

Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

Thursday, January 21, 1965
Illinois Valley News, Cave Junction
Learning To Ski Part 1
 Snow, snow, beautiful snow; why in the – well, why don't you go slow! You're so white and so fluffy, and I love you so, but after all, there's a limit, you know!

That's what being marooned does to a fellow. As his mind scuttles erratically thither and yon – which will collapse first, the garage or the cabin? When the cabin's completely buried under the snow how long will it take me to suffocate? When it collapses, what will be the primary cause of my passage Yonder, the crushing weight of the hundred-ton roof, the smashed red-hot heating stove or the broken propane line? As I say, with the mind performing such fearful acrobatics it's not at all surprising that it should stumble onto such a rich vein of unsuspected poesy.

After surviving a devastating flood, and after miraculously bearing up through the abrupt change of my erstwhile joyous way of life, due to my road out to civilization having been destroyed by the flood, now my tottering existence seems further threatened by an unending series of malicious snowstorms.

It has been snowing steadily all day,

after coming down all last night. An hour ago I measured the depth – 33 inches. If that isn't a record for the last 341/2 years it's getting close to it. And if my little radio is telling the truth, which it sometimes does in its weather forecasting, tomorrow will see the arrival of the heaviest snowstorm of the lot.

But, impending disaster notwithstanding, I have been taking precarious advantage of the deep blanket of snow that covers my meadow slope below the cabin. Some time ago, in a moment of madness, I acquired a pair of skis; and, tightwad that I am, I'm resolved to get my money's worth out of them if I twist every one of these calcified old joints right out of their sockets. Don't laugh, friend; at this so-called sport it isn't just your knuckles that pop when you jump the track.

I've had two sessions on the new skis – or rather, with the skis. The first time I went out for practice the snow was about 8" deep and not very dry. The slope isn't very steep and I didn't seem to be going very fast. After a time I got so I could ride the skis clear to the bottom of the run, and I happily told myself that I had the first step mastered.

A couple of days later the snow was

2 ft. deep, with 8 or 10 in. of dry powdery snow on top. I took my skis to the top of the run, confidently climbed aboard and fastened the bindings. Sounds easy, doesn't it? What makes this part easy is the big ponderosa pine at my take-off point that holds me in place while I fasten my bindings, hastily review my memorized instructions (which promptly flee my mind once I've begun that hair-raising flight down slope) and get squared away with my skis pointed in the proper direction. Then, with my ski poles held at the recommended angle, my knees properly flexed and body leaning slightly forward, I utter a small prayer and cast off from my friendly ponderosa.

But things have changed since the temperature dropped and the snow became drier. The instant I forsook my protective tree I shot down the slope like a mistreated cat. The stance I'd become accustomed to on my previous trials just didn't fit the occasion. Too late I discovered that I wasn't leaning far enough forward. Immediately thereafter instead of -two tracks in the snow I was leaving four.


In the next hour and forty-five minutes I experienced every tumble known to skidom, incidentally contributing several new and choice epithets to the

internationally accepted voskibulatory.

My most spectacular fall was by far the funniest, and since there was no one else there to enjoy it, I laughed enough for all of us. I don't know why it happened, whether I hit a depression in the snow or whether I was putting too much weight on the front end of my skis. Anyway, the skis suddenly (everything on skis is done suddenly) decided to submerge. The tips plowed down into the snow, and I plowed through space, describing a short arc in a split-second flight that ended with me buried face down in the soft snow. When I came up for air I waited several seconds for the dense cloud of flying snow to settle, then discovered that it was plastered solidly on my glasses. Then the picture of what a sight it must have been to the imaginary bystanders suddenly struck me and I laughed out loud like a stir-nutty zany. And I'm glad it happened, because every time I think of it I have to laugh, and lately there hasn't been too much to laugh about in our neighborhood.

Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll chank up the heater and head for my private ski-pasture. I'm anxious to see if I can get onto making a turn on those blue streaks of greased lightning without being tossed bodily into Dunn's Creek.

Classifieds

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