

Backstory: Ski Industry



If you're a North Carolinian or just a visitor to the high country, you likely have fond memories at Appalachian Ski Mountain. The ski resort is one of six in North Carolina and boasts a total of 12 slopes and trails (three beginner, six intermediate, and three advanced), a vertical drop of 365 feet, 27 acres of skiable land, and a peak elevation of 4,000 feet. Skiing at Appalachian is a favorite pastime of locals, students of nearby Appalachian State

University, and tourists alike. Appalachian Ski Mountain is home to one of the most highly regarded terrain parks on the United States' East Coast making it a popular destination for both skiers and snowboarders. The ski resort is also home to one of only eleven Burton Profession Parks in all of North America. (Above image and image to right both via AppSkiMtn.com)

Before the Blue Ridge Mountains, and Blowing Rock specifically, became a winter tourist destination, the area was long regarded as a summer hotspot for those wishing to escape the heat and enjoy the scenic views the area has to offer. This all changed when Bill Thalheimer founded the Blowing Rock Ski Lodge (now known as Appalachian Ski Mountain) in 1962. The ski resort was the very first in the Blowing Rock area and only the second in the whole of North Carolina (Cataloochee Ski Area of Maggie Valley



opened just a year prior). The popularity of the slopes drew in visitors near and wide and before long Blowing Rock transformed into not only a place to summer, but a year-round destination. Hotels, restaurants, and shops had enormous growth in the Blowing Rock area and still continue to contribute significantly to the town's

economy. The ski industry as a whole boosted not only Blowing Rock's economy but also that of the state with the North Carolina ski industry reportedly bringing in \$228 million during the 2019 - 2020 season. (Above image via AppSkiMtn.com)

Throughout the decades, Appalachian Ski Mountain has evolved and expanded into the first class facility we all know it as today. In 1968, Grady Moretz and a group of four other partners purchased the Blowing Rock Ski Lodge from Northwestern Bank (having gone into foreclosure) and began the work of upgrading the facilities and improving what they knew could be a beautiful resort. The following year the rope tow that skiers used to reach the slopes was replaced with a double chairlift and in 1972 a second chairlift was installed. Numerous additions were made to Appalachian Ski Mountain during these early years including a larger ski shop, an expanded restaurant and gift shop, more office space, new slopes, a first-aid room, as well as a larger



reservoir for making snow. In the winter of 1969 - 1970, Jim Cottrell (head of the National Ski Patrol and a ski instructor at App) and Jack Lester (a former show business promoter) founded the French-Swiss Ski College at Appalachian Ski Mountain. This college-accredited ski program would go on to teach

countless pupils how to properly ski using elements honed from both the French Technique and the Swiss Technique and continues to train new skiers in the present day!

(Above images and image to right all via @appalachianskimtn on Instagram)

The 1980s and 1990s saw even more expansion and more additions to the ski resort some of which included: adding 6,000 square feet to the ski resort lodge, installing a Doppelmayr quad chairlift, a replacement of the 1972 chairlift, the addition of the Appaljack slope for intermediate



users, and the installation of the outdoor ice skating rink and rental building. During this time the Moretz family became the sole owners of the resort.

Appalachian Ski Mountain continues to grow well in the 21st century and has seen millions of individuals ski and snowboard down its snowy slopes. The ski industry in North Carolina would look quite different without this Blowing Rock landmark and Blowing Rock without the ski industry just wouldn't be Blowing Rock.



(Above image via [@appalachianskimtn](#) on Instagram)