

What's new on Michigan's ski slopes?

Michigan skiing has come a long way in the past few decades. From humble beginnings of stamping out ski runs with a team of people wearing snowshoes to the massive machine groomers of today, downhill snow sports have evolved. Not only has slope maintenance improved dramatically, the ability to make snow has increased the quality and frequency of skiing. Even if there is no snow in people's yards, the ski slopes can be covered when the weather is cold.

Add to these improvements the tremendous breakthroughs in ski equipment. Skis are faster, more responsive and boots are easier to put on and snap into skis. Also the creation of snowboarding has added a whole new dimension to snow sports and a great deal of exhilaration.

With the constant evolution of downhill snow sports, it's no wonder it is still going strong in Michigan. Crystal Mountain of Thompsonville and Mt. Holly of Holly both celebrate their 50th birthdays this season marking a milestone for the success of the sport in Michigan.

Michiganders don't have to go far to enjoy winter thrills. Michigan has it all, from expert runs through the trees to Olympic-sized half pipes. Michigan ski areas boast a combined total of over 200 chair lifts, 840 runs, 40 terrain parks and thousands of kilometers of groomed cross-country trails. Steve Kershner, Michigan Snowsports Industries Association (MSIA) chairman and director of skiing for Shanty Creek, says there's really something for everyone and every ability level on Michigan's ski slopes and trails.

On the slopes, Michigan ski areas are making improvements that will please all ability levels. For beginners and young skiers there are new beginner areas with easy-to-use conveyor carpet lifts. For experts there are new "glade" runs on steep slopes, through the trees. Many ski areas are also making major improvements to their terrain parks and half pipes – the favorite spots for snowboarders.

Here is a rundown of improvements on Michigan slopes:

Alpine Valley of White Lake (248.887.2180), has a new Wonder Carpet conveyor lift in the beginner area. www.skialpinevalley.com

Apple Mountain of Freeland (989).781.6789), upgraded the terrain park and made snowmaking improvements. www.applemountain.com

Big Powderhorn Mountain in Bessemer (906.932.4838), added their 29th downhill trail. www.bigpowderhorn.net

Bittersweet of Otsego (269.694.2820), expanded their beginner area adding a second conveyor lift for beginners. www.skibittersweet.com

Boyne USA's Boyne Highlands in Harbor Springs and **Boyne Mountain** in Boyne Falls (1.800.GO.BOYNE), both opened new superpipes. Boyne Mountain now boasts the longest superpipe in North America, at over 700 feet in length with 18-foot walls. Both resorts are introducing new winter packages this year that include everything from simple lift and lodging to all-inclusive packages. The two resorts have increased cross-country skiing to 75 km of naturally wooded trails. Dog sled rides are available with day and evening excursions for the whole family at Boyne Highlands. Boyne Highlands is also offering 30-minute groomer rides, (limited availability). Boyne USA launches a new snow sports website in the fall of 2006. www.boyne.com

Caberfae Peaks in Cadillac (231.862.3000), was busy this summer making improvements and renovations. The ski area added five snowmaking

towers, widened its novice ski runs, improved snowmaking for the terrain park and added over 400 pairs of ski boots and increased the supply of snowboards and snowboard boots. Caberfae has a deal for families this year with Family Fun-Day Sundays. On the first Sunday of every month, the entire family can ski for only \$49. This includes lift ticket, rental equipment and a lesson. Caberfae also renovated eight rooms of the MacKenzie Lodge and added full-service dining. www.caberfaepeaks.com

At Cannonsburg Ski Area in Cannonsburg (616.874.6711), every Sunday evening after 5 p.m., skiers can purchase a lift ticket, rental equipment and a group ski lesson all for just \$15. Cannonsburg expanded its terrain park and added more snowmaking equipment to keep snowboarders in the air. www.cannonsburg.com

Bob Frye, owner of Cross Country Ski Headquarters of Roscommon (800.832.2663), extended their "Adventure Trail" which is privy to an elevated overview of Michigan's primeval forest. www.cross-country-ski.com

Crystal Mountain of Thompsonville (231.378.2000), celebrates their 50th birthday this season. Over Thanksgiving weekend, Crystal will kick off a year-long celebration with fireworks and special 50th-themed activities throughout the season. Crystal has made a commitment to renewable wind energy by powering the resort's high-speed chairlift, the Crystal Clipper, entirely with wind power energy credits.

This environmental effort alone will prevent 174,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere each year. That's the equivalent of not driving a car 189,956 miles. Crystal's long-term goal is to power the entire resort with 100 percent

Photo courtesy of Treetops Resort



renewable energy. Crystal is offering a one-day ski lift ticket valid during the 2006/07 season to anyone who purchases wind power for their family's residence for one year through Renewable Choice Energy. Other new happenings at the resort include the Super Sundays Season Pass, in which downhill skiers can purchase a pass that entitles them to ski every Sunday, all season long (excluding holidays), for just \$99 per pass. www.crystallmountain.com

The Homestead of Glen Arbor, (231) 334-5000, upgraded the Little Belle hotel at the base of the slopes. They redesigned each uniquely but all 14 units have king-sized beds and jacuzzis. The Homestead also renovated its eateries, Nonna's, an Italian restaurant and Beppi's, a pizzeria and sports bar. www.thehomesteadresort.com

Indianhead of Wakefield (906.229.5181), added an additional terrain park to provide fresh new challenges for snowboarders. www.indianheadmtn.com

Marquette Mountain in Marquette (906.225.1155), installed a new triple chair lift, improved the terrain park and created a new kid's play area. The ski area has changed their special discounts. Instead of offering deals for a select group of people on certain days, like ladies or college days, Marquette has opened it up for everybody. Anyone can purchase lift tickets at the reduced rates during "Value Times." It costs \$12 for Monday from 1 to 5 p.m. and Tuesday from 4 to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday is \$22 for all day and Sunday is \$22 from 1 p.m. until closing time. Holidays are not included in these discount rates. Glow Nights are December 31 and February 10, where skiers and riders receive free multi-colored neon glow sticks to display. www.marquettmountain.com

Mt. Bohemia in the UP's Keweenaw Peninsula (906.487.9757), is adding 17 new runs this year opening up a huge new back-country section on its east side. Called the Outer Limits, this new section will feature Bohemia's longest runs, as skiers and riders get to explore an almost half-mile-wide forest with chutes and cliff drops. Mt. Bohemia will be offering season passes for only \$99 during a one-day sale on December 2. The regular price is \$340. Season passes can be purchased over the phone by calling 1.888.937.2411 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. You can also add a season pass to the Porcupine Mountain ski area in Ontonagon for only \$25 more. www.mtbohemia.com

Porcupine Mountain of Silver City (1.888.937.2411) is introducing snowcat skiing to the Midwest as it opens a new mountain called Everest for skiing and riding. The snowcat operation will transport skiers and riders from the bottom of Porcupine mountain ski area and take them to the top of Everest. From the top, skiers and riders will disembark from the snowcat and then have over 100 acres of backcountry terrain to choose from. When they reach the bottom they will then get picked up again by the snowcat. With the addition of Everest the Porkies vertical will now climb to almost 800 feet making it the second highest vertical in Michigan and now will have over 42 runs.

In Southeast Michigan, **Mt. Brighton Ski Area** of Brighton (810.229.9581), made use of its grassy hill over the summer with "Sphereing" and "Aqua Sphereing." With Sphereing, one or two riders are strapped inside a huge, 12-foot inflatable ball and rolled down the slope at a speed of 30 mph. With Aqua Sphereing, 30 liters of water are added to the sphere and riders dressed in swimming suits, slip and slide around inside the ball all the way down the hill. www.mtbrighton.com

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