

Big Crowds Enjoy Iowa Ski Project

MOUNT VERNON (AP)—Iowa's newest ski area is attracting big crowds since January snows and cold weather transformed Palisades-Kepler State Park into a winter wonderland.

The area, which lies in the hills of the state park along the Cedar River four miles west of here, has operated through two weekends now. And Dr. G. E. Rahn, its chief promoter, says he's encouraged by public acceptance of it.

"We had about 150 skiers out last Sunday and quite a flock of spectators," Dr. Rahn said Thursday. "I doubt if we could handle many more than about 200 with the three runs we now have in use. But we think the number of skiers will grow."

Skiing as a sport is something of a novelty in Iowa. There's a ski area and jump at Decorah—operated jointly by the city and Luther College—but otherwise, Dr. Rahn's is the only ski area in Iowa.

Fulfills Dream

For the doctor, the ski area fulfills a dream he has had since 1945. He had the cooperation of the State Conservation Commission in establishing the runs in the park.

"I've been skiing since I was a kid but I got the bug seriously in Seattle around 1945," he said. "I interned there and skied all over the Pacific Northwest."

"I've saved data on costs and so forth ever since. I wanted to build some facilities near home, where I wouldn't have to travel so many miles to ski."

There actually are five trails in the Palisades-Kepler development, which Dr. Rahn and his associates call the "Ski-Pal Ski area."

However, only three are in use now. Dr. Rahn says one of the remaining two requires "intermediate" skiing skill and "has some nice turns in it" for those who will use it after it is opened. The other is what he called a "woodland dell trail" which will have to be cleaned out somewhat before it is usable.

An unseasonably warm December delayed the opening of the ski area and for a time it appeared there would be no skiing this winter. The doctor has acquired artificial snow-making equipment but the December weather was too warm to permit the snow to cling to the slopes.

Natural Element

Then came January, with heavy snows and a sharp cold spell. The "Ski-Pal Area" was in business, with natural instead of artificial snow.

"Ski-Pal" is open only on weekends—Friday night through Sunday—except for groups of 20 or more who want to use it on week-end evenings.

There are two "tows" to haul skiers from the bottom of the runs back to the top, and equipment can be rented on the spot. There's a charge of \$1.50 a day for the tow and the equipment rental is \$2.50.

If you need some lessons, four ski instructors are on call on Saturday and Sunday. Three are from Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. The other one comes in from 80 miles away.

In its first two weekends, Dr. Rahn said, skiers had come from as far away as Missouri, Keokuk, Muscatine and the Quad Cities. Anyone who wants to stay overnight can do so. There are 13 motels within a 10-minute drive from the slopes.

The runs, he said, would classify as either "beginner or intermediate" slopes, though to a novice they might appear rather difficult.

"But there's a nice atmosphere in the hills and a skier can have a good time," he added.

His enthusiasm is such that he likes to encourage people to try skiing. He said he plans to help promote the Decorah ski area too.