

Skiing not so bad, super says

By PETER BLAIS

MANCHESTER, Vt. — Equinox General Manager Lee Bowden and Gleneagles Golf Course Superintendent Joe Charbonneau went at it for a couple years.

A cross-country ski center based at the golf course wouldn't do any significant turf damage and could make a sizable contribution to the southwestern Vermont resort's bottom line, Bowden argued.

Track marks and turf damage that could take weeks to repair could sully the reputation of the Walter Travis design that Rees Jones recently spent two years and \$3.5 million renovating into a world-class layout, Charbonneau countered.

"It was a hard sell with Joe and the owners," Bowden said of his efforts to get the go-ahead from his course manager and the ownership group, Equinox Resort Associates. "None of them [the owners] were skiers."

But all were business people and understood the potential profitability of using a seasonal facility on a year-round basis. Bowden pointed to the Woodstock Inn &

Resort's ski touring center 90 minutes drive to the northeast. Woodstock opened its center years ago. The facility boasts 60 kilometers of groomed trails. The course clubhouse is the focal point, providing shelter, warmth, beverages, clothing and equipment for skiers.

Course damage has been minimal, said Woodstock General Manager Chet Williamson, Bowden's former employer and good friend. Trails are groomed through rough rather than fairways wherever possible. Aprons and greens are roped off and posted off limits to skiers.

The center contributes an average \$75,000 annually to the resort's bottom line. "That's allowed us to make improvements to the course and clubhouse we might not have been able to afford otherwise," Williamson said.

The occasional track mark visible in early spring quickly repairs itself, the general manager said. "Club members are sure to find one and blame it on the skiers," he added, "just like they blame all the unrepaired divots on hotel guests who use the course."

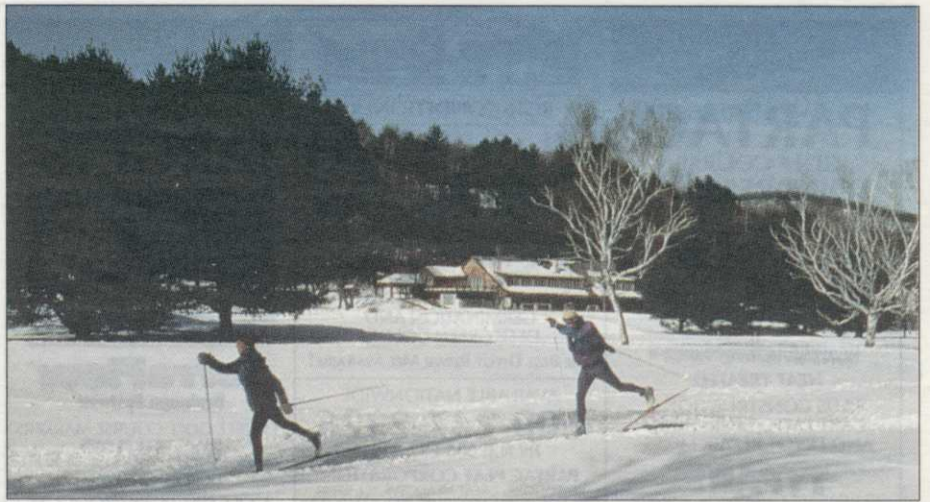
The owners and Charbonneau eventually agreed to introduce a cross-country program last winter.

"I've always been against skiing because my course is sacred to me," said Charbonneau, who proved himself a shrewd Yankee trader. "But I bargained for some extra things out of it, like 10,000 linear feet of cart path and a few extra people on my wintertime crew."

Fourteen kilometers of on-course trails were laid out with another 18 traversing nearby woods. Charbonneau helped the ski director develop the on-course trails, which were generally routed along cart paths and through outlying rough. "The key is good communication with the ski director and getting the superintendent involved in the routing," Charbonneau said.

The result was a profitable ski season, despite a meager snow year, and zero damage to the course. "I'm actually up for the prospects of a good snow year and lots of skiers," Charbonneau said.

GOLF COURSE NEWS



Skiers kick by the clubhouse at Woodstock Country Club



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