

Family sport easier, cheaper

# Cross-country skiing 'catches'

ALBANY, N.Y. — Cross-country skiing appears headed for its biggest season ever, with many of its newest converts downhill skiers tired of 12-hour lift lines and ticket prices ranging up to \$16 a day.

Cross-country touring centers estimate that business has doubled in the past two or three years and no slowdown is evident.

As one new convert in Albany put it, "It's easy, cheap and a good excuse to get outdoors in the winter."

Cost certainly is among the major factors in cross-country's growing popularity, especially where families are involved. To ski all day on groomed cross-country trails costs generally \$2 to \$3 per person.

And many centers have season passes like those offered by the Beresford Farms in Altamont, about 20 miles outside Albany. For a family, the season pass is \$30 — well below what it would cost most families to downhill ski for one day.

The Beresford touring center is on an 800-acre sod farm. Business has doubled every year for the past three years, according to owners Jon and Barbara Beresford. "One reason it's catching is that it's a real family sport, you can do it as a family unit," says Beresford, father of five who ought to know.

Equipment, too, is much less expensive. A good set of skis, poles and boots can be purchased for under \$125, and a skier would really have to

work to spend more than \$150, compared to an average cost of \$400 to \$500 for downhill essentials.

Cross-country enthusiasts also are likely to scorn the "fashion show" atmosphere of many downhill ski resorts. While both sports can be performed with clothes pulled from most closets, bright and expensive skisuits are the rule, rather than the exception, on downhill slopes. A good pair of knickers is probably the only clothes investment most cross-country skiers make.

Time and availability are also big factors. A cross-country skier can snap on his boots for a quick morning spin across a local golf course, getting in one hour the same amount of exercise it might take all day to get skiing downhill, after a long ride to a ski resort.

And, unlike downhill, the basics can be picked up in less than two hours of instruction, for another nifty saving.

Many dyed-in-the-wool downhill skiers scoff at comparisons between the two sports. On the ground there is no "thrill" or "gut challenge" in tracking across an open field, even darting among trees following a track.

But a growing legion are finding separate pleasures in each, and are combining the two on ski vacations, often skiing downhill on less-crowded workdays and opting for cross-country on the weekends, or putting in one day of each per weekend.

Some converts to cross-country have found a new challenge in "Citizen's Races" sponsored by major centers, similar to "NASTAR" races for downhillers. Like joggers, true cross-country devotees are conditioning fanatics.

In Stowe, Vt., giants of each sport often share the same clientele. Mt. Mansfield is one of the oldest and most diversified downhill resorts in the East, while the Trapp Family Lodge, with 65 miles of cross-country trails not far from the base of Mansfield, was one of the first ski touring centers in the United States when it began in 1969.

Business at the Trapp center has doubled in the past three years and the clientele has broken out from the more rugged types, nicknamed the "granola group" to include the "beautiful people" wearing the latest in downhill fashions — or the "wet look."

The business was launched by Baroness Maria Von Trapp, upon

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## High price skiing may thin crowds

DENVER — The rapidly rising cost of downhill skiing may force some enthusiasts of the sport and the ski areas to rethink their skiing habits, says a top industry executive.

At the start of the 1978-79 season, Barrett Mitchell, executive director of Colorado Ski Country USA, said he sees no end to the price escalation.

"Anybody who pays \$15 a day doesn't shop," said Mitchell in an interview. "They haven't shopped. Damn few people shop. The people who shop are the bargains are there."

At the Aspen Complex, including Aspen Highlands, Aspen Mountain, Buttermilk and Snowmass, are charging \$15 this season for all-day, all-lifts, adult pass. The highest ticket in Colorado is \$4 at the Copper Mountain.

Utah ski prices range from \$12 at the Utah City and Snowbird to \$3 at Bluebird. Jackson Hole in Wyoming is charging \$15 for the tramway this year.

The increasing costs of skiing attracted the attention of Sen. Floyd Haskell, D-Colo., who was concerned about the method of granting sole rights to ski areas on public land, passed by the Senate in 1977 and 1978 but killed in the House, would have called for greater participation by the public when a new area applies for a rate increase. It is likely the bill will be presented next year because Haskell was defeated in the Nov. 7 election.

"If an area wants to raise rates, it's an automatic rubber stamp process," said Jim Therrell, Haskell's legislative assistant. "We feel this rubber stamp attitude has helped promote higher rates."

With the cost of equipment, transportation, clothing, food and lodging also going up, some skiers believe the industry is pricing itself out of business.

Mitchell thinks the industry will see another look at the price structure if ski areas seek business dropping off.

"The cost of skiing is apt to go up," said Mitchell. "The higher it does, the more likely customers are to reduce the number of times they go skiing or give up the sport entirely."

Then, said Mitchell, the industry will start giving people more choices in buying tickets.

Mitchell suggested tickets by the day, or a price variety within a given area based on slope desirability.

"You can take one ride on the Vail gondola in the summer so why not in the winter?" he said. "One reason Disneyland does so well is because it gives people options. They pay the difference to ride on the good rides."

Mitchell said most ski areas already offer a variety of ticket programs. He said other bargains could be found through ski shops and ski clubs.

"The only reason we exist is to bring discounts to members," said Mary Feagin, winter social chairman

of the Fagooee Ski Club in Denver. "We just don't do things if we don't get a discount."

Feagin said the ski clubs get discounts on tickets, transportation, meals and accommodations.

"There is buying power by getting groups together," she said. "We can pugner package weekends that are a lot lower — 25 percent or more — than if we did it on our own."

Keystone in the central Colorado Rockies put out an entire pamphlet on ways to save.

"We at Keystone believe that the cost of skiing has risen too high today, so we are doing something about it," the pamphlet begins. It then lists ticket packages that will be honored when facilities are not full.

Pam Stenmark, director of the Copper Mountain, Colo., Ski Institute and a cousin of Olympic skier Ingmar Stenmark, said skiers can save money by planning ahead, looking for group transportation, reviewing terms of special fare programs and not staying in the center of ski areas.

Cost savings programs in Utah include several multi-day packages. Snow Basin offers a ticket good for 10 rides. The Utah Ski Association sells a Ski Utah Gold Pass for \$600 that entitles a buyer to ski at any Utah resort throughout the season.

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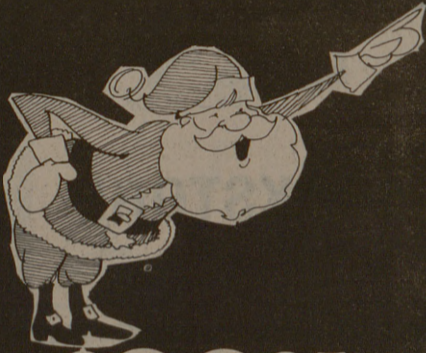
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