

# A Touch of Class

## Mount Washington Resort offers winter fun in a turn-of-the-century hotel

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 GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

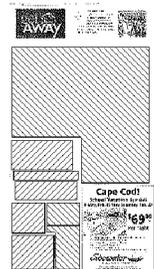
**B**RETTON WOODS, N.H. – Make no mistake. The impeccably dressed and inscrutably accented maitre d' of The Dining Room at the Mount Washington Hotel will turn away gentlemen who arrive for dinner sans jacket and tie.

After a momentary flush of embarrassment for one such man, my dining companion and I decided we were glad The Dining Room stood on its traditions. We had taken care to bring "evening clothes" (not normally part of our travel accessories), and would have been miffed to find we could've gotten away with less.

The hotel, part of the Mount Washington Resort at Bretton Woods, N.H., and especially The Dining Room, tips a top hat to its former life as a turn-of-the-century mountain refuge for the moneyed and leisured classes. Sitting on stiff-backed chairs under crystal chandeliers, as black-tied servers dodged potted palms and a three-piece orchestra played a staid version of "Summertime," I felt a little like I was dining aboard the Titanic.

But those weren't icebergs outside the panoramic windows, they were the Presidential Range - part of New Hampshire's White Mountains - one of the premier recreation areas in the Northeast.

The main attraction of the Mount Washington Resort is the mountains, and they have been since the hotel opened in 1902. In those days, it was exclusively a summer retreat, attracting such notables as President Woodrow



Wilson, Thomas Edison and Babe Ruth.

But since the hotel was winterized in 1998-1999 (a little too well - we often broke a sweat walking back from breakfast) it has catered as well to skiers, snowshoers and snowmobilers.

The resort incorporates Bretton Woods, the largest ski area in New Hampshire, with 434 acres of ski and snowboard terrain. There is also a Nordic center with 100 kilometers (about 62 miles) of trails, a skating pond and a tubing hill.

Guests can arrange to go dog sledding, snowmobiling or take a sleigh ride through a setting so beautiful it looks a lot like a 3-D version of a Currier & Ives print.

In addition to the iconic 200-room Mount Washington Hotel - more chateau than chalet with its MOUNT WASHINGTON, *Page C8*

**MOUNT WASHINGTON, *From C7***

red-roofed Spanish Renaissance architecture - the resort accommodates guests in The Lodge, a motel near the slopes; the Bretton Arms Inn, a Victorian bed-and-breakfast; and a clutch of townhouses for bigger families with bigger budgets.

Despite the nighttime dress code, it's hardly a stuffy place. After dinner my companion and I headed downstairs at the hotel for a pinot noir-fueled grudge match of air hockey in the hotel arcade. Resort-wear during the day in the winter is mostly snow pants or jeans and fleece.

And what stands out, wherever you go on the resort, is the vast number of kids. Even amid the Gilded Age veneer of the hotel, Mount Washington Resort seems to be most simpatico with families.

At breakfast in the hotel, staff put out a kid-size table of mini-cereals and Froot Loop/marshmallow bars for the young and sweet-toothed set.

A popular activity at the resort is the tubing hill. For \$5, you get an enormous inflated doughnut that you drag to the top of a slope and ride down in a giddy whirl.

The downhill ski slopes "make everyone feel like they're a good skier," said Chris Ellms, general manager of Bretton Woods, and that attracts a particular kind of crowd. Bretton Woods prides itself on such top-rated programs as Hobbit Ski and Snow-

board School, in the Kids' Alpine Club, and weekly children's apres ski parties. And while there are a fair number of black diamond and double-black diamond trails among the 101 slopes, derring-do just isn't the specialty.

"We can take care of families beautifully. Can we take care of the 25-year-old hot-shot? Probably not," Ellms said.

James and Heather Matarazzo and their five kids come up to Bretton Woods from Alton Bay, N.H., to treat themselves, even though they have a ski resort in their "backyard." The long, sloping trails mean everyone in the troupe can have a good time, James Matarazzo said. And the snow at Mount Washington is nearly always plentiful, he added.

The weather was beautiful the weekend we were there. But my companion and I don't downhill ski, and a week of warm temperatures and rain had given the cross-country trails a slick crust of ice that scared us off schussing. Instead, we lashed snowshoes to our boots and set off across the golf course in search of wilderness solitude.

We found it only 10 minutes away from the hotel, along the Ammonoosuc River. The only sound we could hear, apart from the crunch of crampons on crusty snow, was the water gurgling against ice floes. Well, OK, and also our own jabbering about the aloof beauty of the place, and how we should call in sick to work on Monday and try to go dog sledding.

## DISCOVERING THE WHITES

You could stay on the Mount Washington Resort property and still get your fill of rugged mountain beauty. But then you'd miss the northern New Hampshire scenery that has managed to become iconic without turning cliché.

Near the resort the coal-fired Mount Washington Cog Railway takes passengers on abbreviated one-hour winter runs to Upper Waumbek at 4,000 feet. In the summer, the rail goes right up to the summit, and is a popular area attraction (it is not affiliated with the resort).

The Old Man of the Mountain rock formation shuffled off this mortal coil and left Franconia Notch (the ledges that collectively looked like a profile of a face collapsed in 2003). But the notch itself is still distractingly beautiful. You'll pass through the area on I-93 on your way to or from the White Mountains - avail yourself of one of the scenic

turnoffs.

For the quintessential New Hampshire village experience, head west on Rte. 302 from the Mount Washington Resort for about a half-hour. Littleton is a pretty little town (get it?) with red brick buildings and a healthy respect for nostalgia. Boutiques and independent bookstores share the main drag with Jax Jr., a two-screen movie theater with roots dating back to the 1920s, and Chutter's General Store, which boasts the "World's Longest Candy Counter."

In nearby Sugar Hill, check out Harman's Cheese & Country Store on Rte. 117 and try a bit of their cheddar (closed Sundays in winter).

Covered bridges are another attraction - there are dozens in the White Mountains region. Find a listing and other New Hampshire travel advice at [www.visit-newhampshire.com](http://www.visit-newhampshire.com).

IF YOU GO...

**STAYING THERE:** A standard room at The Mount Washington Hotel ([www.brettonwoods.com](http://www.brettonwoods.com); 800-314-1752) on a winter weekend is from about \$279 per night for a family of four, but there are several packages available that combine meals and skiing. Summer rates are higher - with summertime attractions including golf, tennis and hiking. If your room is on the back of the hotel, be aware construction is under way on a 25,000-square-foot spa expected to open in about a year. Ski-and-stay packages at The Lodge are from \$99 per person, per night, based on double occupancy.

**DINING THERE:** Main courses in The Dining Room at The Mount Washington Hotel range from \$23-\$33. The wine list is extensive and runs from moderately priced to exorbitant.

**SKIING THERE:** A full-day weekend lift ticket at Bretton Woods ([www.brettonwoods.com](http://www.brettonwoods.com)) is \$69 for adults, \$42 for teens, \$31 for kids 5-12. A Nordic trail pass is \$14 for adults, \$11 for teens and \$7 for kids. Kids 4 and under ski free with a paying adult.



**A father and son take in an afternoon of skiing at Bretton Woods. The mountain has been recognized as providing an especially family-friendly skiing experience.**



GHNS PHOTO BY JIM WALKER

**Take off for an afternoon of cross-country skiing from the Mount Washington Resort's Nordic Center. Skis and boots are available to rent, and snowshoeing is also an option along the miles of trails around the resort.**



**Often cloud-covered in the winter, on a clear day above The Mount Washington Hotel you can see the weather station atop Mount Washington. Below, couples share a laugh during breakfast at The Mount Washington Hotel.**  
GHSN PHOTOS BY JIM WALKER



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