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Wachusett Mountain

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MAINE HOSTING TOP NORDIC RACERS



▶ Jessie Diggins

A pair of major ski races will be staged later this winter in Maine's Aroostook County near the state's border with Quebec. The Fort Kent Outdoor Center in the St. John Valley will host the New England Nordic Ski Association Eastern Cup High School Championships from March 15-17, and the Nordic Heritage Center in Presque Isle will host the L.L. Bean U.S. Long Distance National Championships from March 28-April 2.

Top high school athletes from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and New York will compete at Fort Kent for the Eastern title. A training center for aspiring nordic and biathlon athletes, Fort Kent

Outdoor Center has hosted numerous national and international events in both disciplines. The facility is located next to the Lonesome Pines Trails alpine ski area.

U.S. nordic team members are expected to compete in the Long Distance National Championships, including Jessie Diggins, who along with relay partner Kikkan Randall became the first Americans to win Olympic gold in nordic, which they accomplished during the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang.

Diggins trains in Stratton, Vt., in the summer with her club team SMST2.

SMS to get training ramp

Thanks to a yearlong collaboration with the engineering program at the University of Vermont, Stratton Mountain School's Air Awareness Center will have a new indoor training ramp that will further aid SMS athletes training in slopestyle and mogul disciplines.

Through the Seed Project, UVM seniors in engineering programs are developing three-dimensional designs for the new roller board/rollerski ramp that will be installed in the center once the necessary funds have been raised.

The ramps will be integrated into the existing features of SMS's Air Awareness Center and will allow students to practice aerial maneuvers into the AAC's foam pit. Hydraulic pistons will compress the takeoff to 33 degrees to fit the profile of a mogul ski jump and extend to 45 degrees to allow a higher trajectory for slopestyle.

A scaled ramp model is being provided to SMS for fundraising purposes. The finished design will be delivered to SMS by the UVM Seed team in late winter 2019.

Okemo restaurants slated for upgrades

Okemo Mountain Resort's two on-mountain restaurants, Sugar House and Summit Lodge, will get upgrades as part of Vail Resorts' recently announced two-year, \$35 million commitment for improvements during 2019-20 for its resort holdings in Vermont, New Hampshire and Washington State.

The renovations will offer new concepts and menus, as well as an updated look and feel to interior finishes and furnishings. The company also will invest in planning and approvals for upgrades at Mount Sunapee, although no specific projects were disclosed.

Located just uphill of the Sunburst Six chairlift, the Sugar House Lodge Café specializes in Vermont specialty foods, soups, made-to-order salads and snacks, plus an all-new Thai noodle bowl station. In addition to its views, the Summit Lodge features country cooking with special offerings on the weekends and holidays, Main fare includes burgers, chicken, soups, fresh fruit, muffins, coffee, hot chocolate and other daily specials.



▶ Sugar House at Okemo

New England Ski Museum wins award

The New England Ski Museum, based in Franconia, N.H., received the Steward of Skiing History Award during a ceremony last month in Manchester Center, Vt. This is the second time the award has been bestowed upon an organization

by the International Skiing History Association. Previously, ISHA presented the award to the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum.

The award honors museums and other organizations that share the heritage, history and legacy of skiing with the world. ISHA's first Steward of Skiing

History Award recognized the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum, based in Ishpeming, Mich.

"Often the work of organization and preservation takes place behind the scenes, and it is heartening to have ISHA understand and acknowledge the museum's role in this important aspect of our mission," said **Jeff Leich**, NESM executive director.

"With its academic-quality historical research and more than 26,000 curated items in its collections, the New England Ski Museum is an incomparably valuable institution," said **Seth Masia**, ISHA president. "Whatever we can do to support their work supports all of us who hold the sport's history so close to our hearts."

Accolades for North Conway

North Conway, N.H., has been named "Best ski town" in the United States and second best in North America in the 2018 USA Today's 10 Best Readers' Choice Travel Awards. Jackson Ski Touring Foundation was nominated among the top cross-country areas, while Stowe, Vt., was eighth on the top towns list.

Vermont Adaptive honors volunteers

Four volunteers have been honored by Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports as Volunteers of the Year for 2018. **Phil Crowell** of Plainfield, N.H., and **Jackie Levine, Barry Whitworth** and **Ryan Kennedy**, all of Burlington, Vt., were selected for the awards from among 400 dedicated volunteers who keep the organization moving forward. This year's awards were presented as a tribute in honor of **Jim Hutchinson**, a Vermont Adaptive volunteer who left a legacy of empowerment to people of all abilities and commitment toward supporting the organization.

"Each year, there are a few individuals that shine," said **Tom Alcorn**, senior program coordinator at Vermont Adaptive. "These folks are involved year-round with Vermont Adaptive in exemplary ways. They each represent the organization as a whole. We've had years where a dozen individuals were recognized and years where one single person stood out the most. Jim Hutchinson was the most dedicated volunteer Vermont Adaptive or any organization could hope for. I know he would be so proud of our accomplishments in what we have built over the past years."

Whitworth and Levine volunteer at many Vermont Adaptive special events including the United States Association of Blind Athletes Winter Festival, the Vermont Adaptive Charity Ride presented by Long Trail Brewing, the Vermont 50 and many summer Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired events. They have been volunteers since 2006 and Special Olympics coaches for more than 10 years.

Crowell is one of the few volunteers who arrives early for a lesson on a regular basis, not only to test the snow condi-



► Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sport Winter Ski Festival

tions but also to prepare for his lessons for the day. He's a confident lead instructor on most lesson types, specializes in working with participants with autism and developmental disabilities and is a strong assist instructor on all other disciplines.

"He goes the extra mile to ensure our participants are safe, having fun and always learning," said Alcorn. "He revels in the joy of his students as they progress in skiing, cycling, paddling and just enjoying the outdoors. He's even been known to sing beautifully on the lifts and while skiing at Pico and Killington, too."

Kennedy is a former Vermont Adaptive intern turned volunteer instructor. He teaches full days on the weekends and helps with night lessons at Bolton Valley Ski Area.

"He is sensitive to the needs of our athletes and does everything in his power to help promote their independence and confidence in themselves," said **Kelly Walsh**, program coordinator for Vermont Adaptive. "... Barely old enough to vote, he still prioritizes Vermont Adaptive despite that he is a full-time engineering student as well as a member of ROTC."

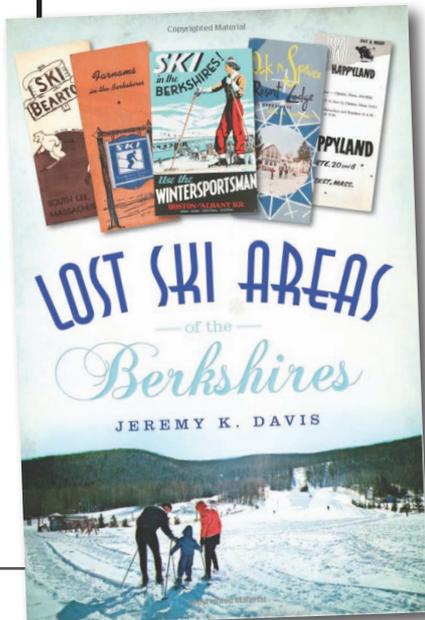
Berkshires featured in 'Lost' book series

Jeremy Davis, founder of the New England and NorthEast Lost Ski Areas Project (www.nelsap.org), has just published the fifth book in his series, which documents the "Lost Ski Areas of the Berkshires."

In his work, Davis shines light on the Berkshires and the important role this Massachusetts mountain range has played as a winter sports paradise, with 44 ski areas arising from the 1930s to the 1970s. The Thunderbolt Ski Trail put the Berkshires on the map for challenging terrain. Major ski resorts like Brodie Mountain sparked the popularity of night skiing with lighted trails. All-inclusive resorts — such as Oak n' Spruce, Eastover and Jug End — brought thousands of new skiers into the sport between the 1940s and 1970s.

Over the years, many of these ski areas faded away and are nearly forgotten. Davis brings these lost locations back to life, chronicling their rich histories and contributions to the ski industry.

Davis has authored four previous books: "Lost Ski Areas of the White Mountains," "Lost Ski Areas of Southern Vermont," "Lost Ski Areas of the Southern Adirondacks" and "Lost Ski Areas of the Northern Adirondacks," with both Adirondacks books winning Skade Awards for outstanding regional ski history from ISHA.



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East Wind, Pats Peak: A perfect intro to 'blue'

By Tony Chamberlain

They don't all have to be big bruisers from the north, you know. Every time we've set out to sample some smaller areas, it's about the same: The experience is as good as the snow and weather on the day we go.

So it was our luck to have sampled Pats Peak on a ringy January morning with plenty of firm snow, the kind that squeaks under your boots but lets you knife in an edge.

The area is in southern New Hampshire (Henniker) not far from the University of New Hampshire, and you'll find the college kids here to prove it, including the race team from nearby New England College.

This matter of size does come up. Pats offers 770 feet of vertical drop, covering 103 acres with 28 runs, the longest 1.5 miles, serviced by six chairs, two magic carpets and three tows. There's enough here to get some fine ski days.

TRAIL OF THE MONTH

With a separate beginners area serviced by the longest magic carpet in the state, Pats Peak is a wonderful spot to take the new or very young skiers who can work on their skills without intimidation. Don't forget, at a certain stage of development in the sport, both surface and chairlifts can be pretty intimidating.

I spent time with the 7-year-old in our group, then left him in a group lesson while I explored the area. First run was Tornado (most trails are named for winds here). It's a straightish steep run, rated double X, but remember that trail difficulty ratings are relative to that particular area.

Both Tornado and Hurricane are pleasingly steep, with Cyclone more of an outward bow, a bit flatter with more bend. I took the longest run at the area, Breeze to Zephyr to Blast, and found some excellent low/intermediate terrain, a kind of road with plenty of length to practice turns and explore edge-to-edge traversing.

When the young man in my charge showed up, we tried some of these runs, but because he was feeling quite masterful at this point, he wanted to try a blue run. That put us on East Wind, a sidecut just inside Zephyr.

From the top, the first look down took his breath away — a perfect first real trail, because it was manageable, yet it put the pressure on to make the turn after a 45-foot traverse, the first of which was a slow descent to the backside. But he was ready for more.

The trail takes a low swoop to the right, changing pace. But it didn't phase him, and soon he was up to cruising speed as the trail joined Zephyr for a long outrun with a couple of tree islands that he had fun with.



Once off the beginners area, East Wind is a nearly perfect run for the learning skier to tackle on day one. Of course, just to reiterate the fact that you can slide on snow without really working at it, we finished the day in a lively tubing park.

Pats Peak, now in its fifth decade, has been in continuous ownership of the Patenaude family when Merle first developed it in 1963. A great alternative to the long drives north, Pats Peak is about 90 minutes from Boston.

S





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EVENTS CALENDAR



College Weeks

Jan. 1-4; Jan. 8-11 | Attitash/Wildcat

Attitash Mountain Resort and Wildcat Mountain welcome college students with cheap lift ticket deals, fun activities and events and après parties. The week serves up lodging specials, \$33 tickets with valid college ID, \$10 lessons, \$10 rentals, plus on-mountain scavenger hunts for prizes and live music.



Saturday, Jan. 5

Stratton — First Run Demo Fest

Sugarbush — Gathering of the Groms

Jan. 5-6

Wachusett — USA Luge Challenge

Sunday, Jan. 6

King Pine — Buddy Werner Open Slalom Race

Sunday, Jan. 13

Stowe — Stowe Derby nordic & fat tire bike race

Waterville Valley — Toyota Revolution Tour Slopestyle

Jan. 14-18

Sunapee — Winter Sports Clinic for Disabled Veterans

Saturday, Jan. 19

Cranmore — Little Monster Jib Competition

Sunday, Jan. 20

Okemo — Shake N' Skate

Monday, Jan. 21

Bretton Woods — 46th Geschmossel Classic Ski Race

Mad River Glen — Mad River Glen Family Tournament

Friday, Jan. 25

Jay Peak — Farmers Appreciation Day

Saturday, Jan. 26

Smugglers' Notch — Snowshoe Festival

Jan. 26-27

Loon — Women's Performance Camp

Sunday, Jan. 27

Pats Peak — Mascot Day

Jan. 28-Feb. 1

Sunday River — Go50 Week

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SOLITARY DESCENT
Photo by Attitash Mountain Resort

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By Matt Boxler

JAY GAMBLE, a 37-year veteran of the New England ski industry, has just been named the new general manager at Ragged Mountain Resort in Danbury, N.H., after serving the past 20 years as general manager at nearby Mount Sunapee. Gamble has served on the board of directors of Ski New Hampshire for the past two decades and, prior to his time at Sunapee, worked at Killington (Vermont), Sunday River (Maine) and for lift manufacturer Poma of America.

New England Ski Journal caught up with Gamble to talk a little skiing.

New England Ski Journal: When were you first introduced to the sport?

Jay Gamble: I was a “late arrival” to skiing with my first day of skiing at age 14. My family had a vacation home near Cataloochee Ski Area in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, and I grew up skiing mostly at Beech Mountain, Sugar Mountain and Cataloochee. As such, I was never in any competitions or racing programs. I was a low intermediate skier through high school and early college years.

NESJ: What was it about skiing that captured your imagination?

Gamble: My fascination with skiing was a combination of a love for the North Carolina mountains, a love of skiing as an exciting sport and a curiosity about how ski area equipment works. Snowmaking and chairlifts fascinated me then and still do today.

NESJ: Why chairlifts?

Gamble: I remember counting the number of sheave wheels on chairlift towers while still in high school. I wanted to estimate what an engineer would use for the weight of the double chairs, including the two skiers in each chair, to calculate the weight supported by each sheave wheel. Remember that in the '70s almost all chairlifts were double chairs.

I met the late Bob Ash when he was mountain manager at Beech Mountain and the owner/designer of Snow Storm and Avalanche Snow Guns. He became a friend who taught me about snow guns and helped me get into the industry full time.

NESJ: How did you transition from skiing as a sport into skiing as your profession?

Gamble: After college I made a couple trips to Europe skiing and decided at age 25 that I was going to leave my corporate job with a Fortune 100 company

RAGGED IN GOOD HANDS

■ **New GM Gamble:** ‘There is very positive energy and momentum’



and be a “ski bum” for a few years. But my interest was not in skiing as much as I could, as much as diving deeper into snowmaking and chairlifts.

I also thought that many positions at ski areas are seasonal, such as ski instructors, and I wanted to get a full-time year position in mountain operations. I saw chairlift construction and/or snowmaking construction in the summer, and mountain operations management of those departments in the winter, as the path I wanted to pursue.

NESJ: What were your early jobs in the industry?

Gamble: In the early 1980s, I spent a summer building chairlifts with Lift Engineering & Manufacturing at Killington and Mount Snow. Many of the guys on the lift construction crew were from Western ski resorts and I thought I would go out west with them to Sun Valley, Idaho, or Heavenly Valley, California. But a love of New England, and a full-time, year-round job offer from Killington, kept me in Vermont.

In 1985 and 1986, I took a leave-of-absence from Killington in the summer and fall to go to Sunday River to build

chairlifts for Les Otten. In the four years 1985 to 1988, we built eight chairlifts and lots of ski trails and snowmaking at Sunday River. It was a great time!

I left Sunday River in 1992 to take a position as Eastern sales manager with Poma of America, who designed and built chairlifts and gondolas. And in 1998, Tim and Diane Mueller — then owners of Okemo, Sunapee and Crested Butte, Colorado — offered me the general manager position at Mount Sunapee, and I left Poma to accept that position.

NESJ: What has all this time working in New England taught you about the ski industry here?

Gamble: Ski resorts across New England and in New Hampshire are very competitive, and they are always improving their offerings to their guests. Every ski area must make capital improvements and constantly improve their guest service to stay competitive. Our guests have high expectations today.

Skiing is very unique in that no one has to be a spectator. It is not uncommon to see grandparents, parents and children all participating together on the slopes. The excitement of skiing and the joy of sharing it with friends and family is unlike any other sport.

NESJ: So your transition to Ragged will not be a difficult one.

Gamble: I’m very excited about the opportunity at Ragged Mountain. It is a fun

mountain with a dedicated and loyal staff, and a very passionate group of season pass holders. Ragged is pure skiing in a beautiful New Hampshire mountain setting.

Ragged Mountain is near Mount Sunapee, so I know the local and regional markets. Both ski resorts share a common trait in that both need to convince skiers and riders take I-89 north into western New Hampshire instead of staying on I-93 north into the White Mountains and the northern New Hampshire ski resorts.

NESJ: What will you focus your efforts on at Ragged?

Gamble: Ragged has made many capital improvements under the Pacific Group Resorts’ ownership in recent years. They had an Express 6-passenger chairlift and Pacific Group added a new Express Quad chairlift a few years ago.

Also, they made significant investments in snowmaking system improvements as well as the grooming fleet. For this winter, an Axess RFID gates system has been installed at three chairlifts. Now, both season pass holders and ticket holders can go direct to the lifts and skip the ticket window.

I hope to continue improving Ragged’s facilities and physical assets while also working with their dedicated staff to enhance their guest services.

NESJ: Ragged Mountain was honored in May at the National Ski Areas

Association annual meeting for attracting new participants to snowsports and retaining them as season pass holders. How has this been accomplished?

Gamble: Ragged launched the innovative "Mission: Affordable" season pass program, which has attracted many new skiers and riders to the mountain. It also created the Bebe Wood Free Learn-to-Ski program, which is introducing new skiers and riders to Ragged. Both of these programs are growing our great sport and also growing a loyal clientele for Ragged. There is very positive energy and momentum at Ragged that is very appealing for me.

NESJ: Generally speaking, consumers see day ticket prices soaring and are often scared away from the sport before giving it a chance. Can you talk a little about skiing affordability?

Gamble: Although the window price for skiing has gotten more expensive, season passes represent the greatest value that has ever been offered in the sport. Years ago, a break-even on a season pass was 18 to 20 days; now it is usually 8 to 10 days. That is a tremendous value! Ragged Mountain's Mission Affordable Season



Pass program has truly made skiing affordable with only 3 to 5 days to break-even on a season pass purchase.

Also, ski resort offerings have never been greater. Multiple high-speed chairlifts, excellent and consistent snowmaking and grooming, modern lodges and outstanding guest service are the best the industry has ever offered. It is a very good time to be a passionate skier or rider, or a new skier or rider, as you get so much for so little if you commit to the sport.

Today's Learn-to-Ski/Ride programs are also outstanding values. Ragged's Bebe Wood Free LTS program will get you started building skills from the first day. Completing the program then opens up other valuable offers to help you continue enjoying skiing very affordability.

NESJ: What, after 37 years work-

ing in skiing, are some of your great memories about this sport?

Gamble: Although my career has been defined by being at ski resorts that were making significant capital improvements in chairlifts, snowmaking and buildings, it is the passion and dedication of the people in the ski industry that are my most rewarding memories. I've worked with so many great people and have many friends in this great industry.

Flying chairlift towers with helicopters, flying snowmaking pipe with helicopters, drilling and blasting granite ledge to make great ski trails, are always memorable adrenaline moments. Also, traveling and skiing so many ski mountains is always a thrill. While with Poma, I had the opportunity to ski at most of the major French ski resorts and many U.S. Western ski resorts.

Although not an expert skier at all, I've skied about 60 ski resorts in Colorado, California, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, New York, Massachusetts, West Virginia, North Carolina, Switzerland, France and Austria. I look forward to skiing many more mountains in many more states as well as going back to Zermatt at least one more time.

NESJ: How have the concerns about climate change been received within the ski industry?

Gamble: Every ski area operator I know believes in clean air, clean water and protecting our beautiful mountain environment. We are all working on energy-efficiency projects, recycling more waste, water conservation, erosion control and limiting air emissions to help maintain our environment. We all have to do our individual part at our local level to make a cumulative positive impact.

NESJ: Safe to say you're happy living and working in New England?

Gamble: I love the mountains. I came into the ski industry for the winters, but I stayed for the summers, the winters and the people. **S**

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▶ Backcountry skiers should invest in adjustable poles such as those from Leki, as well as avalanche shovels, such as offerings from Mammut.

By Matt Boxler

On the frontside, ski accessories are generally fun to own, enhancing our comfort, our entertainment and our social reach, should we want to do that.

Who doesn't enjoy boot warmers on those bitter days? Or smart watches that conveniently show us our incoming calls and text messages? Or those wireless earbuds? Or how about those apps that track our vital skiing statistics like top speed and total vertical? While not for everyone, these accessories allow skiers to feel connected even when they're not at work or in school.

But when it comes to backcountry accessories, the stakes are raised considerably. It's less about fun and games and more about keeping you alive.

When embarking on a backcountry ski adventure, let's assume you're already equipped with the basics of the

basics: appropriate touring boots, skis and bindings, and smart layers to allow you to regulate your body temperature throughout the day. Following are some additional basics that also are considered mandatory accessories for backcountry trips:

Digital transceivers (beacons)

Avalanche transceivers are an absolute must when trekking in the backcountry with a group of friends or fellow adventure enthusiasts. They are small, light and are designed to strap around the waist or over the shoulder beneath your outer layer. Most transceivers sold these days are digital models, which are easier to use and generally faster at locating victims than their analog counterparts.

When set to "transmit" mode, the devices emit a pulsed radio signal. If someone gets buried in an avalanche, transceivers carried by others in the group are then set to "receive" in order to pick

up the signal from beneath the snow. Receiving transceivers interpret the signal into a visual and/or audible display that assists in pinpointing the location. Many digital transceivers include an analog mode to make them compatible with both types of transceivers.

■ Most digital transceivers on the market today range from \$150-\$350. Some of the top models include: Artex PLB, BCA Tracker, Spot Satellite GPS, Mammut Barryvox and Ortovox 3+.

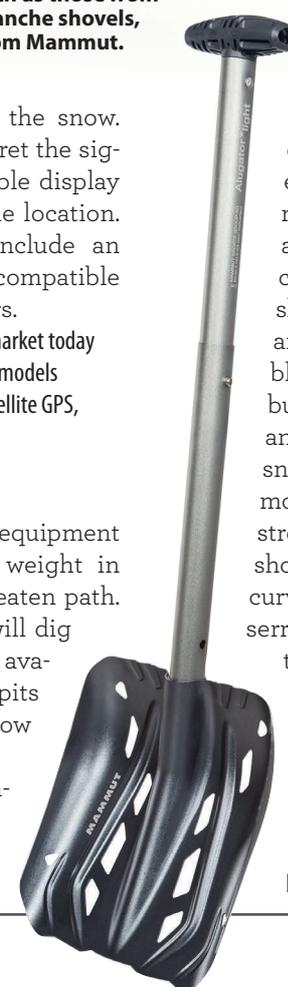
Avalanche shovel

This essential piece of equipment is worth far more than its weight in gold when trekking off the beaten path. These design-specific tools will dig victims out of the snow in an avalanche, help construct snow pits or shelters, and perform snow stability tests.

Popular models are constructed from plastic and aluminum alloy. Aluminum shovels offer the best

strength-to-weight ratio, outperforming plastic shovels when it comes to snow removal. Plastic shovels are lighter in weight. Other considerations when shovel shopping include the shape and size of the blade. Smaller blades are easier to handle but less efficient at chopping and moving large amounts of snow. Larger blades can move more snow but take more strength to operate. Some shovel blades are flat, some are curved, and some models have serrated blades that help cut through snow and ice. Most dedicated backcountry adventurers own a variety of shovels and will pack the one best suited for the conditions at hand.

■ Simple and inexpensive, this backcountry must-have typically falls



Christoph Schoech/Leki; Mammut

into the \$50 range. Some of the popular models are designed by Black Diamond, BCA, Mammut, Voile, Camp, FXR and Ortovox.

Avalanche airbag systems

Inflated when an avalanche breaks loose, airbags expand a skier's volume, allowing a victim to "float" closer to the surface while being swept away in a slide rather than being buried deeper. Being closer to the surface helps dramatically in the rescue effort. Generally, pack sizes range from 18 to 45 liters, and with the use of thinner materials, some brands can offer high-volume bags while maintaining a reasonable weight.

There are different systems on the market to consider. ABS systems inflate two high-volume bags on both sides of the bag. Cartridges and handles are good for a single use and must be replaced when deployed. Snowpulse systems are triggered by a cable that inflates a massive U-shaped balloon around the skier's head, which both protect the skier's head and helps guard from asphyxiation. JetForce technology uses a ventilator instead of a CO2 cartridge for inflation. The device extracts air from the atmosphere and fills a 200-liter canvas. The bag will deflate after a few minutes, creating a pocket of air around the ava-



► Probes such as the BCA Stealth are crucial in pinpointing slide victim location and burial depth.

lanche victim.

■ Airbag systems come in a varying range of technology, weight and ease of use options and can range from as little as \$150 to \$1,500 or more. Some popular brands include Mammut Flip Removable, BCA Float 25 Turbo, G3 Cabrio, Snowpulse Highmark Ridge, K2 Backside Float and Black Diamond Halo 28.

Probes

Once locating a skier's general position beneath the slide debris, probes that can range between 6 and 10 feet or longer are essential in pinpointing the victim's location, as well as measuring the

burial depth.

Typically built from aluminum or carbon, each offers advantages and disadvantages. Aluminum poles are slightly heavier but able to penetrate tough, dense snow more effectively. Carbon is lighter in weight but also tends to be more expensive.

■ Costing about \$50, popular models include Black Diamond QuickDraw, Mammut Probe, BCA Stealth, G3 Speed Tech, K2 Alu, Pieps iProbe One, FXR and Lifelink.

Adjustable poles

Don't take just any old fixed-length ski pole into the backcountry with you. Adjustable poles show their value in a variety of situations. It's nice to have one pole short (in your uphill hand) and one pole longer (in the downhill hand) when traversing your way up a steep skin track. Set your poles long for double-poling situations and your lower back will thank you. Need your hands free for a technical climb? Telescoping them down to their shortest length will keep them out of the way when strapped to your backpack.

■ Typically costing between \$70 and \$150, most ski pole manufacturers offer adjustable touring models. Check out selections from Black Diamond, Leki, K2, G3, Swix and BCA.

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KNEEBINDING UNVEILS CARBON14, LOWERS PRICE POINT

KneeBinding, Inc. of Stowe, Vermont, continues to raise the bar with the Carbon14, introduced for the 2018-19 season.

This new model offers all the same advantages of the best-selling KneeBinding Carbon, but with a higher DIN range (5-14).

"We are excited about the reception we've had for our new Carbon14," said John Springer-Miller, KneeBinding chairman. "In fact, we're already sold out of that model for the season, although there may still be a few left in stores going into the holiday season."

The even bigger news this year is the significant in-store price reductions. Springer-Miller said KneeBinding has been able to reduce consumer prices by \$30 per pair for all of its six models.

KneeBindings are best known for protecting against knee ligament injuries. The bindings include a third patented release mechanism no other binding has — a "PureLateral" heel release that can detect the forces that cause most knee injuries on skis and can re-



This new model offers all the same advantages of the best-selling KneeBinding Carbon, but with a higher DIN range (5-14).

lease before the forces are great enough to cause a knee injury. KneeBinding claims to reduce the risk of knee injuries by at least 75 percent.

But the company is no less pleased with the bindings' performance and retention. "We've won virtually every major performance award in the industry, including 'Gear of the Year' and 'Best Alpine Binding.'"

And KneeBinding is the only binding ever

to win Powder Magazine's 'Skier's Choice Award' two years in a row," noted COO Steve Walkerman.

In fact, reviewers have stated that KneeBindings ski "as well or better than any other binding," an extraordinary advantage for a product that originally made its name by being significantly safer.

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By Brion O'Connor

It's January, which means the "real" ski season is just getting under way. And if you're lucky, you might have a little Christmas loot that you can use to invest on your own gear — skis, bindings, boots, poles and helmet (please) — and really commit to the sport. Or maybe upgrade those 10-year-old boards that have served you faithfully but are now woefully outdated.

Until you walk into a ski shop, and realize how much everything costs.

Granted, sticker shock isn't conducive to the sport. So you hop online and find some deals — maybe last year's model, or some "slightly used" gear on Craigslist or eBay. Large online outfits, like Backcountry.com, have enormous warehouses and the buying power to get gear at lower prices and can pass those savings on to the consumer.

But that means bypassing the local shop, which you hope stays in business to provide tunings and repairs. So what do you do?

It's also an age-old problem that's been around ever since stores started promoting mail-order catalogs in the late 1800s. As an avid cyclist who doesn't reside in the top 25 percent income bracket, I've struggled with this dilemma for decades. I love the guys at my local bike shops and always have bought my bikes locally. Not only do you want to develop a healthy rapport with your local bike mechanics, but also you want to make sure their shop stays in business to tend to your service needs.

However, I've also found that I needed to strike a balance if I wanted to keep the family budget in the black, and if I wanted to stay married. I did a fair amount of my own work on my rigs and found the best deals I could on bike parts and my cycling clothing. Oftentimes, those "best deals" were online (which I rationalized, knowing how expensive divorce can be). Still, I make it a point to buy lo-

► Destinations such as Stowe offer full-service gear and attire shops right at the resort base.



THE ONLINE VS. RETAIL CHALLENGE

■ What you can learn, and how you can benefit, from both purchasing experiences



cal when the costs are close.

Likewise, I've always made it a point to buy my ski gear locally (except a pair of Rossignol Hellgate telemark skis I snagged on clearance for my short-lived backcountry "career"). But living near Boston, I have a number of superb ski shops within a short drive, including one in the town next door.

One New England chain (which, sadly, closed its local store) offered a guarantee: If you didn't love the equipment you purchased, you could return it during the same season for full store credit. I remember that well, because that guarantee provided the assurance I needed to jump back into the sport after a long hiatus, despite being saddled with some

hefty college debt.

Of course, that's a big part of what you're paying for at a retail shop — customer service.

"You get a personalized service by coming to a brick-and-mortar retail store," said Nicholas Morrone, a floor leader with the Patagonia store in Boston. "Sales associates at these shops are more likely than not out using and testing gear regularly and can speak to certain pros and cons from personal experience.

"We often have customers come in with a specific product in mind, but after talking with them about what they are looking to use it for, we often steer them toward a different product that will better suit their needs," said Morrone.

Local shops train their salespeople to take the mystery out of the buying equation, explaining to customers just how different skis handle in different circumstances, over a wide variety of terrain. Plus, many local shops

offer lease or rental programs, or even demo packages, that allow customers to sample a variety of skis and boots without making the full commitment of purchasing the gear outright.

And the good news, said Morrone, is that the future looks promising for local ski shops.

"The 'core' shop seems to slowly be making a comeback," said Morrone. "Smaller shops are a great place to build relationships and connect with local community."

So why is buying online still so popular? First and foremost, buying online is generally less expensive. At a time when the effective buying power of most of us has flat-lined, saving money is appealing.

For example, if you're serious about finding the best skis for hard-as-nails New England boilerplate, you're likely looking at a high-end German or Austrian model that will run you four figures. Translation? If you hope to build a "quiver" of skis (and boots) for a variety

of conditions, the cost can get quite steep quite quickly. So, clearly, price is a major factor. But there's more ... literally. Online stores typically have a far greater selection.

"While price is important, and it's easier to find the best price online, cost isn't the only reason to buy online," said Ben Rabinowitz, a sales advisor with Backcountry.com. "When shopping online, the assortment to choose from is almost limitless — you can find any type of ski, in any size, length, shape or design you want.

"But if you're brand new to skiing, or indecisive, the endless options can be intimidating," said Rabinowitz. "That's where shopping online can actually help you, as there are numerous buying guides, Ski 101, reviews and community forums to read and learn from. While you could learn most of the information from a rep in a store, it's much easier to learn at your own convenience."

That last point, most sales experts would agree, is debatable at best. There is something to be said for shopping from the convenience of your couch, without any pressure to buy. Conversely, many believe there's no substitute for a truly knowledgeable salesperson, in the flesh, who can patiently answer your questions without making you search for the answers. That said, the better online shops are investing in developing experienced staffs.

"If you can demo skis at your local resort, that's a great option to determine which skis you like best," said Alex Quitiquit, ski buyer for Backcountry.com. "But if you are looking to buy, our gearheads have deep, intimate knowledge around the brands and types of gear work best for any skier."

Which brings us to another way to save. Many online shops have enormous warehouses, allowing them to carry not only more current stock, but also products from previous seasons.

"A great way to find ski equipment that won't crush your wallet is to look for gear still available from last season," said Quitiquit. "While this season's product is the new and improved, the best deals can often be found on last year's equipment."

Another factor in deciding between shopping retail or online is determining the level of customer knowledge.

“Online is a great place to go if you know exactly what it is you are looking for,” said Morrone. “For someone just getting their feet wet, they’re much better off coming into a brick-and-mortar location.”

Even online representatives understand that some customers are simply more comfortable buying gear that they can actually see and touch and bring home with them. And in some instances, they even encourage it. For Rabinowitz, that exception is ski boots.

“I highly recommend people purchase boots from a qualified boot fitter,” said Rabinowitz. “Sure, a beginner on a budget may not have the need right away to invest in proper boot fitting, but anyone remotely serious about their skiing should get their boots fitted properly. That’s not to say you can’t purchase boots online, but there are so many nuances to boot design and individual foot anatomy that it’s worth seeing an expert.”

On a related note, one practice that is particularly infuriating for smaller retail shops, said veteran ski writer Peter Oliver of Vermont, is taking advantage of the local knowledge that these outlets offer without shopping there.

“The customer comes into shop and gets all the service that only a good shop can provide — identifying the right prod-

ucts, determining the right fit, et cetera,” said Oliver. “Then the customer leaves without buying anything, but now knowing what to look for, goes online to shop for price.”

To combat this practice (which I agree is offensive), many shops have started charging for boot and ski fitting advice, then deducting that cost from the purchase price. I think that’s a great remedy.

Finally, don’t forget that there’s a third option for skiers — buying from other outdoor enthusiasts through the World Wide Web, on sites such as Facebook, Craigslist or even eBay.

“There is a huge online community of people buying and trading gear on the internet,” said Morrone. “I’m a member of several Facebook groups where people sell their used gear, usually at a super reasonable price.

“Riders selling gear to other riders, you can’t beat that,” he said. “These groups are usually down with helping you sort out any questions or concerns about gear or equipment as well.”

Just remember, you’ll always want that local shop for a last-minute stone grind, tuneup or repair. Be sure to spread the wealth.

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STARTING WITH A FLURRY

By Eric Wilbur

Despite living only 90 minutes away in southeastern Massachusetts, Wachusett Mountain was never really part of my youth.

In fact, the only real connection I ever had to the Princeton, Mass., area during my teen years was the ubiquitous jingle ("Waaaaa. Wa. Wachusett"), born from one of the most successful marketing campaigns (courtesy of Handsome Brothers Music in Natick, Mass.) ever to grace New England.

Mountain skiing. Minutes away.
"Waaaaa ..."

Even that wildly successful commercial hook never got me there, though. Growing up, my parents were prone to frequent New Hampshire ski areas like Bartlett's Attitash and Black Mountain in Jackson, where I was lucky enough to learn the sport at one of the most old-school, soulful spots for skiing in the Northeast. My high school ski club took frequent weekend trips to Cranmore in North Conway, filled with a variety of activities to keep teenagers busy off the slopes at night. By the time I started college in Vermont,



"mountain skiing, minutes away" translated instead to the likes of Stowe and Sugarbush, a pair of storied destinations available under one glorious student lift pass just a 45-minute drive south of Burlington.

And Wachusett remained little more than a catchy melody lingering in the back of my mind. "Waaaaa ..."

It was some years later when I started to question the complete logic of this matter. Growing up, family ski trips consisted of a four-hour drive on Friday nights, logistically complicated Saturday mornings that started with rental shop lines, and a Sunday-morning awareness of the trip home that often led to early departures, cutting into the remainder of the ski weekend.

It was indeed my college days that presented me with a valuable frame of higher learning with a whole new outlook on the possible timeframe of skiing, oftentimes able to grab post-lunch runs on Mount Mansfield in the wake of my slate of morning classes. It was when I came upon the revelation that something I managed to do four or five times a year I could instead do

Continued on Page 24

Wachusett Mountain



NESJ TV: Wachusett



Check out Episode 11 of New England Ski Journal TV, which takes viewers behind the scenes at Wachusett Mountain.

▶ vimeo.com/channels/skijournal

SKI WEEKEND Wachusett Mountain

Continued from Page 22

four or five times a week, the backyard ski area mentality that put a frequent dent in my gas mileage not to mention a burgeoning passion for the sport that would have the sustainability of that radio jingle.

“Waaaaa. Wa. Wachusett.”

“Mountain skiing. Minutes away.”

That has always been Wachusett’s calling card.

Marketing director Tom Meyers has worked at Wachusett Mountain for the past 22 years and the jingle even predates his arrival at the ski area, a time when radio was king in the advertising world.

“It’s interesting when you just look at jingles in general. You look at jingles that resonate in the public’s mind and a lot of it stems from radio,” he said. “It really helped build the brand early on.”

That’s a generation-plus that came to understand Wachusett as the around-the-corner — so to speak — ski area, a weekend trip that wouldn’t require the rush hour headache up 93 north along with thousands of other Boston-area residents who just clocked out for the week. Indeed, mountain skiing, minutes away, took away that notion that skiing and riding were activities enjoyed only at the tail end of a three-hour car ride.

It’s how Wachusett built an image that has lasted over the decades, combined with its never-ending emphasis on providing a quality product in terms of its snowmaking capabilities, grooming, lifts and base services. It’s how the Crowley family has managed to keep re-investing in the mountain, delivering a ski area that might be among the most profitable in all America, a factor that can’t only be attributed to its friendly 65-mile distance from a hub like Boston.

If you build it, they might come. But if you keep making it better, they’ll continue to make the trip.

That, more than anything, has been the code of success for Wachusett over the past 25 years. It has been what has allowed Wachusett to not just remain competitive, but be able to succeed and thrive in an industry that has seen plenty of consolidation and change.

“It’s the constant focus on upgrading and providing a high level of product and service,” Meyers said.

On that note, it has been Wachusett’s recent snowmaking upgrades that have served as not only an improvement, but rather a game-changer.

In 2016, the ski area committed more than \$2 million to its X2 Snowmaking Project, which doubled the mountain’s pumping capacity from 4,000 to 8,000 gallons per minute. The project has allowed snowmaking crews to cover as many as two trails overnight with a foot



► In 2016, Wachusett committed more than \$2 million to its X2 Snowmaking Project, and early snow this November helped the Princeton, Mass., ski area thrive in the opening months of the season.



of snow on each.

Last season, the ability to make so much snow led to Wachusett's earliest opening ever on Nov. 12. But weather wouldn't cooperate, and the mountain was forced to close for a few days before re-opening for the remainder of this season.

In 2018, Wachusett still managed an early opening — Nov. 17 — but also welcomed an agreeable stretch of weather that has allowed it to remain open ever since.

"With the powerful snowmaking system that we have after our huge upgrade doubled pumping capacity, we're able to offer much more reliable conditions early in the season compared to anything that we had done previous to that," Meyers said.

That ability helped lead Wachusett to its best start ever during the latter half of November and early days of December, 17 percent ahead of numbers from 2017 and far ahead of three- and five-year averages to date.

So, while a 10-inch snowstorm within days of running the lifts certainly didn't hurt, the promise of the early season product has still been a big deal for Wachusett.

"You still get those fluctuations in the weather, but in terms of people coming



out early, that's really what kind of signifies that we're off to our best start ever," Meyers said. "We get more terrain open quicker, we get more terrain open earlier, and we offer more reliable skiing conditions for two straight years now a week or more before Thanksgiving."

Wachusett is going to suffer more from variations in the weather than its cousins to the north, so an optimal snowmaking system always has been a need in Princeton. Now, the ability to lay down a solid base allows for a much quicker turnaround after rain. Ever since the improvements, Wachusett thinks of this in terms of hours, not days.

"When we're in operation, especially in optimal conditions, we can produce so much more snow quickly," Meyers said. "In a window of 12 to 24 or 36 hours of solid snowmaking, we can open ski trails much faster than we previously could."

There was a day in early December when the resort posted an Instagram photo of a just-completed snowmaking run on its popular Smith Walton trail, accessible from the 2,006-foot summit. Massive whales of

Continued on Page 26

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Continued from Page 25

snow lumbered in the image, somewhat reminiscent of something you might see somewhere after a snowstorm in Tahoe. It was a frame that showed just how powerful Wachusett's new system can be, not to mention an effective way of reminding local skiers and riders what might be so close by.

It's also a snapshot of how Wachusett effectively markets itself these days. Less "Waaaaaa ..." and more social media-based opportunities.

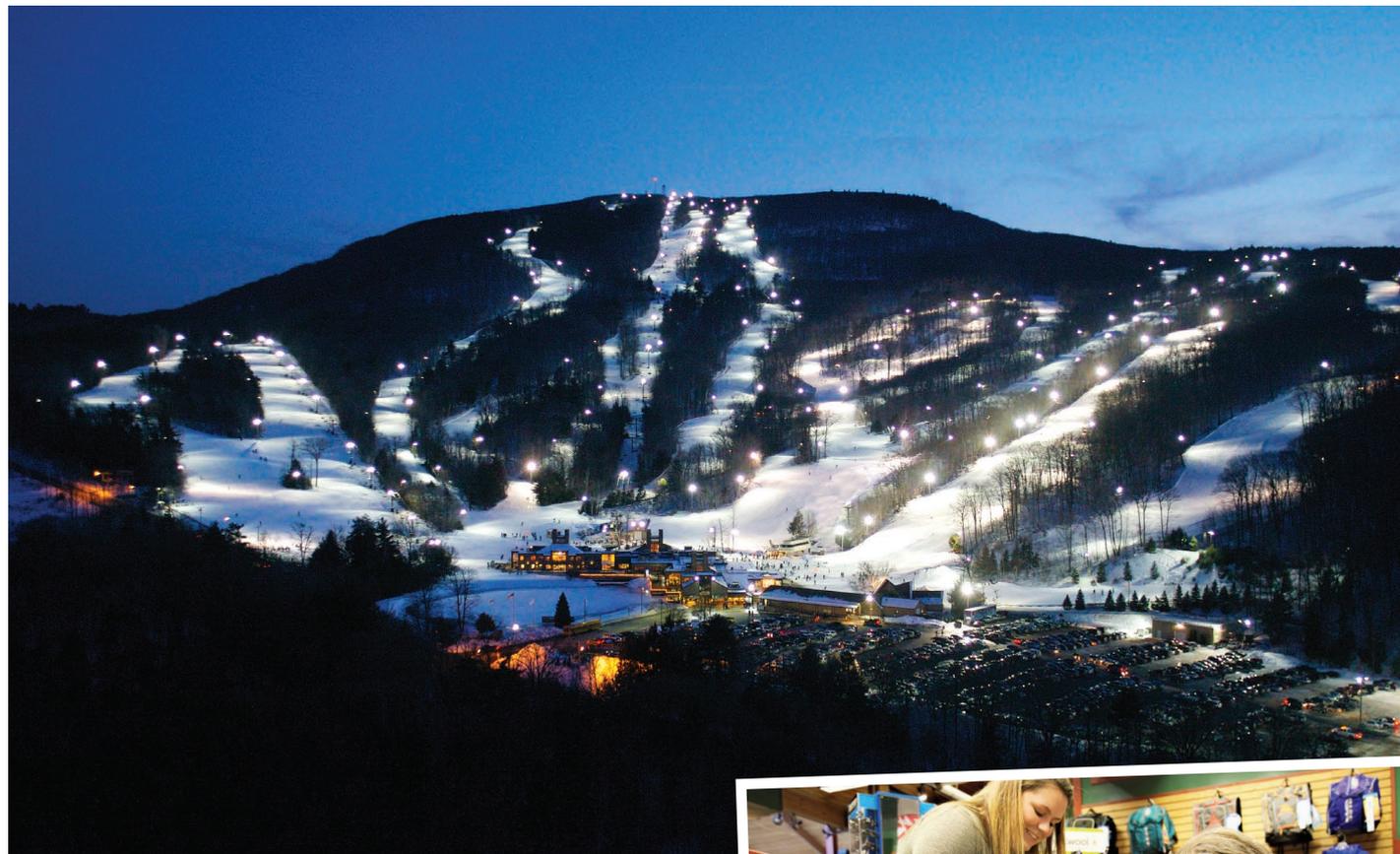
"What we're really striving for is to stay relevant with the millennial market," Meyers said, adding that it's a generation that isn't nearly as familiar with the radio jingle as their parents might be.

"The recognition value of the jingle is certainly attributed to the high volume of radio and television we've done over the years to make it mostly recognizable," Meyers said. "It's really re-created how we're advertising, in a sense."

But they haven't needed to re-create the message.

Mountain skiing. Minutes away.

Or about 90 minutes from downtown Boston, where the MBTA runs a weekly ski train from North Station Saturday and Sunday mornings, complete with



shuttle service from the station to the mountain. The trip (\$11.50 one way) even includes a designated "ski" car for easy storage of ski/snowboard equipment.

When you think about the number of college students who flood Boston

every year, many without cars, the ski train to Wachusett is an ideal situation of ease for avoiding the travel headache that Wachusett has done so well to cure.

"The ski train service has been a huge opportunity to remain at the top of the Boston market," Meyers said. "Because we're now one of the very few ski areas in New England if not the country that provides real viable public transportation to the ski area."

The catering to the younger market continues with the mountain's expanded college night schedule this season. Each Wednesday (when the ski train will be available from Boston) from Jan. 16 through March 27, college students can enjoy discounted night lift tickets, rentals and learning packages. Wachusett also has created a promotional partnership with Uber for Worcester University students.

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product and providing steady improvement year after year continues to be the staying power for Wachusett Mountain, which, yes, may be minutes away, but also has grown into its own as more than just the local hill down the road.

Waaaaaa. Wa. Wachusett.

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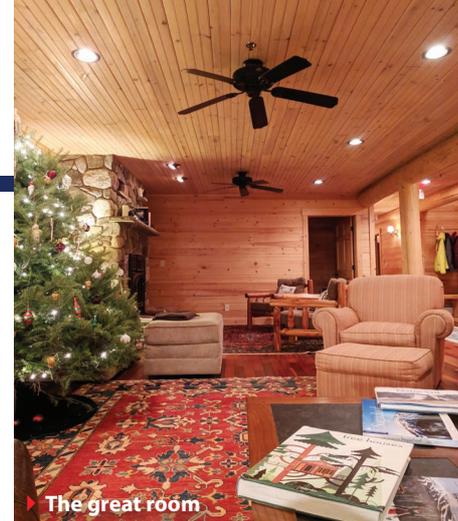
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■ Carrabassett Valley lodge redefines the hostel experience with an emphasis on community and comfort



The great room

By Brion O'Connor

I accept the fact that I might be in the minority on this topic, but I personally feel the condominium was the single worst thing to happen to New England's ski culture. Sure, condos were a convenient, and often less expensive, option to buying a second home in ski country. But what was lost was a slice of the "community," the shared experience that makes skiing so special.

But I've found the antidote — the Hostel of Maine. Thanks to Melanie and Justin Steele, a young couple (30 and 31, respectively) who opened the hostel in 2017, skiers in western Maine can go traipsing down Memory Lane to enjoy an

The Hostel of Maine

3004 Town Line Rd, Carrabassett Valley, ME 04947
Phone: 207-237-0088 | hostelofmaine.com

old-school ski experience. Though she's literally half my age, Melanie Steele and I share a kindred spirit.

"I remember being interested in small, family-style hospitality from a young age," she said. "All I can really attribute that to was growing up spending weekends and vacations here at Sugarloaf, where our family ski home always had a rotating door of guests coming to stay, piling into the bunk room, and creating meals from whatever got picked up along the way. They're some of my fondest memories, trying to create a space

and environment with a genuine sense of welcome for our guests."

The hostel idea really took root in 2012, after Justin returned from his travels abroad, determined to replicate the accommodations he had enjoyed in Europe.

"Justin's definitely inspired the idea of a hostel specifically from his experience traveling in Europe," said Melanie. "When we met, I had never been in a hostel before and admittedly had all of the preconceived notions many others do — unclean, more of a party environment."

That's not what Justin found overseas, though he acknowledges that the clientele was different than the couple has found at Hostel of Maine.

"A majority of European-style hos-

tels we've stayed at focused on younger adults, while we believe there is a massive benefit to having a more broadly appealing space that serves couples, solo adventurers, families and groups of friends," said Justin. "It helps people connect in interesting ways, and helps us be a great option for people regardless of where their life takes them over time."

The beautiful, solid 7,000-plus square foot log cabin-style lodge has a large common area with a fireplace, sumptuous furnishings and plenty of natural light. The idea is to encourage people to gather, and celebrate the shared experience that skiing once cultivated.

"You enter into the great room that acts as the common space where guests socialize and relax," said Melanie. "We have no television, just lots of books and games, and usually some music in the background. So it's an easy place to hang out and meet folks, or just put your feet up."

Asked what the hostel's "strongest elements" were, Justin replied: "Our common space, and a focus on an enjoyable and warm environment. We generally have some nice music going in the great room, and guests have access to a dining room and kitchenette where they can prepare their own food at any time, in addition to the breakfast we serve."

"We're also directly on the Sugarloaf shuttle route, which allows super easy access to the mountain and local establishments without the fuss of getting into a cold car, finding parking and then needing to put your boots and gear on and store the rest somewhere," he said. "Just finish your coffee and walk out the door with your skis or board in hand."

Situated just two miles from Sugarloaf Resort in Maine, the hostel (called H.O.M.E ... get it?) was built alongside the area's spectacular cross-country and mountain biking trails. More importantly, the property is breaking down stereotypes that many guests might have about what a "hostel" offers. Guests can choose from private rooms, family rooms and bunk rooms.

"The majority of misconceptions have been in the direction where we're able to pleasantly surprise people, rather than them being disappointed," said Justin. "For example, we offer five private rooms, which many folks don't realize exist in hostels."

"In addition, all rooms have ensuite bathrooms, including the private and shared rooms," he said. "Breakfast is also included, so that's a nice surprise when



someone books thinking it's a good price without that. We do serve alcohol — Maine craft beer and wine — so that can be complicated. Similar to a bar, folks can't drink outside alcohol in the common spaces. We try to stock enough of a selection that everyone can find something delicious to sip on at the end of their day."

Still, the hostel owners make it clear that their facility was never designed to be "party central," unlike some of those nostalgic ski clubs of days gone by.

"Sure, some guests have shown up expecting a party, and that's just not our environment or intent," said Melanie. "So honestly, they see pretty quickly that it's a relaxed environment and just go to the bar to do their partying. Others definitely show up expecting a younger, 18- to 25-year-old crowd, and are surprised to see that we honestly have guests of all ages staying frequently. Up to this point I think our youngest has been 7 months and our oldest has been 87."

In fact, guests Marnie and Hank Read discovered that the hostel was the perfect lodging option for their multi-generational clan.

"We stayed in a private room that first time, and then booked one of the bunk rooms for ourselves and my daughter's family — seven of us — so we took the

whole room," said Hank Read. "It was fabulous. Shuttle service, accessible with a phone call, allowed us to skip the parking rigmarole at the mountain with the grandkids. And it's within walking distance to one of the best restaurants on the mountain, Hugs, an Italian joint with superb food."

Read's wife, Marnie, was particularly pleased with the hostel's quality bedding, but also raved about her hosts.

"They're world travelers and are modeling H.O.M.E on their very best experiences from those travels," she said. "They are working their butts off, and loving it."

In addition to comfortable sleeping quarters and social common areas, the hostel provides fresh breakfast each morning.

"We serve breakfast everyday and like to give our guests options, serving an assortment of cereals, fresh fruit, bagels, fresh bread and spreads, various

homemade baked goods, eggs, coffee, tea, juice and honestly whatever else I feel like whipping up in the kitchen," said Melanie. "It sounds tacky, but just like a hostel, a continental breakfast can be totally satisfying or completely blah. It just depends on how much love you put into it."

"We hear in guests voices sometimes how unenthused they are at the prospect of a continental hostel breakfast, expecting stale bagels and instant coffee, but love seeing their faces light up in the morning at the surprise of warm bread right out of the oven and freshly ground coffee," she said.

Another member of the hostel staff is Zoe, the Steeles' official greeter, a tail-wagging bonus for lovers of our four-legged friends.

"Melanie and Justin and their greeter dog, Zoe, are simply wonderful," said Hank Read. "They are young entrepreneurs and seem to be thriving in their role. We've also met Melanie's father, Kendall, who fills in when Melanie and Justin need to be elsewhere. We have stayed there three times, and I would call these folks good friends."

However, success has its drawbacks, and Hank Read is concerned that the secret that is the Hostel of Maine won't be

kept under wraps for long.

"I simply hate the fact that you have been asked to write this, because the publicity will make it impossible to find a vacancy at this lovely place," he said. "Word is going to spread and they'll be booked for the season before you know it."

It's a potential problem, but a good problem. New England needs more places like Hostel of Maine, and hosts like Melanie and Justin Steele (and Zoe). It's not an experience that's right for everyone — a point that Hank Read would like me to emphasize — but it's sure to warm the heart of any longtime skier. Which means my wife and I will be visiting this winter. **S**

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▶ Zoe, the Steele's official greeter

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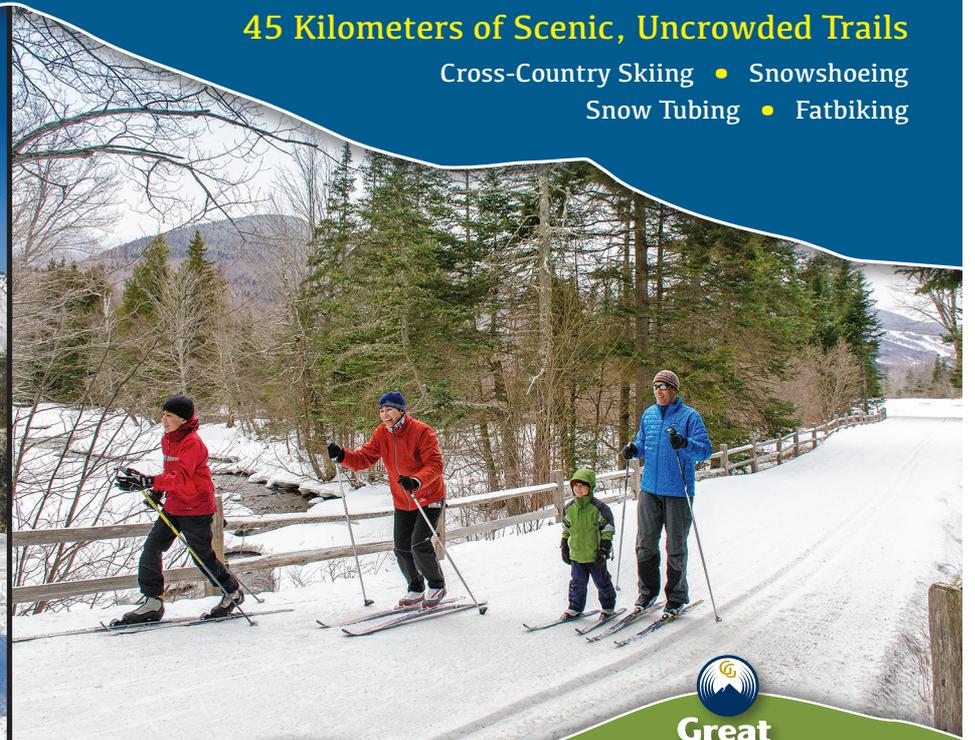
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LEARN FOR A LIFETIME

■ Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month is your no-excuse portal to slope fun





By Joan Wallen

JANUARY IS LEARN TO SKI and Snowboard Month all across the country, and New England resorts are all in. If you or a friend have thought about trying to learn skiing or riding but were deterred by expense or just the uncertainty of how to go about it, then this is the month to take that first step.

Resorts throughout the region are offering special packages making it easy, and affordable, for newbies to make their first turns in a comfortable, nurturing environment. We've all heard horror stories of friends taking first-time skiers to the top of the mountain and saying "point 'em down and see you at the bottom."

Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month aims to avoid that scenario and provide a safe, non-threatening introduction to skiing and riding so participants will turn their first experience into a lifelong activity that can be shared with friends and family and perhaps change their whole outlook on winter.

In Vermont the majority of resorts are offering a \$49 package, in January, for newcomers to snowsports that includes a beginner lesson from a professional ski or snowboard instructor, all the rental equipment you need and a lift ticket to the area's beginner terrain. This provides the learner with the basics he or she needs to continue with confidence, or better yet, the knowledge that continuing with a few more lessons is the best way to reach a level of enjoyment that will make their winter a time to cherish, not dread.

According to Adam White, director of communications for Ski Vermont, "The ski industry is focused on growing their participation base.

The month of January is important because of the industry-wide push to get beginners to come out. January is when skiing and riding is best. Resorts want to put their best foot forward, and this program encourages people to come out then."

In addition, by starting the learning process in January, new participants will have the rest of the season to take more lessons, practice on their own and enjoy all the new skills they've learned for the next couple of months or more. Each member resort might have specific requirements for participation. Contact the resort directly for more information.

Many New Hampshire resorts also participate in Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month, offering the beginner package for \$39 during the month of January with a beginner lift ticket, a lesson and rental equipment. The state's cross-country centers participate with a price of \$19 for a trail pass, rental gear and a lesson. Taking a lesson on your first time out can really make all the difference in your enjoyment of skiing and/or riding and your interest in continuing participation. You should check with the individual resorts on their particular restrictions and availability. Other resorts have specific deals for beginners that



► Main photo and inset left: Mount Snow's Ski and Snowboard School makes it easy and fun to get into a snowsports frame of mind; inset right: skiing rookies savor the experience at King Pine.

Mount Snow Resort; King Pine Purity Spring Resort

Continued on Page 32

FAMILY SKIING

Continued from Page 31

might run for the entire season.

Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month also incorporates the Bring A Friend initiative. Friends are encouraged to introduce their friends and family to snowsports both as a means of growing the sport and also as a measure to retain current participants by helping to ensure they have skiing buddies. Skiing and snowboarding are, after all, social activities often best enjoyed with a companion. The Bring A Friend program rewards those already into snowsports and folks just starting out by offering incentives to introduce a friend into the sport. If you already are a skier or boarder, bring a newcomer along with you to join the program. If you're new yourself, bring a friend to learn with you. The Bring A Friend challenge, running for all of January, offers prizes for introducing a friend to the world of snow. You can enter each time during the month that you bring a new person to take the beginner package at participating resorts.

Jan. 11 is very special — it is Learn to Ski or Snowboard Day. Organizers will attempt to set a world record for the number of beginner lessons taught in one day. Currently the record is 6,002.



First tracks at Waterville Valley

By joining on this particular day, you can become part of history. Check the resorts in your state, or where you want to go, for specific resort offers on that day.

Mary Jo Tarallo, executive director of the Learn to Ski and Snowboard/Bring a Friend Initiative, has worked tirelessly to develop and expand this program. “The Learn to Ski and Snowboard/Bring a Friend initiative gives beginner skiers and snowboarders some very affordable options for learning the sports early in

the season, since January is Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month,” Tarallo said. “It’s probably the best time for beginners to learn from professional instructors because they can take advantage of special deals being offered by resorts throughout the month. This year, we are highlighting the sports on national Learn to Ski and Snowboard Day. We want to see how many lessons can be provided in one day throughout the U.S. It will be fun and a great way to get out and enjoy the outdoors.”

Some New England states also offer a “Passport” or similar program to encourage kids to get out on the slopes and trails. The Ski NH Snowsports Passport is available to all students in grades 4 and 5 whether you live in New Hampshire or are from out of state. The Passport contains one voucher for each of the state’s 32 alpine and cross-country centers and sells for \$30. Users are able to experience a variety of resorts in each discipline while paying less than \$1 a day for all that fun and excitement. A percentage of the funds generated by this program is donated to Make a Wish Foundation of New Hampshire.

Vermont’s fifth-grade passport program offers three coupons for each participating alpine area and one coupon for each cross-

country area, giving the passport holders up to 88 days of skiing and riding. There is a \$10 processing fee, the proceeds of which are donated to Vermont’s Working Lands Enterprise Initiative. The student must be accompanied by a ticket or pass holding adult, and each adult may accompany two passport holders.

More than 75,000 fifth-, sixth- and seventh-graders have participated in the WinterKids passport program in Maine over the past 20 years. This year, the program is more convenient, inclusive and versatile. Through the WinterKids App, you can sign up for a membership and access all the programs offered to members, including some new and enhanced benefits. This season the membership is \$35 and includes five family members. It expands its reach to kids 18 and under and to New Hampshire as well as Maine. Membership grants access to discounts and offers to more than 50 WinterKids partners in both states. Partners will have at least one, possibly more, standard offers throughout the season. In addition, with the digital nature of the program, new offers may be posted throughout the season. Members can opt to receive push notifications from their favorite partners.

S

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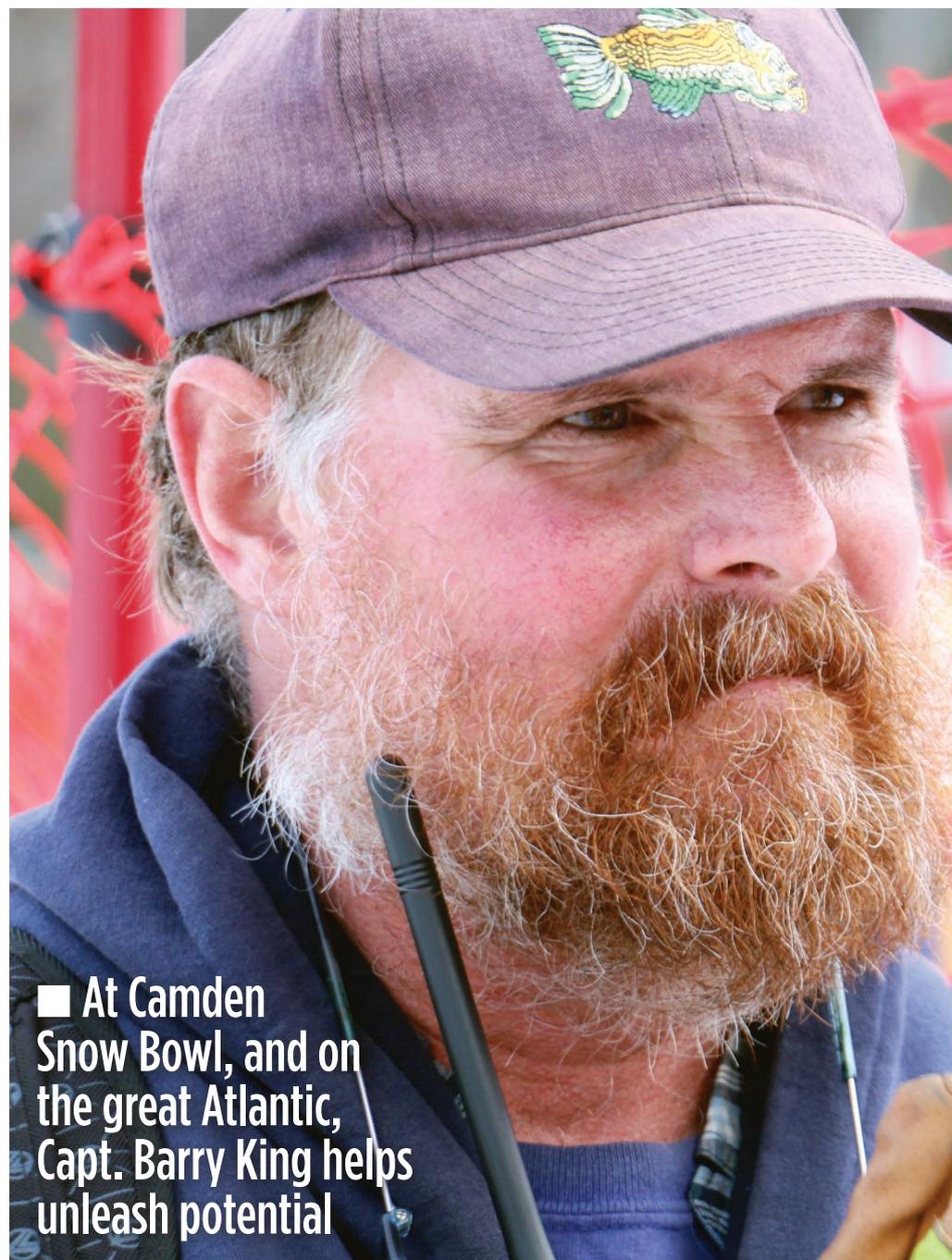
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■ At Camden Snow Bowl, and on the great Atlantic, Capt. Barry King helps unleash potential

By Brion O'Connor

Quick, name two activities that define New England, and the robust Yankee ideal of harnessing the power of nature. There's no right answer, of course. But if I had my choice, I'd pick sailing and skiing. Which is why Capt. Barry King of Appleton, Maine, to my mind, has the best two jobs in the world.

During the warmer months, the 56-year-old King can be found at the wheel of his 90-foot schooner, *Mary Day*, plying the waters off coastal Maine with his windjamming guests.

"I've been sailing all of my life," he said. "I grew up for the first 15 years of my life in Marblehead, Mass., where boats were plentiful. Fished for lobsters as a kid. Forced family sailing vacations. Some racing, yachts mostly.

"My father was a yacht captain, and I helped him with deliveries near and far," said King. "It's about the only thing I have a feel for."

King began working on *Mary Day* 26 years ago, in the spring of 1993. Five years later, he and his wife, Jennifer Martin, bought the schooner, and have "been at it ever since." Sailing is the primary reason that Jennifer and Barry — the pair met at the Audubon Society's



Expedition Institute while earning master's degrees in experiential environmental education — have made their home near Camden, Maine.

However, sailing is only half of the equation when it comes to King's year-long calendar, and his adopted harbor fits perfectly with his other avocation, skiing.

"If ever there was a town where skiing and sailing come together, it is Camden,

David Lyman (top)

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'SAILING AND SKIING KEEP ME CLOSEST TO MY NATURAL STATE'

▶ Capt. Barry King on the alpine race course (above and left) and with his family — wife, Jen; son, Sawyer; and daughter, Courtney — at the shipyard.



Maine, 'Where the mountains meet the sea,' he said. "The Camden Snow Bowl is the only ski area in the United States that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean.

Owned and operated by the town of Camden's Parks and Recreation Department, the Snow Bowl was started as a volunteer effort. It is now operated as a four-season facility with hiking trails, snowshoeing, nordic skiing, alpine skiing and a very active mountain-biking community, said King. At the base of the hill is Hosmer Pond, which offers canoeing, kayaking and "some very decent

trout fishing," he said.

But King traces his skiing roots back to his childhood on Boston's North Shore.

"I've been skiing all my life as well. My father was a PSIA-certified instructor who put me in a pair of skis — wooden Northlands with Dover cable bindings and real metal edges — at a very young age and launched me from the top of the hill," said King. "I learned to swim the same way.

"My dad raced through college at Boston University," he said. "He instilled in me a sense of wonder about the pio-

neering individuals and the evolution of the ski industry in New England. He took me on the first of many trips up into Tuckerman Ravine when I was 14."

Even to this day, King sees strong parallels between his two favorite activities.

"Nature has a way of keeping one in the present moment," said King. "As much as any of us enjoy our screen time, I think we all crave being in the present. We don't realize how much time we spend with our minds drifting away to someplace else.

"In order to successfully sail or ski, you have to be in the present," he said. "Lose your attention for any length of time, and you either wind up aground or in the trees. Sailing and skiing keep me closest to my natural state. I can lose myself in the moment, tune out all the 'stuff' that is really quite meaningless. I get a chance to work with nature to get where I am going. I get to flex my mental and physical muscles when I am outdoors. I feel most alive in those situations."

King's father and several friends bought Mount Whittier, a now-defunct ski area in West Ossipee, N.H. They sold it in the late 1970s to folks "who just didn't quite know what the ski experience was all about," said King. However, the Marblehead native kept making turns.

"I raced alpine through middle school," said King. "I did OK, but nothing to write home about. I was pretty distracted by the social scene.

"I raced nordic in high school here in Maine," he said. "I coached nordic and alpine skiing for a few years in college, and came back to racing when my kids got into it in the local Friday night league. Some very good skiers. I discovered I still had a little something hiding somewhere inside."

So King decided to give back to the sport and started coaching again.

"This is my third year coaching with the Camden Hills Regional High School program," he said. "I've been working on gaining my USSA credential, and will complete my Level 200 in a couple weeks."

Coaching allowed King to spend more time with his two children. His son, Sawyer, now 19, raced from elementary school through high school and is currently a freshman at Maine Maritime Academy, studying marine transportation engineering. His 18-year-old daughter Courtney is a senior at Camden Hills Regional High School and still racing alpine at the high school level. Last year, she was a team captain.

"I'm so lucky to be surrounded by amazing coaches here at the Camden Snow Bowl," said King. "I've been told by many folks that visit that something special is happening at the Camden Snow Bowl.

"It is the best 'village' I have ever experienced for our family," he said. "The coaching goes well beyond ski racing. Last year, both our men's and women's high school teams earned the Maine State Class A Sportsmanship Awards."

The success of the Camden ski teams reflects the commitment of racers and coaches, and that earnestness translates to very little down time between sailing and skiing season for King. He and his family live on a 32-acre farm, and King admittedly would sometimes like "to go work in the woods getting in firewood or hunting deer or just enjoying the quiet."

The high school racing season typically runs from late November through the end of February. King said the staff focuses on drills to help with technique. "We set courses, slalom and GS, to put those techniques to work," he said. "And we talk tactics as we look at different course sets."

"I enjoy watching racers improve, but what really spins my wheels is watching them gain physical and mental confidence. I think that these young athletes bring so much of their lives to the hill," said King with obvious pride. "I help them by just listening or maybe asking the right question at the right moment, seeing the light bulb come on over their heads, seeing them skiing in the present moment.

"Personal growth and maybe even a little character development are the end game for me," he said. "I can tell you that these young adults are going to have their hands full learning to be present. They need to develop the confidence to trust their instincts and well-thought-out ideas. Ski racing gets them off the couch, away from their screens and out into the immediacy of skiing."

Not surprisingly, King feels the same when he's at the helm of the Mary Day.

"Teaching aboard the schooner and coaching racing are really the same for me," said King. "If I do nothing else, I hope that I leave each person I have touched feeling better about themselves. If I can teach a guest to steer a 96-ton schooner or give a young adult the skills to negotiate a long, fast GS course, can you think of anything better?"

"I spend most of my time drawing parallels between what is happening on the ocean or the slopes and what is happening in the rest of their lives. I have been told I have a gift for doing that. Maybe for some, not for everyone, I'm sure. My crew are young adults just out of college, and I feel a real responsibility to teach them skills and an attitude of reverence for what they are accomplishing each day."

That works on the open water. And works on the hill. **S**

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KILLINGTON MOMENTUM NOT SLOWING ANYTIME SOON



Mikaela Shiffrin inspects the GS course.

By Eric Wilbur

Herwig Demschar had every right to figure Killington could pull this off.

When I spoke with the former head coach of the U.S. women and Austrian men's alpine teams back in 2016 in preparation for the first World Cup skiing event to be held on the East Coast in a quarter-century, Demschar said he had spent the previous five years wondering why the East Coast wasn't more of a destination for international skiing events.

"Why don't we promote the East more?" he asked. "Especially because there are most of the ski clubs, most of the ski academies that produce athletes for ski racing. Why don't we go back to this place?"

But if Demschar received any resistance to his idea in terms of arguments over snow control, mountain elevations and crowd size, then he had the ultimate trump card.

Mikaela.

"I could hear the crowd the whole second run, from the start to the finish," Mikaela Shiffrin said after her win in the slalom at the Killington Cup last November. "The crowd really carried me down the hill, and it's just amazing to race here in front of everybody. The atmosphere is incredible."

That crowd is proof. It has been three straight years of record-setting attendance at the base of Killington's Superstar trail, buoyed in part by the presence of World Cup and Olympic champion Shiffrin, the native of Vail, Colo., who might as well have Vermont as her official second home. Three straight years, the product of Burke Mountain Academy has taken the slalom event on Killington Cup Sunday, each win before a fervent crowd that has opened eyes on

the professional skiing circuit.

"Killington Resort and the fans have proved once again that the East can successfully host world-class global ski racing events," Demschar, chair of the Killington Cup organizing committee and VP of international business development at Powdr, said. "The bar has been set higher with each passing year of the World Cup at 'The Beast of the East,' and the rest of the ski racing world is taking notice."

In fact, it was at a media event hosted by trade group Ski New Hampshire later that month when the commissioner for New Hampshire's Department of Business and Economic Affairs, Taylor Caswell, hinted in jest that he was expecting a similar show to Killington's attendance of 18,500 when Waterville Valley hosts the U.S. Freestyle Championships in March.

Of course, Waterville was the site of the last alpine World Cup event prior to Killington in 1991 when Maine native Julie Parisien won giant slalom. Waterville president and general manager Tim Smith is already on record, saying on New Hampshire public radio, that he thinks the crowd numbers the World Cup brought 27 years ago will pale in comparison to what the resort expects in March.

That's the sort of bar that Demschar is talking about.

Much of that success has everything to do with Shiffrin, the de facto poster girl for the event, not to mention the World Cup in general. In the weeks following her win at Killington, Shiffrin remained on an electric pace, securing three World Cup wins over the course of eight days, including back-to-back wins in the super-G at Lake Louise, Canada, and St. Moritz.

"Everyone involved, from volunteers to groomers, put on another great showing for athletes and spectators," Killington president Mike Solimano said. "We're very much looking forward to keeping this event on the East Coast next year."

That question of continuation seems to be a slam-dunk considering the results, something I asked Shiffrin about in the weeks leading up to the event.

"I hope it's sustainable," she said. "For me, whether we're racing in Aspen or we're racing in Killington, it's a pleasure. Aspen — I'm living in Colorado, so I'm home basically. But on the East Coast, I lived there for so long that it also feels like home. Really either of those two places, as long as we keep getting the World Cup back in the U.S., I think that's the most important thing."

The vibe at the races is unmistakable,

particularly in the midst of November when all of New England was enjoying one of the best starts to the season on record. As my sons and I booted up in the parking lot, an attendant came over to suggest the best spots to ski in the woods that week, at the same time shaking his head over the fact that we were discussing hidden gems only two days after Thanksgiving. Taking a stroll through the retail and marketing village there was an energy fueled in part by local commerce, musical acts and a general acknowledgement that few places could be better at that specific moment.

High energy, enthusiastic crowds and a World Cup champ with local roots kicking off what might be her best season on the slopes yet. A perfect recipe.

"Showcasing Killington and the state of Vermont to the international ski community for a third year in a row has us and the entire surrounding community boasting with pride," Solimano said.

Waterville and Sugarloaf hope to follow the momentum kick-started at Killington. Sugarloaf hosts the first-ever U.S. Alpine Speed Championship from March 16-21. Waterville is the host for the 2019 U.S. Freestyle Championships March 15-17 and the slalom, giant slalom and parallel slalom in the U.S. Alpine Championships, set for March 23-26.

"We are looking forward to bringing elite ski racing back to Waterville Valley Resort," Calum Clark, U.S. Ski and Snowboard chief of systems and operations, said last summer. "The membership and fan base in the East is vast and extremely engaged with the sport, and our athletes love competing in front of them."

East Coast ski racing. Who knew?

Demschar, for one. But I think the rest of us New Englanders might have rightfully had a pretty good idea as well. **S**

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Mikaela Shiffrin attacks the Killington slalom course.

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TONY CHAMBERLAIN'S LAST RUN



A LIST ALL YOUR OWN

► Vermont gems Smugglers' Notch Resort and Stowe Mountain Resort (below) are perennial choices for "best of the East" snowsports destinations.

By Tony Chamberlain

When I look at annual magazine assessments of the best skiing in the East, followed by the lists and rankings, I am at once amused and amazed. How do they pull this thing off year after year, I wonder?

HAVING BEEN a ski journalist for 30 years or so, I came to regard this as a staple of the trade. Or, to put it another way, a day off for me. It was a little like the Old Farmer's Almanac that published its annual weather report, including snowfall forecasts for various zones in New England. If you include X number of zones, you're bound to get a few of them reasonably close. Now and then.

So I began tucking one year's OFA column away until the beginning of the next season, then checking out how the prognosticators did with the season's weather. It became quickly clear that, like the stock investor who threw darts at the stock page to determine his investments, that I could have darted my way to a more accurate yearly weather forecast than OFA published.

As for ranking the best New England ski areas (or anywhere else, for that matter), I'm pretty sure they're done about the same way. That is, arbitrarily. Except for those surveys that really do survey the skiers in the region. One year when I headed up this project for a national magazine, the problems were clear

very quickly. To wit: Could we trust the source? In other words, since these were magazine responses, it was very easy to stuff a ballot box, thus leaving us to report on regional enthusiasm, and possibly to end up with a survey as crooked as North Carolina's national elections.

At best, we weren't rating the quality of mountains, but general trends of enthusiasm that seemed to shift suspiciously from season to season. Every New England list will have Killington somewhere near the top. It has the greatest vertical drop (3,050 feet) and is generally agreed the best ski town nightlife in New England.

On about every list, you will find Bretton Woods, with a mere 1,500-foot vertical but with a rolling canvas well-groomed and inviting, and a moniker of being the largest ski area in New Hampshire.

I will always find Loon on the list, but aside from all its enchanting features, I suspect ease of driving from Boston on nearly 100 percent highway (I-93) is a factor in this area's growing popularity. Both Loon (2,100 feet) and Bretton Woods apparently are not penalized by

skiers for their medium stature.

The rest of the bigwigs usually make the top lists, but not always — Sugarloaf (2,820), Sugarbush (2,650), Smugglers' Notch (2,610), Stowe (2,360), Sunday River (2,340). I know for sure that at least one owner carved a trail to a towering, semi-convenient summit in order to claim more vertical for his mountain, but I don't know about others, so no names.

Snow quality, it would seem, is a major factor in skier fave categories, and I have a hunch that the speed of development of Sunday River in the 1980s followed by Okemo a little later was pretty closely linked to these areas' commitment to snowmaking and grooming. Or, as Sunday River owner and developer Les Otten said at the time, borrowing from the political world: "It's the snow, stupid."

While he was ever enlarging his ski area from a one-time backwater in central Maine, Otten built lots and lots of housing. Nothing palatial or in anyway amazing, but adequate. Otten's view: People go to ski areas to ski, and the rest will take care of itself via restaurant and bar investors.

Sunday River quickly rose to the best

list with its snow-first policy and is now a fixture at or near the top of every New England list.

I'm not sure cuisine ever added much heft to rising on the best list. I remember those first reflexes of healthful dining in the 1980s. Some ski areas introduced salad bars, health smoothies and soups worthy of Martha Stewart's kitchens. I even recall waiting for the day, and celebrating appropriately, when Waterville Valley's baked potatoes (from the outdoor potato cart) hit \$5 per spud, a somehow consequential moment. But again, I don't think cuisine will ever bump the needle, and besides, it remains nearly unthinkable that anything would ever bump burgers and fries from the main-line food choice at a New England area.

And regarding fave New England ski lists, I have reflected often on an interview I once had with a friend of Pam Fletcher's mother. Pam is one of the family owners of Nashoba Valley founded by her father, Al, in the '70s, and a very successful ski area at that. Her family friend told me that he had spent a lifetime skiing all over the world — East, West, Europe, just everywhere — and now proclaims "I'll never ski anywhere else but right here."

The bottom line is, despite all the lists that pop up every season, people — skiers and riders, tubers and nighthawks — just like what they like for their own reasons. Most of those never make "The List." **S**

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