

# From Tee to Ski

*Gerry Finn reports on a new revenue producer at the golf course during the winter—cross country skiing. Although limited now to resorts, this sport can be adapted to any type of golf course*

By Gerry Finn

Once upon a snowstorm the golf course would tuck itself in for the winter and take a well-deserved, if unprofitable, rest. In a way it was a return to nature for the green-laced playground. No more divots and no more spike wounds. Just plenty of peace, quiet and the opportunity to refurbish itself for the recycling of the work schedule in the spring.

That was then. Now is now. And nowadays the golf course slowly but steadily is running on all wheels, all seasons. Snowmobiles have kept many a course awake all winter, not to mention some of the people residing on its perimeter with that familiar ear-fracturing whirring sound.

The golf course superintendent has either learned to live with the mechanized monster or convince his superiors to bar them from the grounds as a precautionary measure against turf damage. But the latest craze sweeping the outdoor set may not be so easy to skirt. The name of the new game in town is cross country skiing, a free-form athletic venture which is gobbling up enthusiasts from six to 66. "They say if you're old enough to walk and young enough to dance, you're cross country skiing material," according to George Williamson, manager of the Woodstock CC, Woodstock, Vt.

Woodstock is one of the two major resort areas to open the golf course doors to cross country skiers. The other is Sun Valley in Idaho. Both claim to have experienced much success with the undertaking. And, here's a little twist to the action, both places launched the sport with the complete blessing of the golf course superintendent. Leo Jacques, superintendent



at Woodstock, says cross country skiing is there to stay on his velvet bent. Ken Zimmerman, who carts the big green thumb around Sun Valley, seconds Jacques' motion. "No problem whatsoever," he quips.

This is the second year of cross country skiing at Woodstock. When it started, Dave Clement, who has since moved to the Crestview CC in Agawam, Mass., was the superintendent. He helped break three miles of trail on his golf course. "Funny thing," he offers. "We broke the trails with a snowmobile and snowmobiles aren't allowed at Woodstock! But when we ran it, there was more than six feet of snow on the ground. In no way could it damage the turf."

The winter of 1971 proved to be a champion in producing snow at Woodstock. "We had an official fall of 12 feet," Williamson reveals. "Even if there were a danger of the course being hurt by the skis, it couldn't have happened with all that snow. When we packed in the skis, there was still three feet of snow on the

ground." Skiing at Woodstock does not begin until approximately a 10 or 12-inch powder covers the course.

The Woodstock skiing project was well-received by guests, who use the resort's inn as their base of operations. Williamson reports there were upwards of 50 skiers on the trails at one time with emphasis on family participation. Then, too, the club conducted three races during the season which began in early December and lasted until the end of March. One race drew 33 entrants.

"We didn't enter the sales department of cross country equipment," Williamson tells. "But we understand that a sporting goods store in the town of Woodstock had a sales gain of 300 per cent. We removed the golf equipment from the pro shop and used the shop for rentals of ski equipment." He plans to double his inventory of ski equipment for next year.

Woodstock worked at the skiing operation with more than ordinary enthusiasm. The club even went so far as to import a cross country coach from Hungary. Laszlo Peri spent the 1971 season at Woodstock and has since signed a contract to return in 1972. He is an instructor and a guide, and if plans proceed as expected, he's likely to be the busiest employee on the premises when the snow falls again.

Williamson admits the idea of offering cross country skiing to guests is based on a long-range plan to utilize the golf course as a year-round source of income. Before skiing entered the scene, the course and club were closed all winter. In the first year of operation, Williamson says the club "broke even" and feels that as word



Starting out: beginners' class in cross country skiing.

gets around, they will attract more and more participants each year.

Although the Woodstock people are positive cross country skiing doesn't come close to approaching snowmobiles as a menace to the future condition of their golf course, they give their superintendent his head in control of its incidence.

"Leo Jacques is the last word around here in the matter of determining when we can and when we can't ski," Williamson says. "It's up to him. With all the snow last year, he didn't have to make too many decisions. However, when he said he thought it was time to end the season, that was that."

The results of a four-month run of skiing on the course have proven that the superintendent has no worries about turf damage in that direction. "We kept the skiers off the tees and greens," Jacques reports. "And they were very cooperative. I always have maintained that other activities can be staged on a golf course if they are properly supervised and controlled. I haven't detected any damage at all from the skiers," he says.

Clement, another advocate of controlled outside use of the golf course, is in complete agreement with his successor at Woodstock. "I never have been able to get myself to hate snowmobiles or other winter vehicles which are supposed to be the superintendent's enemies," Clement

explains. "I had no trouble from skiing when I was at Woodstock. And I wouldn't be afraid to allow snowmobiling. There's just one rule to stick to. When the snow melts, everybody and everything gets off of the course."

Williamson says Woodstock decided to make use of its golf course as a cross country track because of its topography. "The course is fairly flat with just enough rises to make it interesting," Williamson declares. "And with the golf pro shop there to serve as a ski shop, it prevents too many outstanding features to keep the place closed up all winter." Williamson explains that, like downhill skiing, skiers ski at their own risk (although he's only heard of one accident in cross country skiing). "The only time a course is liable is through negligence, which can be prevented when the trail is laid out," Williamson says.

Cross country skiing is still a very young sport at Sun Valley where winter takes on a new flavor with a myriad of outdoor games available to guests. But like Woodstock, the Sun Valley theme is to treat the cross country venture as the plus item of the future.

Again, although no evidence of turf damage has existed because of their use, snowmobiles are not allowed at Sun Valley. "We use one only for the cutting of the cross country skiing trails," Zimmerman says. "You may not believe this, but the reason we

don't let the snowmobiles roam our course is the noise factor. It's just too much for the rest of the guests. I don't particularly care for it, either," he says.

Cross country skiing at Sun Valley is made available strictly as a service. "We started very slowly this year," Zimmerman reveals. "I'd say we had double figures using the trails, but not too many people knew about our program. We hope word of mouth will increase the turnout next season. At least, we are anticipating it. We're going ahead with plans to increase our rental inventory," he says. Sun Valley tried cross country to accommodate some of its guests, who were not interested in Alpine or downhill skiing. "We have had many inquiries about the sport," Zimmerman tells, "so we decided to stock some cross country skis with the golf course as a natural setting. I cut two different trails with the greens staked off. The rest of the course was open country. And, I couldn't find any evidence of damage when the golf season rolled in," he says.

There was no special teacher at Sun Valley. However, the resort had classes in cross country trekking through its regular ski school. "We had many who wanted to learn," Zimmerman says, "I think it is the winter sport of the future. I don't see how it can miss," he says.

Sun Valley went one better than Woodstock in utilizing its golf course. "In addition to the cross country trails, we also cut some sled trails on the course," Zimmerman says. "The same results came in the spring. No damage, no scars."

Although Woodstock and Sun Valley are among the original areas to open their golf courses to skiers, they are not expected to be alone in this offering. Both Williamson and Zimmerman think the sport of cross country skiing is on the rise to the extent that most year-round playgrounds will be forced to include it in their programs.

One such place planning to go with it in 1972 and cut trails on its golf course is the Jug End Resort in the bubbling Berkshires section of Massachusetts. Angus MacDonald, president and general manager at Jug End, is enthused over the idea.

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## Ski

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"From all I hear, it's the coming thing," he says. "We've purchased the special skis needed to tackle a trail and will work cross country into our regular skiing program." MacDonald says that he got the cross country influence from a former Olympic ski jumper Art Tokle. "Art's in the cross country business and he sold me on it," MacDonald says. "I have two dozen pairs of skis on order and we'll take advantage of our golf course for the trails."

Again, there seems little worry from MacDonald as far as the potential danger to turf damage is concerned. "I'm not even beginning to think of it," he laughs. "We've had snowmobiles running on the course and the only trouble we've ever had was an oil leak. We use our horse trails for snowmobiles, now, but we wouldn't be afraid to put them on the course if we had to," he says.

Cross country skiing, then, appears to have found a niche in the hearts of outdoor-minded sportsmen—and a home on the golf course. So far, there have been no complaints, except perhaps from the courses themselves. There's just no rest for the weary. □

### Ski Touring: Up and Coming

Ski hiking, ski touring, cross country, or Nordic skiing has just begun to create an impact on the North American continent. According to an article in the February issue of SKI BUSINESS Magazine (a trade magazine for ski retailers), this type of skiing has a "greater possible popular appeal, larger potential for sales and a more widespread recreational feasibility" than does Alpine or downhill skiing.

Nordic skiing has always been a means of transportation in countries such as Sweden, Finland and Norway. This function, combined with its recreational pleasures, makes it a way of life, comparable perhaps to the way American youngsters use bicycles as a way of getting somewhere as well as for the fun of it. Russia, according to an article in SKI Magazine

(December, 1970), has 12 million touring skiers. And "traditional Alpine-only European countries are beginning to dominate" the international Nordic skiing meets. Although the United States has been slow to catch up, it is now on its way and the boom is only just beginning.

There are many reasons why Nordic skiing took off in America last year. One is cost. A full touring outfit fits into a personal family budget much better than the full accouterments of Alpine skiing: it costs about \$80 for a pair of top line skis, boots, bindings and poles. The same Alpine equipment would cost three to four times as much. Areas for Nordic skiing are more available, especially to the city-bound skier; one doesn't need a mountain, just snow and space. It is a group sport and any number, any age can participate. It's safer, which makes it an ideal family sport. It also tunes in smoothly with the current awareness on the part of a lot of people that the land is beautiful, that a slow intake of the environment, absorbing and appreciating it, is somehow more satisfying than dominating a mountain, a stream or whatever.

Aside from creating traffic in the clubhouse, ski touring can help bring revenue into the pro shop. How? For a start, the professional can rent skis, boots, bindings and poles. A professional could also stock ski hats, gloves, underwear and socks. There are other things the Nordic skier needs, the most important of which are waxes. (One warning, the whole process of waxing cross country skis, which is an absolute necessity for touring, is better left to the skier.) There are also touring accessories, such as wax removers, scrapers and smoothing tools, ski straps, even touring overboots for messy and slushy conditions.

By just providing space on the golf course for the Nordic skier and his family, renting equipment and selling accessories, the pro shop can take in revenue over the otherwise dormant winter season.

—Pauline Crammer