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Normandale ski area is reborn after dry years

The new Hyland Hills chairlift stood ready to lift skiers up a newly graded, hitherto unused hill in west Bloomington.

The hills across a single railroad track on the west end of Bloomington, facing a bon-ton neighborhood toward Normandale Rd., have seen a lot of skiing in the last two decades.

Back in the '50s, before the days of snowmaking, they did a brisk business as Mt. Normandale. The owners and managers were Gordy Bowen, orchestra leader, Richfield village councilman, all-around businessman, and the late Oscar Strand, real-estate developer.

Ski areas were just beginning to be heard of. In the metro area there were Moon Valley, Buck Hill, Pine Bend and Trollhaugen. What Normandale gave the others in vertical rise (50 feet or so) it made up for in propinquity, right there in a nest of suburban skiers. The cash register jingled a merry tune.

To the best of Bowen's recollection annual attendance reached about 48,000, which in those days was really something; in fact, it isn't bad today. Then came a six-year drought, winter after winter with just a few light snows. Skiing virtually nil.

Skiers and area operators prayed a lot. Moon Valley put in a new-fangled apparatus stumbled upon by some eastern manufacturers of an agricultural spray which, they found, had made some snow on a cold night. They called it a snow-maker and went into business. At Moon Valley it didn't help much. It covered the ground, but the slopes faced south. The man-made snow tended to settle into a hard mass, and grooming equipment was just as primitive as snow-making.

With faith in the future, Norman-



Ben Kern
your weekend

dale bought something called a "sitzlift," shipped all the way from Austria. Oscar and Gordy had just the place for it, a hill at the south end of the ridge that went up a bit higher and down a bit lower than the others, with an interesting knob in the middle.

The sitzlift stood there through the dry years. Whenever a bit of snow fell and the lift was turned on, the sitz-platter extensions had a way of wrapping around a twisting cable. The Normandale owners thought they were getting it figured out when the Hennepin County Park Reserve District bought the area.

The sitzlift wound up at Moon Valley, where it continued to have problems. Moon Valley, without laying the blame on the sitzlift, ended its skiing venture, opened a shooting range and went into the sand and gravel business.

Mt. Normandale became Hyland Hills, part of the Hyland Lake Park Reserve. With snowmaking it resumed brisk operations as a good community hill, a training ground for hundreds of youngsters who swarmed over the place. There were a T-bar, about five rope tows and a dandy little warming-house,



Staff Photo by Ben Kern

The new Hyland Hills chairlift stood ready to lift skiers up a newly graded, hitherto unused hill.

ski rental and hotdog-snack bar-chalet.

Today, after 10 these many years, Normandale stands ready to step out and resume its place among the grown-up ski areas with a new hill, four-place chairlift, sophisticated snowmaking and grooming equipment, and a new set of buildings—maintenance shed with ample capacity and a chalet you wouldn't believe—complete with an efficient capacious rental-equipment arm and an upstairs hideaway where adults can relax without getting stomp-fever from the sound of kids' ski boots.

Outside, the old never-used sitzlift hill stands ready with a new face-lifting job and a new chairlift to add 40 percent to the area's skiing capacity.

The old knob, which might have been interesting to some, a hindrance to others, has been bulldozed away. The dirt went into road-making. The refaced hill now offers a broad, bowl-like, open-slope invitation to graceful skiing.

to visit Don and Donna, the gorillas, in the Primate House.

Richard Behrens, Red Wing, Minn., nature photographer, will show a colorful film including changes of the seasons, some insects, 76 wildflowers and 78 bird species. Behrens will narrate, supplemented at times by unsynchronized courtship calls. Open to the public, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Heritage Hall, 300 Nicollet Av. Sponsor: Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis.

Marilyn Hermann will demonstrate frame loom weaving 1-5 p.m. Saturday at the Hyland Park Reserve Nature Center. . . The art of print-making on display starting 1:30 p.m. next Sunday. The Center is at 8737 E. Bush Lake Rd., Bloomington.

The Naked Tree (learn to identify bare trees) 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. today, Lowry Nature Center, Carver County Rd. 11 between Hwys. 5 and 7. . . Demonstration session on using natural materials in crafts (\$2 materials fee), age 10 or older, 7-9 p.m. Tuesday. Call 472-4911 for reservation. . . Mix complimentary contrast colors and relate them to the neutral fall landscape. Saturday

Eagle Outdoor Learning Center, Cass Lake 56633.

Wood Lake Nature Interpretive Center, 735 Lake Shore Dr., Richfield: Make your own snowshoes, instruction 7-10 p.m. Wednesday and three succeeding Wednesdays. Instructor: Robert Kohlstedt. To register call 861-4507. . . Astronomy Watch 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. every clear Tuesday. . . Registration begins today for winter tours and field studies Jan. 6 through March 14. Call 861-4507 for more information.

Nationality Day, Indian tea, dances, music, snack, 2-4 p.m. today, Minnehaha International Center, 711 E. River Rd. Sponsors: Minnesota International Center and Minnesota International Student Association.



John Gilbert
on the road

When you buy a car nowadays, it is with the idea of keeping it for a while. The two-years-and-trade-it routine is a thing of the past.

leave a hardening, waxy outer coat to face the elements.

"Every type of rust-proofing has a

