STATEWIDE:
Ski jump complex upgrades launch year-round training for Alaskans

ANCHORAGE:
New season, new opportunities

FAIRBANKS:
Prepping the trails for national events, local fun

PHOTOS BY ANDRE C. HORTON
Low on snow, high on enthusiasm: NSAA and its ski family glide into new season

Message from the NSAA staff and board of directors

It’s that time of year when the weather starts shifting, we start wondering if the kids’ ski boots still fit and we try to remember where we last put the busted pole we meant to get fixed. But there’s no off-season for the NSAA board of directors and staff who have been busy this summer prepping for the ski season. All indicators point the same direction: It’s going to be a great season!

Two tough seasons didn’t go unnoticed but the response and encouragement from our skiing family was overwhelming. Tough times bring our community closer. During these low-snow seasons, we were reminded how hugely committed to the NSAA’s mission our members and loyal trail supporters are. Recognizing the financial and mental challenges, many sent in additional donations or yummy cookies at the end of last season – both were equally appreciated, especially the ones with chocolate. Thank you. NSAA may be challenged financially, but our community support has never been stronger than it is right now.

Unable to control the temperatures or the precipitation, we have narrowed down to one goal this year: tell our story better to everyone! You can help us continue that.

Many trail users have no idea that NSAA is responsible for the year-round maintenance of much of Anchorage’s soft surface trails. Some assume tax dollars go towards the work NSAA does for the community, but that is not the case. Encourage your friends and neighbors to buy a trail pin to ensure quality trails for all four seasons. It’s easy and affordable. Share the membership options at www.anchoragenordicski.com/membership. We need all trail users to support our local trails!

Our program and event volunteer directors are busy preparing for the new season. There is a lot of great information on each in this issue of the Alaska Nordic Skier, as well as on our new-look website: www.anchoragenordicski.com. Our fellow ski clubs from all around the state also have a lot to share for the upcoming season. We all are looking forward to seeing many smiling faces on the trails this season!

Support healthy lifestyles, Anchorage’s trails and NSAA with a membership

The Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage membership season is from October 1- September 30. If you use the Anchorage trails, please contribute today and join our ski family of trail supporters. We rely on generous support from trail users like you!

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:
1. Your donation ensures that NSAA can continue maintaining and grooming over 150 kilometers of trails, as well as make snow at Kincaid Park.
2. Your donation is 100 percent tax-deductible!
3. You’ll stay connected to the Nordic ski community.
4. You’ll receive a decal to proudly display on your car, as well as additional small gifts to show your support of NSAA!

Trail memberships start at just $35. Get your membership today at www.anchoragenordicski.com/membership or use the form in this issue of the Alaska Nordic Skier. For information about gifts by bequest, planned gift, retirement assets, appreciated securities or other legacy giving, please contact the NSAA Office at 276-7699.

Junior Nordic registration begins Oct. 1; session begins Nov. 14

Anchorage Junior Nordic League is Alaska’s largest and longest-running cross-country program for kids. This season’s registration opened on October 1. Remember, some locations fill up fast so sign-up today at www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/nsaa-ski-swap.

First session: November 14, 2016-January 7, 2017
Second session: January 17-March 11, 2017

Jr. Nordic is always looking for coaches. This year’s coaches’ introduction is 10:30 a.m. Saturday, October 29, at the Kincaid Chalet. Find out more at www.anchoragenordicski.com/junior-nordic-coaching.

Skii for Women: February 5, 2017; volunteers needed

Save the date: The wildly popular and powerful Alaska Ski for Women will be held February 5, 2017. Register and learn more at www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/alaska-ski-for-women/.

The event always needs volunteers. Want to help? Visit www.anchoragenordicski.com/volunteer. Ski for Women is also seeking a race director. Interested or know someone who might be? Contact NSAA at 276-7699.

See AROUND THE BOWL Page 3
Tour of Anchorage: March 5, 2017; register today

Set yourself up for a big season of training and racing by setting the bar high and signing up for the Tour of Anchorage, which arrives on March 5, 2017. Register at www.anchoragenordicski.com/races/tour-of-anchorage.

Want to volunteer instead? Put your name in the online hat at www.anchoragenordicski.com/volunteer. Ski 4 Kids is also seeking a race director. Interested or know someone who might be? Contact NSAA at 276-7609.

Ski Train coming down the tracks to Curry on March 11, 2017

Ski Train leaves the station on Saturday, March 11, 2017. It will sell out well before. Tickets go on sale October 1, but you have to be an NSAA member before. Tickets go on sale October 1, Saturday, March 11. It will sell out well before. Tickets go on sale October 1, 2017. Register at www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-train.

Tour of Anchorage: March 4, 2017; volunteers needed

Save the date and get your kids excited for Ski 4 Kids on March 4, 2017. This is a fun-filled day with skis for kids and their families. Register today at www.anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-4-kids.

NSA calendar of events

OCTOBER

Saturday, October 1: NSAA membership season begins; event registration begins.

EAGLE RIVER

Roz Singleton
jrcsingleton@aol.com

FAIRBANKS

Eric Troyer
ftxskierparent@gmail.com

HOMER

Marylou Burton

JUNEAU

Mark Scholten
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MAT-SU

Ed Strabel
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SEWARD

Julie Robinson
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SOLDOTNA

Penny McClain
262-6257

TALKEETNA

Chris Mannix
733-2427

The Alaska Nordic Skier is a publication representing the nordic ski clubs of Anchorage, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Mat-Su, Seward, Soldotna, Kenai, Talkeetna and Valdez. The Alaska Nordic Skier is published October through April by the Nordic Sking Association of Anchorage, Inc.

All rights reserved. © 2016 Articles, letters and advertisements are welcome. Please ensure all names are correct and information is accurate. Submissions may be edited for clarity, content and space limitations. Deadline is the 15th day of the prior month. E-mail nordicskiereditor@gmail.com.

On the cover: It’s always winter on Eagle Glacier, where members of the AKU Nordic Ski team spent part of the summer training. Photos by Andre C. Horton
From Beach Lake trails to Kincaid Park, NSAA Operations had a busy summer

BY ANNETTE BRION

With all the challenges last winter presented, one redeeming factor was an early spring. This meant that Bill and Craig, the NSAA Operations crew, were able to get a jumpstart on summertime trail maintenance. While the trails at Kincaid Park were drying out, the guys kicked off the season on the trails at Beach Lake in Chugiak.

In contract with Eagle River Parks and Recreation and with the cooperation of the Chugiak/Eagle River Nordic Ski Club, Craig and Bill worked to create a new trailhead and improve connecting trails to the new parking lot by the railroad tracks off of Beach Lake Road. This new lot was developed three years ago to accommodate overflow parking from the lot at the Beach Lake Chalet trailhead.

From April 14 to May 14, Bob Stehn (volunteer extraordinaire) organized and led work parties of 21 different volunteers who logged 135 volunteer hours on 23 days cutting and clearing brush and trees. Bill and Craig moved in a few weeks later with heavy equipment (thank you NC Machinery) to remove stumps and manipulate dirt to form a sustainable trail surface.

They also tamed the lower corner of Coach’s Cutoff, which was unsafe and had drainage issues. Additional work on North Pasture was completed to alleviate swampy conditions and improve the structure of the trail.

Overall, the project went well and the weather cooperated. So the next time you’re out in Chugiak, you’ll have time to check out these improved trails and enjoy the weather. Bill and Craig, the NSAA Operations crew, were able to get a jumpstart on summertime trail maintenance. Overall, you should see some significant improvements to the following trails at Kincaid Park: Margaux’s Lighted on the north side of the road and connections to the upper tunnel (including Footballs, World Cup, Easy Street, and S Turns to the bridge) and Margaux’s Lighted on the south side of the road to the bridge.

Again, many thanks to NC Machin-ery for the rental of the Caterpillar D3 bulldozer and 308 excavator! Bill and Craig couldn’t have done what they did without that equipment. We hope that this information helps you understand why NSAA staff does what they do in the summertime. So, enjoy what’s left of the season and we’ll see you on the trails!

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Cleared for takeoff: NSAA ski jump project complete

BY KAREN COMPTON

Three years after breaking ground, the dramatic upgrade to the Karl Eid Ski Jumps is complete. Volunteers finished laying the last of the plastic elements on the 65-meter jump in mid-August and jump practice began immediately on the facility's largest hill.

Summer jump practices on the facility's three smaller jumps began in June. More than 40 kids ages 6 to 17 were able to practice all summer, with sessions taking place four times a week.

That's in stark contrast to last winter when the two largest jumps at the complex didn't open at all due to lack of snow.

"Having plastic and the ability to jump in the summer is a game-changer," said Zak Hammill, head coach of the NSAA Ski Jumping program. "Just two weeks after the 65 opened and you can already see these skiers making progress and improving. They're excited and I'm excited for them!"

The new jumps use a combination of water, steel tracks and a special plastic grass surface to simulate slippery snow and allow for year-round ski jumping. These upgrades give Alaska's athletes an opportunity to train year-round, elevate their talent and match the efforts of ski jumpers around the world.

The complex upgrade project was funded by a grant from the State of Alaska, with additional funding from The Rasmuson Foundation, the Alaska Ski Education Foundation and the Downtown Anchorage Rotary Club. Additional sponsors include CRW Engineering, Horizon Lines, TOTE, DHL, Weaver Brothers, Senco Alaska, Denali Asphalt Maintenance, Anchorage Sand and Gravel, NC Machinery, GCI, and Mantech Mechanical.

Jumping continued through September, culminating in a rededication and ribbon cutting ceremony on September 24.

Learn more about NSAA's Ski Jumping programs at www.anchoragenordicski.com/ski-jumping.

PHOTO BY ZAK HAMMILL

Hugo Compton launches off the 65-meter jump.

PHOTO BY KAREN COMPTON

ANCHORAGE SKI SWAP

NOVEMBER 5

NIGHT BEFORE GEAR DROP | FRI 11/4 6-8 PM
DAY OF GEAR DROP | 1:30-3:30 PM
SKI SWAP SALES | 4-5:30 PM
PICKUP UNSOLD GEAR | SUN 11/6 12-1 PM

--KINCAID BUNKER--

GEAR MUST BE REGISTERED ONLINE AT WWW.FLASHCONSIGN.COM
An array of NSAA just a click away: Check out the new website!

NSAA is excited to announce a new and improved website! The address is the same – www.anchoragenordicski.com – but the site has moved to a new user-friendly platform.

The new website is sleek, modern and updated, combining bold pictures with NSAA branding and current information.

Thank you to John Moriarty and Jan Hazen for their expertise and skills in working with NSAA office staff to create this new website. Head over to www.anchoragenordicski.com and check out the new site. Don’t forget to sign up for your NSAA membership!
Welcome to a new season of backcountry Alaska ski tours led by the NSAA! Even though last season was low on snow, only one NSAA ski tour was canceled. Tour participants learned that if they skied high enough (usually Hatcher Pass and Turnagain areas), we found great skiable snow. Or course, we are optimistic we will have endless snow everywhere this season!

Find more information about NSAA tours at http://anchorage nordic ski.com/tours.htm. There’s also an interesting cheat sheet, suggested gear list and a waiver. A signed waiver form is required for each participant and is good for the entire season. For those attending any tour, they will receive a logistics sheet usually the Sunday by Monday before the tour. All tours are accompanied by members of the Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol, who provide safety, trail sweep, and assist skiers with broken equipment or any other issues. Many thanks for their assistance! We look forward to skiing with you out on the trails.

To support the NSAA Tours program, you can purchase an attractive and specially designed knit cap sporting the NSAA ski bear. The hats will be available at all tours, the NSAA office and the NSAA annual meeting. If you have questions about tours, the program or the hats, contact one of the leaders of the NSAA Touring program: Patti Phillips, Co-chair; NSAA contact, (907) 240-3742, phillipsp@chuagach.net; Mary Vavrik, Co-chair; Nordic Ski Patrol contact, (907) 306-7666, mvavrik@chuagach.net; Karlene Leeper, Co-chair; Denali View Chalet, (907) 440-0049, kbleeper@alaska.net; and Ken DePalma, Co-chair; AT and Tele-ski tours, 907-144-1562, travel@alaska.net.

Below are the tours for November and December. We are working to get overnight cabin rentals in place and will list the complete schedule next month. Also, we are planning two ski trips into Denali National Park again this season. These ski trips are supported by mushers and dog sledders who carry food and gear; you carry your daypack. Check back for more information in future issues of the Nordic Skier.


Join us for this post-Thanksgiving shake-off ski and the first tour of the season. Meet at the Carrs Mudoon bakery at 9 a.m.; carpool to the Independence Mine trailhead where we expect to arrive 10:15-10:30 a.m. A Chugach State Park pass is required for cars. This tour is appropriate for beginning-intermediate skiers who can travel about 7 miles roundtrip on terrain with short climbs and downslopes under various snow conditions. We will ski through Independence Mine and continue up the hill past Gold Cord Mine and beyond into the flatter upper bowl below Granite Peak and Friendship Pass, where we will have lunch. We will descend the hill and if conditions allow, cross the creek to find our way back to the trailhead. Early snow conditions can be sketchy so check the tour hotline at 248-6667 ext. 4 for updates. Tour leader: Karlene Leeper, 440-0049.

December 8: Friday Night Mystery Ski or “Ski and Suds” – Location TBD

Come out for a social ski at 6:30 p.m. on a Friday night followed by a beer or two! This harkens back to the olden days of the NSAA Friday Night Pun Skis. Bring warm clothes and a headlamp. We will decide where to meet and ski based on conditions.

Tour leader: Mary Vavrik, 306-7666.

December 17: Soledi-Ski at Turnagain Pass, Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT), Kenai Mountains

This tour will ski a portion of the Iditarod National Historic Trail starting at Turnagain Pass and ending at Ingram Creek. We meet at the Chuagach State Park Headquarters parking lot (with the train south of Potter Marsh) at 9 a.m. and carpool to the trailhead where we expect to arrive 10:15-10:30 a.m. This tour is appropriate for beginning-intermediate skiers who can travel about six miles roundtrip on relatively flat terrain and negotiate short climbs and downslopes under various snow conditions. Call the tour hotline at 248-6667 ext. 4 for updates. Tour leader: Mary Vavrik, 306-7666.

Thank you to our sponsors for being the title sponsor for the Besh Cup race series. This support makes it possible for CCAK to provide ski racing opportunities to Alaskan skiers. Please watch www.crosscountry-alaska.org for details.

Alaska skiers.

To provide ski racing opportunities to Alaska coaches to go to both Lake Placid as well as Sun Valley. Details will become available soon and will be posted on the CCAK website: www.crosscountry-alaska.org.

USSA requirement: USSA requires all skiers in USSA sanctioned ski races (all Besh Cup races) to have either a full USA license ($95) or a general membership license ($15). The general membership license is for all Junior skiers who are not vying for a spot on Team Alaska as well as Senior and Master skiers. All skiers who wish to purchase a full USSA membership are still welcome to do so. CCAK recommends you visit www.ussa.org to purchase either level of membership and learn more about this change. One day licenses ($10) will also be available on race day, but the better bargain is going for the annual general membership ahead of time.

CCAK would like to recognize hotel sponsors that have come onboard for the upcoming season. Please consider booking your stay at the Courtyard Marriott in Anchorage or the Wedgewood Resort in Fairbanks. At the date of article submission the official Besh Cup hotel in Soldotna has not been secured; watch the CCAK website for further details. Each hotel is providing lodging for race officials, offering group rates for accommodations, and providing wax rooms for skiers. Please mention you are part of the Besh Cup race series when making your reservations.

Once again, thank you to CCAK for being the title sponsor for the Besh Cup race series. This support makes it possible for CCAK to provide ski racing opportunities to Alaskan skiers. Please watch www.crosscountry-alaska.org and the CCAK Facebook page for detailed race information and coaching clinic opportunities as the ski season approaches. Think snow!
Fast and Female: Inspiration, empowerment and athletics for Alaska’s girls

World-class female athletes empowered and inspired 292 Anchorage-area girls to stay involved in sport at Fast and Female’s eighth annual Anchorage Champ Chat on September 18 at the Alaska Airlines Center.

The event, held for girls ages 8-18, included a Champ Chat featuring games, athletic activities and inspirational stories led by Olympians, elite female athletes and sports experts; a special seminar for teen participants; and a session for parents and coaches.

The group of 60 elite athlete ambassadors included cross-country skier and three-time overall World Cup Sprint Champion Kikkan Randall, two-time Olympian Holly Brooks, 2014 Olympian Sadie Bjornsen, U.S. Ski Team member Rosie Brennan, members from the APU Nordic Ski Team and several members of the UAA women’s sports teams.

Girls participated in agility, team building and nutrition games stations and watched an inspirational mini-film festival. Teens did pilates and yoga and talked with the ambassadors about body image, nutrition and college choices.

Prior to the event, Kikkan Randall said, “I was so fortunate to grow up here in Anchorage where we have so many great opportunities to be involved in sports and amazing role models to look up to, many of which I actually got to meet in person. With Fast and Female, my fellow athletes and I are excited to continue the circle of inspiration to help girls discover and build their own love for sports.”

Fast and Female’s 2016 Anchorage Champ Chat was presented by Anchorage Women’s Clinic, and supported by BP Alaska, the Gold Nugget Triathlon Board, Subway of Alaska, Movin’ 105.7, the Alaska Airlines Center, UAA, CLIF Bar and L.L. Bean, Lululemon and Precision Nutrition. Learn more about Fast and Female at www.fastandfemale.com.
Skiku skis Scammon Bay

BY KATI WARD

As a recreational skier, I would have never believed that I would be out in rural Alaska teaching a community how to ski. The opportunity presented itself when friends of mine told me about traveling to parts of rural Alaska as volunteers for Skiku. The organization’s mission is simply to get Alaska skiing.

Throughout Alaska there are perfect conditions for Nordic skiing, but many villages do not have the resources or know how to get a program started. Skiku has developed relationships with numerous communities across Alaska to bring skis, encourage an interest in the sport and foster healthy lifestyles.

When I first applied for a volunteer opportunity I was nervous about the commitment and the unknown of coaching while only being a recreational skier. At the same time, I was extremely excited to visit a place I had never been. Scammon Bay. This trip was an exciting adventure for me and a chance to dedicate my volunteer time, too. Bringing skis and sharing my passion for a week skiing in beautiful, rural Alaska, also allowed me to understand the people and culture of Scammon Bay.

I hope that you will consider volunteering and joining the Skiku coaching team this spring. We are always looking for passionate volunteers to help expand and further develop the program! If you are interested in becoming a Skiku or NANANordic volunteer, please visit skiku.com and fill out the volunteer application.

Summer sweat is the foundation to winter fun

Jason Dennis / President, Chugiak Eagle River Nordic Ski Club

Summer has flown by and I am starting to look forward to another ski season. I have a feeling this is going to be the winter that we end up with a record snowfall to make up for the last few seasons. We have had a busy summer working on the trails getting ready for this upcoming season. What did we get done this summer?

We were able to get the new parking lot on the Beach Lake Road down by the railroad tracks tied into junkyard loop. There is a new trail from the old access road at the top of junkyard loop to the new parking lot and a trail from the new parking lot to the bottom of junkyard loop. These trails will be one-way trails due to the steep grade and trail narrowness. There will be new signage in the area to help with directions. We also built a new hill play area for the kids off of the new downhill section of the new parking lot. I will follow up with more information about the new play area in a future article. These upgrades to the Beach Lake trails would have not been possible without the help of NSAA Bill Brion, Bob Stehn, Jim Kaszuba, the Bieregrohslien family, Kikkan Randall and family, and many others.

But wait: that is not all the club has been up to this summer. If you follow our Facebook feed you will know that we have partnered with Chugiak Mountain Bike Riders (CMBR) to help them build new single-track mountain bike trails at the Edmonds Lake area. We will do a full article on this in the future but as it stands now there is going to be about 3.2 miles of single track; currently 2.5 miles are finished. If you want a help with construction of the new trails, there are work parties to finish the trails scheduled at 6 pm. Wednesday nights. You can check current volunteer opportunities on our Facebook feed Eagle River Junior Nordic or with CMBR.

In our next article we will have information on the Ski Swap and Junior Nordic Sign-Up, events calendar and annual kick-off. I am looking forward to seeing everyone out on the trails very soon.

AROUND EAGLE RIVER

Chugiak-Eagle River Nordic Ski Club

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 12: Ski Swap & sign-ups for Junior Nordic/Masters Programs, Beach Lake Trails Chalet

November 13: Junior Nordic kickoff, Beach Lake Trails Chalet

November 23: Ski waxing clinic, Beach Lake Trails Chalet

November 28-29: Coaches training, Beach Lake Trails Chalet

December 5: Junior Nordic starts

Learn more at cernsc.wildapricot.org.
A bird’s eye view of ski seasons past and future

September 15, 2016 – Two days ago I was on top of Bird Ridge soaking in fall colors and swatting away bugs that should have died off weeks ago. When we drove up from Homer the day before, there wasn’t any new termination dust to be seen, not on the mountains across the bay, not on the high ridges above Cooper Landing and Turnagain Arm, and not along the peaks to the north and east of Bird Ridge. Up high, low-lying blueberries were still there for the taking and a few wild geraniums were putting out a second generation of blossoms. Skiing, needless to say, was not an option.

But today when I sat down to work on this newsletter and recalled how great the skiing was in Homer last winter and spring, I got psyched. In a year when most coastal ski trails (including the lower Baycrest Trails) were bare ice, Homer’s higher elevations saw lots of snow. Lookout, McNeil, Eveline and “out the road” of- fered up some of the best skiing in the state. Later in the season, Wolf Ridge (accessed from McNeil) was particu- larly glorious, especially if you caught it the same day that the pesten hully passed through on its way to Caribou Lake. Actually, “catching” a trail any- where right after it snows or has been newly groomed is the name of the game. The downside is that a person that would be me could put on a lot of car miles playing it. Gas, fortunately, is pretty cheap right now.

None of this is enough to entice me to put away my bike and hiking boots anytime soon, but it is enough to overcome the usual depression that sets in when the daylight slips below 12 hours. Well, that may be overstating it. October through December are generally pretty dismal. But January through April? I’m looking forward to them.

– Billy Margolies Burton

2016-2017 season calendar (already and will) be packed with events, fun

No dates have been set yet for – well, for much of anything. But we all know what the general events are and details will emerge in time and will be listed in future issues of this newsletter, on the KNSC website (kachemaknordicskiclub.org), and in occasional emails (which we try to keep to a minimum).

In the meantime, here’s what’s coming up in November …

KNSC Annual Meeting/Potluck
Bring the family and come enjoy food (bring a dish to share), music, door prizes and good company. There is also a silent auction (great stuff!) and a live dessert auction which is almost as good as the desserts them- selves. This is also an excellent time to renew your membership and sign up for Homer Women’s Nordic and Junior Nordics. Time, date and place coming soon!

2016 KNSC Board of Directors elections
Each year, three KNSC board posi- tions are up for election and are voted on at the annual meeting. Sometimes current board members whose terms expire opt to run again, sometimes they don’t. And sometimes they’re thinking of retiring but don’t because no one else steps up to fill their shoes. The fact is, we are always looking for people with new ideas and energy who want to take leadership roles in the ski club.

While we have some administra- tive functions contracted out, the club primarily relies on volunteers
to do everything from fundraising to grooming. The board, similarly, is an active working board and members should be prepared to put in a little time beyond the monthly meeting. But they get a lot of help – the KNSC volunteer base is extensive, ready and willing to do their part when asked. If you are interested in throwing your hat in the ring, contact any current board member. The board meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first Wednesday of each month, September through May.

Ski & Winter Gear Swap, November 9
Barter, trade, sell or give away your winter-fun equipment, including skis, snowboards, boots and clothing. The swap/sale begins at 5:30 p.m. Wednes- day, November 9, at the Homer High School commons. Event sponsors ask that please no early birds or private business sales. Nevertheless, you will want to be there right at 5:30. The best deals happen quickly.

Participants are responsible for displaying, pricing and removing their unsold items. There is no charge to sell or swap but donations are accepted to benefit local youth ski programs. The Homer High School ski team will also be there and will swap your skis for a small fee. All donations go the the HHS Ski Team Boosters to support team travel and supplies.

This event is sponsored by the City of Homer Parks and Recreation. Call Mike Ilg at 236-6996 for more information.

Junior Nordics registration, equipment rentals at Ski Swap
KNSC Junior Nordics representa- tives will also be at the Ski Swap and you can register your kids for this years program on the spot. Parents can also rent kids’ boots and skis at the affordable rate of $25 – for the entire season! First come, first serve.
Cabins, skiing and friends — a special combination

BY MARYLOU BURTON

Years ago when I traveled now and then to Anchorage for business, I stayed at what are — for me at least — plush hotels. True, the government rate at the Captain Cook only got you a room in the hotel’s older section, but the uniformed guys at the front doors still ushered you in and offered to take your bags, and any room in that hotel has a stunning view. It made me feel special and awkward. How much do you tip those guys? Besides I’m an Alaska girl — I can carry my own darned bags. And what’s a hick like me doing here anyway?

These dilemmas never arise when I am traveling with a group of adventuresome women friends whose idea of a plush hotel is a dry tent pitched on a flat site with an awesome view — and they’ll sacrifice the first two if the view is good enough. A cabin is also acceptable, especially if it’s raining or snowing, and a cabin with indoor plumbing is bordering on decadent.

Last March, when six of us set out for a spring skiing adventure, we sampled it all: tents; a cabin with a Porta Potty; a really nice (plush, even) cabin with a kitchen and full bathroom; and cabins with no indoor plumbing but with a sauna, hot tub and flush toilets not far away. All came with the requisite view.

The tents: Awesome views, as always. Jane Wiebe will tell you more in her related article.

The cabin with the Porta Potty: Hatcher Pass Lodge, which at 3,000 feet is nestled just below the historic Independence Mine, has nine cabins that rent at very reasonable prices. The cabins are rustic but clean, small (two-seated women and a dog in one but it was a tight fit), heated by propane and have a chemical toilet. Showers are also available in the main lodge. There are no cooking facilities and for safety reasons, portable stoves are not allowed. The lodge offers food, a full bar, a barrel (also very reasonably priced), which we crammed six women and a dog into but it was a tight fit), heated by propane and have a chemical toilet. Showers are also available in the main lodge. There are no cooking facilities and for safety reasons, portable stoves are not allowed.

The lodge offers food, a full bar, a barrel stove and company — not the least of which comes from Hap, the owner and operator of the lodge since it was built 40 (maybe 50) years ago.

Hap is a character in his own right, full of stories about politics (he knew them all — Mike Gravel, Ted Stevens ...), battles with the feds, etc. He has a history in Homer and takes a particular enjoyment in talking to Homer guests, especially when some of them are very attractive women of a certain age. I didn’t follow it all — back in the early ’70s he had some business interests in Jakolof Bay that seemed a little squirrely and he used to own the land where McDonald’s now sits on. All very entertaining and it would be easy to spend a couple of hours listening — but we were there to ski.

The whole Hatcher Pass area had a ton of snow, and even though we visited midweek it looked like half of snow-starved Anchorage was also there. Archangel (down the road from the lodge) was recently groomed and made us wish we had lighter skis. But our heavy touring skis were just right for the trails up and around the lodge, which hadn’t been groomed since more than a foot of snow fell the day before. We muscled our way above the mine and drifted down in knee-high snow in our best imitation of telemarking, before heading down the road where we skied up the Gold Mint Trail with loaded sleds. Which is where Jane picks up the story.

The plush cabin: Sheep Mountain Lodge, located halfway between Palmer and Glennallen, has been around since 1946, but the accommodations are modern and very comfortable. Winter options include a bunksite and two sizes of cabins, all of which have access to a hot tub. We rented one of the larger cabins (also very reasonably priced), which came complete with full cooking facilities, two queen-sized beds, a real bathroom and a killer view. The restaurant has a good reputation, but it was closed on weekdays and, in general, we prefer to cook our own food anyway. Snow machiners are definitely welcome, but unlike the Eureka Lodge a few miles up the road, Sheep Mountain caters to cross-country skiers. They maintain about 10K of easy to moderate groomed trails, with a couple of short but honest climbs and a plan to add some connector trails in the future.

The current owners, Mark & Ruth Fleenor and Ryan & Rachel Cole, took over in 2015 and are maintaining the standards and vibe that the former owners established. Mark was also incredibly helpful when it came to plotting the route for a backcountry ski (see Jane — again ...), even going so far as taking a snow machine to check out part of the route to make sure it was skiable. Now that’s good service and then some.

Last, but by no means least, the dry cabins: Mendeltna Creek Lodge, about 35 miles up the Glenn Highway from Glennallen, was built in the 1930s. Like most lodges of its generation, it’s been added onto and updated but still maintains its Old Alaska character (the massive stone fireplace and polished bar in the older part of the lodge are worth the visit). I’ve been by the lodge many times but always been on my way to someplace else. And at first glance, there isn’t much along this black spruce-lined stretch of the road to stop for. But then we ran into this young guy on the Gold Mint Trail (see Jane ... ) who sang its praises. So after first stopping at the Eureka Lodge, surveying its display of local and exotic animal heads in the trophy room and noticing that none of the vehicles in the very busy parking lot had ski racks, we continued on down the road to Mendeltna. Good choice.

BY MARYLOU BURTON

Years ago when I traveled now and then to Anchorage for business, I stayed at what are — for me at least — plush hotels. True, the government rate at the Captain Cook only got you a room in the hotel’s older section, but the uniformed guys at the front doors still ushered you in and offered to take your bags, and any room in that hotel has a stunning view. It made me feel special and awkward. How much do you tip those guys? Besides I’m an Alaska girl — I can carry my own darned bags. And what’s a hick like me doing here anyway?

These dilemmas never arise when I am traveling with a group of adventuresome women friends whose idea of a plush hotel is a dry tent pitched on a flat site with an awesome view — and they’ll sacrifice the first two if the view is good enough. A cabin is also acceptable, especially if it’s raining or snowing, and a cabin with indoor plumbing is bordering on decadent.

Last March, when six of us set out for a spring skiing adventure, we sampled it all: tents; a cabin with a Porta Potty; a really nice (plush, even) cabin with a kitchen and full bathroom; and cabins with no indoor plumbing but with a sauna, hot tub and flush toilets not far away. All came with the requisite view.

The tents: Awesome views, as always. Jane Wiebe will tell you more in her related article.

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our freeze-dried dinners, then shared a toast of Laurie's very smooth and expensive Scotch while admiring Kvichak in his handsome down vest.

We crawled into our tents and it snowed. By morning it had snowed a lot. We went on a snow-shoe romp up the valley and it kept snowing. Our tents were buried. The plan had been to spend a day exploring, another night, then head down. But we changed our minds again, packed everything up and skied with our marvelous sleds down the valley, which was much more fun than skiing up. It kept snowing. Our cars all made it out of the parking lot by the skin of our teeth. Within a few hours, the road was closed for three days.

At Fred Meyer in Palmer, we decided to spend the night in Anchorage and dry our stuff and let it stop snowing before heading in the direction of Sheep Mountain, which turned out to be yet another brilliant change of plans. Don't ever get too attached to what you think you are going to do.

I forgot to tell you about Chad, a tall and handsome young man with a beautiful dog and really nice skis who came skiing along the Gold Mint Trail in the snowstorm and spent at least 20 minutes talking to us old women, which we found absolutely charming. After about 15 minutes we were working on him to marry Lynn's tall, beautiful, charming and extremely competent daughter, who would be a real catch to any man worth his salt, and we thought Chad might be. We still hope to accomplish this, however we've been neglecting the project.

The relevant part to this story is that Chad recom-
**Fall freeze makes us long for skiis**

So, it froze the other night. Not a hard frost, but enough to linger on the windshields of vehicles and remind gardeners to take care of their bulbs. It is one of the great, yet simple things, the first fall frost. For one, it normally is associated with a clear morning sunrise, but the real reason is it so amazing is the smell. Sure that may be just a mix of frozen dead organic matter, but scents are only good for single thing, their associations with memories.

My memories ring back to the days of high school cross-country running. Whether it was a midweek training run with the team or a late season race, it was all preseason training for the real sport … Nordic skiing. Sure, those were simpler days when one could answer the question, “What are you interested in?” with “Sports.” Although life gets much more complex with age, these cerebral responses to such a sense do seem to make life more understandable. Maybe it is just a Pavlov’s dog type response, but to realize winter is just a few weeks away within an instance of smelling frozen air is euphoric. If only I could transplant that response to what I experience when changing my kid’s diapers.

Once again, I find myself in the waiting game, with the rest of you. The good news is that as our club grows, so do the preseason activities and the new club additions for the coming season.

– By Hans Hill, MSSC President

### Annual meeting, gear swap and Jr. Nordic gear pick-up on Saturday, October 15

Once again, the annual membership meeting returns to the Government Peak Chalet! The event starts at 6 p.m. and of course there will be door prizes (free swap) and pizza, but also it’s a chance to renew your membership and catch up with your long lost ski buddies. In addition, there will be a silent auction with great items like a race prep waxing by our very own professional wax technician, with proceeds going to the club’s high school scholarship program. This supports high school students who are awarded a stipend to purchase ski gear so that they may participate in our favorite winter sport.

Of course will we will cover club news and general business, but we hope to have a special guest speaker to keep your interest piqued. A new addition this year will be an outdoor equipment swap from 4:30-5:30 p.m. held in typical swap fashion; show up, set up your items on the tables and start haggling. The best part, no fees! (Donations accepted.) For you Junior Nordic parents, this will overlap with ski pick-up, making it a great time to try to swap out those ski boots that somehow (once again) do not fit your kid’s feet anymore.

So set your phone’s calendar to include the annual meeting. You won’t want to miss it.

### New things: Big groomer, bright lights

We all can agree that our group of grooming volunteers did a fantastic job of keeping us skiing last year. And as our trail system grows, so do our grooming hours. MSSC recognized this as result looked for a “bigger hammer” for the nail that is grooming. The answer: the Argo 8x8 Centuar with tracks!

With the help of a DNR Trails grant, the club is expecting the arrival of our new groomer before the annual meeting. Prepare for great groomed trails, even faster!

The other fantastic news is the trail lighting at Government Peak has been installed. Say goodbye to headlamp skis at GPA and hello to LED lit trails. This was a Mat-Su Borough project, with MSSC contributing a considerable amount of time and, with the help of great contributors like you, money to make this happen. A number of very generous donors were involved and many of them will be shown on plaques mounted to those very light poles they helped make happen, as well as many others listed near the parking area. If you see a name you recognize, please be sure to throw them a thank you.

### Early bird notice: Ski races

The Mat-Su Ski Club will host a community race and two high school weekend races this winter. Mark your calendars for these races:

- **Icicle Double**: A community ski race consisting of multiple distances and age groups: December 31 and January 1.

Please support our racing community by helping out. It will take a lot of volunteers to put these races on. A volunteer signup sheet will be available at the October 15 MSSC annual meeting.

**GPRA Phase II trails – Keep the momentum going**

One of the things the MSSC has been stewing up for a while is additional trails at GPA, with a competitive flavor. Trail design has been in the works to expand the network to make GPA more race friendly. This year we will be fundraising for the Phase II trails. Through the use of grant funding, donations and volunteer labor, Phase II trail construction will begin next year! Additional details will be presented at the annual meeting and posted on the website. Stay tuned.

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**AROUND THE INTERIOR**

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**HILARY SAUCY**

Hilary grew up in Pennsylvania and has always loved being outside. She was a competitive runner and swimmer for 10 years and picked up biathlon and Nordic skiing at age 13. Hilary attended college at the University of Maine at Presque Isle, where she competed on its Division I cross-country ski team and graduated in May with a degree in exercise science.

Hilary has a passion for working with young athletes and has been coaching youth sports since she was in high school. She saw the job with FXC as an opportunity to be a part of a unique program and be mentored by other excellent coaches in order to grow her knowledge. Hilary is excited for what this season will bring and looks forward to exploring the amazing outdoor playground Alaska has to offer.

**ALASDAIR TUTT**

Alasdair grew up in Southeast Australia and has been cross-country skiing since he was 9. Alasdair represented Australia at the 2012-2014 Junior/Under 23 World Championships while completing a degree in sports coaching and exercise science from the University of Canberra. From 2014-early 2016, Alasdair was coaching state-level teams and the Australian Junior Team. Alasdair has been involved in ski coaching and outdoor education since 2011. He is looking forward to applying himself to the challenge of working in Alaska with such a large group of enthusiastic junior athletes and helping them achieve their goals. Alasdair is also looking forward to some huge backcountry crust ski touring in the springtime.

**New coaches bring energy, experience to FXC program**

We’ve got two great new assistant coaches for the FXC program. Hilary Saucy and Alasdair Tutt came onboard this summer, replacing Becca Konieczny and Kenny Brewer. We will miss Becca and Kenny, who have gone on to other pursuits, but Alasdair and Hilary have been doing a great job filling their ski boots. If you get a chance, say hi and welcome them to Fairbanks.

**Tips for new Fairbanks Junior Nordic parents**

**BY SALLY ENDESTAD**

The NSCF Junior Nordics program is a great way to keep kids active, which helps them also be happy and successful. To aid in smoothly integrating Junior Nordics into your busy life, here is a list of suggestions for parents:

- If you have multiple skiing kids take a notebook to the store and jot notes on boot, ski and pole sizes needed for all children.
- Visit ski swaps to look for your specific needs before shopping at stores for retail prices. The kids grow so fast and you might find that they grow out of their equipment during the season. To avoid this problem, purchase boots with a bit more room and double the socks. Those added layers will also help when our cold temps hit.
- If your child has never skied before, make sure to try on all the equipment inside on your living room carpet (before you put on any wax)!. Allow your skiers the space to move around and find their balance a few times. Carve out some time at the ski area for them to safely put on their skis and begin sliding around even if they’ve never tried it before. That will help give them the necessary confidence to successfully navigate the first lessons.
- A sense of humor on really cold days goes a long way to make the experience a good one. It also sets the stage for caring for their bodies in any future endeavors.
- Enter the Kinross Fort Knox Town Series races! They are family oriented and give your child a chance to strut their stuff no matter their level.
- Show up and ski, even just once. Nothing reinforces the fun more than having your kids Stars and Stripes dad out there with them. Plus, it is good for mom and dad to get fresh air. It might just turn into a wonderfully healthy habit! (Adult lessons are often available during Junior Nordics.)
- Ski with your kids when they are not at Junior Nordics. Pick a lovely Saturday and ask your children to take you for a ski at the UAF or Birch Hill trails.
Birch Hill trails modified for upcoming major races, improved grooming

BY JOHN ESTLE

If you were on the Jim Whisenhant Ski Trails at Birch Hill Recreation Area this summer, you no doubt noticed the work being done on the trails, specifically:

- Creation of a short segment of new trail in the White Bear Access area between the bottom of Sidewinder and the White Bear entrance sign
- Creation of a short segment of new trail at the north end of the first outbound leg of the North 40
- Widening and smoothing on the final 500 meters of the North 40
- Widening and smoothing on the first 100 meters of the Tommyknocker
- Widening, smoothing and straightening the final climb on the Competition Loop
- Creation of a short segment of trail toward the north end of the Warmup Loop.

The work was done for two reasons: to prepare courses for the 2017 U.S. Ski & Snowboard Association (USSA) Distance National Championships and SuperTour Finals scheduled for March 27-April 2, 2017; and, equally important, to improve the groomability of those trails.

The Birch Hill competition courses got a lot of work during 2011 and 2012 to get ready for the 2013 USSA Junior National Championships. But the Distance National Championships and SuperTour Finals are races for seniors, not juniors. Those courses need to be longer than junior courses to accommodate the National Championship Men’s 50K and Women’s 30K events. Also, we need courses (especially a sprint course) that are harder than junior courses. Those were goals of the design and construction work on the trails.

Also, head groomer Tom Helmers now has four years of experience with the Pivoten Bally 200 and has a very good handle on what trails groom well and what trails are difficult to groom. Tom completed all the construction work using an excavator, a bulldozer, and the NSCF’s skidsteer in a manner that will make grooming more efficient and improve the end product.

The work also improves the safety and enjoyment for all who ski at Birch Hill. A trail that grooms well is a trail that skis well. While the new trail segments will help create competition courses that are more difficult than our existing courses, the new segments are not, in and of themselves, difficult to ski. No up-hills have been made steeper, longer or harder, and no new difficult up-hills have been created.

The new segments allow us to connect existing trail segments in new ways that create challenging courses – but only the racers have to ski those segments in that order. Also, the widening of the existing sections to International Ski Federation (FIS) width standards enables us to include those segments in our new race courses. So we are able to create many new courses while building less than 100 meters of new trails.

In order for the NSCF and Birch Hill to host these races, the courses that we plan to use must be certified (“homologated” in FIS-speak) as suitable according to the FIS course standards. These standards include minimum and maximum requirements for total climb (TC), maximum single climb (MC) and the number of “big” climbs, as well as minimum width requirements. We have no problem meeting the climbing requirements, but our big challenge is to meet the minimum width requirements which are 9-10 meters on up-hills for mass start and sprint events. Three of the Distance National Championships and SuperTour Finals events are mass starts (skiathlon, relay and 30/50) and the fourth is a sprint.

The major additions to our array of competition courses are 7.5K and 8.3K courses used for the mass start 50K and 30K races, respectively, and a new sprint course suitable for seniors. The 50K and 30K races will be the final two races of the series and the final races of the season for most of the skiers. The men will use our standard South Tower 5K for the first lap, then will make six laps of the 7.5K to get in 50K. The women will start on the South Tower, then cover the 8.3K three times.

In addition to the 7.5K and 8.3K courses, we will be homologating two 3.75K courses for the skiathlon (one for the classic leg, one for the skate leg), two 2.5K courses for the relay (one classic and one skate) and a new sprint course. These courses will be very challenging and on a par with the international courses that U.S. Ski Team skiers compete on throughout the winter.

For more on this story, see www.nscfairbanks.org/index.php/trails/birch-hill-trails-modified-for-upcoming-major-races-improved-grooming.

John Estle is administrator and race director for the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks.

TIPS

Continued from Page 14
Believe it or not, that little bit of interest you show goes a long way and makes for a great family outing.

- Sometimes in the beginning the bundling-and-getting-out-the-door process takes longer than the actual skiing time. Try to be OK with this! Eventually the time spent skiing exceeds the preparation time.
- Listen to your child. There’s a difference between needing a bit of encouragement and gently prodding your child when they’re not excited about skiing. Don’t ever force your child to participate.
- Building relationships is extremely important in your child’s life. If you have an introvert and your personality is an extrovert, be sensitive to that. Give them adequate space to form their own bonds. Stay after the session and speak with other parents so that your child has the space to develop relationships with other kids.
- Creating the desire for healthy exercise is part of parenting. If parents make daily exercise a habit, kids learn by imitation and make exercise a part of their daily lives. Children aim to please their parents. Whether kids decide to ski as part of a competitive club or not shouldn’t matter. The ultimate goal is to have children moving and enjoying the sport of cross-country skiing.

Sunnyside Trail will connect Outhouse Loop to Fort Wainwright

BY JOHN ESTLE

A major new ski trail built on Fort Wainwright lands on the south side of Birch Hill. This new loop trail is currently being called the Sunnyside Trail because it will be one of the few trails on Birch Hill where skiers can actually see the sun during the depths of winter.

Funding for the trail comes from a grant made to the NSCF by the Rasmuson Foundation. The trail was built by Jon Underwood and his trail construction company, Happy Trails, Inc. Construction started in the second half of July and was virtually complete by the end of August.

The route was originally laid out by John Estle in 1985 when the club received permission to create the trail, but funding never materialized until this year. In the lead up to construction, Jon Underwood modified the original design to bring the route and profile up to modern trail standards.

The trail departs from and returns to the next-to-the-top southern switchback on the Outhouse Loop. There are three basic parts to the trail. The first part is the loop portion of the trail that runs southeastally from the Outhouse Loop to a point near where two downhill mountain bike trails turn onto the alpine slope. At its southeastern-most point, the trail bends left and uphill and returns to the Outhouse Loop via a series of climbs and drops to break up what is a pretty substantial climb. The loop distance is very close to 3.5K.

The second part of the route is completely dictated by topography. One of the features of Birch Hill is that the south-facing slope immediately above the floodplain is very steep. It proved difficult to construct a route connecting the bluff edge to the flood plain that would not be overly steep for descending and ascending. Construction was possible at only one location along the entire south face of the hill west of the alpine slope. The route between the bluff and the floodplain is not ideal: it will be steeper than desired, have two-way traffic and include a tight switchback. However, it will work. This segment will be about 500 meters long.

The final segment of the route is a flat, two-way traffic portion on the floodplain from the bottom of the steep bluff descent to the Ft. Wainwright Alpine Hill Base Lodge. This route is also about half a kilometer in length.

Most skiers starting from Birch Hill will probably use the trail one of three ways:

1. Ski the loop from the Outhouse to the top of the bluff and back. This will cut out the steep Outhouse route connecting the edge of the bluff to the flood plain.
2. Ski the loop from the Outhouse to the Ft. Wainwright Base Lodge, then ski up the Sonot Connector. Doing this will provide some new loop options and some exposure to the winter sun. If you ski this loop from the stadium then head straight back to the stadium from the top of the Sonot Connector, it will be about an 8K loop.
3. Ski down the Sonot Connector then up the flood-plan-to-bluff edge climb, then ski the return to the Outhouse. That distance will be 5.8K.

To read a suggested loop of about 30K that takes advantage of the new trail and has little repetition, read the end of this story: www.nscfairbanks.org/index.php/trails/990-sunnyside-trail-will-connect-outhouse-loop-to-fort-wainwright.

John Estle is administrator and race director for the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks.

New building to house ski club grooming equipment

BY ERIC TROYER

A new equipment building is being constructed very close to the Birch Hill recreation area driveway entrance. The main purpose of this building is to house the ski club grooming equipment. With the addition of the large Piston Bully groomer, the old building got very cramped and some equipment had to be stored outside.

The new building will allow our dedicated groomers to move around more easily while storing more equipment inside.

The building will have an enclosed, secured compound for cold storage of grooming equipment and for refueling of equipment. The building will also have an office and fully equipped bathroom.

Current completion date for the building is November or December.

Part of the old equipment building will be used for storage for the borough’s Parks and Recreation Department. The rest may be used as an additional waxing area and equipment storage for competitive events.

The Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks and the Fairbanks North Star Borough worked together to obtain funding for the building, which came from a state grant as well as grants from Rasmuson Foundation, Arctic Winter Games Legacy fund and Tanana Valley Youth Sports. PDC Engineering donated many hours of time to this project.

Unfortunately, the bottom part of the Warmup Loop has been lost to the new equipment building. A short new bypass trail was built so that the Warmup Loop stays a loop, albeit a bit shorter than before.

Also, a bit of trail was added that connects the recreation area road to the north part of the North Forty trail. This will allow the groomers to access the North Forty directly from the new equipment building.

Other facilities work completed or underway include:

• Major brushing around the parking lots and near the Birch Hill Cross Country Ski Center. This was done by a volunteer group from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons.

• The ski center is getting a new coat of paint.

• Plans are in the works to extend a communications wire from the ski center to the timing hut. This should improve the Internet connection to the hut and help improve the reliability of the weather station.

Eric Troyer is Fairbanks editor of the Alaska Nordic Skier.