

All downhill from here

Snowstar grooming new trails

■ For other ideas on where to ski in the United States or Europe, please see today's Travel section. **PAGES H7 and H8**

By Sarah Larson
Staff writer

ANDALUSIA — Hills that are green and gold now will be white with snow in a few months, and Snowstar wants to be ready.

The staff at Snowstar, the Quad-Cities nearest ski area, spent the off-season revamping an existing run and cutting two new runs into the tree-covered hillsides on the resort's southernmost edge.

The expansion brings the resort near Andalusia to a total of 11 intermediate or advanced runs and two beginner slopes, serviced by two quad-chairlifts and two rope tows.

The two new runs are unnamed but should be open to skiers this season, according to Snowstar's outside operations manager John Pullen.

"If we get good, regular snowfall, people will be able to ski over here," Mr. Pullen said, gesturing to the new runs. "We also just bought a new tower-mounted snow machine, so we can blow snow in."

The first new run is an intermediate-level course with plenty of bumps, jumps and turns, Mr. Pullen said. It will keep good skiers busy with about a 20 percent grade.

The second new run is an advanced-level trail that cuts through lots of trees at about a 40-percent grade, Mr. Pullen said.

The new runs add about seven acres to the park, for a total of about 32 skiable acres.

An existing intermediate-level run also has been regraded and widened, Mr. Pullen said. Cosmos now offers a smoother run, but still weighs in at a challenging 30 percent grade.

New runs require new equipment and new workers. Snowstar usually employs 125 to 150 people during the skiing season and plans to hire about 25 more workers this year, Mr. Pullen said.

Snowstar also recently bought a "double-double" chair lift that runs two lifts off one set of towers, Mr. Pullen said. Scheduled to be installed by next summer, the lift will serve the two new runs and increase the resort's carrying capacity from 2,400 people an hour to 4,000 people per hour.

The new lift also can be modified to handle Snowstar's future expansion plans, Mr. Pullen said. Within about four years, Snowstar hopes



Gary Krambeck / staff

John Pullen, outside operations manager at Snowstar, stands at the bottom of the two runs that will be added to the ski area this winter.

Sample costs

Below is a sampling of Snowstar's variety of lift passes, ski rental and skiing lessons:

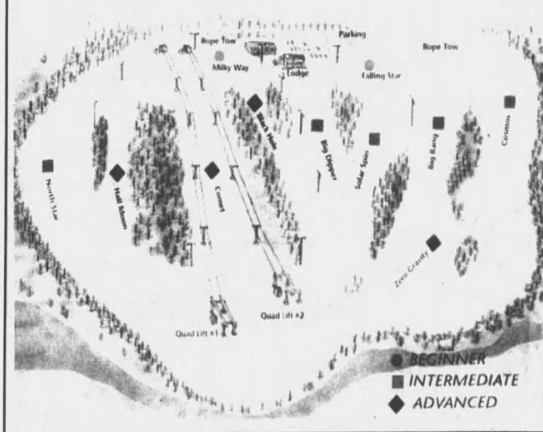
- \$19 for adult, all-day lift pass on a weekday.
- \$23 for adult, all-day lift pass on a weekend or holiday.
- \$18 for adult, all-day ski rental.
- \$14 for youth or senior, all-day ski rental.
- \$31 for all-day snowboard rental.
- \$3 for 1½-hour beginner-group ski lesson.
- \$26 for private, one-hour lesson.

Snowstar also has weekly rate specials, group rates and special rates and lessons for children ages 4 to 8.

to groom runs on the 40 acres it owns west of the existing ski area, he said. The new ski lift can be rotated to run up the western slopes, too.

After the current expansion is complete, Snowstar hopes to add another easier slope for skiers who have mastered the bunny hill but need more practice before moving onto the intermediate slopes, Mr. Pullen said. The new slope would

SNOWSTAR'S RUNS



feature about a 17 percent grade, more challenging than the Milky Way's 10 percent grade.

The new slopes build upon improvements made to the resort over the last few years. Last year, Snowstar's new tubing hill, added near the lodge, proved highly popular, Mr. Pullen said. Riders whiz down a steep hill on an inner tube, sometimes reaching speeds of 30 to 40 mph.

With groomed chutes, a safety fence and plenty of room at the bottom, the activity is safe for children as young as 4, he said.

The recent additions and future plans are all part of Snowstar's strategy to keep visitors frolicking in the wintertime fun. So far, it seems to be working well.

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