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## GRAND SLAM OF EXPERT SKI TRAILS

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View from Mount Mansfield at the Stowe Mountain Resort toward Smugglers' Notch and Spruce Peak. Photo courtesy of Stowe Mountain Resort.



# THE SKIING

## 4 ICONIC TRAILS TO TEST YOUR TALENT ON THE SLOPES



KILLINGTON



STOWE



CANNON





BY LISA BALLARD

# GRAND SLAM!



TUCKERMAN RAVINE

**F**or some, skiing a famous, steep, gnarly trail, usually in full view of the chairlift, is a test of ability. Make it down with a modicum of grace, and you're officially an expert skier or snowboarder. The pros flow down those iconic black diamonds, linking turn after turn, making it look easy.

Every ski resort in Vermont and New Hampshire has a trademark run, and now with multi-mountain passes like Epic, Mountain Collective, and Ikon as well as numerous regional-pass partnerships, you can take on the challenge not just once but at a different place each weekend, especially from the Upper Valley, which is uniquely located on the Vermont–New Hampshire border. But which trails are the true tests? After sampling every major ski area in the region, here's my completely subjective Grand Slam of expert ski trails. Ski 'em if you dare!





Left, top and bottom: A powder day can make the moguls more forgiving.

Top right: Outer Limits at Killington is one of the toughest mogul runs in New England. Photos courtesy of Killington Resort.

## 1 Killington, Vermont

In the early 1980s as a member of the Dartmouth Ski Team and before the Dartmouth Skiway had machine-made snow, I traveled to Killington several times each week to train. Once in a while, we would have a free-skiing day away from gates, and we'd head to the Bear Mountain side of the resort to ski Outer Limits, which did indeed push skiers to the outer limits of their abilities. The long, steep trail was inevitably covered with glazed moguls the size of VW bugs.

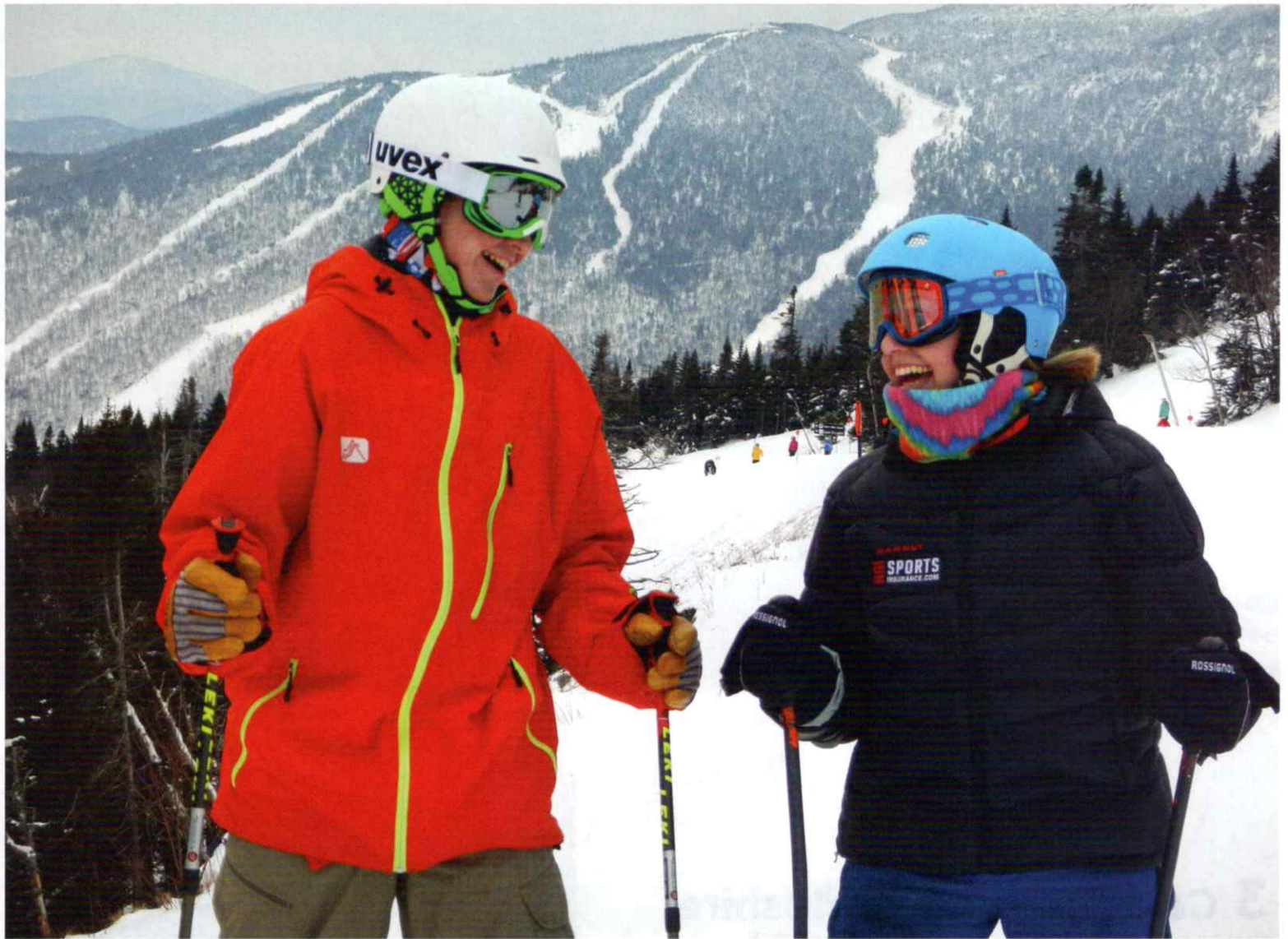
A decade later, I cohosted a series of television tips with Donna Weinbrecht shortly after she became the first Olympic champion in mogul skiing. We shot the tips on Outer Limits. Fittingly, Donna had perfected her bump skiing on that unforgiving run.

"It's not about absorbing the mogul as you ski over it," she told me. "It's about moving forward and extending on the downhill side of it."

When the segment aired, it was all Donna—and deservedly so. Though I took her advice to heart and have since become a more proficient bump skier, Outer Limits still tests my mettle on the moguls. Devil's Fiddle may have a reputation as Killington's nastiest bump run, but I give Outer Limits the nod for the Grand Slam. It's the big show.

**Pass:** Ikon  
[www.killington.com](http://www.killington.com)





Top: The challenging “Front Four” behind skiers at the Stowe Mountain Resorts. Photo by Lisa Ballard.

Bottom: The author demonstrates how to ski a rugged, super-steep slope. See page 40. Photo by Jack Ballard.

## 2 Stowe Mountain Resort, Vermont

Stowe’s “Front Four”—Goat, Starr, Liftline, and National—have historically called to New England’s best skiers. If you can ski these, you can ski anything anywhere. I vote for Goat as the one trail that awards extra credit to the real experts. Upper Goat is narrow with an aggressive, canted fall line that pulls you left, even though there’s little room around the inevitable, unforgiving bumps to counter it.

The main part of the trail offers little natural rhythm as you dive over its snow-covered ledges, around boulders, and down frozen streambeds. The trail rewards agility, strength, and stamina, not to mention well-tuned skis. Goat is the antithesis of modern, wide trails manicured to delight skiers. It’s a narrow, 36-degree piste cut in an era when terrain dictated the trail, not vice versa, and a true test of one’s skiing or snowboarding prowess.

**Pass:** Epic

[www.stowe.com](http://www.stowe.com)





Top: A skier catches air on DJ's at Cannon Mountain.

Right: Heading down DJ's as the Cannon tram approaches overhead. Photos courtesy of Cannon Mountain.



### 3 Cannon, New Hampshire

Cannon celebrates its 80th anniversary this winter. DJ's Tramline, arguably the most challenging in-bounds trail in New Hampshire, dates back to the ski area's historic beginnings, but it wasn't cut as a ski trail. It was cleared for the original tram, which is why it's the most direct route from the top of the mountain to the tram base. It made the trail map in 1980—kind of. It was a way down for the most daring—those who cared more about the challenge and less about preserving their skis. It's steep, rocky, narrow, and once you're on it, you're committed.

"DJ's is an in-bounds boulder field, which makes it unique," says my son, Parker Densmore, who skied it every chance he got during his four years on the Holderness Ski Team. "If you get air, you can't screw up. You get tons of adrenaline at the top, then it's super playful at the bottom."

DJ's descends in waves down a series of cliffy steps. It needs lots of natural snow to cover up the boulders, so it's not always open. Watch the weather. This trail is the least predictable if you're chasing a skiing Grand Slam in Vermont and New Hampshire.

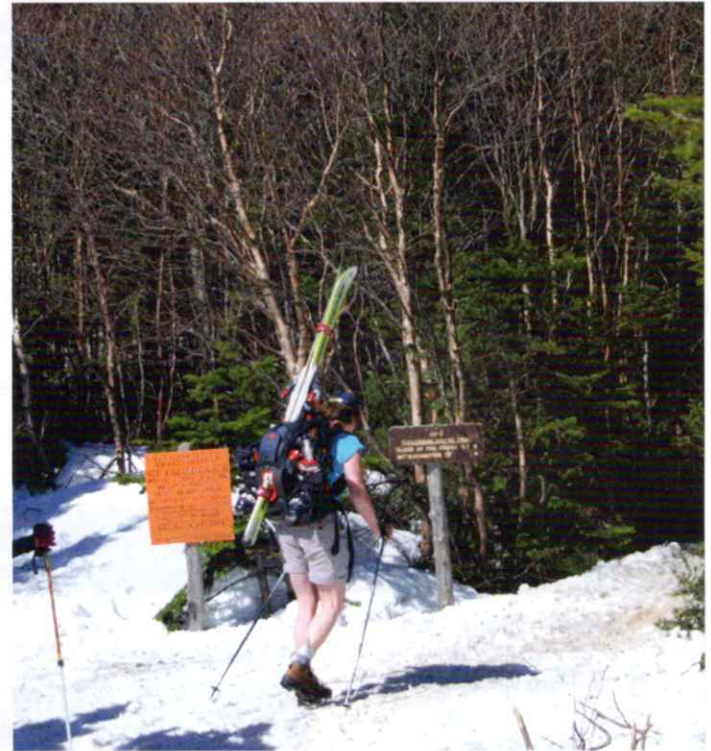
**Pass:** White Mountain Super Pass  
[www.cannonmt.com](http://www.cannonmt.com)





Left: Skiers ascending the headwall in Tuckerman Ravine on Mount Washington. Photo by Lisa Ballard.

Right: A skier at the trailhead in Pinkham Notch, heading to Tuckerman Ravine. Photo by Lisa Ballard.



## 4 Tuckerman Ravine, New Hampshire

It's technically not a ski area because there's no lift, but I would be remiss to exclude the headwall in Mount Washington's Tuckerman Ravine among my votes for inclusion in the Grand Slam. Skiing "Tuckerman's" is a rite of passage. Thousands of skiers make the two-mile trek to the base of this glacial cirque each year. Most hang out on the "lunch rocks," spectating. For your first turns, you have to hike up the 50-degree, 600-foot headwall, an exercise that is not for the weak of heart or leg. Those who do often continue climbing into the snowfields above it for a longer run. From the snowfields, as you approach the lip of the headwall, the only thing you can see is the valley floor.

The first time I skied Tuckerman's was during my freshman spring at Dartmouth College. After climbing

the headwall, the leader of my small group of friends, a senior and a longtime skier there, announced, "Rule number one about skiing Tuckerman Ravine—don't fall!"

With that, he pushed over the lip, caught his uphill ski on the cornice, and tumbled to the bottom. The beer-swilling gallery on the lunch rocks gave him a standing ovation. Luckily he was unhurt. People have died there. Perhaps the risk is part of the allure. For me, the challenge of skiing well on the toughest slopes and that feeling of delight and satisfaction afterwards are why I love it.

**Pass:** None

**Snow report:** [www.mountwashingtonavalanchecenter.org](http://www.mountwashingtonavalanchecenter.org)

**General trail info:** [www.outdoors.org](http://www.outdoors.org)  
(Appalachian Mountain Club)



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## How to Ski the Black Diamonds Better

Want to ski better on the black diamonds? These five tips will help:

- 1.** Tune your skis! The steeps don't hold the snow as well. You'll have more control on firm conditions if your edges are sharp.
- 2.** Look ahead! If you look down the hill instead of at your ski tips, you'll have more time to anticipate your next few moves, which will help you link your turns.
- 3.** Keep your shoulders facing down the hill! If your shoulders rotate across the hill, your skis will flatten, lessening edge grip.
- 4.** Lean down the hill! The steeper it is, the more you need to lean down the hill, out over your downhill ski. Lean in and your feet are more likely to slide out from under you.
- 5.** Reach down the hill with every pole plant! Reaching down the hill (instead of toward your ski tips) helps draw you into the next turn more easily and gives you a pivot point if you need to do a hop turn in a particularly tight spot. **1**

