

Skiing Has First Place in Their Lives

Downhill skiing has long been a top sport, but cross-country skiing is becoming increasingly popular. Enthusiasm for this sport is not new for Charles Banks and his daughters Kathy and Sue.

Charles Banks is an industrial arts instructor at Central High School where he also coached the ski teams for about 18 years. This year there are 6 boys on the team and he also coaches Patti and Paula Grady of Central. Banks himself, enters amateur races of 15km.

Banks maintains about the best cross country trail in this 3-state area at his home located on the Korkki Road and adjacent property (now our Korkki Nordic ski trail—Ed) It was used this past weekend for the Eric Judeen Memorial Races, held for youth and adults, an annual met which has attracted 80 to 90 skiers from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan.

This is the peak of the skiing season. The High School District meet to be Feb. 3rd at Cloquet is unique in Minnesota for permitting girls to be in the competition. Clover Valley High has three entrants, Kathy, Sue and Connie Laiti, coached by Tom Swanstrom. Connie just started to ski during Christmas! She's a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Laiti.

Another coming event is the 30km (approximately 18 miles) race for men only, to be held at Banks' Feb 27.

Jan. 16th, Kathy won first place in Class I and Sue won first place in Class II in competition at Chester Bowl then, in Jan 22nd, Kathy and the Grady sisters (current residents of the Township—Ed) placed second in a Minneapolis relay.

Kathy entered and won her first race six years ago. Sue also entered her first competition while in 6th grade. Kathy competed in a national meet in Alaska in 1969, and the next year raced at Jackson Hole, WY. Now she is hoping to make a team which will enter the Junior National competition in Vermont during March.

It is not accidental that the girls do well. They ski every day in winter and they must maintain their fitness in summer as well. Obviously, it is a joy to the Banks family and they would encourage others to share the fun.

Charlie's Trails and Korkki Nordic Today

Valerie Brady and Mark Helmer

Charlie Banks created the ski trails that eventually became Korkki Nordic in about 1954 so that he and his family would have a place right out their back door to cross-country ski. Back in those days the trails were primarily used by Charlie's family and friends to train for ski racing. As the article (at left) shows, Charlie soon started to use the trails to host the Eric Judeen Memorial races (still held every February) and other United States Ski Association competitions. The trails are named for Charlie's wife Dorothy's family, Mr. and Mrs Hugo Korkki, who had the original homestead on the Korkki Road.

In 1992 Mark Helmer and Charlie Banks decided to make the trails open to the public year-round. In 1993, the warming hut was built, and by 1994 Korkki Nordic had become a non-profit corporation. A board of directors oversees funds that are obtained in an annual membership drive (similar to PBS or NPR), and the trails are maintained by volunteers, overseen by Mark Helmer, assistant chief of trails. The trail system itself has changed substantially over the years to make the trails safer for less advanced skiers and to promote recreation for skiers of all abilities. The trails are on a combination of private, county and a small portion of state land. Korkki Nordic has an easement exchange agreement with St. Louis County, and an easement with the State of Minnesota for the portion of the trail that exists on public land.

Each year Korkki Nordic hosts several major events. Starting in the fall, there is the Bangin' in the Brush trail run. In February, the Eric Judeen Memorial ski race is held. The Nordic Center also hosts the Two Harbors High School Invitational Ski Race. To help support our North Shore Community School, Korkki Nordic hosts a nighttime candlelight ski fundraiser right around Valentine's Day.

The trails are free and open to the public, although a donation option is available or you may support Korkki with the purchase of a membership, a nominal fee for the year. Fees cover operating costs, trail and building maintenance and equipment. Any surplus monies are given back to the community by supporting eight area high school ski teams, donations to the North Shore Community School, and other programs such as Sunday kids ski and our Township Fire Department.

If you come: The trails are for diagonal (standard classic cross-country) skiing only; there are no skate-ski trails. There are 11km of groomed trails. The warming cabin is open daily during the ski season. Please pay attention to any notices about dangerous or closed trail conditions and follow them; some of the trails are fairly challenging and were designed to give advanced skiers some good training. However, there are several intermediate loops and an easy loop for children, along with the advanced loops.

Reminder: Please do not use vehicles on Korkki Nordic ski trails or on the Community Center athletic fields.