

Engineer takes 'Ski Kansas' seriously

Lawrence

Those "Ski Kansas" posters aren't a joke to Walter Klammer.

The 50-year-old Kansas City engineer, who likes to think he is a distant relative of Austrian Olympic skier Franz Klammer, picked a hill in eastern Kansas a couple of years ago and went into the skiing business.

Klammer says there is a market for the sport in a state that some believe to be flat as a pancake. About 40 miles from Kansas City, Mo., and several miles down a gravel road off Kansas 10 lies the "Aspen" of Kansas — Mount Bleu.

The state's only natural ski area, which opened in the early 1960s, never turned a profit and Klammer bought it in 1975. He purchased some equipment at that time and leases about 15 acres and a building housing a ski lounge and restaurant.

Financing a ski area in Kansas may appeal to some, but bankers apparently are not among that group. Klammer said short-term financing for the area was just approved Friday and he has had to resort to borrowing on a second mortgage on his home.

Mount Bleu has a vertical drop of 230 feet and skiers use a tow rope. Only part of the 1,500-foot total run is open.

The area opened Saturday with "anywhere from nothing to maybe as much as a foot as base for snow we made back before Christmas," Klammer said. He said Sunday the seven artificial "snow guns," used during the weekend, had built the base from 6 inches to 1½ feet, with several inches powder and packed powder.

Since Klammer became involved in the operation he has not been able to stay open a full season because of financing problems. Last year, when the area was open from Jan. 15 to Feb. 21 he said between 1,000 and 1,300 persons skied Mount Bleu. He said to turn a profit the area would have to remain open for a longer period.