



# Industry— Skier Visits UP

*Contributed by Catherine Ohl*

Skiers and boarders are complaining about the crowds on the slopes this year. Weekends are especially busy. All the blame has been going to the (relatively) inexpensive Ikon and Epic Passes. I believe that's only a part of the story. Personally, I hear more complaints about Ikon resorts but that may be due to this pass being a first-time deal that allows skiers to visit some really great resorts on the single pass that normally has a high daily lift ticket price.



photo by Elissa Houlberg, Mammoth, Chair 5

photo by Jeremy Swanson, Aspen



## In My Opinion—

I think all the hype on the amazing snow conditions brought a lot of people to the slopes that haven't skied in awhile and they are skiing more often. This especially applies to locals who can get to the mountain on a whim... like when there is fresh powder. And the backcountry has been closed and/or dangerous putting more folks on the mountains.

On top of that I've seen that getting to the slopes has been tough on weekends due to wind, snow, rain and avalanches so people are skiing more weekdays. Then we have a better economy with more people employed. Of course, there is a relatively cheap Ikon and Epic pass. Finally we found that kids get so many more days off school than we ever did.

## ⇒ What (Ikon) Resorts are saying—

Mike Kaplan, president, and CEO of Aspen Skiing Co. is the latest ski resort executive to weigh in on the crowd sizes. He attributes increased crowds to a great snow season and does not blame the Ikon or Epic passes. Aspen has had more than 300 inches of snow only midway through March!

For the locals that are quick to blame the Ikon Pass, Kaplan writes that visitors using the new product make up just 9 percent of skier visits this season, climbing to 15 percent on weekends. He believes that the real driver of the busier slopes is locals' season pass use, the very people complaining about the busier slopes, which is up an astounding 40 percent from last season.

In his Aspen article, Mike Kaplan stated "I can assure you that we will adjust to these new visitation patterns, make tweaks to the Ikon pass, and even abandon it if it's not working for us over the next few years. In the meantime, we are committed to continuous learning and improvement, and will course correct our operations as we go. That includes parking, coordination with RFTA, lift capacity and ski school programming. We will remain unrelenting in our pursuit of the perfect ski/ride experience."

Jackson Hole and Big Sky (both resorts on the Ikon and Mountain Collective Passes) have expressed similar opinions.

## ⇒ Bottom Line—

It would be interesting to hear the experts' analysis at the end of the season and see where the crowds go next year. We personally did not experience massive crowds at the Vail resorts. Meanwhile we are still hoping to ski our ages... and already bought our passes for next season. ■