



Photo by Nancie Battaglia

Most of the Jackrabbit cuts through snowy woods.



Photo by Gary Randorf

Skiers enjoy this view of the Sentinel Range while crossing the Lake Placid Resort golf course on the Jackrabbit Trail.

Joys of the Jackrabbit

By **RICK KARLIN**
EXPLORER CORRESPONDENT

This is how it was meant to be. The wax is holding firm as we ascend the mild uphill behind Pitchoff Mountain and settle into a comfortable kick and glide through the still woods, slow enough to maintain conversation but fast enough to know we're getting somewhere.

I'm skiing the Jackrabbit Trail with Tony Goodwin, who maintains, promotes and practically lives on the trail in winter. Goodwin was among those who thought up the Jackrabbit back in the mid-1980s. It was conceived as a European-style trail that would connect several communities, so people could ski from end to end over a few days, spending the night in town and dining in restaurants.

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"Our thought was that if we built a trail the guide services would fall all over themselves to set up inn-to-inn ski trips," says Goodwin, executive director of the Adirondack Ski Touring Council.

Alas, it hasn't worked out that way. Although hundreds of people flock to the Jackrabbit each winter, most take short day trips. In a typical year, only a dozen or so parties make the 24-mile trek between Keene and Saranac Lake. Eventually, the ski council hopes to extend the trail to Tupper Lake to the west and to Paul Smiths to the northwest.

I intend to ski the Jackrabbit the way it was meant to be skied. On the first day, I'll go from the Rock and River Lodge in Keene, the southern terminus, to Lake Placid and spend the night at Howard Johnson's, which practically sits on the trail. On the second day, I'll finish in Saranac Lake. That's the plan, anyway.

The Jackrabbit offers a wide range of terrain, scenery and challenges. On the same day, you may find yourself breaking trail in the "forever wild" Forest Preserve, gliding along a groomed trail at a commercial ski center or taking in the view of Whiteface Mountain from a golf course. Most of the hills are fairly gentle, but if you're going from Lake Placid to Saranac Lake, be prepared for a 1½-mile downhill run that's considered one of the biggest cross-country thrills in the Adirondacks (requiring intermediate skills).

It took the vision of Goodwin and his friends to realize that the disparate tracts of state land, ski centers and golf courses offered a unique opportunity to create the first (and so far only) long-distance ski trail in the Adirondacks. "It started with a lot of people meeting in living rooms and saying, 'Hey, there's a lot of terrain out there. If we could only find a way to tie it together,'" recalls Goodwin.

After negotiating easements with landowners and much physical labor, the Adirondack Ski Touring Council opened the trail in 1988. The founders named it after Herman "Jackrabbit" Johannsen, the legendary Norwegian who helped popularize ski touring in the Adirondacks in the early 20th century. Johannsen had died in Norway the year before at age 111. He skied almost until the time of his death.

I meet Goodwin at the Rock and River on a warm day in late March. From the lodge, we enter the Sentinel Range Wilderness on skis, following an old road that draws us deeper and deeper into the quiet of the forest. We enjoy an unfolding view of the dramatic cliffs on the north side of Pitchoff Mountain. Just beyond a height of land, we pass frozen waterfalls that are popular with ice climbers. Often, the thwack of tools striking the ice can be heard long before you reach this scenic spot. We next descend a slight but steady grade that ends at Route 73.

After crossing the highway, we wind our way through a dense patch of dark evergreens and past a series of snowy beaver ponds before popping out of the woods at Cascade Ski



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Photo by Nancie Battaglia

Some sections of the Jackrabbit are child's play.



Photo by Nancie Battaglia

The Jackrabbit's sole lean-to, between Lake Placid and Saranac Lake, is a popular stop for lunch.