

Great Caribou Bog Wicked Winter Ski Tour & Race, 2009

“We had a ‘wicked’ good time at the ski race today. It’s the first time we’ve tried racing. We normally break out (and maintain) our own trail or once in a while ski on groomed trails. Thanks to you and all the other volunteers who made it possible. The course was excellent especially considering the rain and the earlier snow knocking down trees and branches!”

“I’ve been over the whole trail up to Kirkland Road (where the trail goes down to the road and then to the right under 95...) I am so impressed with your zeal and the high quality of the trail. I’ve been skiing early season out West for a few years and didn’t think anything here could match those trails. I was wrong!! This trail, though not as wide, easily surpasses what I’ve seen out there. Thank you so much for all the work you and your crew have done. Several skiers whom I’ve met on the trail expressed the same sentiment. “

“Thanks for the photo, John had such a good time! He is already planning next year’s strategy (pretty much just to beat Bucky)... This event is so great: good people, good fun. I was happy to be part of it.”

“It was so exciting to see the very happy faces coming across the finish line and the wonderful comments by everyone about the course.”

These words summarize this year’s edition of the event. Exactly 114 skiers finished the tour, with some younger folks ranging in age from 3 years to 12 years old. Ages ranged up to the 70s (exact ages were not forthcoming....??). The youngest skiers learned to ski under the leadership of Emily Cartwright and others this winter. They skied the informal “Bog Loppet”, with distances of either 7 km or 2 km. There is great interest from this age group, and next year we plan to have a bus take them to the Taylor Road start and Kirkland Road start. These young folks are the future of nordic skiing.

The first of several buses arrived at the Bangor City Forest just before 10:00 am, loaded with tourers. These skiers began the trek shortly thereafter, and enjoyed a leisurely pace. The timed event began at 11:00 am with the ringing of the Lillehammer cow bell.

The course was ~16 km in length. We eliminated the start down by Essex Street due to the early thaws on the Penjajawoc Marsh and the long (5km) ski up the old Veazie Railroad bed to reach the Bangor City Forest, where the best trails begin. This year we started on the East Trail in the Bangor City Forest, right at the Tripp Road parking lot, and proceeded out the East Trail to the north end of the City Forest (2.5 km), where we picked up the railroad bed. Up the railroad bed for 1.5 km, then left into old growth black spruce forest, emerging on Forest Avenue at 4.5 km where Lee Martin and his group provided traffic safety, energy drink, water, and lots of encouragement. Back into old growth black spruce forest, a short section of arctic peat bog, then up onto new trail. This new trail section was planned by a student at UMaine, Charlie Therriault, as a senior project in his Parks & Recreation program. He worked with the IF&W unit managers Mark Caron and Allen Starr, and myself, so as to locate the new trail off the snowmobile route, while avoiding wetlands and sensitive areas such as vernal pools. The location was GPS’d with survey-grade equipment, a GIS map produced, and the route flagged, ~ 6,500 feet long. Then every one of those 6,500 feet had to be cut and the brush dragged into the woods. Later in the fall I ran a small landscaping excavator for 3 days to smooth out the trail (there were many old stumps and skidder ruts from past logging), then Charlie and I carried mulch hay to cover the soil. We’ll seed the trail this spring with a wildlife mix of grasses and legumes for wildlife enhancement. What a project, and thanks to all who helped out.

Continuing on, at 8 km the trail enters the Great Caribou Bog, a stunning peat land supporting dwarf black spruce and arctic shrubs and flowers. With the 3 feet of snowpack this year, the peatland appeared as a fairy-land of miniature trees. After a snowstorm, the dwarf trees look like tall vanilla ice cream cones rising from a sea of white powder. You must experience this. The other unique character of the peatland occurs at dusk on a cold, clear day’s end as the sky becomes that mottled dark purple, foretelling a cold, still night. If you stop skiing, and let your heart rate relax, there are no human sounds but there is a

mysterious, pervasive, universal sound I cannot describe. If you ever wondered about the saying “The silence is deafening”, you can experience this phenomenon.

At about 9 km the trail crosses the Taylor Road at the old bait ponds, and here the 7 km Bog Loppet skiers start. Then it's up and around the lower slopes of Newman Hill, then the new trail up Piney Knoll, then the big climb up Bangor Hill, where Paul Markson and his crew had the second aid station. Bells were ringing as skiers herring-boned up the steep pitch, where, on a sunny day, one can see the Tableland of Katahdin to the northwest. From the top of Bangor Hill it's all downhill to Kirkland Road, and a quick 2 km to the finish at the Herbert Sargent Community Center.

Skiers entering the gym found 30 quarts of homemade chili, a table of cookies, bananas, bagels, and other snacks, plus energy drink and coffee. This delightful repast was prepared by Ben and Margaret Deering, with help from Jean Woodard.

Shortly, awards were given out. This was quite different from other traditional ski races; awards were given for such categories as “wooden ski division”, “best hat”, “best first time story”, broken ski award, bronze broom, youngest, oldest, first, best costume, best kilt, ugly lycra, best knickers, and many more.

Sally Jacobs gave a brief overview of the Caribou Bog - Penjajawoc Conservation and Recreation Corridor Project. This project has made possible the permanent protection of the Caribou Bog Ski Trail through easements and land purchases. The conservation land is open to the public for traditional uses, and includes snowmobile and ATV trails in appropriate locations. Except for two short sections, the ski trail is for skiers only so they can enjoy the quiet. Once or twice per week the trail is groomed 4 feet wide with a classic track set.

New this year were Peruvian style wool and pile hats for sale with the skiing caribou logo embroidered on the front. These all sold out, while the t-shirts were not quite as popular. Decals were also given out. Brad Ryder, proprietor of Epic Sports in downtown Bangor, donated gift certificate awards. Order of finish and time back (for the racing division) was organized by Alice Goodwin (long time Bog Race women's winner), Jean Read, and Kris Hoffman, with help from others.

After paying our expenses (buses, building, t-shirts, hats, bibs, food, safety signs for the road crossings, snowmobile gas/oil, etc.) we had \$309.95 to donate to the Caribou Bog - Penjajawoc Conservation Project for trail and land conservation.

There are many volunteers I have not thanked. Some are noted on the website (www.pvskiclub.org, then link to Caribou Bog Tour). There are many photos on the website too.

Tentative date for 2010 is Sunday, February 28th.

Chris Dorion, Tour Director