

# Winter Fest and Wine Tasting in Shenandoah County

What do you get when you create a 60-foot-long, chest-deep pond at the bottom of a ski slope, deck out a hundred skiers and snowboarders like fairy princesses and vegetables, then shoot them down the slope?

You get the highlight of Bryce Resort's Winter Fest, the wildly popular Pond Skimming event. Athletes, both skilled and not, drink ice punch when they splash into the melt pool at the end of their runs. Hoop skirts, Batman capes, pumpkin outfits — they all take a beating as their wearers splatter into the bath.

Anyone can enter the pond-skimming contest, and occasionally some adept skier does emerge on the opposite shore with a dry torso, but that's rare. The roaring crowd especially enjoys the ones who don't.

This is the way Bryce Resort, hunched against the Alleghenies near Mt. Jackson, says good-bye to Old Man Winter. The celebration begins on March 6 with a scrumptious pancake breakfast, followed by a parade of skiers and shredders sporting costumes in their initial dry splendor.

Then DJ Doug takes the stage, and everyone's dancing in their boots on the snow. Folks of all ages, most tricked out in outlandish costumes, enjoy games, races, and contests. The revelry includes a rail jam competition with freestyle skiers and snow boarders of all ages grinding and jumping through a custom rail garden.

The afternoon culminates in the pond-skimming romp — an exciting twist on the polar bear dip. After that, it's time to kick back in front of a roaring fire in the lodge for some après-ski refreshment.

Main activities run from 10:00am to 3:00pm. Spectators are free; skiers and boarders pay regular lift fees.

## Sipping a Toast to St. Patrick

You don't have to be drinking beer to toast St. Patrick. On the following weekend, folks at Shenandoah County wineries raise their glasses to St. Pat with wines of red and white (never green; no wine is served before its time).

At North Mountain Vineyards near Maurertown, March 13 is Leprechaun Day. All day long, revelers can listen or jig to live Irish music by Chatham Street Duo and sip savory green pea soup in between swigs of North Mountain's plummy cabernet and berry-tinged claret. Festivities run from 11:00am to 5:00pm. Children and adults vie for the pot of gold in a leprechaun hunt, as well as other fun competitions.

The six varietals grown here flourish in the dry mountain valley; they include Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Vidal Blanc, Chambourcin, and Traminette.

Shenandoah County's other wineries are also open for tastings. Besides North Mountain, the northernmost, there are Shenandoah Vineyards and Wolf Gap Vineyard and Winery, both a few minutes south off Interstate 81 near Edinburg. Cave Ridge Vineyard's award-winning wines are just a few more miles south between Edinburg and Mt. Jackson.

Shenandoah Vineyards, the elder statesman of western Virginia wineries, hosts wine and cheese pairings most weekends in March. Housed in a red barn dating to the Civil War, the winery sits atop an old stone foundation which serves as the wine cellar. An upper-story deck adjoining the barn offers a sweeping view of the mountains.

The Wolf Gap inventory currently includes vintage bottles of rich reds including Cabernet Franc, Chambourcin, Petit Verdot, and Syrah. The white wine lineup includes Chardonnay, Viognier, Riesling, and Traminette. "Wolf Gap Willie" boasts his new Chambourcin-Cab Franc blend may be the best Bordeaux-style blend you have ever tasted.

Cave Ridge Vineyards grows Viognier, Traminette, Riesling, Syrah, and Chambourcin. All wine events at this earnest new winery involve some level of education about growing grapes. "We have about 10,000 vines and each one gets touched at least seven times during the year," says owner Randy Phillips. Only grapes raised in his vineyards go into Cave Ridge wines.

By Su Clauson-Wicker

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 Bryce Resort: 800-821-1444, [www.bryceresort.com](http://www.bryceresort.com)  
 Cave Ridge Vineyard: 540-477-2585, [www.caveridge.com](http://www.caveridge.com)  
 North Mountain Vineyard: 540-436-9463, [www.northmountainvineyard.com](http://www.northmountainvineyard.com)  
 Shenandoah Vineyards: 540-984-8699, [www.shentel.net/shenvine](http://www.shentel.net/shenvine)  
 Wolf Gap Vineyard: 540-984-3306, <http://wolfgapvineyard.com>

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