

OUTDOORS

It's a downhill from here

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Put on your thinking cap: How much do you know about downhill skiing in North Dakota?

What ski area is home to an Olympic training ski jump? What's the newest skiing hotspot in the state? How many downhill ski areas does "flatland" North Dakota have? Here's a hint: would you believe more than South Dakota?

OK, here are the answers: Skyline SkiWay, nine miles south of Devils Lake, has an official U.S. Olympic ski jump. Back in the 1930s ski jumpers trained there for the Lake Placid Winter Olympics. Now, nearly 60 years later, the ski jump serves as a focal point for the start of five runs.

The newest ski area is a gimme: Huff Hills, celebrating its fourth anniversary in January, is North Dakota's youngest skiing hotspot with 20 runs.

North Dakota boasts five ski areas: In addition to Huff Hills and Skyline SkiWay, there's Winter Park in the Turtle Mountains north of Bottineau; Frostfire, nestled in the awesome Pembina Hills area west of Walhalla; and Bears Den Mountain, on the north end of Fort Ransom.

South Dakota has three ski areas, two in the Black Hills and one operated by the Sioux Falls Park District.

North Dakota may not have the 2,400-foot vertical drop of Idaho's Schweitzer Mountain or the 80 runs of Montana's Big Sky Resort, but yes, we can ski. And here's a guide to what's available at North Dakota's downhill ski areas:

Huff Hills, 15 miles south of Mandan on Highway 1806, has a 350-foot vertical drop. Virtually all of the 20 runs are open with a base currently varying from 4 inches to 4 feet. Two chairs, a T-bar and beginner's rope tow keep skiers on the move.

Christmas vacation might be a good time to hit the slopes — Huff Hills is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Thursday through Sunday and school holidays.

Adult lift tickets are \$16, children 12 and under, as well as the young-at-heart over 62, cost \$12. Rentals are \$10.

New this year is a \$4 round-trip shuttle from the Pony Express on South Washington in Bismarck to the ski area.

If Mother Nature cooperates, Huff Hills will be open until about mid-March.

If Bears Den Mountain doesn't ring a bell, that's because it was formerly known as the Fort Ransom Ski Area in southeastern North Dakota. But don't confuse it with Fort Ransom State Park — that's a little to the north.

While Bears Den Mountain isn't open yet — they're busy making snow and installing a new chair lift. Owner Marlene Anderson hopes to have the nine runs open soon.

How to find Bears Den Mountain? Just go to the town of Fort Ransom — the ski area is on the west side of the Sheyenne River. The longest run is 2,000 feet and skiers enjoy a 280-foot vertical drop. Lift tickets are \$14 for adults, \$10 for children 6 through 17 and free for ski buffs under 6 with an adult.

Rentals are \$10.

Once skiing commences, hours will be 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday.

Frostfire Ski Resort and the nearby Pembina Gorge may be just as unique as the badlands, but in a different sort of way. The deep gorge and heavily wooded draws may seem foreign here.

Located six miles west of Walhalla on County Road 55, two double-chair lifts accommodate skiers for 10 runs which are groomed daily.

The resort features a half-mile run with a 350-foot drop. All runs currently enjoy a 15 to 25 inch base. Lift tickets are \$10. Rentals are \$14 for skiers 14 years and older, \$10 for those under 14.

Frostfire is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. through the end of March. It will be closed Christmas Day.

Skyline SkiWay might be one of the most unique U.S. downhill skiing facilities. "You can see it from Devils Lake, it sticks out like a sore thumb," volunteer and board member Dennis Olson, says.

In addition to its landmark — the catlike ski jump, Skyline is a volunteer-only staffed operation.

Operating since 1956, it's also one of the state's oldest ski areas. The five slopes offer a beginner's tow and T-bar. Volunteers even provide night skiing — open on Wednesday's from 6:30 to 10 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

"We like to think of ourselves as a feeder program for the slopes out west," Olson says. "We're basically trying to provide family recreation activities."

Tremendous community support includes grooming the runs. The base currently varies from 4 to 12 inches. The longest run is 2,250 feet with a 310-foot vertical drop.

Adults are \$10, \$6 for children 13 and under. Rentals are \$10.

Winter Park, located eight miles north and two miles west of Bottineau, is a non-profit facility on land owned by the Bottineau Park Board. The longest of its nine runs is 1,400 feet with a 25-foot vertical drop.

While the Turtle Mountains have 30 inches of snow, the runs have about an 18-inch base.

Lift tickets are \$14 for adults and \$10 for those 13 and under. Rentals are \$10 adults and \$6 for children. The park uses a T-bar system, but plans include installing a chair lift.

Special holiday hours through Jan. 7 are from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday through Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday and closed Christmas.



By TOM STROMME of the Tribune



The chairlift at Huff Hills, above, hauls skiers to the top of the runs. At left, Howard Bauer escorts his son Matthew, 5, during a recent outing. North Dakota ski areas are nearby havens for both skiers and snowboarders, above left.

WHERE TO GO

Looking for a skiing get-away? Here's what's available in some of our regional states and provinces:

- Colorado (20):
 - Arrowhead Mountain, Vail, Beaver Creek Resort, Vail area, 1-800-525-2257, ext. 213.
 - AspenSnowmass, Aspen, 800-290-1255.
 - Breckenridge Ski Resort, Summit County, 800-800-2732.
 - Copper Mountain Resort, Summit County, 800-458-8366.
 - Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Gunnison, 800-544-8448.
 - Eldora Ski Resort, Boulder, 303-440-8700.
 - Howelsen Ski Area, Steamboat Springs, 970-879-8499.
 - Keystone Resort/Arapahoe Basin, Summit County, 800-256-9555.
 - Loveland Ski Area, near Summit County, 800-225-LOVE.
 - Monarch Ski Resort, Gunnison, 800-332-3668.
 - Powderhorn Resort, Grand Junction, 800-241-6997.
 - Purgatory Resort, Durango, 800-525-0892.
 - SilverCreek Ski Area, Winter Park, 800-448-9458.
 - Ski Cooper, Leadville, 719-486-2277.
 - Ski Sunlight, Glenwood Springs, 800-445-7331.
 - Steamboat Ski Area, Steamboat Springs, 800-922-2722.
 - Telluride, Telluride, 800-525-3455.
 - Winter Park, Winter Park, 800-977-2754.
- Idaho (17):
 - Bald Mountain, Orofino, 208-464-2311.
 - Bogus Basin, Boise, 208-332-5151.
 - Brundage, McCall, 800-888-SKI/for 208-434-4151.
 - Cottonwood Butte, Cottonwood, 208-962-3902.
 - Grand Targhee, Driggs, 800-TARGHEE.
 - Kelly Canyon, Ririe, 208-338-6261.
 - Lookout Pass, Wallace, 208-744-1392.
 - Lost Trail Powder Mountain, Darby, Mont., 406-821-3211 (located in Idaho).
 - Magic Mountain, Kimberly, 208-423-6221 or 208-423-5817.
 - North South Ski Bow, St. Maries, 208-245-4222.
 - Pebble Creek, Inkom, 208-775-4452.
 - Pomerelle, Albion, 208-638-5599.
 - Schweitzer, Sandpoint, 800-831-8619.
 - Silver Mountain, Kellogg, 208-783-1111.
 - Snowhaven, Grangeville, 208-983-2851.
 - Soldier Mountain, Fairfield, 208-764-2300 or 208-764-2260.
 - Sun Valley, Sun Valley, 800-635-8261.
- Minnesota (18):
 - Afton Alps, Hastings, 800-328-1328 or 612-436-5245.
 - Andes Tower Hills, Alexandria, 612-965-2455.
 - Buck Hill, Burnsville, 612-855-7174 or 612-855-7187.
 - Buena Vista, Bemidji, 800-777-7958 or 218-243-2231.
 - Chester Bowl, Duluth, 218-724-9832.
 - Coffee Mill, Wabasha, 612-965-2777 or 612-965-3221.
 - Detroit Mountain, Detroit Lakes, 218-847-1661.
 - Giant's Ridge, Biwabik, 800-688-7669 or 218-865-4143.
 - Hyland Hills, Bloomington, 612-835-4250 or 612-941-7993.
 - Lutsen Mountains, Lutsen, 218-663-7281.
 - Mount Frontenac, Frontenac, 612-358-5826 or 612-388-3304.
 - Mount Kato, Mankato, 507-625-3363.
 - Powder Ridge, Kimball, 800-349-7734 or 612-398-5295.
 - Quadra Four Seasons Resort, Hill City, 800-422-6649 or 612-697-8444.
 - Ski Gull, Brainerd, 218-863-4333 or 218-566-5088.
 - Spirit Mountain, Duluth, 800-642-6377 or 218-628-2891.
 - Welch Village, Welch, 800-421-6869 or 612-222-7079.
 - Wild Mountain, Taylor Falls, 800-447-4958 or 612-462-7550.
- Montana (14):
 - Bear Paw Ski Bowl, Havre, 406-265-8404.
 - Big Mountain, Whitefish, 406-862-1900.
 - Big Sky, Big Sky, 800-548-4486.
 - Bridger Bowl, Bozeman, 800-223-9609.
 - Discovery Basin, Anaconda, 406-563-2184.
 - Great Divide, Marysville, 406-448-3746.
 - Lost Trail Powder Mountain, Conner, 406-821-3211.
 - Marshall Mountain, Missoula, 406-258-6000.
 - Maverick Mountain, Dillon, 406-834-5454.
 - Montana Snowbowl, Missoula, 406-549-9777.
 - Red Lodge Mountain, Red Lodge, 406-446-2610.
 - Rocky Mountain Hl, Fairfield, 406-467-3664.
 - Showdown, Nehalem, 406-236-5522.
 - Turner Mountain, Libby, 406-293-4317.
- South Dakota (3):
 - Deer Mountain, Lead, 605-584-2230.
 - Terry Peak, Lead, 800-456-0524.
 - Great Bear, Sioux Falls, 605-367-4309 (Sioux Falls Park Board).
- Wyoming (8):
 - Antelope Butte, Shell, 307-653-9630.
 - Grand Targhee, Alta, 800-TARGHEE or 307-353-2300.
 - High Park, Ten Sleep, 307-347-4480.
 - Hogadon, Casper, 307-235-8281 or 307-235-8499.
 - Jackson Hole/Teton Village, Jackson, 800-443-6931, 307-733-2922 or 307-733-2291.
 - Pine Creek, Cokeville, 307-279-3201.
 - Snow King, Jackson, 800-522-KING or 307-733-5200.
 - Snowy Range, Laramie, 800-GO-2-SNOW or 307-745-5750.
- Manitoba (9):
 - Big Friendly, Virden, 204-746-1571.
 - Falcon Lake, Falcon Lake, 204-349-2201 or 204-349-5966.
 - Holiday Mountain Resort, LaRiviere, 204-242-2172.
 - Minnedosa, Minnedosa, 204-867-3509.
 - St. Agassie, McCreary, 204-835-2633.
 - Mystery Mountain, Thompson, 204-778-8624.
 - Spring Hill Winter Park at Birds Hill, Winnipeg, 204-224-3051.
 - Stony Mountain Winter Park, Stonewall, 204-344-5877.