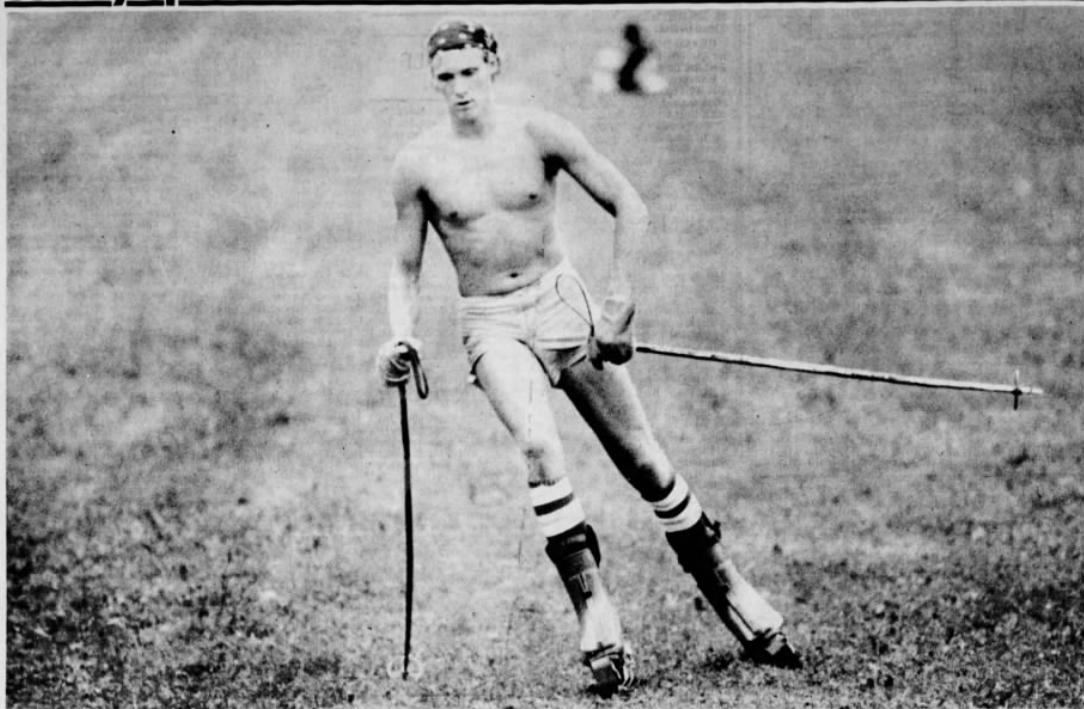


**Sunday Special**



THE RIGHT WAY — Mike Young shows his grass skiing form as he heads down the hill at the Black Forest Ski Area. The Times Herald - Steve Boerner

# Skiing on grass

Here's a way to beat summer's heat — and dream of winter

By RICK SCHEURMAN  
Times Herald Sportswriter

There was the whoosh of skiers whizzing down the slopes; there were people falling and ski poles flying in the air.

Skiing in August? In Port Huron, Mich. You better believe it.

The slopes at Black Forest Ski Area are already groomed, the tow ropes are running and people are zooming down the hills.

The only thing missing is snow, right? Not when you are grass skiing.

"We're the first one in Michigan to try it," said Dan Foster, Black Forest owner. "The other big ski centers will probably be watching us, and if it works they'll probably try it."

Foster opened the center to the public officially Friday and is hoping it catches on. "I tell people we're grass skiing here and they look and me like 'Oh yeah!'" Foster said. "We've got to get our feet wet first."

"If this gets going, we'll have a season in the spring and in the fall."

The principle behind grass skiing is fairly simple. It is a combination of roller skating and downhill snow skiing.

Instead of the flat snow ski, which most people are used to, there is a tread which revolves in a circular motion such as one on a bulldozer.

The tread, which is about two feet long, is attached to a regular snow ski boot.

"It's a European sport and it was in the United States first in the Carolinas I think," Foster said. "In Europe, they have almost an Olympics for it."

For those downhill skiers who think they will

be able to slip on a set of grass skis and fly down the slopes, Foster said you should think again.

"They're so used to sitting back on their skis. They can't do that with grass skiing. They're got to learn to change."

"After you do it a few times, you start getting comfortable," Foster said. "It will actually help the people who go into snow skiing because you will know what you are doing before the season starts."

One of the first-timers on the slopes was Vicky Taylor, who had cross-country skied before and lives in the apartments above the Black Forest ski lodge.

"We were watching at first from the window and my boyfriend said 'Come on, come on. It's fun,'" she said after coming off the beginner's hill. "I don't think I'm ready for the big one yet. I was scared at first, but the last time I felt pretty good."

Foster said grass skiing is good for beginners because the skis are short and not as clumsy as the longer downhill skis.

"I remember reading about grass skiing in a magazine and I couldn't believe it," said 11-year-old Mike Koob. "But here I am."

"My first day skiing, I went down that hill," he said, pointing to the beginner's hill, "and I went flip."

But Friday, Koob was mastering the larger hills.

"It's real fun," said Eric Jurysta, 14. "You just can't go down a couple times, fall and give up. You've got to keep trying."

The professional on the slopes opening day was Mike Young, an employee at Black Forest, who seemed to glide past everyone else.

"I've been practicing doing jumps," he said.

"It's a real workout. It helps strengthen the legs and ankles."

The skiing is a workout as the sweat on most of the skiers proved.

"Just make sure you wear shorts," Jurysta said. "It helps a lot."

Knee pads, heavy gloves, skis, boots, and poles are the required equipment for grass skiing, which Foster said is less hazardous than snow skiing.

"I know a guy in who owns a place in Canada who said in four years the only injury he has had was a broken thumb," Foster said. "I find that a little hard to believe, but there are not as many injuries as in snow skiing."

Black Forest, which is just west of Wadhams Road on Lapeer, is open for grass skiing Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. All the equipment needed can be rented in the ski lodge.

"All we've got to do is get people to know about it and they'll come," Foster said. "There is nothing better than word of mouth to get the word around."

About 25 to 30 people showed up for Friday's first sessions.

"As soon as the kids get back to school, we'll be busy," Foster said. "I figure the first week of school, we'll run right out of rentals."

The sport is already catching on in the U.S. "Grass Skiing, A Complete Beginner's Guide," has already been released.

Beech Mountain, N.C. one of the top grass skiing areas in the U.S., is ready to introduce helicopter grass skiing — the first in the world — where skiers will be lifted by helicopter to the top of the mountain.

"They have quite a set up there," Foster said.



GETTING READY — John Beauvais, 11, assembles his equipment as he prepares for an evening of grass skiing at the Black Forest Ski Area. The Times Herald - Steve Boerner