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## January 2015 Newsletter

### Sandpoint Nordic Club NEWSLETTER

**Volume 1 Issue 4: Jan 3, 2015**

Let's go skiing! Here's what's happening:

**Western Pleasure** and **U of I** became skiable this past week. **Schweitzer** opened its Nordic trails the week before. More snow this weekend. Get out there!

**Schweitzer Winter Trails Day** 1/10. Aka. Learn to Ski Day. Tell your procrastinating friends that this is their big chance. We need volunteers to help run this thing. See Rick's write up and <http://www.schweitzer.com/events-activities/learn-to-xc-ski-free-day/>

**Monthly Member Meeting** Tuesday, 1/13, 5:30-7:00, Laughing Dog Brewing

in Ponderay.

**Western Winter Roundup** Saturday, 1/24, 9:00AM, Western Pleasure Guest Ranch. See Vicki's announcement below.

**Schweitzer Nordic Ski Clinics** 2/6-2/8 <http://www.schweitzer.com/events-activities/nordic-ski-clinics-2015/>

**Explore Schweitzer** 2/22 <http://www.schweitzer.com/events-activities/explore-schweitzer-2015/>

## **Learn to Ski Day**

Our biggest outreach day of the year is coming up Saturday, January 10. Our Nordic Club, along with Schweitzer Mountain Resort will be putting on our annual Learn to Ski Day. This day offers free ski rentals and free group lessons for beginner skiers. For club members, this is a great day to show off why we love this sport. This all takes place in a trail that will be groomed at the Roundabout just before you get to the resort. We will have a morning and an afternoon session. We have gotten a hundred new people comfortable on skis each of the last several years.

Club members who want to help for all or part of the day should contact Rick Price at [sandpointprices@frontier.com](mailto:sandpointprices@frontier.com). If you have friends that you have been wanting to get on skis, have them call the Schweitzer Ski and Ride Center at 208-255-3070. They'll need to provide height, weight, shoe size, and contact information.

The morning session starts with ski fittings from 9:00-10:00 and lessons from 10:00 'til 11:30. The afternoon session starts with fittings from Noon 'til 1:00 and lessons from 1:00-2:30.

If you have your own equipment, no reservations are needed. Just show up in time for the lessons. There will be lessons for both skate and classic technique.

– *Rick Price*

## **Monthly Member Meeting**

At Laughing Dog Brewing, 1109 Fontaine Dr., Ponderay, on Tuesday, 1/13, 5:30-7:00. This is an open member meeting at which President Vicki will report on Club doings and you will have a chance to meet and converse with other Club members. See you there! – *Bob Love*

## **Western Winter Roundup**

The Sandpoint Nordic Club is hosting a 5 or 10K Nordic ski race at the Western Pleasure Guest Ranch ski trails on January 24th. The course will be held on the gentle terrain of the Meadow trails and will be set with skate and classic tracks. Start time is 9am and registration is \$20 (includes WPGR trail fee), kids 12yrs and under are free. There will also be a 5 or 10K snow shoe race taking place at the same time so there is fun for the whole family! The Ski registration form can be accessed on our website – [www.sandpointnordic.com](http://www.sandpointnordic.com) and you can fill it out and mail in a check. You can also register for either the ski or snow shoe race at [www.active.com](http://www.active.com). – *Vicki Longhini*

## **Join a Ski Group?**

The Club is offering a variety of opportunities for you to get to know and ski with other members on a regular basis. This follows the lead of and expands upon the successful Wednesday Ski Group which, for several years has been

organized and facilitated by Michele and Bill Tregoning.

The Wednesday Ski Group continues to meet at 9:10 AM Wednesday at the Schweitzer clock tower. Many skiers ride the 8:30 bus and get more acquainted with others in the group. It may be skate or classic depending upon snow conditions. For more information contact Bill at [btrego2811@msn.com](mailto:btrego2811@msn.com)

The Saturday Ski Group meets at 8:40, Saturday morning, at the Schweitzer clock tower. You can use the 8:00 bus and get ahead of the downhillers. This is an informal group, there will be no leader or organizer, just a chance to meet and ski with other Club members.

If you can't make those sessions or would like more group skiing the Club will try to match you up with other members to form groups that meet your needs. The idea is that skiers would be matched with others of similar abilities and interests for regularly scheduled outings. If needed the Club will try to provide an experienced skier to act as guide. If you're interested, send an email telling what you would like in a group to [sandpointnordic@gmail.com](mailto:sandpointnordic@gmail.com) – *Bob Love*

## **Waxless Skis is an Oxymoron**

There really isn't such thing as a waxless ski. All skis need to be waxed in order to enjoy the skiing experience. Waxless classic skis got their name because they don't require a grip/kick wax in order to propel down the trail. The fish scales provide the grip. Without proper care however, snow can stick too much to the fish scales and the remainder of the ski may not glide easily across the snow. The good news is waxless classic skis are very easy to maintain!

Let's first discuss the grip/kick zone of the ski. This is the middle section of the ski where the fish scales are located. We need to keep this section clean. If dirt accumulates in the kick zone, then certain snow conditions may cause snow

to adhere tenaciously to the ski and gliding will become impossible. So we need to clean the kick zone periodically. Spray the base, especially the kick zone, with wax remover and wipe it clean with a base cleaning paper or paper towel. If this process doesn't seem to clean the fish scales, then try using a wax remover and a stiff nylon brush.

The tips and tails of the ski are the gliding surfaces. We want these surfaces to slide freely across the snow so we need to keep them slippery. Firstly, these gliding surfaces need to be clean as well. You can clean them just like you did the kick zone.

Once the bases of the skis are cleaned, you apply an inexpensive liquid wax to the entire ski base. Products like Toko Grip & Glide Wax, Swix Easy Glide, or Maxiglide are specifically designed for use with waxless skis. These products will help the ski glide faster on the snow and help prevent snow from adhering to the fish scales.

If you want to optimize performance of your waxless skis, then you can use standard hot waxing techniques on the glide zones, just like you would for your skate skis or your waxable classic skis.

It only takes a few minutes to take care of your waxless skis and you will find it well worth the effort; especially on those days when you ski past the frustrated classic skier with his cans of kick wax, tubes of klistor and natural and synthetic corks spewed across the trail! – *Ross Longhini*

## **Skiing Big**

*The following is an essay written exclusively for the Sandpoint Nordic Club by David Axelrod. Mr. Axelrod is a professor at Eastern Oregon University, former head coach for the Pacific NW Ski Association and coach of the Blue Mountain Nordic Ski team. His essay describes the virtues and culture of the classic*

*technique of Nordic skiing.*

It had been a snowy week in early March 2001 on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Pacific Northwest Nordic Ski Team, including skiers from the Sandpoint area, had traveled there to participate in the annual Junior National Nordic Ski Championships. The historic Suicide Bowl, aka the Suislide Bowl, played host for the event as it had hosted Nordic skiing and ski jumping events since 1925. This event however, was the end for the Suislide Bowl, which was slated for closure at the conclusions of that week's competition. A mining company had claimed its mineral rights to riches that lay unmolested for 72 years beneath the storied ski area's grassy fields, boreal forests, and deep winter snows.

The morning of the team relays, that is, the final morning of competition, the wax coaches for PNSA, Ben Husaby and Flash Clark, arrived at the venue early with the intention of testing skis, along with another coach, Laura McCabe. The snow conditions were ideal: fresh, tilled and packed, moderate humidity, with air temperatures in the upper teens and snow temperatures well into the blue wax range. There wasn't going to be much of a need for testing. Nor did the coaches really anticipate that need.

The PNSA coaches were all long-time competitive skiers. Husaby and McCabe were both two-time Olympians. Though Flash missed qualifying for the Lillehammer Olympics by an infinitesimal amount of time, he was no less the ski legend. One evening as he and I walked through a hallway to a coaches meeting, a man only a few years younger than Flash stopped us. The younger man literally melted in Flash's presence. "Are you," he asked, truly in latent adolescent awe, "are you . . . Flash Clark? The Flash Clark?" It turned out Flash had been the other man's childhood ski hero in Vermont. Flash, for his part, just blushed and laughed with embarrassment. It was I who assured the fan that, yes, this was indeed "The Flash Clark." But that last morning of competition in the Suislide Bowl wasn't about past glories, unless the pursuit of a particular

enthusiasm can be properly called a glory. Well, it can, and once achieved this glory will be sought out again and again throughout the remainder of a lifetime. What the coaches had arrived early to do was classic ski. Not just to classic ski, but to “ski big,” as they described it.

That wasn't the first time I'd heard that descriptive phrase, and though my own classic skiing technique at the time had a great deal to be desired, I knew the feeling they intended to chase that morning in the birch and hemlock forested hills above Ishpeming. You can recognize skiing big when you see someone classic skiing well in ideal conditions. Hips forward, our skier's ankles are flexed so that were the skier to abruptly stop in mid-stride, our skier would surely fall on his or her face; but our skier is in fact the embodiment of balance and strength, and is certainly not going to fall, passing through the seamless progression of motion that is skiing big. You will note several other characteristics occurring virtually simultaneously: the knee above the glide ski will be slightly bent and driving straight up the track as the poling arm follows through behind; the opposite, now trailing ski will lift out of the track behind as the poling arm reaches forward in anticipation of the next pole plant. The kick, alternating between skis, will be firmly set, followed by a bright and powerful spring forward that initiates that knee aggressively driving forward up the track, the poling arm following through behind.

Besides the natural beauty that typically prevails along ski trails, skiing big is, to my way of thinking, the most beautiful sight one encounters while skiing. I have paused in awe to watch it on two continents, in skiers young and old, male or female, and felt the urgent need to praise it, wishing always to emulate it because, frankly such beauty is all too rare in a world of “stick walkers.” – *Continued at the end of the newsletter following the Ski Curmudgeon.*

## **One Problem with Skate Skiing: It's Hard**

For a take which varies slightly from Professor Axelrod's “Skiing Big” see this

New York Times article:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/travel/one-problem-with-skate-skiing-its-hard.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/travel/one-problem-with-skate-skiing-its-hard.html?_r=2)

## **Black Jack Ski Club – an Overview**

Last season (2013-2014) was the first time my wife (Eli) and I tried skate skiing anywhere other than Schweitzer. One of the venues we tried was the Black Jack Ski Club, just 3 km north of Rossland, BC, a city which is about a 3 hour drive from Sandpoint. This article presents an overview with no emphasis on trail details.

Although right across the highway from the 4200 acres of alpine ski terrain available at Red Mountain Resort, Black Jack is a separate entity, operated by a club of slightly over 700 (yikes!) members. It is claimed that 1/6 of nearby Rossland's population are club members. The club's independence from any profit driven corporation and a budget provided by its large membership give Black Jack advantages our club cannot yet imagine. It incorporated as a nonprofit in 1983 and has successfully attracted grant monies over the intervening years. It has a detailed 5-year plan which makes interesting reading.

Black Jack provides 30 to 40 km. of groomed trails meandering over 1,360 acres. The club acts as steward of the property which has pieces belonging to three separate owners, the City of Rossland, the Ministry of Forests, and the Beaumont Timber Company. The club itself owns 20 acres at the trailhead. Some of the features worth mentioning are

- a ski loop dedicated to those wishing to bring their dogs
- no snow bike infestation, “for insurance reasons”



- a 2.5 km lighted loop for night skiing
- a trailhead cabin and two trailside warming huts
- even a biathlon range (but don't try to bring your gun across the border)

The area has an active schedule for instruction and participation starting with the very young and continuing through training regimens for adults. Provincial and national competitions take place here. The Black Jack web site is quite informative, tracking all events, giving timely reports on grooming conditions, etc.

The scenic terrain ranges from easy (~25%) to challenging, certainly something for everybody. The base elevation is about 3700 feet, with the biathlon course and related trails higher. Groomers include 2 Pisten Bullys and 2 snowmobile driven Ginzu groomers. When we visited, it was during a warmish spell so early morning trails could be icy and, depending on exposure, become mushy by midafternoon. Interestingly, the 5-year plan mentions the possibility of moving to higher terrain if global warming adversely affects the present site.

The warmish weather we experienced was somewhat atypical and we expect to return to better conditions on our next visit. Even as it was, we had a great time. Despite an elevation lower than Schweitzer, it is high enough to deliver cool weather with good snow. Run by nordic skiers, grooming is of highest priority. With Rossland and Red Mountain nearby, lodging and places to eat are plentiful. There may be a vibrant night life, but with a 7:39 PM bedtime for elders, we wouldn't know.

Those contemplating a visit to Black Jack should consider at least two factors:

- the current weather forecasts

- any scheduled competitions or other events which might monopolize the facilities

### References:

Black Jack Ski Club web site: <http://www.skiblackjack.ca/>

City of Rossland: <http://tourismrossland.com/splash> – *Richard Sevenich*

## **University of Idaho Extension Property**

Have you ever wished there were a place to ski that would be easy to get to? One with trails for beginners? Close to home so you wouldn't spend an hour of travel time to get a quick workout? Ski U of I!

Talk about convenient, IT'S RIGHT IN TOWN! But the snow comes and goes so get it when you can!

Actual grooming depends on conditions but typically you should find a long outer loop of about 1.3m/2.1/k plus inner trails of varying lengths. The trails are groomed by SNC and all donations help with the equipment and fuel expenses.

Access is from the parking lot at 2105 North Boyer Avenue in Sandpoint. Use this link to download a printable map:

<http://www.sandpointnordic.com/uploads/2/2/7/3/2273094/uofimappost130214.pdf>

Dogs are allowed but one of the few restrictions U of I has set is that we clean up after those dogs. Please help us keep this location open! – *Bob Love*

**Need advice? Ask the Ski Curmudgeon!**

Dear Ski Curmudgeon,

Cross country skiing causes a couple of big problems for me. At first everything is OK but after a mile or two the discomfort builds up and I just can't continue. My friends say it's called "Nordic Nipple." What can I do? Chest Pains

Dear Chesty,

Very funny, Princess. I recognized your email address. You may think this topic makes me uncomfortable or that there might be some humor in it, but I think it is a serious issue. In a long duration, repetitive activity like XC skiing, chafing might be a problem for any of us. There are two things to consider. First, your clothing should fit properly. Not too loose, not too tight. Try something different and see if it helps. Second, moisture is the enemy. Sweat, no, I mean perspiration, and friction aggravate the skin. No, no, I know that you don't perspire but perhaps your camelback leaked. Yes, that must be it. For people like me who do sweat, be careful with your layering. Don't let the moisture build up. SC

Dear Ski Curmudgeon,

I have never owned my own equipment, but have classic skied for years. I have seen others skate skiing and think I'd like to try that too. If I buy my own equipment, can I use the same equipment for both? Frugal

Dear Frugal,

You can use the same equipment for both techniques, but you're most likely not going to like it. If you do one or the other for extended periods, it may be

tolerable, but switching back and forth can be a major pain due to the wax issue. The grip wax you apply under your foot for classic needs to be removed for skating, then re-applied for classic. Also, classic boots tend to have a flexible sole while skate boots are stiffer with more ankle support. Classic pole heights extend between the armpit and shoulder, while skate poles are longer often reaching to the lower tip of the nose. Best advice, attend ski swaps in the fall and look for closeout deals in the spring. If you're even somewhat serious about the sport, shake the cobwebs out of your wallet! SC

Dear Ski Curmudgeon,

I'm an alpine skier, thinking of converting part time to nordic, what's the best way to dress for X-C? Styling

Dear Styling,

If you're comfortable when you start out, you're probably overdressed. Dressing in alpine clothes may turn heads in the village, but will cause a major sweat fest the first trip up Dammit Hill. The secret is layers, layers, layers. Start with a moisture wicking material as a first layer, then a light weight zip-t or smart wool and a light jacket or shell. A thin vest can be added under the jacket if it's really cold. Wind briefs, light weight ski pants and warm moisture wicking socks are a must. Round out your ensemble with a stylish nordic ski hat (available from Sandpoint Nordic Club) and warm flexible gloves or mitts. If you become a total nordic junkie, a buff can come in handy for the those rare polar vortex days. Don't forget your fanny pack (with water) or camelback. SC

Send your question for the Ski Curmudgeon to [sandpointnordic@gmail.com](mailto:sandpointnordic@gmail.com)  
The views expressed by the Ski Curmudgeon are his own and hardly ever reflect the views of the SNC.

## Skiing Big (the conclusion)

All right, I said it, that terrible epithet used by melancholic classic skiers to describe that ubiquitous form of Nordic skiing that results from two gross misconceptions about skiing and skis. First, the totally asinine claim that if you can walk then you can classic ski; and second, that no-wax are a solution to the mystifying complexity of kick waxing. Sure, if you can walk you can also walk on skis, but why bother? As for no-wax skis, all I can say is “argh!” Skiing is, essentially, maximizing glide. No-wax skis don’t glide and therefore necessitate stick walking. [Nota bene: sure there are now so-called zero skis that do glide, but the point is that if you are inclined to buy a pair of zero skis, you probably already know everything about skiing big, viz., how to maximize glide. Further: “zero” tells the tale. Zero skis really only work around zero degrees celsius. Owning and using a pair is an acknowledgment that you would prefer to classic ski on waxable skis, except in the cheerless temperature range around freezing.]

You might say that the perception of classic skiing being awful is a clear case of the medium very much being the message. Classic skiing is slow, trudging and boring (the message), but only because no-wax skis (the medium) don’t glide. It’s pretty much as simple as that. This perception of classic skiing has pretty much torpedoed the popularity of Nordic skiing generally, and has led to the perception that skate skiing is a much cooler preference; that is, if one is even considering Nordic skiing an option.

Another sad truth about no-wax skis is that they were originally little more than a marketing ploy to try to get more people involved in the sport when the sport enjoyed its first moment of American popularity during Bill Koch’s 15 minutes of fame on the World Cup. Lacking anything like a ski culture from which to derive knowledge about skiing, no-wax skis were the denatured alternative. You didn’t have to know much else than how to walk and that skis work best on snow. I remember the time well, and purchased my own first set of skis, Jofa no-wax skis (including boots and bamboo poles) for the unimaginable price of \$119

+ 4% sales tax. I was happy enough then in my wool knickers, argyle socks, and Pendleton wool shirt, stick walking through the woods with my Millet rucksack on my back, imagining myself some kind of Romantic Lieutenant Glahn wandering the boreal forests of the Nordland in a Knut Hamsun novel, searching for a glimpse of the lovely Edvarda. Happy enough, that is, until the time I saw skiers on waxable classic skis zip past me on a single track and disappear into the forest. That group of three skiers seemed so . . . so beautiful. They were definitely skiing big.

The great Russian Modernist composer, Igor Stravinsky, commented famously that “taste is a moral category”; that is, preferences have values, and some preferences are better or more valuable, in the nature of things, than others. For example, Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden,” that heart-rending portrayal of early death, with its urgency and despair, breathtaking shifts from fortissimo to pianissimo and back is, according to this critical criterion, a far superior preference to the Star Wars soundtrack, which is, if you haven’t heard, a palaverous schmear of mock-heroic twaddle. To prefer the latter to the former is, and this friends is a bitter pill to swallow, a moral failure. Of course Stravinsky was talking about music or more generally art. Certainly he wasn’t interested in applying his critical criterion to Nordic skiing. But if you think about it for maybe three seconds, you will probably sense where this is going. Skiing big on classic skis is, aesthetically speaking, Nordic skiing at its absolute finest. It is a condition to aspire to. An idealization of human potential for beauty. Or you might say: a preference for classic skiing is a moral category superior to an exclusive preference for skate skiing.

There. I said it.

Don’t get me wrong here. I skate ski all the time. Or at least some of the time. And when the conditions are right, say, old transformed snow, boilerplate, under bluebird skies, with just a micron of moisture making the snow slightly “greasy,” and each stride on the flats is 60 feet of silky glide, then all I can say is that

today is a good day to skate ski on stiff skis. And one feels kind of patriotic about it, I guess, given that Americans sort of invented skating, despite the fact that, as Ben Husaby once sagely pointed out, “there was skating long before there was ‘skating.’” The invention of skating was, however, an act of desperation and impatience in less than ideal snow conditions. Classic skiing, if it demands anything, demands formal calm and patience, even in less than ideal snow conditions. A quick analysis of cultural interpretations of these paired characteristics results in our being forced to admit that only one of these pairs is considered a virtuous pairing. That virtue attaches itself to classic skiing is really no surprise and is basically the thesis of this essay.

The problem with skate skiing is aesthetic: skate skiing is ugly to watch. Or to put it in an even more devastating way: our own skate skiing is beautiful, but only in our own imaginations. It really doesn't matter if we are talking about mere mortals like ourselves or professional skiers. I love watching Bjorgen and Randell go head to head in a skate sprint in Davos, but when I see, on another day, the pack of Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, Ruskis, and the rest classic striding side by side up a steep hill, as focused as race horses in harness on the back stretch, there is a human beauty and excellence in play that the thrashing about of skate skiing will never achieve. Call that beauty and excellence what it is; i.e., skiing big.

A perfect example of what happens when one culture has a tradition of classic skiing and another prefers skating as its cultural default: One day last fall, during the women's WC relay in Lillehammer the conditions were atrocious. There was little snow in the run up to the weekend's events, then the day of the relay it snowed a foot during the race. I recall one classic leg in the race, when our beloved American skier Sadie Bjornson matched up against a young Finn, vying for a place on the podium. Bjornson held her own just fine, kudos to her, but she was clearly struggling at times. The Finn, however, was as smooth as precision clockwork in what were conditions that would have sent us all to the lodge to reconsider our ridiculous affection for Nordic skiing. If you find it on-line,

watch it and compare the classic legs to the skate legs. You'll see what Stravinsky meant about taste being a moral category. On such a day, the natural preference is for classic skiing. Or vacationing in the Azores.

That same ideal bluebird day for skate skiing is of course also a great day to classic ski with a blue klister binder (ironed in) and covered with Rode Multigrade. That combination would deliver what is referred to affectionately and variously as “bomber,” “dialed in,” or “bullet-proof” kick, followed by giddy laughter when the skier realizes that not only is the kick superb, but the skis “are free.” Here, though, we encounter another huge problem. Waxing. The *raison d'être* for no-wax skis, and the source of so much untruth. Waxing for kick seems arcane, if not an outright occult practice, and reason enough to avoid classic skiing altogether. I'm better at waxing, much better, than I used to be 20 years ago, but there are still those days when for whatever reason I miss the wax and basically disappoint my wife who has complete, if completely misguided, faith in me to get it right. Twice last winter I embarrassed myself as regards kick waxing (and O! that it were kick waxing alone by which I embarrass myself). And it's true that among a certain class of skiers, call them Masters-level skiers, who treat waxing like a secret knowledge that must be guarded and never under any circumstances shared, and besides, tough s\*\*t, these future Olympians in their minds only would tell you, it's a dog eat dog world, and to the winner goes the spoils. Well, not to put too fine a point on it, that's a lot of a\*\*holery, and we can dismiss it as such. I'm not going to otherwise reassure you that you can experience skiing big without a thoroughgoing knowledge of what waxes work in what conditions, but really, if you have the capacity to afford the wildly expensive skis you skate ski on, you probably possess an equal capacity to read and understand the very straightforward Swix wax guide. Or you can use the brainless on-line Wax Wizard. Wax recommendations for races, too, are posted on the Internet. These recommendations are often very detailed, and so one can easily extrapolate from these many sources of information the finer points of how humidity, texture, temperature, and age of snow effect kick and glide, and the durability of each. Such knowledge will someday soon allow you to know in your



bones the beauties of skiing big.

Someday. Maybe soon. That's the rub. Here's a melancholy fact, or at least I often repeat it as though it were fact: skate skiing is hard to learn but easy to master; classic skiing is easy to learn but hard to master. Classic skiing is, therefore, at least to a certain kind of sensibility, preferable because of its technical demands and the truly aesthetic excellence of those who master it. Here is another "fact," though the scare quotes should alert you that I'm skeptical: in the end, one skates no better than one classic skis. A reasonably competent classic skier covers similar terrain only a little slower than the same skater. Sometimes, over great distances such as in the Birkie, the good classic skier is faster than many skaters in the earlier waves whose technique has fallen to pieces. Or perhaps the better way of saying this is that specialization in your preference is a whole other can of maggots, and you don't have to take my word for it. You can easily name the WC Nordic skiers who struggle to overcome their (almost inevitable) specialization in skate skiing. They report that they and their coaches are "working hard" to improve their classic technique. It's bogus to compare our preferences to WC skiers and their specializations, but think about it: the skiers who win the overall WC, Weltmeister und Weltmeisterin, can both sprint and ski distances, and are able to win races or at least win significant points in either skate or classic technique. Could it be that being an all-round skier makes you a better skier? Short answer: yes.

We classic skiers, fair weather skaters that we are, probably deserve the dread label: conservative. Or worse: orthodox. Conceivably even a bunch of Luddites. Traditionalists. Yes, ski curmudgeons. Afflicted by the hypochondria of the heart; i.e., afflicted by nostalgia. Always longing for a home that no longer exists. Soon perhaps we will all be similarly longing, when snow is little more than an inaccessible dusting, a rumor of something fantastic on a high mountain ridge. In such circumstances, we will be melancholics all, like Colonel Aureliano Buendía in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, who, as he faced the firing squad, "was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover

ice.”

It's coming on the dark of the old year now, the autumn sun retreating over the horizon to the south. The forecast is for cold and snow this week. Soon, in the canyons below the hogbacks west of our town where I prefer to classic ski, by 3:00 p.m. the snow will begin turning vermilion, alpenglow lifting skyward as the planet turns from the sun. Out there far away from town and people, a few wolves and mountain lions having crossed the ski trail, I will be striding across hardpack, kicking and gliding, silent but for the rhythmic huff of my lungs, small fists of frost forming in blue air before my face, each breath the privileged first and final sum of what this one life adds up to. Skiing big, if in my imagination only. I'm no longer young enough to boast that I could go on like that forever, into the twilight, my body glowing, triumphantly alive. Skiing big as my dear friends skied that beautiful morning long ago in Michigan.

When I am classic skiing, I am skiing home. That's how it feels, how I imagine it anyway, as though I've come back to my family's village, but how many lifetimes later? Is it the meager light? The long winter recurring in my own blood? Or the soft cry of elk calves calling the cows? The intimate steam rising above the somber herd, kneeling under the trees? Where is that village now, those shacks scattered at a forest's edge, the wagon-rutted lane disappearing at the ford, the place where all the older ones I never met are buried in a field? When I glance up again, the mountain will have moved closer, the snowy pines glowing more deeply red than I ever recall, etched against the high, violet distance, and the night of time arriving from far below. – *David Axelrod, Professor English/Writing, Eastern Oregon University*

Comments and suggestions for the newsletter may be sent to [sandpointnordic@gmail.com](mailto:sandpointnordic@gmail.com)

The Sandpoint Nordic Club is on Facebook at “Sandpoint Nordic Club” and online at [www.SandpointNordic.com](http://www.SandpointNordic.com)

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