



New York: Skiingest State of Them All

Big Apple to Borscht Belt, with 216 resorts and touring centers, New York is a ski-crazy state.

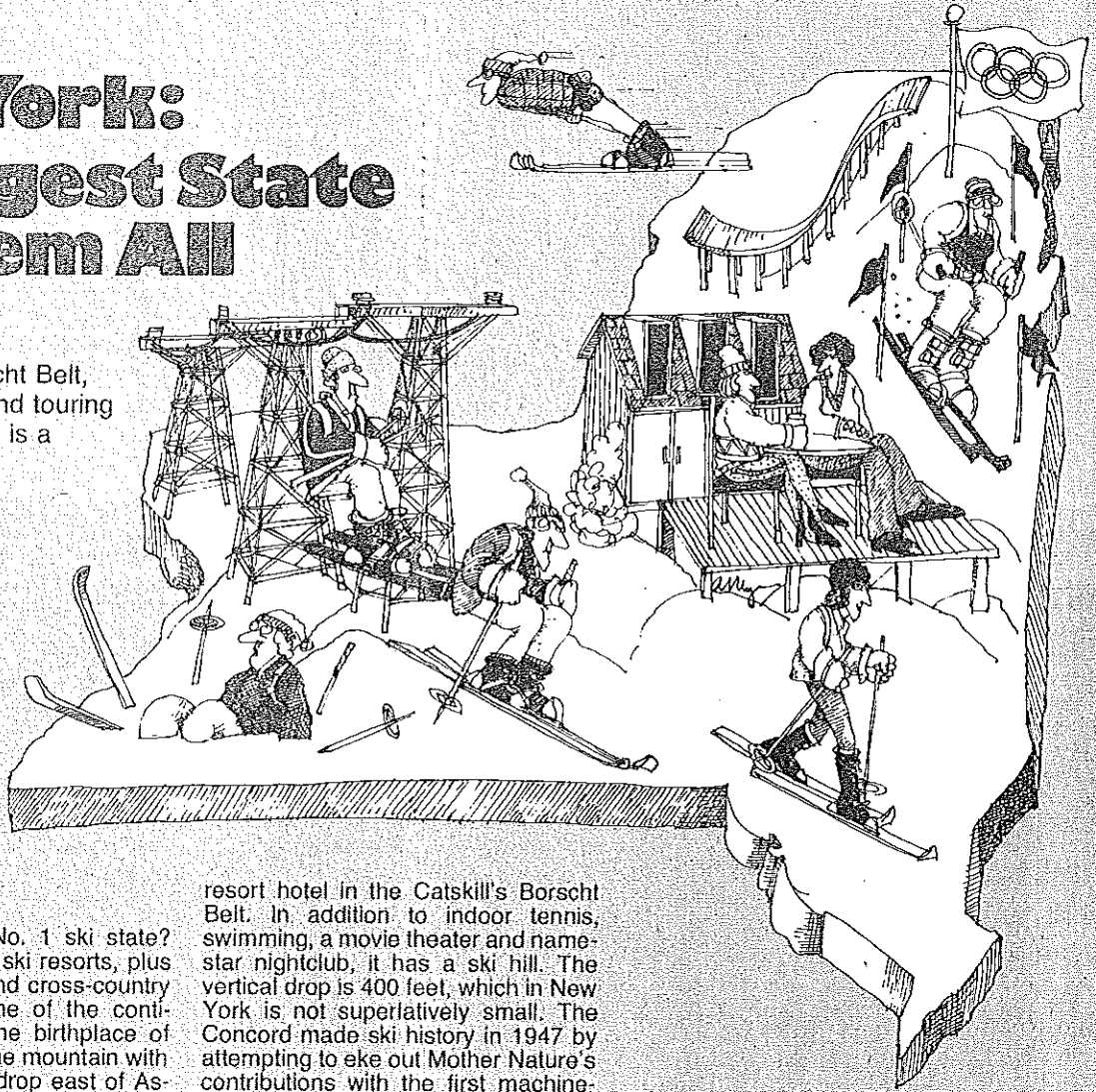


ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW MEYER

BY ABBY RAND

What is America's No. 1 ski state? Hint: It has 87 major ski resorts, plus 129 smaller Alpine and cross-country areas, including some of the continent's oldest. It is the birthplace of snowmaking. It has the mountain with the greatest vertical drop east of Aspen. It has the greatest concentration of skiers, 1.8 million of them, skiing day and night, from October to May. It is a total ski state, with both ski areas and skiers linked by Interstates. It is the first state to make reckless skiing a misdemeanor.

It has produced U.S. Ski Team racers—Hank Kashiwa, Viki Fleckenstein. It is where the first ski trains started from, heading to the Berkshires from Grand Central Station. It is the home of skiing's two grandest old men, Lowell Thomas, pioneer propagator of the skiing faith and W. Averell Harriman, father of Sun Valley and, when governor of New York, father of Whiteface.

If you still have not guessed the answer, I'll give you a final hint: It's been twice selected as the site of the Winter Olympics.

New York, the Empire State, is a state of ski superlatives. Among them: home of America's most unusual ski areas.

Consider the Concord, the lavish

resort hotel in the Catskill's Borscht Belt. In addition to indoor tennis, swimming, a movie theater and name-star nightclub, it has a ski hill. The vertical drop is 400 feet, which in New York is not superlatively small. The Concord made ski history in 1947 by attempting to eke out Mother Nature's contributions with the first machine-made snow.

The next year, the Concord's arch rival, Grossinger's, began making snow. But Grossinger's was no newcomer to skiing. It put in its first slope in 1936. Why? The customers, who had seen such wonders in then-far-away Europe, demanded it. Grossinger's current hill is a modest 900 feet long, but it was laid out after World War II by no less a master than Hannes Schneider. The man who invented modern skiing also invented Grossinger's.

Grossinger's once tried making snow out of plastic by grinding up lots of collar buttons. The Concord stuck to air and water, but tried to improve on nature by dyeing the snow in brilliant patterns of color. People loved it—until they fell down. The subsequent dry cleaning bills were large enough to make the management re-assume nature's color scheme.

Some of New York's pioneer pre-World War II areas have long since been reclaimed by forest. The Mad

Russlan's and Austerlitz are now barely remembered by oldtimers. But some of the pioneer areas are still going strong. Whiteface had a racing trail but no lifts until the Fifties yet Mt. Whitney, just beyond Lake Placid, was operating. There was Silvermine at Bear Mountain... Catamount... Cazenovia Ski Club... Speculator... Highmount. By 1945, Snow Ridge was running rope tows on the western edge of the state. By the time the ski boom erupted in the mid-Fifties, New York State had set up Belleayre and Whiteface, and the Catskills had blossomed with lifts. The Sixties spread skiing throughout the state.

"Vermont and New Hampshire each only have one ski personality," says Bristol Mountain's manager Joe Kohler, president of the Ski Areas of New York, "but New York has five. The Catskills are different from the

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New York: Skiingest State of Them All *continued*

Adirondacks, the Finger Lakes Region, the Western portion and the Capitol District. Snow Ridge in the west is not like Bristol in the Finger Lakes and Bristol is not like Hunter in the Catskills."

Nothing is like Hunter in the Catskills, not even Mammoth Mountain, Calif., to which it is akin because it also is the nearest real mountain for urban hordes.

Don't be fooled by the busloads of beginners nor the three ring circus-pizza-and-pastrami parlor that is the base lodge. Hunter has some great stuff up there, particularly on its west face, and it has a formidable battery of snow guns, kept working night and day by owners Orville and Izzy Slutzky, plus a vertical drop of 1,600 feet, all within two and a half hours from Manhattan.

The state's biggest vertical, the one that cannot be surpassed east of Aspen, is the 3,216 feet held by Whiteface.

New York has three areas owned by the state and run by its Department of Environmental Conservation: Whiteface, Belleayre, and Gore Mountain. Belleayre rivals Hunter as both a serious and crowded mountain. The top of the main mountain is steep and wind-battered; the lower portion is moderate and wind-scarred. Gore Mountain, in the Adirondacks, has the state's only aerial tram, a vertical drop of 2,100 feet and plenty of good intermediate terrain. There is a proposal to launch a new state-owned

touring center at Oswego, but private operators are fighting that plan.

New York also has private-club areas. Windham Mountain in the Catskills includes among its members various Skakels (Ethel Kennedy's family), Murrays and other Eastern bluebloods, plus enough physicians to staff a metropolitan hospital. Cazenovia, near Syracuse, has 200 local families, 400 feet of vertical and operates in a lower key. Membership for a family of four is \$180. It used to be \$10. Members keep their ski gear in lockers just as they keep their golf gear in their golf club lockers.

New York families not only ski together but some own ski areas together. The Wilson family owns Labrador, and locals say they make their real money not from lift tickets but chocolate chip cookies, of which they sell 2,500 on a good Saturday. Dr. L. Miller Harris, a physician, and his family own Snow Ridge. The Hinkley family owns Plattkill, a small but challenging hill in the Catskills. They built it with their own hands, and they began 21 years ago. The Gilbert family and Don Edwards have owned at various times Fahnestock, Silvermine and Sterling Forest. Now they own Catamount.

Catamount should count as two areas. Decades before Heavenly Valley caused a stir by spreading its slopes from California over into Nevada, Catamount skiers were whizzing between Massachusetts and New York. The area has to pay dues

to both Massachusetts and New York area operators' associations as well as taxes in both states. "Our biggest slopes are in Massachusetts," says Sandy Gilbert, "but our best are in New York." The hill has a 1,000-foot vertical, good for the Berkshires, and a lot of horizontal ski space, too.

There used to be a ski area within New York City, on a municipal golf course in Van Cortlandt Park, in the Bronx. It hit several years of weather too warm for snowmaking, and its rope tow has been moved elsewhere. What a shame. It could have been the only American ski area to offer 30 Broadway theaters, Studio 54 and air connections throughout the world.

New Yorkers are their own best customers. Connecticut and New Jersey residents are, as might be expected, also prone to head for New York's hills. Ohio license plates are prominent in parking lots of areas on the western fringe of the state. But New York skiing is also an earner of foreign currency. For years, New York state taxpayers were pouring money into Whiteface, and the largest beneficiaries of the area were Canadians. The area is a two-hour drive from Montreal.

Because the fashion, travel and publishing industries are centered in New York, its residents have a sizable influence on how people elsewhere ski. Among the state's contributions to culture: the over-the-boot ski pants, invented by Ernst Engel, and trotted before the cameras by yet another resident, the then Jacqueline Kennedy. Where she was skiing was not New York.

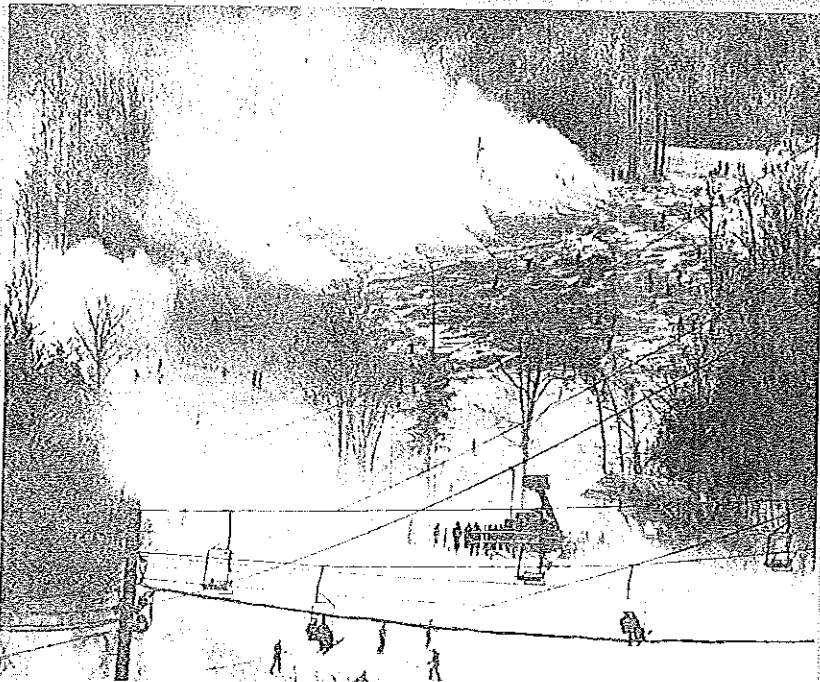
Like many another residents, she was doing her skiing in Vermont.

The New York State ski industry has yet to convince a lot of New Yorkers, let alone outsiders, that all this glorious variety exists.

Last year the New York State Department of Commerce—those wonderful folks who got the country to sing the catchy unmelodic *I Love New York* song—put on the state's first sophisticated ski promotion campaign with a half-million dollar budget and lined up their first-ever array of ski-week deals. This year New York has another solid lineup of ski weeks, covering 150 lodging establishments in 36 resorts.

And this year New York has a nice little TV show going for it—the Olympics. If the millions of eyes glued to television sets airing the events from Lake Placid February 13-24 will note what state this wonderful place is in, and if their feet, skis and pocketbooks follow, the rush will be on.

The variety, color and convenience of New York State skiing might not stay a secret much longer. **SKI**



Hunter Mountain modestly claims to be the "Snowmaking Capital of the World"