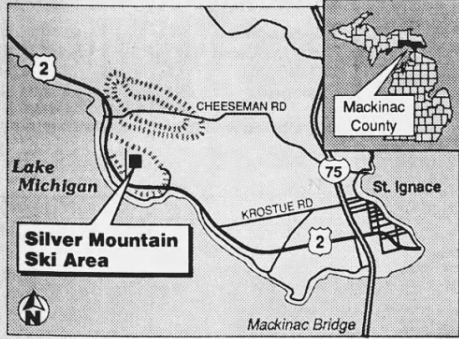


SILVER MOUNTAIN SKI AREA



Skiing: Silver Mountain Ski Area features four downhill runs serviced by a paddle lift. A small beginners' run is also offered.

Season: The season is generally from mid-December through March, depending on conditions.

Hours: Noon to 5 p.m. and 6-9 p.m. Monday through Friday, opening earlier on weekends.

Fees: A full day lift ticket in 1990 cost \$3 for children and \$5 for adults. Silver Mountain does not offer rental equipment.

Information: Call the lodge at (906) 643-9056.

From the Mackinac Bridge, head west on US-2 for six miles. The entrance to the ski area is posted along the road.

News Graphics Network/Jef Maillett

Lack of snow pulls plug on revamped, traditional ski area

**'VENTURE
KIDVENTURES**
Jim DuFresne

ST. IGNACE — My children and I stopped at our favorite downhill ski area recently and were a bit shocked.

For starters, Silver Mountain was moved — at least the ski facilities were — to a hill next door.

The Silver Mountain Ski Club, which manages the facility, has built new runs, a new ski lodge at the base of the slope and has even installed a paddle lift to replace the long tow rope that used to befuddle virtually everybody.

But even more shocking than the new facilities was the fact that the mountain was closed, not just the day we were there but all winter.

"We didn't open this year at all," said Bill Murphy, ski area manager. "We never had enough snow and that's the first time that's ever happened."

"It's been unreal up here this winter. I've only blown out my driveway once with the snowblower."

At most ski resorts, no snow is no problem. They merely turn on the snowmaking machines. But not at Silver Mountain, and that's why we like it.

This is a no-glitz ski area, which means no snowmaking but also no high prices, no hotdoggers zipping past you in their neon jackets and pants and, best of all, no lines.

A crowd at Silver Mountain, said Murphy, is 70 skiers on a nice Saturday, or what is equivalent to a Boyne Highlands lift line at Christ-

mas time.

"This is a family place because it doesn't cost you an arm and a leg to ski," Murphy said. "We've taught a lot of kids how to ski out here."

The old ski area, with its tow rope and small wooden shack warming hut, had been around for "years and years and years" said Murphy when the decision was made in 1989 to upgrade the facilities.

Last winter the new ski area opened at the next hill, featuring a paddle lift — a simplified T-bar really — and a larger ski lodge at the base.

No, they still don't have a bar, dining facilities or a jacuzzi, but the lodge does have tables, a big wood barrel stove and a small concession area.

The hill features four runs, the longest a 1,200-foot ski off the side through the trees briefly before returning to the paddle lift.

"The paddle lift was a big improvement and it goes quite fast," Murphy said. "A lot of people were having a hard time with the old tow rope. They were wearing out a pair of gloves a night."

Silver Mountain is a local ski area to be sure, pulling regulars from St. Ignace, Manistique, even from Newberry, but Murphy said because the old hill was within sight of U.S. 2, downstate families were slowly starting to discover it.

Families like us.

"We started getting a lot of families from down below," said the manager. "They drive by enough times, they finally stop. This must be a pretty decent place because now they stop and ski every time they pass through."