

## FR144: A Tale of Two Tours

Sunday, Jan. 31, 2021

Inspired by a trip report from Louise Broadbent, long time friends of mine Pete and David Espinosa and I decided to go ski FR144 in the Jemez. None of us had skied it yet this year, and from Louise' report, we knew that there would be a broken track for some distance. We pulled up into the parking area on Highway 126 at 9:45 and saw that since Louise and company had been there, so had some snowmobiles. The trail was a mosaic of snowmo tracks, but at least we knew we wouldn't have to break trail! The temperature was in the upper 20s. We suited up, ritualistically applied some Maxiglide, and took off skiing. Within 15 minutes, we had to stop to shed a layer of clothing; even though the air temp was rather cold, with dead calm air and bright, blazing sun, it felt much warmer. We quickly realized that we had more efficient glide if we were following in one another's ski tracks, so we began to take turns "breaking trail". Every 15-20 minutes, at the tops of hills, we would take a mini break and switch leaders. But mostly we got into the rhythmic routine of kicking and gliding. The three of us have been skiing together for decades, so we chatted away while cruising north on the road. The road basically trends north as it follows the western rim of the mighty Valles Caldera. There are gentle ups and downs, with the uphill being on sunny southern aspects and the descents being on colder northern aspects. All of us were on Rossi BC skis: Pete and I on BC80s, and David on BC70s. We commented numerous times how efficient they were in handling the cold, dry snow conditions on the northern aspects, and slightly slushy snow on the sunny aspects. True do it all skis. After about 2 hours, we had skied 5.5 miles from the car, so we found a nice sunny spot and sat down for lunch. Just as we were finishing lunch, we were surprised to see another skier come along. He cruised past us as we exchanged pleasantries. After lunch, we skied a bit further to a spot right on the rim of the caldera that afforded us a nice view down into the upper reaches of the Rio San Antonio. As we gazed at the serene scene before us, I began to imagine



what it would have been like to stand at this same point around 1 million years ago, after the eruption of the volcano and the collapse of the caldera floor. We would be standing at the top of a crumbling cliff of welded tuff and be looking down into a barren wasteland of volcanic rock. The bulging, blistering resurgent dome (Redondo Peak) in the center of the caldera would be riddled with large fractures. Steam vents would be hissing with noxious clouds of toxic vapor. The smell of sulphur would have been pervading the air. Not a living thing would have been seen.

My how things change.

Returning to reality, Pete and David and I began our ski back to the car. Once again, we followed in one another's tracks, and alternated leads regularly. Heading back south we were facing the sun, which was incredibly intense. I was glad that I had brought a broad brimmed



sun hat. It was so warm that David skied the entire way back in just a t-shirt. I re applied

sunscreen at one of our mini breaks, and we all were drinking water regularly. The snow had warmed considerably, but our BCs took it all in stride. A couple of the downhills were quite exciting as we were forced to do quick step turns moving from one snowmo track to another. Those step turns are a handy skill to have! It took us just under 2 hours to get back to the car. We had seen only one other skier and two snowmobiles that passed us just before we got back to the car. The skiing was so fun that we vowed to come back on Tuesday with our spouses.

Ski Tracks Stats:

11 miles with 920' of vertical gain/loss.

Tuesday, Feb. 2021

The best laid plans of mice and men sometimes go awry...or so the saying goes. Unfortunately neither Pete nor David (and wives) were able to go on Tuesday, but my wife Cecilia and our friend Andrew Lieuwen were game to go, so off we went. We pulled into the parking area at 9:45 again, but this time the temperature was already 37! It felt cooler though because there was a gentle breeze and wispy clouds. Once again, after a short bit of skiing, we all had to stop and remove a layer of clothing. The snow was considerably softer this day, with the warmer temperatures. Today, all three of us were on Rossi BC80s paired with Alpina Alaska boots. Of all of the cross country gear that I have owned, I feel like this combination of boots/skis is the most versatile set up for general touring. The boots are somewhat heavy, but they offer warmth, comfort and control. I still favor the bombproof 75mm, three pin binding too. If you're looking for a lightweight "racing/fitness" set up though, this isn't it.

Once again, we followed in each other's tracks as we began our northbound kicking and gliding session, through the magnificent stands of old growth Ponderosa pines. The warmer snow, however, was a lot slower and stickier. It required a lot more energy to move our skis along. We skied about 3.8 miles north in around an hour and twenty minutes, then found a nice, sunny, south facing hillside for lunch. We were stumped trying to find a spot to sit... actually we found some nice stumps to sit on, making for a very comfortable lunch stop.





As we sat and ate lunch, we propped up our skis in the snow, facing south into the sun. It's an old habit of mine, to keep snow from freezing to the fish scales on the ski bases. It helps keep the bindings thawed out too. Today however, it wasn't really necessary, because it was well above freezing, but old habits die hard. After a leisurely lunch, we began our ski back toward the car. By now the temperature had risen to what surely must have been the mid to upper 40s, and as a result the snow was really soft and sticky. Even with Maxiglide, our skis were really ssssslow. The steeper descents were welcome because we could actually glide without having to double pole, and we all got a good workout pushing our skis along. But hey, we were here for some exercise right? It took us a bit longer to get back to the car than it had to get to our lunch break because the snow had warmed considerably. Cecilia commented that it was beginning to feel a bit like a slog, but all three of us thoroughly enjoyed our day out. We didn't see another soul all day.

Ski Tracks stats:

7.8 miles with 930' of gain/loss

Addendum:

On Thursday, Feb. 4, I joined a group of friends for a day of downhill skiing at Ski Santa Fe. The forecasted 1-3" of new snow predicted for Wednesday night didn't materialize, but the cold air certainly did. I pulled into the parking lot at 8:15 and the temperature was 17. After warm temps earlier in the week, the cold temps today had made the snow quite FIRM! But it was like our own private ski area; there was no one around so the lift lines were non-existent and the runs were empty. We started the day by warming up (or should I say cooling off...the wind chill at 30mph was downright cold!) on the firm groomers, where we could carve long GS turns without fear of traffic. The required technique reminded me of the name of a rock climb in Tuolumne Meadows put up by the legendary John Bachar: "Edging Skills or Hospital Bills". Better mind your edges! I was so glad that I had worked on my edges last week, their sharpness gave me some sense of security. After a few groomers, we moved on to find the "best" snow on the mountain. It was on the north-facing Burro Alley/Pipeline and the left side of Wizard, both places where the sun hadn't been all winter long. We alternated runs down one, then the other, doing 5-6 laps on each, and throwing in a groomer every now and then. It was a beautiful sunny day and it eventually warmed up a bit. We all had a great time despite the snow conditions.

Ski Tracks Stats:

17 runs with 25,105' vertical

So there you have it! There is still some fun skiing to be had in our bony Land of Enchantment! You just have to have the right attitude, equipment and skill set!

Happy trails everyone! Please be safe out there!

Ron