



# THE PENNSYLVANIA NORDIC SKIER

The Pennsylvania Cross Country Skiers' Association

April, 2013

## Double Biathlon

By James Fenn

We left for Michigan on Friday afternoon, and got there a bit past the average 13 – year old's bedtime (but not mine). We stayed at a Super 8 hotel in some remote place with only a road, a gas station, snow, and trees in sight.

The first biathlon was at Hanson Hills. The trails were immaculately groomed. We had about half an hour to practice shooting the paintball guns at the targets, in which we learnt that three out of five of the guns just shot randomly; the aiming mechanism was no use at all. Out of the other two, one of them shot consistently lower, and the other one was perfect. Also, the guns were very big and heavy. It was hard to find a place to put the gas bottle without throwing your aim off completely (and accidentally hitting one of the volunteers...). We had five targets to shoot at on a wooden board, and they moved the guns from place to place, so it was a complete lottery as to which gun you got.

In the race, we shot at the targets, skied a 1/2km lap, shot at the targets again, skied another lap, shot at the targets one last time, and then finished. I came second in my age group, but that was probably because there was only one other person in my age group. Also, the course was totally flat, so it took a lot of time getting used to pacing myself. The adults skied 5 x 1k loops.

After the race, we skied around the other trails there for a bit. There was a huge hill right outside the warming hut, and I went up and down it loads of times. At the bottom of the hill, there was just snow-covered ice, so the only place I could snowplow was a short bit of trail just before a rope and a small hill with a tree on top. The fourth time I went up, I came down too fast, tried to snowplow and failed, ducked under the rope, went up the hill and came to a stop about one inch from crashing into the tree.

After that, we went back to the hotel in the middle of nowhere and my mom did stuff on her laptop while I relaxed in the hotel's extra-large hot tub.

The next race was at the cross country ski headquarters. The course was kind of M shaped, surrounding a little hill, so we could see most of the course from there. Again, we had the same race setup, only this time, the guns kept running out of air and making machine gun noises. It was a lot easier to race this time, though, because instead of going way far out, like the first race, it stayed all bunched up around the ski hut, so you couldn't get that all-alone-in-the-woods feeling.

Overall, this event was great and I am glad we went. If anyone would like to organize one closer to home, that would be super! All you would need is five target boards, paintball guns, a few straw bales (to put the paintball guns on), some squeegees to wipe the paint off the boards, and some brave volunteers.

**James Fenn heading into the sunset in search of his next biathlon. James is a member of the Yellowjackets and son of PACCSA Board member Naomi Jarvis.**



Did you know PACCSA has 340 "likes" on Facebook? Are you one of them? You can use our Facebook page to communicate with skiers from all over PA, the US and the world! You can follow us on Twitter as well @PACCSA. Keep an eye on our website to find out what exactly hashtags are and why you can't eat them.

## Poster Contest

Send us your artwork or a photo with a caption to promote our favorite sport - cross country skiing. The winning entry will be chosen by the PACCSA Board and used as a promotional poster for cross country skiing and PACCSA.. Artwork/photo and caption must be your own.

By entering you consent to it being used for PACCSA publicity purposes (with PACCSA name and/or logo added). **Closing date: 7 May 2013** Prize: PACCSA Ski your S off shirt. Winner to be announced in next newsletter and on the website. Send entries to [board@paccsa.org](mailto:board@paccsa.org). For inspiration, look what the Canadians have come up with

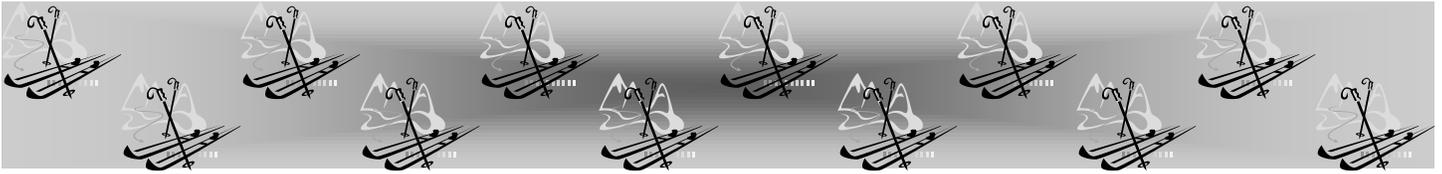


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## THANK YOU!

A big snowy thank you to our website snow conditions team - Charlie the Weatherman and all the Venue Snow Reporters who diligently write in from the different ski areas throughout the season to let the rest of us know when and where we should go to ski. We really do appreciate it. NOTE: The snow reports page was viewed a total of 24,651 times since November 1!



## A Letter from the President

What a great ski season! How many times did you get out this year? I've heard numbers in the 40's and I think I'm somewhere around that number myself. Most of us are weekend warriors and it seemed like it snowed every Friday just in time for the weekend. I keep thinking that conditions haven't been that great this year but in fact they have been. The local ski areas have done a good job working with the snow to make the skiing as good as it's been in several years. It was disappointing to have to cancel our PA Championship race again this year but we have learned from this and have a backup plan for next season. We are talking about having two races next year, which would improve our chances of actually having snow on race day. We may have to move the race to Canada to insure we have enough snow. Just kidding, but we are discussing other areas for our races. Stay tuned to our website, Face-Book page, and newsletter for updates. Those of you who have been involved in past years know how much effort and preparation it takes to hold a race. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved, especially Dave Jenkins, our race director. It was a difficult decision to cancel the race and I know he agonized over it. Based on the conditions at the time Dave had no other choice. Dave will need our support as we move forward and expand our race scene in PA. Let him know that you have his back and are ready to help support in whatever way is needed.



Thanks everyone.  
See you on the trails.

Bruce  
Bruce Cox, PACCSA President  
president@paccca.org

## Yellowjackets End Of Season Wrap-Up

By Naomi Jarvis

2013 was a record season for Yellowjackets - we had five on-snow sessions and only one dryland session - a huge improvement over last year when we only had two on-snow sessions. The snow was sometimes thick and sometimes thin, but certainly good enough to play games and to give the kids the regular practice that they need, and they made good progress. The most popular activities are noodle tag, drinking hot chocolate and building up the snow fort. The pictures below were submitted as evidence in support of the previous statement.



# A Guide to a Season of Races From PA to Canada

By Jim Anglin

The Gatineau Loppet is typically held in the middle of February and is one of the biggest X-C ski events in Canada, attracting not only locals but some excellent skiers from across the country and from other countries. It takes place in a large park in Gatineau, Quebec, just across the Ottawa River from Canada's capital city. The park has a massive array of trails and roads, only a fraction of which are used in the race. The main events are the classic on Saturday and the freestyle on Sunday, both offering distances of about 27 and about 50 km. The freestyle typically has a total of about 600 entrants departing in 5 waves 2 minutes apart. While I've only done the shorter race, I think its terrain is representative and consists of a good bit of fast-moving skiing on gentle to moderate inclines on the roads and a variable amount of trails depending on conditions but typically including several long, steep uphill. The downhill on the trails should be manageable by a good intermediate skier, but can be icy in places. Some long downhill on the road have the option of skiing in classic tracks. The highest point in the course is about 500 ft above the start and there might be slightly more climbing than at the VASA. The weather is typically colder than in PA and was in the -10 to -15F range on my first (and nearly last) time; however, that was the only time it's been below zero for me. You should have waxes suitable for colder conditions, but you can have ski preparation done there if desired. It has not been postponed or cancelled in the ten times I've gone. A knowledge of French, while helpful, isn't necessary at the race site, but don't forget your passport! . Ottawa has many year-round and winter attractions for racers and non-racers alike, including this year an outdoor craft beer festival in the downtown area. It also has a number of shops with a much wider selection of X-C ski equipment than is available locally and so is a good place to purchase equipment. Race activities are centered at a high school, enabling skiers to stay inside until slightly before the start and to browse exhibits from local shops. A few other PACCSA members have participated in recent years, but I think many others would find it interesting. It's only about 3 hours more than Hardwood Hills! Survivors receive a small pin upon finishing. Feed stations are located roughly every 6-8 km on the course and at the finish.

The Pre-Birkie is held a couple of weeks ahead of the much bigger and more famous Birkebeiner in northwestern Wisconsin. It provides a chance to ski some of the same course with much less hoopla. This year's event, the weekend after the scheduled date for the PACCSA race, was 26 km, and covered the second half of the Birkie course, but in the opposite direction, starting in Hayward (with its giant musky) and heading north. Classic skiers started ahead of freestyle and skiers positioned themselves for each mass start based on signs with expected finish times. After the first km or two on a frozen lake, the course was a relatively continuous roller coaster of hills of mostly moderate gradient on a wide and well groomed trail that accommodated the ~800 skiers pretty well. It's not highly technical, but the many climbs added up, giving an appreciation of the importance of good style and the stamina needed to do the full Birkie. For those without a shuttle, buses can bring finishers, with the sweatshirts handed out at the finish, back near the start. There are some good videos online of skiers on the course. While about 900 miles from Pittsburgh, Northern Wisconsin has a number of good X-C ski areas and a visit to some of them is definitely worthwhile if you have some additional time.

The Highmark Quad is one of four events in four disciplines that are held north of Pittsburgh at different times during the year, but it isn't necessary to sign up for all four to do the ski race. It's held on a golf course adjacent to Wilderness Lodge and the Peek'n Peak downhill area in northwest New York. It's a more casual race of about 5 miles with a mass start and sprint (for some) to the first hill, helping to spread out the group, which was about 160 skiers this year. While the area gets a good bit of snow, the open terrain of the golf course appears to subject the course to wind and sun, leading to many postponements in recent years. In some places this year, drifting snow narrowed the trail, making it more difficult to pass slower skiers. It was held in the middle of the day, making a one-day trip for the race easy to do, but of course Wilderness Lodge's trails are also nearby. For those looking for another race beyond the PACCSA race and Cleveland's Nordic Flurry, this is a convenient alternative that isn't a big step up in commitment or skill needed. You may well bump into others you've seen at the Ridge! Be sure to watch the web site in case of postponement.

Happy racing!

**Jim Anglin (center) after finishing this year's Pre-Berkie. Jim is a long time PACCSA member and racer. Jim is a semi-retired chemist and lives in Export, PA.**



# How a Dream Becomes A Grant...or Two

By Mike Blessington

While enjoying the out of doors with Bob Mazur, Trail Coordinator for PACCSA, and Ed Callahan, District Forester, Forbes State Forest, the subject of buying a snowmobile for grooming the trails at Laurel Mountain State Park came up. Since the state did not have funds available the challenge to find them was accepted...Thus the journey began.

Attempting to “cash in” on what is usually considered a close connection to a major corporation, a request was made for funding the snowmobile, including a little photo shopping so their name would appear on sled. The rapid response from them as well as just about every company connected to snow sports was exactly the same, nothing.

Cheered on by the sound of silence, the issue was pursued and a request was made to the PACCSA Board of Directors to obtain a tax exempt status, which would permit corporations and foundations to assist us. Jim South, Legal Advisor for PACCSA, took on this challenge and soon obtained our cherished designation as a 501 ( c ) 3 charitable organization. This complex yet single step opened the door for us to get the needed funding. Working very closely with Bob Mazur and Bruce Cox, President of PACCSA, and Ed Callahan, a plan was developed to not only request a grant for the snowmobile, but also purchase a groomer with track setter and put up a storage building at Laurel Mountain. An additional and very important part of this endeavor included PACCSA being designated to groom selected trails at Laurel Mountain.

Many hours went into research. Locally, The Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania, a close knit organization of most of the foundations in our area, looked to be the best place to obtain the funds we needed. They offer a training course and guidance through the Carnegie Library in Oakland. Once the course was completed the real work began. Initially a letter of inquiry is sent to the selected foundation to determine if they are interested in funding. The choice was made to solicit the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation as well as the Richard King Mellon Foundation. Both foundations expressed interest and requested a formal application be submitted.

The formal application process tells potential donors who we are, what we have done and where we are going. Being able to show PACCSA as an all volunteer, 30 year old club, with a diverse Board of Directors and plenty of members actively dedicated to promoting the sport of cross country skiing was a relatively easy task. The amount of year round work frequently done by club members on state parks was another very important part of the application process.

Both foundations worked with each other toward helping us with our goal, and both made an exception to their scheduled dispersal of grants since our needs were immediate. The first grant was received mid December from the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation. Brian Hill, Project Coordinator for the Richard King Mellon Foundation needed to see the trails being groomed. On Dec. 27, 2012 a meeting was held at the warming hut at Laurel Mountain and Bruce and Bob went skiing with Brian, a very enjoyable day for all. The formal application was reviewed, signed and submitted to Brian. Additional detailed information was requested and submitted promptly. Final approval was made and the Richard King Mellon Foundation completed our grant request. Several conditions were attached to the grants, first the amounts of the grants are not to be made public, and second a complete report of our use of the grant money must be made.

To date a new Arctic Cat Z1 Groomers Special snowmobile has been purchased along with a TiddTech G2 groomer with track setter. A new drive through storage shed will be erected this spring at Laurel Mountain, giving us a home.

These grants reflect how our club is viewed by others outside our sport. Every PACCSA member can smile a little more knowing your work has resulted in an ongoing program to improve cross country skiing. Ski clubs far and wide have watched our progress and asked for assistance on similar endeavors.

While enjoying the trails at Laurel Mountain, keep in mind there will be ongoing expenses required to keep this project active. Your support in the future will ensure PACCSA, the premiere cross country ski club in Western PA, continues to build and grow.



PACCSA snowmobile and groomer purchased with grant money from the Katherine Mabis McKenna Foundation and Richard King Mellon Foundation.

Mike Blessington is PACCSA's Funding Coordinator and a long time active PACCSA member from the Pittsburgh area.

# My Journey to the North Country - Traverse City, Michigan

By Denny McDonough

Ten years ago, I traveled north for my very first North American Vasa ski trip, Traverse City, Michigan, with my wife, Patty. That year I did the 50 km. classic and had a total blast, albeit very exhausted. Patty did the 12 km classic while I was out on the main course. Ever since then I've been hooked on the beautiful, snow covered north woods of the Pierre Marquette State Forest, which is located approximately 6 miles east of the city. And, in those ten years, I've only missed two years of racing.

This year, we traveled, again, to do the classic races, but this time around I did the 27 km. I like watching the other crazies continue with a second loop while I know that I'm done! My better half stuck with the same 12 km. classic. Needless to say, we were excited with the trip because we, also, had the opportunity to ski at two other different venues.... Crystal Mountain and Cross Country Ski Headquarters. We, here, in Pennsylvania should be so lucky to have these types of excellent facilities...groomed everyday, and just having the best possible scenery.

Our journey started on a Wednesday evening, after work. Our first stage took us six hours to Ann Arbor, where we stayed with my sister-in-law and her husband. It's always nice to visit them, and to break up the long trip. We had breakfast there, and then headed off so that we could stop at Cross Country Ski Headquarters

It took about two and a half hours to get to Roscommon (Higgins Lake Region). The drive was rather straight forward, with a due shot north on Rt. 23, which converges with Rt. 75. Once there, we HAD to stop in to check out the newest and latest gear at the Headquarter's shop. I hate that part of the trip, as I feel like a kid let loose in a candy shop. I was good, though, and only purchased what I needed....waxes and other small items. Naturally, we had to ski on their network of finally groomed and scenic trails. It was my third time to ski there, but Patty's first. And, yes, she loved it, as the day was just gorgeous.... the sun was out and the temperature was pleasant. Oh, and they did have a lot of snow, which always helps on a ski trip:)

Off to Traverse City, after Roscommon. That evening we met up with Pete LaPlaca, the Vasa president and his lovely fiance, Linda. They had us over for refreshments, and then it was off to dinner. It was so nice seeing Pete and Linda, and chatting about everything under the sun. For those who don't know it, Pete is originally from Windber, PA and landed in Traverse City many years ago. He loves it there so much, I doubt he'd ever move back to the Johnstown area, although he does visit relatives occasionally. Over the years, we've become great friends. He calls me his Pennsylvtuckian. Go figure!

It was a well deserved night of rest, before getting up and heading to another wonderful place to ski, Crystal Mountain. It's located roughly 25 miles south west of Traverse, situated out in the middle of nowhere. It is, first and foremost, a year round resort, but downhill skiing is its forte. You'd laugh at the size of the hill, but the scenery, more than enough, makes up for the lack of vertical drop. The village, on the other hand, is just absolutely gorgeous, like something out of a picture, totally engulfed in pines. Now, the cross country trails are, by far, the best groomed trails that I've ever skied, and I've skid at many venues, in many different states. This place seems to be a well kept secret when it comes to XC, and I don't know why.

Skiing at Crystal Mountain is beyond description. The trails have a variety of terrain for all abilities, and the grooming, done with a Piston-bulley, is top notch. The funny thing is, every time I ski there, I hardly see anyone out on the trails. We liked having the whole place to ourselves. I can speak for my better half, too, as she fell in love with it at first sight.

Race day, well, was race day. At the start, 8:20 for my race, temperature was much colder than I had anticipated...1\*. Burr, that was cold!! Oh, and I did not have the right glide wax, so it was like skiing on sandpaper. My kick, on the other hand, was awesome; walked up all but the very steepest hills. On a scale of 1-10, my glide was 5.5. Not blaming that on my finish, which was lower than I wanted, but I still won...I had fun!!! With the cold temps, we still managed third in our age groups; Patty in the 12 km, and me in the 27 km. By the time Patty was done (she started at 12:50) the sun had come out in full, and temps warmed up to the high 20's or low 30's.

After I finished, I had the customary, post-race feed and then headed back out on the course, in reverse, to ski with Patty into the finish. Not sure how hard she pushed, as she was talking up a storm to everyone on the trail. Hey, she had fun!!!

I could go on and on, but space does not permit me so. Just know that returning to PA was very depressing.



**"There's nothing better than skiing through a quarter-mile tunnel of pines and having every tree frosted with snow. If this isn't heaven!!" Denny is a long time PACCSA member and avid racer. He lives in Latrobe with his patient wife and fellow PACCSA member, Patty.**



**Pennsylvania Cross Country Skiers Association**

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"With luck, it might even snow for us."  
— Haruki Murakami in *After Dark*

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Please indicate if you are interested in volunteering in any of the following areas:

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