

Backtracks: A North Star Retrospective 1967–1977 Compiled by Wayne Lindskoog

The original publication of "*Backtracks*" appeared in the fall of 1983. It was a collection of historical articles compiled by Wayne Lindskoog that appeared in the pages of the *Løype* throughout the 1981-82 season. Wayne's chronicles were met with much admiration and affection by members, and it is his efforts that sparked a desire throughout the club to document our progress with each ensuing year.

A history of the North Star Ski Touring Club cannot begin without a few words concerning events prior to the 1967-68 season, our first year of operation. In 1965-66 the United States Ski Association formed a ski touring committee chaired by Norm Oakvik, and then Bob Larson, with the purpose of improving interest and participation in ski touring in the Twin Cities metro area and throughout the Central Division of the USSA. Membership in that committee, besides Norm and Bob, included Jinny Mcwethy, John O'Bleness, James Rupert and Dag Helgestad. A touring handbook was prepared and sent to forty interested parties. A two-mile trail was cut near the Bush Lake ski jump and a schedule of eight committee-sponsored trips was set up. A dialogue was established with State Senator Henry McKnight; this was to eventually lead to a touring center at Jonathan village and the VJC tour, about which we will hear more later.

1967–68

Meeting at Dwight Johnson's in the summer of 1967, nineteen members drafted a constitution and the North Star Ski Touring Club was born. Lon Weidenhaft was elected our first club president. Original committee members McWethy, Oakvik, Helgestad, and Larson were joined by Shirley Esnough, Dwight Johnson and Lon Weidenhaft to form the nucleus of the new club. The club's meetings were held that year at the St. Louis Park Community Center.

Fifteen trips were scheduled this first year, including a ski clinic and USSA time trials. Ski destinations included some long forgotten areas like Gridley's Tree Farm, El Rancho Manana, and Sand Dunes State Park, as well as what were to become over the years some perennial favorites—Olympia Village, Eagle Mountain, Wirth Park and Bush Lake.

1968–69

Club records for our second year of existence revealed a total of 76 members as of February, 1969, with \$151.30 cash on hand. Hoigaards sold 100 sets of touring skis, their entire order for the year. Officers included Ray Esnough, President; Donna Pederson, Secretary-Treasurer; and Jinny McWethy, Trips Coordinator. Fifteen trips were organized for this year, including the first club-sponsored trip to the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming. The cost was \$10 a day for food and lodging, with transportation extra. Norm Oakvik and Dag Helgestad led thirty members on this trip (which included a mountain rescue by helicopter). There were, thankfully, no injuries—just hurt pride. Contact with Jonathan village resumed, and project manager Clyde Ryberg pledged

Jonathan's support in establishing ski touring trails within the development. The North Star season closed with the club's first annual spring banquet.

Little did any of us realize during these first two years of the club's existence the sleeping giant that lay beneath the snow. He began to stir in the next couple of years as ski touring began to flex its muscles, and the growth potential of the sport became apparent to all.

1969–70

Officers included Bob Larson, President; Helener Currier, Secretary-Treasurer; Kathy Winikainen, Corresponding Secretary, Glen Bennington, Trips Coordinator, and Tom Cooper, Member-at-Large. Memberships increased to 69 single and 54 family memberships, a total of about 120 adults. Hoigaards increased its inventory to 300 pair of cross-country skis and rapidly sold out the entire stock. The '69–70 trip schedule began with about 18 trips, but was revised to accommodate several additional trips in February and March. Two instructional clinics were included at Wirth Park.

The club again returned to the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming with Wayne Lindscoog and his wife Jacque leading this \$99 extravaganza—and we never did find Granite Pass! Activity began to increase at Jonathan, with trail work and remodeling of an old farmhouse later to be dubbed Oakvik House. The Oakvik House, named for Norm Oakvik's contributions to skiing (and *not* because he held the mortgage as once was believed), was dedicated in the spring of 1970 at ceremonies presided over by Bob Larson.

A contest was held this year to determine a design for a club logo. Glen Bennington's entry won, and we all know it as the club patch and logo of today.

1970–71

This was probably the pivotal year in the history of the North Star Ski Touring Club. With Glen Bennington now serving as president, the first general meeting of the year, held at the Prudential Auditorium, began with 900 to 1,000 eager skiers crowding in to learn about ski touring, and to view the latest in equipment.

Glen's Board of Directors included Sue Ellefson, Liz Rasmussen, Tim Knopp, and John Hollister. John was appointed VJC Chairman, and one of the first 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. Future years would find this to be a recurring problem, and we soon learned that Mother Nature is not always beneficent when it comes to early February and the VJC. Tim Heisel was the winner of that first tour/race and recipient of the Jonathan Cup, donated by Senator Henry McKnight. Under Glen's visionary leadership came recommendations for the formation of new clubs statewide, establishment of more ski touring areas, increasing the number of instructional clinics (including clinics for racers), and the appointment of a "political action chairman" to organize opposition to the rapidly expanding

snowmobile industry.

Thirty-five trips were scheduled for the year, the most ever until then, with no less than seven instructional clinics at Wirth Park and Jonathan. Tim Knopp led another successful Wyoming trip during Easter week.

It is important to note that Glen and Tim wrote a letter to the Hennepin County Park Reserve to impress upon them the potential growth of ski touring, and to ask them to assess areas of trail expansion in the system. This was, in effect, a foresighted effort to head off a rising tide of snowmobile encroachment, something with which we'll deal a bit later in this historical account.

The 1970 season concluded with 400 skiers in the club and a treasury of \$227.46. The coming season was to promise greater political clout for our expanding membership and the birth of our club newsletter, the *Løype*.

1971-72

This year's officers included Tim Knopp, President; Jacque Lindskoog, Secretary-Treasurer; Joan Velander, Corresponding Secretary; Dwight Johnson, Trips Coordinator; Dick Green, Member-at-Large; Ben Pawlak, Oakvik House Manager; and Lucy Cook, Program Chairperson.

President Tim Knopp compiled a trail guide for ski touring. July 1971 heralded the first issue of the *Løype* as we know it. While only a select few (even today) know what *Løype* means, word leaked out very early that it is Norwegian slang for "kindly remove yourself from the place in which I am about to ski."

The second annual VJC tour/race was a real success, with 873 skiers participating. Tim Heisel again dominated the event, but the big prize, a trip to Norway, was won by club member Don Wetlaufer of Minneapolis. Arnulf Veland, age 76, was the oldest finisher in the 1972 VJC.

Twenty-eight trips were listed on the 1971-72 trips schedule, including an instructional clinic at Jonathan and another Western trip to the Bighorn Mountains, led once again by Wayne Lindskoog. This was the famous trip known as the "Big Snow" or, in some circles, "Who was that couple from Denver?" We were officially snowed in by a 45-inch whiteout.

In spite of continued growth in numbers, the club was encouraging the formation of smaller groups, of which the 3M Ski Touring Club and the Swedish-American Institute Touring Club, were most notable. Both these clubs enjoyed a modicum of success.

In the May 1972 *Løype*, Tim alerted the membership to the potential crisis in the BWCA over the use of motorized vehicles. He also commended the Hennepin County Park Reserve for its planning on behalf of ski touring.

Dave Pederson compiled a club directory in the summer of 1972, and members began to turn their thoughts to the '72-73 season.

1972–73

Officers for the year included John Hollister, President; Becky Peterson, Secretary-Treasurer; Linda Peckham and Kajsa Knopp, Corresponding Secretaries; Wayne Smith, Trips Coordinator; Terry Dick, Member-at-Large; John Farrell, Oakvik House Manager; and Lorraine Opstad, Program Chairperson.

This year was highlighted by the USSA Nordic National Championships held at Hyland Lake Park Preserve. 1972-73 was an almost snowless winter, and the North Star Ski Touring Club was instrumental in providing manpower to haul snow and build a skiable racing track on the old Bush Lake competition trail. Norm Oakvik was Chief of Course, and Lars Kindem was Chief of Competition. For the first time we were able to see the greats of cross-country skiing: Martha Rockwell, Bob Gray, Mike Devecka, Mike Gallagher, and two promising teenagers named Tim Caldwell and Bill Koch.

Tim Knopp became the first *Løype* editor. Jack Maloney published a book on ski trail construction. Tim was appointed to the newly formed Governor's Trail Advisory Committee. Thirty trips were listed in the schedule, with yet another return to the Bighorns, led this time by Jinny McWethy.

Terry Dick headed the VJC committee, and despite horrendous trail conditions and some wrong turns, Tim Heisel did it again. Telemark announced a 50 kilometer ski race from Hayward to Telemark. The entry fee was \$7.00. Who'd be crazy enough to ski that distance let alone *pay* to do it?

John Hollister reported on a successful year with total membership pushing one thousand and a treasury of nearly \$3,000.

Glen Bennington and Tim Knopp went to Sweden to ski the famous Vasaloppet. When Bennington was asked if he'd do it again he replied, "Yes, when hell freezes over and the devil himself enters the Vasaloppet!"

1973–74

This year and the one to follow marked what could be properly called the club's entrance into the "modern era." During these years the club continued its phenomenal growth, and involvement in trail development began to take on larger proportions. No longer were there only a handful of retail outlets for equipment. New shops sprung up everywhere, and sales in touring equipment began to rival those in the alpine market. Synthetic materials began to replace the wool and wood of the past, and Wayne Lindskoog fought to retain the old ways with his "ski organic" campaign. Even resort owners began to see the potential for winter vacations, and as a result of this awakening, were faced with the dilemma of choosing to cater to either snowmobilers or cross-country skiers. Officers for this year included Jinny McWethy, President; Marion Reinke, Secretary; Lucas Von Hilst, Treasurer; Leslie Hollister, Trips Coordinator; Tim Knopp, *Løype* Editor; Bob Tokar, Program Chairperson; and Members-at-Large Connie Donnelly, Jack Parsons, and Lee Mayer.

With the proliferation of new ski touring areas, the use of the Oakvik House

and the Jonathan trail system began to decline. However, Glen and Judy Bennington took up temporary residence, and the area still realized substantial use, especially for instructional clinics on weekends.

The energy crisis forced the Board to adopt a policy of no trips outside a radius of 150 miles from the Twin Cities, except by chartered bus. While it was not known at the time, this policy spurred even greater interest in group participation. Increased membership necessitated obtaining a post office box for handling the voluminous mail.

Leslie Hollister compiled another full schedule of trips, including some new areas such as Hungry Jack Lodge and the Northwoods Audubon Center. She and husband John also led a new Western trip, this time to Hideaway Park in Colorado. Club dues increased to \$5 per household. Tim Knopp conducted a trail seminar for interested groups, and over 100 individuals responded to the invitation.

Bill Rolshouse began his first of many years chairing the VJC, and this time Don Lee edged out three-time winner Tim Heisel by 46 seconds to win the Jonathan Cup. Toni St. Pierre won the women's division while 4 skiers finished the tour/race.

Ski marathons began to attract attention, and the April 1974 *Løype* noted that the second Telemark Birkebeiner attracted seventy entrants in the 50K event, with Tim Knopp placing first in the 35-42 age class, and Jean Dick placing third in the 22K Korteloppet. Jacque Lindskoog was once again the only woman entered in the long race (for the second year in a row), and with tongue-in-cheek it is noted that her husband, Wayne, managed to beat her by ten minutes.

Under Jinny's leadership the club ended a highly successful year capped by the formation of an umbrella organization of ski touring clubs, later to be known as Minntour. With Jack Maloney and Tim Knopp providing much of the impetus, Minntour was soon to become a major force in encouraging and promoting ski touring statewide, particularly in relationship to the state DNR and local county/municipal park departments.

1974-75

Officers for the year were Lucas Von Hilst, President; Wayne Lindskoog, Secretary; Jack Parsons, Treasurer; Jean Dick, Trips Coordinator; Pat Richards, *Løype* Editor; Donna Pederson, Program Chairperson; and Members-at-Large Lee Mayer, Connie Donnelly, and Helener Currier.

Jean announced a trip schedule of no less than thirty trips including, for the first time, a trip for beginners only and another for singles only. This was also the year of the infamous Grand Marais trip when a busload of North Star members was stranded in Duluth during a spring blizzard from Sunday, April 6th until Tuesday, April 8th, and Ed Wheeler had to fly from Duluth to California for his own wedding.

This year's Western trip returned to Hideaway Park, Colorado; this time led by Wayne and Jacque Lindskoog. Thor Nordwall led a trip to Camp du Nord where skiers slept in sleeping bags on the floor of Thor's Lodge.

Minntour began operations in earnest and joined with the Sierra Club to appeal a Forest Service decision allowing snowmobiles inside the BWCA. Pat Richards devoted much of her efforts as editor to publicizing new trails and touring areas in the pages of the *Løype* (including maps with detailed descriptions). This perhaps, more than anything, promoted the expansion of touring trails and resort interest in the sport of cross-country skiing. For the first time the *Løype* accepted advertising to help defray costs, and our once one-page mimeographed newsletter now averaged eight to nine pages.

Kodak announced a new "Medals for Miles" program and encouraged club participation. As a result, the North Star Ski Touring Club won the first of several consecutive awards as the club with the most yearly participation. Kodak finally tired of sending us merchandise and discontinued the category.

Bill Rolshouse chaired his second VJC, and it proved to be an outstanding race. The winners included Sten Fjeldheim, 1st; Roger Pekuri, 2nd; Tim Heisel, 3rd; and Todd Kempainen, 4th. Wendy and Robin Brown finished first and second among the women racers, with Carol Finsrud placing third.

Lee Mayer announced a membership total of 935, which translated to roughly 2,000 total skiers in the NSSTC.

The third annual Birkebeiner listed four female finishers from our club: J. Lindskoog, P. Richards, B. Sandager and J. Dick. And the season ended in style with the spring banquet at the Normandy Hotel in downtown Minneapolis.

Looking ahead to the years 1975–76, we will see how Lucas' leadership and commitment to North Star growth this past year really came to fruition. The BWCA controversy began to embroil within, and for the first time in our history, the NSSTC was forced to take a controversial stand and see it to the end. In the mid-seventies a new *Løype* was born, and the singles division took shape; this latter phenomenon in spite of numerous attempts at infiltration by some of our well-known married members.

1975–76

Officers included Wayne Lindskoog as President; John Hollister, Secretary; Craig Swan, Treasurer; Rick Whiting, Membership Chairperson; Mary Lou Boice, Program Chairperson; Jean Dick, Trips Coordinator; Pat Richards, *Løype* Editor; Bill Miller, Publicity; Bruce Sillers, Member-at-Large; Glenn Richards, VJC Chairman; Newell Searle, Trail Development; and Tim Knopp, Minntour Representative.

With our increasing involvement in a number of issues came the need for an expanded Board of Directors and more specific responsibilities. Foremost was the introduction of the new look of the *Løype* which, under Pat's guidance, was now commercially printed and mailed, and included photographs. The

trip schedule included 46 trips ably organized by Jean Dick, and for the first time, three and four choices per weekend throughout the ski season were common.

Ken Rykken reported on new equipment that would revolutionize cross-country skiing. Fiberglass skis, double camber, graphite poles, and a whole new technique demanding upright posture, faster cadence, and double poling (along with greater emphasis on upper body conditioning) were just around the corner.

An aggressive trail development program began in earnest under Newell Searle's leadership, and we began to think in terms of not just identifying potential areas, but providing as well the manpower and funds to get the trails cut. Minntour became an increasing statewide force on behalf of ski touring and the thrust was for separation of ski touring and snowmobiling areas. Pat continued to publish detailed descriptions of new touring areas in the pages of the *Løype*.

Membership by early December reached 883. A feature article by Ralph Thornton appeared in the *Minneapolis Star* on Monday, December 1, 1975. It highlighted the North Star Ski Touring Club, and members John Hollister and Bob O'Hara. (In spite of the photo of Hollister with his plastic nose shield, the gadget never really caught on, thank heaven!).

The club-sponsored instructional clinic at Edenvale Golf Course drew more than 500 participants, and with that we began our annual fund-raising for Courage Center. Minntour released a comprehensive statement on ski touring needs in the state of Minnesota, which was to become our benchmark for further action regarding statewide trail development.

The Western trip this year went to Beaver's Lodge in Winter Park, Colorado, led by Glenn and Pat Richards.

Even though we suffered our first VJC cancellation due to an unexpected thaw, the ski season statewide was excellent and Birkebeiner IV reported 698 finishers. Public hearings began on the BWCA controversy with Knopp and Maloney becoming the two most wanted on the snowmobile "hit list." The spring banquet was held at the Normandy with Ralph Thornton as guest speaker. We finished the year with over 2,400 members on our rolls.

1976-77

Having been called upon to do it again until he got it right, Wayne Lindskoog repeated as President. Other officers included John Holmquist as Treasurer; Roger Freeberg, Secretary; Pat Richards, Trips Coordinator; Judy Rykken, *Løype* Editor; Jane Lincoln, Programs Chairperson; Rick Whiting, Membership Chairperson; Bill Miller, Publicity; Bud Pawlak, Member-at-Large; Lee Radermacher, Trail Development; and Goodman Larson, Minntour Representative. 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 bumped our way into oblivion.

This was an especially significant year for our club since Lucas Von Hilst, our

VJC chairman, also distinguished himself by helping form the nucleus of what was to become the singles division. To this day, I claim that there was no statement intended when we lost their original charter.

We were heartened by the Department of Agriculture's decision to uphold the Wilderness Act in the BWCA, but the battle was not yet over since Congressional action was pending. Forty-five trips were scheduled by Pat for this '76-77 season. The *Løype* continued to be a high quality newsletter with feature stories on many members and ski touring personalities.

The Western trip was moved to Yellowstone National Park—Big Sky, to be more specific. Wayne Smith, Tom Cooper, Ed Wheeler and Mike Wheeler trekked on skis through the Canadian Rockies. The "Old Scout" wrote a series of articles on the joys of cross-country skiing, but he was plainly involved in the conflict of choosing between wood and plastic (a transition many undertake only to find they must relearn waxing, hill climbing, and total technique). "Herringbone" became the new rage, born of necessity. Alas, the VJC was cancelled again and Wayne Lindskoog was destined to never utter the words, "This is a tour, not a race!"

The singles division grew phenomenally and soon established its own officers, with a proposed trip schedule for the following season. Despite the coldest weekend of the year, the instructional clinic at Meadowbrook netted \$225 for Courage Center. Glen and Judy Bennington left Oakvik House and it closed its doors permanently. Birkie V attracted 2,200 skiers.

By now club growth had pretty well stabilized, although we experienced a sizeable turnover of about 35% annually. The singles division began to have a profound impact on club membership; and it must be noted with a certain degree of pride that in the face of the demise of smaller clubs throughout the state, the North Star Ski Touring Club remained an institution. It even expanded to such unlikely areas as Minot, N.D., where the "Uff-da" division was established.