

# Area's best slopes

• Rating the slopes — from advanced to intermediate to novice

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Special to the Record-Eagle

The state of Michigan has a long association with downhill skiing. It's been at the forefront of that industry for over a century.

The first ski club in America was formed in Ishpeming during the 1880's.

Caberfae's opening in the 1930's and utilization of rope tows coincided with the opening of Stow in Vermont, which is credited with being the first downhill ski area in North America to use tows. And, of course, Boyne, which started operating in 1947, ushered in the modern era of lifts in the Midwest.

Michigan has more ski resorts than either Colorado or California. With 37 identified ski areas, it's second only to New York, which has the most with 42.

If you're a downhill skier, consider yourself lucky. Living in northern Michigan puts you within about an hour's drive of several different ski resorts and an unlimited variety of terrain. It's hard to find that kind of choice elsewhere in the heartland, or anywhere for that matter.

The choices range from heart stopping, deep and steep to gentle, soothing terrain for the novice. Just about every area provides a good variety of slopes, but a few always stand out because of some particular trait.

Following are arguably some of the best advanced, intermediate and novice runs in northern Michigan, and some of my personal favorites.

Boyne Mountain's Hemlock, the dean of Midwestern steep, still rates up at the top of my list. I know they claim to have an even steeper slope off the new Disciples Ridge area, but Hemlock has been around longer and gained more notoriety than any other steep slope in the Midwest. Believe me, it hasn't lost any of its toughness over the years.

This northeastern facing slope seldom sees the sun since huge pines border it. Its surface is normally glacier-like, even after grooming. With

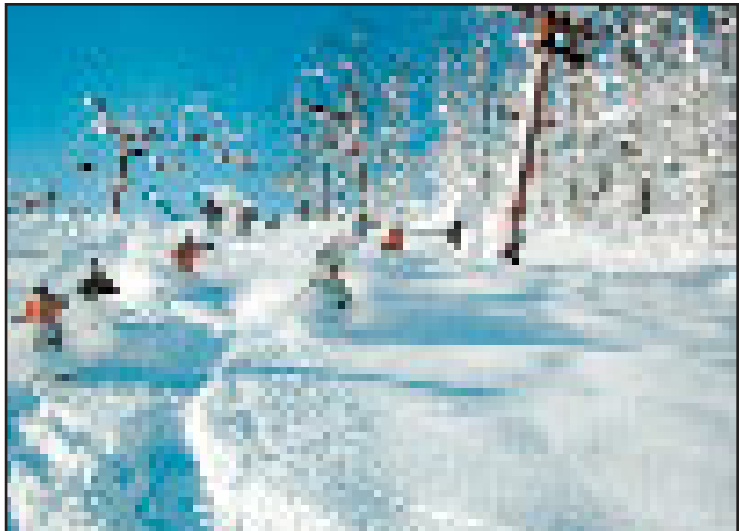


Photo courtesy of Nubs Nob

**Skiers enjoy the fresh powder after a heavy December snowfall last winter at Nubs Nob.**

its constant steep pitch, it doesn't take long for the ice to reappear as skiers quickly scrape the slope. As you ride up the Hemlock lift—so the legend goes—you'll be able to hear the skiers before you see them.

As the focal point of the Mountain, and in full view of the base lodge, you'd better be able to handle the heat. All eyes may be watching your descent.

Nubs Nob's front facing slopes certainly qualify. You won't find a better trio of steep slopes around the Great Lakes. Chute, which sounds steep, sits on the right. It's bordered by almost equally steep Scarface (named after Al Capone who summered in the area) and Old Smokey. Once you head over the lip, the slope drops like an elevator shaft. It can leave you gasping for breath at the bottom.

And, by the way, they're also in full view of a wall of windows along the day-lodge and a chairlift bisects the middle of the slope. Skiers in chairlifts love to rate crashes. Stay nimble and link your turns; the spotlight's on.

The Schuss Mountain slopes offer the best steep at Shanty Creek. Kingdom Come has long been the standout here and still is. There are no surprises. In full view of the restaurant, hotel, and swimming pool, this wide, steep slope drops straight down from the top of the ski

hill into the Schuss Village.

Ski it early when the light is best. It's normally groomed early, but skier traffic will have it covered with moguls by noon on weekends exposing icy patches where the snow has been scraped off.

A new double-black diamond glade was opened last season off the red chairlift. It's steep, moguled and has lots of trees to maneuver around, but it doesn't have the universal appeal that Kingdom Come has. A lot of skiers just easing into skiing the steeper slopes will try the old standby before they try the glades.

Crystal Mountain's Loki is the focal point of the resort. It can be seen several miles away as you approach the resort from the east on M-115. While not as long as the above mentioned steep slopes, it can sure test your skiing ability. It requires quick, precise turns to negotiate the ever-accelerating slope as it drops quickly away from you. A small shelf allows you to regroup before beginning the final plunge, which, of course, is right underneath two chairlifts full of skiers just waiting to rate a good fall.

Boyne Highlands' South Challenger slope is a good slope for those first wanting to test their mettle on advanced slopes. Although a true advanced slope with a 40-

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