

# Vue Weekly

 

- [CURRENT ISSUE](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)
- [ADVERTISE](#)

**FIRST READ**  
• [SUBSCRIBE](#)  
• [UNSUBSCRIBE](#)





## SNOW ZONE

### NO IFS, ANDS OR BUTTES, THIS HILL ROCKS

STEVE THRENDYLE / [stevet@vueweekly.com](mailto:stevet@vueweekly.com)



I could hear my ski shooter pal Karl Weatherly bearing down behind me, threatening to speed past and poach my line if I didn't hurry the hell out of his way. "Git some, Tren-dale!!" Karl bellowed in his native North Carolina accent. I picked my speed up a notch, diving into 10 centimetres of talcum light powder atop a firm base of creamy corduroy. We were on the slopes at Crested Butte, experiencing Colorado skiing straight out of a postcard: high altitude blue skies with snow so dry and light that you'd think the state had patented it.

Whether Weatherly passed me or not was rather a moot point, since on most days Crested Butte offers both plenty of powder (especially if you can arrange a local hookup) and fantastic groomed on piste skiing.

Located in the southwest part of the state, Crested Butte is a mid-sized American resort with a storied yet financially dismal past. In the valley floor lies the former mining town of Crested Butte; three kilometres higher there's the resort town of Mount Crested Butte, where the skiing is. Guests fly into nearby Gunnison, which in pre-global warming days was frequently known as the coldest spot in the lower 48.

Crested Butte garnered huge recognition in the late '80s and early '90s as the birthplace of extreme skiing in the United States. The fearsome pyramid known as the Crested Butte mountain dominates the skyline and features dozens of sketchy lines punctuating a series of bony ledges and "chocolate chip" rocks.

Recreational skiers are free to flail down gravity-defying test pieces such as Banana Peel, the Funnel, the North Face and the infamous Headwall. This is billy-goat skiing on a par with Lake Louise or Whistler. Ever-present jagged boulders make Seth Morrison's advice to "always take your rock skis to Crested Butte" more than just an idle comment. A friend of mine slipped on the Banana Peel several years back and broke her wrist, shattered her pelvis and pulverized her face. She was in a Denver hospital for 10 days.

Free skiers, telemarkers and their similarly financially challenged brethren may get great press but they don't sell a lot of lift tickets. Due to its reputation, an intermediate skier from vertically-challenged states such as Texas or Kansas might consider Crested Butte a place you'd stay away from. Which is to say that though hardcore skiers look upon the resort with reverence, it didn't make the Calloway family of Texas (the hill's previous owners) a lot of money.

The resort languished without a purchaser for several years until Vermont's financially-astute Mueller family entered the picture. As owners of Okemo Resort in Ludlow, Vermont, the Muellers had successfully turned around a middling family mountain back east and were now ready for some Western adventure.

The first thing the Muellers did from a marketing perspective was to de-emphasize the gnarly stuff and rebrand the resort as "Colorado's Best Corduroy" in order to attract the masses. State of the art grooming machines and snowmaking guns were installed to get the most out of the resort's rather sparse annual snowfall. (CB averages 610 centimetres of snow). Double black diamond extremists might have winced, but many locals were quickly addicted to the fresh corduroy.

The second, far more costly, endeavour was to redesign Mount Crested Butte's base village, an architectural mash-up of angular, Euro-trash condos with cracked paving stones and fading stucco. (Think Les Arcs crossed with a cheap Mexican time-share.) The Muellers plan to level and rebuild several buildings in the core of Crested Butte village, and add another town centre at the North Village. The striking new Mountaineer Square project features corrugated metal cladding that reprises the region's mining heritage.

Aside from the truly challenging skiing, the best reason to visit Crested Butte is simply to bro-down with some of the friendliest and most iconoclastic mountain folk you'll ever meet. They take kindly to you once they find out you're from Canada and not from Texas, and will even apologize for George Bush. Much of the town features nationally-preserved historic buildings that thankfully have not all been converted into real estate offices. Grab your morning java at Camp Four, take in the Museum of Mountain Biking on Elk Street after the lifts close, then helicopter dance to a local jam-band until the wee hours at the Calypso at night.

"Git some," indeed. **V**

[Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#) | [Advertise](#) | [About Vue Weekly](#) | [Contact Us](#)

- [ABOUT VUE WEEKLY](#)
- [CONTACT US](#)