

Making Tracks: the History of the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club

Major Competitions

While the World Cup was without a doubt the most internationally significant event hosted by the WCCSC, through the years it hosted a number of significant competitions. Similar to hosting the World Cup, these events required large volunteer efforts as well as corporate sponsorship and government support. In 1986, the club hosted the Canadian Junior Nationals with Ed Schiffkorn acting as Chief of Race. While the race was put in jeopardy by early season thawing, record snowfalls in March saved the event.

The Vachon Cup made a stop in Whitehorse in March of 1989, with eight members of Canada's national ski team in tow. As a unique feature, a race was held downtown, resulting in exciting sprint finishes and crashes for the spectators. Notably, future Olympic gold medalist Becky Scott dominated the Juvenile Girls' race. In 1996, Whitehorse hosted the Western Canadian Cross Country Skiing Championships. 155 racers from the Yukon, Alaska, and Western Canada attended this event. The next event of national significance that the WCCSC hosted was the Canadian Masters National Cross Country Ski Championships in March 2003.

While the WCCSC had hosted a number of fairly significant national competitions, the year 2007 represented something much larger not only for the club, but for the City of Whitehorse. In 1989, Whitehorse had been tentatively selected to host the Canada Winter Games (CWG) in 2007. As time marched on and the CWG loomed closer on the horizon, the city sprang into action preparing for the games. This meant constructing the Canada Games Centre and training volunteers. The ski club also had many tasks to undertake in order to prepare to the CWG. This included constructing a new stadium (as their previous stadium had been displaced by the construction of the Canada Games Centre – see the section discussing the ski trails). Meanwhile, Claude Chabot took on the dual position of Chief of Competition and Sport Chair. One of the challenges faced in preparing for the event was trying to convey the needs of an outdoor cross country ski race to people who were more accustomed to indoor sports. This included ensuring that volunteers who would be standing outside for six hours a day would get sufficient calories to keep warm. Additionally, in 2006, the WCCSC hosted another Western Canadian Championships as a test event for the upcoming CWG.

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2006 Western Canadian Championships
Credit: Vince Federov/Whitehorse Star

The CWG left a number of legacies for the ski club, while continuing other legacies of the Yukon ski racing community in general. The legacy left by the event was a new stadium, an improved ski trail system, and the new Pisten Bully. Meanwhile, the Yukon skiers built upon the legacies left by previous Canada Games medalists such as Lucy Steele, Martina and Gerard Frostad, and Sean Sheardown. David Greer won a gold medal while Bryn Knight won a bronze. On top of these medals, the Yukon women's team took a bronze in the relay. The GWC also featured a tribute to 89 year old Father Mouchet, who skied a half lap through the stadium.

With the all of the trail improvements brought by the CWG, Whitehorse's ski trails were just begging to host another major ski event. There were also many volunteers who were highly trained after the preparations for the CWG and eager for another event. As a result, in 2008, a committee of Claude Cabot, Joan Stanton, Alain Masson, Mike Gladish, Sue Mickle, and Anne

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Kennedy prepared a bid package for the 2010 Haywood National Championships. This committee reviewed previous bid packages, put together a rough budget, and with the assistance of the Yukon Convention Bureau, they put together a bid to submit to Cross Country Canada. With this bid, the WCCSC won the opportunity to host the National Championships.



Chandra Crawford at the 2010 Haywood Nationals.
Credit: Justin Kennedy

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Volunteers at the 2010 Haywood National Championships.

Credit: Justin Kennedy

In addition to the great amount of volunteer support, there was also a great amount of Yukon Government and business support behind the National Championships. The ski club was able to purchase of \$50,000 worth of grooming and timing equipment through a Lotteries fund and received an additional \$100,000 from the Community Development Fund. The event also received sponsorship from Northwestel, the local Coke bottlers, Apogee, and Air North. This was of great benefit, as the ski club needed to rent tents for waxing as well as the athletes and also needed to rent half of the Canada Games Centre parking lot.

The National Championships were a huge success, both for the Yukon racers and the volunteers that made it happen. The Yukon skiers collected a large amount of medals throughout the event. Meanwhile, the two hundred-plus volunteers worked tirelessly in order to ensure the races ran smoothly. The sprint races were a particularly intense day for the volunteers, as there were over one hundred heats. However, at the end of the day the events were only five minutes behind schedule. The organizers also chose to do something different with the banquet. Rather than holding it midway through, they saved it until the final day and took over the entirety of the Canada Games Centre.

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To an extent, the event took over Whitehorse, with live radio broadcasting and even some television coverage. Part of the draw was the high level of competition, which featured numerous Olympians. The Nationals also proved lucrative to Whitehorse. Post-event economic impact studies estimated that the races had a positive impact of \$800,000 to \$1,000,000 on the city! By hosting the National Championships, Whitehorse was able to overcome the stigma that it was an expensive place to travel to for competitions. While travelling to Whitehorse was somewhat costly, upon arrival in Whitehorse there was little driving around as the ski trails were right in town.

In addition to hosting the Vachon Cup, CWG, Western Canadian Championships, and National Championships the WCCSC has hosted the cross country skiing portion of a number of Arctic Winter Games (AWG) as well. The most recent one was held in 2000 and the club is currently preparing to host the 2012 AWG.

These events were successful largely due to the volunteer efforts of club members as well as other members of the community. As Chabot has stated, “it’s an amazing spirit of volunteerism here.” For instance, while Chabot and Stanton (whose contributions Chabot characterised as “just awesome”) were the driving force behind the 2010 National Championships, there were also many non-ski club members who volunteered for the events as well.