



Ready and waiting

Snow is late in coming this year, but once it does, the winter fun is liable to continue 'til Easter. The attraction of new powder snow lures throngs of skiers to the Black Hills — the highest slopes east of the Rockies — each winter. (S. D. Travel Section photo)

Everyone's just waiting for the snow!

By Bill Honekamp
Star-Travel Section

PIERRE — When winter settles into its white routine in South Dakota, the cold weather people materialize faster than a Yukon snowstorm. Suddenly they're everywhere, schussing through the powder on the highest slopes east of the Rockies, scrambling through the timber on snow machines or out-waiting big walleyes and rainbows at icy fishing holes. As the natives in the west put it, "When the Black Hills turn white, the fun goes on."

Within a month, our state's five ski areas will have good snow bases, and the skiing usually lasts until Eastertime. Some of the ski resorts have beefed up their facilities during the summer to handle the growing number of ski buffs who are discovering that there are some pretty salty slopes in the Black Hills. Terry Peak, the Hills' premier ski area, has a double

chair lift handling 600 skiers per hour, three Poma lifts, ski school, rentals, lodges and accommodations. The slopes have a vertical drop of 1,200 feet and there are about six miles of trail on Terry Peak's 11 runs.

Just over the ridge is the Deer Mountain ski area, which has three lifts and 14 runs down a 700-foot hill. Manager Sherman Teigen added ski touring to his operation this winter, along with the usual night skiing, school, rentals, cafeteria and chalet.

Business is booming at these two Black Hills ski complexes near Lead, and the proprietors say it's because they're relatively inexpensive, compared to the fancy ski villages in the Rockies. Ed Keene, who runs the Terry Peak operation, says ski clubs from Iowa, Missouri and Kansas are becoming "regulars" at his slopes, and the college crowd continues to grow as the word gets around at schools in the Midwest.

Three eastern South Dakota ski areas also have plenty of action after the snow flies. Great Bear Ski Valley, near Sioux Falls, has 11 runs that drop 250 feet, along with lifts, concessions, rentals and ski school. At La Coteau ski area, near Sisseton, there's free use of the rope lift and 1,500-foot run, and the Lakpa Du Ta ski complex at Big Stone City has five runs, three tows, rentals, school and snack bar.

Snowmobile clubs by the handful are springing up across the state and new races or rallies are constantly showing up on the calendar. At this time, snowmobilers have 19 race dates circled; there will probably be even more.

South Dakota's "big three" includes the annual Governor's Cup Cross-Country Race on Jan. 6-7, when drivers race 210 miles, from Pierre to Aberdeen, in pursuit of the \$1,500 first place prize. Lead's annual Hill Climb up 45-degree streets on Jan. 20-21, and Deadwood's "Winter

Wonderland" festival with both oval track and cross-country races, Feb. 24-25, both draw big names and big machines from all over the Midwest.

For pleasure snowmobiling, the Black Hills National Forest and surrounding areas have miles of roads and trails through meadows, canyons and frozen lakes. Explorers are finding that their machines make out-of-the-way ghost towns and gold mines easily accessible over the white stuff.

The cold weather also freezes the mighty Missouri River into a 400-mile freeway and hundreds of miles of wide open spaces on the prairie provide the ideal setting for extended power runs at full throttle.

Winter doesn't stop South Dakota fishermen; they just bundle up and continue to fill their stringers with Northern pike, walleyes, trout, perch and sauger. Last year, one fellow pulled eight rainbows out of a hole in the ice at

Pactola Lake and not one of his trout weighed less than five pounds! Colonies of ice fishing shacks mark the hot spots when the walleyes are biting—and that's almost always.

Some fishermen even brave the icy winds and waters in boats. They fish the open waters below the powerhouses at the four big dams across the Missouri River: Dale Dam at Pierre, Big Bend Dam at Ft. Thompson, Ft. Randall Dam at Pektstown and Gavins Point Dam near Yankton. We even have a season when it's legal to take Northerns through the ice with spears, a technique that produced some 35-pounders last winter.

If you're a South Dakota sportsman, there's no such thing as a slack season. Right now, everybody's preoccupied with hunting deer, pheasants, partridge, geese and ducks. And even before the hunting slows down, winter fun is already in full swing. Winter, of all seasons. South Dakota, of all places!