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the ALASKA nordic skier

FEBRUARY 2024, VOL.25, NO.5

PHOTO FROM **ANCHORAGE NORDIC SKI CLUB SCRAPBOOK**

A special online section of the Alaska Nordic Skier features the ski race that kicked-off NSAA's 60-year legacy, a cowboy skiing off into the sunset, and more! Find it at

anchoragenordicski.com/newsletter

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Anchorage Nordic Skier
Newsletter Of The Nordic Skiing Association Of Anchorage, Inc.

9170 Jewel Lake Rd, Suite 200, Anchorage, Alaska 99502
Phone — 276-7609 **Hotline —** 248-6667
anchoragenordicski.com
info@anchoragenordicski.com

AROUND THE BOWL

PHOTO BY **JAMES MASON**

The action was awesome at early January's Hickok Skiathlon at Kincaid Park. The popular Hickok is the second race in NSAA's AMH Anchorage Cup series.

Almost time to Tour!

The 37th Tour of Anchorage is scheduled for Sunday, March 3, and features six different cross-country ski races with classic and skating options beginning in the morning along with three fat tire bike events in the afternoon. Ambitious athletes can opt for the Tour Double, participating in both ski and bike races.

In each event, participants range from elite ski racers and bikers to recreational skiers and bikers challenging themselves to finish. There are three events for each discipline: the 50k, 40k, and a 25k course. The 40k and 50k races traverse the city along ski and multi-use trails. The 25k races start at midtown (APU) and join the 50k and 40k courses. All races finish at Kincaid Park on the westernmost side of the city near the coastline of Cook Inlet.

There will be a festive finish line with food and amenities along with transportation back to the start locations, provided by shuttle bus. Register to race and learn more about the Tour at **anchoragenordicski.com/events/tour-of-anchorage/**.

All set for Ski 4 Kids?

NSAA's annual Ski 4 Kids event is celebrating its 30th year this season! The 2024 Ski 4 Kids event takes place from 2-5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, at Kincaid Park. There will be tons of winter activity stations for kids to explore and enjoy, including biathlon, ski jumping, sit skis, snow biking, orienteering, obstacle courses, and more. The event also features a fun ski race course with a 3km loop for the go-getters and a fun 1km activity course with plenty of animal mascots! Subway sandwiches, cookies, and hot chocolate are provided to all participants!

Ski 4 Kids is free for participants but relies on community donations and sponsors to thrive. Funds raised at Ski 4 Kids support ski equipment grants for local schools. Thank you to all the sponsors who help make the event possible and encourage healthy outdoor lifestyles for our kids, especially Banker Law Group, ConocoPhillips, Continental Auto Group, Subway, LaTouche Pediatrics, and the Elsberg Family Foundation.

Learn more about the event, how to register, and opportunities for school bus rides to the event at **anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-4-kids**.

Hip-hip hooray for the Hickok!

Early January's Hickok Skiathlon, Race 2 in the AMH Anchorage Cup series, drew a field of 130 skiers. So did the Cub Ski, while others opted for the 5K freestyle race and the rest participated in the 5k/10k skiathlon options showing their ability to ski classic and then change over to skate.

It was a great day skiing topped off with a great afterparty, complete with soup, for the ski community provided by APU's ski team. And as always AMH provided some amazing raffle prizes. Find results of the Hickok and other AMH Cup races at **zone4.ca/event/2023/Om2EY9/**.

These awesome races would not

See **BOWL,** Page 3

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NSAA OFFICE HOURS
10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday

BOARD MEETINGS
Fourth Thursday of the month
6:30 p.m. at NSAA Office
Open to all

Celebrating NSAA's 60 spectacular years while focusing on an even brighter future

Message from Kikkan Randall / NSAA Executive Director

Happy midwinter, everyone! Wow, what a season we've had so far! The snow and the grooming have been unprecedented, all races and events have gone off without a hitch, and Junior Nordic is in full swing across the city. There is so much to celebrate.

Last month provided the opportunity to pause and reflect on NSAA celebrating our 60th anniversary. It was a fantastic chance to appreciate how many wonderful trails and traditions in our city have been started by our Nordic skiing pioneers, benefiting many user groups beyond just those who like to slide around on skinny skis. So many parts of what makes Anchorage a great city to live in owe their beginnings to cross-country skiing!

But as much as we celebrate what has been accomplished so far, we also want to use this time to look forward and not rest on our laurels. While Anchorage has been pioneering in so many ways, the sport of skiing has progressed immensely across the United States and the globe. We will have to stay hungry, creative, and innovative to keep Anchorage as one of the top ski destinations in the world. Many people ski in Anchorage but there are still wells of untapped potential to introduce new people to the sport. We have put Anchorage skiers on World Cup and Olympic podiums, but new talent lays in our pipeline, just waiting to be cultivated and inspired!

That is why, as we look forward to the next 60 years, NSAA is making the commitment to keep pushing our mission forward. To continue to create opportunities for our community (skiers and non-skiers alike) to enjoy our local trails, to come together at inspiring community events, and to push the level of competitive performance by hosting high-caliber races. We are committed to improving our infrastructure to deliver the quality service you expect and anticipating future challenges and opportunities. To achieve this, we need your continued support. Bring your ideas and roll up your sleeves … we are going to accomplish great things together!

Read about the ski race that kicked-off NSAA's 60-year legacy on Page 21 or if you're reading the print version, find the story in the bonus online section at **anchoragenordicski.com/newsletter.**

BOWL

Continued from Page 2

be possible without the hard work of all our volunteers. We might not say it enough but thank you – your hard work is appreciated.

There are more great community races on the way: we have three more awesome race events that you can participate in. February 11 is the Criterium Race, and we finish up on Feb. 18 with the Sven Memorial Ski, also known as the Tour of Kincaid. We would love to see you all out on the trails! Register and learn more at **anchoragenordicski.com/races/amh-anchorage-cup/**.

NSAA Calendar

FEBRUARY

February 3-4 — Alaska Ski for Women, Kincaid Park
February 9-10 — High school regionals
February 11 — AMH Anchorage Cup Race 4 – Criterium, Kincaid Park
February 14 — Middle school race
February 17 — Ski 4 Kids, Kincaid Park
February 17 — Skate Ski High School race
February 18 — AMH Anchorage Cup Race 5 – Sven Memorial/Tour of Kincaid
February 22-24 — Alaska High School State Championships
February 27-March 2 — Ski Jumping Junior National Championships, Kincaid Park and Karl Eid Jumps
February 29 — Middle school race

MARCH

March 1-2 — Biathlon Races 5 and 6, Kincaid Park
March 3 — Tour of Anchorage
March 10-16 — Arctic Winter Games 2024, Mat-Su
March 16 — NSAA Ski Train
March 29 — NSAA 60th anniversary Polka Party

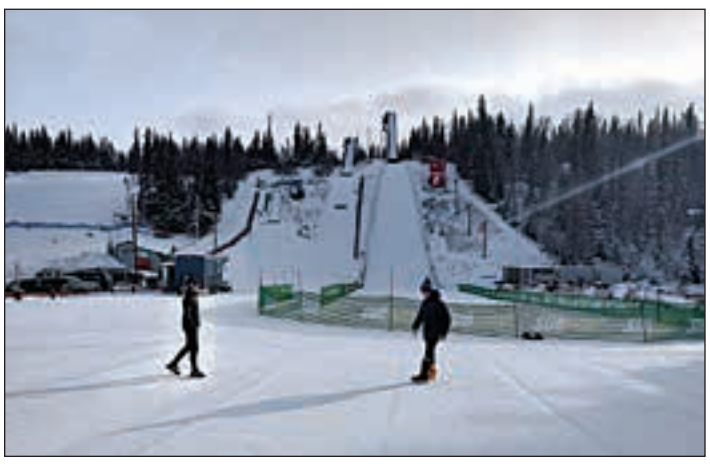
JNs landing in Anchorage!

BY ZAK HAMMILL
Director/Coach, NSAA Ski Jumping Program

After months of planning, Junior Nationals are finally upon us! All the necessary upgrades to the ski jumping hill have been completed, sponsors have been signed on, and we are gathering all the necessary volunteers! The best junior ski jumpers and Nordic combined athletes from across the country will head to Anchorage for our event from February 27-March 2.

Since there are five ski jumping and Nordic combined divisions in the U.S., we host this event every fifth season. It is encouraged to display local pieces of culture throughout the event, so we are excited to show off our beautiful city of Anchorage as well as our local culture. Opening ceremonies will take place at Kincaid Park on the evening of February 27. We are excited to have a dog musher from Jim Lanier's Kennel to help us kick off this year's event!

Following open ceremonies, we will have ski jumping and Nordic combined events each day until we wrap up the event on the evening of March 2. We encourage members of the community to come out and watch these athletes compete for Junior National Championship titles each day. All events are free to the public and a detailed schedule can be found on our event website: **anchoragenordicski.com/events/jumping-nationals/**.



Anchorage's high-flyers and current U.S. National Team members Skyler Amy and Carter Brubaker were warming up for 2018 Junior Nationals in this photo taken the last time Junior Nationals were in Anchorage. Get ready to see the next generation of Alaska and America's top ski jumpers in action at Junior Nationals in Anchorage from February 27-March 2.

We are also looking for volunteers to help throughout the week. Putting on an event like this requires a large amount of planning, but also requires people to fill volunteer roles. Please check our event website for our Sign Up Genius if you are interested in volunteering!

We would like to thank all of our event sponsors this year: Alaska Heart and Vascular Institute, Santos, ConocoPhillips, Alyeska Pipeline, Bear's Tooth, CRW, Hilltop Ski Area, Snow City Cafe, AMH, Hoarding Marmot, Alaska Chip Company, Alaska Sausage and Seafood, Cynosure Brewing, and the Nordic Ski Patrol!

the Alaska nordic skier

EDITOR
Josh Niva
nordicskiereditor@gmail.com

LAYOUT
Kevin Powell
kevin@powelldesign.net

AD REPRESENTATIVE
Sara Lucey
nordicskieradvertising@gmail.com

LOCAL EDITORS
ANCHORAGE
Josh Niva
nordicskiereditor@gmail.com
EAGLE RIVER
Barbara Johnson
sbejohn1@mac.com
FAIRBANKS
Eric Troyer
newsletter@nscfairbanks.org
JUNEAU
Tristan Knutson-Lombardo
tkl1289@gmail.com
KACHEMAK
Anna Lewald
kachemaknordicskiclub@gmail.com
MAT-SU
Marla Jakab
marla.jakab@matsuski.org
GIRDWOOD
Deb Essex
deb@skigirdwood.org

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

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On the cover: A skier cruises across the finish line of the Moose Run Race as spectators and officials look on in 1965. The event added to the momentum of Anchorage's newly formed Nordic Ski Club. Read more about the Nordic Ski Club's history and the 60th anniversary of the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage in a special online section of the Alaska Nordic Skier at **anchoragenordicski.com/newsletter.** Photo from a Nordic Ski Club scrapbook.

Make a costume, make a memory, make an impact: Alaska Ski For Women is here!

We can't wait to welcome you to Kincaid Park on February 3 and 4 for this season's Alaska Ski for Women. Remember, this event has room for everyone. Saturday, February 3, the decorated 4 km course will open at Kincaid Park for the Friends and Family Ski. Everyone is welcome to register for this event, including adults and kids of any gender! Sunday, February 4, is the main event: timed classic and freestyle races, the costume contest, refreshments in the chalet, and the iconic party wave. You can find more information and download the 2024 event guide at **AlaskaSkiForWomen.org**.

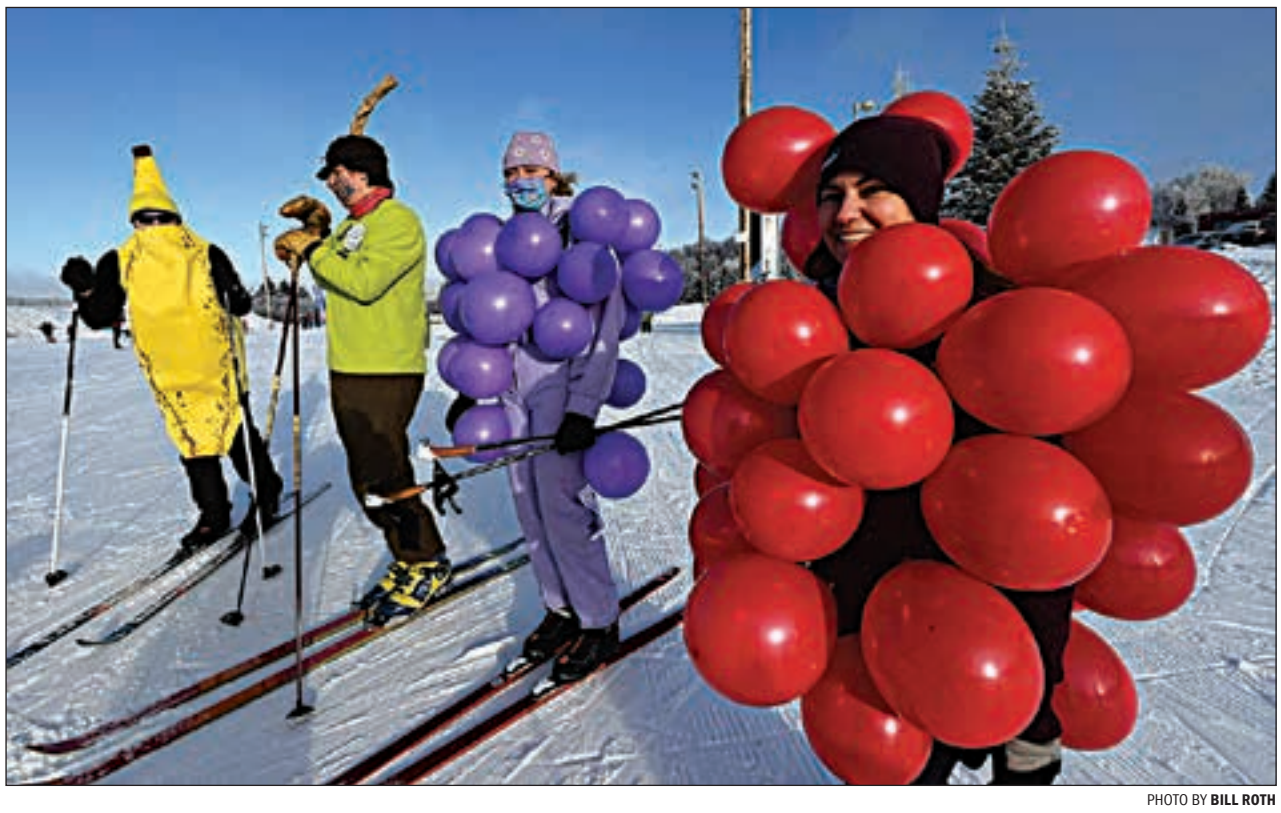

PHOTO BY **BILL ROTH**

Bib pick-up and in-person registration

Already registered and ready to ski? Great! We have three opportunities for bib pickup. You can also register in-person at any of the following events.

Noon-7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 1, Midtown Mall (600 E Northern Lights Blvd): This is the preferred bib pick-up date. We will also have merchandise available for sale and silent auction items on display.

11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3: in the blue Kincaid Stadium Timing Building.

Starting at 9 a.m. Sunday, February 4, Kincaid Chalet: Day of registration is limited to Party Wave only

Minimum donation is $35 for adults 13+ and $15 for youth 0-12: In-person registration is by credit card only (no cash). The first 100 registrants who donate an additional $40 at registration receive a limited edition 2024 tote bag!

2024 Alaska Ski for Women details

Costume contest: The Mardi Gras of the North is happening in person on Sunday! Get ready to show our judges the creative side of skiing! Categories include: Terrific Team (3-plus people); Dynamic Duo (2 people) and Incredible Individual (1 person).

Volunteers: We have many opportunities for volunteers to assist! Find the "Sign Up to Volunteer" dropdown at **anchoragenordicski.com/events/alaska-ski-for-women/**.

Toko waxing: Our friends at Toko will be back again this year donating wax and waxing services. Stop by to get top-of-the-line kick wax before your race! Thanks to Toko for providing this awesome service over the years. Want to help wax? Sign up on the volunteer form on the event website.

Beer garden: Cheers! The beer and cider reception is back and in the Kincaid Chalet during Sunday's event for participants 21 and older. Don't forget your ID and your race bib! Thanks to Double Shovel Cider Co. and Turnagain Brewing for making this possible.

Merchandise: Merchandise is available for preorder online and will also be available at bib pickup on Thursday and at the race on Sunday. We've restocked past favorites including mugs and hats, plus our 2024 limited edition T-shirt. New this year we have cute and comfy crewneck sweatshirts, plus lounge shorts designed in collaboration with Anchorage woman-owned business SWOOP.

Cause: This event raises funds for organizations working to stop domestic violence across our state and the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage. Proceeds from the 2023 event supported Abused Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC) and Standing Together Against Rape (STAR).

Parking and Shuttles: The Kincaid parking lots can get crowded, so we encourage carpooling. We will also have free shuttles available from the Kincaid Elementary School parking lot. Visit the website or download the race guide for details.

Silent Auction: Feb. 1-4

This year's ASFW Silent Auction is going to be special in so many ways. Here are some previews of the exciting items available in the auction. These items and more will be on display at the Thursday bib pickup and in the chalet on Sunday. Can't attend the event? You can still participate in the auction - it will be held virtually and is open to the public!

We can supply you with new winter gear: Salomon Skin Skis or a choice of Nordic poles: a set of Dynamine D1 Swix from AMH or a personalized set with both your name and the Ski for Women logo from United States Ski Pole Company.

Winter biking will rock with Fatback Winter Cycling Pogies from Speedway Cycle, or a choice of two sets of sunglasses (Alaska Eye Care and Rudy Project): And this year, we have a compact T6 Kick Sled from Alaska Kicksled.

Looking for fun and entertainment? We have several nights on the town: visit the opera (La Traviata) and dine at Orso. Want a more casual option? Pick up the Bear Tooth Theatrepub gift package. Or, for even more adventure, explore the Homer area with Kachemak Bay Adventures.

Zip Kombucha, 49th State, and Cynosure will handle your libations, Tastee Freeze and Great Harvest, your post ski refueling.

This is just a sampling of our 95 auction listings. Check out our brochure link **drive.google.com/file/d/1LcqdzdHpCJ--0aBkg-9jnDY7Lyw6udFp/view?usp=sharing** for a quick peek, watch our Facebook and website for the updates, and bid February 1-4.

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The cat's meow: Big new groomer is making Hillside trails purrfect

BY NSAA OPERATIONS

A new snowcat is prowling the Service/Hillside trail system … NSAA's 2023 PistenBullly (PB) 400!

The equipment arrived at the end of 2023 in five pieces: two rolled-up lengths of track, all-way blade, tiller implement, and chassis/cab, loaded on a shipping flat/trailer and trucked to an adjacent Hilltop Ski Area parking lot. There, NSAA master mechanic Craig Norman off-loaded each component under one of the parking lot lights. A generator was brought in to warm up the engine and charge the batteries. Once proper warming was accomplished, fuel and diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) was added, fuel lines bled of air, and the Cummins-powered snowcat fired up.

Lead Servcie/Hillside Operator Matt Pauli joined Craig in the assembly at what was one of the coldest days of this ski season so far at approximately 10 below. The snowcat was fully assembled and ready to go on New Year's Day! Staff has been exercising its capabilities and needs since, as well as addressing trail needs such as additional width and trail (skiing) surface renovation.

This direct investment to the trail system will bring a higher quality ski experience for the skiing public. With this equipment in place, one pass grooming on the "wide" trails is achievable. The wide trails include all Lighted Loops, Gasline, Service stadium area, Spencer Loop, and Double Bubble. A significant amount of work was done during the summer of 2023 widening trails to accommodate the new equipment. The finish width of the 400, known by staff as "402," is approximately 5.5 meters (18 feet). This compares to the trail mainstay machine, a PB 100 (104), at an approximate finish width of 3.5 meters. Using 104 required two passes to complete operations on the wide trails, sometimes resulting in a noticeable center ridge. 104 will remain on-site to maintain classic-only, multi-use, and Homestead/Tour of Anchorage/BLM trails.

So far PB 402 is living up to our expectations and hopefully those of our trail users. Enjoy the trails!

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New jackets, same old fun and fundamentals for Junior Nordic skiers, coaches

Fittingly, the Hillside Monday/Wednesday group enjoy a convo and fun photo at Conversation Corner.

The Hillside Monday/Wednesday crew take a moment after conquering Heartbreak Hill.

Refreshed after Winter Break, all of NSAA's Junior Nordic groups have been jumping back into skiing and enjoying the amazing conditions and grooming across Anchorage. Our coaches, especially the Polar Cubs and Otters coaches, have been excited to start wearing our new puffy coach jackets. They have been especially welcome during January's colder temperatures.

Looking forward to February, there are two important dates coming up. First, Ski 4 Kids is Saturday, February 17, at Kincaid Park. Junior Nordic will not have regular practice that day so skiers and staff can help with and participate in this fun event that helps raise funds to support youth skiing in schools. At Ski 4 Kids, you'll find great skiing activities, as well as biathlon, orienteering, obstacle courses and much more! You can find more information on Ski 4 Kids at **anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-4-kids/**. Second, we will have regular practice on President's Day, Monday, February 19.

– Art Harmon, NSAA Junior Nordic Sport Director

STATEWIDE

Resources help reduce pet/trapping conflicts

BY ERIC TROYER

Trapping season opened Nov. 1, so trail users who let their dogs run loose should make sure they know some basic information about traps and traplines. Most trapping seasons run from Nov. 1 to the end of February, but the season for a few species lasts longer. Wolf traps could be active well into April. A pamphlet and videos are available to help.

A pocket-sized pamphlet titled "Trap Safety for Pet Owners" describes the types of traps and snares that may be encountered and provides illustrated instructions on how to free pets swiftly and safely. It is produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Alaska Trappers Association (ATA). Copies are available free of charge at department offices or may be viewed on the website at **tinyurl.com/m6oulhk**. More information, including video footage featuring trap removal instructions, is found on the department's website at **adfg.alaska.gov** (see "Sharing the Trails" under the "Hunting > Trapping" dropdown menu).

The ATA also sells a 30-minute video, "Sharing Alaska's Trails," that includes information such as how to know if you are on a trapline, trapline safety, the physics of handling and opening traps and snares, and tips for first-aid for pets accidentally caught in traps. The video doesn't promote trapping but deals with the practicalities of sharing the trails. A three-minute excerpt of the DVD can be found on YouTube (**youtube.com/watch?v=Jk242jZwEAQ**). Order a copy of the DVD from **alaskatrappers.org**.

Bobcats come home to race in Anchorage

BY STEVE WILSON

One-third of the Montana State University's Bobcat Nordic Ski Team hails from Alaska. In December, they came back home to race on their home turf at the SuperTour. Katey Houser, Joel Power, Rosie Whittington-Evans, Helen Wilson and Kai Meyers all have traded in their Xtratuffs for cowboy boots to ski in Bozeman.

PHOTO BY **H.R. WILSON**

A band of Bobcats, from left, Rosie Whittington-Evans, Joel Power, Eli Hermanson and Helen Wilson.

Head coach Adam St. Pierre said, "Montana State University has a long history of success for skiers from Alaska. Alaska pride is a real thing, and from what I can tell Bozeman is one of the few places in the Lower 48 that is even close to the natural splendor of Alaska. Bozeman is surrounded by mountains with ample opportunities for outdoor recreation and training. Plus, it's a relatively simple flight on AK Airlines from Bozeman to Anchorage, through Seattle of course, and only two times zones away.

"There are a number of strong teams in Alaska," he added. "I'm impressed how the clubs and high school coaches balance racing at the club and high school level to keep lots of athletes in the sport and allow for the motivated ones to truly excel. I find that Alaska athletes are generally very well prepared to adapt to training at the NCAA level and motivated by the process of improving."

Joel Power, a Service High School graduate, attributes his skiing success to the club support, particularly his Alaska Winter Stars coaching. He said, "The clubs made a great environment for learning to race well, train well and enjoy the sport. And Montana State attracted me because of other Alaskans friends."

Katey Houser, a Palmer High School graduate, trained with Alaska Nordic Racing (ANR). She was attracted to Bozeman because of the good snow and scenery, and great coaches. Observing Montana State's team dynamics at a Fairbanks RIMSA race sealed her decision to be a Bobcat. ANR coaches emphasized the teamwork requirement in training and so do the Montana State coaches.

Rosie Whittington-Evans, also from Palmer, trained with ANR and Alaska Pacific University. She attributes her success at a Division I school to Coach Mikey, early and late winter snows, and the hills at Government Peak. Rosie relished the opportunity to show off the Anchorage ski trails to her non-Alaskan teammates during the SuperTour races.

Helen Wilson, from Eagle River, said that ANR emulated the college training regimes, including HR monitors, training logs, strength workouts, ski practices. The biggest change was only a step up in hours.

"Alaskan weather have made us gritty and tough, whether cold, wind, ice, slush–well prepared for any race venue," she said. "We Alaskans take pride in our state, trails, mountains, ski clubs and all that Alaska has to offer."

Many Bobcat alumni have returned home to Alaska and still stay engaged in the ski community. Forrest Mahlen, Aubry LeClaire, Laura McDuffie, Ti Donaldson, and Eli Hermanson are just a few of the Nordic Bobcats that came back to the best Nordic skiing in North America.

When surveyed, the Alaskan Bobcat's favorite race venue was Kinciad Park and by far their favorite salmon was Alaskan sockeye.

Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
Girdwood, Alaska

P.O. Box 337
Girdwood, AK 99587
skigirdwood.org

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AROUND GIRDWOOD

Winner Creek Trail and narrow gauge trails

BY DEB ESSEX
GNSC PRESIDENT

Aside from the well-known groomed winter multi-use trails in Girdwood, from Moose Meadow to the Upper Meadows via Stumpy's Winter Trail, the narrow gauge trails are gaining in popularity and numbers. Spurred on by the enthusiasm and number of fat tire bikers, the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club acquired two SnowDog groomers to create winter singletrack trails in Girdwood.

The great idea of purchasing SnowDogs was first introduced by Ben Kohler. Ben is a trail-loving mountain biker who has witnessed the success of narrow gauge grooming around the U.S. These machines are used for ice fishing, hunting, hauling gear, and single-track grooming. They are lighter and more maneuverable than a snow machine at about a third of the price. They can go 20 MPH, and have the options of an attachable sled and grooming drag. (We like the sled.) You can stand or sit behind the machine as it rolls out great two-foot-wide trails for classic skiing, walking and biking. They can handle the deep snow that cycles through Girdwood, and are easily transportable. (aka in Ben's truck.) Ben did the research and brought this concept to the Girdwood Trails Committee and the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club. After he gained support from both committees, we immediately started fundraising for a new SnowDog. We purchased another one the following year.

The GNSC started with the Beaverpond Trail and Lower National Historic Iditarod Trail. With positive local feedback from skiers, walkers, and bikers, the GNSC began grooming a scenic outer-loop in the snowy meadows. These trails meander closer to the trees and guide trail users away from the wider multi-use trails.

An office with a view! The club's Skandic machine with a narrow gauge pan on its back takes a break during a busy day.

The popularity of the single-track groomed trails continued to grow, which led to the GNSC creating a volunteer agreement with the U.S.F.S. to groom the Winner Creek Trail. This undertaking is not for the weak. To successfully groom the Winner Creek trail, you first enjoy multiple touring sessions with wide skis for compaction (read: duck walk in wide skis carrying a shovel to fill-in postholes), then if downed trees are blocking the trail, coordinate their removal, then shoveling all narrow turns and icy sloped areas, then first attempts with the SnowDog, then more shoveling, etc. Ben successfully groomed the Winner Creek trail in 2022-23 winter and now has created a narrow gauge groom up to Zug's Slide (section of Winner Creek Trail) and is currently waiting for the next storm cycle to continue north. We follow his lead and help where we can, all-the-while knowing a warmer rain event could wipe out all evidence of his efforts, and we start over.

We have trained a handful of groomers with the SnowDog, and they keep up with the meadows and narrow trails as needed. To experience the Winner Creek Trail as a smoothly groomed trail rather than an icy post-holed trail (with high pucker-factor on the downhill) is a delight. I realize that weather dictates our grooming patterns, but I am eternally grateful for Ben's perseverance. And when I say Ben, I mean Ben and his wife Jill. They are quite the pair when it comes to creating narrow gauge trails in Girdwood. Rarely does Ben leave his house for this Type-2 Fun without a chainsaw, shovel, or Jill. They quietly create useable trails in Girdwood for walkers, skiers and bikers. They are Midwestern and humble, so you'd never know about their efforts, and I will probably get in a little trouble for bragging about them. I'm OK with that.

If you see them out on the trail, give them a wave. Or help them out by heading out on your skis to continue compacting the trails. You might just enjoy yourself and find the grooming went a little further down the trail.

In other news this February …

The Little Bears annual Barneløpet will be February 24. More information

See **GIRDWOOD**, Page 9

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Swing on in!

Juneau Nordic Ski Club

Juneau, Alaska

P.O. Box 21262
Juneau, AK 99802
jnski.org
info@jnski.org

Mission: To enhance, develop, and promote Nordic skiing in Juneau.

Goal: Great Nordic trails for all skiers!

AROUND THE CAPITAL CITY

Be careful what you dance for!

We snowdanced in October. We danced in November. We put on our ugliest of sweaters and danced right on through the holidays ... and boy did it pay off. A frigid cold snap followed by 30 inches of snow over the Martin Luther King Jr. weekend now has us skiing from Pioneer Road to Eagle Beach – and back again! Our best winter down here in Alaska's banana-belt is always the second half. So for those coming on down for session, don't forget to bring your skis!

Speaking of coming down to Juneau ...

Planning to visit Alaska's Capital this winter? If you do, here's your personal guide to the best ski spots only the locals know about. (Know before you go: make sure to check jnski.org for the latest trail conditions.)

Montana Creek: Located at the end of Montana Creek Road, this is Juneau's most reliable ski trail. Locals call it our "refrigerator" as it keeps snow better than almost any other trail in the state! Pro tip: bringing a dog that's skittish of gunfire? Make sure to keep them on leash as the trailhead is located next to a popular gun range.

Mendenhall Campground (and Lake): Wide and smooth, the campground consists of a 3-kilometer loop that is great for skiers of all abilities. Pro tip: the ski club grooms the adjoining lake once the ice is thick enough, adding up to 7 more kilometers of groomed trail backed by one of the most dramatic settings around.

Dredge Lakes: While not groomed regularly, the ski club occasionally links grooming from the Mendenhall Lake to this back-alley network of single-track trails.

Salmon Creek: Located near the hospital, it's our newest grooming location. Now the downtown folk have something close by to ski!

Eaglecrest Ski Area: More than just downhill! They groom around 6km of trail on their "lower loop" and 4km of trail on their "upper loop." Trail users must purchase a trail pass. Pro tip: no dogs allowed on these trails!

Pioneer Road: The weather doesn't always cooperate, but when it does it's the longest groomed ski (11km roundtrip) in town! Pro tip: located at the end of North Douglas Highway, the parking lot isn't regularly plowed by the city so, depending on the snow, take your chances pulling in, or park along the road and walk up.

Eagle Beach Campground: Juneau's northernmost ski destination (mile 27 on Glacier Highway) is maintained by State Parks staff and volunteers. With more average snowfall than in town, consider renting one of three cabins for a ski in/out kind of retreat!

Ask Skadi

The JNSC's semi-irregular advice column for curious skiers. Have a question? Shoot us an email: info@jnski.org.

Q: Do I have to pick up my dog's poop? Signed No Sense of Taste (or Smell)

A: Dear No Sense,

Yes.

It's Pick.Click.Give. Season!

We're thrilled to once again participate as a Pick.Click.Give. nonprofit.

See **JUNEAU,** Page 9

Our second season of Adult League kicked off with a waxing clinic at the Trail Mix, Juneau's local trail building nonprofit shop.

A recent high school ski team practice at Eaglecrest's Upper Loop after school.

JUNEAU

Continued from Page 8

And apparently so are our skiers. Last year, our first year as a participating org, more than 60 Alaskans gave nearly $4,000 to Nordic skiing in Juneau. That's more than just money towards our bottom line, it's money that lands in our bank account before ski season starts. Meaning we have an extra boost to getting grooming equipment tuned-up, youth program skis purchased, and cash for fall trail maintenance – all to get you out skiing the moment the snow flies. There are dozens of amazing Pick.Click.Give. nonprofits doing great work here in Alaska's Capital City. We hope you count the JNSC as one, too.

Upcoming Events

SKI-O-CACHING

Ends Feb. 16: It's not too late to get in on Juneau's biggest community scavenger hunt on skis! Combine all five clues and email your submission phrase at the end of the five weeks to be entered to win a whole host of cool prizes! Register at **jnski.org/contact-us** using "Ski-O-Caching Registration" in the subject line.

COMMUNISKI

Sunday, Feb. 4, Location TBD: Come celebrate (with) kids on skis and let's see how far we can collectively glide! Last year we raised $30,000 for youth ski programs and skied over 4,000km on the lake. What can we accomplish this year??

WOMEN'S SKI-UP 2

Feb. 7, Location TBD: A women-specific group opportunity to improve technique and gain greater ski comfort. Classic style, all levels and abilities. (For maximum participation fun it is suggested a fitness level able to ski 3-5km).

SOUTHEAST SNICKERDOODLE SKIATHLON AND SKI TOUR

Saturday, Feb. 17, Location TBD: Do both legs or share it with your Valentine, this skiathlon is for everyone! Snickerdoodles for all the love bugs who finish.

Skiing at Capitol Park, behind the State Capitol, during Juneau's 30-inch snow dump on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

GIRDWOOD

Winner Creek Trail gets some narrow-gauge grooming love.

GIRDWOOD

Continued from Page 7

coming soon, but mark your calendar for this fun family event on the 5K Loop.

The Girdwood Trails Plan introduction was pushed by to January 23, and the hearing is tentatively scheduled at the Anchorage Assembly on February 13. We will update you with date and time to support the Girdwood Trails Plan approval.

Please consider donating to Girdwood's non-profits when you sign up for your 2024 Alaska PFD (**mypfd.alaska.gov**/). We are very grateful to the past Pick.Click.Give. donations we have received, and we utilize these funds to keep our machines running and the crew happy! Many thanks!

See you on the trails.

STATEWIDE

Arctic Winter Games arrive in Mat-Su Valley in March

Support Alaska, and the Arctic's top young athletes as a fan and volunteer!

Mat-Su 2024 AWG tickets on sale now

From March 10-16, the Arctic Winter Games will bring together over 2,000 youth athletes, competing in 20 sports, ranging from Arctic Sports and Dene Games to traditional sports. As the Arctic's premier international sporting event, the Games are a fantastic opportunity to connect with individuals in our community as well as those from across the Circumpolar North.

Visit tickets **awg2024.org** to purchase your tickets and check out the sizzle reel (**youtube.com/watch?v=qLgha4XzoE4&t=2s**) for a glimpse of what to expect!

Volunteers needed for AWG success

Be a game-changer and take part in Alaska's premier multi-sport and cultural event as a volunteer! Opportunities include:

- Training Sessions: Get prepared and informed before the Games begin.
- Exclusive Volunteer Kit: Enjoy perks like a branded winter jacket, shirt, and hat.
- Community Connections: Take part in something big with volunteers from across our region and the state.

Sign up at **awg2024.org/get-involved**/volunteer!

Many Bobcat alumni have returned home to Alaska and still stay engaged in the ski community. Forrest Mahlen, Aubry LeClaire, Laura McDuffie, Ti Donaldson, and Eli Hermanson are just a few of the Nordic Bobcats that came back to the best Nordic skiing in North America.

When surveyed, the Alaskan Bobcat's favorite race venue was Kinciad Park and by far their favorite salmon was Alaskan sockeye.

Kachemak Nordic Ski Club

Homer, Alaska

P.O. Box 44, Homer, Alaska 99603
kachemaknordicskiclub.org
kachemaknordicskiclub@gmail.com

AROUND THE BAY

Season hits its busy stretch with lots of members, events, programs

KNSC has been firing on all cylinders maintaining excellent trails, coordinating events, and running adult and youth Nordic clinics. KNSC's membership base is at an all-time high, and an army of dedicated volunteers has been working tirelessly to provide quality trails and instruction. Recent notable club happenings include hosting of the national qualifying Besh Cup, kicking off Junior Nordic, our Friday Night Lights event (moonlit ski), McNeil's trail system improvements, record ski rentals through Ski Kids Equipment Rental (SKIER), and updating our dog policies through copious amounts of public input.

PHOTO BY **KATIE MARTIN**

Lots of coaches mean lots of skis at the recent Junior Nordic coaches clinic.

PHOTO BY **DON PITCHER**

Look at the beauty of this Lookout trails sunset. Great shot, Don!

Junior Nordic coaches clinic

On January 7, organizers of our Junior Nordic program hosted a coaches clinic at McNeil School and the surrounding trails. Our five-week youth program kicked off January 27, and the 40 participants of the coaches clinic will run a high-quality, high-fun program on our trails. KNSC's SKIER program has provided over 300 sets of Nordic gear to youth, much of that equipment being applied to Junior Nordic. We'd like to thank Megan Corazza, Emily Lints, Claire Benton, and Allison O'Hara for putting on the clinic.

Friday Night Lights, Ski for Women and Cheese and Wooden Ski Tour

By publication of this newsletter, KNSC will have hosted a local favorite event, our Friday Night Lights moonlit ski. Last season's event was magical with a roaring firepit at the end of a tiki torch-lit trail illuminated by the light of a full moon. The temps were frigid, but the warmth of the fire and hot cocoa made it more than bearable for the many in attendance. We hope to have a similar report of this year's Friday Night Lights.

We are also proudly working with South Peninsula Haven House to host the annual Ski for Women, taking place on Saturday, Feb. 11. Proceeds from the event will benefit Haven House, which supports and empowers individuals and families impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. Participants will ski a few laps around our Lookout Hayfield and revel in the community partnership -costumes are encouraged!

And beyond the club's youth-oriented programming, KNSC is excited to host the annual Wine and Cheese and Wooden Ski Tour. From noon-4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 18, skiers will enjoy refreshments and good cheer at two sites around Eveline State Recreation Area. Woolies, antique Nordic gear, and furs encouraged and the traditional award for best-dressed will be presented.

PHOTO BY **JOE LLENOS**

Friday Night Lights is a party on skis!

New policy is for the dogs (and their owners), get ready for big races

Off the ski trails, KNSC has been working hard to update dog policy with respectful, solutions-based input from the skiing community primarily collected through an online survey and community meeting on January 3. KNSC appreciates Homer News' report of the event. Immediate outcomes include an incident report form, protocols to communicate with violators of KNSC's existing dog policy, and the establishment of a working group to further update policy this season.

January has been a busy month at KNSC, and we are preparing for our biggest event: the Nordic Ski Marathon! Keep an eye on our website and social media for more updates on the Marathon, Homer Epic, Sea to Ski triathlon, and more!

– Compiled by Anna Lewald
KNSC Administrative Manager

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Kachemak Bay Ski for Women
(Benefit for Haven House)
Kris Holderied / Shelly Laukitis

Wine & Cheese and Wooden Ski Tour
Mike Gracz

Kachemak Bay Ski Marathon
TBD

Marathon Connector Trail
TBD

Sea to Ski Triathlon
Derek Bynagle

Mat-Su Ski Club

Palmer, Alaska

P.O. Box 364
Palmer, Alaska 99645
(907) 745-SKIS
www.matsuski.org

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AROUND THE VALLEY

Community Events and Program dates

JANUARY

Adult ski lessons are ongoing in January and February: Lessons are only $15 per session for Mat-Su Ski Club Members. Sign up for one today!

Junior Nordics: continues from January to March.

Junior Nordics Finisher Series Race 1: on January 28 at GPRA with a 1, 2.5 or 5K race option. A free event open to all Junior Nordics participants and one of three for the season. Kids put their skills to the test with a fun non-competitive course that builds confidence and self-awareness.

FEBRUARY

Mat-Su Ski for Women: 1 p.m. February 11 at GPRA. Ski with purpose and contribute to a great cause. It's the perfect way to pre-burn those Super Bowl calories and still make it home in time for kickoff!

Holiday Tree Tour – A community celebration!

The Holiday Tour of Lighted Trees was a huge success, exceeding everyone's expectations and attracting hundreds of delighted visitors. The community spirit was brought to life by the dazzling lights and festive costumes, making it an unforgettable experience for people of all ages.

PHOTO BY **AILIS VANN**

Soaking up the Tree Tour lights and bonfire at the trailhead.

There were many notable highlights, including the very popular hot chocolate stand, the beautifully decorated trees sponsored by local businesses and families, and the impressive lit spruce at the trailhead, decorated by Valley Tree Service. The PistenBully100, which was aglow with lights, became a popular spot for photos. Judging the sponsored trees proved to be a close competition, with the heartwarming Gnome tree, created by the Reed, Maroney, and Delduca families, capturing the hearts of many.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all the tree sponsors, such as Backcountry Bike and Ski, Revel Treks and Tours, Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers, Kasilof Pottery, Valley Wanderers, Joanne Ruggeri, Matt Lemons Keller Williams Realtor, and AkTive Soles, for making this enchanting evening so special by adding just the right touch to their trees. We would also like to extend special appreciation to the volunteer trail elves who prepared the way for this magical night. Here's to another year of spreading holiday joy in our community!

PHOTO BY **AMBER PARKER**

Holiday Tree Tour photo of Backcountry Bike and Ski's Tree.

Icicle Double recap

Day one of the Icicle Double unfolded with a classic race, where participants fearlessly tackled the course in a bone-chilling 10 below. Day two warmed up both the weather and the competition, ushering in freestyle skiing that drew participants from the valley and beyond. New race distances this year offered the choice between 5, 7.5, or 15 kilometers.

From seasoned racers to Junior Nordics participants, this annual community ski race brought out a range of abilities and experience. Post-race delights included complimentary hot soup on day one and baked potatoes on day two. Kudos to our grooming team and the mighty new PistenBully 100 for creating a beautiful carpet of corduroy perfection. A massive salute to our grooming and race day volunteers, the unsung heroes.

As we bid farewell to 2023, we expressed our heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed. We extend a special appreciation to our Board members for providing soups, and we tip our hats to Stephanie LaRousse, our Volunteer Coordinator, for her amazing potato-baking skills. Let's raise a cheer for Ida Gullett, our Icicle Double Race Director, for her outstanding efforts!

We're thrilled to announce the generous support of the Mat-Su Health Foundation and Backcountry Bike and Ski in Palmer for our Icicle Double ski race. Their kindness has truly elevated our experience, and we're immensely grateful!

Volunteer with AWG at GPRA

We are getting ready and excited for the Arctic Winter Games (AWG) Nordic ski races at GPRA from March 10-16, and we're thrilled to invite volunteers like you to be part of the excitement! Sign up here: **awg2024.org/get-involved/volunteer** and choose "Cross Country Ski" as your preferred area. Let us know about your special skills and join the team that makes these games extraordinary.

AWG is seeking volunteers for race support, parking management, and

See **MAT-SU**, Page 12

PHOTOS BY **KIM TAYLOR**

It was double the skiing, double the fun at the Icicle Double!

MAT-SU

Continued from Page 11

various other essential roles. Contribute 12-plus hours and receive an exclusive AWG jacket, hat, and shirt. Visit the AWG website for all the details.

Whether you're volunteering or cheering from the sidelines, your support is invaluable. Let's make these AWG Nordic ski races an unforgettable experience together!

Gratitude for volunteers and supporters: Your contributions mean the world to us!

We deeply appreciate our dedicated volunteers! Your contributions are truly valued. If you decide to volunteer, we're sincerely grateful for your help. However, if you're attending as a spectator or parent, there is no need to feel guilty – your presence alone is more than enough, and we genuinely appreciate your support!

Mat-Su Ski for Women

Come and be part of the excitement at the Government Peak Recreation Area for the Mat-Su Ski Club's annual Ski for Women event on Sunday, Feb. 11! Since 2014, this vibrant fusion of Nordic skiing and a costume party has attracted individuals of all genders and skiing skill levels. It's a celebration that embraces everyone, fostering a lively and inclusive community. Be a part of the excitement – you won't want to miss the fun!

Registration opens at noon with a 4K ski tour kicking off at 1 p.m. Let your creativity shine, as costumes are welcome and highly encouraged! After skiing the course, gather in the chalet for an indoor potluck. This season, we're thrilled to revive this cherished tradition, providing a warm respite for attendees. More than just a meal, the potluck offers a unique opportunity to socialize and strengthen community bonds. Join us in reviving the spirit of togetherness.

Order of events: Registration at noon with a suggested donation of $20 per participant; skiing starts at 1 p.m., costumes Encouraged; Potluck in the chalet following the skiing. Suggested food contribution by first letter of last name: A-F, crockpot meal or soup; G-L, salads; M-R, deserts; S-Z, appetizers/drinks.

Don't miss out on the Ski for Women event: join us for a day filled with winter excitement, community camaraderie, and the satisfaction of supporting a worthy cause! Learn more at **matsuski.org/ski-for-women/**.

STATEWIDE

Making tracks at the 2024 McCarthy Classic

The Kennicott McCarthy Recreation Alliance (KMRA) will host the McCarthy Classic skiing race on Thursday, March 14. KMRA is a new, local nonprofit, that is working on establishing a local playground for McCarthy and supporting recreational events in the area. Entry is $35, cash and check accepted; if you need other accommodations, let us know. All race fees and donations will be used for the construction of the new community children's playground

The course is a little over 3 km. It starts at the McCarthy ballfield, goes up past the Copper Val-ley telecom tower and down the neighborhood road, takes a shortcut road to Barret Way and then heads out to McCarthy Creek until it gets to the bridge and then follows the main road back to the ballfield.

The trail will have some of type of grooming done with a snowmachine and groomer drag. We will mark the course as well. If McCarthy Creek is not safe to ski on, we will provide and mark an alternate route.

The race starts at 2:30 p.m.; please show up at 2 p.m. for registration. You can also call Han-nah Rowland at (907) 259-5648 or John Erdman at (831) 331-0034 for questions and early registration.

In the past we have done this race as a relay, but this year it will be a mass start race. Re-member to wear layers and bring snacks and water bottles; we will have warm water availa-ble. McCarthy is very remote and has limited winter lodging; there are many in the ski commu-nity who have connections out here, so please call us and ask your friends. Thank you for your support of skiing in our community! One of the goals of KMRA is to organize healthy, outdoor community activities like these.

Ready to Oosik? The classic Alaska race is coming soon

The Oosik Classic Ski Race will be held March 9, starting at high noon. Registration opened January 8 and closes on March 6. Register and find more information on **denalinordicskiclub.org/oosik-ski-race/**.

The Oosik team is also seeking volunteers. Email racedirector@denalinordicskiclub.org to learn more.

Eagle River Nordic Ski Club
Eagle River, Alaska

P.O. Box 770117, Eagle River, Alaska 99577
Club hotline — 689-7660
Junior nordic hotline — 689-7661
cernsc.org

Fun ski tours on Peters Creek and Eagle River

BY BARB JOHNSON

Five hardy skiers bundled up on December 30 for a club ski tour. The original plan was to meet at Briggs Bridge to ski up Eagle River to Barbara Falls. The cold weather changed our plans! On the morning we were all supposed to meet, the temperature at Briggs Bridge was 15 below. That was cold enough that Ros checked with co-leader, Barb Johnson, to see if the temperatures in Peters Creek were warmer. Sure enough, there was an inversion so the temperature was only at around zero. We notified all of the interested skiers to change the venue to Peters Creek and also changed the time to noon, hoping that two more hours might also help make it a bit warmer.

PHOTO BY **BARB JOHNSON**

Steve Johnson, Ros Singleton, John Wood and Amy Belmear smiling for a photo about a mile up the trail.

Although it wasn't any warmer when we left, there was plenty of snow. Big Peters Creek Trailhead was packed and hard. Wasting no time once we had our gear on, the crew headed up the valley. The trail was packed and wide until we got past the Mount Eklutna turnoff. Just past this turnoff, there is a packed snow-machine trail that veers to the right down a hill. We opted for the non-motorized trail straight through the barriers. The conditions were pretty good and they improved the further back we got. There were plenty of moose tracks along the way and a few moose beds, but luckily we didn't have any close encounters. The further back we got, however, the worse the snow-loaded brush got. It got a lot colder as we headed into Four-Mile Valley and it was slow going. Ros Singleton took the lead as the trailbreaker. That meant breaking a new snow ski trail and whacking a lot of alders to get the snow off. Behind her, John Wood, Steve Johnson, Amy Belmear and Barb Johnson continued to knock off snow and to attempt to break the low-hanging alders and willow. It was a slow process so we didn't make a lot of time through this section.

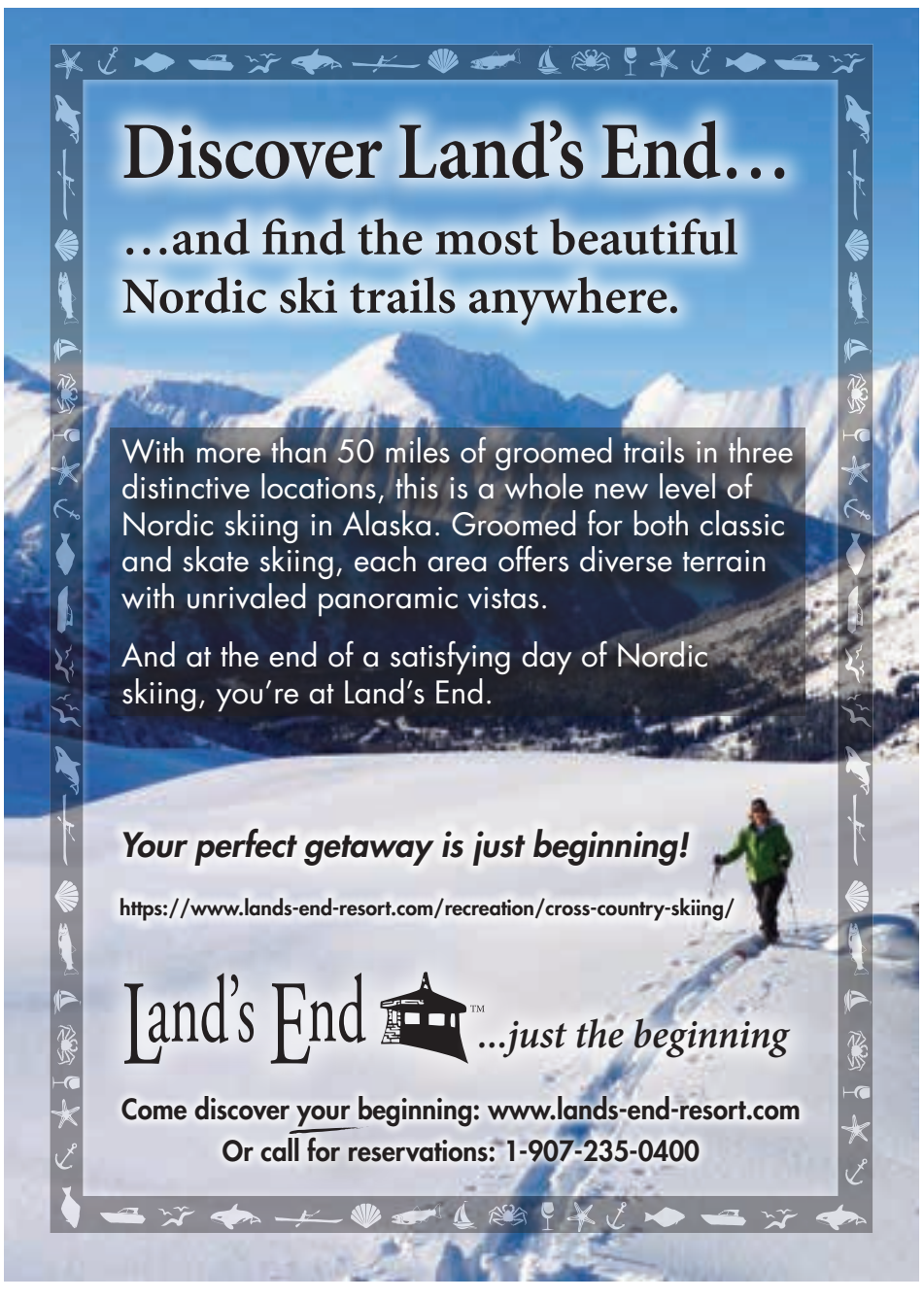
By the time we got close to Four-Mile, Amy, Barb, and Steve decided to head back the way we came. It was a fast ski back on the newly broken trail and even faster on the packed trail. No turns were made on the way down, because it was either a fast tuck or a snowplow to slow down a bit! John and Ros continued on to Four-Mile and then swung down to the right to the packed trail, completing a loop. The loop is between 5-6 miles and Ros said that she and John made it back on the packed trail in about 35 minutes because it was so fast.

Everyone had a good ski! We enjoyed the beauty of Alaska's winter and embraced the cold. We all had a satisfying ski including the dogs!

Ros also rescheduled the Briggs Bridge Ski to Barbara Falls tour to encourage more skiers to get out when it was warmer and to include ski club members who might have been traveling. This trip took place on January 4. Conditions were excellent after a fresh snow and the tour was well attended.

PHOTO BY **ROS SINGLETON**

John Wood and Ros Singleton in Four-Mile Valley before they dropped down to the snow machine trail.



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Alaskans ready to represent state, country at AWG and international events

Team Alaska Biathlon roster ready for AWG 2024

The Kincaid Park biathlon range recently hosted the final trial races to determine Team Alaska for Arctic Winter Games 2024. Over 20 biathletes competed for statewide team spots for snowshoe biathlon and ski biathlon.

Earlier races were held at Fairbanks's Birch Hill. Rural biathlon spots for AWG 2024 were determined at the Western Interior Ski Association's Spring Championships held at White Mountain.

The team is made up of the following age groups and events: U18 Girls Ski Biathlon, Ayuu Roesch, Unalakleet (UNK); Vanessa Wing, Anchorage (ANC). U18 Boys Ski Biathlon, Levi Watson, ANC; Wassaq Nanouk Jones, UNK. U15 Boys Ski Biathlon, Coal Flint, ANC; Lance Smith, ANC. U15 Girls Ski Biathlon, Elin Lunoe, ANC; Isabella Eller, UNK; U18 Girls Snowshoe Biathlon, Ourea Busk, UNK; Fiora Graziano, ANC; U18 Boys Snowshoe Biathlon, Hawken Scotton, Galena; Drake McGinely, ANC. U15 Girls Snowshoe Biathlon, Eva Driggs, ANC; Solveig Alcarez, ANC. U15 Boys Snowshoe Biathlon, Oliver Kupilik, ANC; Ezra Jack, UNK.

These athletes will represent Alaska in AWG 2024 biathlon events at the Kincaid Park range from March 10-16. Come cheer and volunteer for Team Alaska and stay tuned for more information as the races arrive at **awg2024.org/sports/biathlon-ski** and **awg2024.org/sports/biathlon-snowshoe**.

PHOTO BY **K. REARDON**

Coal Flint competes for a spot on Alaska's Arctic Winter Games biathlon roster at a recent trials event.

PHOTO BY **JOSELYN FINCH**

Haley Finch was locked in as she took her shots before qualifying for the IBU Junior Cup and European Open Championships in Poland.

Alaska biathletes make Team USA

Alaska biathletes continue to highlight our state's talented athletes on the national level. Ten biathletes from Alaska recently competed at Mt. Itasca, Minnesota, for the U.S. Biathlon Trials (Youth-Junior World Championships to be held in Estonia, and Youth Olympic Games in Gangwon Province, Korea).

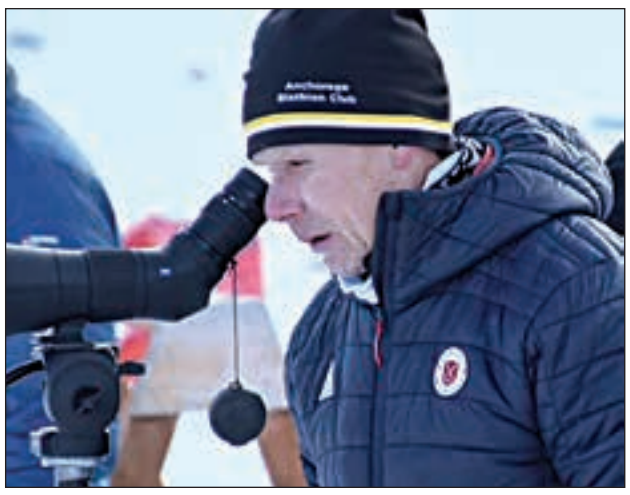

PHOTO BY **K. REARDON**

Anchorage Biathlon coach Jean Paquet keeps an eye on his team during recent races.

The Youth Men's roster for both international events was an Alaskan sweep that included Elias Soule, Noa Kam-Maguder (both of Anchorage Biathlon Club), and John Lohuis (Biathlon AK).

"It was hard leaving Alaska's good snow," Soule shared about Minnesota's lack of natural snow on Mt. Itasca's course. Coach Jean Paquet of Anchorage Biathlon Club added, "The Minnesota club did a good job of making snow and providing a great ski venue."

Also making Team USA was Haley Finch, who will compete in the IBU Junior Cup and European Open Championships in Poland. Congratulations to our Alaska biathletes!

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Fueling Your Fire – Pre-training warm-up exercises

(HINT: IT IS NOT STRETCHING!)

Before you hit the ski trail or slope, it's essential to ensure your body is well-prepared for the physical demands ahead. A strategic warm-up is like kindling for a fire, igniting your muscles, enhancing flexibility, and improving overall performance. At Runners' Edge PT, we emphasize the importance of a comprehensive pre-training warm-up routine for athletes of all levels. Hint: warm-up is NOT stretching!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRE-TRAINING WARM-UPS

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

1. Enhanced Blood Flow: Warm-up exercises stimulate increased blood flow to your muscles, delivering essential oxygen and nutrients to support optimal performance.

2. Improved Muscle Elasticity: Warming up helps improve the suppleness of your muscles and tendons, reducing the risk of strains, tears, and injuries during exercise.

3. Enhanced Joint Lubrication: As your body warms up, synovial fluid production in your joints increases, enhancing cushioning and minimizing friction for smoother joint movement.

4. Mental Readiness: Warm-up routines offer mental preparation, allowing you to shift into a focused and attentive state conducive to peak performance.

EFFECTIVE PRE-TRAINING WARM-UP EXERCISES

1. Dynamic Stretching: Engage in dynamic stretches that mimic the movements of your sport or workout, such as leg swings, arm circles, and hip rotations. These promote flexibility and joint mobility.

2. Cardiovascular Warm-Up: Kick off your warm-up routine with 5-10 minutes of light cardio exercises, such as jogging, light skiing, or jumping jacks, to gradually elevate your heart rate and body temperature.

3. Joint Mobility Drills: Dedicate time to gentle joint rotations and circles for ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, and wrists. These movements enhance joint flexibility and range of motion.

4. Bodyweight Exercises: Integrate bodyweight exercises like squats, lunges, push-ups, and planks to activate major muscle groups, strengthen your core, and prepare your body for the workout ahead.

SAMPLE COMPREHENSIVE WARM-UP ROUTINE FOR CROSS-COUNTRY SKIERS (YOU CAN DO ALL OF THEM ON SKIS!)

1. Start with a 5-10 minute light ski or jog: to increase your heart rate and warm up your muscles.

2. Perform leg swings forward and backward for 20 seconds: on each leg to enhance hip mobility.

3. Transition into light front and side lunges in place for 30 seconds: engaging your glutes and quadriceps.

4. Conclude with 30 seconds trunk rotation and arm swings: to enhance upper body mobility and prepare for your ski.

Comprehensive pre-training warm-up exercises are the cornerstone of peak athletic performance and injury prevention. Whether you're a seasoned athlete or just starting your fitness journey, these routines are essential for optimizing your readiness and achieving your best results. At Runners' Edge PT, we're dedicated to helping you excel in your sport or fitness endeavors. Incorporate these warm-up exercises into your training regimen, and you'll discover that a well-prepared body is a powerful one. Remember, success begins with preparation, and your warm-up is your first step toward excellence.

Disclaimer: Since we don't know you and we can't perform a detailed examination, responses are general tips only and not medical or physical therapy advice. If you need detailed answers to your questions, please contact us directly.

Ski the Beach for Erin on February 25

BY BARB JOHNSON

Ski the Beach is our ski club's community race. It has been held annually for almost 30 years, giving a first-race opportunity to our Junior Nordic skiers and a fun race open to all. The race grew bigger in February 2018 in reaction to the tragic loss of Chugiak High School skier Erin Johnson, who was killed by a predatory black bear while working collecting environmental data in Alaska near Pogo Mine. The community rallied to support a newly established Erin K. Johnson Memorial Fund to help keep her spirit alive and changed the name of the race to Ski the Beach for Erin. The race has continued to grow even after a couple years of virtual races during Covid lockdowns, with this season's race arriving on February 25.

Last year, the donated funds went towards the Korohusk Public Use Cabin being constructed on Eagle River in memory of Erin. The cabin is nearing completion and will be managed by the Eagle River Nature Center. Anyone will be able to rent it for overnight stays by this summer. Erin's family and friends and members of the ski club are thrilled by this opportunity for increased public enjoyment of wildlands at this breathtaking upriver location. There will be no race fee, any donations will go to the Erin K Johnson Memorial Fund. The fund, managed by the Anchorage Community Foundation, supports getting youth outdoors, science education, and protecting Alaska's special places. Donations will first go to ensure that the Korohusk Cabin project is complete and any remaining funds will go to support things that Erin held dear to her heart.

This race is a memorial event to remember all loved ones we miss. It is a fun, no pressure, end of the season celebration of friends, life and skiing! Sunshine and great trail conditions are guaranteed. Participants are encouraged to dress up in tropical clothing and just enjoy the day outside! We will have a 1.5 km and a 3 km course for youth up to 13 years, and a 5 km and 10 km course for competition or touring for all ages. There are always fantastic raffle prizes at the end of the races donated annually by many wonderful local businesses including Alaska Mountaineering & Hiking, Barney's Sports Chalet, Carrs, Coldstone Creamery, the Eagle River Nature Center, Jitters Coffee, and Skinny Raven Sports. Great Harvest Bread has also supplied their delicious cookies for after the race. In the past, winners of the races have won beautiful medals handmade by our own ski club member, Alycia Beiergrohslein, and first place winners always receive a pineapple, while second and third place winners have traditionally won mangos!

We hope you will consider coming to this fun family event to celebrate skiing in our community! Please see the flyer for additional information or visit the Chugiak Eagle River Nordic Ski Club website at cernsc.org or go to our club's Facebook page. Come an hour early to register on race day!

PHOTO BY **BARB JOHNSON**

Some of our club's wonderful coaches are all smiles after a snowy evening of Junior Nordic. From left, Michelle Foreman, Chad Foreman, Lucy Galloway, Kristi Brown, Debbie Slater, Aurora Agee and Brian Slater.

PHOTO BY **JOE LAMMERS**

Eli Lammers, senior at Chugiak High School, raced in Besh Cup 2 at Kincaid Park in December 2023.

Ski the Beach for Erin 2024

A Memorial Race /Ski Tour for Erin K. Johnson and all our loved ones we miss!

Sunday, February 25th at Beach Lake Chalet

Community Freestyle Ski Races:

Youth: 1km & 3km Any age: 5km, 10k

Bib Pickup and Registration: 12:15 pm-1:15

Limited parking: Please use parking at CHS and carpool, if you can

Race Start: 10k-1 pm, 5k-1:10, 3 k-1:20, 1.5k 1:30

Prize drawings begin: 2:30 pm

This is a fun family event open to all ages. Ski Race entry is free, but all donations are appreciated and will go toward the Erin K, Johnson Memorial Fund to support any final costs to finish the Korohusk Cabin and to support getting youth outdoors. The trails will be decorated all weekend, so you can avoid the crowds and ski prior to the race if you would rather ski the course as a tour.

Come dressed in tropical attire to enjoy your time at the Beach! Be sure to check the Chugiak Eagle River Nordic Ski Club website (https://www.cernsc.org) or Facebook page for updates. We look forward to seeing you at the Beach!

Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

Fairbanks, Alaska

SKIING UNDER THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

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Competition Fax — 907-474-2073
Racing Hotline — 907-457-4434
nscfairbanks.org

AROUND THE INTERIOR

Large group greets the Sun on Moose Mountain Tour

The 7th Annual Moose Mountain Sunrise Ski Tour celebrated its seventh anniversary Saturday with the largest turnout of skiers in its history. **tinyurl.com/37zennzc**

Norris grabs Bronze at U.S. Nationals

Fairbanks-born David Norris is still pulling in the medals! At the 20-kilometer freestyle pursuit race in the U.S. Nationals in January, Norris placed seventh overall but claimed the bronze medal as the third-best American. At 33, Norris was the fourth-oldest skier in the race. **tinyurl.com/mpvcwmkp**

Another long-distance multi-sport winter trail race

There's a new multi-sport trail race on the Fairbanks trail-racing calendar headed up by Tekla Butcher-Monson, daughter of Dave Monson and the late, great Susan Butcher. It is designed for mushers, skiers, bikers, para-skiers, runners, and everyone in-between! The race will be held March 23, and you have a choice between 50 and 110 miles. Find out more at **trailbreakerkennel.com/home/t-dog/**.

Interior Alaska temperature, weather

Trying to decide where to recreate outside in winter can sometimes be a challenge. Getting good information about weather, especially temperatures and wind, can help make that decision easier. Fortunately, the internet has a variety of resources. This page has collected several that are useful for Fairbanks and Interior Alaska. **interioralaskatrails.org/interior-alaska-temperature-weather/**

UAF mobile weather temperature mote

A note about the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) temperature reading on our mobile weather page (**nscfairbanks.org/mobile-weather/**). The weather station is on the roof of the Geophysical Institute just above the IARC building, so during inversions, the temperature could be considerably cooler several stories down at the West Ridge Ski Hut, which is one of the higher places on the UAF trail system. So, if you use the UAF temperature reading to plan your outings, take that into account.

You can actually see parts of the weather station from the ski hut or if you are on the parking lot in front of IARC looking to the Geophysical Institute; right at the front corner is a pole with a panoramic camera. Images are updated every 20 minutes at **akclimate.org**.

PHOTO COURTESY **SHARON AND BAD BOB BAKER**

A participant of the Moose Mountain Sunrise Ski Tour skies toward the sunrise.

How to pass a dog team

Here's a useful resource on "How To Pass a Dog Team On The Trail: **stinkypup.net/2016/12/23/how-to-pass-a-dog-team-on-the-trail/**.

Land Trust groups helps save trails

The Interior Alaska Land Trust is not a trails-specific group, but the work it does preserving greenspace also saves a lot of trails. And the group understands that when people have an opportunity to use trails in greenspace areas, they become more invested in keeping that land as greenspace. Saving land equals saving trails equals saving land. IALT board member Seth Adams recently wrote a great fundraising letter for the group, showing how the group has saved trails in the Fairbanks area. Read it here, and if consider donating to the group: **tinyurl.com/3mm7mc7j**. Here's a link to the group's website: **interioraklandtrust.org**.

Fairbanks Assembly passes trails-related ordinance

The Fairbanks Borough Assembly unanimously passed an important trails-related resolution in December. The resolution (Resolution No. 2023 – 44) added a long list of projects to the Capital Improvement Program list. Many of those projects are trail related. Thank you to everyone who advocated for the resolution and/or the projects in the resolution. While passage of the resolution does not guarantee any of the projects will happen, it is an important step in that direction. This post has information on the resolution and the trails-related projects that were included: **tinyurl.com/mtpr3j57**.

UAF Nanooks win Alaska Nordic Cup

Nanooks Win Alaska Nordic Cup Over UAA with Kramer and Ophoff Leading Way in 10k Freestyle Races: http://tinyurl.com/5xy3a9vb

Some ski vacation ideas

John Estle passed on some information that might be of interest to those who like long ski (or hiking) tours.

This is a story about an effort to build more public use cabins in Alaska. These would be in our national forests -- the Chugach, in Southcentral, and the Tongass, in Southeast. http://tinyurl.com/3ehatptk

This is a website about the Vermont's Catamount Ski Trail, a 300-mile trail that stretches from Massachusetts to Canada. It's billed as the "longest backcountry ski trail in North America." Obviously, not everyone will want to do the whole trail in a single go, but it can be broken into shorter segments. **catamounttrail.org**

Who's Who in the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

PRESIDENT
Chris Puchner
president@nscfairbanks.org

VICE PRESIDENT
Vacant

SECRETARY
Olivia Karns
secretary@nscfairbanks.org

TREASURER
Ann Jamieson
treasurer@nscfairbanks.org

AT-LARGE MEMBERS
Peter Delamere
Jon Denton
Pam Laker
Dan Darrow

ADULT LESSONS
Susan Schwartz
adultlessons@nscfairbanks.org

JUNIOR NORDICS
Susan Schwartz
juniornordics@nscfairbanks.org

FXC (FAIRBANKS CROSS COUNTRY)
Jesse Wilkins
fxc@nscfairbanks.org

RACE PROGRAM DIRECTOR
competitionevents@nscfairbanks.org

MEMBERSHIP
membership@nscfairbanks.org

SPONSORSHIP
Stephanie Rozell
sponsorship@nscfairbanks.org

BIATHLON
Jim Pasek
biathlon@nscfairbanks.org

TOURING
Eric Troyer
touring@nscfairbanks.org

NEWSLETTER EDITOR
Eric Troyer
newsletter@nscfairbanks.org
For more contact information
nscfairbanks.org/about/

NSCF seeking Junior Nordics coaches

Our youth skiers are in need of your help! We have lots of excited, budding Nordic skiers ready to enjoy this amazing snow and not enough volunteer coaches to go around. You do not need experience, just a positive attitude and love of skiing. If you are interested, please contact Susan Kramer (juniornordics@nscfairbanks.org; 907-371-9564).

Please help keep the dumpster clean

Getting the dumpster emptied at Birch Hill Recreation Area is done by the Fairbanks North Star Borough on an on-call basis. Sometimes it can get full in a hurry after a big event. If you see that the dumpster is full, don't hesitate to give Birch Hill Facility Supervisor Michael Simmons a call or shoot him an email: 907-457-4488; mobile 702-830-3513; michael.simmons@fnsb.gov. And if you see trash that has fallen out of the dumpster, please pick it up and toss it back in.

Use the Borough Winter Trails Challenge to explore Fairbanks-area trails

BY ERIC TROYER

Want a great excuse to explore some Fairbanks-area trails on your skis? Well, then, take the Fairbanks Winter Trails Challenge.

The sign list was revealed in late December for this popular ongoing event, which is run by the Fairbanks Borough Parks and Recreation Department. The event is free and open to anyone. Participants have until mid-April to finish the challenge, but conditions for some trails may deteriorate by then so don't wait too long.

The challenge is to find at least 10 of the 20 Trails Challenge signs hidden around local trail systems and share their photos with each sign. Participants under age 10 need to find at least 5 signs to win the Junior Trailblazer Award. And seniors aged 60+ can find 5 to get win the Sourdough Trailblazer Award. Anyone who meets the challenge can receive the Trailblazer Award and be entered in a prize drawing, but you need to be registered to be eligible for prizes and awards.

The challenge comes with a guidebook to make it easier to find the trails. This winter's challenge features trails at local recreation areas including Birch Hill, Tanana Lakes, Chena Lake, Skyline Ridge Park, Pearl Creek Nordic Ski Park and more.

There are a mix of multi-use trails, non-motorized trails, and some ski-only trails to suit a variety of tastes and skill levels. The Trails Challenge signs are typically placed within 1-2 miles of the nearest trailhead. A couple are definitely not great for skiing, but most are skiable, and some are ski-only.

Anyone can participate by finding the Trails Challenge signs. Register (follow the link below) and then share your photos on social media using the hashtag "#fnsbtrails" or by emailing their photos to trails@fnsb.gov. (Remember to show off your skis!)

- Facebook Event: **tinyurl.com/y2uawvh3**
- Trails Office page: **tinyurl.com/24euutbt**
- Trails Challenge guide book: **tinyurl.com/6sa2bu6j**

The Delta Junction Trails Association is also having a Winter Trails Challenge. Most, if not all, of the trails are accessible by skis. Right now, it's only on Facebook. Find it here: **tinyurl.com/ywm3kc33**.

PHOTO BY **ERIC TROYER**

Participants from a recent Winter Trails Challenge smile after finding the sign on the Colorado Creek Trail in the Chena River State Recreation Area.

Make tracks straight to a skier's door

The Alaska Nordic Skier is mailed directly to 3,000 ski enthusiasts every month. When you advertise with us, you won't have to break new trail to get your word out.

nordicskieradvertising@gmail.com

Proposal would add ski trails at UAF

BY ERIC TROYER

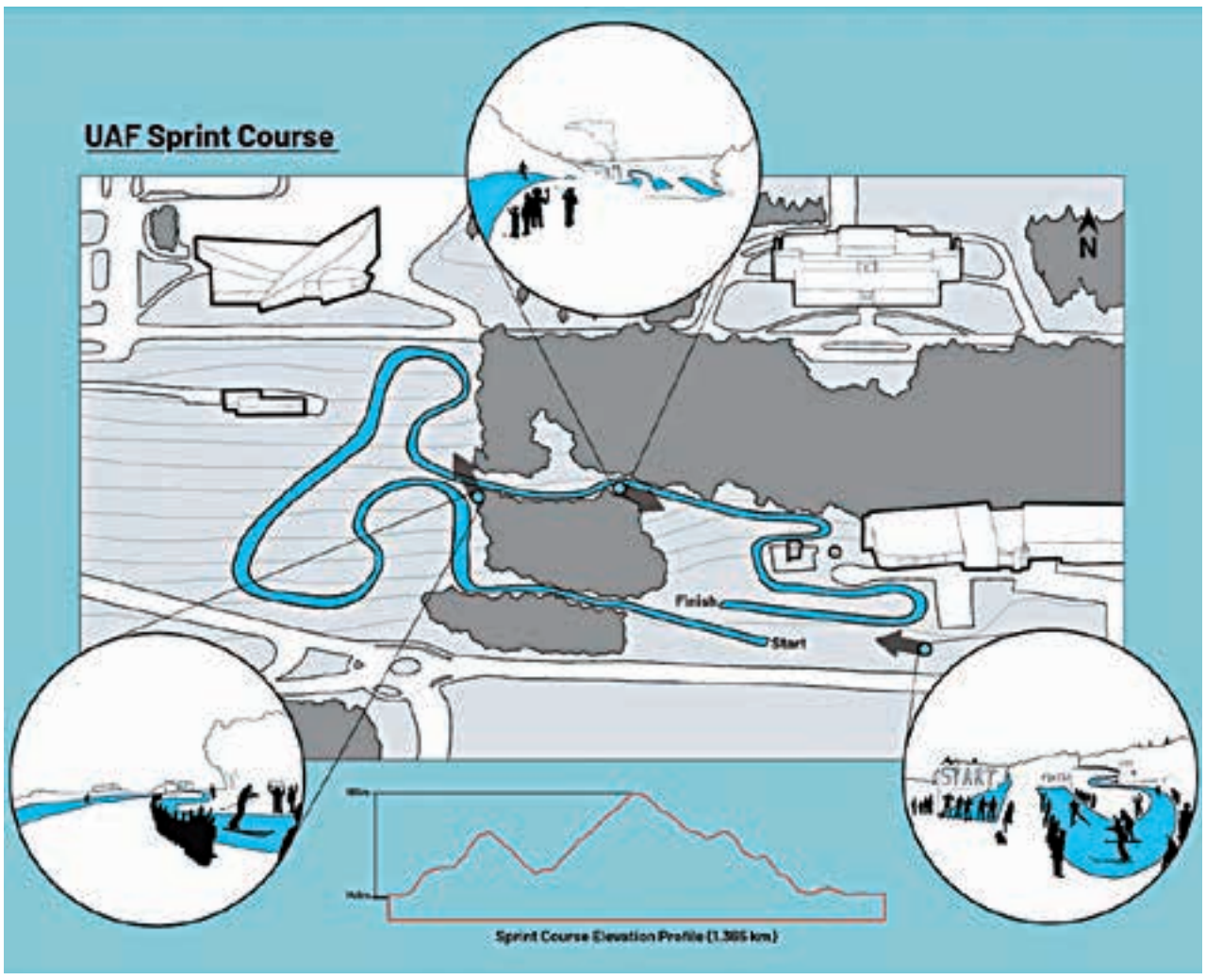
An interesting proposal to create a trail system on the main south-facing slope at the University of Alaska Fairbanks is making its way through the university's planning process. At last report, the proposal has neither been approved nor denied.

The main focus of the proposal is to create a ski trail system that could be used for practice and competition by the UAF Nanook ski team. However, the proposal has been devised to take into account other trail users and seasons.

The proposal also has several "layers," each with increasing cost and impact on the area, which would be between the Student Recreation Center and the UA administrative building.

The primary layer of the proposed trail system is the 1.3-kilometer sprint course. The course has been designed to be "exceptionally spectator friendly by creating the conditions for tightly contested sprint finishes on a course where the most exciting moments of the race can be viewed from the same spot."

The first addition to that would be a 2.5-kilometer extension, which would allow the venue to host distance races, as well as sprint races. It would also make the campus trail system more attractive as a training venue for local and "teams from lower latitudes in search of early season snow for training camps."



The final layer would be a 3.75-kilometer extension, making the venue better able to host a wider variety of races, such as team relays. It would also provide "more opportunities for casual recreators, as it would consist primarily of mild rolling terrain."

Planning for each layer of the system has taken into account existing trails and trail users, trying to add opportunities and avoid restricting current trails or uses. Find a copy of the proposal at **tinyurl.com/5x8duvdb**.

Sweat, slide, glide. Repeat.

...and don't forget to sleep.

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LOL Scavenger Hunt offers a great reason to explore Birch Hill Ski Trails

BY ERIC TROYER

How well do you know the trails at Birch Hill? You probably have seen the old cement outhouse on the Outhouse Loop, but have you seen the old wooden one? Did you know there used to be a luge run that started at the stadium and went down into the Black Loops? You can still see part of it on the Black Hole trail. Have you seen the non-functioning streetlamps on the Black Hole trail? Or the pond off the Classical Bear Trail? How about the red-striped pole at the biathlon range? The shack on the Sonot Connector? The bear skull with golf ball eyes? The sign written in German? Or the sign that says White Beat instead of White Bear?

The ski trails at Birch Hill Recreation Area and Fort Wainwright are a great place to ski, but they are also lined with a bunch of interesting finds. Chris Broda of the LOLs (Ladies of Leisure) put together a Birch Hill Scavenger Hunt that's a great ski activity.

We've created two lists for you. One is a written list of the items. The other is the written list along with photos of most of the items. Download one or both and then head out on the trails to see how many of these things you can find. You can really challenge yourself by using the list without photos first. Then, if you just can't find some, you can head out again with the photos. Or you can just head out with the photo list. It's all up to you.

There's no time limit. You don't have to find the items in any order. You don't even have to find all the items. Just go out and have fun. Thanks to Chris for creating the list! Links to the lists:

PHOTOS COURTESY **CHRIS BRODA**

- LOL Scavenger Hunt list without photos: **tinyurl.com/49bv2cf5**
- LOL Scavenger Hunt with photos: **tinyurl.com/3twxb47y**

Here are some trail map links to help you find the items.

- Birch Hill trail map: **nscfairbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Birch-Hill-Trail-Map-2012-2013.pdf**
- Sunnyside Trail map: **nscfairbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Birch-Hill-Sunnyside-Trail-Map-2017.pdf**

Aging well: More than 1,900 kilometers logged at 2023 Ski Your Age in Kilometers

BY CHRISTINA TURMAN AND ERIC TROYER

The Fairbanks ski community proved itself to be tough yet again! Despite cold temps and very slow snow, more than 100 people showed up to the 20th annual Ski Your Age in Kilometers.

Those hardy skiers cranked out more than 1,900 kilometers at Birch Hill Recreation Area. Skiers from 2 to 75 years old came out and put in some Ks. Bobby Gillis skied the most kilometers of the day, who skied his age: 59.5 km.

A few fun facts from the event:

- 108 participants.
- Forty participants skied their age or more in kilometers.
- The oldest participant was 75-year-old Gail Davidson, who skied 8.5 km.
- The youngest participant was 2-year-old Isha Ghosh who skied 0.2 km.
- The youngest participant to ski their age in kilometers was 7-year-old Thatcher Kirkman who skied 8 km.

Due to the tough conditions, some people came up with new challenges. For example, five members of the Ladies of Leisure social ski group decided to ski the minutes of the combined ages of the youngest and oldest in their group. They even exceeded their 136-minute goal.

A big thank you to Interior Women's Health, LLC for sponsoring this event. Also thank you to everyone who came out for this fun community event. It also serves as a fundraiser for NSCF's FXC junior race-training program, which put on the event. Thanks also to the NSCF groomers for getting the trails in shape for the event.

Christina Turman is the NSCF head of skier development and head coach of FXC Masters. Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor of the Alaska Nordic Skier.

PHOTO BY **HALEY LEHMAN / FAIRBANKS DAILY NEWS-MINER**

Skiers head to the trail Saturday at the Ski Your Age in Kilometers event.

Young participants note their times and ages Saturday at the Ski Your Age in Kilometers event.

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The race and community that started an Anchorage Nordic skiing organization

Membership, volunteers remain the heart of the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage, as it celebrates its 60th anniversary season

BY ALICE TOWER KNAPP

It is time to celebrate the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage's 60th anniversary and look back at this organization and all that it has brought to our city and state.

Anchorage was a different place in 1964. Fireweed Lane was considered the outskirts of town. There were two high schools: West High and East High. Winter recreation activities were limited yet the "can do" spirit that helped Alaska reach statehood in 1959 was everywhere.

The Nordic Ski Club of Anchorage was born on January 12, 1964, when Sewell "Stumpy" Faulkner invited friends, their families, and community leaders to a cross-country ski race beginning in his front yard and heading over the train trestle tracks to Forest Park Country Club and back. The Alaska Railroad agreed to halt trains to accommodate the race. Olympian Dick Mize (East High Ski Coach) and Joe Kalla (Clark Jr. High's Ski Coach) set up the course. Trophies sponsored by local companies were awarded to the age group winners. There was Gluhwein for the adults, lemonade for the kids, and cheese fondue for all. Over 100 people of all ages showed up and two days later the Nordic Ski Club (NSC) was formed on January 14 with 40 pioneer members and their families. By the end of the first season races, ski tours, lessons, and wax clinics had been held, a Jr. National team had been selected, and plans were made to build a ski jump and a ski trail at Russian Jack Springs.

PHOTO FROM **NORDIC SKI CLUB SCRAPBOOK**

The Evans family takes a ski tour along Turnagain Pass circa 1971.

Fast forward 10 years … by 1974, NSC had over 2,000 active members. There were monthly meetings and a newsletter that kept everyone informed about club activities. Ski trails had been built at Russian Jack Springs Park, Pt. Woronzof, Centennial Park, Kincaid, and Service. The Russian Jack trail now had a lighted loop. The NSC and USSA had an active race program often with two races each weekend plus high school and junior high races. Many Jr. racers represented this club in Jr. National competitions and Anchorage based skiers were named to National and Olympic XC Ski Teams. Club sponsored ski tours were very popular filling buses for tours all over Southcentral Alaska. The Great Alaska Ski Train debuted in 1972.

The 1980s and 1990s was a time of program expansion and further trail improvements. Kincaid now had a biathlon range, 20 km of additional trails including the World Cup, Jodhpur, Lekisch and Sisson trails, and additional lighting on Margaux's. The Kincaid Chalet was built with road, parking, and stadium improvements with Project '80s funding and a lot of volunteer energy. In 1985, NSC became NSAA. The track pin program began in 1983 to help fund trail grooming. At Hillside, the Spencer trail and Randy's Loop were added along with additional lighting and parking at Hilltop and Abbott Road. The Tour of Anchorage trail through Far North Bicentennial Park was now in use with bridges over Campbell Creek.

NSAA's marquis events – the Tour of Anchorage and the Ski for Women – were now part of the yearly calendar. During this time NSAA hosted 15 National and International events ranging from the first US hosted World Cup race (1983), the Ski for Light, Special Olympics, Olympic tryout races, Masters Nationals, World Masters, and Jr. National competitions. NSAA now had huts at Manitoba and Golda's Cabin in Hope for NSAA's backcountry skiers. Our Nordic Ski Patrol was recognized as one of the top in the nation.

PHOTO FROM **NORDIC SKI CLUB SCRAPBOOK**

Nordic Ski Club members getting ready to load up on the first Ski Train on March 19, 1972, at the Anchorage Railroad Depot.

See **ANNIVERSARY,** Page 22

ANNIVERSARY

Continued from Page 21

By the 2000s, the club had established the core trail systems at Hillside and Kincaid. Focus shifted to improving signage, widening existing trails for the skate technique, and upgrading the grooming fleet. The Kincaid Project Group (KPG) raised funds to install snowmaking and a new biathlon range, a 20-year project. The Karl Eid Ski Jumping complex at Hillside saw the most growth with an additional 65-meter ski jump, snowmaking, and improvements to the hill for summer jumping. Jr. Nordic became an official program of NSAA in 2004 and in the 2021-22 ski season there were 885 active participants. Anchorage now is home to elite training clubs for XC skiing, jumping and biathlon. Over half of the U.S. Olympic Cross-Country team in the last two Olympics were based in Anchorage. They wouldn't train here if it wasn't for the great trails and grooming support NSAA (the "Mother Club") provides. At the end of the 2022-23 ski season NSAA had over 4,000 members.

How did this all happen? Volunteers! Too many to list here but if it wasn't for these dedicated folks, Anchorage would not be considered the Best Urban Ski Trail System in the U.S. NSAA maintains and grooms over 160 km of trails year-round. While NSAA still depends on its volunteer workforce we have grown and depend on year-round paid staff to maintain and run our grooming equipment and run our multi-million-dollar operation.

We are proud of all that we've done yet we have many things to still accomplish. Moving forward our club has dreams for the future. An elite level roller skiing loop, snowmaking at Hillside, a club endowment, trail links to Chugach State Park, a warm-up facility at Hillside are just a few of the many wishes for the future. How can you help? Be a member at whatever level you can afford and volunteer. We need you. And plan to celebrate NSAA's major milestone with a big party in 2024 – details coming soon!

Alice Tower Knapp is a lifetime NSAA member and author of "On Track! The history of the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage," available at **nordic-skiing-association-of-anchorage.square.site/.**

PHOTO FROM **NORDIC SKI CLUB SCRAPBOOK**

Homegrown Alaskan Barbara Britch skis in the first Jr. Nationals that included a girls division in 1967. Barbara was part of the first U.S. Women's Olympic Cross-Country team that competed in 1972 in Sapporo, Japan.

Ski Jumping in Anchorage: 1937-2024

Join us in celebrating NSAA's 60th anniversary with a look at Ski Jumping.

Alaskan Peter Tikka competing in the 1969 Jr. Nationals at Alyeska (NSC scrapbook)

When: Monday February 5th, 2024, 5:30-8 pm
Where: Kincaid Chalet
What: Potluck, Slide show presentation about Ski Jumping in Anchorage with a guest panel talking about the development of the Karl Eid Jumping Complex

Who: Anyone interested in ski jumping past and present.

Current jumpers and their families are encouraged to attend.

We'll provide baked potatoes and toppings you bring a side dish or dessert. Planning to come?

Please RSVP a.knapp.a@gmail.com and let us know what you'll bring and if you can help.

This is When the Cowboy Rides Away

BY JOHN WOOD

The article below was first published on nordicinsights.news. When I was recently skiing with John on our Chugiak-Eagle River Nordic Ski Club Tour, I asked if he would be able to share the article he wrote about competing in the World Masters Cup 2023 in Europe. It is an inspiring story about one of our club members! Congratulations, John Wood! – Barb Johnson

I am 75 years old now and I began to play the guitar a little over 5 years ago when I was 69. Every time I strapped on my skies to race this past month the words of an old George Strait song I sometimes play would start to repeat in my head, "this is when the cowboy rides away". You see, I had decided to step back from cross country ski racing at the end of this season, and with every race completed that time grew closer.

I have been training with the Alaska Pacific University (APU) master's group for 15 years and had just matured into the next older age group. I was in great shape (for an old man). At this age a person loses strength and fitness every year no matter how hard you train …. The slippery slope has steepened. Use it or lose it. This was the year. This was the opportunity. Now was the time. Time to seize the opportunity and go back to Europe to ski against the world's best master skiers!

American Cross Country Skiers national director John Downing ("JD") had started to organize the annual trip to the World Masters Cup ("WMC"), this year to be held in Seefeld, Austria during the week of March 19-24, 2023. I contact JD in early May 2022 and tell him that I am all-in for the Seefeld trip.

Training for masters skiers my age involves compromises and tailoring exercise to bodies that have experienced a lot of cumulative life stresses as well as the daily bodily aches and pains; my compromises include those associated with living with two titanium-steel knees (see FasterSkier articles "Life at 71 on Two Artificial Knees: 2019 World Masters" and "From a Bum Knee to a 2015 Birkie Age-Group Win"). I live in Eagle River, a suburb near Anchorage, Alaska, where summer training consists of hiking in the nearby Chugach mountains, road and mountain biking, and ski bounding. I canoe and paddle board out the back door on Fire Lake. I do not run and, at the insistence of my wife, gave up roller skiing 3 years ago. During the ski season that typically starts mid-October, I ski up to 5 days per week. Strength training in the gym one day per week continues year-round.

At the WMC level the racing distances decrease at age 60, and then further at 75. At any WMC age and distance, the pace of the competition is blistering fast. My answer to build speed this winter was to race short distances in our local citizens races, which usually means competing against 12-15 year olds that only have one speed – all out! And these kids really don't like to ski behind old men! My legs get weak and I gasp for air and just about fall over, I taste blood as I try to keep up, I lose a lot of my technique as I flail, but I get faster.

March 2023 rolls around and the Nordic Ski Association of Anchorage is hosting the US Masters Nationals in conjunction with its annual flagship event, the Tour of Anchorage. I win the M10 age group (75-79) 10K classic race by 10 minutes and the M10 25K freestyle race by 11 minutes and am named to the "2023 USA Masters Cross-Country Ski Men's Team" in the M10 division. I am ready for WMC 2023.

My real adventures started at the Munich airport. Its March 14 and I am 18 hours into my journey from Alaska to the WMC 2023 in Austria; I have been up all night flying plus endured 9 time zone changes and am a bit jet lagged. I collect my checked luggage – a heavy suitcase and ski bag – which is added to my personal roll-on and small back pack, and set off slowly to find the airport train station. I find a baggage cart which helps considerably, but pushing the cart while dragging the ski bag is still cumbersome and challenging, especially navigating multiple airport terminal levels. I do not speak German, but folks try to be helpful to language-challenged travelers such as me and I eventually find my destination. I show my travel-agent furnished train ticket to the agent and he informs me in broken English that my ticket is from Munich to Seefeld and that I need to take the regular commuter train from the Airport to Munich Terminal, then transfer to the train for Seefeld. So I lug my baggage upstairs to the ticket counter, buy a commuter ticket, then return downstairs and board the next commuter train for the 45 minute ride to the Munich Terminal. My shirt is drenched with sweat from the exertions.

PHOTOS COURTESY **OF JOHN WOOD**

John Wood races in the Icycle Double outside Palmer in Dec. 2022.

Onboard the commuter train, the conductor does not speak English, nor do any of the passengers around me, and I grow concerned. The ticket agent told me it was a 45-minute ride to the Munich Terminal and I carefully keep track of the time. The train stops every few minutes at stations where passengers come and go. Everything is automated, so folks really scramble in the boarding/offloading process. All kiosk and signboard words are in German, and I don't see any words that resemble "Munich Terminal". So, when my watch says we have been traveling for 45 minutes and the train stops at a station, I scramble to get off. I drag my ski bag out the door onto the ramp and turn to get my two bags when the train door closes and off the train goes! With my bags! I was shocked! Oh CRAP! What to do? I eventually found an English speaking vendor who told me the main station was half a mile away and I had debarked one station early, so off I went down the sidewalk headed in the direction of the terminal while dragging my ski bag behind.

The entire area soon began to look like a giant food court and, after multiple enquiries, was able

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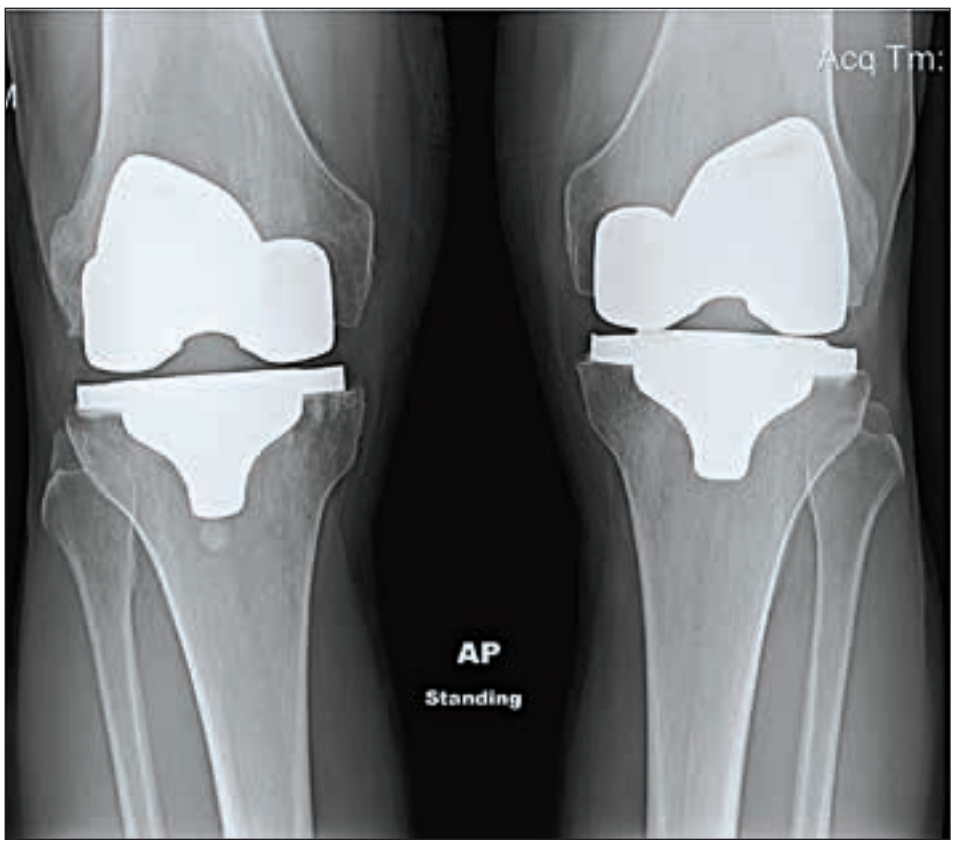
to find a kind lady who spoke English and gave me directions to the main terminal and "lost luggage" office. Off I go into the crowds again dragging my ski bag, pretty much at my wits end and in shock. Things begin to look like a terminal with hundreds of people scurrying in all directions, and as I walk, I am approached by three very large young men in safety vests and one asks me in English, "are you Mr. Wood from Alaska?". Trust me, I just about fell over! What a relief! Turns out my bags were safe in the lost luggage office that was about a block away and one floor up. I collect my bags and walk about 200 meters to Bay 28 and board my train to Seefeld, where I arrive exhausted and very much relieved at about 5 PM local time. Almost too much of an adventure!

It's now Sunday, March 19 and the first day of racing at the WMC 2023; 1000 skiers, 25 nations, and 6 days of age group racing among many of the fastest masters skiers on the planet. I have entered three classic races and have an ax to grind … my goal at the WMC 2019 in Beitostolen, Norway 4 years ago was to finish in the top 10 in a classic race and do well in the relay. Turns out my best finish was 11th place and I faded badly in the scramble leg of the relay over the last half kilometer. I know I can do better and plan to do so here.

Today is the "short" classic race. My age group, the M10's (age 75-79) start about 10 AM in the next to last wave of classic skiing for the day and compete on a 5 K course. The starters assign skiers to lanes, the gun goes off and it's a mad scramble of flying poles, skies and growling single-minded old men trying to be first to the end of the stadium where the trail necks down and makes a long sweeping left downhill turn onto the course. I am in the lead mix as we start down the hill and I glance up at the skiers just ahead. My right ski catches some slushy snow pushed up by hundreds of skiers in earlier waves, I bobble, then fall! Oh CRAP! I pull my ski poles in and try to make myself small to avoid being run over by the skiers behind. I scramble to my feet and access the damage. I am now in very last place. Several other competitors have fallen on the hill below me, but most of the pack has successfully navigated the hill and are speeding off down the trail. I do not see my dreams disappearing into the distance, instead I see the full measure of the work that has been unexpectedly been cut out for me.

My skies are good, my body feels good, my mind is determined, I ski purposefully down the trail and start to pass skiers one by one. I get to the first big hill and scramble around some more skiers (this is where I discover I am the strongest hill climber in the M10's). Up and down hills, across flats, past cheering crowds, the competitors come back to me, and I go around them, skiing like a mad man. Up the last hill that leads into the stadium I fly past the Finn in full-on maniac sprint mode and take aim at the Norwegian who is in the lead. JD is now screaming at me from the side of the trail to lean into the hill and go with all I've got. But I run out of hill, out of trail, and up ahead the Norwegian is crossing the finish line and flashing a victory sign to the camera. I finish a couple of seconds later in second, and feel pretty damn elated!



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN WOOD

Here's proof: two artificial knees.

From left, John Wood (USA), Kjell Johnson (Norway) and Pekka Hietanen (Finland) take the M10 5km classic podium at the 2023 World Masters in Seefield, Austria.

It's early evening at the awards ceremony and the hall is packed; the first day's races have been completed and interest is high. The M10 podium winners' names are called, and I bound onto the stage accompanied by tremendous cheering and clapping. I experience a deep sense of accomplishment when accepting my silver metal, mugging with the other medal winners in my age group, and waving to the crowd. Way cool, and very humbling.

I would be remiss if I did not discuss the weather in Seefeld and my pre-determined WMC 2023 race series strategy. My strong suit is the classic technique, and the longer the race the better. When I signed up for the races I decided to enter all three classic races that were to be held in the order of middle distance (10K) on Sunday, short distance (5K) on Monday and long distance (15K) on Friday. Wednesday was to be the nation's relay, with its members to be determined based on the results from prior days of racing. Based on my experience racing in MWC 2019 in Beitostolen I knew that I need at least a day's rest between races in order to recover to do well. So my strategy was to race Sunday's "middle distance" race and if I did well enough to make the relay I would skip Monday's short distance race and rest up for the relay. If I had problems in Sunday's race I could try again on Monday.

Then the weather became a factor. Conditions in Seefeld became very springlike, with daytime temperatures above 50 degrees, causing the courses to be rearranged at the last minute due to snow conditions and limited terrain availability. The race sequence was shuffled so that the short races were Sunday, then medium classic race on Monday and medium freestyle race Tuesday. As a result, I skied the short distance Sunday and, because I did well, skipped the medium distance race Monday.

Over the week of competitions the trail conditions continued to deteriorate. The slushy trail conditions of Sunday and Monday became firmer and icier, but thinner, as the week wore on. The coarse corn snow was held together with nightly generous applications of salt. The trail tended to be hard and icy fast for the first racers, but degenerated to wet, slushy, and slower, trails as the temperatures rose for the later skiers. Major kudo's go to the race organizers to be able to hold the trails together till the end of the competitions.

Relay day Wednesday dawns clear and cool, but temperatures are forecast to rise to a high of 60 degrees! The M10 4X5 mixed technique relay is the last contested race of the day and as the starting time of 11 AM approaches the temperature is 50 degrees and rising. I am to ski my usual position in the scramble leg. The gun goes off and away we go. I successfully navigate the sweeping downhill at the end of the stadium and it soon becomes a 4 team race between the Norwegian, the Swiss, the German and me (USA). Today the course is wet, hard transformed snow with spotty slush on top; nothing like we usually race on at home in Alaska. It's also clear from the start that my skies are not running well on the flats, but I am untouchable on the up hills.

I crest the big hill about half way through the course in first place but am passed on the ensuing downhill by the Norwegian. Seeking to compensate I cut to the inside of the corner at the bottom, and DAMN, my skies get tangled and down I go. I pop up but the damage is done .. the Swiss skier has passed me and the Norwegian has broken away. I ski my heart out for the rest of the loop but my skies just aren't running as fast as my competitor's and I enter the tag zone in solid third place. My other USA team members ski well, and we ended up just out of the metals in fourth. When I look at the splits, I see that I skied the third fastest time of the 12 classic relay skiers, which is a small consolation. I had targeted the relay all week as a race where I wanted to do well and I feel kind of hollow inside about the results. I try to "shrug it off" but I have the haunting feeling of opportunity lost.

The following day, on the advice of JD, I stayed off my skies. Instead, in the morning I cheer and support my teammates from the trailside as they race in their long distance freestyle races in temperatures that are climbing through the high 40's and headed for 60. The race course is getting thin in spots and the ephemeral puddles have emerged with the sunlight, but, thanks to the efforts of the groomers, it looks like the snow will last through the week. At the end of the day's racing the USA freestyle skiers have done very well and are done with their WMC 2023 competitions.

And now it's Friday, the long dis-

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Help Protect Our Winters fight climate change

BY ERIC TROYER

Climate changes affects everyone, especially cross-country skiers. Some skiers are helping lead the fight to mitigate climate change, and you can join other famous skiers, including a few Alaska stars, and help.

A warming climate can mean shorter snow seasons, and more extreme events like snow droughts and rain-on-snow. These will just get worse unless we slow climate change, which means we need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Protect Our Winters is a group of outdoor people organized to "protect the places and lifestyles they love from climate change." Several cross-country skiers, like Kikkan Randall, Jessie Diggins and Gus Schumacher, are part of that group.

POW was founded in 2007 by pro snowboarder Jeremy Jones. Jones saw that many of the resorts he'd counted on for good snowboarding were closed more often due to lack of snow. He felt a need to act, but he couldn't find any organizations focused on mobilizing the snow sports community on climate. So, Protect Our Winters was born.

The group is made up of pro athletes, individuals, resorts, brand partners and other outdoor enthusiasts. It organizes for lobbying and other actions to help fight climate change.

You can help the group by donating and/or joining. If you join, you can sign up to be a volunteer. Find out more about the group at **protectourwinters.org**. See Kikkan's POW page here: **protectourwinters.org/alliance/kikkan-randall/**. See Jessie's POW page here: **protectourwinters.org/alliance/jessie-diggins/**. See Gus's POW page here: **protectourwinters.org/alliance/gus-schumacher/**.

PHOTO BY **FRANKIE FOUGANTHIN**

Kikkan Randall

PHOTO COURTESY **OF PROTECT OUR WINTERS**

Jessie Diggins

PHOTO FROM **GUS SCHUMACHER WEBSITE**

Gus Schumacher

PHOTOS COURTESY **OF JOHN WOOD**

John Wood's awards from the 2023 World Masters, 2023 U.S. National Masters, and 2023 Tour of Anchorage.

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tance races, and last day of WMC 2023 racing. Due to deteriorating trail conditions the starting sequences have been altered so that instead of starting first, the old guys get to go out last (again, in the warmth and slush, again). Oh well, all M10's get to ski in the same conditions. As the race time 10:30 AM approaches and competitors gather around the starting pen it's clear that there is significantly less tension in the air than earlier in the week. It's just kind of a laid-back atmosphere with no racing around doing last minute warmups.

However, once the starting gun goes off its all business. The Norwegian, Swill and I immediately distance ourselves from the pack and are in a real horse race. We are skiing together and we are skiing apart … sometimes one, then sometimes the other in the lead, and sometimes three abreast. There are usually two tracks set on the side of the trail, but we ski all over the trail seeking out the fastest running for our skis. We are evenly matched for the first lap, but then the Swill slowly begins to pull away. I can't quite catch up to his lead on the up hills anymore. Then on the last big downhill a merging skier from an earlier wave falls right in front of me, and I need to take violent evasive action, losing momentum; the Norwegian bolts ahead and I cant catch up. And so we finish the last race of the last day of WMC 2023, one, two and three. Very tired but very happy!

My horse is saddled and tied to the nearby bushes, and I am putting out the last remains of the morning's campfire, the smoke slowly drifting into the clear morning air. The sun has crested the hills and promises to bring a warm, sunny spring day. I have reached the apex of my master skier racing career and am satisfied with a job well done. Two WMC 2023 individual metals in two races. Third in my leg of the relay. The only classic technique USA male double medalist. The grulla looks over his shoulder at me and softly nickers, I take one last look at my ski racing career of the last 15 years, climb up into the saddle, and hum an old George Strait tune as I slowly ride away.

As I was writing this essay from my home on Fire Lake a very faint whisper from the back of my mind drew me to my 1965 East Anchorage High School Senior class yearbook. On the inside of the front cover several classmates wrote about my newfound skiing abilities and commented about expecting to see me in the 1968 Olympics. Those were the dreams of the young! But 58 years later I have the satisfaction of fulfilling this lifelong dream and have meddled in the World Masters Cup 2023 championships. I feel good, real good.

See more photos and find the online version of this essay at **nordicinsights.news/2023/05/09/personal-essay-this-is-where-the-cowboy-rides-away/**.