



Operator Ken Hansen

By Gene Raffensperger

FLATLAND Iowans in stretch pants, colorful windbreakers and yellow goggles are swooshing down ski slopes in increasing numbers this winter, and if they are leaving more than their share of sitz marks on the runs, who cares. Skiing, once thought to be the private sport of the Scandinavians or those Americans affluent enough to journey to Sun Valley,

Ida., has come to the midwest and now is within easy driving distance, especially for eastern Iowans.

There is a fine ski area at Decorah, another at Bunker Hill at Dubuque, a brand new Alpine setting at Chestnut Hills, Ill., southeast of Dubuque, small runs at Davenport's Duck Creek park and along the river hills in Illinois north of East Moline. At Chestnut Hills, for example, a brisk winter Saturday will find 400 skiers on the slopes—perhaps half of them

from Iowa, including Davenport, Clinton, Maquoketa, Dubuque, Waterloo, Oelwein, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City.

It's a good guess that 40 per cent of these Iowans are out for their first try, or at least their first season. If they don't have the equipment, they rent it. Then they line up for lessons, impatient to be off on flying boards. When they do take off on the beginner's slope you'll notice the hill pock-marked with sitz marks, a spot where a skier has taken a tumble. Occasionally you'll see what they call an "egg beater," a would-be skier going end over end, skis and poles flailing the air.

SOMETHING TO DO TOGETHER IN WINTER

Peter Huggler, a former Swiss Olympic skier, is an instructor at Chestnut Hill. "I was surprised that so many Iowa people were interested in skiing," says Huggler, "but really, they do very well."

Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Hunt of Clinton, while not typical of most Iowans in skiing experience, perhaps express the feeling that brings Iowans to the slopes: "We all have things to do with our families in the summer months; we want something to do together in the winter."

The Hunts both were born in Canada and ski very well. However, their two daughters do not and on a recent weekend Virginia Hunt, 10, was on skis for the first time.

Ken Hansen, 32, formerly in the construction business in Chicago, opened Chestnut Hills in partnership with Ron Jirik, 31. "I thought most of our business would come from Chicago," says Hansen. "I am really surprised at the number of Iowa people who come out."

SOME ARE JUST INDOOR SKIERS

Hansen pin-points three aspects of skiing that apparently attract Iowans: Skiing is a sport of style, it is invigorating, it is an activity where you meet kindred spirits on a snow slope, later know them better over a cup of coffee before a roaring fireplace.

No one could well deny that skiing is a sport of style. Of course one does not have to wear anything fancier than blue jeans. But stretch pants (\$35 average) come in greens, blues, lavender, topped by a matching sweater (\$30 average). Boots run to \$30—and so far you're not out of the lodge.

But it's a truism of skiing that some don't get out of the lodge. They are content to wear the uniform of the skier, clomp around in the heavy boots, and perhaps rough it by drinking coffee from a plastic cup while watching others leave their marks on the runs. But, as one observer asks, is this any different from the river fan who wears a yachting cap, and never leaves the dock, or the golfer who has the latest in slacks and polo shirt, and never gets away from the nineteenth hole?

No, as Hansen explains, skiing is also a sport of companionship, and the roaring fire and the group singing are part of it.



MAIN SLOPE at Chestnut Hills drops down toward the Mississippi, in distance. Poised at top is Donald Paxton, a freshman at Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport.

(Register Staff Photographer Maurice Rosen)