

RECREATION Center

Technology helps novice skiers

(Eccentric sportswriter Chris Mayer recently had a question-and-answer session with Hans Erni, manager of Bavarian Village Ski & Golf in Birmingham, regarding the winter ski/snowboarding season.)

Q: How does Oakland County stack up with the rest of Southwestern Michigan when it comes to outdoor winter recreational activities, like skiing?

A: We do have quite a few local resorts. You look at (Mount) Holly, (Mount) Brighton, Alpine Valley and Pine Knob and people can at least do a few turns out there. Night skiing is very popular and these places are good for people looking for a couple hours of recreational skiing after work. For recreational skiers this is a very good place to be, no question about it, since you have a lot of quality ski schools like the ones at Alpine Valley, Pine Knob, Brighton and Holly. So from that standpoint this is a very good area for the recreational skier.

Q: Last year the parabolic ski made its much-anticipated debut. Is it still popular?

A: Yes, its popularity has gotten a lot stronger. Last year there were only six models on the market and now there are 80 of them. A lot of brands next year will bank completely on the shaped skis. But parabolic is a very dangerous word, shaped is a better term because a lot of the skis out there now are not really what we call parabolics. They are moderately shaped skis, so for a lot of beginners they're easy to ski on. The shape skis, in any other year, have been

allowed even beginners to learn quicker and in many cases become accomplished in a short period of time. They will notice improvement immediately and then they are hooked. This ease of learning, as well as the variety of equipment available, makes skiing a perfect activity for families to begin together because there is a ski for everybody. It's the absolute best thing out there for beginners, there's no question about it because it just helps you learn how to properly carve a turn.

Q: Are improvements in ski technology still on the rise?

A: That's what everybody is looking at - gaining improvement in technology. The same thing happened in golf when the oversized drivers first came out. Everyone was saying they weren't for the good golfer and then titanium golf clubs came out and the same thing happened. And now both are accepted, even by the pros.

Q: How popular is cross country skiing in this area?

A: The cross country season in this area depends on what kind

of winter we have. If we have snow, logic says it will be good. We obviously depend on natural snow, but cross country is very popular here. It's very easy to learn with the technological change in skis, especially the shorter skis that came out about three or four years ago. The shorter skis make it a lot easier for the recreational skier.

Q: As far as cross country skiing is it an expensive sport to get into?

A: Cross country is one of the least expensive sports out there and it's great exercise. All you really need to invest in is a set of skis and bindings and some poles.

Q: Is it wise to take lessons first?

A: It's always good to take lessons, like in any other sport. It helps to take a couple of lessons, and cross country skiing is a little like in-line skating. You basically use most of the muscles in your body for cross country and it's great exercise.

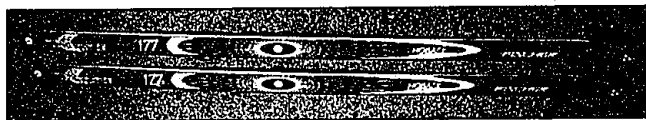
Q: The number of snowboarders nationwide continues to soar. What might the future hold for

that sport?

A: Snowboarding has gone from really just a kids sport into something a lot of people are doing. It's just another winter sport out there that people have liked to take up. It really took off about eight years ago. I think a lot of the kids took it up because it was a little different, but it has turned into a mainstream sport. It's tough in the beginning because you only have two ways to fall - forward or backward - but it's certainly wise to take lessons. Snowboarding is not just for 20-somethings anymore. So many others are trying it out and seeing for themselves just how different and thrilling the sport is. It has also given the industry a shot in the arm as far as the number of new participants.

Q: What has the increased popularity of snowboarding done for Alpine/downhill skiing?

A: With the new shaped ski, I think downhill has regained some of the market. I think it helps the beginning skier to develop a lot faster, so more people are willing to try it.



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLTYNSKY

Ski revolution: The latest equipment trend in cross country are skis that are shorter in length, more maneuverable, need no waxing and require very little maintenance. The Fischer Revolutions are included among this group.

It's always wise to prepare first

Carol Fink knows the importance of planning for a cross country skiing adventure.

"There's an expression that says if you can walk, you can learn to cross country ski," Fink said. "It's not difficult at all. It's just important to know the right things to make the experience easier and more fun."

"One of the major advantages of cross country skiing is that there are really no age limits. I've taught people as young as five and as old as 80. Another advantage is that it's such an aerobic sport."

Fink possesses quite a bit of knowledge when it comes to outdoor recreation. She is an integral force behind "Happy Trails Inc.," a community-based organization specializing in hiking, in-line skating, backpacking, canoeing and cross country ski instruction.

Cross country skiing is a main focus in the winter and Fink, an accomplished Professional Ski Instructor of America, says simple steps can help advanced, intermediate and beginner skiers.

Fink recommends anyone over 40 years of age first consult with a doctor before partaking in a strenuous activity such as cross country skiing.

Lessons might not be for everyone, but even one class can go a long way whether it's becoming familiar with equipment or learning to get up from a fall.

"If you know the right technique, you don't have to kill yourself," Fink said. "I recommend at

least a starter lesson."

Warmth is the key where clothing is concerned.

"In cross country skiing there is a functional warmth theory," Fink said. "It involves a three-layer system that's designed to keep you warm. The first is avoid cotton at all cost because it absorbs and holds in moisture. The second deals with insulation and wearing something like wool, and the third layer is protection in protection from the elements. A windbreaker is ideal for that."

Hats, gloves and wool socks can also boost the comfort level.

Prevent dehydration by consuming fluids before and during the trip. Fink also suggests bringing along some dried food and a first-aid kit.

"Before you go out skiing you should drink a lot, whether it's water or an energy drink like Gatorade," Fink explained. "You can also carry it in a backpack when you're skiing."

If you plan to ski alone, sometimes it's fun to go skiing alone, but it's important to plan ahead," Fink said. "You should know the area where you are going."

Fink and "Happy Trails" partner Leslie Johnson will teach cross country this winter at weather permits. "Happy Trails" is presently working in conjunction with community education departments in West Bloomfield, Farmington and Novi.

Call Fink at (810) 669-2520 for additional information.

Cross country fans enjoy variety of top-notch sites

BY CHRIS MAYER
STAFF WRITER

Last week's batch of warm weather may have discouraged area cross country ski enthusiasts, but one significant snowfall and some colder temperatures should bring the popular activity back to the forefront.

When the weather enables you to try your skis again, here are some first-rate courses just a short drive away. As a precaution, it's wise to call ahead and check conditions.

OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS

Addison Oaks County Park, located on West Romeo Road nine miles north of the city of Rochester, features more than 12 miles of groomed trails. Hours are 8 a.m.-dusk, Sunday through Thursday; 8 a.m.-10 p.m., Friday and Saturday (night skiing available on a lighted 1 1/2-mile trail). A volunteer nordic ski patrol is on duty weekends as available, and rental equipment is available Friday-Sunday evenings and by arrangement. Private and semi-private lessons can be made by appointment. A heated concession building with hot food service is available select Friday evenings and weekends. A warming area and restrooms are also on the site. Call (810) 693-2432 for additional information.

Independence Oaks County Park has more than nine miles of

groomed trails. Hours are 8 a.m.-dusk, daily. A volunteer nordic ski patrol is on duty weekends and as available. Heated concession (food available Saturday and Sunday only), warming shelter with fireplaces and restrooms are nearby. Skiers can also warm up at the Nature Center with its fireplaces and restrooms. Equipment rental is available on weekends, and private/semi-private lessons can be made by appointment. Independence Oaks is located on Sashabaw Road, 2 1/2 miles north of I-75. Call (810) 625-0877 for more information.

Glen Oaks Golf Course in Farmington Hills, off 13 Mile Road between Orchard Lake and Middlebelt roads, has open skiing on marked trails for those with equipment. Hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Call (810) 851-8356 for more information.

White Lake Oaks Golf Course, located on Williams Lake Road just south of M-69, has open skiing for those with equipment (no trail grooming). Hours are dusk-dawn, daily. Rental equipment available 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and during the week by arrangement. Clubhouse open weekends for concessions and restrooms. Call (810) 698-2700 for more information.

(A vehicle entry fee - Oakland County residents pay a discounted rate may be charged at Addison Oaks and Independence

Oaks.)

HURON-CLINTON METROPARKS

Stony Creek Metropark just north of Rochester features nearly four miles of cross country ski trails, suitable for novice and intermediate skiers. Trails are groomed and marked on the east side of the park and more than 10 miles of groomed and marked traditional trails lie on the west side of the park for the novice, intermediate and advanced skiers. Cross country ski rental service is available daily (weather permitting) at the Ski Touring

Center located at the Golf Course starter building. Ski rental hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays and 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekends. Rental equipment must be returned by 6 p.m. Access to ski trails on the east side of the park is from the Oakgrove Picnic Area or from Eastwood Beach. Trails on the west side of the park are accessible from the Ski Touring Center or the West Branch Picnic Area - Lot B. Skiing is not permitted after dark. Park hours are 8 a.m.-8 p.m. daily. For ice and snow conditions, contact Stony Creek at (810) 761-4242 or 1-800-477-7756. A vehicle entry

permit is required.

Metro Beach Metropark on Lake St. Clair near Mount Clemens has a 2 1/2-mile groomed cross country skiing trail. Park hours are 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with extended hours to 10 p.m. for skating when the weather permits. For snow and ice conditions, contact Metro Beach Metropark at 1-800-477-3172 or 1-800-234-6534. A vehicle entry permit is required.

Indian Springs Metropark, located five miles southwest of Clarkston, has groomed cross country trails covering more than 12 miles through the park. Park hours are 8 a.m.-8 p.m. For more information, call (810) 625-7870 or 1-800-477-3192. A vehicle entry permit is required.

Kensington Metropark near the Milford/Brighton area is extremely popular when it comes to cross country skiing because of 15 miles of groomed trails covering all types of terrain. Skiing is permitted on the golf course where the open space appeals most novice skiers. Cross country ski rental service is offered daily (weather permitting) at the Ski Touring Center/Golf Starter Building with complete rental equipment available. A cross country ski map is also available upon request. Park hours are 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. For snow and ice conditions, call 1-800-477-3178 or 1-800-234-6534. A vehicle entry permit is required.

MICHIGAN STATE PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS

Maybury State Park has 10 miles of easy-to-difficult groomed trails that traverse wooded and hilly terrain. Cost is \$5.25 the first hour, an additional \$2 for the second hour and \$1 for a third hour or more. Indoor shelter and restrooms, snack bar, and weekday group rates with reservation available. The park is located in Northville on 8 Mile Road between Beck and Napier roads. Call (810) 346-1190 or 810-948-8390 for more information.

Bald Mountain Recreation Area, located in Lake Orion, offers eight miles of easy-to-difficult groomed trails that travel along wooded areas, lakes and streams. Take I-75 to exit 81 and drive north on M-24 approximately two miles. Call 810-693-6767 for more information.

Highland Recreation Area has 16 miles of easy-to-difficult trails that traverse wooded and hilly terrain. Located at 5200 E. Highland Road (M-59) in White Lake. Call 810-685-2433 for additional information.

(A \$20 annual motor vehicle permit or \$4 daily entrance permit is required for entry into any Michigan State Park. For additional information on cross country skiing, call the Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division at 517-373-9900.)

STATS

Michigan's 1997 Michigan Ski & Snowboard season is being promoted by the Michigan Ski & Snowboard Council, a non-profit organization that promotes skiing and snowboarding in Michigan. The council is currently accepting applications for the 1997 Michigan Ski & Snowboard season. The council is currently accepting applications for the 1997 Michigan Ski & Snowboard season. The council is currently accepting applications for the 1997 Michigan Ski & Snowboard season.

THE Earl E. Byrd gets the house!

How would you like to find your dream home? Earl E. did. He was getting tired of the messy nest he and his wife threw together in the spring, so early one Sunday morning he checked out our new Real Estate and New Homes sections and found just what he wanted at an affordable price. (Got it away from a sparrow who'd slept in)

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