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Inclined to ski all year

By Cornell Fowler

Nobody has quite figured out how the tempestuous Bonnie and Clyde evaded a 100-man posse after being pinned down in Dexter back in 1933.

"I bet they were wearing grass skis," theorizes Kathy Claar. Maybe.

Claar and her husband, Dan, own the Raccoon River Ski Resort at the rural Dexter site where Bonnie and Clyde dodged a flurry of bullets and G-man Melvin Purvis. Clyde's brother, Marvin, was wounded and apprehended.

What all this has to do with grass skiing will remain a mystery.

Grass skiing is another sport craze that started in California a few summers ago. There's not much snow in Southern California, but leave it to the Angelenos to come up with a new pastime. "Hey, like wow, man, farrrr out."

The sport caught on in Colorado and other ski states as a way to ease the pain of skier withdrawal when the snow melted. And even the Texans are doing it now.

Well, next week, grass skiing comes to central Iowa, and not a moment too soon. The Claars will open their 18-acre resort for the first time during the summer months — as Iowa's only sanctioned grass skiing resort.

With only one obvious deviation from snow skiing — i.e. no snow — there isn't much difference in grass skiing. The skier is bedecked in basically the same equipment — two skis, boots, poles and gloves — and is pulled by a tow rope to the top of one of Raccoon River's seven hills (one beginner, three intermediate and three expert).

By employing a little imagination, grass skiing can look about the same as snow skiing. There is only one real difference in technique — the skier has to turn uphill to stop. Other than that, it's the same.

Grass skis are shorter than snow skis and have a caterpillar tread, much like the ones that propel tanks and snowmobiles. The tread keeps grass from getting snagged under the ski and also enables the skier to pick up about the same speed as a snow skier.

Kathy Claar says grass skiing is fun, athletically challenging and practically injury-

proof because all spills are onto a soft ground. Kathy demonstrated the proper falling technique a few times last week.

"I started about two years ago, and it's been fun every time," says Kathy. "It's something different to do in the summer."

Aside from being an increasingly popular summer sport, grass skiing is said to be the perfect off-season diversion for serious snow skiers.

"It's uses the same muscles and it's the same technique," Kathy says, backed up by Tracy Garwood, the official grass ski instructor for the summer. "Of course, a lot

of people get into grass skiing because it's something a crazy person would love doing."

The resort will be open daily from about noon until 9 p.m. Kathy says, but partyers can arrange to have the lights turned on and the course open until 3 a.m.

Free lessons are provided.

"We're trying for a party atmosphere," Dan says. "We have a hog roaster and we're trying to get a beer permit."

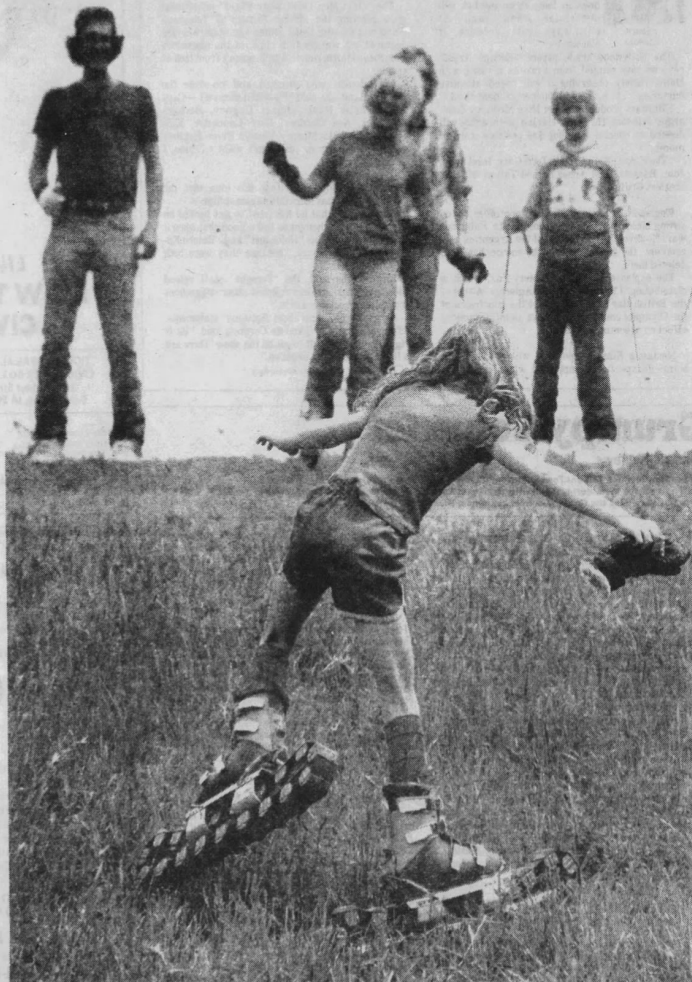
If anything beats grass skiing, it's probably grass skiing while under the influence.

The rate is \$3 for the first hour, \$2 for the second, and \$1 for each hour thereafter. That includes equipment rental and use of the rope tow. Dan heartily recommends that beginners wear long pants for their first bout with the slopes. The resort can accommodate about 30 skiers at a time. Refreshments are available at the lodge.

For those who really take this sport seriously, there are a bunch of tournaments planned nationally, according to Grass Ski Newsletter. None are planned at Dexter for right now, but if they have one, we hear they're going to call it the "Clyde Barrow Memorial."



Grass skis, above, have a continuous belt of rollers and are about 2 feet long. At right, Kim Fosselman, 8, tries to herringbone up a hill.



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