

Detroiters Pioneer Development of Virgin Skiing Slopes in State

"The best skiing to be found between Sun Valley and the Laurentian Mountains."

That is what some experienced ski enthusiasts term the gently rolling hills of Oswego County near Vanderbilt, Mich., which have been taken over by the Vanderbilt Ski Club. This 400-acre area which the club has leased presents all the ski conditions to be desired by the novice or the hardy veteran who can slalom and do the Christians Turn.

A group of 60 Detroiters has organized the club, which is only 240 miles from the city and nine miles north of Gaylord, in an effort to enjoy their favorite winter

sport without taking the time or expense to travel to Idaho, Quebec, New Hampshire or Lake Placid.

Don McLouth, of Detroit, is chiefly responsible for the club's inception. He invited a group of friends to his fishing camp on the Sturgeon River, near Vanderbilt, last winter. They found the slopes of Stone Mountain good for skiing and the snow conditions ideal. There was plenty of snow and little crust. So it was decided to form a non-profit ski club.

Other pioneer members of the group were Thorne (Mike) Murphy, Detroit broker, who has been skiing for 17 years, ever since he was a student at Yale; Alvan Macauley, Jr., state banking

commissioner; Langdon Hubbard, who has skied in Switzerland; Gordon Saunders and Dave Wallace, both of whom have enjoyed the sport at Sun Valley.

This winter a warming cabin was built on top of the hill, two ski trails were laid out through the woods, and a ski tow, the first in Michigan, was installed. The ski tow is in two 600-foot sections. It revolutionizes downhill skiing by more than doubling the enjoyment through elimination of the tiring climbs back to the top after each thrilling descent.

According to Murphy, one of the prime movers in the club, a person can do as much skiing in 30 minutes as he did in two hours under the old system. When he

wants to ascend the hill, he merely grabs onto a continuous rope that traverses a motor-driven drum. The rope hauls him back up to the top with no effort on his part. The Chrysler Corp. perfected this particular ski tow.

There are gentle slopes for beginners as well as steeper descents for experienced and daring sportsmen. A 300-yard slalom course, in which the skier descends over a zig-zag route between flags, and a steep 400-yard slope are available. Later, a small ski jump may be built but that is a secondary consideration in the club's plans.

Vanderbilt is located in the Michigan "snow belt," so there usually is a foot or more of snow available from December through

March. The snow is of the powder variety, with little crust, which makes it ideal for skiing. The snow often reaches a depth of two or three feet. Snow fences have been put up to keep the snow from blowing off the best slopes.

Vanderbilt, two miles east of the club, has a population of only 456 but this was swelled by 75 skiers from Detroit, Grosse Pointe and Birmingham who invaded the town over the New Year's Day week-end. There are only two small hotels in the town, each limited to 15 guests, so accommodations were at a premium. Fishing cabins and the Fontanelis Club were put into use. One hotel already plans a sizable addition.

Members of the club, whose roster is private and restricted, include George Booth, Roy Chapin, Jr., John and Charles Warren, Lewis L. Bredin, D. Dwight Douglas, Bill Yaw, Bradley Higbie, Henry B. Joy, Jr., the national skeet champion; John and Gari Strahan and Dick Jackson. Duane Stranahgn and Bill Knight, of Toledo, also have found the skiing good.

Murphy, however, envisions public skiing on the best slopes near Gaylord if the town and railroad co-operate.

The Vanderbilt development may be the forerunner of similar week-end treks to Michigan's snow belt.

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