



# This Little Known Resort Is One of Skiing's Oldest (And Most Innovative)

If you call yourself a ski history buff, you deserve a pilgrimage to this mountain town.



Jamie Aranoff



I'm a huge history buff, and when it comes to ski history I'm a total nerd. So when I discovered I could ski at one of the nation's oldest resorts on a weekend trip from New York City, I wasted no time packing my bags.

A brief history of our beloved sport in the U.S. begins in the mid-1830s when Norwegian immigrants brought over snowshoe-like variants for traversing frigid landscapes. Over the years, the sport evolved significantly, with the first U.S. ski resorts emerging in the 1930s.



You're likely familiar with Sun Valley, the first U.S. destination ski resort, and other historic destinations like Alta and Stowe. But hidden away in the woods of Vermont is a ski resort whose history stretches back just as far — and flies much further under the radar.

## **Meet Saskadena Six**

Nestled in the heart of central Vermont, Saskadena Six has been a cherished destination for downhill skiers for 89 years. Formerly known as “Suicide Six,” this historic resort is conveniently located less than 10 minutes from the picturesque New England town of Woodstock. You won't find Woodstock by accident, but at two-and-a-half hours from Boston and five hours from New York City, the town is well within striking distance of even the most carsick weekend warrior.

You may not be familiar with the resort's new name, [Saskadena Six](#), which is the product of a 2022 name change. The new name was carefully chosen to honor the region's Indigenous heritage. In the Coosuk-Abenaki Nation language, "Saskadena" translates to "the standing mountain," reflecting the area's deep cultural significance.

The "Six" is a reference to the local topography. Back in the region's early days, the locals kept track of the crumpled peaks by bestowing each mountain with a number. The sixth peak was widely considered the steepest and most daunting, leading locals to say it would be "suicidal" to ski down.

But skiing *down* the fearsome Peak Six is only half the story; Saskadena's history as a ski destination begins with the journey back *up* the mountain.

The story begins in 1934, when a rope tow—the first in the U.S.— was installed on the land of local townsman Clinton Gilbert. By 1936, word of Gilbert's invention had spread to the region's skiers, namely former Dartmouth College ski instructor [Wallace "Bunny" Bertram](#), who figured the new technology might turn Peak Six from a fool's errand into a ski paradise. Bertram was right. The rope tow was installed on Peak Six in '36, and soon the "suicide" peak was a sensation.

For 18 years, the resort operated with a single rope tow to carry skiers up to Peak Six. However, by 1954, the aging equipment was no longer sufficient to meet the growing demand. Bertram responded by purchasing a \$40,000 Poma lift (a modern-day button lift) increasing the uphill capacity to 950 skiers per hour. This pivotal upgrade marked the beginning of a new era for Saskadena Six.

As part of this new chapter, the resort welcomed a new owner in 1961: Laurance Rockefeller, who was captivated by the local charm. Under his ownership, significant upgrades were made, including the installation of new chairlifts and a j-bar surface lift. Today, the resort is owned by [The Woodstock Foundation](#), a public charity established by the Rockefeller family in 1986, ensuring the continuation of its legacy and commitment to the community.



And Skadadena's legacy in the ski world runs much deeper than rope tows. A year after opening, the ski area hosted its inaugural ski race, the Fisk Trophy Race, an event that continues to this day ([this year's competition was held on Feb.2.](#)). The Fisk is now the longest-running ski race in the United States, and has been a launching pad for many collegiate racers with Olympic aspirations, including Jimmy Cochran and Chip Knight. For 88 years, this storied race has captured the attention of the ski world.

At the summit of Quad Chair 1, the resort's primary lift, you'll encounter an old shack—the original starting gate for the Fisk Race. A historical site marker stands nearby, offering insight into the resort's legacy. From there, continue your journey through time (and test your skills) by descending the official Fisk run, skiing from “Mid-Face” to “The Face.”



The original Fisk Trophy Race ski gate can still be visited today. (Photo: Courtesy of Jamie Aranoff)

## Skiing Through History

With only three lifts (including the beginner area), 28 trails, and a total vertical drop of 650 feet, the resort is modest in scale by modern standards. But what Saskadena lacks in terrain it makes up for in old-school charm. Here, you can be assured of a serene atmosphere, with minimal crowds and no lift lines to disrupt the tranquil ambiance.



Saskadena Six hasn't changed much since it opened, and that's a good thing. (Photo: Courtesy of Saskadena Six )

When you're ready to escape the brisk Vermont air, step into the inviting lodge at the base of the mountain. Inside, history is woven into every corner, including a small museum located near the ticket area. The lodge walls are adorned with hundreds of black-and-white photographs, along with authentic signage from the resort's early days. Many of the skiers featured in these images still grace the slopes today, Matthew Closter, the ski area's Director of Golf and Ski Operations tells me.



After exploring the ski resort I drove 10 minutes down the road to Woodstock. [The Woodstock Inn](#), also owned and operated by the same foundation behind Saskadena Six, was next on my must-see list.

A quintessential example of New England elegance, the Inn boasts a stately front lawn and classic Federal architecture. Once a favored retreat for the Rockefeller family, it exudes timeless appeal. Even if you're not staying overnight, be sure to stop in to unwind by the grand fireplace, enjoy a bite to eat, or indulge in an après-ski cocktail (or delicious mocktail) at either the [Red Rooster](#) or [Richardson's Tavern](#) (I highly recommend the Rooster Salad, with homemade maple cider vinaigrette, available at both restaurants).



The fireplace is the star of the show in winter. (Photo: Courtesy of Jamie Aranoff)

While you await your table, stroll through the Inn, where you can admire artifacts from the Rockefeller family and explore the mini in-house museum.

Since the ski resort and inn are both operated by The Woodstock Foundation, you can [book a ski package](#) including lodging and lift tickets. There are also plenty of activities for the whole family, including a spa, Nordic ski facility, and sports facility to round out a weekend trip. Or do as the Rockefellers did, and hold up in the study with a good book, preferably about nature's splendors.

With a storied past, charming atmosphere, and proximity to the picturesque town of Woodstock, Skadena Six is a destination that invites guests to reflect and adventure. Whether you're skiing down historic slopes, exploring the lodge's collection of memories, or warming up by a fireside in the nearby Woodstock Inn, Skadena Six encapsulates the essence of skiing's early days. The resort is a must-visit for any history enthusiast seeking to connect with the roots of the sport.

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