

FOR MANY ENTHUSIASTS, MIDWEST NOT A SKIING WASTELAND

Iowa Slopes? 'They Fit a Ski Beginner's Needs'

By Norman Brewer
(Last in a Series)

ASPEN Highlands' ski slope drops 3,800 feet down a Colorado mountain.

The Hickory Hills slope in pasture near Waterloo, Ia., has a vertical drop of about 125 feet.

Fortunately, there isn't a direct ratio — at least for most skiers — between sking pleasure and vertical drop.

"I like Iowa skiing," said a Des Moines man. "It isn't like sking mountains, but there are some decent slopes around."

"I don't think of us as being in the minor leagues," said Bob Smith, a resort official at Welch Village, Minn., where the vertical drop is 330 feet. "The only thing we lack is length."

The point is that for many skiers, especially beginners and intermediates, the midwest is not a wasteland.

In Iowa, too. There are good fast slopes in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois — many of them within an easy drive for Iowans — and there are satisfactory — and improving — runs in Iowa that even expert skiers say can provide a decent day's outing.

"You can get just as many miles of sking as much vertical drop" in a day at a good midwestern ski area as you can at Colorado resorts, contends Smith.

Instead of making half a dozen runs a day in the mountains where there may be a 45-minute wait in the lift line — you make two dozen runs and stand in lift



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lines not more than about seven minutes, he said.

ANOTHER factor, especially for the budget-conscious, is that sking in the midwest is generally cheaper than in Colorado or other mountain ski areas in the nation.

The saving — in both money and time — is transportation. Being close to an Iowa slope — and virtually everywhere in the state is — means you can avoid overnight lodging, and by taking along a sack lunch, probably not have to buy any restaurant meals.

Lift tickets are cheaper in Iowa, too, generally costing \$2 or \$3 for one day, compared with about \$6 in Colorado. Renting skis, boots and poles will usually cost you \$2 or \$4 — two-thirds the Rocky Mountain price.

And group lessons will run \$2 or \$3 an hour. On an hourly basis, that's about the same as in Colorado. But there, you have to invest about \$5 in a half-day of in-

struction or probably \$7 in a full day.

There are some disadvantages in Iowa. The equipment may not be as good and instruction probably won't measure up to Colorado standards.

Improving. "It's not here yet," said James Hicks of 431 Allison Ave. in charge of Iowa recruiting for the National Ski Patrol, in describing Iowa's standard of sking.

But, he added that instruction is improving and "there should be adequate beginners' instruction this year."

Smith of the Minnesota ski resort contends, "The person who wants to go all the way to Colorado to learn sking is foolish."

For the beginner, a Colorado trip mainly replaces the naked grassiness of leafless Mahauts and elms with mountain scenery, Smith said, adding: "We can get you ready for the mountain."

THERE ARE other differences, too, when it comes to learning.

For one thing, there isn't as much opportunity in the midwest to be taught under the graduated-length method, which is quickly becoming popular because the beginner starts on easier-to-control short skis and progresses to longer skis as his skills develop.

Also, snow in the midwest is slicker and icier.

Colorado snow is dry and light, and it snows often. Many midwestern ski areas rely on snowmaking machines to keep their slopes in decent condition when heavy

For Free Passes

"Some people get into patrolling by trying to save money on lift tickets," said Hicks, explaining that patrol members — and sometimes their families — usually receive free passes at the slope where they volunteer their time.

"But if a person's not dedicated," he continued, "he soon quits. The biggest compensation is when you get a letter of gratitude, saying the care received on the hill was competent and very beneficial."

The patrol in Iowa is big enough to provide service at only six of about a dozen slopes — those near Estersville, Montezuma, Waterloo, Crescent, Humboldt and Des Moines — and at some of those only on weekends.

Area ski clubs patrol some other slopes, however. Many midwestern slopes offer night sking, particularly on weekends, as part of the daily lift rates.

Depending on where you go, you might save a couple dollars a day on lifts and perhaps a little less on equipment. You're also likely to get a discount on rates by sking during the week.

At Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois ski areas, a family of four on a minimum budget can get by for about \$45 a day — compared with \$50 in Colorado — if you have your own equipment, know how to ski and can take advantage of three-day lift rates.

That's figuring about \$14 a night for a motel room with kitchenette, \$7 a day to cook breakfast and dinner, \$4 for a cafeteria line lunch at the ski area, \$15 for lift fees and \$5 for extras.

If you go to the more popular resort areas in northern

ski traffic wears off snow faster than nature replenishes it.

One thing to be careful about, particularly in Iowa, is sking in areas with scant snow cover.

James Hicks says flatly: "If an area has patchy snow it shouldn't be open."

Unsettled, however, is the question of whether Colorado's soft snow or Iowa's icy snow is safer.

Icy snow, said Hicks, is "harder to ski, and faster, but you don't get the twisting pressure" that exists with more resistant soft snow.

"Generally we find we don't get severe accidents or breaks with icy conditions," he said. Also, a person's potential speed is less on the midwest's shorter slopes.

There has been more of a problem in the midwest with beginners not receiving basic instruction. Most frequently injured, said Hicks, are persons skiing for the first or second time who have never had lessons.

IF YOU take a nasty tumble, look for someone in a blue or rust-colored parka with a yellow cross on the back. That will be a member of the National Ski Patrol, a group of volunteers who are probably a skier's best protection.

There are about 70 in Iowa, and they're at least intermediate skiers and have had considerable first aid training.

Besides assisting injured persons, they keep an eye on skier conduct, discouraging recklessness, and work with ski area management to keep runs in the best possible condition.

Unless you have your own plane, the simplest way to get to out-of-state ski areas is to drive. From Des Moines to most areas around Minneapolis takes about five hours, and forests to the north — like popular Telemark, Wis. — take at least another three hours.

Here are a few places you can save money:

• At the four-deck bunkroom at Welch Village, where you provide your own linen or sleeping bag, you can bed down for \$3 a night.

• The A & W at Red Wing, Minn., where a 50-cent breakfast special is being offered.

• The weekend package at La Crosse, Wis., where the Bluff View Motel offers lodging, lift tickets, dinner and breakfast for two days for under \$30 a person.

• Edgar Manning at Stud-dard, six miles south of La Crosse, rents sleeping rooms in his home, \$3.50 for singles and \$5.50 for couples.

• A good ski area in Illinois is Chestnut Mountain Lodge, where a day of meals, lodging, lift fees and lessons for a family of four (children 12 and under) will cost \$72.

• Motel rooms with two double beds can be rented for about \$16 a night in nearby Galena.

Several ski areas north of Chicago have daily lift rates ranging from about \$4.50 to \$7, but reportedly are often crowded.

Fun Valley near Montezuma and the Ramada Inn at



Stars on map locate nearby ski areas. More than a dozen are within circled area around Minneapolis.

Wisconsin or Minnesota, however, better figure on spending about the same as you would in Colorado.

Cut Lesson Costs

Mount Frontenac near Red Wing, Minn., cut the cost of individual lessons from \$10 an hour to \$6 this year. The idea, said Marge Otto, is "to assure us of producing a skier who will stay with us."

Welch Village's Bob Smith added that "people who ski here may not be able to afford to travel to Colorado."

Smith and Mrs. Otto agreed their out-of-state business is growing and, like other northern ski officials, they're starting to point their promotion toward Iowa because the state's "just so wide open."

Just how "wide open" is impossible to tell.

But James Hicks estimates the number of Iowa skiers has quadrupled since 1965, and each year one or two more ski areas open up.

Farmer Edwin Bryan of Fun Valley near Montezuma, operating last year with the barest of facilities, recalled: "We'd have 200 to 400 people here on weekend afternoons, and so I decided to stick my neck out."

Rental Skis

Bryan, 51, doesn't say how far, but he bought 120 pairs of rental skis, built a small lodge, put in lights for night sking, bought a snowmaking machine.

"I'm going to make some money, I hope," he said. "If I don't I'm in trouble."

Dick Williams, manager of Holiday Mountain near Estersville, is optimistic about the Iowa ski business.

That area has been open seven years, now, he said, and "it is fantastic. You just wonder where the people keep coming from. But this is Iowa and people are looking for something different."

MIDWEST SKI COSTS

Here's the cost of sking in Iowa. Some areas have lower weekend rates, and some have special rates for children. Areas with snowmaking machines are marked with an asterisk. Two new slopes near Dexter and Fort Dodge are scheduled to open during the Christmas-New Year holidays, if there is snow.

	Ski Lift Fee	Equipment Rental	One-hour group lesson
*Crescent Ski Hills, Crescent	\$4	\$1.50	\$3
Dayton Delis, Fort Dodge	\$3	\$3	—
Dexfield Ski Lodge, Dexter	\$3	\$3	—
Duck Creek Park, Davenport	\$6	\$5.50	—
*Fun Valley, Montezuma	\$3	\$4	\$3
Hickory Hills, Waterloo	\$3.50	\$5	Half hour free with rental, lift fee
*Holiday Mountain, Estersville	\$3	\$3	\$2
Knob Hill, Forest City	\$2	\$2	—
Nor-Ski, Decorah	\$4.50	\$3.50	—
Ted's Hill, Grimes	\$3	\$3.50	\$2
Veterans' Memorial Ski Area, Dubuque	\$2	—	—
*Winter Playground, Humboldt	\$3	\$3	\$2

Here are some average prices from a representative sampling of ski areas in nearby states.

	MINNESOTA	WISCONSIN	ILLINOIS
Lift fee	\$2-\$6.75	\$4-\$7.50	\$3-\$4.50
Rental	\$5-\$8	\$4-\$10	\$2.50-\$6
Lesson	\$4.50-\$7	\$4-\$7	\$3-\$5

CHART BY STAFF ARTIST STEVE PEGLOW



Bob Smith and snow machine at Welch Village, Minn.