For more than a century, L.L. Bean has been identified with Maine’s sporting heritage, especially hunting, fishing and general outdoor recreation. And for many of those 100-plus years, the company’s role went much further than selling top-quality goods. L.L. Bean also actively promoted and spread the gospel of outdoor recreation via lessons, programs and sponsorships.

So it should come as no surprise to learn that Maine’s iconic outdoor retailer also boosts the sport of skiing in a major way. The story of that Bean boost began in the 1920s and continues to the present. This issue of Snow Trail traces the history of the company’s involvement.
Founded in 1995, the Ski Museum of Maine is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization established with the mission to celebrate and preserve the history and heritage of Maine skiing. The Ski Museum exhibits artifacts, photographs, artwork and documents at its location in Kingfield, conducts educational programs to ski clubs, schools, libraries, historical and civic organizations, and hosts social events and activities throughout the year.

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Upcoming Ski Museum Events

February 18
10th Annual
Maine Ski Heritage Classic
Sugarloaf Base Lodge and Sugarloaf Inn
Carrabassett Valley

March 18
Sisters of Skade: Women in Maine Skiing 1870-2017
Carrabassett Valley Public Library
Carrabassett Valley

April 15
Skee Spree
Barker Mountain Base Lodge
Sunday River Mountain Resort
Newry

The Mountains of Maine: Skiing in the Pine Tree State

An exhibit created by the New England Ski Museum, augmented with considerable additional material from the Ski Museum of Maine, will be on display at the Robinson House of the Bethel Historical Society, 10 Broad Street, through late spring.

Tuesday through Friday
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Admission by donation
For more info, call 800-824-2910 or visit www.bethelhistorical.org
From the president ...

When *Snow Trail* editor Scott Andrews told me that Nordic skiing would be a major theme of the Winter 2017 issue, I was excited to be able to tell my story. After working in Maine’s alpine ski industry for nearly 20 years, I’d viewed cross-country skiing as recreation for the timid and effete who eschewed the thrill of rushing downhill. Was I wrong! Try navigating even the gentlest trail on skinny skis — with no edges and no fixed heel — or working up a sweat as you herringbone uphill with the same equipment. Nordic skiing is not for the faint of heart or muscle tone. We alpine skiers don’t know how good we have it riding that detachable chair and letting gravity work its wonders on those wide slopes.

My involvement with Maine’s Nordic ski centers began in 1990 when I was listening to a PBS commentary on my drive to take a few runs at Sunday River. “Cross-country skiers are nothing but a bunch of flatland Sugarloafers, flying by in their neon, tight-fitting outfits,” opined the commentator. To me, having had a career in marketing, those were fighting words. Rather than heading to the slopes, I stopped at the Sunday River Inn and Cross-Country Center to speak with my friend and inn owner Steve Wight. I convinced him that I was the one to help promote Maine’s Nordic industry. Thus began my second career as executive director of the Maine Nordic Ski Council.

Then as now, cross-country ski operators are more passionate about their sport than they are about their profits. Our Nordic Ski Council was made up of dairy farmers, orchardists, Christmas tree farmers, golf course operators, woodlot owners and inn owners who were pursuing their love of the sport while supplementing their income. I loved their resigned attitude if it didn’t snow and their crop of skiers never arrived. The farmers were used to Mother Nature and there was never a panic about the weather as with the alpine industry.

Our Nordic centers pooled their resources to print a brochure, establish a website and toll-free number for Nordic ski conditions. We organized our special events including a series of recreational races sponsored by Coca Cola — and with the help of a grant from Ski Industries America — a learn-to-XC-ski program called “Free on Fridays.” In cooperation with the Maine Lung Association, the Nordic Council sold an all-area pass to raise funds for both organizations. The Council had an active PR campaign culminating in the first cross-country-oriented meeting of the Eastern Ski Writers Association at the Bethel Inn. After 14 years at the helm of the organization I retired and the Ski Maine Association took the Nordic Ski Council under its wing.

I’m just as passionate about cross-country skiing now as I am about alpine skiing. I encourage all my die-hard downhill friends to try Nordic on those wind-hold days or at a center “close-to-home.”

Wende Gray
President, Ski Museum of Maine
Since I started working full time as the Ski Museum’s executive director in September, I have been enjoying a great bustle of activity. It has been exciting and rewarding to become involved in this accomplished and inspiring community!

The Ski Museum has been busy throughout the fall and early winter. Just as school was starting, we presented ski industry students at the University of Maine at Farmington with “Down-Mountain and Cross-Country: 145 Years of Skiing in Maine,” a Fireside Chat which traces the origins of skiing to the present. In October we hosted the tremendously successful Maine Ski Hall of Fame Induction Banquet at Sunday River — it was an honor to meet so many people with such interesting ski history!

November saw the launch of our Fall Online Auction, which raised funds and promoted awareness of our mission. At our Annual Open House in December, held in conjunction with Kingfield’s First Friday Artwalk, we received new guests as well as old friends, and presented the Amalgam ski, which is manufactured by Sugarloafers Phil and Amy Taisey. This addition enriches our “Made in Maine” exhibit here at the museum.

In the first week in December, the fourth-grade class from Kingfield Elementary School visited the Ski Museum. There was much excitement at all the “old” stuff here. As one student wrote in our guest book: “I love this place a lot!” The following week, curator Scott Andrews and I visited the elementary schools in Kingfield and Stratton. We presented our hour-
long session on skiing in Maine to the fourth-grade classes. This in-school education program is aligned with the fourth-grade Maine history curriculum. It begins with a video, “Twenty-first Century Ski and Snowboard Competition in Maine,” continues with a PowerPoint show that surveys the history and evolution of Maine skiing, and concludes with a hands-on session where students can touch and feel more than a dozen items of vintage ski gear. This program was made possible through a grant from the Sugarloaf Regional Charitable Trust.

This February, we will host the Sugarloaf “Heritage Classic” on February 18. The Classic this year will take on a Retro 1970s-1980s theme. So, plan on digging out that neon and join us in this fun event!

On March 18, Carrabassett Valley Public Library will host the Ski Museum’s signature program, *Sisters of Skade: Women in Maine Skiing 1870-2017*. It is focused on the role of women in the state’s 145-plus years of skiing history, and I very much look forward to helping to present it.

March is International Women’s History Month and *Sisters of Skade* celebrates the accomplishments of women who competed in races, and also those who were the backbone of many ski organizations. From Ma Judson here in Carrabassett Valley to Olympic and national women athletes, this program tells the history of the many women’s roles in our sport and industry.

*Sisters of Skade* is a two-part session: a narrated PowerPoint presentation followed by a panel discussion with four women who have contributed to the advancement of the industry. This event is free and open to the public. We encourage men and women of all ages to enjoy this evening of discovery.

The museum is open daily, and often I watch visitors lingering at “Memory Lane” and commenting on their past experiences with the skis we have here. So, come visit the museum and tell your story!

Theresa Shanahan
Executive director
Bean boost, continued from page 1

Viewed in retrospect, L.L. Bean’s efforts in skiing were random and unfocused from the 1920s through the 1960s. But beginning in 1970 the company has intensely focused on Nordic skiing — both products and promotion — with enormous impact and long-lasting influence.

Early efforts

There have been skiers in Maine since 1870, but skiing only emerged as a significant outdoor recreational activity in the 1920s, a decade when winter carnivals sprouted like weeds in dozens of cities and towns.

L.L. Bean, founded in 1912 by its namesake, Leon Leonwood Bean, began to offer a limited product line for skiing beginning with a single ski boot and “harness” in its 1929 catalogue. Two models of skis were introduced in the 1936 catalogue, with further expansions to the line in 1939, as illustrated below on this page.

Following World War II, the company began actively promoting the sport, offering a prize for “skiing proficiency” in downhill and slalom to schoolboys and schoolgirls in Freeport and a number of nearby towns. (See cover photo.)

The skiing boom of the 1950s and 1960s was mostly focused on alpine, with dozens of lift-served hills opening all over Maine.

Bean’s 1939 Ski Boot

Made on new lasts of the very latest design which tread flat on ski. Goodyear welt. Full grain brown water resisting leather with top and outside counter of same high grade leather in contrasting pearl gray color. Completely leather lined. Sponge rubber padded top binding and sponge rubber padded full bellows tongue. Wedged shank construction with 4 thicknesses of leather at heel, 3 at shank and two full leather soles at forepart. Heavy leather strap at instep. Flat hard rubber heel lift. Heavy steel shank. Grooved heel. Hooks and eyelets.

Sizes 6 to 12. Price $7.75 postpaid. Send for free samples. One set of 8 brass plates as shown at right 40¢ extra.

Bean’s Ridge Top Hickory Skis

Touring model, single groove. Made of the finest selected second growth hickory the same as used in the best imported skis. Stock is carefully air seasoned followed by scientific kilndrying. Matched for spring, weight, balance and appearance.

Men’s 6’ 9” Standard bottoms, $8.85 postpaid.
Ladies 6’ Standard bottoms, $7.50 postpaid.
Men’s 6’ 9” Steel edges and clear bottoms, $14.85 postpaid.
If Bindings are ordered with Skis we will attach them at no charge.

Skis were first sold in the L.L. Bean catalogue in 1936. As illustrated above, by 1939 offerings included “Ridge Top Hickory Skis” as well as a very sturdy leather ski boot. (Courtesy L.L. Bean Archive)
and the U.S. Those were also decades when most retail ski sales shifted from large general merchandisers to small specialty ski shops, often run by famous athletes. It was not a trend that favored L.L. Bean, and the company’s presence in the ski market diminished to almost nothing during those two decades.

Those were also decades when recreational cross-country skiing almost vanished in North America, leaving Nordic almost entirely to competitors.
Splitkein Touring Skis

Made in Norway and multi-laminated from the finest woods for strength, resilience and responsiveness. Very light in weight. Three models:

Touring Standard: Beginner and utility model. Pre-tarred base of birch with hickory edges.
- Children’s lengths 150-170 cm.
- Price, Children’s Standard, $19.00 postpaid.
- Adult lengths 180-215 cm.
- Price, Adult Standard, $25.00 postpaid.

Turski Special: For the advanced skier. Pre-tarred base of hickory with lignostone edges (oil impregnated, compressed beech) for long wear. Metal clamps at tail prevent splitting.
- Adult lengths 180-215 cm.
- Price, Turski Special, $40.00 postpaid.

Tourmaster: Top performance model. Hickory base with outer lamination of synthetic “Splitkana” for the fastest running surface made. Exceptional durability.
- Adult lengths 195-215 cm.
- Price, Tourmaster, $55.00 postpaid.

(Note on lengths: Skis should reach from floor to wrist of up-raised arm. Cm = inches x 2.54. Also include user’s weight.)

Eie Bindings

Most convenient made. Step-in motion locks toe of boot in binding. Releases with pressure from ski pole. Heel stabilizer for maximum lateral stability. Heel can also be locked to ski for downhill runs. Easy to mount. (Instructions included.)

Prices: Men’s Eie Binding, $11.50 postpaid. Women’s/Children’s Eie Binding, $11.00 postpaid.

Standard Ski Touring Sets

Includes Splitkein Touring Standard Skis, Eie Bindings and Bass Touring Boots constructed for Eie Bindings.

Prices: Men’s Set, $60.00 postpaid. Women’s Set, $58.00 postpaid. Children’s Set, $52.00 postpaid.

Touring Ski Poles

Light, strong and springy bamboo shafts. Cork grips on adults’; plastic on children’s. Leather straps and tough, plastic baskets. Length should be from floor to two inches below top of shoulder.

Adult lengths 47” to 61”. Price, Adult Poles, $8.50 a pair postpaid.

Children’s lengths 31” to 45”. Price, Children’s Poles, $4.50 a pair postpaid.

L. L. Bean, Inc. Freeport, Me.
Leon Gorman, grandson of Leon Leonwood Bean, became president of the famous Freeport retailer in 1967. Among his many innovations, Gorman got L.L. Bean deeply involved in the burgeoning business of ski touring. (Courtesy L.L. Bean Archive)

Cross-country revival

In retrospect, 1967 marked a watershed in the outdoor recreation retail business, and two suburban Massachusetts companies led the way. In Concord, Moor & Mountain opened its doors, specializing in advanced gear for hiking, climbing and camping. In Wellesley, Eastern Mountain Sports opened on a similar concept.

In Maine in 1967, Leon Leonwood Bean died after leading his eponymous company for 55 years. The founder was succeeded as president by Leon Gorman, his 33-year-old grandson. The new president took over at a time when the company was in slow decline, and Gorman’s candid appraisal of the company’s institutional sclerosis is vividly recalled in his 2006 book, L.L. Bean: The Making of an American Icon. Within a few years Gorman proved to be the proverbial breath of fresh air, reviving the moribund outdoor retailer with a new concept of customer service, a vastly expanded line of products and a totally rebuilt Freeport store.

One year later, in 1968, America’s first cross-country ski center opened in Stowe, Vermont, the creation of Johannes von Trapp, scion of the legendary Sound of Music family. With its emphasis on recreational ski touring — versus competitive cross-country racing — Trapp’s ski center began an
10

The Freeport retail store carried these items and more. Interest was intense and sales were torrid, recalled employee Bill Yeo. “The ski department rocked back then,” he remembered. “We always had people standing in line for service.”

L.L. Bean has been a major factor in selling cross-country ski gear ever since.

L.L. Bean Cross Country Ski Festivals

Cross-country skiing neatly fit with the tenor of the times — the 1970s and 1980s — according to two Bean product buyers, Roger Poor and Tom Sidar. Both Poor and Sidar emphasized that cross-country skiing perfectly jibed with the physical fitness movement, the back-to-the-land philosophy and America’s growing ecological awareness.

After booming through the 1970s and early 1980s, interest in the sport seemed to reach a peak and participation numbers declined somewhat by the end of the decade. L.L. Bean undertook two efforts to rekindle interest in the early 1990s. First it established an annual L.L. Bean Cross Country Ski Festival in Bethel. For a small fee, skiers and wannabes could try out gear, get basic

Ski touring appealed to the back-to-nature movement of the 1970s, as captured in this detail from a painting used on the cover of an L.L. Bean winter catalogue. (Courtesy L.L. Bean Archive)
Learn-to-ski lessons were a core concept of the L.L. Bean Cross Country Ski Festivals of the early 1990s. Bill Koch, America’s Olympic silver medalist and 1982 overall World Cup champion, was the top draw. Other high-profile instructors and clinicians included former members of the U.S. Ski Team and active members of the U.S. Biathlon Team. One of the key members of L.L. Bean’s festival team was Phil Savignano, who currently serves on the Ski Museum of Maine’s board of directors.

The New York Times was impressed with these festivals. Reporter Barbara Lloyd wrote: “Chris Frado, president of the Cross Country Ski Areas Association, a professional trade group in Winchester, N.H., said that the six-year-old festival is highly respected in the industry.”

Lloyd quoted Frado as saying: “I certainly know a lot of people who are doing clinics there. It is the biggest consumer event on snow that happens.”

Declining interest in cross-country skiing in the late 1980s naturally spurred some soul-searching and self-analysis on L.L. Bean’s part.

Part of the problem could be traced to the twin mantras that were so instrumental in getting newbies started in the first place. The first mantra was: If you can walk you can ski. The second was: You can ski in your backyard. Taking these together, many first-time ski buyers put on their new gear and walked around in their backyards. No fun in that! As a logical but unhappy consequence, unused ski gear quickly found itself permanently stored in garages and basements. And of course there were no re-orders of equipment, which directly and adversely affected Bean’s bottom line.

Andy Shepard, an L.L. Bean product manager at the time, cites one eye-opening
customer survey that revealed that only a miniscule percentage of L.L. Bean’s first-time ski buyers had ever visited a cross-country ski center, where conditions were ideal for learning.

Shepard’s solution was to package ski sales and trail passes together and promote the equipment and the experience jointly. The result was the L.L. Bean Premier Pass, which was a voucher for lessons and trail passes valid at a list of top-tier cross-country ski centers around the country, including several in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. The Premier Pass represented the proverbial win-win solution. L.L. Bean could be assured that its ski buyers were getting started on the right foot, and the superior experiences offered by the ski centers in turn created passionate lifetime skiers.

The Premier Pass program was a success and it continues to the present under the name Nordic Ski Pass. Any buyer of a complete cross-country ski package — whether through the store, the catalogue or the internet — receives three free days at more than 100 participating members of the Cross Country Ski Areas Association.

**Current Bean Boosts**

Currently L.L. Bean offers a variety of cross-country skiing lessons through its Outdoor Discovery Schools — the successor to the
festivals — conducted at the company’s Fogg Farm property in Freeport.

Sponsorships are another way that the company successfully builds its reputation by binding its name to the sport of cross-country skiing. L.L. Bean is a longtime sponsor of the U.S. Ski Team — which uses its outerwear. Plus it has an additional sponsorship agreement with Kikkan Randall, the top woman on the squad, and the first U.S. female to win a World Cup race.

At the grassroots racing level, L.L. Bean sponsors the New England Nordic Ski Association, which is the U.S. Ski Association’s governing body for cross-country competition in this region.

The Appalachian Mountain Club named its Gorman Chairback Camp in honor of major support from L.L. Bean and owners Leon and Lisa Gorman. The company and the Gormans were also major donors to Maine Huts and Trails, which credits them as sponsors of the Flagstaff Lake Hut. (For more details on the Appalachian Mountain Club and Maine Huts and Trails, see following story.)

L.L. Bean also has a special sponsorship agreement with Kikkan Randall, the star of the U.S. Ski Team and the first American woman to win a World Cup cross-country race. (Franky Fouganthin photo)
Nonprofits today’s driving force in cross-country skiing

By Scott Andrews
Editor, Snow Trail

Past is prologue to present. So goes the familiar refrain. There’s also a corollary: Present is tomorrow’s past. And tomorrow’s ski historians should note that today’s cross-country scene in Maine is bustling with activity, from southern York County to the northernmost reaches of Aroostook.

And when tomorrow’s Maine ski historians write their articles for future volumes of Snow Trail, they’ll likely underscore a watershed date: The turn of the 21st century marked a profound change in direction. Beginning about 2000, nonprofit organizations provided the driving power behind new cross-country development in Maine.

Looking back to the early 2000s, there were three well-heeled organizations that worked on a statewide and/or regional scale: Maine Winter Sports Center, Maine Huts and Trails and the Boston-based Appalachian Mountain Club.

Plus there were a slew of tiny nonprofits engaged in local projects.

Echoing the “tomorrow’s past” refrain, the first of these major organizations is now history. When Caribou-based Maine Winter Sports Center lost its principal source of funding in 2014, it spun off its physical facilities as independent entities, then re-conceived its central mission as four-season outdoor education and changed its name to Outdoor Sport Institute.

Large-scale

MWSC’s legacy includes two world-class biathlon centers in Fort Kent and Presque Isle, which have hosted a total of four World Cup competitions plus many other significant national and international events. Pineland Farm in New Gloucester, one of Maine’s premier touring centers, was also a MWSC creation.

Two major forces are currently moving and shaking Maine’s cross-country ski scene on a large scale. Biggest and most ambitious is Kingfield-based Maine Huts and Trails, which envisions a 190-mile trail stretching between the Mahoosuc Mountains and Moosehead Lake. Along the way, MHT envisions 12 off-the-grid “huts,” each capable of accommodating about 45 overnight guests.
At present MHT has opened 80 miles of groomed trails (between Route 27 in Carrabassett Valley and Route 201 in West Forks) plus four huts. Poplar Stream Falls Hut was the first to open, in February of 2009. Flagstaff Lake Hut followed a year later and the following year Grand Falls Hut hosted its first visitors. Newest is Stratton Brook Hut, which opened for the 2012-2013 season.

The Appalachian Mountain Club has a similar concept, with a geographical focus on a vast wilderness northeast of Greenville. The AMC, one of the nation’s first and foremost outdoor organizations, has purchased about 100 square miles of land in this area, which includes several former sporting camps that date from the turn of the 20th century.

Three camps have been winterized, and they’re connected by about 25 miles of cross-country ski trails. The newest development will be a totally rebuilt Medawisla Camp, the northernmost of the group, which will open for the 2017-2018 season.

Local lights

Far too numerous to mention here, most Maine communities now boast some sort of cross-country ski facility. Most of these facilities are very modest — a few miles of trails on a local nature preserve or other public land, with maintenance and grooming performed by a local Nordic ski club.

Aroostook County was a pioneer in this trend, inspired and partially supported by MWSC. An exemplar is the Four Seasons Trail Association, which built miles of trails and a comfy rustic lodge on property owned by the Madawaska Water District. The FSTA runs races, learn-to-ski programs and a roster of events on its trails.

At the southern end of Maine, the Agamenticus Ski Club is another exemplar of this growing trend. The ASC maintains trails on the Highland Farm Preserve, a property of the York Land Trust, and the Kittery Water District. The ASC runs a gamut of youth

Maine Huts and Trails envisions a 190-mile cross-country ski route stretching between the Mahoosuc Mountains and Moosehead Lake. In the photo above, skiers approach Flagstaff Lake Hut, with the Bigelow Mountain range seen in the background. (Courtesy Maine Huts and Trails)
programs in connection with local schools, from elementary through 12th grade. With assertive programming and local focus, the ASC exemplifies the local partnerships that represent the future of cross-country skiing in Maine.

The newest example of local initiatives started this winter, when Mahoosuc Pathways and the Bethel Outing Club teamed up to salvage the cross-country center at the Bethel Inn. When the former for-profit concessionaire stepped out, these two nonprofits stepped in to fill the void.

Other interesting local connections include the Cape Nordic Ski Club’s collaboration with the Cape Elizabeth Land Trust and the Southern Maine Biathlon Club’s partnerships with the Western Foothills Land Trust in Norway and the Midcoast Conservancy in Jefferson.
10th Annual Maine Ski Heritage Classic

February 18, 2017
Sugarloaf

Saturday - February 18, 2017
Sugarloaf Base Lodge
10:30 to 3:30 pm Ski Memorabilia Display
3:30 pm Vintage Ski Photo

Sugarloaf Inn
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4:00 to 5:40 pm Silent & Live Auction

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Ski Museum of Maine, P.O. Box 359, Kingfield, ME 04947

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Would you like to become a Ski Museum Volunteer? Let us know how you would like to help:

□ at events
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Mission Statement

“To celebrate and preserve the history and heritage of Maine skiing.”
Save this date!
Saturday, February 18
Maine Ski Heritage Classic
Details on page 17

The Agamenticus Ski Club grooms trails on the Highland Farm Preserve of the York Land Trust plus property owned by the Kittery Water District. The club also runs an extensive youth program serving youngsters in elementary school through 12th grade. It exemplifies cooperation between ski clubs and other nonprofit organizations. See story inside on page 14. (Laura Creagan photo, courtesy Agamenticus Ski Club)