

The Problem of Downhill and Slalom Courses

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IT IS time that downhill and slalom racing in Eastern Canada grew up, and that certain ideas held by a few competitors and officials be discarded. It is time that important races such as Provincial and Dominion Championships be held only on courses that are a real test of downhill or slalom running.

Championship jumping events are not held on a sixty-foot hill, championship cross-country races are not held on near level ground; in the realm of other sports, major golf championships are not held on a nine hole course. It is just as important that downhill and slalom courses for major races be of sufficient length to test out the legs of the racer and of sufficient steepness to test out his skill.

The FIS, to which the C.A.S.A. belongs, states that the vertical drop of International downhill courses should be not less than 2,400 feet for men and 1,800 feet for women. For the slalom the vertical drop should be at least 600 feet if run twice, or not less than 1,200 feet if only one run is allowed; furthermore at least a quarter of the course should be on slopes exceeding thirty degrees in gradient. While we have not got the terrain in the East for such courses yet we should use only the best that we have. If the length can not be obtained then the trail should be made so steep and rough that the runner must ski in hard control all the way, and two runs should be given all competitors.

The main objection to using only our best courses is that there are only a few places in the East that are blessed with a terrain where major races could be held, and that hence other places would never see a championship race and the crack skiers that go with it. That is true enough, but with the ninety or more clubs that are in the East if, no matter what the course, it went to a different one each year, each would have to wait a long time for its turn. One of the arguments often stated in favour of a club belonging to the C.A.S.A. is that it may look forward to some day holding the Canadian Championships. If that is all the Club is in the Association for, and some do think it is, then it had better resign right now. The Association can be of much more value to a club than merely giving it a race to run off. The competition end should be only one of the objects, although an important one, of Canadian clubs.

Another angle that is scorned and laughed at by some is that of the impression received by

foreign skiers who travel long distances to compete in our major meets. If we continue to give them courses that are no test of skill, there will be no inducement to visit us. Why are we thrilled by the names of the Rockies and the Alps? Because we can picture in our minds miles of downhill running on big hills. If we are racers, and have a bit of blue blood in us, we want to test our skill against the hills, and the tougher they are the more thrill we get if we negotiate them successfully. Continue to hold our major races on easy courses and competitors from below the line and from Europe will cease to visit us, and we will be left to ourselves, to race amongst ourselves. How does that sound to those that know the attraction produced by the name of a foreign star appearing at a certain meet.

Again the feeling between the East and the West has been consolidated during the last few years due to a better understanding of our separate problems. But continue to hold major meets on easy courses and we will get no competitors from the West, and the the Dominion Championships will become, when held in the East, only an Eastern Championship. Once again the East and the West will drift apart, as this Dominion Championship is the one time of year, is the one event in the season, when we can get together and compete with and learn more of one another.

While at the moment it is true that we have only a few courses in the East of sufficient toughness, in a few years time we will have others. For instance a trail is being cut down Sutton mountain in the Eastern Townships having a vertical drop of 2,100 feet. On Mount Orford a fast downhill trail of 1,800 vertical feet is easily possible and requires only the cutting. And then there are the mountains on the North side of the lower St. Lawrence. Actually none of our courses are tough compared with the standard race courses of the Eastern United States, the Rockies, or Europe. The Quebec Kandahar on Mont Tremblant, at present the premier downhill race of Eastern Canada, is not tough; in fact it is generally referred to as a coast. This year the committee, in order to make it harder, are omitting the lower third where wax more than ski-ings counts, and are changing the race to two runs down the steeper upper sections. Thus it will in future consist of two runs of 1,400 vertical feet each in place of one run of 2,100 feet.

The same line of reasoning applies equally to the women; they also must be given courses that are sufficiently tough to test out their skill. There is a certain element that feels that the girls should be pampered a bit and not given too hard a course, that they can not stand the strain of modern racing as well as their male companions. This may be so, but I believe that it is the wrong attitude to take. Personally I am not in favour of downhill racing for women, the slalom being much less hazardous and more graceful should be the event for them to concentrate on, but I do believe that if the Association is to encourage it that they should support it to the limit. Certainly having started it we can not at this time discourage it as the fair sex themselves would be the first to be up in arms. Let us not do things half-heartily. The relatively unfavourable showing made by our Quebec women in the American

National Downhill and Slalom Championships last April was due entirely to the fact that our girls had not had sufficient experience on tough courses to survive against the mental and physical strain that makes the runner fight to stay in control the whole way with no time out for rest.

In closing may I remark "let us wake up" and put slalom and downhill where it belongs in the East. We have not and cannot have as good courses as there are in the West, but let us at least use the best we have for major competitions. Clubs not having suitable terrain must give up ideas of holding major meets. After all it must be rather bitter for them to feel that they have to apologize to their visitors for the flatness or the shortness of the courses offered, especially when the visitor who has been used to the Alps or the Rockies, and being a good natured fellow smiles and says "not bad."



A German Student Skis in Scotland

From the "Scottish Ski Club Journal"

WHEN four years ago the question of skiing was put to a few Scottish students, one needed a lot of waving of hands and shuffling of feet to explain what skiing really meant; that it was not just an absurd thing to put wooden boards on one's feet (on which one flew through the air as the news reels showed it), was hardly ever believed, and with a queer look in their eyes they used to follow one's strange stories of a sweeping turn, a dust cloud of powder snow, the sensation of speed and quick turns, as if they were thinking "Well, you are just another of these mad foreigners who get enthusiastic whenever they hear the word SNOW mentioned. Poor chap, you will soon finish up with your neck broken or be on crutches by next winter."

If there is anything remarkable about skiing in Scotland, one of the first things to be mentioned is the change in popularity. Last winter it was difficult to find people who proved utterly ignorant of some of the winter sports, and even a tram driver was able to give me some good advice when parking a hefty rucksack and skis next to him. He also knew which end of the ski pointed backwards, which forwards, which was back and which front, but, he was a bit puzzled about the sticks and the round contraptions on them.

These examples seem a bit far-fetched, but they illustrate quite well the spreading familiarity with this kind of sport, although presumably in popular opinion it is still regarded as

the hobby of the idle rich. That will be the most difficult point to conquer, but until it has been done somewhat more successfully, skiing will be severely handicapped in these northerly regions.

Another way of illustrating the advance of popularity was to see the number of people on skis at Lothianburn last winter, when there were about two inches of snow. A few winters ago, a dozen or so enthusiasts were having some fun under similar conditions, but last year it was worthy of the nursery slopes of any big winter sport resort. These meets of hounds on ski became really an event for the otherwise dreary Scottish Sunday. Those who did not venture to take the skis and boots of their friends had the greatest fun watching all this strange activity.

Herring-bones, christianias, ploughs, stem turns and all the varieties of posture that the human figure can achieve between the horizontal and the vertical, head up or down, could be seen. Some people turned out in their moth-powdery ski-ing outfit to prepare for their Easter stay at one of the British colonies in Austria or Switzerland, or should one call them dominions and independencies, or are they just West End? Others obviously thought that a good acquaintance with the bumps of Lothianburn would improve their handicap on the round, so they thoroughly investigated the course and carried away most interesting maps on parts of their anatomy.