

1973-2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“Covering a 100 Kilometre Cross-Country Ski Tour in 1979”

Story shared by by Ann Deveau

I grew up in southwestern Nova Scotia, affectionately known as the Banana Belt for its mild winters. When I moved to Ottawa to study journalism at Carleton University, it felt like Siberia. I bought sturdy boots and a heavy wool parka with a quilted lining and a fur-trimmed hood.

Darn good thing. I definitely needed that warm coat later in New Brunswick when, as an Atlantic Television reporter, I was sent to cover a two-day, 110-kilometre, cross-country ski tour in minus 20-degree weather with brisk northwest winds. I'm unsure whether the temperature was given in Fahrenheit or Celsius in 1979, but it was dangerously cold either way.

ATV camera operator Bernie Mulhern, now a retired community college instructor, immediately recalled the assignment when shown the video footage he shot that long-ago winter.

“It was soooooo cold!!!,” he said, remembering problems he had with rapidly-draining equipment batteries.

“The severe weather made it the most challenging assignment I ever had, but the drive and endurance of the skiers inspired me.”

My own memories of that weekend are as sharp as the frigid air. I can't say as much for other assignments of that era: provincial elections, labour strife, sporting events, floods, forest fires. Details have blurred over four decades.

I tried to keep my teeth from chattering in the freezing cold and bitter wind as I interviewed intrepid skiers and volunteers from the ski patrol. I was incredulous that 550 people aged four to 66 could find a ski marathon fun (fun?!). In my mind, it was beyond challenging. They stubbornly faced down the bone-chilling cold, howling winds on Howland Ridge, glare ice on the Mactaquac Headpond, threats of (and actual) frostbite, rugged terrain, and muscle-aching weariness.

I had so much admiration for the people who even attempted the long journey and especially for those who somehow managed to complete the entire, gruelling route. They were such determined and hardy folks, nothing like a bundled-up, non-skiing wimp from the Banana Belt.