

1973 - 2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“The Great Quinzhee: A Winter Camping Adventure”

Story shared by Jane Hadley

In the winter of 2009, a group of skiers who had completed Jackrabbits still wanted to ski together on Saturday mornings. Antoine Arcand and I led this group, which ranged in age from 9 to 14. At that time lessons were held at Odell Park. After exploring the park trails on several Saturdays, we thought it was time to offer a different experience and challenge for the skiers. We suggested a two-day winter camping trip and the skiers enthusiastically agreed.

We chose a route, and on a Saturday morning parents drove skiers out Highway 10 to a location basically in the middle of nowhere. I knew that by following logging roads, a section of pipeline, and forest trails, we would get to Mount Hope.

John Ball, Felix Schwarz, Antoine and I set off with a group of 10 skiers, (Lucy Miller, Sam Phillips, Luisa Schwarz, Evelyn Martin, Brook Martin, Jack Ball, Peter Ball, Antonio Molina, Kevin Watmough, and Cameron Haigh) for the 13 km trek. A lunch stop, plus snacks and fresh strawberries on a section of trail Eric and I called Strawberry Lane for its abundance of wild strawberries, kept everyone energized.

By mid-afternoon, skiers arrived at our home where they were to build and sleep in snow houses called quinzhees. Quinzhees are built by piling up a mound of snow, letting it harden and digging out the interior. To save time, Eric had used the snow-blower earlier in the week to pile up two large mounds. Unfortunately, the snow had become so hard that it was almost impossible to dig. Parents were enlisted to help and after several exhausting hours of chopping and shovelling, the interiors of two snow houses were ready for occupation.

Having earned a time of rest and warmth, everyone gathered in our house for hot chocolate and a warm meal provided by the parents. Then the skiers entertained us with their talents on the piano – an impromptu concert! Next they played hide n’ seek, finding bizarre hiding places in our house. Finally it was off to the quinzhees for the night. Antoine slept in the quinzhee with some of the boys, but I opted for the comfort of my own bed in the house.

In the morning it appeared everyone had slept reasonably well, though one person abandoned the quinzhee and finished the night inside on a couch. After eating breakfast and packing gear, the skiers set off on the final 9 km route to a location along the Penniac Road where parents would meet them.

An icy slope on the trail caused one of the lead skiers to slide out of control down the wooded hillside. There were a few scrapes, but no serious injuries, and everyone was smiling and eager to relate their adventures to the waiting parents.

Fourteen years later, the young skiers are all in the 20s and have fond memories of the weekend. Brook recalls “a group of super awesome kids, no competition, just enjoying skiing, being outside and enjoying each other’s company. The trip made me really fall in love with cross-country skiing.” For Peter, “What I remember most from that trip is the sense of freedom. I realized that my skis could unlock not just exercise but grand adventures, intrepid excursions into the unknown,

basically the central priorities of a nine-year-old. A bite of black licorice, the Hadleys' magical house in the woods, and a climactic scramble down a steep icy bank all left deep impressions on me.”