

# What's Up

ski news, access issues and more

## BEAR VALLEY MOUNTAIN COOPERATIVE

Bear Valley, California stands alone in the Sierra. It's just a few miles from South Lake Tahoe and Northern Yosemite as the crow flies, but a relaxed world away, tucked into a corner of sparsely populated Alpine County. The village is snowbound during the winter months, and many residents make their way around on foot, snowshoe, ski or snowmobile. It's a rustic town, and like licorice or the Grateful Dead, Bear Valley is not for everyone.

Excellent skiing of all types abounds. The Bear Valley Cross Country Center offers one of the largest trail systems in the US. The Bear Valley Ski Resort, in partnership with Mountain Adventure Seminars (MAS), offers affordable snowcat skiing and shredding on some of the best terrain in the Sierra. And miles of pristine backcountry beckon.

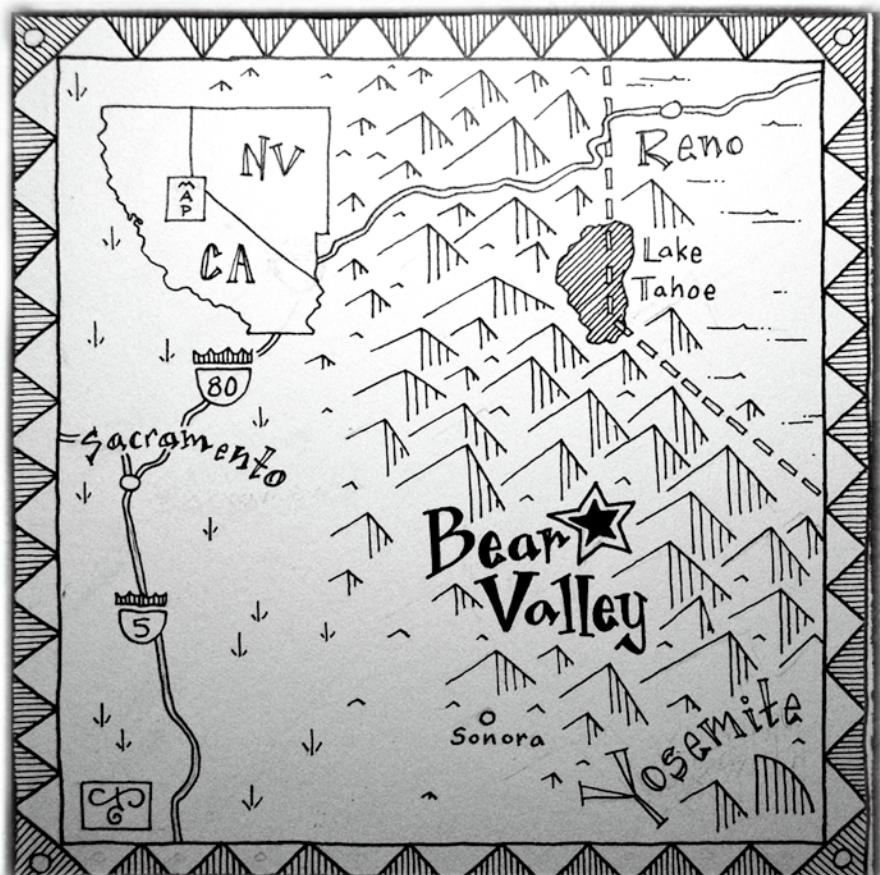
Backcountry and nordic ski numbers, bucking the trend at the resort, boomed into the early 2000's. MAS also grew rapidly - guiding backcountry tours, teaching avalanche safety courses and telemark skiing plus hosting an annual event that has evolved into the Bear Valley Freeheel Festival, now famous on the West Coast and scheduled, once again, for March 28-30 this year. Bear Valley, as a whole, was doing well as the 21st century unfolded.

But the off-piste ski boom was short lived and, given the recession and difficult snow years as of late, all skier numbers are on the decline in Bear Valley. Many local businesses have come and gone; many others are on the edge. Everyone agrees that when the ski mountain booms, the community, including all its related businesses, succeeds. The ski resort is the glue for the community. It represents a core resource for attracting and employing people, so that the larger community can thrive too.

The partnership that purchased the mountain in 2005 has made some progress on their plans to revitalize the mountain and the small amount of real estate available in town for development, but a variety of factors have led them to put the resort on the market.

Today, with the destiny of the resort in limbo, uncertainty hangs over the Bear Valley community like a dark cloud with no snow. To lose the ski hill would devastate the Bear Valley economy and, thus, its choice as a viable home for some residents.

When a deal to purchase the mountain collapsed last September, a small community group took action. Inspired by community-owned, mid-sized resorts like Mad River Glen, Bogus Basin, Bridger Bowl and others, we have chosen to work together to reverse the decline of the mountain, the village and the surrounding community. A small, dedicated group, in partnership with a local homeowners association, has spent countless hours researching ownership models and options for evolving the mountain and town toward a new, more



Map: Jason Leslie

sustainable model. We've attracted over 900 interested folks via social media and, with the community, we came together one dry December weekend in a standing-room-only Town Hall meeting. Heads nodded and the overwhelming feedback was: "We want change...show us how to do it."

To move forward, the Bear Valley Mountain Cooperative was born in February 2014. The group's mission is to preserve the unique characteristics of Bear Valley Mountain through community leadership and ownership. The Cooperative believes that Bear Valley Mountain Resort is inextricably linked to the economic viability of Bear Valley Village and the surrounding communities. The group's story will unfold over the course of this year and for many years to come, and we look forward to sharing more news next season as skiers and snowboarders come together to preserve a unique community which is united by their love for the outdoors. [www.bvmcoop.org](http://www.bvmcoop.org) - Steve Troyer

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