

Ski Area in Oklahoma Won't Wait for Snow

Swooshing down a snow-laden Oklahoma slope on skis sounds about as feasible as hooking a shark in the Arkansas River.

But Mr. and Mrs. Willis Barrows of Sapulpa are planning to match wits with nature and open the Snow Valley Ski Area in Kellyville some time in December.

They're not counting on a blizzard — they're going to create one whenever the mercury drops below 32.

Barrows, a skiing enthusiast since 1938, has been manufacturing snow 12 years and believes he can adapt the operation to Oklahoma's climate.

A FORMER instructor and ski area manager at Big Bear Lake, Calif., Barrows formerly spent seven years competing in the United States and Canada with the Austrian ski team. Before moving to California, he managed ski areas around his native Stowe, Vt.

With a background like that, his decision to come to Oklahoma seems unlikely — until his wife, Yvonne, explains.

"I'm very proud of the fact that I'm from Oklahoma," the Konawa-born woman said. It was during a visit to her parents in Konawa that the Barrows decided to chance the snow fabrication business in Oklahoma.

"I just looked at a hill and said, 'That's as big as Rebel Ridge'," near their California home, Mrs. Barrows said. That was in March.

"AT FIRST IT was a joke," she said. "Within a month we

were talking seriously about it."

Once Barrows was sure he could sustain the operation in Oklahoma — an assurance that came after months of studying climatological data — he began looking for a suitable site.

In one week he traveled from Oklahoma City to Kellyville by way of Ada, Guthrie, Sand Springs and intermediate detours.

In Kellyville, he set out to view some land near Heyburn Dam and got lost, when "there I was, looking at this fine ridge."

Subsequent investigation led to a lease with J. D. Goodman, owner of the three-sloped area. The area can be seen both from old U.S. 66 and the Turner Turnpike.

THE COUPLE cleared the seven acres themselves with a chain saw and brushcutters. They recently began construction on steel towers for the ski lift.

When complete, Snow Valley Ski Area will have ski tows, instruction, exhibitions, ski rentals, a toboggan area and a "huddle house," complete with fireplace.

But its greatest calling card may prove to be the novelty of man-made snow.

When the temperature falls below freezing, Barrows said, he can cover five acres of land with five inches of snow in about eight hours. He estimated he could operate 30 days with 10 freezing nights.

Then all he has to do is hope it doesn't rain.