

Portraits of the Past and Present

50 Years with the North Star Ski Touring Club



1967–2017

Introduction

It started in the summer of 1967 with a gathering of 19 people who shared an enthusiasm for the emerging sport of cross-country skiing. The meeting was the culmination of groundwork that had begun several years earlier. Those 19 people were determined to create an organization to promote ski touring and to be a collective for those of like interest. To that end, they drafted a constitution and chose the name North Star Ski Touring Club. The club they founded would grow and thrive beyond their wildest dreams.*

The club quickly grew from 76 members in its second year of existence, to 900 within a few years, then to 1,600 by its tenth anniversary! Over the years, the NSSTC has organized ski touring trips across the state, nation and world, and sponsored both local and national citizen racing. It was also an early leader in trail development and funding, helping to develop the Great Minnesota Ski Pass. The club has also provided ski lessons and offered 50 years of fascinating programs at its regular meetings. And it would be a major oversight not to mention the club's role in the formation of countless lifelong friendships, including more than a few marriages.

Now, 50 years after its beginning, we have the opportunity with this 50th anniversary publication to honor the founders' original commitment. And to recognize the work of many, many others since who have done so much to promote ski touring, lead trips, maintain trails, and enrich the lives of the club's members as well as countless other outdoor enthusiasts. We also hope the publication will move club members, both new and not-so-new, to appreciate the impressiveness of North Star accomplishments and will inspire them to contribute to the club's future success. So, read on, enjoy the stories, enjoy the memories, and marvel in the winter wonders our great club has brought to so many lives.

~Bruce Nelson, NSSTC President, 2017

* For a detailed history see "Club History" under "About Us" on the club's website
www.north-stars.org

Cover photo by Rob Andersen

Seefeld, Austria, 2005. Left to right: Al Volkers, Andrea Johnson, Audry Nordwall, Ellen Watson, Lowell Johnson, De Andersen, Bev Anderson.

50th Anniversary of the North Star Ski Touring Club

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Ski Tourer's Pledge

I will protect the land and the natural resources of the land on which I ski.

I will make it my personal business to leave the land in such a condition that, except for the tracks of my skis upon the snow, no one will ever know I was there.

I will always treat the land gently so that I may return in the future and be welcomed as an old friend.
Leo Hannan, Anchorage Alaska.

Back cover photo by Eric Ramstad

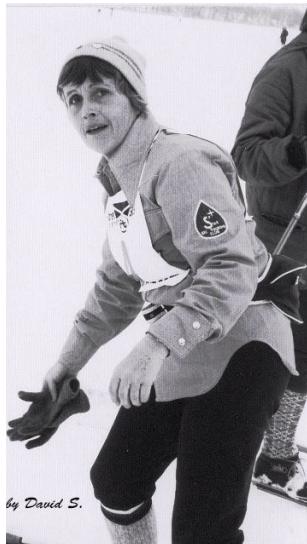
Solo canoeing on the Upper Iowa River in 2007.

1967–1977 North Star Beginnings

The North Star Ski Touring Club is born, ski trips are scheduled, the first Nordic citizen race in Minnesota is organized (our own VJC), and North Stars begin working with state and federal government officials to develop ski trails throughout our state. We are eternally grateful to our founders and many others.

Jinny McWethy 1917-1994

Jinny McWethy was one of the founders of the North Star Ski Touring Club. In 1965–66, the United States Ski



*Jinny at the 1974 VJC.
Photo by David Siskind*

that allowed Jinny to keep everyone on track. The position also entailed serving as the primary telephone contact for the club.

“Remember that through all of this we were guided, scolded, cajoled, and generally kept on task by Jinny McWethy, without whose mothering we would have bumbled our way into oblivion.” Those were the words of Wayne Lindskoog, who was doing his second tour as club president in 1976–77—words that earned Jinny the moniker “Mother North Star.”

Jinny led the club trip to the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming in 1972–73; a trip to Lone Mountain Ranch, Montana, in 1980–81; and a lodge-to-lodge ski trip on the North Shore in 1991–92. She started the annual midweek lodge-to-lodge ski trip for the “Idle Rich” (precursor to “Wednesday Wanderers”)—skiing the North Shore trails from one resort to another.

Jinny was involved with the VJC from the very beginning, helping to plan, organize, and make sure that everything went smoothly. She also helped organize the North Star Classic ski race at Aamodt’s Apple Orchard in 1992.

For many years Jinny wrote a column for the *Loype* entitled “Making Tracks.” In it, she chronicled North Star club events and provided information about members. She died in 1994 after a lengthy illness. The club would not be what it is today were it not for Jinny’s guidance.

Norm Oakvik 1920-2015

Norm Oakvik was born with skiing in his blood. His parents were Norwegian immigrants, and his father was a



Norm in 1968. Photo submitted by Jim McWethy

ski jumper. Norm started practicing ski jumping at the age of 12 at Theodore Wirth Park on skis his father made for him. Norm was on the ski team at North High School in the 1930s and trained with the famous 10th Mountain Division during WWII. After the war, Norm continued competing, racking up many titles, including North American Cross-Country Ski champion in 1954, Western Canadian Cross-Country Ski champion in 1958, National Veterans Nordic Combined champion in 1959, and National Veterans Cross-Country Ski champion in 1960. In 1956,

Norm was first alternate on the US Olympic team in Nordic Combined.

Norm, along with his friend Dag Helgestad, started importing skis from Norway in the early 1960s. It wasn’t long before they found enough people interested in ski touring to form a ski touring committee within the United States Ski Association, chaired first by Norm. The members of that committee got together in the summer of 1967 to form the first ski touring club in Minnesota—the North Star Ski Touring Club.

Norm led club trips over the years (like the first club trip to the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming), but his most important contribution to the club was the cross-country ski lessons he gave to members. Knowing that it would be too much for one person to take on, he organized a series of weekend ski lessons for about 20 North Star members, with the goal of turning them into cross-country ski instructors. This was the origin of the formal NSSTC ski lesson program.

“Without Norm Oakvik’s dedication, skill, and persistence, our club would not be what it is—nor would the sport of cross-country skiing in America be what it is today.” ~ Bruce Jacobson, 2011

Bob Larson

Bob Larson, one of the founders of the North Star Ski Touring Club, grew up in South Minneapolis. He received his LL.B. from the University of Minnesota in 1950 and became the legal advisor for the Central Division of the National Ski Patrol System. He was appointed National Ski Patrolman in 1957 and received National Certification as an Avalanche Instructor in 1962.

Bob learned about cross-country skiing while with the Ski Patrol in Montana and was interested in continuing the sport here in Minnesota. When he moved back to Minneapolis from Montana in the early 1960s, he met Norm Oakvik. In 1965, the United States Ski Association formed a ski touring committee to promote interest and participation in ski touring in the Metro area and throughout the Central Division of the USSA. Bob chaired the committee after Norm Oakvik stepped down and joined with other committee members to form the North Star Ski Touring Club in 1967.

Bob became the third president of the NSSTC in 1969–70. He worked tirelessly on all of the projects the NSSTC was involved in: the Oakvik House in Chaska, the organization of the first VJC race in 1971, the formation of MinnTour and the Viking Nordic Ski Patrol, and the preservation of the BWCA. Bob also helped lay out the ski trails at Remote Lake with Bob Tokar in 1972. He died on July 6, 1984. The NSSTC made a donation in his memory to the National Ski Patrol.

North Star Memories by Marion Stief

I joined the North Star Ski Touring Club in 1970 to ski with others who enjoyed the sport of cross-country skiing. While living on Anderson Lakes in Bloomington, I hosted several North Star cross-country ski events at my home. We skied Anderson Lakes and Tierney's Woods, sometimes taking longer routes across Bush Lake and into Hyland Park Reserve.

Through the years, we have enjoyed several western ski trips, including an early Yellowstone trip and the trip to Devils' Thumb Ranch in Colorado, led by Pete and Kathy Hawkins.

In more recent years, we have enjoyed bicycling and hiking tours with Al Mayer. Wednesday Wanderer events are a special treat. Al Mayer and I are the same age (or rather, I am one month older than he). My husband and I now use electric-assist bicycles, but not Al.

The organizational and leadership skills of these and other members are greatly appreciated.

We have many memories of our years with special North Stars—Jinny McWethy, Terry Quam, Jacque and Wayne Lindskoog. As North Star member Jean Dick expressed on a visit several years ago, “You can be away for years, but you will always be friends with the North Stars when you return.”

Tim Knopp 1935-1989

Tim Knopp was a leading figure in the North Star Ski Touring Club until his untimely death in 1989. He was a forestry professor at the University of Minnesota, and after hours he lobbied public agencies to build the trails we all enjoy today. Tim compiled a trail guide for skiing and worked with government officials to expand the ski trail system in Minnesota. He was appointed to the Governor's Trail Advisory Committee in 1972, and in that role he submitted proposals for new ski trails to be considered by the state legislature.

Tim at the 1974 VJC.
Photo by David Siskind

In 1982, Tim worked with fellow NSSTC club members Bob Tokar and Don Pusch to get the concept of a skier user fee off the ground. The need to supplement Minnesota DNR funding for public ski trails was evident, and with Tim's help and leadership, we now have the Minnesota Ski Pass as we know it today.

Tim was also involved with MinnTour, an umbrella organization formed to unite ski touring clubs in Minnesota. MinnTour was a major force in encouraging and promoting ski touring statewide. Tim's involvement with MinnTour and the Sierra Club was instrumental in successfully appealing a U.S. Forest Service decision to allow snowmobiles in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA). The Banadad ski trail system, located in the BWCA, includes a trail named in his honor.

Tim founded the NSSTC's newsletter and gave it the evocative Norwegian name *Løype*, which means both a literal ski trail and also a path through life based on love of outdoor recreation, respect for nature, and mental and physical toughness. He designed the club's logo with five skiers in a row showing various abilities and interests. Tim served as NSSTC president in 1971–72, was the club's first *Løype* editor, served as trails coordinator for many years, was the club's first MinnTour representative, and served as government liaison from 1982 until his death.



North Star Ski Touring Club

A Tribute to Norm Oakvik by Jim Johnson, Sr.

Norm Oakvik stood only 5 feet, 3 inches tall and weighed only 135 pounds. Yet Norm powered his skis past both Canadian and American Olympic cross-country skiers to win the glory of the North American Cross-Country Ski Championship in 1954. In 1956, Norm was first alternate on the US Olympic team in Nordic Combined.

I first met Norm in 1953 after my father encountered him while ice fishing on a frozen Minnesota lake. When Norm found out that I was a member of the Edison High School downhill ski team, Norm said he wanted to meet me and gave my dad his telephone number. Our team's cross-country skiers were being soundly beaten by skiers from Minneapolis Roosevelt and Minneapolis North High Schools. The Edison coach knew that I was a fast runner, and he practically begged me to compete as a cross-country ski racer. I had zero knowledge of cross-country ski techniques and waxing. I reluctantly entered four or five cross-country ski races with mediocre results. I became desperate to learn more about cross-country ski racing. So, I telephoned Norm and asked him to help me.

Norm drove to my home in northeast Minneapolis, and he gave me my first ski lesson at Columbia Golf Course near my home. He amazed me with his effortless, classic ski technique. In truth, it was magic when Norm strapped on his skis. This diminutive skier appeared to float above the ski trails when he classic skied. He seemed to be one with the snow. I tried very hard to imitate Norm. But I immediately learned that cross-country skiing was very hard work. I needed to capture some of Norm's ski magic.

My father spent little time with me, because he worked two jobs. Thus, Norm became my surrogate father when we skied together. He drove me to ski meets in Minneapolis, northern Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Norm often drove me to practices and ski meets at Theodore Wirth Park. He patiently showed me how to climb the steepest hills and how to push myself to the very edge of my limited strength. Norm was incredibly strong and had the ability to climb the steepest hills without moving his legs. He had developed awesome upper body strength. I weighed only 135 pounds and was six feet tall. As my strength gradually increased, Norm pushed me harder and harder in ski practice. The skiing climax of my junior year's competition came in a regional high school meet on the steep hills of Bush Lake in early spring. Using Norm's coaching expertise, I was able to beat the next closest racer by over six minutes. Norm and I were so excited!

During my sophomore and junior years at Edison, we often lost many cross-country ski events to skiers from Minneapolis Roosevelt. However, my teammate Bill Peissig and I trained hard all summer and fall for the 1953-1954 ski season. When the snow came, we practiced very hard under Norm's watchful eye. In the Minneapolis City Ski Championship, Bill won first place and I finished second. And in the early winter of 1953-1954, Edison's cross-country skiers consistently beat Roosevelt.

There was an extreme snow drought in the Twin Cities for over one month before the State Championship in Duluth. I ran the hills and fairways of Columbia Golf Course up to four times each week with my dog.

Finally, our ski team took a school bus from the snowless Twin Cities to snow-covered Chester Bowl in Duluth. In the history of Edison High, the school's cross-country ski racers had never won any events at the state meet. Norm had coached my teammates and me on the intricacies of waxing. Before the race, I corked in several layers of Swix wax, as Norm had taught me. I knew I needed good grip to climb the steep Duluth hills. I started the race very fast and I tried to maintain that up-tempo pace throughout the race. Finally, I out-sprinted the skier ahead of me to the finish. Our coach read the state results as we drove south to Minneapolis. I placed seventh in the meet and teammate David Moe placed ninth. The race officials combined the times of each team's top two qualifiers, placing us third in the state as a cross-country team. We were only seconds behind the top two Duluth area teams, who raced on their home course where they skied daily.

The year after I graduated from Edison, Norm and Jack Pauley drove my former teammates, Lenny Smith and David Moe, to a regional ski camp in South Dakota over Christmas vacation. Norm was determined to improve the race performances of Twin Cities' skiers. He pushed Lenny and David and other Minneapolis skiers to the absolute edge of their abilities. Under Norm's coaching, Lenny and David and the Edison cross-country ski team improved drastically. The climax for the cross-country team was the State Championship at Chester Bowl in Duluth. David placed third in the state meet, and Lenny placed sixth, placing them first as a team to win the coveted State Championship for the first time in Edison history.

Norm's close friend John Holmquist told me that Norm continued coaching until he was 91 years old! Norm was a great man and a great skier. He changed my life and the lives of hundreds of other skiers.



Norm sold Jim Johnson this pair of skis in 1954. They are now on display in the Casper Nordic Center in Casper, Wyoming. Photo by Jim Johnson, Sr.

Early Days with the North Stars

by Janet Gabor

Tom and I and our two sons moved to Minnesota in October of 1969. Our first stop was Hoigaard's, where Norm Oakvik fitted us with wonderful wood cross-country skis. In early December, we went to Theodore Wirth Park for ski lessons with Jinny McWethy.

In those early days we made our own trails, stayed at places with limited facilities, and had a great time. I remember sleeping on the floor at El Rancho Mañana in Richmond, Minnesota. It was such fun, as dogs ran over our sleeping bags at night. Dinner was hot dogs and baked beans.

A trip to Wyoming was done on the cheap—less than \$200 per person for a week. We traveled by bus and stayed four to a room. A curtain between the beds separated couples. All trails were man-made. It took three years of exploration before a group finally located "The Garden of the Gods." We were compatible with snowmobiles then, as the local snowmobile club gave us rides home from a barbecue and even provided a tow up hills. One day, I was skiing with the "easy group" when our trail became a wind tunnel as we skied back in a blizzard. We were in serious danger of hypothermia. Lee Mayer took us into the woods and built a fire. I used his back to warm my frozen hands. We were almost back when the snowmobilers came to rescue us. We declined help and all made it back on our own. The intrepid "hard-core" skiers had seen the storm coming and had made it back hours before.

Oh how marvelous were those days of our youth, when we were strong and adaptable to all conditions!



Early North Star trip to Wyoming. Tom Gabor is in red.
Photo submitted by Janet Gabor

Minnesota's First Nordic Citizen Race/Tour—the VJC

In February of 1971, the NSSTC organized the first cross-country ski race/tour in Minnesota. It was called the "VJC" for the towns it went through—Victoria, Jonathan, and Chaska. Following are some notes from our history:

Glen Bennington was club president in 1970–71, the year of our first VJC (Victoria/Jonathan/Chaska) ski race. John Hollister was appointed VJC Chairman, and one of the first Nordic tour/races in the country was born, with nearly 300 participants. Beginning in the town of Victoria and winding its way through Jonathan, the first VJC was forced to an abbreviated finish by a lack of snow outside Chaska. We soon learned that Mother Nature is not always beneficent when it comes to early February. Tim Heisel was the winner of that first race and recipient of the Jonathan Cup, donated by Senator Henry McKnight.



The first VJC, February 1971.
Photo submitted by Jim McWethy



Wayne Lindskoog is pictured with son Allen at the 1974 VJC. Allen skied the entire first VJC in 1971 at the age of five.
Photo by David Siskind

Skiing the First Birkebeiner in 1973 by John Holmquist

The story begins with the shuttle-bus taking us from Telemark to the start of the race. Dawn of the great day is mild and overcast. As streaks of red-gold show low in the sky over the Chequamegon National Forest, I ask myself, "Am I ready for this?" From then on, events take over and assume their own immutable tempo.

At Telemark we barely have time to catch the shuttle bus to Hayward. I find a seat at the back. Rumbling down the county road to Highway 63, I'm thinking, "Y'know, I could just stay on this bus and return with it to the lodge." Then the bus stops at the town of Cable. One last skier boards and takes the seat across from me. He has a guileless, open face. He has on heavy, army surplus, olive-drab wool pants and jacket, high laced boots, and a large backpack. He carries a pair of wide, white, army skis with cable bindings, and a pair of cane poles with baskets the size of garbage can lids. By now I'm guessing he has enough grub in his backpack to feed everyone on the bus. He doesn't speak, but his manner says: "Gol-lee, ain't this somethin'?" I picture him as a young pulp cutter who just now lays down his chainsaw, borrows some skis, and trudges out of the woods to "give this thing a try." Seeing him (and that outfit), I feel like a wily old pro. Any thoughts of abandoning the race are replaced by an eagerness to get on with it.

I've been to the Lumberjack Bowl before, but in summer for Lumberjack Days. Now all is ice and snow. A small building on a dock at the edge of the lake is Race Headquarters, packed with people. Wayne and Jacque Lindskoog are the only ones I know. Jacque, a strong biker and skier, is doing the long race. Assuming no woman would want to ski it, the entry form didn't specify gender, and she'd applied hoping they would assume that "Jacque" was a man. She's trying to blend in as one of the guys. Skiers line up; the starting gun sounds and the fifty-odd starters move out in a body across the frozen lake.

As the boom rattles through the Lumberjack Bowl, I ask myself, "What am I doing on this wooden deck, waxing my skis?" But I've never done a race longer than 15 kilometers, and if these skis are to carry me several times that far today, a couple extra layers of wax means more to me than getting off the line at the crack of the cannon. Waxing finished, I jump off the dock, kick into my bindings, and cross the starting line. The wax feels right, but only time will tell. There is no time for testing it.

Skiing alone

We'll stop here to say that for most of the way the course that first year was laid out on logging roads and snowmobile trails. Set tracks were shallow to non-existent. For long periods I skied alone, to the point where I found myself talking to the trees. I saw weathered signs pointing snowmobilers the way to local bars. Race markers were sparse. At one point I was sure I'd missed a turn and doubled back for a couple kilometers to check. Then,

about 10 kilometers from the finish, it all changed. The trail joined the Telemark cross-country system. These trails were wooded, winding, narrow, hilly, and beautifully groomed. You could step into the tracks and ride them like you were on rails.

Too soon, the course leaves the Telemark trail system and runs out into flat, scrub growth and then climbs into the trees. A half-kilometer on, the trees thin out and I'm standing at the top of an open hill. Spread at my feet is a panorama too good to be true. Like a stunned ox, I process the view. I'd never seen it from this angle, but there it is—the base chalet, main lodge, parking lots, airstrip, and the broad valley stretching north from where I stand on the flank of "Mount" Telemark.

The finish line

It sits like a golden prize after hours of sweaty effort, often despairing of ever reaching it on skis. It's all there, but now I'm seeing only the long, open downhill. The finish is down there somewhere, but my hockey-stop isn't that good. What if I wipe out the timer?

I ease off the crest of the hill, setting my skis into a snowplow. It's actually no more than a long bunny-hill in soft snow. The slope flattens, and with a wide right turn, the base chalet comes into view, and next to it a finish-line banner. I dodge a young child carrying his skis and poles across the finish area. I snowplow under the banner, shoulders relaxed, dragging my poles, trying to look nonchalant, as if it's just one more marathon ski race, and I've been doing them for years.

Music blares from loudspeakers. Overhead, a sun deck juts out from the base chalet. Alpine skiers with goggles pushed up on their hats sit at tables in the mild, early afternoon with beer and munchies. I can imagine the show we've been putting on for them. About every 10 minutes, another one of us comes in with a numbered bib, skimpy clothes, and long, narrow skis. This crowd wouldn't know a Birkebeiner from a chainsaw.

It's my first time at a downhill resort, a busy weekend at the height of the season. The crowd, the noise, the smells, are at once pleasing and repellent after hours in the silent winter woods. I feel a rush as a loudspeaker announces my name and bib number into the crowd. Someone hands me an envelope and congratulations. A smiling woman hangs a ribbon around my neck, from which suspends a large medallion.

Now, I stand there dumbly, thinking that with a little luck I might crouch down and release my bindings. I manage to do this without falling over. So my major goal in life is to straighten up again. Not knowing what else to do after that, I try walking. This goes better than I had hoped, and I gather skis, poles, and sweat bag and wander off toward the main lodge.

After a hot bath, we were sitting in the lobby when, to my surprise, copies of the finishing order appeared while, as we learned later, there were still skiers out on the trail. Thirty-two names were listed but not Jacque's. They apparently couldn't believe a woman would ski that distance and that, if they ignored her, maybe she'd go away.

The awards ceremony took place in the lobby, in a conversation pit fronting a mammoth stone fireplace. I'd heard of Tony Wise, how he'd started Telemark on little more than determination and built it into the biggest employer in the county. Tony had a round face and short neck. His head, set forward on wide shoulders, gave him a pugnacious look. He told us his vision of the future for cross-country skiing in America, and how Telemark would be part of it. He spoke in bursts, running words together, forcing his mouth to keep up with the ideas tumbling out.

As I bid an early goodnight to friends old and new, the Telemark Saturday night revels were just beginning. In the events of the day at an alpine ski lodge, the Birkebeiner finish and post-race celebration were like pebbles dropped in a large pond. The ripples had all but disappeared, and I gave no thought to next year and another Birkebeiner



*John Holmquist at
the 1994
American
Birkebeiner.
Photo by
David Siskind*

Our Work with Government to Develop Trails

The history of our club's work with state and federal government officials began in 1974 with the formation of MinnTour, an umbrella organization of the state's ski touring clubs. With the involvement of North Star Tim Knopp, MinnTour soon became a major force in promoting ski touring statewide. The following year, MinnTour joined with the Sierra Club to appeal a U.S. Forest Service decision allowing snowmobiles within the BWCA. And in 1976, Tim Knopp became our club's first MinnTour representative. In 1978, Governor Perpich met with MinnTour representatives to establish a ski trail task force. Also in 1978, President Carter signed into law a bill that established the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, banning motorized vehicles from the BWCA.

In 1982–83, the position of MinnTour representative was renamed, and Tim Knopp became the first government liaison for the North Star Ski Touring Club. Also that year, a statewide ad hoc committee, which included NSSTC members Tim Knopp and Bob Tokar, was formed to promote the passage of a ski trail user fee bill in the state legislature. The bill passed, and we now have the Great Minnesota Ski Pass.

After Tim's untimely death in 1989, Arne Stefferud, a student of Tim's at the University of Minnesota, became the club's government liaison. In that role, Arne has represented the NSSTC and all cross-country skiers in the metro area on the Minnesota Recreational Trail Users Association (MRTUA) since 1992. MRTUA reviews and recommends the awarding of grants for state and local trail projects to the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The grants are financed by a portion of federal gasoline taxes. A portion of the funds is used for non-motorized trail projects, including cross-country skiing, hiking, road bicycling, and mountain biking—activities that NSSTC members enjoy.

Recent examples of grants awarded are:

\$45,000 to the Superior Hiking Trail Association for the replacement of damaged bridges, boardwalks, steps, and signage on the trail.

\$50,347 to the City of Champlin to develop a portion of a paved pedestrian/bicycle trail connecting Elm Creek Park with the Mississippi River.

\$75,000 to the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board to partially finance purchase of snowmaking equipment for cross-country ski trails at Theodore Wirth Regional Park.

\$150,000 to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to develop 3.3 miles of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail.

1977–1987 Moving into the Modern Era

Fiberglass skis and graphite poles replace the wood skis and bamboo poles of the past. We hold our first annual ski swap and our first annual 10K run. Governor Perpich establishes a ski trail task force with the involvement of North Star members. Spring, summer and fall events make it onto the schedule.

Thor's Dream Fulfilled: First North Star Hut-to-Hut Trip, 1981 by Mel Peterson

It was the culmination of a dream, and hopefully the start of something much greater, when a group of North Star skiers completed the first "hut-to-hut" ski tour in Minnesota—specifically through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)—in March of 1981. Thor Nordwall had spent a good number of years nurturing the dream of just such skiing in the Boundary Waters, and the reality in every way equaled the scope of his dream.

The 18 skiers who arrived at Camp du Nord late on a Wednesday afternoon discovered, as Thor had been saying for years, that there is almost always snow in this part of the state from Thanksgiving until early April. While Ely and the surrounding lake country did have less than average snowfall that year, there was over a foot of well-packed snow on the lakes and an adequate cover on the portage trails.

Conditions were unique! The warm melting days and 20-degree evenings created a crust that Thor claimed to have seldom seen in his experiences in the Boundary Waters. Mornings found us skating rather than skiing across the frozen expanses. The warm afternoon sunshine made the going more difficult, but the landscape sparkled with the interplay of sun, snow, and trees. There's a definition to the winter land that is made clearer by this eternal sun, which very subtly sabotages the season it illuminates.

One of the basic values of hut-to-hut skiing is the lightness of travel, which provides for more comfort and distance. Most of us carried only daypacks as we left Camp du Nord early Thursday morning and headed north into a stiff wind for Lodge of the Whispering Pines on Big Lake. Our route took us generally northwest past Coxey Pond, up the North Bay of Cummings Lake, across Big Moose Lake (our first real chilling taste of the wind), then on to Big Lake via Duck Lake portage, Portage River, and LaPond Lake.

The 18 miles were covered in about eight hours, and we all spoke of the bite of the north wind with utmost respect. The wind is simply one of those elements that seems inherent to the north country in winter. It is sometimes harsh, at times unforgiving, yet essential, and therefore very much a part of the rugged beauty of the land. The lake crossings seemed long, and the portages moderately challenging. We were relieved when we began the

last long haul across Big Lake for the distant set of cabins that would be home for the night.

Harry and Marge Lee ran Lodge of the Whispering Pines with warmth and congeniality. They were the first local proprietors to support the hut-to-hut concept of winter travel, and the entire group was impressed with the simple comfort of the cabins and the lodge. Marge's homemade Italian dinner and baked fruit pies seemed a just reward for the work of getting there, and I think we were all endeared to this cozy spot, which is a haven of rest on a large lake in a country even larger and more commanding.

The return trip the next day was completed by way of a more eastern network of lakes and portages. The distance was shorter, the day sunny and quite warm (temperature in the upper 40s), and the wind of the previous day no longer a factor. While a small group of skiers made an ambitious side trip to Angleworm Lake (some of the nicest terrain I've skied) and the Indian pictographs at Hegman Lake, the rest of the group continued the pleasant trip back to du Nord—through Hook, Rice, and Slim Lakes—for a rendezvous with Lucy Grams and her group up for the weekend. It was during Lucy's annual Camp du Nord trip that this overnighter was first conceived.

The Boundary Waters is an area of awesome size and grandeur. It is a landscape dominated by lakes, pine forests, and the lore of the voyageurs and the Indians before them. In the winter, you have the snow and wind, and the coldness of the season. The scattered remains of a wolf kill on Big Lake were solemn testimony to a struggle for life that we of the city cannot possibly comprehend. I had this feeling the entire week I was there—that I was a total stranger with no real sense of purpose in the scheme of things. I was always aware of being watched by those hidden animals of winter whose timidity is testimony to my strangeness. Yet it was important that I be there, if for no other reason than to learn a little about the fact of my own smallness.

The lakes and portages make all this country accessible, and the availability of lodges and homes adds a degree of comfort to the journey. And we have dreams still wrapped in sleep. Let's be thankful for those dreams, and for men like Thor Nordwall, who spends much of his time making those dreams turn over and awaken. Thank you, Thor.

Poland, the Land of My Fathers by Robert D. Tokar

This article originally appeared in the April 1980 issue of the Løype.

Twenty-one NSSTC members and I have just completed a very unique trip. We skied the Tatra Mountains of Poland. It was there in the foothills of the Tatras that my mother was born. For me it was a trip back to the land of my ancestors.

Each trip has one bad day. We were lucky to have our first day be that bad day. Due to a heavy fog in Warsaw, we were forced to make an emergency landing in Poznan, 180 miles from Warsaw. Our pilot showed us his skill by landing his big Russian built Ilyushin 62 on a runway built for much smaller planes. He still had two feet of runway left when we stopped. Our stay in Poznan was to last about nine hours. There was no one there with enough authority to make a decision, so plans to get us to Warsaw were made and rejected. Our luggage was unloaded and reloaded four times as decisions to fly to Warsaw were made and then changed. At 6:00 p.m. that evening, Warsaw informed the pilot that if he wanted "to take the chance" he was free to fly to Warsaw. He took the chance and we took it with him. Many Polish passengers refused to take the chance and stayed in Poznan. We wondered if they knew something we didn't know.

We landed in Warsaw and first saw the ground when the wheels touched down and we came to a stop with a good 12 inches of runway to spare. By this time, some of our less sophisticated travelers were tossing around "Polish jokes" as if they thought the local Poles would find them funny. We finally settled down in a Warsaw Hotel and had our first high-calorie, delicious meal. We were to repeat this over and over again in the next two weeks.

The next morning, we took an early train (6:00 a.m.) to the ancient city of Krakow, arriving before noon. For the next three and a half days we were to visit castles, churches, the Salt Mines, and old buildings in this 700-year-old city. We were to shop like Russians turned loose in a Sears Roebuck store. Evenings saw us eating at Hungarian and Polish restaurants. We learned to drink vodka. We listened to progressive jazz, chamber music, and gypsy music in a below-ground cabaret. On our last day in Krakow, we subjected our sensibilities to the stark and utter reality of Auschwitz. For some of us it was painful to look, but we all came away with a sense of shame that "our" generation was capable of doing this.

The foothills of the Tatras

With the shopping and sightseeing mostly out of the way, we boarded our private bus for the foothills of the Tatras where we would start our ski adventure. With overnight packs we climbed into the snow-covered hills. Following an afternoon of climbing into deeper and deeper snow, we found our new home for the next two days—the hut of Ywopswa. The huge spruce trees were pregnant with

snow, and we were greeted in lusty Polish by our hut master and his big white dog Bella. Sweaty clothes came off, and cold bottles of beer were poured down our throats. We settled into our cozy stone and log hut, which had a large eating and common room with fireplace, and bunk bed sleeping (coed style) upstairs. That night around the fire, our Polish joke-tellers tried to prove that Polish vodka was just another Polish joke. The next morning, when they found themselves turned completely inside out, their enthusiasm for the Polish joke was greatly diminished. Our first days of skiing from the hut found us doing a three-hour climb to another hut for lunch. After lunch, we made the same trail back in about one hour, skiing down narrow trails that were cut two feet into the surface by centuries of use. The native Highlanders, with their horse-drawn sledges, greeted us as we sped by.

That night no one tried to prove anything about vodka; we were convinced. We rested our bruised and tired bodies, and our hut master showed us how to roast Polish sausage over an open fire. After dinner, we shot fireworks off into the mountain night and took a short walk down the trail with fiery torches. All the ancient longing welled up inside me, and I knew I was "home," as I was less than an hour's ski from where my roots are. I knew then where my love for hills, forest, and snow came from. We skied out the next day, but only after our hut master gave us all a thimbleful of vodka and a big hug. He showed us his concern as he went down the trail with us to the limits of his hut's jurisdiction. With a loud "do widzenia" and a sad wave, he and Bella watched us ski down the hill. That morning, as we gave him a VJC pin, he told us that we were the first Americans to visit his hut. He embedded the pin into the woodwork and said, "It stay there forever."

Zakopane—winter sports capital of Poland

Our bus met us in the town of Nowy Targ as we came out of the hills. We then drove to Zakopane, the winter sports capital of Poland. For the next five days we would stay in three private Highlander homes, with all of us eating in the center home. It was here that we would be totally immersed in Polish culture, with all its smells, tastes, and sounds. Zakopane, with its quaint shops, and ice cream and pastry shops, captured our hearts and stomachs. We skied during the day through sleepy peasant villages, drinking fresh cow's milk, giving small gifts to awe-struck children who all thought we came from Chicago. And always we took pictures, recorded sounds, and sucked it all in. Evenings saw us taking jingle-belled sledge rides up the mountains where we roasted Polish sausage over an open fire and passed around a bottle of vodka and a loaf of rye bread, tearing hunks off to dip into horseradish. Certainly that beats French fries and hamburgers at McDonalds by a long shot. We climbed up impossible mountains only because our trusty guide Andrzej told us not to worry, as the trail was "mostly flat." Our efforts were rewarded by a spectacular view of the high Tatras

and a look down into Czechoslovakia. We hurled ourselves down narrow chutes, and somehow made it to the bottom. That night there was a proud displaying of black and blue marks in the obvious and not so obvious places.

On to Warsaw

Broken, bruised, and broke (we spent most of our Polish money), we dragged and carried our newly acquired possessions into sleeping compartments for an overnight train ride to Warsaw. Even the loud and profane amongst us slept the sleep of the innocent that night. The click, click of the rails brought back all our newly acquired memories of this lovely country. The Polish jokes had long since disappeared. A deep sense of admiration for these people took their place. You could not help but admire a people who had paid such a high and disproportionate price in World War II. True, their affluence was not as great as ours, their standard of living was way below ours, but they had somehow managed to preserve a culture and a way of life that we in this country had already thrown away. The bottom line in judging any people or culture rests on two criteria: how they treat their children and how they treat their elderly. The children appeared well cared for, loved, and well-dressed. The old grandmas and grandpas still held an important and honored place in the family. All this was done without welfare and nursing homes.

Our last day in Warsaw was spent in last-minute shopping, sight-seeing, and an evening dress-up visit to the ballet at the Warsaw Opera House. We then faced the impossible task of saying goodbye to our Polish guide Andresj. Here was a young man who "managed" our sometimes difficult group. Our most difficult problems were solved with a simple "don't worry, it's no problem." Our fears in the mountains were dispelled by a simple "don't worry, it's mostly flat." Without him our whole trip would have been "mostly flat," but with him it was "no problem." The women all loved him, the men all envied him. He left an indelible mark on all of us, and he will remain in our memories forever.



North Star Memories ca. 1979

by Karen Buggs

Long Ago, maybe 1979, I joined the NSSTC. I ventured into my first weekend ski trip to Camp du Nord near Ely with my pal, Julie Holmen. We jumped onto the semi-luxurious bus waiting at HarMar Mall in Roseville. What a magical ride! We chose our seats, then wandered the aisle meeting new friends, singing, sharing snacks and laughter.

It was a cold, cold weekend, never reaching the plus side of zero. We ran to and from the bathhouse, to the old dining hall early for breakfast, and later for dinner and folk dancing with Terrence Smith. We followed Paul Smith up and down the snowy trails, then onto Burntside Lake with the wind on our backs. It was a parade of penguins following our scout! And finally the crown jewel—the hot wood-burning sauna at Burntside's shore. The carpeted ramp invited our steaming sauna bodies into the donut hole in the ice, guarded by cold tolerant icemen and a rope for sure exit from the hole. There was the welcome shock of hot body/cold water, then a calm unforgettable sense of peace. Standing steaming on the ramp again—me in my birthday suit, air below zero, comfortable, blessed and part of the universe.



*Above: Thor takes a drink from a cold stream while Linda Jacobs uses the more traditional method.
NSSTC BWCA hut-to-hut trip, March 1981.
Photo by Liz Rasmussen*

*Left: North Stars in the Tatra Mountains of Poland, 1980.
Photo by Connie Donnelly*

Letter from the North Country

by Thor Nordwall



This article originally appeared in the December 1982 issue of the Løype.

The snow will be coming soon now. How do I know? There are many indicators. I know because when I look at the woodpile there is a feeling within of "not enough." I looked at this same woodpile during the summer and walked merrily by. In the storage building is a bundle of cross-country skis. They are noticeable now. I reached for many items—fishing rods, landing net, nails—but now it is as if someone has rearranged my storage. The skis are suddenly the most visible. Now where are my boots, waxes, down vest, and jacket? Long underwear, gloves, and hats must be in the bedroom trunk, I think! I couldn't possibly miss winter. All of these happenings jar me to the coming reality of winter. Also, I notice my cabin is warmer and the door is closed more often. Hey! The screens are also gone. Yes, I will pay attention to these signs. I know you are coming. I will be happy to see you. Winter is a quiet friend of mine. Welcome!

Wintering In. The summer passed quickly. My activities were more varied than in past months so I find myself scurrying like the squirrels to get ready for the winter. Bears, chipmunks, and other animals have learned to sleep through the cold and snow. Man unfortunately must endure to survive, and that "mind set" is evidenced by people I meet everywhere.

In my travels the word "Minnesota" creates a question of its derivation. Many believe it means "land of snow and ice" or "land without summer" or "land of 10,000 frozen lakes." I tell you, when you meet these people, don't ignore them or feel sorry for them. Just smile and let them see your North Star patch and the numerous ski event badges on your chest. They will not be so anxious to engage in any conversation with this apparent nut. Smile again, you happy nut!

In order to describe my approach to my seventh winter up here in the North Country, I should perhaps set the scene. My cabin site is high on a granite ridge overlooking the north arm of Burntside Lake. I have chosen to call it "Torsbacke," meaning Thor's hill. It is Swedish, the language of my native country. It is not my claim to this hill but a name needed to set aside a very special natural place. The name evolved from friends who referred to it in English. It is, and always will be for me, "Torsbacke."

There is no road to Torsbacke. A road is something that is

maintained by grading and resurfacing. It usually is made to serve homes and resorts. Such a road does exist two-thirds of a mile below my cabin. Years ago, logging was extensively done throughout the area surrounding my home. I would estimate that logging occurred on about fifteen square miles of first and second growth during the years 1900-1964. In many of those early years horses were used so no road grading was required. Very little is seen today of these old drag roads. About 1940 there was renewed logging for second growth timber. Roads were needed for trucks and tractors. Rough grading was done to provide routes for removing this timber. I reach my cabin on such an old road. It is also used as a portage trail to numerous lakes north and west of Torsbacke.

Each season, cabin living has its particular challenges. The logging road to the cabin is drivable during the summer with a four-wheel drive vehicle. It is rock strewn and uphill the full two-thirds mile to Torsbacke. Tall pine, birch, and maple form a beautiful corridor and proper entrance to this high granite ridge. The new ski trails in the area surround my cabin. I simply open the back door, choose a pair of skis, wax, and go. I will be setting tracks on these trails as soon as the snow arrives. My wide boards with steel edges (thanks to Ben Pawlak) serve the first few passes of "wilderness grooming." Rocks govern which of the trails become useable first, as does the amount of snow. I think twelve inches of snow are needed for all the trails to be safe and enjoyable.

Today is a beautiful October day. This day has the smells, sights, sounds, and feelings of the stirring of the newborn. How will this new young winter come in? I can enjoy and marvel in this mystery. As we are all unique, so is each day and certainly the seasons. Nature unfolds and expresses herself to me each day of the year. I have chosen the best seat in the house. These same changes of scene unfold before all of us. Some see them from the "upper balcony." Colors are fast fading. The ground is a crazy quilt of design. Geese cry out excitedly as they head south. I can feel the gentle, first cool breath of winter—a special time. I choose my isolation not to be away from people, but for the peace it gives me and the friends who spend time here.

What really supports and sustains me are the visits from individuals and groups who share their warmth and interests. If I represent a manifestation of a peaceful life, remember that it is one man's desire. Today I will go to town as I do each Wednesday. I do not have the desire to grow my own or slaughter as a true backwoodsman. Soil conditions are good only for growing rocks, and the animals I see are friends. Here is where my interpretation of the simple life may be misconstrued. But I find it simple and sociable to buy groceries, do laundry, visit the local sauna (legit), eat a nice dinner, and see friends in town once a week. I must see to my toboggan soon. The snow will cover the road I now drive, and we all will use it for skiing. Pulling a toboggan or carrying a pack with supplies the two-thirds mile on skis or snowshoes will soon be here. Buy less, eat less—adjust.

History of NSSTC Trail Development by Dana Siskind

Trail development and maintenance have been a primary focus of the North Star Ski Touring Club since the beginning. In 1967, when the club was founded, it really was “cross-country” skiing—setting your own tracks in pristine snow across a field or through the woods.

In the mid-1960s, the local chapter of the United States Ski Association Ski Touring Committee cut a two-mile trail near the Bush Lake ski jump and a one-mile trail in Indian Mounds Park in St. Paul. They also contacted Hennepin County Park Reserve District, and a three-mile trail was cut near Normandale Park.

On December 5, 1968, members of the NSSTC and officials of other outdoor activity groups met with Clyde Ryberg, an official for the town of Jonathan and administrative assistant to Minnesota state senator Henry McKnight. This meeting led to a strong position in the legislature for development of areas and trails to serve various outdoor activities. The following year the NSSTC helped lay out and clear a seven-and-a-half mile trail in Jonathan. This later became part of the VJC race course.

In 1970–71, Glen Bennington and Tim Knopp contacted officials of the Hennepin County Park Reserve District to impress upon them the potential growth of ski touring and to ask them to assess areas of trail expansion in their system. This was also an effort to head off a rising tide of snowmobile encroachment in these areas. Tim Knopp was appointed to the Governor’s Trail Advisory Committee, thus beginning a long career as government liaison for our club.

In 1973–74, there was phenomenal growth in ski touring throughout the state. Tim Knopp conducted a “trail seminar” attended by over 100 people. He developed a comprehensive list of considerations to take into account for trail development—from physical aspects of the trail, to access for skiing and emergency situations, to waste disposal and signage.

Our first official trail clearing trip that year was led by Bob Tokar to the Remote Lake trails near McGregor, Minnesota. The following year, trips coordinator Pat Richards publicized a list of new trails and touring areas in the *Loyce*, thus expanding the choices for ski trips.

In 1975–76, Newell Searle led an aggressive trail development program, both identifying potential areas and providing funds and manpower to clear trails. North Stars became very active in development of ski trails. We also wrote letters to our representatives in Congress, asking them to keep snowmobiles out of the BWCA.

In 1979–80, donations to the trail fund increased dramatically. People realized we could make a difference in the state’s trail systems. Scott Knudson took an active role in assisting ski touring areas, resorts, and parks in the cutting and maintaining of trails as well as offering advice on trail development.

That year also saw the beginning of the North Arm Trail

System near Ely, Minnesota. Thor Nordwall, who built a cabin near the YMCA Camp du Nord, thought that ski trails would be a great idea. He and his friend Paul Smith, a ranger with the US Forest Service, laid out a system of trails in and near the BWCA. Thor, Paul, Tom Cooper, and Lee Mayer started this great system by cutting a one-and-one-half-mile trail through the BWCA to connect two existing trails. Combined with existing portages, this created a 40K trail system connecting Camps du Nord and Widjiwagan. The NSSTC provided funding and manpower for this project. Our club still maintains trails in this area each year. All of the work is done with hand tools, as chain saws are not allowed in the wilderness.

Also in 1979–80, the NSSTC board decided that meals and gas reimbursement should be provided to our trail work volunteers. The resort or lodge that would benefit from the trails would be responsible for food and lodging. The club would reimburse gas mileage to any who carpooled to the site. This resulted in essentially a free weekend in the north woods. If the work was done locally on a day trip, the club often provided meals as well. The NSSTC or the US Forest Service would also provide hand tools and safety equipment. This visionary policy has worked well over the decades and remains in place today.

Trail clearing became a very popular activity, and the trail development chair became an elected board position with voting privileges. In 1984–86, groups of up to 40 people were bussed up to the North Arm trail system and the North Shore mountain trails for trail work.

In 1988, five miles of new trail opened in Battle Creek Regional Park in St. Paul. The 1990s saw a great deal of expansion in both donations and manpower. In 1993–94, a \$5000 donation was applied to five different state trail projects. Money was also donated to Battle Creek Regional Park for signs and lighted trails.

The club’s peak year was 1996, with 10 trail-clearing trips on the fall schedule—five weekend trips up north and five day trips at local parks. At this time we were still building new trails—cutting trees, moving rocks and dirt, and nipping brush. It was a lot of work, but as we worked together and thought of how much fun it would be to ski these new trails in a few months, we developed not only friendships but an ownership of the trails we worked on.

As more trails were developed, and park systems and ski areas became more sophisticated in maintaining their trail systems, demand for our labor decreased. We still continue to support these areas with funds for signage, equipment upkeep, and construction of trail shelters.

We have a few favorite locations where our labor is still required, primarily the North Shore trails, the North Arm Trails, and the Banadad Trail System. The latter two are located in the BWCA, so hand tools are required. We are always willing to get a group together to answer other requests for our help or expertise.

1987–1997 Moving into the Digital Age

We purchase our own computer system to make membership updates easier, establish a hotline (the Nordic Connection) for trip updates, purchase desktop publishing software to produce the *Loye*, and develop our own website.

North Star Ski Lessons by Bob O'Hara

In the early days of the club, cross-country skiing was in the classic style only. This was also true for racing—both high school skiers and citizen racers. Norm Oakvik, who was an outstanding classic skier, recognized that the majority of people joining the club needed help to learn the sport. Realizing that it was too big for one person to attempt, he offered a month-long class for about 20 of us to become teachers so we could then pass on what he taught us to others. We held our lessons at Theodore Wirth Park on natural snow and in very cold temperatures. While Norm Oakvik trained a number of club members how to cross-country ski, and in turn replicate what he taught us to help other club members, we never had a program of formal ski lessons for club members until club president Ted Cardozo instituted them.

Ted wanted to accomplish two objectives with new skiers: to give them a sample of what a club trip was like, and to teach them to ski. He asked me and others to get involved. We wanted to give lessons in December so skiers would be ready for upcoming club trips. I had a cabin in Grantsburg, Wisconsin, where we usually had skiable snow before the Metro area. The town had a nice golf course, which meant that you did not need much snow to ski. I had contacts in town and secured permission to use the golf course. Down the road was a nice motel. We were able to book rooms for the students and all was set.

The group came up Friday night—only a 90-minute drive. We had videos, handouts, and some dry land information. Saturday morning after breakfast was lesson number one, which was all about balance and glide. We made ovals for small groups to ski in. We had a number of instructors, so the ratio was about one to seven. After balance was achieved, we moved on to the use of poles, coordination between legs (kick), proper pole plant, and, most important, the glide. In those days the majority of skiers did not know how to use their pole grips properly, because they had their hands in the straps incorrectly, preventing good glide. After lunch, we went back to doing some skiing on the gentle hills of the golf course. Sunday was open to either more instruction or some skiing. We did this for many years until it became more difficult to get people to commit to the whole weekend, and the cost of the trip was going up. It was a great idea on Ted's part, and it helped new members to bond with each other and to get involved with more club trips.

The lesson part was very valuable, so we continued the tradition, but tailored it to one day, a Saturday. We used many venues over the decades, including St. Paul, Minneapolis, Medina, and Trollhaugen. The classes filled up each year, with 35 or more people attending. A few were cancelled due to lack of snow in December. We

evolved from teaching just beginners, to including those who wanted to brush up on more advanced technique, to teaching skating as it became more popular. The best compliment I received was from a club member who struggled to get in a few miles before tiring. She was signed up for a European club trip and took the class. After learning how to hold her poles correctly and extend her glide, she was able to ski 20km every day. Needless to say, she was ecstatic about her ability to ski longer and not feel exhausted. Nothing beats success!

The lessons ran for over 30 years. It was a good run for the club, and lots of members were able to improve their technique and have more enjoyable club trips. We had a cadre of excellent volunteer instructors, and we all had fun conducting the classes. However, because we were running out of volunteer instructors and due to my age (I turned 75 this past year), we have closed the chapter on club lessons. We now encourage members to select from the various venues in the Metro area that offer excellent lessons.

The key aspects to being a good classic skier are: balance, poling, rhythm, and the ability to turn, along with skiing up and down hills. Norm was a master at balance and a real joy to watch when he skied. Cross-country skiing, like any sport when done well, is a picture of beauty and grace. Balance is the key. Norm impressed upon us that in order to achieve balance you needed to ski without poles in an open area. There are two advantages to this practice: first, the instructor can see everyone all the time; second, you have to worry only about balance, nothing more. Balance comes very quick when learned this way, along with complete confidence that one can easily glide on the snow. Then you add your poles. Then comes the timing or rhythm. I used to tell my new skiers to hum the "Skaters' Waltz" to get a nice rhythm. Once they had good balance and good pole timing, they could pick up the pace for more speed. What good balance provides is the ability to get real glide. It is the glide that makes skiing fun with less effort. I always tell folks that if you want to walk on the snow get snowshoes, not skis.

Norm was not only a good teacher but a good example. He realized that by building technique in an easy-to-learn manner, a skier could progress at his or her own pace and always feel confident. Many of the young skiers Norm helped over time became coaches, and they often would go back to Norm with questions or invite him to ski with their team.

While Norm looked like a little elf tearing across the snow, he was a master skier and teacher. Because of Norm's influence, I became a high school Nordic ski coach. All of the success I have had is due to Norm's example. Thanks, Norm—you taught us well.

The Duncan Ski Trip of 1993 by Inez Wick

Heading up the shore to Two Harbors for the Duncan Ski Trip, we (Mel Peterson, Al Porter, Barb Wahman, Cindy Porter, John Christensen, and I) cut inland to the lake the cabin was on. Funny, there were no other cars in the parking area.

We strapped on our packs, put on our skis, and off we went. It was a pretty cold evening. When we asked Al in what direction we needed to go, he located the North Star and said "Head straight for that star." Hearing wolves howling as we skied in was maybe "the tale of what was yet to come."

Skiing across the lake was a challenge, as it was thawing—the cold weather at night making a thin layer of ice with water underneath. We were continually breaking through.

After the challenge of getting across the lake, Al led the way to the cabin. It took as long as the ice crossing, as we kept falling through the snow because of the icy crust. He mentioned that "we should be seeing smoke coming from the sauna, because Eric always has it ready for us." We didn't see any smoke—this was the second clue that something was wrong. Also, Al was surprised that the Duncans hadn't put the candle lanterns along the steps leading to the cabin. By now it was past midnight, and we had been looking forward to the warm cabin and the deluxe gourmet food that the Duncans always bring up. Oh boy—this was getting eerie.

Arriving at the cabin, we found no form of life, and everything was locked up. It was dark, and skiing out wasn't an option. We circled the cabin, looking for an open door or window. It was shut up tight. John, Cindy, and I found a loose window and started pushing up and down. After 10 minutes, laughing hysterically, we finally got the window to drop past a peg that released the hold, and the window dropped down. Up on the snowy picnic table on all fours, we crawled through the window, hit the top of a table, and tumbled to the floor. This was to be our only exit in and out for the next 24 hours, including "late-night potty breaks." Needless to say, we did not get much sleep.

Once inside, we started scavenging for anything useful that would help us survive the night—food, kettles to melt snow, stove, gas lamp, places to sleep, a bag of Oreos in the cupboard, etc. We pooled all of the snacks from our backpacks (crackers, licorice, trail mix, M&Ms) and placed them on the table, giving us our dinner and morning breakfast. We located coffee and hot chocolate in the cupboard. After fooling around with the stove, we had hot drinks; and the warmth from the wood-fed stove would keep us toasty on this very cold night.

Our sleeping bags were the saviors of the trip, as we all looked around and quickly claimed our sleeping spots. John had brought in a bottle of peppermint schnapps that came in handy. John commented afterwards that "a shot before bedtime was almost like brushing your teeth with mint toothpaste."

The next morning was sunny, but cold. We found a pump that was working, so water was plentiful. We heated up water for coffee/hot chocolate and ate our "breakfast of champions"—backpack snacks and Oreos. We skied the morning with Al charting our course, and then packed up and left to make our journey back across the lake to our cars.

John was surprised to find that in the morning Al was feeling somewhat dejected from messing this up. Everyone else was in high spirits, as this trip had turned into "an adventure." Al felt the need to apologize to John for the way the trip had turned out. John tried to cheer him up, saying "That's okay, Al, now I've got a skiing story to tell too!" Al replied, "What I don't understand is why these stories always seem to be about me." (What had happened was that Al and Eric hadn't talked much to each other about the trip beforehand; when both said, "See ya Friday," each was thinking of a different Friday.)

John had skied some and had been dating Cindy for slightly less than a year. He thought that the stories he'd heard about Al from Cindy—like death marches, going through brush and swamps, coming in after dark on ski trips—must be exaggerated. But as he met more North Star skiers, he found that it was definitely true—they were able to surmount any obstacle while wearing skis. His apprehension grew as the trip approached and he decided that the only way he could possibly keep up with this group was to be as well prepared as possible.

We drove back into Two Harbors and had our late, large breakfast in a warm cafe. (I had tried for several years to get on the Duncan trip list, and when confirmation finally arrived, I was thrilled. But I never got up to the cabin again.) The Duncans went up the next weekend. Now the Duncans spend most of their winters in Florida.

It was a memorable trip—one that we will never forget. Take it a step at a time, figure out the problem, discuss it, solve it and LIVE! We did it!



*Al Porter leading the way to the Duncan cabin.
Photo submitted by Cindy Porter*

Two Unforgettable North Stars by Don Youngdahl

I joined the North Star Ski Touring Club in the early 1970s in order to connect with other cross-country skiers. Ted Cardozo and Al Porter were the two North Star members who influenced me the most. Ted, for his indomitable courage and fortitude in pursuing an active lifestyle in spite of his severe sight handicap. Al, for encouraging my predilection for long days on the trail, exploring, and not worrying about getting "lost."

Do any of you remember the *Reader's Digest* monthly feature, "The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Ever Met"? Anyone who knows Ted will realize why he is my personal candidate for that honor. Ted was fearless in his skiing endeavors, refusing to let his sight handicap stop him from contributing to our sport. He skied well and he skied fast.

When light conditions were poor, Ted was forced to slow down on hills, to keep from flying off the trail at corners he didn't see in time. On one or two occasions, when poor light conditions slowed Ted down, I skied behind him and called out the turns, just like guides do for blind skiers. I believe the only time I bested Ted in a race was when he had crashed off the course, and I passed him without realizing it.

Ted's sight handicap led to some humorous incidents, and I must emphasize that we were not laughing *at* Ted. Rather, we were laughing at humorous incidents resulting from his indomitable spirit. On the first Nemađji Hilton trip, Ted was leading the way as we were bushwhacking through a swamp in knee-deep snow. When we approached a 40-foot diameter patch of hip-high weeds, Ted led the group right through the center of the weeds instead of circling around it. When Al Porter asked me why he didn't go around the weeds, my answer was, "He didn't see them." Later, on that same route, we were looking for a single-track dirt bike trail in a white birch tree grove. I instructed the group to look for shards of white paper on the trees, left from temporary markings for an Enduro competition. Ted's response was, "Heck, I don't even see the trees."

On one of our western trips, as Ted was leading the way down Express Creek in Colorado in fresh snow, he missed a turn and flew across the creek into a snowbank—not surprising due to the cloudy conditions and lack of definition from the fresh snow. The skiers behind him arrived to find his ski tracks simply vanishing, followed by the silhouette image of Ted in the snowbank, just like the silhouette of Bugs Bunny crashing through a wall in the old cartoons.

My annual Nemađji Hilton weekend trip was, at one time, the longest running North Star weekend trip, when one considers same venue, same co-leaders, and same weekend.

Al Porter was my faithful co-leader, and it is him, not me, you should blame for this trip's reputation as a

grueling exercise that would test your stamina and cold weather resolve. Al is the one who taught me to always take the longest route back to the cabin. The trip went on regardless of temperature; and a temperature of zero degrees was no reason to shorten the route, which sometimes found us getting back after dark. We skied a mixture of lightly-used snowmobile trails, dirt bike trails, and abandoned snowmobile and logging trails, and bushwhacked unmarked routes through the woods. One essential fact that Al and I had to educate our guests on was that we were not lost just because we were a long way from the cabin and didn't know precisely where we were.

Several years ago, a friend of mine mentioned a North Star trip that he had been on (and that Al had also signed up for). I asked my friend if he had met or skied with Al Porter on the trip. He replied, "Well, the first day, I saw this guy who looked like he chewed nails for breakfast, with a bunch of maps and a compass, talking about a long trip into parts unknown. No, I didn't ski with him, but I assume that was Al Porter."



Ted Cardozo and Don Youngdahl on one of many Colorado hut-to-hut trips. Photo submitted by Don Youngdahl



Don Youngdahl and Al Porter relaxing in the Nemađji Hilton. Photo submitted by Don Youngdahl

Getting Involved with the Wednesday Wanderers by Al Mayer

I joined the North Stars sometime in 1989. That year I was on an AYH weekend bike ride when I met Jane Bickel. When she heard about my forming a bike club for employees of Prudential called the “We Don’t Do Hills Riders” (for the kind of trips I like to lead), she invited me to show up for a North Star ride the following Wednesday. I’ve been a North Star member ever since. But what really hooked me on the North Stars was when I rode my first Iron Man bike ride and was invited to a party at Lucy Grams’ home after the ride. When I got there and learned that she was still out on the ride but her home was open to everyone who showed up without her being there, it was almost more than I could imagine. What a great group of people! I wanted to become part of this group. I also liked the hugs I received.

Jinny McWethy was “Mother North Star” at that time and headed up the Wednesday riders, who were referred to at times as the “Bored Housewives” or the “Idle Rich,” meaning rich in idle time. But Jinny didn’t like those names, so eventually we became the “Wednesday Wanderers.” Sometime in 1991, Jinny brought a box of maps to my house, and, due to her failing health, she dubbed me the next head of the Wednesday Wanderers.

While Jinny was spearheading the Wednesday group, she made sure that a bike ride was scheduled for every Wednesday between Memorial Day and Labor Day; and, as long as there was snow on the ground, a Wednesday ski event was scheduled. To make sure she knew how many would show up for each event, Jinny would always leave out a pertinent piece of information in her notices so that people would have to contact her before the event.

Shortly after I took over as Wednesday Wanderer coordinator, I decided that from then on an activity would be scheduled 52 Wednesdays a year, with the weather determining what the event would be. This, however, caused some consternation in the Mayer household, for during the cusp months between the biking and skiing seasons, I would be deluged with phone calls asking what the activity would be on an upcoming Wednesday. During that time of year, my dear wife Jeanne refused to pick up the phone. Salvation came via the e-mail system and the Wednesday Wanderers e-mail list.

During my reign, I would often lead as many as 100 events a year, but I never felt that this was a burden because North Star volunteers were always willing to step up and lead a Wednesday Wanderers event.



2007 Wednesday Wanderer Halloween Hike. Al Mayer in front row, right.
Photo by Bob Clift

Memories of a Ski Club Nature by David Siskind

Since joining the North Stars in November 1972, the club has been a big part of my life. In the winter, it is my life. It's what makes Minnesota not only survivable, but actually pleasurable. Our club has provided for good skiing locally, all over the US and Canada, and even Europe, with people who have become life-long friends. Most of the time, everything goes as planned. However, it's when it doesn't, or when we're thrown a curve ball, that the memories we retain forever are made. Here are some of mine.

Who is this woman? (1972). In July 1972, I went on my first bike tour in Upper Michigan, with Jacque Lindskoog, Charley Field, and Ed Rappaport, our leader. While not a North Star trip, it was where I found out about cross-country skiing and the North Stars. By the end of the year, we were all North Star members. We had also found a lifelong friend in athletic Jacque, who had not a bit of trouble with this ambitious nine-day trip. The first day's ride to Rice Lake, Wisconsin, was 127 miles; and Day 3 was 97 miles in the rain. Not only can Jacque ski (like all those Birkebeiners that women weren't initially supposed to be competing in at all), she's done some epic bike rides, like a double crossing of hilly Missouri (540 miles in 49 hours).

North Star Ski Racing Club (1975). Okay, the 1974–75 activities schedule still said "Touring Club," but why were there so many races on our schedule? There was the King Boreas Ski Tour in St. Paul, the Wasioja Cross-country Ski Race and Tour in Rochester, the Snowflake in Bunker Hills, the fifth annual VJC (when it actually started in Victoria on Lake Bavaria, went through Jonathan, and ended in Chaska), the Birkebeiner in Cable, another Birke in Bemidji, the Vasaloppet in Mora, the Banks-Gooseberry-Duluth, and finally the Grand Marais Spring Tour. Apparently, many North Stars did these just for fun, not for the competition. That year, Wayne and Jacque Lindskoog led a trip to High Forest Inn, Hideaway Park, Colorado. And Thor Nordwall led a trip to Camp du Nord where skiers slept in sleeping bags on the floor of Thor's Lodge. We've come a long way.

A no-good bus (1976). Many North Star weekend trips in 1975–76 were by rented bus, and Glenn Richards' Itasca (Wilderness Bay) trip was no exception. About 36 of us were gathered at the HarMar parking lot with a bus that somehow wasn't legal for taking us. A little late for Plan B, but we worked it out anyway—with many phone calls and a last-minute bus substitution. We arrived a little late that evening, but the weekend was saved. The schedule didn't show trip costs but most required a \$10 deposit. North Star membership was \$5. The longer trips, typically one week, were called "Western Trips," and the 1976 one was led by Glenn and Pat Richards to Beaver's Lodge, Winter Park, Colorado.

Of course it's cold—it's Minnesota (1977). But why on the family weekend? Long Lake Conservation Center—January 8, 1977. It was minus 26 degrees F. on Saturday

and minus 42 on Sunday. Somehow, I got my eight-year-old daughter Lisa out skiing on that Sunday, which was better than some of our cars that wouldn't start. It helped that it was sunny and calm that day.

50-km patches (1978). As an incentive to ski (besides the usual incentive of the fun of gliding through the snowy woods with our closest friends), we were able to earn patches. Hennepin County Parks (not yet Three Rivers) had stamping stations on their longest trails, and skiing 50 km worth earned you a patch. Our children, Lisa, age nine, and Daniel, age seven, earned theirs in January that year. Previously, it was bronze, silver, and gold pins from the President of the United States. Those completing the VJC received dated VJC pins. Somehow, these tokens seemed important at the time. It was a good winter for me too, with over 800 total km skied. (The next season was to be my best ever with 1,386 km.)

Snowbound in Dallas, Texas (1978). Some North Stars (mainly us, the Betzes, and the Coxes) had been enjoying weekends in Bemidji for their annual ski-touring festivals. That year, one of our trippers (Ed Rappaport) was on a business trip to Dallas, Texas, before the ski weekend and was going to be late joining us (being snowbound in Dallas). He ended up flying to Hibbing and then land-traveling to our cabin in Bemidji. Why was the snow we wanted and needed in Texas?

Our own marathons (1979). My wife Sylvia was away in Itasca, and also out of town was Julie Betz (later Norwall), my other regular skiing companion. So I decided to test myself with a Birke-distance day at Baker Park. Taking two breaks, I skied 57 km in a total time of 6 hours, 45 minutes. Later in the month, I skied with Julie on her birthday, when we skied her age in kilometers—41. Oh, the strength of youth! It would be over 15 years later that I would ski the American Birkebeiner.

Search and rescue (1980). "One of our skiers hasn't returned." This wasn't what we wanted to hear. We had skied 22 km that day at Olympia Village on a North Star trip led by Wayne and Jacque Lindskoog. It was a pretty fair distance, made even tougher by our efforts to keep up with speedy Wayne Lindskoog and Roger Betz. We had cleaned up and eaten supper, and were set for a relaxing evening. The lost tripper was from another group, not a North Star. It was already dark out and, in those pre-Al Porter epic days, nobody thought to bring lights. But we rallied and went out, essentially feeling our way down the groomed trail, on our skis of course. Fortunately, the lost skier wasn't far from camp, just doing aimless circles.

Northland Village (1982). Forty-five North Stars were on the President's Day weekend trip led by North Star President Bob Tokar. Unlike floor sleeping in 1975, we now had winterized cabins with beds and gas heaters that usually worked. The trip description bragged about the new centralized toilet/shower/sauna building. That building would burn down two years later, requiring that year's trip to relocate to Widjiwagan. Northland's replacement

sauna at lakeside would later burn down. The 1983 Northland trip was also led by Bob Tokar, and included an after-dark ski out to the island for a BBQ brat dinner. This was the pre-dance era when entertainment was provided by the trippers—a tradition now carried on at Maplelag. The 1982 and 1983 trip lists included many who are still active North Stars (the Hawkins family, Mel Peterson, Connie Donnelly, Lucy Grams, Al Porter, Germaine Hall, Linda Johnson, George Vania, the Rasmussens, Barb Wahman) and, of course, many who are no longer with us (unfortunately too many to name, but the most prominent being Jinny McWethy, aka “Mother North Star”).

Western trip cancelled (1983). Has this ever happened before, or since? The long-term North Star policy is that trips go whatever the conditions. If skiing isn’t possible, then we hike, or something. In February 1983, the week-long trip to Hinton, Canada, near Jasper, was cancelled five days before departure. Lack of snow, they said.

A Bird in Hand by Anne McKinsey

Sometime in the early 1980s—after I returned from my 11-year hiatus in Washington, D.C., and joined the “Single Sierrans” and the North Stars to enjoy the company of other outdoor lovers—I co-led a club bus trip to Lutsen with Dan Goldblatt. Unfortunately, as often happens, snow was sparse to nonexistent on the trails by Lake Superior. We decided to take our bus up the Gunflint Trail to the Bearskin/Golden Eagle trail system, where snow was plentiful. While skiing on a remote trail, several of us stopped at an Adirondack shelter. I noticed the birds hanging out in the nearby trees, which I recognized as gray jays, or Canada jays.

In Minnesota, gray jays are found only in the far northeastern coniferous forest along the Canadian border. I first encountered these birds in the Boundary Waters, where they are commonly known as “camp robbers.” There the jays are brazen; they will perch on the side of a frying pan and eat your scrambled eggs or swoop down to steal your sandwich from the log you are sitting on. I had become more familiar with gray jays while skiing in the Bearskin area one sunny day the previous spring. I had stopped next to a frozen lake to sit on a rock and eat my lunch. As soon as I opened the bag of chips, I was joined by several jays, hopping around and waiting for a handout. I shared my chips and sandwich with them, and this was when I first realized that I could hold food in my hand and they would fearlessly land on it to eat whatever I offered.

The gray jays hanging out by the Adirondack shelter on that ski trip were there because they knew that the human visitors left crumbs behind—and could even be persuaded to share their lunches and trail snacks. The exuberant Barb Watts was in my little group of skiers that day, enjoying the skiing on rolling borderland trails that were new to her. When we paused at the shelter and she opened a bag of snacks, I suggested that she hold some in her outstretched hand to see what happened. One of my



Sylvia, Daniel, and Lisa Siskind skiing Meadowbrook Golf Course around 1975. Photo by David Siskind

favorite memories from all of my North Star adventures was Barb’s unbridled elation when a jay landed on her hand and began to nibble on the treats. She often reminded me of that moment later, recalling it as a highlight of that trip.

I had an opportunity to share my knowledge of gray jays decades later, on the first trip to Silver Star Ski Resort led by Kathy Kelly and John Driscoll. While skiing on the beautiful Sovereign Lake trails, some of us stopped at a charming little warm-up cabin nestled in the trees. I immediately noticed a pair of gray jays in a nearby spruce tree. I wondered if they were as tame as the Minnesota gray jays, so I broke some pieces off my granola bar and held them in my outstretched hand while standing under the tree. Sure enough, within seconds one of the jays landed on my hand and began pecking at the crumbs—to the amazement of onlookers, including several gleeful children. Some of them grabbed cameras to take pictures of me and the jays. It seemed they thought I was some kind of “bird whisperer.” I kept up the charade for a couple of minutes before I shared the secret: I wasn’t special; they could do the same thing.



Barb Watts and Anne McKinsey feeding the gray jays. Photo submitted by Anne McKinsey

1997–2007 Improving the Visibility of the NSSTC

We give \$2000 to Ramsey County for lighted trails at Battle Creek Park, are awarded a National Forest grant to be used for trail development and maintenance on state forest lands, reintroduce our fall Fun Run, publish our “Ski the Metro” booklet and sell over 1,000 copies, hold our first North Star Ski Festival, volunteer at the first City of Lakes Loppet, and institute the Tim Knopp Award to honor members who have made outstanding contributions to the club.

Fun Memories with the North Star Ski Touring Club by Lee McCullough

I have been a member of the NSSTC since 1980. I was looking for a club to provide exercise and adventure in my life, and boy, did I find it! I was a member when we went to Camp Menogyn, skied all day, danced all night, sat in the hot sauna, and jumped into the lake. This was back in the day when Al Porter led a group of skiers bushwhacking. I remember them returning long after dinner with twigs sticking out of their hats.

My first trip out of the country was to Banff, Calgary, Canada, in 1998. Elaine Krenik and Don Rowe were our trip leaders, serving a two-turkey dinner for twenty skiers. After we made a steep climb up Blueberry Hill, there was a song and chorus line. The North Star members involved obviously wish to remain anonymous. At night we sang along to old cowboy movie music and remembered the words!

Another really fun trip was to Kandersteg, Switzerland, in 2009. Al Volkers and Anne McKinsey led us to this cross-country ski mecca. It snowed 8-10 inches every

night, and the groomers were out before dawn making trails. One day we took a train ride to visit the highest mountain, Lauchernalp. We took four trams to reach the top, but what a view! We had lunch on the mountain top—a great Swiss pizza and even better German beer. On our return trip, we stopped in Lucerne where Carnival (similar to Mardi Gras) was being celebrated. We danced in the streets to Mama Mia.

I enjoy making people laugh, so for years I headed up entertainment for our Spring Banquet. I still remember dressing up Al Mayer as a nun, who then went around blessing us. There were several visits from Miss Tina Turner, the Blues Brothers (with John Driscoll), “Oh Brother Where Art Thou” (with Cal Schadel and Mike Fredericks), and, of course, the YMCA song with sportsmen as dancers. It was a hoot!

This club has brought me life-long friends and dear memories. Thank you, North Stars.



Lee McCullough and George Tkach playing “Sonny and Cher” at the Spring Banquet.
Photo submitted by Lee McCullough

My First Ski Race by Ann Morrissey

The VJC was my first ski race and, not wanting to reveal my age when Jinny McWethy called, I said, “Can I just give you the decade?” She thought for a while and finally said, “Yes, okay.” So I told her I was in my forties.

In the car on the way to the race, Ron Brand asked, “Are you competitive?” I said I didn’t know—I’d never raced before. When the gun went off, I took off like a bullet and promptly collided with another skier, both of us landing on the ground. Many apologies (and many precious moments later), I was off again, somewhat chastened, at a more reasonable pace.

When I finished the course there was no one in sight, so, since it was a short course, I decided to just ski it again. The second time I finished there was still no one around, but by this time they were all inside. I took off my skis and headed indoors just in time to hear, “Third place, Ann Morrissey, 45.” What?? I thought—I’m not 45!! So much for trying to hide your age in a club where fellow skiers would grow to be good friends, and where race organizers really do need to know your age!

Rebuilding a Life with the North Star Ski Touring Club by Ellen Watson

I joined the North Star Ski Touring Club around 1996, when a co-worker dropped a flyer on my desk and said "This is for you, go for it!"

I was in the process of trying to rebuild my life after the death of my husband. I was barely over 50 when my husband died and left me with the "command" to build a life around the things I enjoy. I had been struggling for three years to find out just what those things really were.

My first overnight trip was to the North Shore, on a trip led by Jane Norman and Woody Croatt. I was terrified. I was not a proficient skier and had never been on a trail other than the Baker Park ski trails. It was the first time I realized that cross-country skiing could be something other than a romp around the county park on a Sunday afternoon, and not just something for the high school kids. I had taken lessons the previous season at the park, and a good friend had taught me the basics back in the 1970s while living in rural Wisconsin, where we could ski out on the corn fields. On this trip, however, I was so impressed with how helpful, thoughtful, and, most importantly, non-intimidating the North Star skiers were. Yes, I enjoyed this so much I thought it could be one of those things I could build a life around.

After several meetings, a few day trips, and guidance from the likes of Pete Hawkins, Greg Fangel, Fran Howley, Sam Meddaugh, Bob O'Hara, Ted Cardozo, and many others, I became a better skier and bought skis a little more upscale from my wooden Vasa variety—something that didn't need pine tar!

Later, it was Al Mayer's Monday night bike rides that encouraged me to think of biking as a way to stay in shape for skiing. Terry Quam showed me what real biking was all about. The thought of biking 20 miles in a single day seemed ludicrous. Then a good friend took me to a bike store to move up from my Target ten-speed. After dropping \$900 for a bike I thought, "This bike better last me the rest of my life." I've been riding it for 20 years!

There have been so many memorable trips over the years. The European trips with Anne McKinsey and Al Volkers—Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Spain—were among the best experiences ever. But nothing could compare to skiing the Engadin Ski Marathon on a trip led by Greg Fangel. I'd never seen anything like it. I was not in it to race but, as Greg said, "it's for the experience." The start of that race is a vision that will live in my head forever—thousands of skiers on beautiful snow-covered lakes wrapped by spectacular mountains and capped by a crystal blue sky.

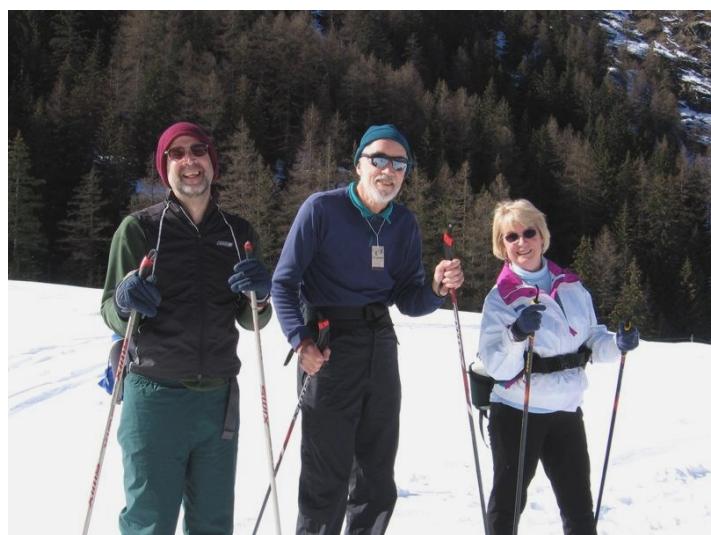
On a trip to Austria, Anne McKinsey, Andrea Johnson, and I spent an afternoon ice skating on the city rink, which was surrounded by Austrians sitting in the sun sipping tea

or whatever, and the three of us feeling pretty special. Anne and I skated again in Turin, Italy, just so we could say we skated on the Olympic ice rink. The guy kept it open an extra 15 minutes just for the two of us.

Another favorite memory: taking the train from Vancouver to 100 Mile Ranch on the west coast of Canada, on a trip led by Audry Nordwall. The scenery was spectacular, but most memorable was her husband Thor, wearing his ever-present cap, standing on a Vancouver corner outside a fancy café playing his concertina, attempting to drum up donations. Dave Siskind primed the pot by dropping in the first buck while we sat on the tour bus comically observing the whole scene play out. What a hoot!

I remember co-leading a trip to the North Shore when we actually got snowed in and had to stay an extra day. There was too much snow to ski—roads closed, trails couldn't be tracked. It was Academy Awards weekend, so we all pooled our snack food and watched classic movies as they aired in anticipation of the big event.

So, it's not necessarily the skiing but rather the accoutrements to the sport that make it so special. The North Stars have provided a combination of unique environments, unexpected situations, people involvement, and adventure that make this club truly something worth building a life around. It has not only made me a better skier, better biker, better hiker, better kayaker, and better friend; it has also enriched my life, changed my attitudes, and encouraged continued learning. Thank you for that little purple flyer twenty years ago! Who knew it would be a "building block"?



*Mike Jubert, Sam Meddaugh, and Ellen Watson in Seefeld, Austria, 2005.
Photo by Julie Nelson*

The Incredible, Reliable Maplelag Trip by Barb Wahman

I joined the NSSTC in 1976, and it wasn't very long before I started hearing about Maplelag from Jinny McWethy. Norm Oakvik, her friend, had gone to visit the Richardses, the owners, and suggested that perhaps Maplelag (which at that time was a maple syrup producer) would make a good ski area. The NSSTC started going there for skiing shortly thereafter.

When I first went to Maplelag, there was only one bathroom in the buildings. Most of the buildings were primitive, but the skiing was always great! I started leading the club's annual Martin Luther King weekend trip over 30 years ago. Jinny led most of the trips before that. I took over the trip when Bryant Dunshee, Jinny's co-leader, was not able to lead it anymore.

The early trips were by bus, as were many of the NSSTC trips. We had many experiences during the bus travel days. One year, the wind chill was -90 degrees, and the bus heater was not working, so we ended up putting on many of our warm ski clothes just to stay warm on the trip up to the resort. Another time, the bus driver kept falling asleep during our trip up to Maplelag. Yet another year, the snow was so deep that we couldn't get into the property, so we had to ski to our buildings while they brought our luggage in by snowmobile.

In the 30 years that I have led the trip, we have always had skiable snow. One year, it was the only place in the

state where we could ski. I was very nervous when we were 50 miles away and the landscape was still brown. I had a bus full of 55 people, but Maplelag is in that meteorological pocket where there has always been snow. It wasn't the best snow, but we skied. The Richardses have always done a marvelous job with the grooming, whether with a snowmobile or their Pisten Bully groomer. Jay is often up all night grooming so that the trails are ready for skiers in the morning.

The main lodge burned to the ground in 1999. A neighbor had spotted the fire when the lodge was almost completely consumed with fire. But the Richardses have rebuilt the lodge so that it is twice the size it was before. All of the units now have bathrooms. In addition to the fabulous skiing, they have marvelous family-style meals and never-empty cookie jars. We have a dance on Saturday and a talent show on Sunday. We've had many fun acts over the years; the North Stars always come up with something unique. The resort has a hot tub for over 30 people and a sauna near the lake, so you can jump in a hole in the ice after steaming in the sauna. There are also massages, which book early.

Some of our trip participants have been going for many years. Ed Waldera has been going since his daughters were young, and now he's bringing his family with the grandchildren. We hope to continue this trip for many years to come.



Maplelag 2015. Left to right: Al Porter, John Christensen, Emily Christensen, Barb Wahman, Tammy Lambas, and Bonnie Palmquist. Photo by Cindy Porter

Memories of Bally Creek with Kirk

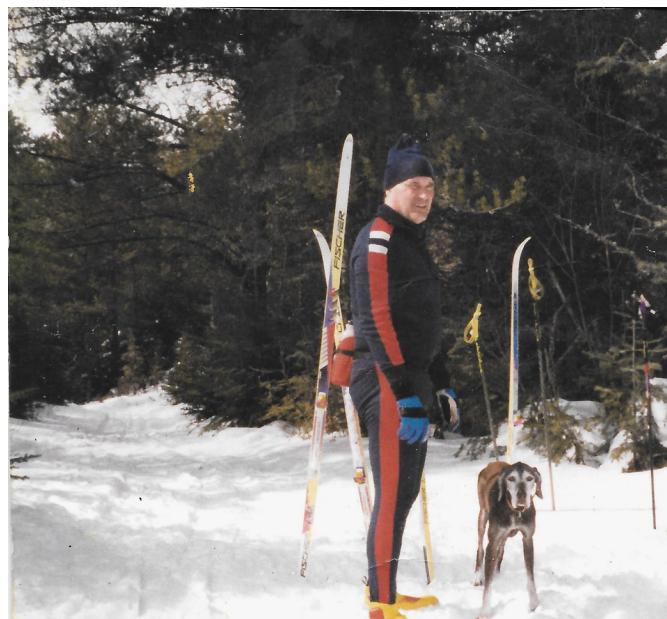
by Pam Meyer

Kirk Meyer and I loved skiing the trails at Bally Creek out of Grand Marais. One of our first weekend ski trips was to Bally Creek, staying in the small cabin, "Ollar," Kirk's favorite, with Mel Peterson, Jim Luadke, and Debbie Bergstrom. A full house! We were delighted by the intimacy of the trails and loved the winding trail system—Sundling Creek Loop, Pine Plantation, Wildlife Pond, and Moose Area, with the Big Cedar Tree marking the trail leading downhill to the Cascade River State Park trails. We loved the high scenic trail that descended to the lake and across to the Bally Creek Loop—a hilly trail through thick conifers.

Over five years, we returned several times each winter, often with our dog Candy, and always in March for a late spring ski. Many times Bally Creek had the last skiable snow out of Grand Marais. We led a North Star ski trip there in the late 1990s and skied the day-long trek to Cascade Lodge for lunch at the café.

Kirk loved winter in the outdoors, and Bally Creek was as close to "winter camping" as I wanted! With the gas lanterns, wood stoves for heat, water supplied in jugs, a great sauna for bathing, the glow of the lights in camp at night, and the incredible stars in the dark night sky, we had many special times there. After Kirk's death in 2000, the owners, Dave and Kathy Williams, named the high trail down to the lake after him.

Be sure to check out "Kirk's Run" the next time you are at Bally Creek, and salute our North Star friend.



Kirk Meyer with dog Candy at Bally Creek.
Photo by Pam Meyer

Top right: Nemadji Hilton. Photo by Don Youngdahl



Nemadji Hilton

by Cindy Porter

Early one November, my dad called me, excitement in his voice, and said, "Cindy, the *Loyce* came. Listen to this trip description. It starts 'For rugged outdoorsmen only.' We ski five miles from the car, carrying everything we need for

the weekend, then ski around the surrounding countryside. There's room for only ten people; I'd better sign up right away! Do you think I'm rugged enough for them?"

That was the first Nemadji Hilton North Star trip. From that moment, the team of Don Youngdahl and Al Porter was born. The two of them had a true meeting of the minds, in both the type of skiing they loved to do and the balance of cost and plushness of accommodations they required. Together they explored new lands (in the Nemadji State Forest), developed new "trails," and redefined "rugged" activities for the North Stars.

After Dad's first trip to the Nemadji Hilton, I knew that I would enjoy it. The first year that I was free that weekend, I wanted to sign up, but Dad discouraged me. He explained that Don envisioned the trip as a getaway for men and thought that women wouldn't like the rough accommodations. I didn't agree, but didn't want to push where I wasn't welcome. A year or so later, a woman tried to sign up for the trip and was told that it was for men only. The next year she decided to lead a trip for women only. The board got involved and decreed that the North Stars would not reserve trips for only one gender. After that, when women tried to sign up, Don explained to them that the Hilton had two double bunk beds and one double couch, and everyone who goes has to share a double bed with another participant, who so far is always a man. That worked for a year or so, until a couple with a daughter signed up together. As soon as I heard that women had broken into the Hilton trip, I sent in my registration. I was in! I ended up sharing a bed with the daughter and had a wonderful time. Even better, Don realized that women were as able as men to enjoy the accommodations, and from then on welcomed me and many other women.

I've had many wonderful weekends at the Hilton. We would arrive in small groups, according to our schedules. Saturday morning Don would divide us into two groups, led by Don and my father. Each group would break trail for half of a large loop, then meet and ski in the tracks set by the other group. We've skied in -35 degree weather with wind. We've skied during a weekend-long snow storm that dropped 19 inches of snow. We've explored amazingly rugged terrain, broken trail in all conditions, and enjoyed the natural beauty. It is truly a trip for rugged outdoorsmen (and outdoorswomen) only.

The 10th Mountain Hut System Experience by George Vania (with Mel Peterson)

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine into the flowers. The winds will blow their freshness into you, the storms their energy, while cares drop off like autumn leaves."

~ John Muir

Trip History

Members of the North Star Ski Touring Club have informally scheduled over 20 trips to the Fred Braun and 10th Mountain Hut System in the Colorado mountains since 1982. We have been known as the Minnesota Flatlanders.

Ted Cardozo was our leader for the first ten years. The initiative all started when Ted, Mel Peterson, Don Youngdahl, Kirk Meyer, and Al Porter went out to Colorado to cross-country ski in the Breckenridge area in 1982. They were staying at a youth hostel in Frisco, and learned that there was a Fred Braun hut system with five primitive huts heading out of Ashcroft, south of Aspen.

In that first year, they went to Fred Braun's home, found that a couple of the huts were available, paid the fee, picked up the hut keys, purchased some food, and skied to the huts on Epoch 900 cross-country skis. They were skiing on powder the entire time and using, in the famous words of Bob Tokar, "a touch of blue under the foot." Based on this positive experience, a new group went out in 1983 and skied to all five Braun huts in two weeks.

The Braun huts were primitive, but they provided the model for improved huts designed and supported by the 10th Mountain Division soldiers who came back from World War II.

In 1983, Ted learned that a group of the returning 10th Mountain Division soldiers was building a new, modern hut system with the support of Robert McNamara and friends, as a memorial to Robert's late wife Margy. Ted scheduled a trip to the two new huts—Margy's and McNamara. Built in 1982, these were the first two huts in the 10th Mountain system. The building of these huts represented a major step for the fledgling organization, which had to promise the Forest Service that the huts would be razed if they were not used.

In 1984, Ted arranged our first North Star trip to the two new huts. We reached them via the Diamond J Ranch Lodge and a shuttle to the trailhead east of Aspen. The location, great snow conditions, and the comfort and beauty of these huts set the stage for the next 30-plus years of North Star hut trips by the Minnesota Flatlanders.

Both huts have a bunk room that sleeps four on the main floor, a private room with a double bed, plus 10 single beds in a communal sleeping room upstairs. The capacity of each hut is 16 people. Margy's Hut is located on a lightly treed hillside just below timberline at 11,300 feet, about 10 miles northeast of Aspen. The hut has beautiful views of the Elk Mountains to the south.

The McNamara Hut is located in Burnt Hole, deep in the forest on the north side of Bald Knob, at 10,360 feet. The hut has a cozy, secluded feeling that lends itself to sipping tea by the wood burner or exploring the nearby forest. We found good intermediate ski touring on Bald Knob and could strike out on long tours east towards the Continental Divide.

Since 1982, 31 huts have come under the control of the 10th Mountain Division Hut organization. The newer huts are also unique, located below the tree line and with great views of the mountains, especially at sunrise and sunset. They have been built with solar panels, LED lighting, and improved outdoor latrines.



10th Mountain Hut.
Photo by George Vania

Preparation

In the last 34 years, the Minnesota Flatlanders have skied to at least 23 of the 31 huts. Because of group members' past experiences, and good map and compass skills, we have never had to use a guide. In addition, the 10th Mountain Division staff provided good maps showing the huts and trailheads. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) elevation data was clearly shown on these maps.

Our group leaders have had to focus on airline contacts, shuttle contacts, trailhead motels or lodges, routes to and from the huts, and, most importantly, good skiing locations near the huts. We have also had to educate newcomers on how to prepare, how to pack, what to bring, and what to expect. Past leaders have included Ted Cardozo, Al Porter, Don Youngdahl, Amy Brooks and Dale Hettke, Mel Peterson, Wayne Monsen, Chip Treen, and myself.

Getting to a hut requires good physical conditioning and hard work. Most routes require skiing five to seven miles at one to one-and-a-half miles per hour with a 40- to 45-pound pack. The well-maintained trails drop and rise 1,500 to 2,000 feet or more to a hut situated at 9,500 to 11,500 feet of elevation. Most North Star participants had a regular exercise routine, including bicycling, running, and skiing. This level of activity enabled them to

complete these trips successfully. Given that we flatlanders live at 800 to 900 feet of elevation, it requires special conditioning to ski at over 10,000 feet.

Careful planning for all contingencies is critical on these trips. The goal is to get everyone safely up to the hut at least two hours before sunset. Situations do arise, however, as we found in reading one log book entry: "The hut was a nice place to have breakfast. We could not find the hut last night; had to bivouac in the woods last night."

Challenges

Through the years, we have had to deal with many unexpected challenges. Among them were Jan Armstrong's vehicle oil pan failure, Sharon Erickson's telemark ski tip broken by airline baggage, Kirk Meyer's boot failure 11 miles from the nearest town, and my exhaustion, due to altitude sickness, after skiing seven miles with still one mile to get to the hut. Thankfully, Mel Peterson helped me make it that last mile, and Rick Strickler later skied back down the trail to retrieve my pack. There were also heel blisters for Suzanne Hanson due to poor-fitting boots (the single biggest problem found on the trips), the 12-25 inches of slushy snow on a 1500-foot climb up to Folwer/Hillard Hut on a sunny day (which turned into night for Chip Treen, Laura Baker, Tom Harris, Paul Knutson, and me), and spectacular crashes on downhill runs.

10th Mountain trips are the ultimate team-building experience for backcountry skiers. Given the variables of weather and snow conditions, one never knows what the team challenge will be. Excellent route-finding skills using USGS maps, a GPS, an altimeter, and a compass are essential.

Joys!

- skiing powder after a new snowfall on a downhill slope above the tree line that has not been trashed by other skiers;
- looking back at all the beautiful telemark turns done by Al Porter and Chet Mirocha;
- doing an all-day ski tour with Al Porter to one of the amazing cirques or peaks (bring a headlamp and don't plan on an early supper);
- pizza and beer at Beaujou's in Idaho Falls with Ted Cardozo

Being above tree line in the Colorado mountains in the winter is a lifetime experience. Getting a Rocky Mountain high is guaranteed when one climbs the gentle side of a peak and takes in the 360-degree view from the top of the snow-covered mountain. Coming down always has the potential for some fantastic powder skiing.

Trip Reflections

The body really meets the challenge when you put it to the test while climbing the steep incline to the hut. One can draw strength from inside as well as from the group.

A goal set enables the body to perform up to its maximum. On these trips we all become soul buddies. One becomes open and willing to share experiences, joys, and difficulties. We are able to start a conversation on any subject, and we try to be open to the feelings and needs of others.

On the last day one is grateful for having less weight to pack for tomorrow, but sad because we know the trip is over and the group will be breaking up, never to be formed the same way again. Each group is unique because all have had difficult and physically demanding wilderness experiences in the past.

Therein lies the key to the success of these trips. All members have skills to share and are willing to pitch in without being asked. We have solved problems as our equipment or bodies broke down. We have made it through the bright sunshine, and through the blowing snow wilderness, and ended each trip satisfied with our efforts.

Mel Peterson had this to say about his hut experiences: "I've been skinny skiing since the mid-1970s, and my trips to the Colorado mountains rank near the top of my many adventures. It is nearly impossible to put into words the joy of putting a pack on your back and skiing, self-contained for a week or more, those pristine mountains. It was hard work but the views and the camaraderie made it worthwhile. I've never seen such grand sights in my small world and never felt such accomplishment in the great outdoors. I had the opportunity to ski with a great bunch of people who came together to seek adventure and simplify their lives in the Colorado mountains. Looking back on my 60-plus years on this earth, I can say with certainty that I've never felt more alive, more vital and connected, than during those days both slogging through and playing in the mountains around Aspen and Leadville. None of this would have happened if not for my good fortune of being a member of the North Star Ski Touring Club."



*Al Porter telemarking with full pack in Colorado.
Photo submitted by Cindy Porter*

2007–2017 A Very Generous Ski Club

We celebrate the 40th anniversary of our club, donate \$2000 to Three Rivers Park District for tree planting at Elm Creek, make a substantial contribution to the Minnesota Youth Ski League for upgrading their ski trailer, give \$1500 to the Algoma Highlands Conservatory to protect the land used for the Stokely Creek ski trails, and give \$555 to the Norpine Trail Association for building a trail shelter.

“Al and Anne’s Excellent Adventures”: European ski trips 2005-2014

by Al Volkers and Anne McKinsey

Anne: Al and I led five ski trips to European destinations from 2005 through 2014. On each trip, our group of 30 or so North Stars flew into interesting gateway cities, and then bused to our mountain destinations. At the end of our ski adventures, we bused back to the gateway city for a couple days of sightseeing, always stopping en route for a visit to another town or tourist attraction. I was the publicist, pre-trip communicator, and bursar; Al was the location selector and principal tour director “in-country.” These are our reflections on fun trips with great groups of North Stars.

Austria, 2005

Al: The ski trips to Europe were designed to accommodate a wide variety of skiing abilities and travel interests, and provide ample opportunities to experience the culture of Europe in the winter. Each venue had an established transportation infrastructure, allowing skiers to travel to neighboring villages and additional ski trail systems.

Our first adventure in 2005 was to Seefeld, Austria, where we had access to 250 km of trails, the venue for the Nordic events of the 1976 Winter Olympics. We found several mountain huts and chalets with good food and great views. The excellent trail system traversed a mountain plateau and dropped down into the Leutasch valley.

On one day, several of us took a short train ride into Germany, intending to ski back to Seefeld. Good intentions, but we soon discovered that the return trail we wanted to use was closed. Plan B was to ski the local trails in the German village and return to Seefeld by train.

After a week-long stay in Seefeld, we returned to Munich for a two-night stay and explored the culture of that city. On the return to Munich, we explored King Ludwig’s Neuschwanstein Castle in the Bavarian foothills.

Anne: My memories of this first trip include charming villages connected by popular mountain walking trails intersecting the cross-country trails. I also remember a sunny day when Ellen Watson, Andrea Johnson, and I went skating on an outdoor rink in town, joining the local couples ice dancing—the women dressed in long coats and fur hats. But my most vivid recollection from this trip was my personal challenge. In the fall, I was diagnosed with late-stage endometrial cancer. I was not sure whether I could make the trip. As it happened, however, the trip fell in the hiatus between my three months of radiation treatments and five months of chemotherapy. My oncologist thought the trip would be good for me. And it

was. I had a sense of leaving the cancer behind in the U.S., and while abroad I weaned myself off heavy doses of anti-anxiety medication. I know this trip was a turning point in my attitude about my illness.

Italy, 2007

Al: The 2007 trip was to the Cogne Valley in northwest Italy. On one afternoon, the city of Cogne hosted a welcome concert and wine tasting for the guests of the local hotels. On another evening, several of us participated in a torchlight walk through the village, followed by a house concert with dancing and typical desserts. Toward the end of the week, most of our group took a day trip to the French border and rode a series of gondolas to the summit of Mt. Blanc, where you can stand with one foot in Italy and one in France and enjoy spectacular views.

The gateway city for this trip was Torino (Turin), which had recently hosted the Winter Olympics. The museum of Egyptian antiquities in Torino was exceptional and is rated as one of the best museums outside of Egypt.

Anne: Although there was a shortage of snow, and warmer than average temperatures affected lower-altitude trails, there was sufficient snow to ski on the trails from Cogne to nearby villages at higher altitudes. There we would enjoy lunches at local restaurants before skiing back to the hotel. These outings from village to village were unique to our European venues and were among the experiences that made our trips so memorable.

Switzerland, 2009 & 2014

Al: In 2009 and 2014, our destination was the Kandersteg Valley in Switzerland. Kandersteg is located on the northern side of the Gemmi pass, which was a trade route over the Alps. In addition to skiing on the local trails, we were able to travel by train and ski the trails in the adjacent Lötschental valley. In 2014, several members of our group used the sledges (sleds) provided by the hotel for a ride down the sledge run that paralleled the downhill ski runs on the western side of the valley. Riding the sledges at breakneck speed was both terrifying and exhilarating. The ski trails began right outside the hotel, giving the group great flexibility. In 2014, one group decided to take the train through the 14.6-km Lötschberg tunnel and hike the 9.6-km trail up and over the Gemmi pass from the southern direction.

The gateway city for the Kandersteg ski trips was Zurich. On our return to Zurich on both trips, we stopped in the beautiful lakeside city of Lucerne. In 2009, we were

delighted to find that Lucerne was in the midst of its pre-Lenten Carnival. The city streets were filled with visitors in strange and fantastic garb and masks, with numerous roving marching bands in costume, representing communities from a wide area. This was a pleasant surprise for us and enjoyed by all.

Anne: Kandersteg is truly a cross-country skier's paradise. The beautiful trails in the valley provided a variety of loops beneath the surrounding mountains, along the Kander River and gurgling streams, to destinations including historic restaurants serving fondue and raclette. It frequently snowed overnight, and the ski trails were always impeccably groomed. At either end of the valley, cable cars took us up the sides of the mountains—to the spectacular Oeschinen Lake surrounded by cliffs on the east, and Sunnbüel on the south, both featuring mountain dining and downhill ski slopes. The variety of winter activities, and the beauty and peace of the mountain surroundings, made these trips the most memorable of our destinations.

France, 2011

Al: The 2011 trip was set in the Pyrenees in southern France, in the small family resort town of Font Romeu. The outlook for snow for our trip was dismal, and several members of the group decided to leave their skis at home and use rental equipment in the event the area received skiable snow while we were there. What was planned as a ski trip turned into a Pyrenees hiking excursion. Some of us managed a day of skiing on our final day in the Pyrenees, and others enjoyed downhill skiing on principally man-made snow in the small alpine area above the village.

The gateway city for this trip was Barcelona. The return trip to Barcelona included a stop atMontserrat, with its historic Benedictine Abbey. Barcelona is fascinating, and we enjoyed exploring it from our hotel near the Gothic Quarter in the center of the old city. Some of us joined in with locals swing dancing in an open gazebo in a city park.

Anne: This trip, more than any other, characterized for me the flexibility and good humor of a gregarious gaggle of North Stars. Although all of us—and especially Al and I as leaders—were disappointed that our ski trip did not actually feature skiing, we made the best of it. We were lucky to have Julie Holmen, fluent French speaker, among us. She worked closely with our local tour guide to plan wonderful mountain hikes and snowshoe outings on several of the days we were there. And we found other attractions to enjoy. We took the "Yellow Train," a century-old electric narrow-gauge train, through the scenic mountains and countryside to an 11th century walled village featuring a massive fortress above the town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. And we toured the world's first and largest solar furnace (used for high-temperature scientific research) near the town. I especially enjoyed our time in Barcelona exploring the lively city center, the museums, and the Sagrada Familia and other

amazing architectural wonders created by Antoni Gaudí.

Al: It was great fun to travel with our NSSTC members and experience the wide variety of ski venues and the European culture that these trips provided. Special thanks to Anne, whose communication skills were essential for coordinating our trips.

Anne: I was especially grateful for the great groups with whom we traveled, and their flexibility and good attitudes. Complaints were rare. Most of all, I appreciated the resourcefulness, ingenuity, and patience of Al, an amazing North Star leader.



*Al Volkers and Anne McKinsey with hotel owner Peter Seiler in Kandersteg, Switzerland.
Photo by Patrick Gearhart*



*In the Pyrenees Mountains in France, 2011.
Left to right: Sue Noskey, De Andersen,
Rob Andersen, Melvin Croatt, Ed Waldera.
Photo by Al Volkers*

Our Strength and Our Hope by Colleen Cavell (with Barb Watts)

"Our strength comes from the traditions we learn from our elders. Our hope comes from our young, who possess the power of a million new ideas."

~Elders of the Ojibwe Nation

The club's first Kathio Trip was in 1988. It has always been about families. Bill and Linda Weber, Ron and Gail Brand, John Christensen and Cindy Porter, and I have continued this 29-year North Star tradition. Parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren and many, many singles have come together to enjoy a cozy weekend at Camp Onomia over the years. Harald and Janet Jensen, and Jerry Norris, are now considered "the elders." They brought their own children when they were youngsters, and now they bring their grandchildren, who wouldn't miss it, no matter the snow conditions.

A North Star ski trip isn't just about the skiing; it's about relationships and fond memories shared.

The Kathio trip of 2016 was particularly special because of the diverse backgrounds of the participants—age-wise and culturally. We had 17 children and 23 adults. Singles and families enjoyed each other immensely. I've received several notes of thanks over the few years I've led this delightful trip, but I especially appreciate this note from Barb Watts:

The weather did not cooperate this year. On Thursday and Friday morning, an untimely weather pattern rolled through, with a downpour of rain that melted the snow on the ski trails at Kathio State Park. But weather conditions did not dampen the warmth of seeing friends, their children, and grandchildren. I do not have grandchildren, so being surrounded by the lively, high spirits of these children was a special treat. The Friday night welcome and introduction were wonderful. Discovering the many years some people have been coming, and hearing the children name their parents and grandparents, was heart-warming.

This is the second year that Bruce and I have had the pleasure to be part of this trip. Camp Onomia is a comfortable place for a weekend stay, with good food prepared and served by a cheerful staff. We enjoyed visiting the Mille Lacs Indian Museum. Our guide helped me see and understand his band's culture from the mid-1700s and how it relates to their life today. He reminded us that even though the tribe does not live in the same way, they still follow the seasons: wild rice harvesting, hunting, fishing, and keeping their language and culture alive. This is a valuable museum, and I have recommended it to many friends and family.

I woke early on Saturday morning and found a comfortable seat in the gathering hall. Harald Jensen and I were the only ones reading. The sun had not yet risen. Just like birds waking in the forest, the children started arriving using quiet voices at first. But soon they could not contain their enthusiasm, and with happy, delightful voices they started playing games and playing the piano.

In the afternoon, Ellen Watson's granddaughter Andrea did a wonderful job with face painting. Fun was had by all—kids and adults! She transformed girls, boys (and even Jim Ruhl) into flowers, butterflies, and green-faced monsters, with beards and handle-bar moustaches.

Roxane Hanley mentioned that this was one way that her grandsons would sit still.

The candlelight hike through the park could not have been better. A full moon, luminaries, mild weather, and a wonderful surprise—a screech owl calling—made for a perfect evening at the park. Oh, and I almost forgot to mention the astronomer pointing out the glorious heavens above. After the hike, we enjoyed hot cider, cookies, and "Hans Blix and the Weapons Inspectors" band at the Interpretive Center. We thought they were as good as some of the bands we've heard at the Cedar Cultural Center. On the way home, Bruce and I talked about our wonderful weekend.



Getting ready for a GPS adventure at Kathio State Park. Deb Haines-Brandenburg, Erin Cavell, Zora Cavell, Aysa Cavell, and Gabby Haines. Photo by Colleen Cavell



Relaxing in the gathering hall at Camp Onomia, 2016. Paula Faraci, Theresa Jensen, Erik Jensen, Bruce Nelson, Natalie Jensen, and Barb Watts. Photo by Colleen Cavell

Memories of the Annual Mid-week Ski Trip to Carlton

by Margie Schally

In the 50-year history of the North Star Ski Touring Club, the mid-week ski trip to Carlton, Minnesota is a relative newcomer. Little did we know when, in the fall of 2008 Audry Nordwall, Ella Mogilevsky and I put our heads together to plan a “low-key” mid-week ski/snowshoe trip, just what a hit it would be.

Our goal was a trip that would be fairly nearby (not hours away), easy to plan, and easy for everyone involved to participate in. We hit on Carlton because most of us can be there in less than two hours, there is plenty of skiing nearby, and there is an AmericInn just off Highway 35 in Carlton.

The AmericInn proved to be the perfect choice. Mary, the manager, always welcomes us with open arms and said she especially likes to have us there because we “have so much fun.”

We've skied and snowshoed at Jay Cooke State Park, Pine Valley in Cloquet, Spirit Mountain, and Banning State Park (on the way up). One year, a few hardy skiers ventured to Fond du Lac State Forest for a day that extended almost into early evening. When it started to get dark, we began to get worried. It seems conditions at Fond du Lac were less than ideal and presented quite a challenge. When the group finally arrived back at the motel, they were very cold and very tired, but otherwise okay— except for Jean Moede, whose boot had frozen into her ski binding so she had to hobble into the motel in stocking feet.

But, of all these adventures, our annual Thursday morning ski/snowshoe at Eileen Shantz-Hansen's former tree farm, just south of Carlton, is the trip favorite. Eileen is a long-time North Star who takes great pride in grooming her own trails, now with the help of her John Deere Gator (see photo), which she acquired in 2014. We are always accompanied by Amiga, Eileen's happy, snow-frolicking chocolate lab/springer, and then treated to a lunch of homemade soup in Eileen's warm and welcoming home before heading home.

On our 2013 trip, we were especially grateful for cell phones. Ella, who always leads a group of snowshoers at Eileen's, got lost. She called all the cell phone numbers she had until one of us picked up. Eileen had no trouble finding her and her group, but there were a few tense moments. The next year Eileen provided maps.

Most of the trip participants are repeaters; it's too much fun to miss. And we almost always have a few newcomers. The first couple of years, we had a not very satisfactory dinner out the first night, then ordered pizza the second night. Then we decided, since North Stars are such good cooks, we would bring our own soups, chilis, salads, and desserts for the first night, with leftovers and

pizza the second night. Mary is very generous with the AmericInn facilities, letting us literally take over the inn's breakfast area for our group happy hours and meals.

We've definitely had our share of sub-zero skiing, with cars reluctant to start, as well as one or two years when snow cover was questionable, if not downright non-existent. But with or without good snow, and whatever the temperature, this trip has become a favorite for many of us.

Here are a few memories from trip participants:

“I liked how the group kept their high spirits despite marginal conditions; everyone went out and did something. There was no sitting around all day reading and playing games. Great group of people!” ~ Janet Jensen

“Eileen's dog's joy at being outside with so many people to greet; happy hour in the breakfast room; chit chat in the huge hot tub; pesto pizza, and all the wonderful chili and salads. Not only do we like to be outdoors, we like to cook!” ~ Diane Bublitz

“We made the best of the snow shortage. We skied, hiked, snowshoed, hot tubbed, chatted, ate yummy homemade potluck food, and caught up on club members' lives, hopes, fears, plans and joys. We are a community.” ~ Frank Janezich.

“Eileen's place is great! I am not afraid to be lost there anymore because we have the maps now. I enjoyed snowshoeing with the group of wonderful people.” ~ Larissa Krioukova.



Eileen Shantz-Hansen and her John Deere Gator.
Carlton ski trip 2014.
Photo by Margie Schally

Honoring our Club Presidents

by Pat Lawrence, club historian

Since the North Star Ski Touring club was founded in 1967, we have had 33 presidents. In the earlier years of our club history, most served only one year. Since the 1980s, their commitment has increased to two years in order to maintain more leadership continuity. Preceding their term as president, they often serve as vice president in order to have a smooth transition in club leadership. Following their presidency, they serve on the board for one more year as an advisor.

For many this represents a commitment of five years, helping to lead our club with such duties as setting club goals, working with committee heads to achieve those goals, presiding at all the club board and general meetings, and representing the North Stars in any public or political issue capacity. They are also the “go to” persons for any club issues or problems, big or small.

Our club would not be what it is today without the hard work and commitment of these people. Many are as active today as they have always been and are still serving the club in many ways. When you see them out on the trail or at a general meeting, give them a pat on the back—they deserve it. Here are their names:

Lon Weidenhaft	1967-1969
Bob Larson	1969-1970
Glen Bennington	1970-1971
Tim Knopp	1971-1972

John Hollister	1972-1973
Jinny McWethy	1973-1974
Lucas VonHilst	1974-1975
Wayne Lindskoog	1975-1977
Jean Dick	1977-1979
Leslie Hollister	1979-1980
Lee Mayer	1980-1981
Don Nelson	1981-1982
Bob Tokar	1982-1983
Connie Donnelly	1983-1984
John Holmquist	1984-1986
Pete Hawkins	1986-1987
Dick Neumeg	1987-1988
Ted Cardozo	1988-1989
Ron Brand	1989-1991
Connie Donnelly	1991-1992
Mel Peterson	1992-1994
Dale Hedke	1994-1996
Fran Howley	1996-1998
Kathy Kelly	1998-2000
Greg Fangel	2000-2002
Bruce Jacobson	2002-2004
Marcy Otypka	2004-2006
John Driscoll	2006-2008
David Miller	2008-2010
David Siskind	2010-2012
Inez Wick	2012-2014
Lee Wenzel	2014-2016
Bruce Nelson	2016-2017

A Few Last North Star Notes



North Stars clearing the Banadad Trail in 2008.
Photo by Tom Rice

Ted Young, trail administrator for Boundary Country Trekking, stated in a 2005 *Loyope* article, “Ski trails do not just suddenly appear in the north woods, tracked and ready for you to step into your skis and head out. Many hours of labor are required before the first tracks can even be set. In

the case of the Banadad Trail north of Grand Marais, this is even truer! 26 kilometers of the Banadad lie within the BWCAW wilderness. Within the BWCAW, all maintenance must be done with hand tools. And this takes time—lots of it! Without these volunteers, I’m not sure how we would ever be able to maintain this beautiful wilderness ski trail.” (See article on page 13.)

Birke Founders and Birch Leggings

Many North Stars have skied the American Birkebeiner in Cable, Wisconsin, since its inception in 1973. Three North Stars were named “Birke Founders” (John Holmquist, Jacque Lindskoog, and Wayne Lindskoog), having skied all of the first ten Birkebeiners.

In 2000, 10 North Star members received plaques denoting their charter membership in the Birch Leggings Society. This means that they have completed twenty American Birkebeiners. John Holmquist, Wayne Lindskoog, Jacque Lindskoog, Marty Johnson, Solveig Olson, Ann Berry, Roy Carlstad, Gregg Kelley, Jeanine Evenson, and Nona Gertz were the recipients. North Stars Charlie Evenson, Frank Dennis, Bob Woodruff, John Leighton, and David Miller have since become members.



North Star members have volunteered at the City of Lakes Loppet since its inception in 2003. Some creative members have even entered the snow sculpture contest. The sculpture of Rapunzel in her tower won first place in 2011. Gifted North Stars Jon Clark, Stephanie Croteau, Chris Shaffer, and Stellar Mason pose with their winning creation. Photo submitted by Chris Shaffer



Singles hike, November 2008. Photo by Jean Iwen

North Star Singles

Singles trips made their way into the North Star trip schedule in 1974–75. The singles schedule included both summer and winter trips. By 1984, the Singles Division was becoming a separate entity. To reverse the trend, monthly meetings and winter trip schedules were combined. In 1987–88, the decision was made to include singles and main club trips in a joint summer schedule. Sometime around 1990, the singles added “Weekend Editions” to their schedule—spontaneous Friday and Saturday night events. The singles initiated “Singles Night Out” (SNO) in 1996, featuring concerts, plays, social gatherings, and the like. Singles events and trips have been a great way to meet other singles and have resulted in many North Star marriages.

Trails named for the NSSTC or its members

North Star	Upper Gunflint
North Star Run	Solbakken
Mother North Star	Maplelag (Jinny McWethy)
Mother North Star	Pincushion Mountain
Mother Hen	Maplelag (Bryant Dunshee)
Tim Knopp Trail	Banadad
Ernie's Trail	Sunfish Lake (Ernie Engemoen)
Linda's Loop	Sunfish Lake (Linda Johnson)
North Star Trail	North Arm Trail System
Thor's Trail	North Arm Trail System (Thor Nordwall)
Toivo's Tail	North Arm Trail System (Thor and Audry's Cat)
Klaus's Trail	National Forest Lodge (Klaus Foerster)
Kirk's Run	Bally Creek (Kirk Meyer)



Jinny McWethy poses in front of a sign for the trail named for her at Maplelag. Photo submitted by Jim McWethy

Medals for Miles

Years ago, Kodak sponsored a “Medals for Miles” program; our club won every year. Lucy Grams skied one of our area parks every morning to earn miles. Connie Donnelly would climb the fence of the Edina golf course to get her ski miles in. What a determined bunch we North Stars are!



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