **Christie Burke**, **Pat** and **Gayle** even earned a tiger tail from the adventurous Los Amigos ski group that was also staying at the same hotel. As the second group of skiers started out from Houston, **Joe Kulpinsky** and **Patricia McKechnie** took the dress standard up a notch by arriving at the airport in truly elegant attire.



Ready to go skiing

After a hassle-free flight into Geneva followed by a scenic bus trip through the French Alps, we arrived Saturday afternoon at the Hotel Alpina. We were greeted by **Cheryl Mershon**,

the TSC Winter Expedition Coordinator, and invited to the orientation meeting that evening. When we gathered for our meeting, **Brenda Soileau** already had a story to tell about the bidet that came on by itself and flooded the bathroom while she and **Penny Chancey** were rearranging the furniture in the other section of their room...French ghost?

Sunday morning as we had breakfast in the hotel restaurant, everyone was discussing their plans for the day while enjoying the beautiful panoramic view of the mountain range. Some of our guided skiers were whisked off to different mountain areas to enjoy incredible scenery and different levels of difficulty. **Mike Montgomery**, **Bob Debell**, **Ellen**, and **Diane Baker** skied along the gorgeous and world-famous Vallée Blanche glacier. (Be sure to read Ellen's story about the experience). **Yolanda Fusilier** got a bit squeamish about having to wear an avalanche control beeper and decided that this was perhaps not what she had in mind when she signed up for guided skiing. While **Andrea Meltzer** enjoyed a private lesson with her very own French ski instructor, **Charles Albright** ended up skiing with **Chip Stokes** instead of his first choice, Carmen Electra. On this trip we also had people like **Davis Tucker** and **Margaret Walker**, who spent so much time on the slopes that we rarely saw them in town, and novice, **Nora Montgomery**, who reported that she enjoyed skiing for the first time.

Since we were in Chamonix during Super Bowl weekend, we had the French version of a football party in the hotel bar with a “super” bowl that was full of potato chips and an all-night bartender. Our passionate and enthusiastic viewers, **Ron Rodriguez**, **Christina Anderson**, **Sean O'Brien**, **Chip Brenda**, and others partied through the Monday a.m. to the last quarter. **Tor Lileng** was present at the football gathering, but I don't think he saw many first downs.

Skiing was not the only way to enjoy the Mont Blanc region. **Shirley James** and **Rosa Fusilier** did a great job walking around the top of the Aiguille du Midi peak after riding the gondola to a height of 11,500 ft. The thin air was making even the youngest of our group catch their breath, but the unique panorama view of the Mont Blanc terrace and the summits make the trip up worth it. **Shirley Debell** and **Ellen** had an adventurous experience learning how to drive a dog sled. It is uncertain if either will be ready for the next Iditarod race in Alaska. It is also doubtful that Shirley and Ellen could get as lost as the group who tried to find the entrance to the ice hockey area. A local hockey team was playing against an amateur group from Boston so a few people from our club wanted to cheer for the USA team as well as purchase some hockey shirts. The directions given by the hotel front desk sounded simple but by the time this wandering group had walked around back alleys and through snow piles, the first period was over. When the group finally did get inside the area, they found out from Sean and Bill there was a shorter and better route. Oh well, the Boston team did win and the group got to cheer for them, so all was not lost.

We had daily opportunities to explore the Alpine regions as well as other countries. Our first tour took us into Aosta, Italy, where monuments from the Roman period are still standing in the center of town. After a guided tour through the cobblestoned streets of the old town, a relaxing lunch



Augustus Arch in Aosta Italy Founded by Romans 25 AD

was enjoyed by **Gloria Lopez** and **Carmen Mikhail** where they were able to practice their Italian to the delight of the restaurateur owner. Tuesday we had the opportunity to travel to the Chillon Castle, on the shore of Lake Geneva, in Switzerland. The castle was dated from the 13th century and immortalized by the English poet Lord Byron. **Jose Araujo**

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was seen waving his arm out of the opening in watch tower while **Larry** and **Deborah Christie** were checking out the dungeon where Lord Bryon carved his name into the stone. Lyon was the Wednesday excursion for the people who wanted to visit the gourmet capital of France. Thursday we traveled a short distance to Megeve, where "the rich and famous" live and play. After a traditional French lunch, the group split up and the shopping began. Penny found a fur shop first, then gave directions to **Camille LaRoe**, Carmen and others in our club as well as some people from the other ski clubs. **Ann Rogers** was the perfect size for French clothing and was able to purchase a beautiful outfit.

On our last excursion, we traveled to the beautiful town of Annecy, located between the lake and the mountains in the Haute-Savoie district of France. Annecy has canals that flow through the center of the old town, somewhat reminiscent of Venice. When we arrived in Annecy, it was market day. The local vendors were selling everything from cheese and fruit to herbal soap and leather purses. **Carolyn McGinnis** browsed the different stalls but was drawn to the shop with the cashmere sweaters. **Dawn Rodriquez** and **Julie Ostistaya** were on their own special shopping spree for French lingerie in Geneva. Others like **Patty Finch**, **Laurie Ravkind**, **Ray Villarreal** and **Caryn Brewer** rented a car and toured the area under the guidance of **Suzan Brice**, who had previously lived in Geneva. **Brett** and **Cathey Littell** made special arrangements through the Chamonix tourist information center and toured on their own.

With our days filling up with skiing and excursions, our nightlife wasn't lacking either. Besides the Super Bowl party on Sunday, we had a SCSC party on Monday night with hors d'oeuvres made with avocado and prawn mousse, curry duck foie gras and Roquefort mousse with apple and walnut, just to name a few. Nearly everyone attended our little get together so we were able to pose for our group picture.

The casino in Chamonix had slot machines that were tested by a few members of our group and **Darrell Mayfield** seemed to be the one with the loudest machine. Could it be that Darrell's machine was paying off? The midweek disco party was another test of endurance among the dancers in our group.

With the dine-around plan available, different groups tried out different restaurants in Chamonix. While experiencing the art of fine dining at the Hotel Mont Blanc, **David George** was able to enjoy a Peking duck dinner that the staff sliced especially for him. That was some kind of service, having your meat cut for you. The desserts were such a work of art that pictures had to be taken.

A farewell party and dinner was given on Friday night by the Texas Ski Council and dancing was enjoyed by all. After the music stopped at the TSC party, Charles, Tor, Brenda, Jose and others moved to The Garage and danced until it was time to load the bus and head to the airport.

On one of the post trips, Bill, Diane, and Ross went to Sicily to join the TSC group for a few days. They were able to visit an open air living museum, tour Greek ruins where remnants of previous societies were uncovered and visit a Roman theater located by Mount Etna. Bill was able to locate information about his family history and get copies of the records. Ann was able to visit with her son who has been stationed in Sicily since August. Another group went to Geneva for a few days then flew to Paris. While in Geneva, some people toured the International Red Cross Museum and the United Nations building. We also found a great Chinese restaurant around the corner from our hotel. The days in Paris were spent going to the Louvre Museum, Museum d'Orsay, Champs-Elysees, the catacombs, Napoleon's Tomb, Eiffel Tower and too many others to mention. A great time was had by all and we can't wait to do it again next year.



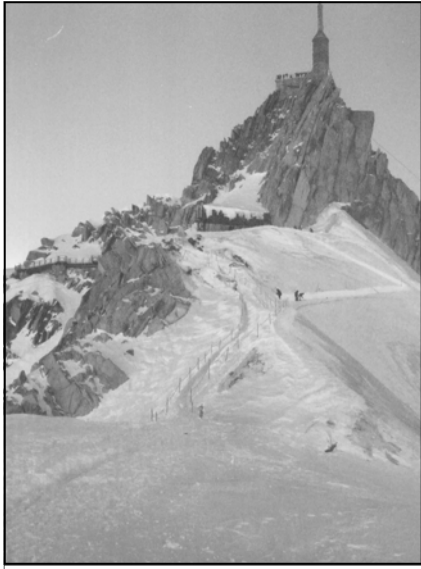
Enjoying the beach in Cannes on the French Riviera



Group enjoying the welcome to Chamonix Party

Skiing Vallée Blanche in Chamonix, France

By Ellen Eastham



Aiguille du Midi elevation 12600 and the ice walk

To some who seek a challenge in skiing, it does not necessarily mean skiing a black diamond, or an advanced ski run. Five SCSC members skied twenty kilometers on the “ultimate” glaciers of Vallée Blanche. When skiing the first ridge and over the glaciers, it is recommended to hire an experienced guide to avoid the dangers of out-of-bounds skiing.

Mike Montgomery and **Charles Albright**, each with a different ski guide

for several days, enjoyed the diversity of the various ski areas around Chamonix. Finally their guide said they were ready for Vallée Blanche (White Valley). **Diane Baker, Bob Debell, Ellen Eastham, and Los Amigos Rob Lowry** hired a ski guide, Fabian, to take the four of them to advanced section of Vallée Blanche. They each had different experiences, but on the same spectacular mountain.

A visual of the journey first begins riding the two trams to the top of Mont-Blanc at Aiguille du Midi, an elevation of 12600'. The group is instructed how to put on the body harness and monitor equipment. “Is this in case we fall and you have to locate us?” we wonder. After a short walk through an ice tunnel, there is a spectacular panoramic view of Chamonix spread out across the valley below. The challenge initiates with an ice walk down a narrow pathway, for over 100' four skiers are roped together, testing the “teamwork” concept as they pass skies down to each other, and make their way slowly

along the icy path. If someone had slipped from the path on the mountain crest, a serious injury could have occurred. The ski guide wearing crampons, walks by the skiers with ease, and while wearing all of their ski poles on his backpack!

Now on the summit, the group dons their skies while viewing the Alps' mountaintops of three countries, Switzerland, Italy, and France. The three borders meet at the summit of Mont Dolent, also called “peak of the three frontiers.” The adventure is an awesome experience as they ski on the “Glacier du Géant Vallée Blanche” and “Mer de Glace” (Sea of Ice). La Mer de Glace is eleven km long from its origin in Glacier du Géant and 400 meters at the thickest point. It is the second largest glacier in the Alps after Aletsch Glacier (Switzerland). Various observations have determined the speed of advance of the Mer de Glace to be 90 m/yr, or 1 cm/hr.

It was a heart throbbing experience to ski on a narrow ridge between two drop-offs, which required meticulous skill to avoid the danger of the hidden, bottomless crevasses. Often there was no room for error. Some runs were so steep that the group was taught the “jump turn” to change directions. Without formal ski runs, all along the journey were new experiences, through a narrow ice alley, past blue ice formations that were huge, majestic, and unique creations of nature. The end of the journey was strenuous as the group trekked up the steep incline on the side of a mountain, by stepping where others' boots have been. Finally arriving at the warming hut on the summit, Rob was the first to arrive, waiting with a tray of drinks and a smile of encouragement for the group. As a finale in the picturesque sunset, was the last venture of descent. The entire expedition was a true test of a physical skiing challenge. This was one of the most awesome, yet technical and demanding experiences never to be duplicated. The group all earned their bragging rights, that they skied the unforgettable trip down the glacier “Vallée Blanche.”



Rob, Diane and Fabian overlooking Glacier du Géant Vallée Blanche



Bob Debell by Argentiere Glacier at Grands Montets