



# HIDDEN GEMS

## Afterglow Lake Resort, Phelps, Wisconsin

*Editor's note: With this issue we begin a new occasional feature—Hidden Gems—highlighting some of the deserving, but lesser known cross country ski destinations, resorts and trails around the country. If you know of such a place that fits this description, please let us know at [info@crosscountryskier.com](mailto:info@crosscountryskier.com) for future consideration.*

Afterglow Lake Resort in Phelps, Wisconsin, is a truly fitting choice with which to begin our Hidden Gems series. It is not just a ski resort; it is a skier's resort. While it caters to other segments of the winter tourism market—ice skating, tubing and ice fishing—cross country skiing is the obvious passion.

Owned by Pete and Gail Moline, Afterglow is a small, second-generation, family-owned cabin-based resort. On 240 acres, it is perched beside its namesake lake just about as far north in Wisconsin as you can go before hitting the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This is true Northwoods. With 15 housekeeping cabins (dogs are permitted in some cabins), each with a fireplace and full kitchen, Afterglow is an ideal destination for individuals, groups and especially families. A well-equipped indoor recreation center with everything from table games to exercise equipment for après ski and the obligatory whirlpool and sauna, show they know how to round out a great ski day. Trails literally start at the cabin door: Walk to the end of the sidewalk, clip in and ski away.

Garnering a well-deserved cult following among Nordic skiers in the upper Midwest, Afterglow attracts cross country enthusiasts trekking from Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the Twin Cities' area of Minnesota and beyond. Besides its hominess, Afterglow chalks up other things in its favor. Located so far north, it is less subject to the vagaries of fickle snowfall patterns. Snows also get a bit of a bump due to occasional lake effect weather.

Its other claim to fame—and that which keeps skiers coming back—is grooming. Pete Moline, a former U.S. Ski Team moguls star, long ago embraced Nordic skiing, and more importantly, grooming. To say that he is a fanatic about grooming is an understatement, failing to do justice to the time he puts in and the quality of his product. “We don't see much of Pete once ski season gets underway,” jokes Gail. Her “loss” is the skiers' gain, however, as Moline usually logs over 100 nights of grooming a season. You might hear the distant sound of his Skidoo Scandic as he departs for his appointed rounds at 4:00 a.m. By 7:00, he's back with the trails finely tuned for the day's skiing.

But Moline is more than just an avid groomer; he has fully embraced the “art” of grooming. Though he uses a snowmobile and pull-behind Tidd Tech, you'd swear he's been over the trails with a Pisten Bully or other snowcat-style machine. The trails, only 12 to 14 feet wide, require two passes with this rig. Unlike many trails groomed in this fashion, in the middle of the trail where one groomer path crosses on top of the other, there is no bump, ridge or discernable joint. The trail surface is virtually flat and seamless. I asked Pete

how he achieved this degree of perfection in his grooming. “I have a couple of tricks,” he hinted with smile. One is the use of an add-on smoothing bar—a simple piece of PVC pipe that he slips over the cutting tines of the groomer. “This helps level the trail and erase any seam that might be created when making the second pass around the trail,” he explained.

At 18 kilometers, the Afterglow trail system is not large, and one can ski most of it in a morning. But it is such a delight to ski that repeating parts of it in the afternoon is totally within reason. There are nine trails, most skate with a classic track, numbered simply 1 through 9. None threaten with large challenges, though three expert loops—#4, 7 and 8—provide short, steep climbing and rewarding descents, fun enough that I repeated them a couple of times. Leaving the Afterglow property, Number 5 tours a bit in the adjoining Nicolet National Forest on a wide, flowing, out and back trail where you can practice your V2 or just cruise along.

Classic skiers will delight in the Phelps Trail. This trail also ventures off Afterglow property, winding its way onto adjacent national forest land that Moline grooms under an agreement with the US Forest Service. Single track most of the way, the four-kilometer-loop starts out innocently enough, but as the signs intimate, it tosses in some swooping and winding descents about 2/3 of the way into the trail.

To complement the great skiing, Afterglow also offers a network of mapped, marked snowshoe trails. With distances from .3 miles to 1.8 miles, the half dozen trails can be ganged together for a much longer tour, up to seven miles total. None are overly strenuous. All intersect ski trails, so getting lost is not an option. Afterglow Lake Resort is the kind of place cross country skiers dream about. With a family environment, dedication to quality grooming, quiet and comfort, this hidden gem begs discovery.

**For more skinny...**

Afterglow Lake Resort: 715/545-2560,  
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