

Ski Tracks and Sitzmarks

A History of the Whiteshell Cross-Country Ski Club 1973-2013

The Beginning

“Stay off the fairways!” “Snowshoes are better!” “Snowmobiles have flattened the tracks again!” Being a cross-country skier in Pinawa in the early 1970’s had its challenges. Still, in the fall of 1973 thirty skiers and enthusiasts gathered at Gilbert School and formed the Whiteshell Cross-Country Ski Club. An executive of Herb Rosinger, Graeme Strathdee, Lyn Grant, Malcolm Sargent, Heiki Tamm and Walter Harrison was elected and set to work developing trails, teaching cross-country skiing and organizing ski races.

Trail Development

The Club’s first trails were skied-in tracks on the rough and service roads of the Pinawa golf course. However, in 1974 there was little snowfall before Christmas and the golf club closed



Whiteshell Cross-Country Ski Club Trails

the course to skiers because of concern about possible damage. In response, scouting parties crossed the diversion dam and pieced together a ski trail from old roads, walking trails, swamps and ridges north of the Channel. Joe Szekely remembers that “it

seemed as if each tree to be cut to make this trail engendered a major discussion often lasting up to 15 minutes. One faction argued to move the trail to save the tree and protect the natural look while the other was sure it had to be felled. Many trees were saved after much argument only to be cut down immediately by the next work party! A few years later, when skate skiing became a popular technique, the trails had to be widened and many trees that survived the first cut had to

come down. Once more this generated much controversy but nature has a way of repairing itself, and a short time after each cutting the trail again looked natural and inviting”. This trail, now known as the Red Trail, was extended in subsequent years and has become the Club’s most popular trail. An extension east of the T1 snowmobile trail was started in 1976. The series of rock ridges on this trail often resulted in bruised skiers as they tumbled and made sitzmarks in the snow. This extension was consequently renamed the Blue Trail. In 1998, a log warming cabin was built on the Red trail by Larry Gauthier, Heinz Ehlers, Bob Jones, Bob Dick, Oliver Greenfield, Bruce Goodwin, Derrek Owen, Roy Styles and Dennis Cann.

It should be noted that the Ski Club has enjoyed good relationships with the Golf Club and the SnoPals Snowmobile Club in more recent years, The ski trails set on the golf course now are very popular and often used for races while the SnoPals helped to set ski tracks in the past and continue to help with ski races.

In the early years, off-trail tours were organized into the back country north of the Channel, to Pine Point Rapids and to the Agassiz Forest. By 1980, interest in these tours had dwindled and the Club decided to improve the local touring trails to old Pinawa and Otter Falls. The Old Pinawa trail, originally a favourite of Mike Tomlinson, Eric and Edna Graham and Bob Jones traversed marshes and forested areas along the Pinawa Channel to Old Pinawa. It was maintained until 2001 when low usage and the new Trans-Canada Trail to Old Pinawa no longer justified the effort required to maintain the trail.

The English River/Otter Falls area, first explored on skis by Jim Putnam, was a favourite destination of Walter Harrison and Bob Jones. Walter, Bob and Eric Graham marked and cleared the English River Trail on the peninsula jutting into the Winnipeg River opposite Otter Falls in 1979-81. The views of Margaret Lake and Otter Falls from this trail makes it the most picturesque of the Club trails. In 1995 a log warming cabin was constructed on the trail by Larry Gauthier, Heinz Ehlers, Bob Jones and Bruce Goodwin.

In 1982, the Club decided to make a new, more challenging trail between the T2 and T3 snowmobile trails northeast of the Diversion Dam. Dennis LeNeveu and Derrek Owen chose the route from aerial photographs and advice from hikers and back country skiers. This 10 km trail starts from the Red Trail and follows a chain of rock ridges to incorporate challenging terrain before returning through a large spruce bog and marsh to near its Red trail start. One hill on the original trail, nick-named “The Screamer”, was found to be too challenging by many members

and subsequently bypassed. In 1983, a cabin was built near the trail midpoint. It had an unusual shape, a polyhedral geodesic dome. This shape maximized strength and allowed for the prefabrication of the triangular panels that were hauled to the site, a fact much appreciated by Dennis LeNeveu, Alf Wikjord, Bruce Goodwin and others who helped with in its construction.



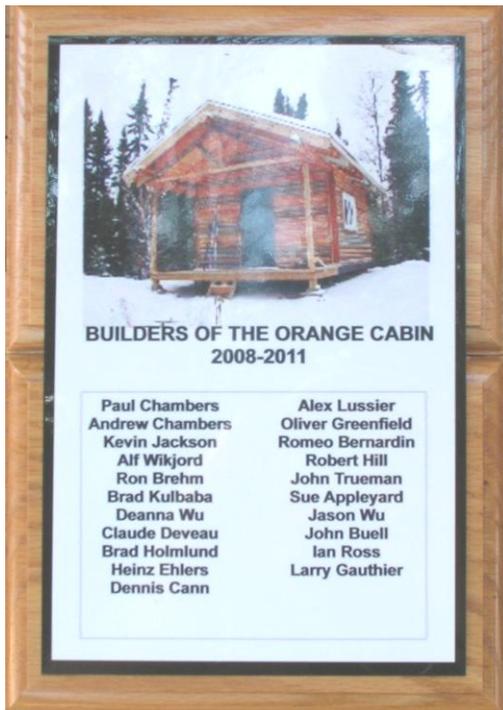
1984



2012

Orange Trail Cabins

By 2008, the dome cabin had suffered numerous bear attacks and needed replacement. Paul Chambers, Romeo Bernardin, and Oliver Greenfield with input from Larry Gauthier and



Bruce Goodwin designed a new log cabin. Over the next three years, Paul led the cutting and peeling of 50 spruce trees, the hauling in of building supplies and the construction the new log cabin officially opened in 2012. The Jones-Graham-Gauthier Freeway trail provides a challenging but direct link between the Orange and English River cabins.

Ski Instruction

Eva Rosinger was the Club's first ski instructor and taught members how to tar and wax wood skis, many of which she and her husband Herb had sold from their basement business. She and others

also instructed many novices on the diagonal stride technique of cross-country skiing. In 1980, the Club wondered if there was enough interest to start a Jackrabbit program to teach children cross-country skiing. There was! Thirty-five juniors turned out and dragged 15 "seniors" with them. The first leaders were Eva Rosinger, Mike Quinn, Don Ewing and Joe Szekely. This program continues to be a major success for the Club because of the enthusiasm of the children and people like Derek Martin, Jan Cramer, Doreen Dick, Ken Demoline, Derrek Owen, Don Bachinsky, Peter Chernis, Alf Wikjord, Peter Vilks, Elaine Greenfield, Keith Reid and Bruce Goodwin and the many other coaches over the years. In the past decade, many Jackrabbit coaches have completed the National Coaching Certification Program including current co-ordinators Susan Barnett and Kevin Dearing.



1980-81 Whiteshell Jackrabbits 1.Erica Greenstock 2.Tammy Ohta 3.Andrew Chambers 4.David Mayman 5.Peter Szekely 6.Unknown 7.Alaina Bridges 8.Janet Bird 9.Sowmil Mehta 10.Graham Wright 11.Jay Bridges 12.Alison Ritchie 13.Carol Schatzlein 14.Karen Harrison 15.Joseph Szekely 16.Andrew Simpson 17.Todd Bridges 18.Sonali Bera 19.Keri-Lyn Bailey 20.Glen Bailey 21.Anna Chambers 22.Helen Ritchie 23.Unknown 24.Jane Simpson 25.Eva Rosinger 26.Sandra Wright 27.David Johnson 28.Unknown 29.Mike Quinn

For the more competitive youth, Nick Scheier and Don Ewing started a Junior Development Program in 1984. By 1986, there were fourteen members and Sonali Bera, Tamara Ewing and Tanis Westdal had made the Provincial A Team while Trudy Mills, Angela Moyer, Trevor Olson, Brad Ryz, Peter Szekely and Karla Wikjord were on the Manitoba Talent Squad. Sonali, Tanis and Joseph Szekely Jr. were part of the Manitoba



Ben Dearing at 2012 Manitoba Provincial Championships

ski team for the Canadian Winter Games. Later in the 80's the group was renamed the Whiteshell Ski Team and Keith Olson, Pat Mills, Derek Martin and Doreen Bigelow came on board as coaches. For his knowledge and dedicated leadership Don Ewing was named Manitoba Cross-Country Skiing Coach of the Year in 1992. Pinawa skiers, both youth and adult have continued to excel in competitions and, in March 2012, Ben Dearing competed with the Manitoba team at the Canadian National Championships in Quebec City. Graduates of

the program have now entered coaching ranks. Karla Wikjord is qualified as the highest level Nordic ski instructor and both she and Jeff Hampshire have been presidents of the Canadian Association of Nordic Ski Instructors.

Ski Competitions

The thunder of an RCMP shotgun or the blast of Martha Owen's air horn as she perched atop a step ladder are just two of the ways that starts have been signalled to ski races hosted by the Club. Its first Canadian Ski Association sanctioned race was run in 1976 while the Club's



2012 Loppet

first Loppet or citizen's race was organized by Herb Rosinger in 1977. This race, now called the Manitoba Loppet, has been held annually and regularly attracts over a hundred competitors from Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. The Club has hosted numerous provincial cross-country ski championships and in 1987 and

2010 hosted Canada Cup races and Western Canadian Championships for elite skiers. In 2006, it hosted the cross-country ski competitions for the Manitoba Winter Games. To more easily

handle the registration and result tabulation Peter Chernis developed the Race Wizard software program that was used for a number of years for managing races in Manitoba. More recently Paul Chambers played a key role in Manitoba in implementing the Zone4 race management and timing program to meet the higher precision now required for inter-provincial races.

More recently, Carol Randall started Racers and Pacers in 2009. This is weekly evening program allows skiers to race against others or themselves on a short set course.,

Now and the Future

The Whiteshell Ski Club is a volunteer organization. With the exception of a few youth grants and assistance from Natural Resources in the early days all the trails have been cut and improved and their cabins built by volunteers. Each fall members remove deadfall and new



Jeff Long and Romeo Bernardin setting ski trails in March 2009

saplings from the 45 km network of Club trails. After snow arrives, members operate and maintain the Club snowmobiles and equipment to pack and set ski tracks and to cut and haul firewood to the cabins. The Club executive and many volunteers organize and run the Loppet and other race events as well as instructional programs. To gain additional funds to upgrade Club equipment, volunteers work bingos at Winnipeg casinos, a task organized for many years by Marj and Heinz Ehlers. One early Club member, Henry Kuehl, was such an enthusiastic volunteer in fund raising, trail clearing and maintenance that the Club now recognizes an outstanding volunteer each year by awarding them the Henry Kuehl Memorial Trophy. In total, it is

estimated that volunteers put in 3000 to 5000 hours each year to provide the excellent trails, facilities and events enjoyed by members, area residents, and skiers from further afield in Manitoba and elsewhere. The Whiteshell Ski Club has been a strong and vibrant part of the recreation scene in Manitoba for 40 years and will continue to be so.

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