



Feature Article

BOYNE MOUNTAIN, MICHIGAN

By Jim and Ann Neff

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Written in 2005: Please go to www.boyne.com for the latest updates.

It's a long way from Toledo to the Superbowl, about five hours if the outside lanes on northbound I-75 are clear. Debi Koltoniak and her buddies from the Toledo Ski Club make the dash a half-dozen times each winter, headed to Boyne Mountain's aptly named race arena where elite adult ski racers gather for events hosted by the Michigan Alpine Competition Committee.

"Superbowl is a fantastic race venue because it's isolated from the rest of the resort and has its own parking lot, quad lift, and warming house," says Koltoniak. "Boyne Mountain goes all out to keep the hill well maintained and with dual courses it's one of the best places to race in the Midwest."

At "the Mountain," as locals call it, Koltoniak connects with Boyne's ambassador of skiing, Cary Adgate, a two-time Olympian, former U.S. Pro champion and World Cup competitor who ups the ante in every MACC event. "Watching Cary race is awesome," observes Koltoniak. "Most of us call it 'training by osmosis.'"

For Midwest skiers, Boyne Mountain has long been a Mecca. Boyne has a history of innovation: first triple, first quad, first high speed six (in the U.S.), allowing expansion from one run with a used chair from Sun Valley to today's 67 trails with slants for every persuasion, an ever evolving venue that always serves up surprises. Recently, Boyne staples like McLouth, Hemlock, Aurora and Victor on the front side have been joined by newcomers, like Devil's Dive on Disciple's Ridge, a double black plummet unveiled a few years back. Last winter saw the debut of a collection of green cruisers off the back side of the Mountain that seem to swoop to the shores of Deer Lake. Of these, Cary Adgate says: "Even I don't like to ski the steeps every day, so I head out with my kids and we have a blast carving big arcs on Johnny Mac."

While racing has been a staple at the Mountain since the early 50s when Stein Eriksen directed the skiing, people haven't been streaming northward for 58 years just to feed a need for downhill speed. The resort has paralleled its attention to the hard core with the development of amenities for families. For example, while Koltoniak and crew are on Superbowl, you'll find 4 year-old Charlie and 2 year-old Katie Runstrom on the tubing hill right next door. Their parents, Eric and Jill, have a time share at the base of Superbowl, although no one in the family races. "We enjoy all the activities at the resort and when the time comes the kids will be in the ski school," says Jill. "For now, just being together as a family is what brings us here."

Although skiers have come to expect yearly changes at the Mountain, what they'll encounter this winter is an eye-popper. Yo dude, surf's up, as Boyne becomes the first ski resort in America where the cars coming into the parking lot will be sporting racks with surf boards alongside skis.

Last Memorial Day the resort opened Avalanche Bay, the largest indoor water park in Michigan and the only such operation at the base of a ski hill in the country. Inside is a Rip Zone FlowRider, the first surf simulator installation of its kind in the world. During ski season Boyne will now be the only place where you can bridge from winter to summer and hang twenty in five minutes, ten while riding the six-place ski lift and, if you're a quick-change artist, another ten when you catch a swell on your stick in the Rip (surftalk for ride a wave on your board). This assumes you don't dawdle along the way to pet Fritz, the Bay's St. Bernard mascot.

Avalanche Bay, crafted to resemble an alpine village covered by a snow slide, is adjacent to the Mountain Grand Lodge and Spa, also opened on Memorial Day, a 220-suite condo hotel that's painstakingly themed after the finest Austrian-Swiss ski hotels, with everything from cuckoo clocks in the rooms to massively beamed ceilings in the lobby. Think Gidget and Moondoggie do Kitzbuhel.

Together Avalanche Bay and the Mountain Grand represent \$74 million of a \$300 million rebirth of Boyne Mountain. Next up, a transformation of the village at the base of the Mountain.

THE TOWNS

The lion's share of Boyne Mountain skiers opt to stay on property, although two nearby towns offer some interesting options. This is authentic Hemingway country, described in some of Papa's "Nick Adams" stories and both towns still retain some of that era's charm. Boyne City, ten minutes west of the Mountain and situated at the eastern end of 13-mile-long Lake Charlevoix, is better known as a summer destination, meaning the small motels and locally flavored downtown shops are less frenetic in winter. Several restaurants and a 1960s-style movie house draw skiers looking for a relaxing après ski dinner and movie. Petoskey, twenty-five minutes north of the Mountain along the Lake Michigan shoreline, is much larger than Boyne City. On one hand, Petoskey offers a bustling Victorian Gaslight Shopping District, lots of turn-of-the-century architecture, and some locales that can truly proclaim "Hemingway was here." On the other hand is a casino and a multitude of national brand motels and eateries. Staying in either of these towns presents some options for the cost-conscious, but because you have to actually drive past Boyne Mountain in order to get to them the Mountain's array of ski-in/ski-out lodging convenience is a tough to beat trump card.

WHERE TO STAY

Mountain Grand Lodge and Spa The new 220-room luxury hotel features one, two, three, and four bedroom suites complete with wetbars, kitchens, plasma screen televisions, video game systems, and vintage ski artwork. Some suites are uniquely designed for families, with separate bedrooms for kids featuring bunk beds and bedding themes keyed into the ages of the children. Winter rates begin at \$135 for a deluxe hotel

room and \$252 for a one bedroom suite. Ski/water park packages available. 800-GO-BOYNE; mountaingrandlodge.com

Boyne Mountain Main Lodge Still a prime spot to stay at Boyne Mountain, a place where you can pop out of your bindings and be in your room or at the bar in the Snowflake Lounge before the powder melts off your parka. With an outdoor heated pool slopeside under the famed Boyne clock tower, the Lodge carries forward its original Sun Valley ambiance. Modern and well-appointed rooms go from \$80 per person for a lift and lodging one night combo or from \$183 for a ski weekend with two breakfasts, a dinner, and two full-day lift tickets. 800-GO-BOYNE; boynemountain.com

Mountain Cabins For those who want more secluded accommodations these are ski-in/ski-out retreats on the back side of Boyne Mountain set along the newest ski trails adjacent to the Alpine lift. Rustic in theme, the three bedroom/three bath cabins are full of luxury touches, like stone fireplaces. (prices not available yet) 800-GO-BOYNE; boynemountain.com

WHERE TO EAT

Everett's Boyne Mountain's newest restaurant, named after resort founder Everett Kircher, is off the main lobby in the Mountain Grand. The bill of fare is influenced by Kircher's passion for hunting and fishing, with several dishes featuring the native fish and game found in the local region. The 100-seat main dining area presents views of the mountain and village, while the lounge area houses a freshwater aquarium with trout from the nearby Boyne River. {CUT: For fun see if the chef will serve you Everett's favorite lunch – a Spam sandwich and Dinty Moore beef stew.} [REPLACE: Be sure to hoist an "EK" (Everett Kircher Ale) brewed exclusively for Boyne. (Prices and specific entrees not available yet.) 800-GO-BOYNE; mountaingrandlodge.com

Red Mesa Grill Away from the resort but well worth the 15-minute drive into downtown Boyne City. Latin-American influences blend with Michigan favorites, like the Corn Roasted Walleye (\$14.95), but a major attraction is the most extensive tequila bar in the Midwest with 140 (or so, but who's counting) varieties. 117 Water St., Boyne City; 231-582-0049

Garrett's On Water Street Also in Boyne City, Garrett's not only has two dining rooms overlooking lake Charlevoix, but also an authentic Irish Pub (Biddy Mulligan's). The cuisine is consistently ranked among the best in the state; people rave about the Seared Sea Sacallops in sweet red pepper cream (\$22), but skiers invariable go for the hearty Meatloaf in Wild Mushroom Sauce (\$14). In the Pub, latch onto a Whitefish Po' Boy (\$9) and a cold Guinness. 1 Water Street; 231-582-1111; garrettsonwaterstreet.com

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Avalanche Bay At 88,000 square feet, it's the biggest indoor water park in Michigan. Climb the giant Splasherhorn peak and try to survive its 800-gallon water avalanche, or meander down the Lazy River on a float trip. \$39 full-day/\$29 half-day; \$35/\$29 for Boyne house guests. 800-GO-BOYNE; avalanchebay.com

Solace Spa If Avalanche Bay is too frenetic for you, luxuriate at the new Solace Spa in the Mountain Grand. 19 treatment rooms provide pampering like body exfoliation, massage and cosmetic services, private men's and women's saunas and hot tubs, private trainers, the Das Café juice bar. (Prices not set at this time.) 800-GO-BOYNE; mountaingrandlodge.com

Boyne River Brewing Company Housed in an old fisherman's shack, this is a funky locals place with the best brews in Boyne country. If you're lucky the Pumpkin Ale will be on tap, but any of their "laid back ales" go good with a slice of Lake Trout Stout cheesecake. 419 E. Main, Boyne City; 231-582-9001.

STATISTICS

Boyne Mountain Resort 418 skiable acres; 500 vertical feet; 120 annual inches; 67 runs; 10 lifts, including one high-speed six and a magic carpet.

Getting There From southeastern Michigan, take I-75 take exit 282, Gaylord/Alpena, and turn west onto M-32 and go 13 miles. When you reach US-131 turn right continue for 7 miles. The entrance to Boyne Mountain is just south of Boyne Falls. From Chicago and west Michigan, take US-131 North. The expressway ends north of Manton, MI but stay on the two-lane highway the rest of the way to Boyne Mountain.

Information Boyne USA and Boyne Mountain: 800-GO-BOYNE; boyne.com; boynemountain.com; mountaingrandlodge.com; avalanchebay.com

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