

1973-2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“Jackrabbits 30 Years Ago”

Story shared by Marc and Bobbi Milner

When our boys started the Jackabbits program Rita Monteith was running it out of the lodge at Odell Park. Her daughter had completed the program and Rita wanted out. So Bobbi and I took it over in 1991 and ran it for five years.

As those who run the Jackrabbits know well, the program makes for a busy winter. We typically had 60-80 kids registered, organized into groups by age and ability from beginners to those ready to leave the nest and take on the Fraser Cup. Volunteer instructors, many of them new to the sport and all of them parents of kids involved, led each group. Teaching beginners the Monkey Walk or falling down and getting up was something even novice skiers could do. But Cross Country NB put on a number of clinics over the years to help us out with advanced techniques. The most memorable for us was the skating lesson at the Fredericton Golf and Country Club. Skating was new in the early 1990s (at least here!). It was not easy to learn on long, wide wooden skis, with short wooden poles, three-pin bindings and those low-cut flimsy boots. Our instructors that day were a very fit young couple equipped with the new SNS bindings and boots, long poles and a very short pair of thin skis that looked like unstrung bows. We watched them zip around, and then thrashed our way along trying to do it, too. It might have gone better, especially the uphill part, had it not been raining.

Then, as now, last minute cancellations were a great challenge – and disappointment. There was no internet to watch the radar and track the weather: you just listened to the CBC or called the weatherman at the airport. And no cell phones and social media either to stay in immediate touch with parents. Each group leader had a phone list and tried to reach everyone. We also had an arrangement with a local commercial radio station to announce cancellations on days when it was too icy, too mild, too cold or when there was a storm. “Too much snow to ski, eh?” the radio dude often chided us. Yup.

The Odell Park keeper, Monty, was a great help. He was often out early on Saturday morning setting track for us around in front of the lodge, around the broccoli tree – now lost to a storm – and along the path between Smythe Street and Hanwell Road. Trails up through the park, used by the advanced groups, were set as well. The morning routine began with loading kids, skis, poles, extra clothing, the clip boards with group names, badges (if they were to be awarded), and the big urns for the hot chocolate into our van. On the way in we picked-up the obligatory Tim Bits. If it was too cold, we all huddled in the lodge until the temperature rose enough to send everyone out. Many parents stayed to learn and to help. There were always skis to wax, mittens and poles to put on: Dads, hovering by the door, usually did that. The Mums, who ran the lodge, did a fabulous job: hands and feet to warm, noses to blow, wet mittens to dry out and tears to wipe. They served the hot chocolate and the Tim Bits, and then did a great job shooing the kids back

out into the snow. Our parents and volunteers were a wonderful group. They were instrumental in organizing and running a series of Provincial Jackrabbit Fundays, with races and games in the snow for anyone from around the province who wanted to come.

By noon everyone was exhausted – except for me! I stood around in my skiing gear, managing things around the lodge and chaffing at the bit, while my family skied their hearts out. Fortunately, we were all young and the ski day had only just begun. The biggest question after Jackrabbits was often, “Where to next?” – Lindsey Valley if they had snow; bushwhacking off the Hanwell Road around Tower Lake; the Mountain Trail (if the senior skiers had set the track); or maybe Mount Hope and an afternoon on the Hadley’s trails? As our kids aged and collected all their badges we moved on, too. In 1995 we passed the torch to Kevin Percy and his young family.