



Feature Article

By Jim and Ann Neff

Online Publication: February 2007

For the latest resort updates go to www.caberfaepeaks.com

CABERFAE PEAKS: Cadillac, Michigan

You can pull into the parking lot at Caberfae Peaks on a Saturday morning, buy a lift ticket, ski until 10 p.m., and when you pack it in you won't have to brush a single fleck of glitter from your parka. At a time when some regional resorts are piling on the glitz in a mad scramble to be mini-imitations of Deer Valley, Caberfae has remained constant to its theme – skiing pure and simple. Think “Alta of the Midwest.”

“It’s a skier’s resort, not too fancy but very functional,” says Caberfae regular Bob Medema of Muskegon, MI. “It takes a skier back to the real reason people were drawn to the sport in the first place. When I ski somewhere else, I always wish I was back at Caberfae.” Indeed, Caberfae is still a place where skiers in jeans can tote a brown-bag lunch into the lodge and feel right at home.

Opened in 1938 as Michigan’s first ski area, Caberfae has a rich history. As joint project of the U.S Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps, runs were carved out of the Manistee National Forest and skiers chipped in \$5 contributions until there was enough money for volunteers to construct the first rope tow in 1940. Over its 65 years, “The Fae,” as locals call it, produced generations of skiers, a legacy that has been a point of pride for the resort. Today’s Caberfae Peaks, however, is a far cry from those early days. The current owners, the Meyer family of Cadillac, have remade Caberfae into one of the more delightful places to ski in the Midwest. There have been so many significant improvements that skiers who haven’t recently been to Caberfae wouldn’t recognize the place.

The vibe is starting to spread, though, because readers of SKI magazine voted the resort as the top value in Michigan’s lower peninsula a couple of seasons ago and if anything the resort has put a stranglehold on that designation with recent improvements. Things like ongoing trail upgrades that make favorite runs even better, or like the purchase of a new grooming machine this winter to make the ski surfaces as smooth as silk. And skiers can’t forget that because Caberfae Peaks is the destination ski resort closest to major metro areas in Michigan they’ll spend less time in their car and more time on the slopes than anywhere else in northern Michigan skiing. With 34 runs spread out over 200 acres with 485 feet of vertical, one SKI reader commented that it’s “the best bang for your buck” in the region.

Situated in the heart of the Manistee National Forest, Caberfae treats skiers to gorgeous vistas and an unfettered mountain summit sight line that runs all the way to Lake Michigan 45 miles to the west. Solid terrain has always been the ski area’s stock in

trade, but the development of two new peaks, South and North, now the highest (above sea level) lift-served peaks in the lower peninsula, has given the resort a fresh identity.

South Peak boasts a testy collection of four main expert runs, and Charlie may be the best single ski run in the LP -- long, knee-screaming steep, with no run-on or run-off. Doug Nelson, who has been skiing Caberfae since 1948, raves about South Peak. "It has the best fall line in all of Michigan," claims Nelson. "South makes everyone who skis it a better skier; if you can ski South you can go out West and pretty much handle anything."

Paired with Charlie on one side of South is Liberty, another blue cruiser. Over on the opposite side, called the "dark side" by locals because it's not lighted for night skiing, GG's Ride is a roller coaster along a sweeping ridge and Bullet quick elevator shaft of a drop.

North Peak, actually just a few snowflakes higher than South, is more appealing to intermediate skiers, with a wide-open upper third spilling into the hardwood-lined Number One, Canyon, and Lift Line trails and stretching for a quarter mile. Thigh burners, all.

Beginners can also ski off the top of North Peak along Smiling Irishmen, which feeds into Candy Cane and Gum Drop below and winds for nearly a mile. Another great green, Easy Street, is a trail where newbies can turn wide and let 'em glide.

To round out the action, the legendary Shelter run, once a feared challenge for experts, has been re-contoured into a wonderful blue-green expanse leading down to the day lodge.

Down below, the Blackmer Day Lodge is the largest day lodge in northern Michigan. It joined new buildings for lift ticket sales and rental operations in a revamped base area. With exposed-timber construction and a 2-story stone fireplace at one end, the Blackmer was blended into the former Upper Deck lodge which was built in the 1930s. The result is a rustic ambiance in a modern day lodge where there's plenty of room to spread out and enjoy a leisurely lunch.

Lodging is limited, but the 36-room MacKenzie Lodge at the base of the slopes is still serviceable with comfortable rooms and a full-service restaurant. A recently added outdoor pool and hot tub has given the old hotel a new sparkle.

Caberfae Peaks, with its blue collar ethic and unpretentious attitude, may not be fancy enough for some skiers, but for those who want no nonsense skiing for an honest price it doesn't get much better.

STATISTICS

485 vertical feet, 34 trails, 200 skiable acres, four chairlifts, two surface tows, longest run $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, 100% snowmaking. Ski school, children's programs, night skiing 7 days a week, snowboard and ski rentals, cross country skiing nearby.

WHERE TO DINE

In Cadillac West at the corner of M-55 and M-115 give Lakeside Charlie's a try for a great Friday fish fry. Or take a dinner trip to nearby downtown Cadillac. For gourmet fare, go to Hermann's European Café operated by Austrian chef Hermann Suhs. Dive into a chicken burrito at Maggie's Tavern.

WHERE TO STAY

Lodging information at 800-22-LAKES, www.cadillacmichigan.com. Cadillac has many motel and hotel options.

HOW TO GET THERE

Take the U.S. 131 expressway or I-75 from southern Michigan and turn west on M-55. Caberfae Peaks is 12 miles west of Cadillac.

Information: 231-862-3000; Snow Phone 800-YOU-SKI; www.caberfaepeaks.com.

Sponsored by:



INSTALLS, DE-INSTALLS AND SERVICE FOR AUTOMOBILE HANDS-FREE CELL PHONE COMPONENTS. ON YOUR WAY SKIING, DRIVE SAFELY. TALK HANDS-FREE ON YOUR CELL PHONE. CONTACT US AT WWW.KADWELLCONNECTIONS.COM.

Copyright ©2006-2007 MichiganSkier.com. All rights reserved.

MichiganSkier.com