



THE PENNSYLVANIA NORDIC SKIER

The Pennsylvania Cross Country Skiers Association

February 2014

It's Been a Great Winter to Race!

Snow can be a "hit-or-miss" proposition in Western Pennsylvania, but the 2013/2014 season has been outstanding. Mother nature has brought us plenty of snow, and for the first time in recent memory, every scheduled local ski race went off without a single cancellation. If you love to go fast on Nordic skis, or simply enjoy fun competitions with friends, this has been the winter for you.



2014 PA Nordic Championships, 5.5k Classic Race Start

A large portion of this issue of The Pennsylvania Nordic Skier is focused on the various racing events that have taken place in our region over the past month. Inside, you'll see coverage of West Virginia's Mountain State Marathon, Ohio Nordic's Championships, Crystal Lake's Ski Chase, the North American Vasa, and PACCSA's own Pennsylvania Nordic Championships. Special emphasis is placed on PACCSA members who trained for these races and gave them their all!

The race season is not over! PACCSA members are currently training for some of the biggest ski marathons in the United States. Look for PACCSA skiers on the results lists for the Lake Placid Loppet, Canada's Gatineau Loppet, and the American Birkebeiner!

Let's Go Racing!



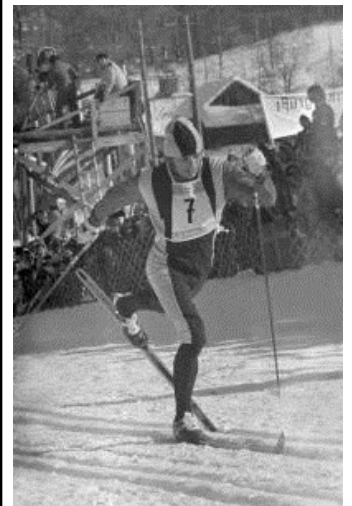
Kid's 3k Skate, PA Nordic Champs



Racers at the 2014 Mountain State Marathon

**To view our Webcams
and find information
about sking in our
region, check out our
website!**

www.paccca.org



U.S. Olympian **Bill Koch** winning the silver medal at the 1976 Olympic games in Innsbruck, Austria. Koch is the only American to medal in an Olympic Cross Country Skiing event.

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Letter from the President

Wow! This winter has gone fast. Most folks dread the winter, but I tell them to come out and ski sometime and you'll begin to enjoy it. There's nothing like a crisp winter day, good snow conditions, and a pair of cross country skis to raise the spirits and release stress. As you know, PACCSA provides free cross country ski lessons for beginners and others. Take advantage of these sessions to kick start your winter enjoyment! PACCSA also provides webcams at local ski areas so you can see what the conditions are. Even when the lower elevations have no snow, the mountain tops can be a winter wonderland.

The Laurel Mountain grooming project is going full throttle thanks to PACCSA's volunteer groomers. Also, volunteers helped in the off season to clear rocks, pull roots, and haul fill to improve the trails and make things easier on our grooming equipment. If you haven't skied at Laurel Mountain for a while, I encourage you to make a visit. You'll be surprised at how enjoyable skiing the groomed trails can be. Looking for ungroomed backcountry trails? Laurel Mountain has miles of those, too! Check out PACCSA's website and Facebook page for the latest skiing conditions.

I would be amiss if I didn't mention PACCSA's Pennsylvania Nordic Championship Races which were hosted this year by Wilderness Lodge in Wattsburg, PA (near Erie). Poor snowfall in the Laurel Highlands has forced us to cancel the races in past years, so we decided to give the northern "lake-effect belt" a try. The event has historically been held on the first weekend in February, and this year we had excellent conditions thanks to Mother Nature and the good folks at Wilderness Lodge. With almost 150 adult and kids racers it was an extremely successful event. A big "Atta-Boy!" goes out to PACCSA's race director, Dave Jenkins, for coordinating it all. Plans are already in the works for next year's race, so if you didn't make it this year, you don't want to miss it again.



See you on the trails,



Bruce Cox, PACCSA President
president@paccsa.org

Fundraising Update

Over the years, your help has allowed PACCSA to grow as an organization. Everyone knows about PACCSA's webcams, our informative website, and the trail work that we perform at publicly owned skiing facilities. Last year, PACCSA purchased state of the art grooming equipment which is being used as part of the Laurel Mountain Grooming Project. Thanks to the hard work of PACCSA volunteers, the public now enjoys free access to expertly groomed and tracked cross country ski trails within DCNR's Forbes State Forest. Of course, there are certain financial realities associated with progress like this. There are maintenance costs for the groomer, expenses for webcam internet access, and from time to time, equipment breaks down. Recently, it became apparent that our aging webcams are nearing the end of their expected lifespans.

As a result, PACCSA is currently trying to raise \$3000 to replace and upgrade our webcams. To achieve this goal, a membership/fundraising drive was started on the PACCSA website two months ago. Seven Springs Mountain Resort helped PACCSA kick off the fundraiser by donating a dinner for two at their Slopeside Dining Room. PACCSA also received generous donations from auto dealer #1 Cochran, and sporting goods retailer REI, both of whom provided prizes for the fundraising effort.

PACCSA's membership has grown by nearly 15% over the past year. As a result of your memberships and generous donations, we're already half-way to our fundraising goal. Additionally, PACCSA recently secured a grant from the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau of Somerset County to help replace and upgrade the webcam equipment at Laurel Mountain. A special thanks goes out to Mike Blessington who has spearheaded PACCSA's fundraising drive.

The fundraising effort continues! Everyone who joins PACCSA or renews their membership before March 26th will be entered into a weekly drawing for a free oil change at any #1 Cochran branch, and a special gift from REI. Winners are announced every week on PACCSA's website. PACCSA appreciates the support we've received from our members and sponsors!



**THANKS TO THE
SPONSORS
OF PACCSA's
FUND DRIVE!**



2014 Pennsylvania Nordic Championships

The 2014 Pennsylvania Nordic Championship races were a Huge Success! For the first time since the event's inception, the races were held outside of the Laurel Highlands region. Over the past decade, the lack of suitable snow has forced multiple cancellations of PACCSA's premier event. Because of this, when Wilderness Lodge invited PACCSA to hold the Championship races at their Wattsburg, PA venue (in the heart of Northeast PA's lake-effect snowbelt), we decided to give it a try.

The folks at Wilderness Lodge did a great job of laying out a series of fun and challenging courses. As anticipated, the snow was plentiful and the trails were expertly groomed. At race time, participants enjoyed mild temperatures and a light snowfall. Though rain was in the forecast, it thankfully held off until after the races were completed.

Altogether, nearly 150 skiers participated in the event. This was a new record for the PA Nordic Championships and PACCSA thanks everyone who came out to enjoy the excellent racing conditions. In addition to Pennsylvania, racers traveled from New York, Ohio, Maryland and Virginia to participate in the races.

The day started off with the 5.5k classic race. In the women's race, the delightful Angela Lager ("like the beer") of Cleveland Heights, OH set the pace in 24:59. Second place was claimed by Denise Braeger (26:53), with Naomi Nelson close behind in third (27:00). In the men's race, Jim Samuels of Fairview, PA brought out a monstrous double pole, winning with a blistering time of 14:22. Jim was followed by runners-up Jared Craig (15:50) and Bill Mathie (16:40).

Next came the kids' races. In many ways, this was the highlight of the day with nearly 40 children participating. Watching the next generation of Nordic skiers compete was great fun. Top finishers included Delsin El-Farouki & Ruby Kasmer (1k classic), Isaac Hammer & Ellie Cardman (2k classic), Andrew Brown & Nora Teed (2k skate), and Will Schneider & Gwendolyn Wright (3k skate). Special thanks goes out to all of the coaches and families involved in PACCSA's Yellowjackets program, the Wilderness Lodge Wildcats, and Ohio Nordic's Hilltoppers.

The 8.5k freestyle race was hotly contested. The women's race was won Debbie Mizikowski from Erie, PA who rocketed through the course in 28:56, a time that missed the men's podium by just one second. Finishing second and third were the daughter/mother team of Haile (age 14) and Jenny Martin who finished together with a time of 31:32. In the men's race, a trio of speedy youngsters ruled the day. 15 year old Tony Mathie of Edinboro, PA took the top spot in 26:59. Tony was followed closely by 14 year old Michael Maring (27:29) and 12 year old Colton Martin (28:55). Oh, to be young again!

The main event was the 17k freestyle "PA Nordic Champion" race. Speed demon Nancy Herbst of Erie, PA was crowned the women's Pennsylvania Nordic Champion with a blazing time of 57:52. Second place was claimed by Kristin Lazzara (1:00:49), and third went to Alicia Cruz-Urbe (1:01:54). Jim Samuels, who has owned this race for the past decade, once again claimed the men's Pennsylvania Nordic Champion title. Jim exhibited seamless form and an evil V2, scorching through the demanding course in 46:44. Sheldon Degenhardt came in second with an impressive time of 50:30, with Gregory Harkay bringing home third in 52:19.

(STORY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)



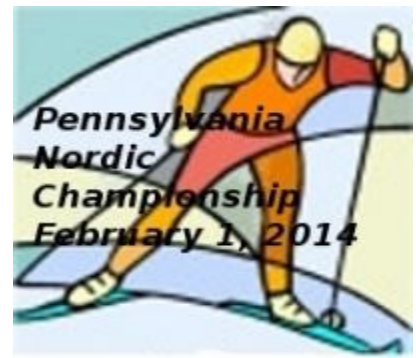
Jim Samuels in the 5.5k Classic



Kid's 3k Skate Boy's Champion Will Schneider

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

It was a great day of racing and fun was had by all who participated. PACCSA would like to extend special thanks to the Presque Isle Cycling Club (for loaning us their registration tent), Whole Foods of Pittsburgh (who donated the post-race oranges and bananas), Big White Trailer Timing & Scoring, and Nittany Nordic. We also thank Wilderness Lodge and the Janes family for inviting PACCSA to their venue, setting all of the courses, providing top-notch grooming, and being wonderful hosts. Congratulations to Race Director Dave Jenkins and all of the fearless PACCSA volunteers who helped make this a successful event!



Join PACCSA Next Year for the 2015 Races!



Kid's 3k Skate Girl's Champ Gwendolyn Wright



5.5k Runner-up Jared Cregg



Kid's 3k Skate Mass Start, PA Nordic Championships

Ohio Nordic Championships

By Naomi Jarvis

The Ohio Nordic Championships were held on Jan 26, 2014 at Lake Metroparks' Girdled Road Reservation in Concord, OH. The Ohio Nordic Hilltoppers put together a nice set of short races over a 2.5 km loop that travels around a pond and a meadow, through the woods, and over one gentle hill. The event was aimed at young and new racers, with options to do one or two laps of classic, skate, or both. For skiers doing both techniques, the times for their skate and classic races were combined to give a 'pursuit' time. All races had a mass-start format.

PACCSA Yellowjacket skier James "The Eagle" Fenn was victorious in the 5k Men's Pursuit race with a combined time of 32:30. Ohio skier Sarah Hannibal took the Women's 5k Pursuit title in 43:45. The Men's 10k Pursuit was won by Michael Schaefer (40:14), and Olivia Cook was best in the Women's 10k Pursuit (59:30). Also of note was PACCSA Yellowjacket coach Naomi Jarvis who finished second in the women's 10k Pursuit, posting a combined time of 1:10:31. Below is an account of Naomi's race:



Yellowjacket James Fenn (Donna Clark photo)

The previous evening we drove home in whiteout conditions after a day of skiing at Laurel Ridge. We got home late and frazzled with no time left for waxing. When we arrived at Girdled Road, the temperature was very cold (low teens) with a lively wind-chill. The facilities are a little Spartan, but their trail brochure has a cover photo of my son James!

A snowstorm whipped up during the classic races, which came first. I warmed up nicely, doing a rapid shuffle. My skis weren't gliding very much and I found myself wondering what wax they had and how long it had been since they were last waxed. My son James fared much better. He was flying along, chasing and passing his friends, most of whom were from Ohio Nordic's Hilltoppers program.

By the time the skate race started there was 3-4 inches of fresh snow. The mass start was a frenzy of double-poling until almost the whole field pulled ahead and I was on my own, abandoned even by my feet (which were frozen from the cold temperatures). They seemed to follow instructions, but sent no feedback. The new snow was boggy and skating was really hard work. I passed James after someone else trod on his pole, causing him to trip. He got up and fell in behind me, but his grumbling from behind was too much, so I let him pass. James then disappeared into the distance, gliding away on much faster skis. By the time I finished, my half-eaten banana had frozen solid in the cold!

The nice surprise came when I saw the results. James had won the short pursuit, and I came in second in the women's long pursuit. If Ohio Nordic puts on similar races next year, I would recommend them. Girdled Road is a nice place to ski, and the short "pick-your-style-and-distance" format was fun. Also, we always like to see our Hilltopper friends.

Crystal Lake Ski Chase

By Greg Harkay

On Sunday, February 9th, the annual Ski Chase was held at the Crystal Lake Ski Center in Hughesville, PA. The event featured two race distances of 5 km and 15 km, with participants free to choose either the skate or classic technique. Skiers of both distances began by circumnavigating Crystal Lake twice before entering the woods to enjoy much of the Ski Center's challenging and exciting terrain that was blanketed with deep and beautifully groomed snow. Between the lung-busting uphill and the exhilaratingly twisting, undulating downhill, the courses left no room for boredom!

Skiers finished with two more laps around the lake before retreating to the warmth of the main lodge for the awards ceremony and the glowing camaraderie common to gatherings of folks that enjoy sliding around on skinny skis. The prizes that went to top competitors in many age groups were quite diverse, ranging from handmade wreaths to glide wax to several particularly popular boxes of candy. The awardees were equally varied, with competitors drawn to Crystal Lake's phenomenal skiing from as far away as Maryland. Before departing for home or yet more skiing in perfect conditions, everyone involved enthusiastically thanked race director Alex Gstalder for putting on a fantastic event with a competitive but fun and festive atmosphere.



2014 Mountain State Marathon

By Brian Joly

Every skier I know has a “bucket list” of things to do to make their winter complete. Often this includes travel to some remote idyllic environ to ski the days away. Long ago I was introduced to Whitegrass, a snow catching geographical anomaly that is 3200 feet at its base and 4300 feet at the top. While Whitegrass is a great place to ski, it also hosts the Mountain State Marathon, a unique cross country ski race that is always on my calendar. Skiers can opt for one of three races: a 10k freestyle, a 25k classic, and a 25k skate. There’s also a kids race for the little ones.

This year, the snow was iffy in early January and it looked like the January 26th race might be postponed. But like all things West Virginian, hope springs eternal. Owner Chip Chase and his Crew prayed and partied to the great gods of snow, and before you knew it, a storm blew in. As a former Mountain State Marathon champion, I made my way south hoping for a repeat performance.



Conditions were sketchy due to lots of freshly fallen snow which made the infamous “Snow Farm” deep and slow. The 25k route has evolved over the years, but still features four 6k laps encompassing some insanely challenging terrain. You start out by going around the “Snow Farm” before starting the excruciatingly long and steep “Springer Forest” climb to the mountain top. You then go down the death-defying “Springer Orchard” descent, a former downhill slope. To make things fun, the bottom of this long downhill featured a lumpy right hand sweep which turned out to be a great place to wreck (after the first pass, many skiers opted to use the deep off-trail powder to slow their descent). From there you followed Gandalf’s Glade back to the lodge before starting another lap of fun. A friend once told me that this race has more vertical climb than the 25k Olympic loop used at the notoriously difficult Lake Placid Loppet. I believe it.

All three races started together in mass and five of us double-poled for the first hundred yards. After that, I was quickly dropped and watched as the better skiers danced through the deeply drifted course. In the Men’s 25k skate race, Ohioan Vince O’Connell took victory in 1:27, with Virginian Andrey Revyakin taking 2nd in 1:28 (check out Andrey’s awesome write-up at www.oxygenfedsports.com). Pennsylvanians Greg Harkay (1:35), Don Nichter (1:53) and myself (1:56) took 3rd through 5th. The Women’s 25k Skate race was won by Nittany Nordic speedster Alicia Cruz-Urbe in 2:03. Both the Men’s and Women’s 25k Classic races were won by PACCSA racers Sean Kelly (1:51) and Michelle Kelly (2:35), a husband-wife duo from Sewickley. I can’t wait to do it again next year!

PACCSA Skiers Find Success at The VASA

The 2014 North American Vasa races were held on February 8th, 2014 in Traverse City, Michigan. It was an incredibly cold minus-7 degrees at the 8 AM start, warming to a balmy 12 degrees by the end of the races. The course was prepared wonderfully, and the snow was plentiful (they’ve had 170+ inches fall this year). However, the cold snow made for a course that was slower than sandpaper. Waxing difficult, but at least the classic skiers had excellent kick!

A large contingent of PACCSA skiers participated in the races this year. Denny McDonough of Latrobe won his age division and earned a top-10 overall finish in the 50k Classic (4:03:44). Hop Kruper of Jones Mills had a 2nd place age group finish in the 50k Skate (3:07:53). In the 27k Classic, Sean Kelley of Sewickley won his age division with a 7th place finish (1:55:20), and Scott Rugh of Johnstown fought for a top-5 age group finish (2:19:14). For the women, Michelle Kelley of Sewickley won her age group (3:00:43), Zuzana Matouskova of Baden had a top-5 age division finish (3:00:59), and Diane Rugh of Johnstown took second place in her age group (3:17:29). In the 27k Skate, Jason Zimmerman of Latrobe finished 7th overall and 1st in his age division (1:30:42). Debbie Mizikowski of Fairview finished 9th and won her age division (1:57:56) and Ann Morris of Erie finished top-5 in her age class (2:23:06). Also, Yellowjackets alumna Alexis Merka of Clarksville, MD finished 6th in the 12k Classic (1:28:15). Congratulations to all of these PACCSA skiers!

Snakeguy’s Pepper Donating to PACCSA

Snakeguy’s Pepper, a locally owned business, has named PACCSA as its focus charity for the month of February. Snakeguy’s specializes in all-natural gourmet pepper blends. Every month, Snakeguy’s selects a different non-profit charity to which they donate a portion of their proceeds. PACCSA thanks Snakeguy’s for supporting Pennsylvania’s Nordic skiing community!

Snakeguy’s Pepper blends come in three different levels of heat: *Venom*, *Habenero*, and the incredibly spicy *Ghost*. To place an order or find out more information about their products, visit the Snakeguy’s “Facebook” page: www.facebook.com/snakeguyspepper



Membership Has Its Rewards!

Thank you again for your continued support of PACCSA. Your generous donations have given PACCSA the tools necessary to enhance the cross-country skiing experience throughout our region. As a PACCSA member, make sure you are taking advantage of the benefits available to you. Members receive nice discounts on daily trail fees at top touring centers in the region, including **Whitegrass** (\$5) and **Wilderness Lodge** (20%). Members also receive a 10% discount at **Cycle Sport & Ski**, located at 863 Georges Station Road in Greensburg (behind Valozzi's Restaurant on Route 30). Make sure you show them your card!



The intangible benefits of membership are perhaps the greatest reward. As a PACCSA member, you are an integral part of the local ski community. Your membership dues, donations and volunteerism provide an opportunity to give back to your sport and community. Visit paccsa.org for the latest news and opportunities to participate in trail work, outreach, and other PACCSA activities. PACCSA is a charitable non-profit corporation organized under Chapter 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All donations are tax deductible.

Featured Ski Area: Whitegrass!

Whitegrass is a unique Nordic skiing venue located about 3 hours south of Pittsburgh in West Virginia's Canaan Valley. This region of West Virginia is high in the Alleghenies and gets considerably more annual snowfall than the Laurel Highlands. The property was originally built in the 50's as a downhill center with wide-open slopes and rope-tow lifts. Today, it is a dedicated Nordic facility focused on all types of "free heel" skiing. The rope-tows are gone, but the open slopes remain, making Whitegrass popular with backcountry and Telemark skiers.

There is literally something for everyone at Whitegrass. If you like groomed trails, they have 25k of them for classic and skate skiing. There's also more than 30k of well-maintained backcountry trails. If you like adventure, the trails connect to the Dolly Sods Wilderness, a Federal Wildlife Reserve with hundreds of miles of trails to explore. And as noted above, the varying terrain is perfect for Telemarking. Whitegrass also hosts the annual Mountain State Marathon, a grueling 25k ski race (skate or classic) featuring huge vertical climbs and screaming downhill (see Brian Joly's write-up on Page 6).

Don't be scared off by the steep slopes, because there are trails for every level of ability at Whitegrass. Just outside the lodge you'll find the "Snow Farm" and a network of gently rolling trails suitable for novices. There are also plenty of moderate and "black diamond" trails for more experienced skiers. One particularly popular trail is "3 Mile" which climbs gently to spectacular views at the Roundtop and Bald Knob summits. Whitegrass also has some downright interesting trail names, including "Gandalf's Glade," "Boutros Boutros Gully," and "Yassar Air is Phat" (to name a few).

Probably the best part about Whitegrass is the atmosphere. Proprietor Chip Chase and his team are dedicated to making sure visitors have a great time. There is an excellent café on site with some of the best food in West Virginia. Whitegrass has a full complement of rental skis and offers lessons for classic, skate and Telemark skiing. PACCSA members receive a \$5 discount on the regular trail fee. For more information, check out their website at www.whitegrass.com.





**Pennsylvania Cross Country Skiers
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