

## **Council Tracks**

The newsletter of NJ Ski & Snowboard Council  
February 2012

### **An Ode To Snow**

Sorry for my lateness this month but February got off to a muddled start. Punxsutawney Phil – Weather Profit Extraordinaire wasn't sure if he wanted to come out of his burrow and I couldn't publish till I had confirmation of the expectations for whatever may be left of a winter this year. With a reported 40,000 onlookers who were waiting, a Tuxedoed arm reached inside Phil's cage and pulled the poor beast from his mate and warm surroundings. Under those circumstances you can't blame the critter for being confused. While many of us harbor doubt about the Groundhogs ability to forecast weather one thing IS certain, this winter is a bust in the Northeast. If I tried to tell you anything else you probably wouldn't read more of this newsletter. Truth, however painful it may be is one of the great strengths of Journalism and The Truth is what you will get here! It's a fact that this year, Old Man Winter went somewhere else because he didn't land in the Northeast and surely not in New Jersey. Its 2/8/12 as I am belatedly hammering out this month's newsletter in time for the February meeting of The Council in a few days and we still have not had a winter snow or a Winter period. The surprise storm in October when the leaves were in fall colors, did no good for the ski resorts or the skiers and riders. Sadly, Mother Nature finally heard the call of those who bemoan Winter and turned off the cold but hopefully not forever.

Those who abhor Winter do us no good. I mean really now, is snow and cold weather all THAT bad? Who in their right mind, unless they were born in a southern climate would have bad words for *foul* weather. While I'm on that subject, can someone out there tell me what is FOUL about snow? As it comes down, snow is clean water, crystallized water but water still and no one argues that we need water. Ask those who don't have it.....they'll tell you how much they need water. Ask the farmers in Texas about their burned crops. People are starving to death in the African Sudan, not because there is no food, but because there is no water which would allow them to grow food. Water-snow-ice- its different forms of the same thing and we can't live without it.

Have you ever wondered how snow forms, how those intricately designed flakes of fluff are created? That itself is a miracle, then when you consider that each one of gazillions of snowflakes is different (no two are alike) and whalla, we have the entire universe falling upon us each time it snows. Infinity.....an infinite number of flakes each time we have a snowfall multiplied by the square footage of earth covered by snow at different times of the year multiplied by the number of snowfalls since the beginning of time .....Now that's something to stir even the goofiest nerd or anti Winter person!

SNOW –it blankets our world, erasing the scars man has inflicted on the natural land. It bespeckles the eyelashes of children and lovers on a walk, it allows children to play and adults to be children again, it gives us something to do whether we want to or not, it makes places different and is the defining characteristic of some places on Earth (Alaska, Canada, the North Pole). Like the white feathers of the Bald Eagle our symbol of strength, snow brings majesty to our Mountains! Why then do some hate it, the reason couldn't be more obvious.....because they don't understand it.

Those of us who participate in the Snowsports understand snow and appreciate the joy it gives to millions. An Earth without snow would not be the same. People who understand snow are different people and as long as I am alive, it is those people whom I will surround myself with. Skiers & Riders are the people who understand snow and it is WE who shall save it for humanity and generations to come! Old Man Winter.....you shall return!!!!

**Council Racing in Review:** The weekend of February 3-5 saw newly self volunteered Race Chairman, Pat Finn directing the annual NJ state race at Pico. I wasn't there to record events but was told there were a number of glitches and some things could have been done better. There's a first time for everything and seeing as though the previous Race Chair stepped down we were glad that Pat accepted the challenge. Pat's not a racer and I'm sure backup from a few race knowledgeable veterans could have helped. Regardless, the race went off as scheduled and as usual some good skiers were on the course. A number of NJ Ski & Snowboard clubs fronted teams for the event. The High Life ladies 'A' team, a perennial powerhouse took first place amongst the women. Trailsweepers another eternally strong race club with Jim Thomasetti who, joined this year by John Foy founder of the American Ski Racing Alliance (ASRA) powered through the course to take first place in the Men's division. Grand honors for most points overall was nailed down by the Ski Club of New Jersey. Congratulations to all.

I heard the conditions of the race trail left a lot to be desired but then again this season has been a challenge for even the best snowmaking crew in the East. Next month the Presidents race will be held at Hunter and this race always draws a big crowd. The race is in March when almost always the weather is mild giving it a spring-like festive atmosphere. Since this is the year of the non-Winter, we probably should all show up in shorts n T-shirts in March. Maybe we should say the heck with the race and make it a pond-skimming contest. If the weather pattern goes further downhill, we may just spend the day riding Hunter's zip-line.

Council members barely had time to recoup from the state race when on Monday, 2/6/12, the Consolation race was held at Tuxedo Ridge ski area in NY. This was a departure from recent years as the Consolation race had been held at Hidden Valley for a while. Apparently Hidden Valley has grown their evening high school ski program and would not commit to giving up a trail for racing at night. In one sense that is understandable since they only have 3-4 trails and with such a late start to the season this year, management probably wants to maximize profits and giving up one of only a couple trails this year, is a lot to ask.

The switch to Tuxedo Ridge may have caused concern for some who were used to the race trail at Hidden Valley but that was quickly offset by the low \$15 fee for the evening. \$15 took care of the registration fee, lift ticket and bought you a meal prior to the race. In these challenging financial times a price like that it's real hard to come by. It does show however, that a little mountain like Tuxedo Ridge is willing to work with the state council. In exchange I think we should give them some business. For those of you who live nearer to Tuxedo, NY you might consider a night of skiing there or if you are retired and like to sample different areas, pencil in a date to check out Tuxedo Ridge. Obviously, as a small ski hill it would be ideal for young kids or never-evers that are just learning to ski or ride. It's a small mountain with few trails which is reflected in lower ticket prices. An adult weekend (9am-5pm) ticket is \$42 which drops considerably to \$25 during the weekdays (1pm to closing). An evening ticket (5pm to closing) on weekdays is only \$16 and for juniors a few dollars less.

**Logo Contest:** This is a reminder that NJ Ski Council is now NJ Ski & Snowboard Council and that means we need a new logo. Earlier this season, the Ex. Com. of The Council announced a contest amongst its member clubs to design a new logo for the Council reflecting the new name. The contest is open to members of all clubs and there is no limit on the number of submissions from each club. We haven't seen many submissions so far, so please remind your members that they can submit designs via their club's Ski Council Rep. The contest is running at least till the end of March and maybe longer so there is time to get a design in. It's YOUR Council so chip in and make this contest work!

**Weather Outlook:** In case anyone is wondering what the heck happened to winter this year it can be explained by taking a look at a map of the National Weather Service. The map shows that the jet stream shifted far north and is hanging on the border of the US and Canada. While anything is possible, it isn't expected to shift back any time soon. Because of its position, the jet stream is keeping the high pressure systems and cold weather above the border. This is allowing warm air from the South to invade the causing above normal temps and not allowing snow to form.

However, with the jet stream where it is, the ski resorts in Eastern Canada and the Canadian Rockies are experiencing a pretty normal winter. The resorts in Banff and a bit further West, (Panorama, Kicking Horse, Fernie) have plenty of snow. This year seems to be the right time for you or your club to plan a trip into Canada and it's NOT too late to get in on the council trip to Mt. Tremblant. I've been checking the ski reports for all Northeastern and Canadian resorts each week and the Canadians are well ahead of us in all aspects including base depths, natural snowfall and cold temperatures. We can sit home and bemoan our lack of snow and keep the skis in the closet OR we can do something about it.

The resorts in the West also have snow but if a western ski trip is not in your budget this year, seriously consider a drive across the border to the Eastern Townships of Canada or Quebec. A trip to eastern Canada is within driving distance and negates the need to pay for airfare saving you \$500-\$600. Between these two regions there are probably two dozen ski resorts some of which will surprise you in what they have to offer. Two years ago, I took a drive across the border for a look at Bromont, Owls Head, Mount Orford and Mount Sutton. Owls head reminded me of down home Vermont skiing, with an older and smaller base lodge but the mountain looked interesting. You don't have to rely upon me to give you an account because these resorts are as far away as your computer keyboard. It's a days' drive but a good plan would be to stay at your club's lodge one night. Vermont is 2/3-3/4 the distance from NJ to the Eastern Townships of Canada and one night in Vt. will recharge your batteries for the drive the next day. If your club doesn't have a Vt. lodge you can probably book a night with another Council club and they'd be thankful that you did.

At this time the US and Canadian dollars are about equal with small shifts from week to week. That aside, snow vs. no snow is a 'snow' brainer. The price of gas is up but if several friends car-pool the cost of gas can be split 3-4 ways making the trip even easier on your wallet. Don't dwell on the weather and don't let the lack of natural snow in our area get you down. There is snow and cold north of the border..... go get it!!!!

**Tech Talk:** Last month I began a discussion about *the numbers* on skis and what they mean. We spent most of that column talking about the 4<sup>th</sup> number which is the sidecut of the ski. I talked about the importance of the turning radius and how it affects our ability to turn. Most of us, know that there are other numbers on our skis and have an idea of what they mean but in this month's Tech Talk we'll take a good look at them. Somewhere on every ski is a group of three numbers which are the width of the tip -middle and tail of the ski. Some people in ski shops have it backward and tell you it's the tail-middle and tip. The simplest way to sort them out is to look for the biggest number which is the tip and the smallest number being the waist of the ski. Now let's talk about what these numbers really mean.

Years ago when straight skis were the norm, no one thought much about these numbers with the exception of the middle one –the “waist” of the ski. Skis with narrow waists were always considered to be quick edge to edge. Simply stated, the skinner the mid section of your ski, the quicker you could flip it from one edge to another. This was of real interest to slalom racers banging gates on a race trail and hotdoggers who shoot black diamonds at warp speed. For lower end skiers and those not interested in bombing the mountain, a narrow waisted ski wasn't needed and in fact may be a detriment. Skis of 20 years ago and as recently as a few years ago could still be obtained with a waist of 67-70mm and maybe a bit narrower. It probably hails back to cross country skis which are narrow and were used as means of transportation in areas with a lot of snow. Nordic skiing came first and was followed by Alpine skiing when someone realized it was more fun to slide down a hill than trudge up one. The early alpine skis were basically Nordic skis put to a different use. At some point ski manufacturers realized that two different types of skiing requiring different skis and things needed to change but again, old ideas die slowly. Used to cross country skis, designers were reluctant to let go of skinny ski technology and although the tips and tails got bigger it took longer to get away from a thin mid-section. That mentality was bolstered as alpine racing came into being where quick edge to edge skis were desired.

Fast forward to the introduction of the shorter parabolic skis about 20years ago. It was then that manufacturers increased the width of the tip and tail giving the edge of the ski an hour-glass shape (deeper sidecut). The middle of the skis didn't change a lot and for years afterwards it was possible to get a ski with a wide tip and tail but narrow waist. Women in the Wild West may have had a desire for an hour glass figure but it might not be the best of designs for skis although many people do quite well on a ski with a narrow middle.

Move the clock forward again to another milestone in ski design. What began to happen is easily explained by one word – SNOWBOARD. There is no doubt that the advent of the snowboard eventually had an effect of skis. Ski designers began to realize that boarders were able to float on the snow rather than cut their way through. It took years but that concept crept into ski designs eventually affecting the waist of the ski. You can't make a WIDE ski without having a wider mid-section. Wider middles nestled between wide tips n tails ushered in two new categories of skis: the fats and the mid-fats. Skis with wider midsections ride higher in the snow making it easier to ski after an 8" or better dump of snow. If you have trouble skiing after a snowstorm and before the groomers pack it down, you should try a pair of mid-fats. A mid-fat has a waist of about 72-80mm; skis with a waist wider than 80mm are getting into the category of fat skis and now we have powder skis so wide they look like water skis.

So the three numbers taken together define the overall geometry of a ski and play a big role in what kind of a ride you'll have. Skis with wider tips tend to be able to initiate a turn easier but that is due more to the fact that a ski with a WIDE tip also has a substantial sidecut = the turn radius we talked about last month. Supposedly wide tails play a role in how a turn finishes but I tend to think the width of the tail plays more of a role in the overall float of a ski than how it affects a turn.

The final number we should talk about is the length which is partly a personal choice and also a fact of technology. Years ago ski length was determined by having the skier hold their hand above their head and tip the fingers horizontal and that was the length of your skis. The main reason for a long ski was to get good edge hold and to some extent to cut down on chatter. Ski design has improved so much that phenomenal edge hold and no chatter is possible with much shorter skis. Today's shaped skis should fall somewhere between your chin and your eyebrows. More ski than that is a matter of choice but for performance purposes it's not needed.

So that ends the discussion of ski numbers -5 in all.....width of tip-middle-tail, turn radius and length. Numbers tell you a whole lot about a ski but don't reveal the entire plot. Become knowledgeable about side cuts and widths and when choosing a ski, NEVER EVER ignore its numbers. However, ski engineering is a complex science and the only true way to see how one performs is to use them on the snow. This can't be done in a shop so the last word I leave you with is DEMO them.

**Last Tracks:** Mother Nature dealt us a bad hand this season and so far it's been tough to find god snow. However, ski resorts in the tri-state area are 75% or better operational – a credit to modern snowmaking. Don't hold back waiting for snow, because this year, the big dumps may not come. As skiers and riders, THIS is our time. Don't be afraid to travel & carpool to find Winter!!

**“Life moves fast and if you don't stop to look at it you might miss it”**



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