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State ski industry may have reached peak

Michigan's ski operators hope lightning will strike twice to bring another season of record snow and crowds to the slopes, but with fewer than half expanding operations this winter, it appears the industry may be near its peak development at this time, according to Automobile Club of Michigan.

"There are two new state ski areas, but two others will not re-open this winter, and the number of lodges operating in Michigan remains at 58 for the second year," said Joseph Ratke, Auto Club touring manager.

"This would indicate that the state's ski industry has stabilized, and unless it can lure more out-of-state skiers away from resorts in the Northeast and the West, the major growth era may have ended," Ratke said.

Last year, Michigan's winter sports generated nearly \$72 million in business, and a major contributor to this boom was the ski industry, which reported an average 20 per cent increase in both crowds and profits.

Ski operators are hopeful of a 10 to 15 per cent increase in skiers over last year's record, but their optimism is tempered by memories of how easily they can be hurt by the weather and changes in the economy, Ratke noted.

The two new lodges opening this year are Cole Creek, near Comins in northeast Lower Michigan, and Blackjack, near Bessemer in the western Upper Peninsula.

"Cole Creek formerly operated as Fon-Ro the late 1960s and reopened under its new name last January," said Ratke.

Cole Creek has two beginner-intermediate runs serviced by rope tows. Cross-country skiing is offered on nearly 30 miles of surrounding trails. The ski center includes a dining room, lounge and ski shop with rental equipment.

Blackjack has been six years in the making and offers three double chairlifts and two rope tows serving 12 runs spread along a hill with a 460-foot vertical drop. It also features a cafeteria and ski rental shop.

Not operating this year are Wallon

Hills, one of four Boyne Country complexes in the state, and Newaygo County Winter Sports Park, new Newaygo. Wallon Hills closed due to lack of interest by the public in a lodge that offered low-cost weekend skiing. Erosion caused by off-road vehicles at Newaygo Winter Park was blamed for its closure.

Auto Club states that persons traveling to Michigan ski areas will pay an average \$6.35 for daytime weekend lift use. Prices are unchanged from last season at 16 areas while lift ticket increases from 25 cents to \$2 were found at 32 others.

Boyne Mt., near Boyne Falls, and Boyne Highlands, near Harbor Springs, have the highest weekend lift fees at \$12.

Those two lodges boast a total of 31 runs and 15 chairlifts. Each has snowmaking and at-slope accommodations

in rooms or condominiums and chalets. Both offer package rates, equipment rental and instruction, plus caters and dining room, lounges, week-end entertainment, heated outdoor pools, babysitting and cross-country skiing.

The most inexpensive skiing in the state can be found at Crystella, near Crystal Falls, in the Upper Peninsula. Auto Club notes that the area's three runs are serviced by a pair of rope tows, with cross-country skiing the only "extra" offered.

Here is "what's new" at state ski areas for this winter:

Southeast Michigan — **MT. BRIGHTON**, near Brighton, added a 600-foot expert-only run billed as the region's steepest. Also new is a 1,600-foot intermediate-advanced slope served by a two-place chairlift. A double rope tow and ski shop have been

added and rental stock increased to 2,000 pairs.

MT. GRAMPIAN, Oxford, lists a new 1,300 square-foot ski shop with complete alpine and cross-country equipment.

East Michigan — **MT. MARIA**, Spruce, has two new intermediate runs of 2,000 and 2,500 feet. Cross-country ski equipment and three miles of added trails also are available. **MIO**

MT., Mio, added a 1,100-foot intermediate run. Snowmaking capability also was increased by half. **MOTT**

MT., near Farwell, increased its snowmaking equipment by one-third. **BINTA APPLE** **MT.**, near Freeland, added 200 new sets of rental skis and upped its snowmaking capability 25 per cent. **SNOWSNAKE**, Harrison, now offers cross-country skiing, rental and lessons and a newly widened advanced downhill slope.

West Michigan — **TIMBER RIDGE**, Gobles, cut a new 600-foot beginner run and two advanced-beginner runs of 2,000 and 1,800 feet. Also added were a triple-chairlift, three rope tows and 400 sets of rental equipment. **ROYAL**

VALLEY, Buchanan, sports two new four-place chairlifts which triple its capacity, plus a 1,500-foot beginner run and an extended advanced-beginner run. **SWISS VALLEY**, Jones, reports a new 1,200-foot intermediate run and poma tow, plus added cafeteria space.

CANNONBURG now has more than six miles of cross-country trails and 200 sets of cross-country rental equipment, a new 12,000 square-foot cafeteria, added parking and snowmaking capability. **CRYSTAL** **MT.**, Thompsonville, installed a four-place chairlift, expanded its cocktail lounge and offers weekday nursery service. **CABERFAE**, Cadillac, increased

snowmaking capability 30 per cent and increased night lighting one-third. Expert runs were re-graded and a snack bar and sun deck also are new. **TRAVERSE CITY HOLIDAY** doubled its snowmaking equipment. **SUGAR**

LOAF, Cedar, remodeled its lodge. **BOYNE HIGHLANDS**, Harbor Springs, doubled its cafeteria seating, and **LOST PINES**, Harrietta, reports a modernized lodge.

Upper Peninsula — **BRULE** **MT.**, Iron River, boasts the region's biggest snowmaking system, plus three new chalets sleeping up to 18 persons each. The ski shop and sun deck also have been expanded. **QUAIL**, Ishpeming, and **MT. ZION**, Ironwood, added rope tows, while **PORCUPINE** **MT.**, Ontonagon, installed a new T-bar. **GLADSTONE** can be rented for ski parties.

Lansing show set this weekend

LANSING — A colorful free-style skiing demonstration will be featured during the Michigan Snow Show, to be held Friday through Sunday in the Lansing Civic Center.

The skiing will be done on a large indoor ramp, and will feature three young Michigan skiers, known as the Skamit Shopt Freestyle Team. The skiers are Larry Skonieczny and Kevin Menne of Detroit, and Doug Hobeke of Grand Rapids. All have appeared at winter shows throughout the Midwest.

A portion of the free style program is based on the theme "Star Wars", with special costumes, lights, and music included in the colorful presentation.

The large ski ramp also will be used for other demonstrations during the Snow Show weekend.

Skiing will be just one of the winter sports to be featured at the Snow Show. Snowmobiling, winter travel and camping, skating, and many other leisure time activities will be displayed.

Snowmobilers will find the show will provide them with an opportunity to compare the recently released 1978 models. All major manufacturers will be presented, along with dozens of displays offering the latest in clothing, accessories, and other snowmobile related products.

Winter sports films, prizes and free daily stage shows also will be included in the giant winter sports exposition.



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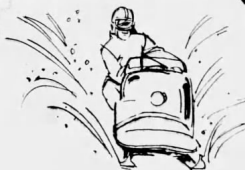
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