



Travelling Pine Knob's tow ropes is routine for the average skier. When you're blind and it's your first time up the hill, it's pure high adventure—but with the security of a guide behind you, it's not bad at all.

Skiing is learning



Feeling snow under ski is an all-new experience for any novice skier, and doubly exciting for a blind child when he tops the hill, lets go of the tow rope and stands ready for his first run. One skier, perhaps a little unsure of himself, gets some encouragement from his guide.

The orange caution signs read "Blind Skier" on one and "Guide" on the other. They ski together always, under the auspices of the Detroit Chapter of the American Blind Skiing Foundation (ABSF), with free instruction from Ron Brown and his ski school at Pine Knob ski resort.

Upon completing a new two-year program at Pine Knob, the average blind skier skis as well if not better than the average sighted skier.

"They're no harder for me to teach than sighted people, in general," Brown said. "In fact, they learn to ski better than most sighted skiers because they take lessons."

Last Sunday at Pine Knob, a group of blind skiers, under Brown's tutelage, had their first experience with the feeling of moving across snow with long sticks attached to the feet. They progressed to side stepping, snow plows and simple turns.

Brown's main teaching device is a long bamboo pole with the blind skier in the middle and a guide (or instructor) on both ends. The pole is "something secure," and gives the skier a fix on the fall line, an imaginary line running from the top to the bottom of the hill.

After two or three lessons, students are weaned from the bamboo pole, get their own ski poles and head for the big hills, but are always accompanied by a guide.

The guides, all volunteers, act as seeing eye dogs for the blind skiers, giving them constant reference signals such as "turn left," "turn right," "come toward my voice."

The guides attend a six week clinic conducted by Brown to improve their skiing and to learn to work with the blind. Last year Brown had to stop the blind skiing program for a week because the blind skiers had sur-

passed their sighted guides in skiing ability—the reason for the clinic this year.

The program is more than just learning how to ski. It's an overall educational experience emphasizing blind-sighted relationships and acquainting blind children in particular with working with many sighted people, said Chuck Reader, ABSF Detroit chapter head.

Whatever the purposes, a main ingredient in the program's success is simply that skiing is fun.



Birmingham Seaholm student Bob Rentschler is one of the instructors.

Pictures and story by Michelle Bogre



Rochester-area resident Ron Brown, who started the skiing classes for the blind, shows one student how to keep his skis parallel. Since the student can't see, Brown teaches, in part, by touch.



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