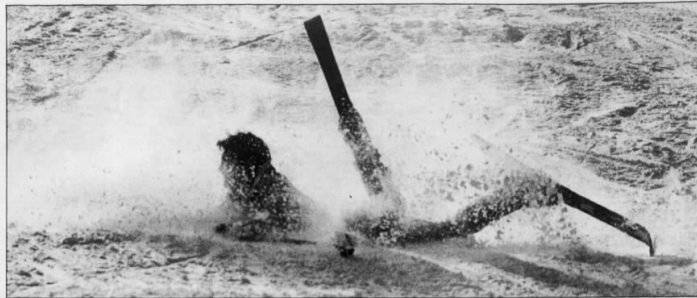


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Blue Water Portrait: Black Forest Ski Area



Coof! A skier at Black Forest Ski Area in Wadhams takes a year than last when most skiers ignored the slopes and the artificial snow that the Fosters spent \$200 to \$300 a night to make. "If there's no natural snow in their yards, we don't get the people," Diane Foster said. "People either don't think about it, or they think if we don't have natural snow, skiing can't be any good."

Snow doubt about it! Ski slope operators live, die with weather

By BILL BURN
Times Herald Staff Writer

WADHAMS — "Try for Snow" implies a small sign behind a refreshment counter at the Black Forest Ski Area.

No such entreaty was needed this day. Scores of skiers glided down the hard-packed slopes, where snow lay polished and gleaming like frozen sugar paste in a cold afternoon sun.

But Black Forest owners Daniel and Diane Foster don't take the weather on faith, not after last winter, when they struggled through the most snow-free winter on record.

"If there's no natural snow in their yards, we don't get the people," Diane Foster says. "People either don't think about it, or they think if we don't have natural snow, skiing can't be any good."

The capricious sky can sabo-

tege Black Forest, the Blue Water Area's only ski slope, in other ways, the couple says.

- Too much snow. Skiers won't try drive to the area on Lapeer Road, one-half mile west of Wadhams Road, if the roads are too snow-covered.
- Powdery snow. Local skiers aren't used to it.
- Too warm. High temperatures or rain melt the artificial snow.
- Too cold. Skiers get frostbite.

"Year in and year out, you never know," Diane Foster says. "From one day to the next, she says. "We look out the window and see what we've got."

What they've got has been good since Dec. 7, when Black Forest opened. An early start to the season is essential. "If we don't get the Christmas holidays with the

kids, the year is kind of a bust," she says.

Beginners like Cliff Pickett, Port Huron, rent boots and skis and start on the bunny hill — a slope of about 100 feet long at a 30-degree angle.

When they've mastered the bunny hill — which means knowing how to stop at the bottom — skiers graduate to any of six other runs.

More experienced skiers say they prefer longer runs than Black Forest is able to offer.

But its small size — 13 acres — has compensations. It's not crowded, and an outing isn't as expensive as it would be at bigger areas.

J. Vincent David, Applegate, who has skied for 18 years, says, "For a smaller area, it's probably one of the nicest ones around."

The Fosters started Black Forest in 1961.

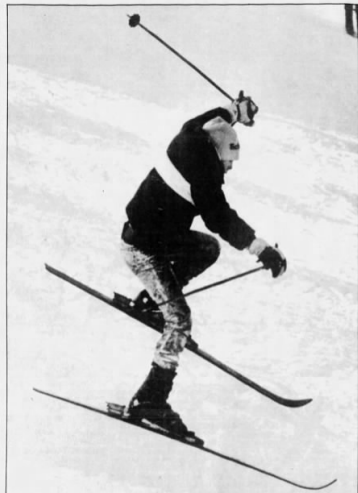
Within a few years they had a continual stream of skiers, but recent economic downturns seem to have chilled skiing enthusiasm.

But the winter has started well in terms of numbers of skiers and absence of casualties.

Black Forest has yet to record a broken leg this season, but Daniel Foster says one or two on a busy day isn't unusual.

Foster has just helped bring in a young woman on a stretcher, with two big blue ambulances holding a leg right. The injury turned out to be a treated knee.

It's been a good winter so far. Black Forest is open from 9 to 10 p.m. during the week and from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and runs 9 to 10 p.m. on weekends. Charges for renting equipment and using the runs are \$12 for people 12 years and older and \$10 for children under 12. The cost is cut in half if you bring your own equipment.



Youngsters like Craig Klias, 13, of 1119 White St., Port Huron, dominate the slopes at the area can accommodate about 250 skiers at a time. Klias is the son of Joanne and Dennis Klias. The ski



Nine-year-old Amy Robertson, Richmond, reaches for her first ski outing.



The Black Forest Ski Area features seven runs, include the bunny — or beginners' — hill to a 700-foot trail through woods to an advanced run that drops 125 feet within 600 feet. Tow ropes pull the skiers to the top again.



Skiers at the 12-acre Black Forest Ski Area get a view of the Black River during downhill runs. The sport is not entirely risk-free. Black Forest owners Diane and Dennis Foster say that one of two broken legs during a busy day is not unusual. "It's just the fact that you're moving at a fast speed," he said. "When you fall, something has to give." Skiers also injure themselves trying to do more than they're capable of, he said.