

Revelstoke Nordic Ski Club

All across Canada this week, communities are celebrating National Volunteer Week. In Revelstoke, it is the 'kick-off' for a year long campaign to promote volunteerism in our community.

Revelstoke has a strong history of volunteerism. Volunteers represent one of the strongest threads that tie a community together. In face of the many changes happening in Revelstoke today and in the near future, continuing citizen participation in community organizations and events will help keep our town the friendly, happening place its residents know and love.

The many hundreds of people who enjoy skiing at the Mt. Macpherson cross-country area will fully appreciate this month's 'Volunteers of the month' - the men who voluntarily groom those beautiful ski trails – Brian Ahear, Allan McInnes and Mickey Olson. What a team!



MICKEY OLSON & ALLAN MCINNES

This winter over 6 meters of snow fell in the Mt. Macpherson area. The Nordic ski season had 125 days. The 21 km of trails were groomed 48 times, with a total of 205 hours on the machine. Depending on snowfall, it takes 2.5 to 4 hours to groom the trails each time. Last season (06/07) had an earlier start. The trails were groomed 56 times with a total of 225 hours. Brian, Al, and Mickey also use the machine to plow the parking lot (3/4 hour) and spend about 150 hours per season doing regular maintenance and safety checks on the groomer itself.

If any trees are blown over the trails, they take care of it. Preparing for the club's 2 lantern ski events are also a team effort, with a few days preparation for each event. In spring it takes 3 or 4 days of work to put the machine 'to bed' for the summer.

As well, every summer, Brian, Al and Mickey (along with other volunteers from the club), spend many hours brushing and widening the trails, falling trees, putting in and cleaning out drainage culverts, and building new roads and ski trails. Often, Al's wife Evelyn works at his side. This summer there are plans to extend the 3.7 km 'Mickey Olson' loop to 5 km, which will allow the club to hold future Nordic ski races.

A couple of years ago, the Nordic ski club collated the number of hours their volunteers contribute. The total was 3000 hours, with the work Brian, Al and Mickey do for the club representing an incredible 2000 of those hours. Whereas Al and Mickey are long-retired, Brian volunteers on days off work and takes his holidays in the winter to enable his contribution.

The three emphasize the cooperation the club has had over the years from the local Ministry of Forests folks and citizens like Gary Schiller and Dan Boltwood who freely offer heavy-duty equipment when needed. The club also gets consistent technical support from Prinoth/Bombardier, from whom they purchased the grooming machine.

All three have a long history of participation in the ski industry and are avid Nordic skiers. Both Allan and Mickey were ski jumpers, spent many hours on Mt. Revelstoke, and knew its terrain well. Al remembers cutting the 5 km loop on Mt. Revelstoke with a chainsaw and a couple of buddies. In winter, folks would pack the trail with snowshoes!

Brian has been involved in the development of Nordic skiing in the Revelstoke area since 1978, also when skiing was across the valley on Mt. Revelstoke. By this time, the track was set with a snowmobile pulling a tracksetter. It took 5 hours to groom the 5 km loop in this way. Today, Al still uses this system to groom Nordic trails down on the flats and other places around Revelstoke.

In 1983, Revelstoke hosted the BC Winter Games. The high level of volunteerism necessary to host the games took its toll and for a few years afterwards Nordic tracksetting was left to individual skiers.

However, enthusiasm renewed around 1988. At that time, Parks Canada was reluctant to widen the 5 km loop to accommodate machine grooming. With the Mt. Macpherson area in mind, Brian and a couple other fellow skiers approached Peter Frew, at the Ministry of Forests office, who was very supportive. The old logging roads on Mt. Macpherson were perfect for winter ski trails. In the early 1950's, Mickey worked for Al's father's logging company, driving truck and hauling logs out of the Macpherson area. Mickey joined Brian on the trail maintenance team in 1990 and Al in the late 1990's.

Since the mid-1990's, the Revelstoke Nordic Ski Club has been able to enhance local Nordic skiing through gradually improving the grooming equipment as well as the hard work and dedication many volunteers like Brian, Al and Mickey. Its membership has gone from around 50 people in the early 1990's to almost 350 people this season. There is no paid staff. The high level of volunteerism keeps trail fees affordable for all.

Brian, Al and Mickey have learned skills from each other and on the job. Their success stems from love of the sport and their ability to work as a team. A sense of satisfaction comes from making people happy - the smiles and waves they get when they come upon skiers on the trail. Mickey laughs, "you don't get that in a real job!"

For more information on volunteering in Revelstoke, call the Community Centre at 837-9351.

Submitted by Jill Zacharias, Photo courtesy of Cathy Burke, CFDC Volunteer Committee members