



Update # 46

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History Matters Detective



Now that the ground is covered with snow, it's time to think about winter. Did you know there have been 9 ski resorts in Otsego County? Back in the 1950s and 1960s – way before the Golf Mecca, we were known as the Ski Capital of Michigan.

The first ski resort to open in Otsego County was The Vanderbilt Ski Club in 1936. It was located on Cherwinski Road and is shown in the postcard below. Notice the car parts that were used for the ski lift – the first in the state of Michigan. In 1939, the group relocated to Gaylord and became the Otsego Club. It was owned by Don McLouth until his death in 1954. Alan Gornick and then his son Keith operated the private ski resort for over 50 years until selling in 2007. It is now owned by Gary Vollmar, renamed Otsego Resort, and open to the public.

History Mystery: When did the Vanderbilt Ski Club close?



Round Top, next to the St. Mary's Cemetery, opened in 1941. It was operated by the Youth Activity Committee and closed in 1965.

Ski Village in Waters operated from 1947 to 1957 by Al Almon and his wife Stevie. Their specialty was teaching beginner skiers and is where the Gaylord High School Ski Team began in the early 1950s. The Almons also owned and operated Mt. Frederic in Crawford County.

Snow Valley on the west side of Otsego Lake operated from 1948 until 1968. It is now the site of Beaver Creek.

The AuSable Ski Ranch opened in 1954. It later became part of Michaywe'.



The Meade family – Ouellette “Lin”, Ruth, and their son Lynn – opened Sylvan Knob in 1954. They started with 5 slopes on 80 acres and expanded to 12 slopes on 102 acres. Sylvan Knob was the first ski resort in Michigan to have a Poma Lift. Sylvan Knob is now Treetops Resort.

In 1956, a ski hill was added to Gay El Rancho Stevens.

Our last ski resort to open was the Pinnacles which later became Tyrolean Hills. It closed in 1988.

Discover ♦ Learn ♦ Share

Otsego County was a pioneer in Michigan's downhill ski industry. It capitalized on the abundant snow and higher elevations that created challenging slopes. Our proximity to population centers such as Detroit made it a convenient trip by car, bus, or Snow Train.

Having so many choices of places to ski, tourists and local residents could find a perfect match for their skill level, interests, and budget. Downhill skiing, like most forms of recreation, adds to people's quality of life.

Our ski history was and continues to be a significant part of our local economy. It lengthens the traditional tourism season, creates jobs, and brings in outside money.

Learning about our ski industry shows how things change over time. The novelty of a sport can wear off or be replaced with other winter recreation such as cross country skiing, snowboarding, or snowmobiling. New technology like snow making or chair lifts creates tough competition.

Share your thoughts on why our ski history matters.