

Slopes gearing for the onslaught

The ski season will kick off with nearly half of Michigan's lodges listing major improvements despite one of the worst profit pictures in five years last winter.

New or remodeled runs and lifts at 12 areas, new housing at 18 and new snowmaking equipment or cross-country ski trails at 14 others are being counted on to help get business back to normal after last winter.

Last winter's lightest snowfall in more than a decade across lower Michigan sent statewide profits tumbling \$48 million, 35 percent below the 1978-79 season, according to Automobile Club of Michigan reports.

Downlifters will find no new areas open and five fewer lodges than last season. Mt. Maria near Spruce in East, Michigan closed after last winter's season, and Vulcan, U.S.A., near Vulcan, in the Upper Peninsula, closed late last year.

The lodge at Missaukee Mountain, near Lake City in western Michigan, burned, but will be rebuilt and reopened sometime this season. Lost Pines, near Harrietta, will open for snowmobilers and cross-country skiers only. Middleville, near Middleville, could re-open sometime this season.

Moonshine Mountain, formerly Ward Hills, near Branch and Crystella, near Crystal Falls plan to operate this winter.

SKIERS HEADING for the ski lodges

will find lift tickets averaging \$1.70 more than last winter. "Higher operating costs plus last year's losses are the reasons most operators give for raising lift prices this year to an average \$3.55," says Joseph Ratke, AAA touring manager.

In southeast Michigan, lift tickets will range from \$4 to \$11.50 on weekends. The area's nine lodges generally open first because of their extensive snowmaking systems. All except one feature night skiing and equipment rental.

SKIERS HEADING for east Michigan's 10 areas will pay \$7 to \$10 on weekends for lift tickets. Lodges here have skiing on natural hills without the extra-cost features offered by some resorts. Five feature skiing on all-natural snow, three have at-slope lodging and all have equipment rental and ski schools.

Lift tickets at west Michigan's 20 ski resorts will range from \$4 to \$15 on weekends. Skiing at Petoskey's Winter Sports park is free. The region's resorts offer some of the state's most luxurious accommodations. Sixteen have snowmaking equipment, nine list lodging in condominiums or chalets and 12 list weekend entertainment and dining rooms.

The most costly expansion at any lodge in Lower Michigan is at West Michigan's Hilton Shanty Creek near Bellaire. A \$5 million project will include 40 condominiums, with 20 ready for this season.

A two-place chairlift for advanced runs has been added, and five runs have been widened by 50 to 100 feet. Snowmaking capacity is doubled, and two more runs have been lighted for night skiing. Also new is an indoor pool with a whirlpool and fireplace.

WITH SUCH DRAWING cards as the state's highest vertical drops and the greatest natural snowfalls, the 12 Upper Peninsula ski areas are the Midwest's most popular alternative to western powder snow skiing.

Lift tickets will range from \$2 to \$15. Five ski areas offer at-slope lodging in rooms, condos or chalets; six list weekend entertainment, and three have swimming pools.

The U.P.'s largest expansion is at Blackjack, near Bessemer, where 42 condos, a 200-seat restaurant and lounge and lodge gift shops have been added.

Other improvements skiers will find this winter are listed below by lodge and tourist region.

WEST MICHIGAN — Schuss Mountain, Manacela, a touring center, 19 kilometers of cross-country trails connecting with Hilton Shanty Creek, including a 200-seat restaurant and lounge, interchangeable lift tickets with Shanty Creek along with \$20 worth of gasoline on midweek packages, snowmaking upped 30 percent, and grooming equipment. Boyce Highlands, Harbor Springs, a

four-place chairlift on beginner-intermediate slopes, 15 condominiums and snowmaking capacity increased.

Boyer Mountain and Thunder Mountain, Boyce Falls, snowmaking capacity increased; Sugar Loaf, Cedar, a 100-room, four-story motel completed, snowmaking boosted 20 percent, 13 miles of cross-country trails, and slope groomers; Royal Valley, Buchanan, two-place chairlift on beginner-intermediate runs, a second beginner area with rope tow, a 200-seat sack lunch room, and instruction including ballet and racing; Swiss Valley, Jones, a 19,000-square-foot lodge with 400-seat cafeteria, ski shop and lounge, and four place chairlift on an intermediate run; Traverse City Holiday, Traverse City, ski-by-the-hour rates, a 125-seat dining room, 20-seat cocktail lounge and 50 cross-country ski rental sets; Pando, Rockford, a 1,000-foot-long intermediate run served by rope tows and two miles of cross-country trails; and Nub's Nob, Harbor Springs, 20 percent more cafeteria space, snowmaking expanded 15 percent and an intermediate slope remodeled.

Caberac, Cadillac, a beginner area with rope tow, 50-person group dormitory and 40 sets of rental snowshoes; Crystal Mountain, Thompsonville, remodeled lodge, ski shop and lounge, plus children's ski lessons; Mt. Manacela, Manacela, 10 sets of rental snowshoes; and Waterskool, Lakeview, cross-country skiing.



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