



Photo by Lee Ferris

# *Adirondack skiing an economic alternative to out West*

by Matt Amato

On Indian Lake, high in up-state New York's Adirondack mountains, a cloud of snow dust sweeps across an icy tundra. Only a few months ago, throngs of boats, swimmers and day-trippers had lapped its calm water.

The steep, long roads are barren. Shuttered motels and boarded homes give the eerie impression of a civilization in full retreat. In town, dark windows of restaurants and bars advertise reduced days of service, instead of the day's specials.

Conditions couldn't be more perfect for **Pat Cunningham**, however. The Gore Mountain Ski Center's owner is so busy that he had to forsake a favorite local activity last week, deer hunting, to accommodate the rush brought on by the unseasonably early icy blast that left overnight temperatures at

minus 10 degrees.

Last week's numbers were ahead about 30 percent, he enthused, with an eye to the staggering national economy. And we had a tremendous year last year—and remember the [economic] conditions weren't exactly great then either, he pointed out. If the frigid temperatures last, the pre-Christmas boon of a season that runs from Thanksgiving to Easter weekend should continue.

At Gore Mountain's peak, the light swath of fog passes, revealing the sheen of a glimmering slope. The snow is superb in the East, said 69-year-old Cunningham, who started skiing in 1934. The mountains are bigger and the terrain is superb.

The top of the elevation is 3,600 feet, which, while no Everest, represents a challenge. Augmenting these alpine conditions is a specially placed pipe into the mountain

rock, used to position snow deposits and slicken the slope.

For more than 30 years the apparatus has been in place; however, the mountain's status as a New England favorite took shape in 1932. The Winter Olympics had just been hosted in nearby Lake Placid and, some years later, Gore Mountain modelled its slope on the one used in the games.

Today, it's a viable economic alternative to heading out West, with amenities rivaling those of competitors. Daily adult tickets, which are required for access to the slope, typically run \$70. However, family reductions are applicable for longer blocks of time. Equipment rentals, available from Cunningham's shop, can also offset ticket prices.

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If you've never skied, you'll need to enroll in a school, and it'll be about a week before you can go alone, Cunningham said. "We can take care of everything; all you need to provide are clothes and mittens," he said.

Accommodation, in spite of the weather, is also abundant in North Creek, which services Gore Mountain.

And the town, like Cunningham's ski shop, represents the potential commercial future of an area that has endured several decades of economic hardship. The recent opening of a tapas-style restaurant, Bar Vino, complete with a wine cellar and exotic dishes—ranging from frog legs to goat cheese salad—indicates a community catering to more affluent tastes afforded by skiing dollars. It's a far cry from the staple of fried liver and onion served down the road at the Oak Barrel; it's the best cold-weather seller. "We have a saying here at the shop," said Cunningham, who runs an rafting business in the summer. "Snow or rain, it's good for business."

### Getting there:

Delta Air Lines runs a direct service from Atlanta to Albany. North Creek is roughly 90 minutes from Albany Airport, where you'll find a number of car rental companies.

*Places to stay:* North Creek has a number of smaller hotels, with most motels having shut for winter. Friends Lake Inn, which has seasonal specials, is the best local example of an Adirondack country inn. A number of "snow birds," locals who head for warmer weather during winter, also rent their homes out.

*Places to eat:* Bar Vino, a recently opened tapas bar in North Creek, has swiftly become a hit. Its dishes are plentiful, well-prepared, and, in relation to other nightspots, it is a good deal more lively.

