

A HISTORY OF THE NORTH OKANAGAN CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLUBS
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOVEREIGN LAKE SKI AREA
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In the early 1970's there was a great increase in interest in cross-country skiing, starting in Ontario and Quebec. In 1974, the North Okanagan Cross Country Ski Club was formed under charter president Keith Brewis, who continued to guide its activities for several years.

Early development at Sovereign Lake

Gradually a plan evolved to create a cross-country ski area in the ideal country near Sovereign lake. This was not a new area for many of the older skiers, for the Lake was the site of the old Silver Star Ski Club cabin. This was the centre of ski activities on the mountain during the period from 1938 to 1958. When the new development started in 1958, skiing interest shifted to "downhill" and cross-country or ski touring, for the moment, fell into disuse. The first trails cleared by the Club were narrow and primitive by today's standards. By 1978, however, planning began in earnest. The Ministry of Parks developed a master plan and undertook overall responsibility for the development of the Recreation area and the ski trails. Park planners at Kamloops worked closely with ski club members to plan new trails and improve the old ones. When a new trail received approval from B.C. Parks, club volunteers went to work cutting the new routes. In addition to its volunteer work, the club sponsored several Federal-Provincial work projects which speeded up the trail development. In the meantime, B.C. Parks created two parking lots, one for snowmobiles and one for cross-country skiers.

The middle years

The area proved to be popular right from the start, and the increase in skiers caused a steady expansion of the trail system. In 1983 the Recreation Council of B.C. sponsored a major project, during which the first warming hut was built. There were no work grants available in 1984 and 1985 but the ski club undertook construction of a major trail to the summit, now called the Aberdeen trail. Over 2000 hours of volunteer work in two years was expended to finish this section. The Jobtrac program in 1987 resulted in the completion of Centre Star (now Lars Taylor) and Gold mountain trails.

During 1986 and 1987 a start was made on a trail system west of Sovereign Lake. Its purpose was to provide a challenging group of trails suitable for racing and training separate from the main recreation area. It was completed in the fall of 1988 when Parks undertook major upgrading of existing trails and the completion of racing loops. Parks also built a beautiful log cabin warming hut near the junction of several main trails in 1988.

The development of the 45 K complex has taken several years and a great deal of work but the results are most gratifying. Ski club members have spent over 10,000 volunteer hours plus five Fed.-Prov. work grants and major expenditure by Parks in 1988 to bring this trail system into one of the finest cross-country ski areas in Western Canada.

Recent Activities

In 1989, the club was informed that in keeping with government policy the Sovereign Lake area would be required to be self supporting on a user pay basis. The club was offered the opportunity to operate the area. As the lead time was too short for the 1989-90 season, Parks carried out the maintenance for that year. Preparation was in high gear in 1990. A contract was signed and a committee or operating arm of the Club was formed under the very able leadership of Ed Devlin.

The Club acquired a twin-trac snowmobile in 1990 and in 1991 a PB170 groomer was purchased. Because the first season was so successful, the Club was able to expand the parking lot by 40 per cent.

In the Summer of 1990 the new administration cabin and ticket office was built with many hours of volunteer labor.

The Club sponsored a World Cup in conjunction with Silver Star Resort in 1991. Over two hundred Club members held key positions in this event which has been acclaimed as one of the best ever by the International Ski Federation.