

History of the Avalon Nordic Ski Club

The St. John's Ski Club was formed in 1965 and its purpose was to promote alpine skiing. However some of the members were avid cross country skiers and in 1968 formed a cross country ski section of the club. Instrumental in this development was Dr. E. R. W. Neale who is known for founding the Newfoundland Ski Marathon which was first held near Springdale in the years between 1968-1972. As interest in cross country skiing grew during the 1970's the club began to offer instruction to new skiers and hold club races. Fall training (gym and swimming) was available at the Provincial Recreation Centre under the direction of Wilf Thomas who in 2006 is still a very active member of the Avalon Nordic Ski Club.

In the late 1970's Ted Harper helped reinvigorate the cross country side of the club and in 1978 trails were cut in Pippy Park. This began a long association between the ski club and the Pippy Park Commission. Many individuals helped with trail cutting and yearly maintenance. Notable contributors were students from the Outdoor Program of the College of Trade and Technology and from the Memorial University Ski Club. At this time in the club's history there were hikes in the fall and ski tours in the winter along with waxing and equipment clinics. The following year, 1979 saw the first annual St. John's Invitational ski race at Butter Pot Provincial Park. Finally in 1979, the cross country section of the St. John's Ski Club passed a motion to become independent resulting in the St. John's Cross Country Ski Club. Ted Harper was the first President.

In 1982 the St. John's Cross Country ski Club began offering the National Jackrabbit Program for young children. The club was officially incorporated in 1984 on March 6th under President Lew Feltham. Skiing continued on the Pippy Park trails (~10.0 km) during the 1980's with annual fall trail clearing. During the 1987-88 season the club had about 240 members under club President George Beckett and a very active Jackrabbit program overseen by Barb Taylor (in 1989 180 children were registered). The next year or 2 saw some decline in membership but lots of activity with Jackrabbit, the invitational and various social events.

The early 1990's brought a couple of lean snow years and the St. John's invitational was not held for 2 years in a row, resuming in 1992. Grooming in the trailer park was provided by the City of St. John's resulting in some great skiing conditions. Membership grew under President Lloyd Button and the good snow of 1992 and reached 320 during the season. In 1993 Barb Taylor became Club President and instituted adult ski lessons at the same time as the Jackrabbit lessons on Saturday mornings. Membership continued to be strong and several of the club's young racers made the Provincial team (e.g. Joanna Gilles and Tom Dabinett) and did well in Provincial events under the coaching of Pat Dabinett. Concerns arose due to the loss of use of the "Log Cabin" in Pippy Park with Northbank lodge subsequently used as an alternative. A trial period of user fees and ski rentals was instituted by an organization known as the Friends of Pippy Park. Revenue from this venture was to be put towards snow making equipment (an idea for the future?). With great snow conditions the 1995 Invitational at Butter Pot attracted 100 entrants. In the late 1990's despite the best efforts of club President Diane Rendell the poor snow conditions and increasing use of Pippy Park trails (Nagel's Hill and the trailer park) by dog walkers and motorized vehicles culminated in a decline in membership. Also, cross-country skiing techniques and equipment (e.g. skating technique) evolved to the point where wider groomed trails were required.

In December 2000 President Graham Mowbray initiated the process to move our club to Butter Pot Park which has been a great success. A snowmobile compatible trail groomer (JACA)

was purchased through volunteer fund raising efforts and a concerted effort was made to enhance the facilities at Butter Pot Park including the use of a heated clubhouse. Since then under President Dale Corbett the ski trails have expanded to ~ 20 km and the clubhouse has been significantly upgraded including a bathroom, stove for cooking and other amenities. In 2004 the Club changed its name to the Avalon Nordic Ski Club in recognition of the fact that many of our members come from all over the Avalon and that our base of operations was outside St. John's.

In 2005 the club successfully hosted the Provincial Ski Marathon that brought nearly 100 skiers from all over the province to Butter Pot. Hosting such an event led to further enhancement of the trail network, signage and waxing facilities (5 benches). Building on this success the Club will host the 2006 Provincial Championships at Butter Pot in mid-February. A new memorandum of understanding between the club and the Provincial government (Minister Tom Osborne) was signed in 2005. As part of this agreement members get unlimited access to groomed ski trails at Butter Pot and are fully covered by an insurance policy provided by our membership in Cross Country Canada. In addition, they get discounts on ski lessons, race entry fees and free advice on equipment, waxing, where to ski, etc. We also hold several social gatherings during the year (fall and spring) and run a ski equipment sale in the fall. Our membership fees are modest compared to other parts of the province and country. In 2005 we had approximately 250 members from all over the Avalon. Under President Richard Wardle the club is embarking on a major expansion of its activities and infrastructure for the 2005-06 season including the acquisition a of Bombardier 160 trail grooming machine and revitalization of skiing in the Pippy Park trailer park facility through procurement of new grooming equipment.