

DESTINATIONS



MOUNTAIN CREEK, NJ

Shredding in the Garden State

NEW JERSEY IS COLORFUL in the fall, snowy in the winter and warm in the summer. So throw away your images of mobsters, pollution and its second-to-New York status and imagine, if you will, a rolling landscape full of foliage and charming architecture. Here is where you'll find Mountain Creek, the two-peak, 1,040-vertical-foot ski resort that has turned half of its acreage into a giant terrain park complete with a Red Bull-sponsored editing studio and cool places to hang out, including a bar with DJs spinning nightly.

Located in Vernon, NJ, Mountain Creek is a close 47 miles from Manhattan, easily accessed with the New Jersey Transit bus system. During the winter, a 57-passenger bus leaves the Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT) in the heart of Manhattan, departs for Mountain Creek and returns that evening. For just \$20 you get a round-trip ticket, but the looks you'll get from three-piece-suit wearing Manhattanites at 7:30 a.m., while you wait in your ski gear, will be priceless.

We had just finished up a week-long road trip through the Mid-Atlantic states that landed us at Salomon Jib Academy number four in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Keri Herman, Michael Clarke and Matt Walker, along with me and photographer Jay Michelfelder, decided we'd stop off at Mountain Creek for a day or two and see what it was all about. Mountain Creek illuminates all of its 165 acres and 45 trails — 63 acres and 19 trails of which make up the park on the South and Bear Peaks of the mountain — seven nights a week, giving locals and Manhattanites alike a great place to learn, progress and slay the "Funnest Park in the East," as Mountain Creek calls it.

The resort decided to up its commitment to park riding in 2007, and made Bear Peak alone, providing a separate park in the east. It left Vernon and Granite Falls and wannabes shred park, a move that presents an attractive dichotomy for a family getaway that excites everyone. The park at Mountain Creek features over 40

jibs, three lines, a superpipe and multiple rhythm sections that are changed constantly over the course of the season. We headed up the Bear Peak Express lift at 7:30 that night and were spewed out on top of the extra-large feature section on Big Bear. We rolled over and scooped out the jump, lines and what features we could hit the next day. There were c-rails, s-rails, down-flat-downs, log jibs, serpent rails and multiple other features topped off with a Red Bull One-Hit Wonder butter-to-down box with wall rides on either side.

Being dark and unfamiliar as well as fairly icy, we skipped hitting anything the first run down and took the other chair on the South Peak, the South Peak Express, up for more scouting and found ourselves in a field of learner-park features that offered up a perfect environment to remind us all why we started riding park in the first place: fun hike sessions with friends figuring out new tricks on new features. The 16x2-foot flat boxes and flat-down boxes were loads of fun, as was the 40-foot super-wide box where all three athletes trained it over and over.

We cruised back to our hotel, the Appalachian, over at the base of Vernon Peak. The Appalachian provides a ski-in and ski-out lodging, and even though it's at the base of Vernon Peak, the Sojourn Double chairlift connects both sides of the mountain in the winter, making it easy to get all over the mountain and back to

THROW AWAY YOUR IMAGES OF MOBSTERS, POLLUTION AND ITS SECOND-TO-NEW YORK STATUS

VITALS

WEB	mountaincreek.com
SNOWFALL	65 inches
LIFTS	9
ACRES	165
VERTICAL	1,040 feet
RUNS	45
SLEEP	Appalachian Hotel
EAT	Mixing Bowl
DRINK	The Kink Nightclub

Over the rainbow, into Oz... or rather, New Jersey, Mike Clarke is the wizard.



DESTINATIONS DESTINY



The Salomon train, Keri Herman, Matt Walker and Mike Clarke are all aboard.

MOUNTAIN CREEK, NJ

your room without ever taking your boots off. The new Appalachian has year-round pools and hot tubs, a day spa, kitchenettes in every suite, and an authentic, mountain-living feel. Needless to say, after our week on the road, it was nice to be settled for a couple nights with television and Internet.

The next day, we grabbed some breakfast at the Mixing Bowl, perhaps — and this is no small statement for me, being the resident Brunch Buffet Connoisseur — the single greatest breakfast establishment I have ever patronized. The cinnamon apple pancakes are a thing of beauty. For a few dollars, you can grab coffee, scrambled eggs, fresh fruit and pancakes. Between the Mixing Bowl and the local Dunkin' Donuts, we were set for food on a budget.

Getting to the hill for first chair at noon (yes, noon. It was getting late in the season and Mountain Creek didn't open the South side until then, knowing its park riders like to sleep in) we headed up first to the serpent rail. Walker, being our resident rail expert, slayed it. Nose press, tail press... you name it, they did it. After nailing some solid rail shots in the larger park, we moved over to the smaller park to have some fun. The kids trained the super-long box and got some synchro going on

side-by-side features. Walker disassembled a big flat-down over and over, once again proving he's the man when it comes to rails. We finished the day with Clarke sessioning the Red Bull One-Hit-Wonder feature. His parents, who had made the trip down from Lake Placid to spend some time with their son and watch him do work first hand, stood by calmly while Michael wall-rode, slid, tapped, bonked, and generally made the One-Hit-Wonder do with the feature, tried to imitate Clarke and broke themselves off while we watched on with jaws dropped.

We wrapped for the day and meandered around the base lodge of South for a bit. Mountain Creek has put some serious effort into making an area with a cool vibe readily available for its park monkeys. The Kink Bar with DJs, murals on the bathroom walls and live palm-tree-looking plants scattered about all make for a great place to chill.

We grabbed a Snickers at the South Square Café and a cup of coffee at Grovers for the ride to the Newark airport. It was amazing how quickly trees and birds turned into high rises and homeless guys flipping you the bird as we made our way into the city. Mike Clarke barely had time to get his requisite car-ride nap in, it was that close. But we made it home safe and sound to spread the word of the claimed "Funnest Terrain Park in the East."

BETWEEN THE MIXING BOWL AND THE LOCAL DUNKIN' DONUTS, WE WERE SET FOR FOOD ON A BUDGET.

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