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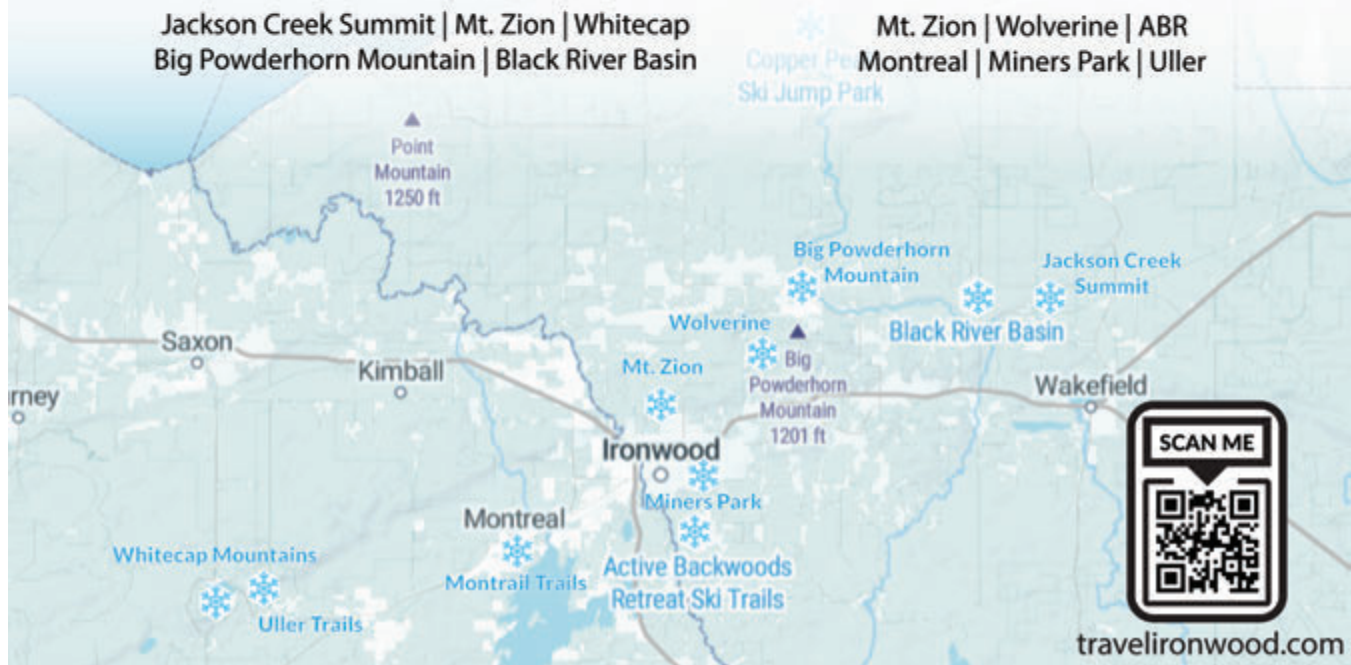
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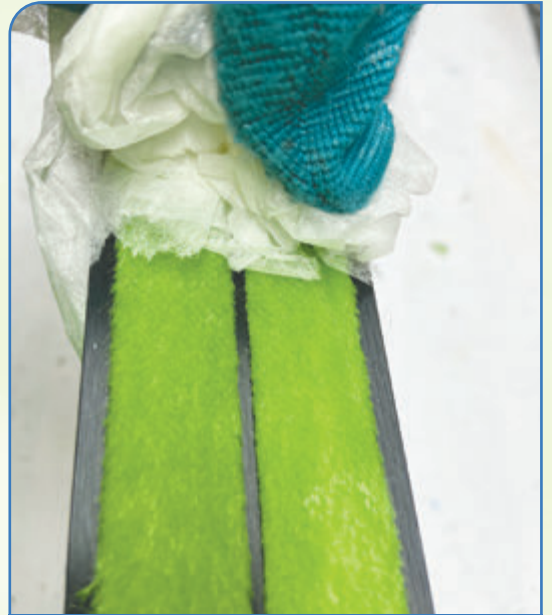
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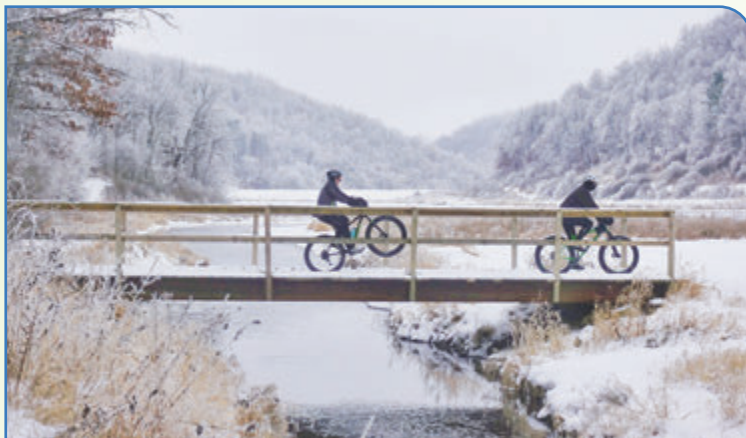
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About that Klaebo December Issue Cover

Johannes Klaebo competing at the World Cup in Trondheim last year. It's his home ski area and location for the Word Championship this coming winter. Luke Bodensteiner shows the heart of cross-country skiing's current and arguably greatest champion ever beats for the youth of the sport, and the great Norwegian's second home: The USA! Photo courtesy of Craft Sportswear Nor/Chris Thomas Johansen, with thanks to Luke Bodensteiner for making the connection.

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silentSPORTS™

DECEMBER 2024 • VOLUME 41 • NUMBER 6

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For circulation information, please call the Waupaca office at 715-258-4360

ADVERTISING

Northwestern and Southern Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Eastern and Western United States

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ADVERTISE

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Silent Sports™ (ISSN 1543-3005) is published monthly by Multi Media Channels, LLC, 970 Furman Drive, Waupaca WI, 54981. Periodicals Postage Paid at Waupaca, WI and additional mail offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Silent Sports, PO Box 408, Waupaca, WI 54981; 715-258-4360 The contents of *Silent Sports*™ are copyright 2024 by Multi Media Channels, LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher or editor, is strictly prohibited. Silent Sports™ is a registered trade name.

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The Front Page

A Deserved Ode to Michael McFadzen's *Silent Alarm*

If we were offered the choice between sitting in an often hours-long local government, board, or legislative hearing or session versus doing almost anything else, my guess is the latter would easily prevail, with a large percentage of us not first asking what that almost anything else is. But this is what **Michael McFadzen** does, and does often, to bring all of us news about what matters to our Silent Sports environment, as well as the environment for all. He carries on one of the finest traditions of this magazine, as exemplified in the past by calls-to-action articles written by Founder/Managing Editor Greg Marr and then Managing Editor Joel Patenaude.

And then there is our readership, the people of Silent Sports who are known to take up what needs to be done for the sake of our trails, waterways, forests, events, others in need, and so much more. One such person is **Timothy Seline**, who sent an email resulting in our phone conversation that has led to the meat of this issue's Front Page as follows:

As a longtime subscriber to Silent Sports Magazine, I am always eager to read Michael McFadzen's Silent Alarm. The piece discussing the Wisconsin Proposed Wakeboarding Bill (LRB-3518) was of particular interest to me. [January 2024 issue: Proposed Wakeboarding Bill Bad for Paddling, Fishing, and Invasive Species.]

My wife and I have a place on Lake Owen, a Wisconsin lake on the DNR's list of Outstanding and Exceptional Lakes. Recently, wake boat traffic has increased yearly. Some of the wakes were remarkably large even when the boats were in the middle of one of the widest segments of the lake. I could see the accelerated shoreline erosion near our dock. Some of the wakes were large enough to wash over parts of my dock. I also began noticing large clumps of uprooted aquatic plants floating out in the lake.

Reading the Silent Alarm article confirmed my observations and added to my concern that LRB-3518 was quite inadequate. Lake Owen has been a very clear lake which is significantly related to the lake ecology. I had not really considered wake boating's deeper underwater effects. The lake experiences little lake turnover and water phosphate is largely sequestered in the deep cold water, thus limiting algae growth. I was concerned that the deep prop wash could upset this balance. I was also unaware of the ballast tank risk with respect to invasive species introduction.

Soon after reading the segment, I helped arrange a link to the Silent Alarm article on the Lake Owen Association website. On August 14, 2024, the Drummond Town Board held a public meeting before a large audience, including many Lake Owen Association members. After discussion and a show of hands, the Drummond Township unanimously passed an ordinance limiting wake boat operation to at least 600' from the shoreline and in at least 20' of water depth. The ordinance bans boats operated in other lakes this year without written proof that the boat has been properly decontaminated — the first Wisconsin ordinance to implement



Lake Owen, one of the DNR's Outstanding and Exceptional Lakes.

PHOTO BY TIMOTHY SELINE.

the ballast sterilization requirement.

As stated in McFadzen's original article, "It's imperative that the legislature passes sensible regulations that balance the rights of everyone to recreate on Wisconsin lakes. Without common sense restrictions, Wisconsin's tourism, property values, public safety, and the lakes themselves are at risk. If you care for Wisconsin lakes, join the discussion by contacting your legislator. Urge them to add the above common-sense provisions in any wakeboarding legislation." I remain concerned about oversight and the mechanisms for enforcement of the ordinance provisions. Sincerely, Timothy Seline

With some kismet, there is even more news on wake boating as part of this issue's *Silent Alarm*.

There is pride to be had here, to learn that what we do makes a tangible, positive difference. In this issue's *Front Page*, pride is focused on Timothy Seline for leading the charge to protect beautiful Lake Owen. And also on Michael McFadzen for doing the work few choose to do and putting it all together in his monthly *Silent Alarm* columns to help fuel and inspire what Timothy then accomplished.

Gentlemen — well done!

Bruce

Silent Sports Magazine QR Code-Connects Race Event Calendar

Help plan your training and race schedules well in advance using these QR Code-Connects options. These links take you to the races' websites themselves where you can check with the ultimate source for each event to confirm race day changes, cancellations, race-entry-fee price increase dates, and up-to-date conditions. And you can take them with you on your phone! Please email bruce.steinberg@mmclocal.com for any additions and corrections. Thank you!



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The 2024 Election — What the Heck Happened?

Michael McFadzen

As I pen this in mid-October, the outcomes of the national and local elections are still unknown. However, there is a promising opportunity for Wisconsin and the Midwest to advance natural resource and recreation policy.

Last summer, the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned highly gerrymandered legislative maps, leading to the establishment of fairer voting districts. This shift opens the door for collaboration between Republicans and Democrats on important issues, including those affecting silent sports enthusiasts. The next legislative session begins in January 2025, providing a chance for meaningful progress during a relatively short session. Wisconsin legislators don't work much: The 2024 legislative session began on January 16th and adjourned on March 12th. Great job if you can get it!

Natural resource legislation has a huge impact on operating our parks, forestland, and lakes, and should be non-partisan. There are champions on both sides of the aisle, including Senator Rob Cowles (Rep) Green Bay who has sponsored and passed numerous bills supporting parks. However, the Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee has squashed numerous natural resource projects. Here's what to look for in 2025.

Supporting Natural Resource Initiatives in 2025

Wake Boating: Recent studies indicate that wake-enhanced boats create wakes that are 2 to 3 times larger, with total wave energies that are 6 to 9 times larger, and maximum wave powers that are from 6 to 12 times larger than the non-wake surf boats (St. Anthony Falls Laboratory, FAQs: *Boat-generated wake wave study*). These studies and others showed that wake boating has led to pollutants being stirred up, eroding aquatic vegetation,



Clark Reinke pictured skiing the hoarfrost in the Kettle Moraine State Forest. The 2024 Election will have big impacts on recreational spending. Will Wisconsin finally start investing in parks?

PHOTO BY MICHAEL MCFADZEN.

and endangering water quality. The ballast tanks of these wake boats also pose a significant risk by serving as a conduit for invasive species such as Eurasian water-milfoil, curly-leaf pondweed, and quagga mussels. These invasives could devastate Midwest lakes, and the pollutants spread into swimming areas raises further concerns. (*Wake boat ballast bags can harbor invasive species*, Michigan State University, July 25, 2016).

A statewide coalition, including Wisconsin's Greenfire, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, and Lakes at Stake, is working to address these challenges. Representing a diverse group of lake users, the coalition has proposed reasonable principles to protect Wisconsin's lakes:

- **700 Feet from Shore:** Wake-enhanced boating should occur at least 700 feet from any shoreline.
- **30-Foot Depth:** Activities should take place in water depths of no less than 30 feet.

- **Invasive Species Prevention:** Boats must prove their ballast tanks have been decontaminated before entering new lakes.
- **Local Control:** Local municipalities should retain the right to enforce stricter ordinances.

Despite pushback from the powerboat industry, organizations and individuals can support these standards, which could become law in the next legislative session. To become a signatory, reach out to Greenfire ED Meleesa Johnson at mjohnson@wigreenfire.org.

Wisconsin DNR Budget Proposals

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has put forward its budget requests for 2025-27, advocating for increased investment in land, water, wildlife, and parks. **Gathering Waters**, Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts, emphasizes the need for a ten-year renewal of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program,

seeking \$100 million annually through 2036. This funding would total \$1 billion, representing a pivotal moment for conservation in Wisconsin.

Previously, **Governor Evers** proposed \$70 million annually for the Knowles-Nelson program, but only \$33 million was approved annually for four years, which is set to expire in 2026. A return to a ten-year authorization would provide much-needed stability for strategic conservation planning. Evers will outline funding allocations in his executive budget in February, which the legislature will review in spring. If this funding isn't approved, Wisconsinites could lose vital resources for protecting landscapes and ensuring public access to outdoor recreation.

Mining Concerns Near BWCA & Porcupine Mountains

Environmentalists are raising alarms over proposed sulfide mines near ecologically sensitive areas adjacent to Lake Superior. **Highland Copper** is on the brink of initiating a mining operation near the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, while Chilean-based **Twin Metals** seeks to develop a large mine close to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

These areas are treasured for their natural beauty and ecological significance. The 60,000-acre Porcupine Mountains State Park is home to massive old-growth forests, roaring waterfalls, and miles of rivers and streams. In kind, the BWCA encompasses 1.1 million acres of pristine wilderness and is the most visited U.S. wilderness area; it's a bucket-list paddling destination with thousands vying annually for permits.

Lake Superior is the world's largest freshwater lake by surface area and the most pristine of the Great Lakes. Sulfide mining poses serious risks of water pollution, with the potential for harmful leachates that can damage groundwater and aquatic ecosystems. I know the NIMBY

(not in my backyard) theory. Many among us like our electronic devices and use electric cars, but there has to be a better place for a mine than Lake Superior.

Progress in Conservation

In an August 24, 2024, *Capital Times* opinion piece, *Two Wins for Wisconsin Conservation Efforts*, former state assembly representative **Spencer Black** highlighted important victories for Wisconsin's conservation efforts, including the Supreme Court ruling on the **Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program**. This decision *overturned* the Joint Finance Committee's ability to block conservation projects through anonymous objections, ensuring that public input is now part of the process.

Black pointed out that past legislative changes had allowed individual legislators to halt conservation efforts without accountability. Notable examples include attempts to block projects such as Cedar Gorge Clay Bluffs and the Pelican River Forest. The recent ruling will enhance public hearings and accountability in stewardship projects.

The Future

Outdoor recreation is huge in Wisconsin, adding \$8.7B to Wisconsin's economy and supporting 89,000 jobs. State lands are economic drivers that benefit our physical and mental well-being. A balanced legislature may protect funding for programs like **Pittman-Robertson**, which supports conservation and recreation initiatives. However, many questions remain, including the restoration of general-purpose revenue (GPR) for state parks, which currently faces a \$1 billion backlog in maintenance and other challenges. Also, will the DNR bring back educators and naturalists cut during the Governor Scott Walker era?

Engaging with local and national decision-makers is crucial. As one colleague reminded me, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu. With a more diverse

group at the decision-making table, there is hope that common sense and collaboration will prevail in 2025. \$

Correction: WEA/ASL Contribution

Editor's Note: To correct an error in the October *Silent Alarm*, there is no record available showing that the WEA (Western Energy Alliance/the "Alliance") has ever contributed to the ASL (Texas-based American Stewards of Liberty). The Alliance is not itself an oil/gas company but a regional (Western U.S. States), membership-based non-profit trade association of about 200 independent natural gas and oil producers. The Alliance does not keep track of its memberships' contributions to other entities. \$



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Deep in the Heart of the Driftless

Fat biking Sidie Hollow County Park. It's ... just ... so ... beautiful!

PHOTO BY CHAD BERGER.

Kierstin Kloeckner

Viroqua, this bucolic town in the heart of the Driftless region, is becoming quite an attraction for those who love silent sports throughout the country. What once, not long ago, was a sleepy community known only to a small group for the abundance of quiet and challenging cycling roads (both gravel and paved), paddling, mountain biking, and fly fishing, is now a Mecca of sorts for those in Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago needing a break from urban life. Throw in the fact there are gourmet farm-to-table restaurants, an award-winning coffee roaster, a well-established food co-op, a bookstore, and a knowledgeable bicycle/outdoor store, and you might just feel you've arrived in heaven—at least from spring to fall.

On summer weekends, most of the cars seem to be carrying bikes, canoes, or fishing equipment. But the gentler-temperature months are not the only time to visit this region. Winter, from the two locals I interviewed, offers its own kind of magic. And for those looking for beauty, more solitude, and outdoor activities (without bugs), winter might just be the best time to make a trip there.

Wintertime Viroqua Pleasures

Laura Hrubes, a well-known fixture in the gravel and mountain bike community throughout the Midwest, calls Viroqua home. Moreover, she's in love with winter and all that the season brings; she competes in several fat biking ultras each year. "The sky in the Driftless region in this area," Laura said, "is really dark and there's not a lot of ambient light when you get outside of town. The stars are so bright

at night in the winter sky it's just unbelievable. There's a quietness in winter that is so different from the rest of the year, like the world just slows down a little bit. It's so comforting to bundle up in warm clothes and everything feels a bit more adventurous, and then it's such a treat to come inside and have a hot cocoa. Being outside in the snow makes you feel like a kid again.

"Winter just makes you feel alive! One of the things I'm looking forward to most of all is riding my fat bike on the groomed trails at the **Veteran Hills** fat bike trail in Viroqua. When conditions are good with snow, it's one of my favorite places to fat bike anywhere, and the **Vernon Trails Team** does an amazing job with the grooming. I think the loop is about 5 miles and there's a little bit of everything: lots of climbing, tight windy trails through the trees, amazing downhills—all of it. It's

100% fun and worthy of a trip to Viroqua on its own. I'm also really looking forward to snowshoeing and maybe even cross-country skiing at the **Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR)**. That's a special place twelve months a year.

"There's a trail called the **Ice Cave Trail** that's worth a hike in the winter, and some ice caves that form at **Wildcat Mountain Park** as well. I'm excited to explore them all this winter!"

Viroqua Events/Racing Action

For Laura, who loves outdoor events, the area offers her so many great options even in the dark months. "**Bluedog Cycles** (bluedogcycles.com) puts together a fun last hurrah of mountain biking at the KVR in November called the **PUKE** (Peddling Up The Kickapoo Epic) ride that's worth putting on your calendar. The KVR also hosts a **Winter Fest** in January that is an amazing family-friendly event, with the opportunity to participate in lots of outdoor activities. It's on January 11th this year; check out: kickapoovalley.wi.gov/

Events/Annual-Events/Winter-Festival.

"**Norskedalen in Coon Valley** hosts a **Candlelight Hike** later in the winter that's dreamy and fun. Occurring in either February or March depending on conditions, it used to be known as the Candlelight Snowshoe Hike; while you can still snowshoe the event, skiing and regular hiking are now welcome as well. For updates, go to: norskedalen.org/events/candlelight-snowshoe-hike.

"One of my favorite winter events in Viroqua is the **Twinklefest Parade**, which is the Friday night after Thanksgiving. Area businesses and groups make floats, decorate everything with lights, and have a big parade down Main Street. It's silly, charming, and joyful, meaning it's a perfect start to the holiday season and a beautiful reminder of what makes Viroqua so special—the people here."

Viroqua Warmth

Through trial and error, Laura has become quite talented at staying comfortable and warm despite cold temperatures. I enjoy



Fat biking by the Bad Axe River.

PHOTO BY LAURA HRUBES.

asking folks who participate in winter activities what their stay-comfortable tricks are and Laura said, "Planning what to wear and dressing in layers is important. Keeping your hands and feet warm is a big part of staying comfortable and safe. Bring things like chemical hand warmers and extra layers. Wear your boots a bit on the large side to help your feet stay warm. A face mask and goggles can protect your skin [and eyes] and help you stay comfortable and avoid frostbite. Also, make sure you have a headlamp handy so you can feel safe and secure being outside when it gets dark. Try some short outings till you feel more comfortable with your gear and what works for you to stay warm. Putting some time into preparation can make those nervous feelings disappear and you will feel ready for anything winter has to offer."

More From Bluedog

Pete Taylor, owner of Bluedog Cycles (which just celebrated their 19th year in business), has not only been supplying the community with their bike, outdoor clothing, and silent sports equipment needs year-round, but also organizes year-round outdoor events and helps build and maintain the Vernon Trails network. While living in Boise, Idaho, Pete and his wife, Alycann, started missing and craving the seasons. "We moved back to the [Viroqua] area nineteen years ago. The quiet Driftless area gets even quieter around here in the



Pete and Kelsey fording Weister Creek, Kickapoo Valley Reserve P.U.K.E. 2023

PHOTO BY DAVID PAQUETTE.

winter and the stars pop. The crisp air feels great and the mountains around here become nicely defined when only the oaks are holding their leaves. You can see the trails everywhere. The fat biking scene is fantastic.

"There are miles of groomed [trails] and even more miles of human-packed. Getting out on a gravel bike on a windless day is pretty amazing also. We just don't have any traffic and our roads are the best. Snowshoeing and Nordic skiing, both on and off-trail, are amazing around here as well. And we're only 30 minutes from **Mount La Crosse** which offers great lift-assist stuff. We used to host a pretty great candlelit snowshoe stomp, but it ran its course so to speak. But there are a couple of places around here that do that type of thing. Norskedalen and Wildcat State Park are beautiful venues that light up the snow and invite people to enjoy.

"There's definitely a crew that works diligently at stomping down some singletrack with snowshoes so they can fat bike. It's not advertised like the Veteran Hills machine-groomed stuff is, but it's epic. That occurs at **Sidie Hollow**, which happens



to be one of the best trail networks in the Upper Midwest, in my biased opinion. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is another place that everybody should explore. They allow recreation out there, but it doesn't get much promotion, so we take care of that on our end. This is the same 9,000 acres that we host the P.U.K.E. Forty-four miles



Fatbike groomed trails under pastel skies! Veteran Hills Fat Biking Trail at Dusk.

PHOTO BY BDC STAFF.



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Bluedog Cycles with a winter set-up. While enjoying the Viroqua area, shop often and where expertise comes with the gear!

PHOTO BY BDC STAFF.



Selfie time! Laura Hrubes enjoying the fat bike trails at Veteran Hills.



of backcountry trail that most people don't know anything about. In wintertime, there's an 8-mile loop that can be ridden on a fat bike. Simply one of the most beautiful chunks of property in the country.

"Also designated as a dark sky location, this is where the astronomers go to hang out at night. The Reserve may be home to a couple of hidden gems in the sense of snowshoeing and ice caves. You can get a map showing the more popular and easier-to-visit ice caves, but there are so many more out there. You just have to get off-trail to find them."

If the winter wonderland pictures that Laura and Pete have painted don't make you want to run/bike/ski/snowshoe as fast as you can to the Viroqua area, I'm not sure what will. I joke with others to keep this region a secret. To tell no one and help keep it a hidden gem. But in all honesty, beautiful things must be loved and shared with those who will appreciate it. ☺



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THE PENOKEE RANGE & THE RANGERS WHO LOVE IT

Charles Zinsmaster

Editor's Note: Born and raised in Wisconsin, Charlie Zinsmaster has been skiing and trying to make trails since the mid-60s, when girlfriends' houses were only accessible by ski. Charlie spent nearly 40 years working on and for the Iron County Forest as a crew leader and forester. He has a masters degree in Forest Management and Ecology and has been "Chief of Trails" of the Penoque Rangers Trail Corps for 50 years. He lives in Pence, Wisconsin, high atop the Gogebic side of the Penoque Range with his wife (and former snowshoer) Carol.

The range of hills running Southwest from Hurley, Wisconsin, to near Drummond, Wisconsin, known as the Penoque Range, got its start 2.7 billion years ago. That makes the rocks present today among the oldest on earth. The Range is one of the three or four sister ranges surrounding Lake Superior.

Complex geology that includes huge volcanic deposits, what I've heard called "Trapp," covered by varying types of sedimentary layers, makes the hills unique.



Portal at Montreal Trails showing sage advice.

PHOTO BY KARL ZINSMASTER.

Geologists we've taken into the Range start to loosen up once we stop to rest and discuss crazy things that probably happened here during "deep time"; things such as the big meteor that crashed into Ontario, creating the Sudbury basin, burying our range in shattered rock. They tell us that they have proof of four glaciers grinding down the range from a pretty high elevation. They said there could have been more; they just can't prove it.

Today, the Range tops out around 1,550 feet above sea level, about 900 feet above Lake Superior. Years of erosion

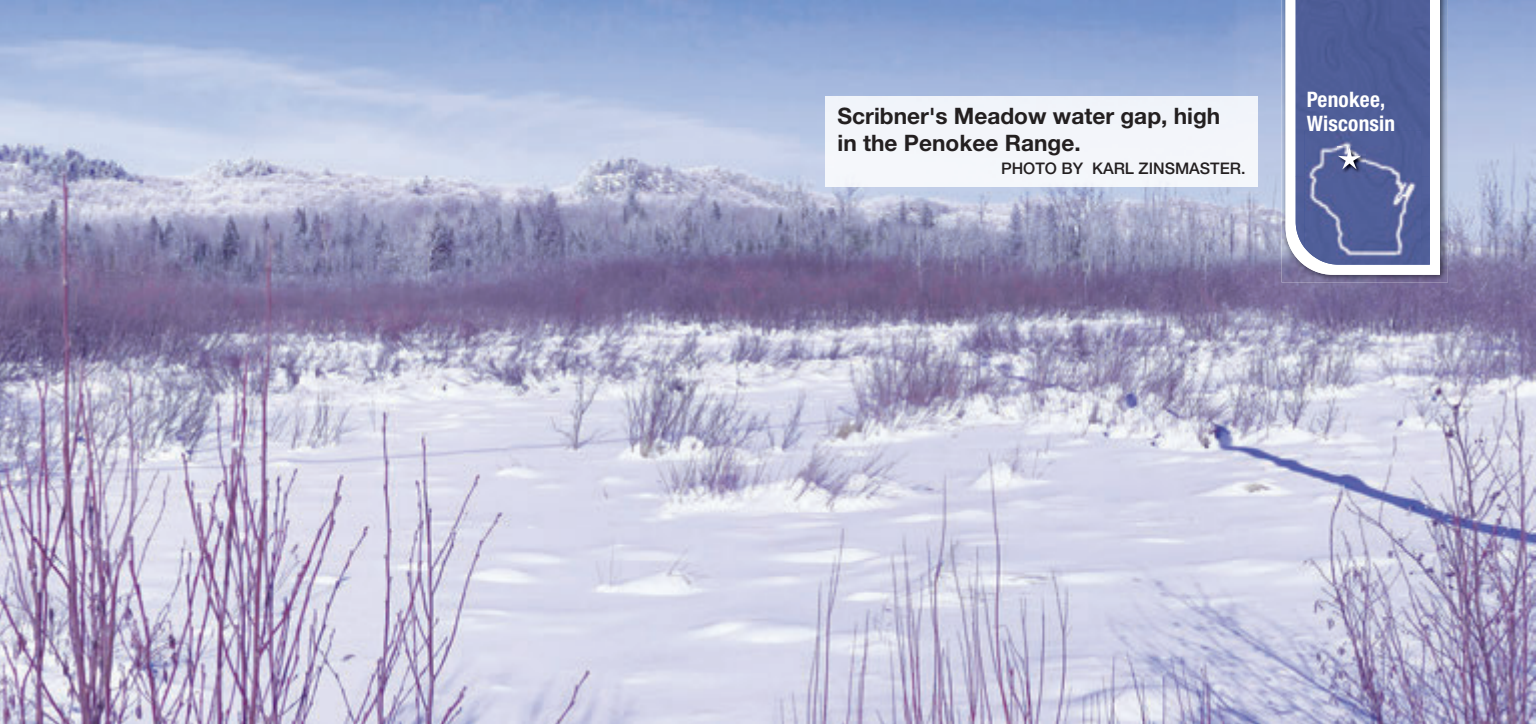
have created wind and water "gaps": N/S passes crossing through the SW-running hills. These gaps have an interesting relationship with the Big Lake and the rest of the Penoque Hills. When north, north-east, or northwest winds blow across Lake Superior, the air picks up moisture and, as it rises against the Range — snow falls. Sometimes really big snow.

What we see today are super-old rock outcroppings, old, eroded faults, and plants that, well — don't tell Madison, but they belong more in the Michigan Upper Peninsula; or, more precisely, in Ontario.

Scribner's Meadow water gap, high in the Penokee Range.

PHOTO BY KARL ZINSMASER.

Penokee,
Wisconsin



Sharing the trail with friends, Montreal Trails.

PHOTO BY BECKY HOLMES.

All I know now is that it's no place for old men.

The Land Nobody Wanted

By the late 1930s, most of Northern Wisconsin and nearly all of Iron County were completely cut over. The white pine went downriver to build Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis. The hardwoods went down into the mines for lagging or supported railroad tracks. It was a moonscape of brush and slash.

Except for the north ridge of the Penokee Range. That land was just too rough and

remote to log.

All of this used-up land sat vacant and eventually went tax-delinquent. Nobody wanted it because it was too rocky and swampy to farm, had a very short growing season, and was too far from markets. The State, after a few years of legislative circus gymnastics, decided, *Hey, let's give all this land to the counties!*

And so ... they did.

They also assigned at least one forester to each county forest to help manage the land and floated non-interest loans for that purpose. Iron County ended up with

around 178,000 acres of brush. The Range was included in this transfer.

They Should Have Wanted It

This crazy idea from Madison turned out to be one of the biggest success stories in Forestry. Today, the Wisconsin county forest system (the only program like it in the world, which also includes Gogebic County in Michigan) is a showcase of sustainable resource management and a significant revenue-generator for the rural, northern counties.

From the start, all 29 county forests embraced Multiple Use: timber production, watershed protection, hunting/foraging, and recreation. County forests are public forests, meaning open to the public. If you are on foot, you can go anywhere and do almost everything on county forest land as long as you don't leave garbage behind, tear up the land, or light the woods on fire.

Iron County's Forestry and Recreation Department (ICF) has spent the last 88 years managing its forests' growth and yield, building and maintaining roads, parks, boat landings, motorized trails, and, although it may be hard to believe, a harbor on Lake Superior. Since 1980, they have worked and cooperated with cross-country skiers to develop ski trails scattered around the county. ICF's interest, passion, and support have always been outstanding.

It took a little while for the Forestry

Committee to take a bunch of rag-tag backcountry skiers seriously when the question of trails in the Public Forest came up. Once the two groups started working together, some unique recreation opportunities happened.

The Skiers

We were ski bums in 1973. We were all trying to find real jobs in the recession world of the times. We ended up working seasonal jobs at downhill ski areas. I caught T-bars and shoveled snow.

We had no money.

In some seasons, the Hill paid us only in room and board. Bank tellers in Ironwood would laugh as we walked in with our paychecks. "Oh, another latex paycheck?" they'd chuckle. On those perfect winter days, in between swinging T-bars, we'd look out on all those gorgeous hills covered beneath hoar frost and deep, deep snow. There was no TV at the Hill and we had already read the available books. With nothing to do in the evening, we started to take our wooden skis and, with chintzy, weak headlamps, started poking into the Range.

Each night's excursion left us with a packed trail for the next night. Farther and deeper into the hills, it didn't take us long to realize that this ground was someplace special during winter. Natural passes kept leading us northeast through the Range and eventually brought us to an overlook where, at midnight, we could see the lights of Hurley. I don't know what any of the other people with me that night thought, but I could see a trail almost totally on public land, that was open to everybody to ski point to point.

Some of us have moved on while others are gone. But some of us ended up staying (and found real jobs). Over the years, we packed snow with skis and snowshoes; then, we waited and skied our trail after a new snow. We bought cheap snowmobiles and constructed sleds to set tracks out of plywood and oak molds. We went to Forestry Committee meetings and told them what we were doing and what potential the hills had.

We sold chicken at the fair. We got aspen maintenance projects from the County. We took out loans and bought serious snowmachines. One of us ended up at the Olympics in Lake Placid and Salt Lake because we were recognized as inventors



Sundown, perfect ski day, Montreal.

PHOTO BY KARL ZINSMASER.



Stuck again. Uller, at headwaters of Boomer Ck.

PHOTO BY TYLER WICKLUND.



Trail Shelter, fall, West end of Uller, Iron County Forest. PHOTO BY SHANE WYSLIC.

of track-setting and had more experience working snow than most people in the country.

Eventually, people would request information on **Uller trail conditions**. We'd tell them, quite frankly, "It's an act of God. If we can handle the snow, our equipment is running, and our wives and children have let us out for the hours it will take, the tracks will be there."

It's still a little that way. Uller is a challenge to pack and track every time we go out there with enough fuel and running equipment.

There are only a few of the original ski bums around. However, the next generation is showing up. They have the energy and strength it takes. They only need more time on the big snow and running the chainsaws. I'll back off then. Perhaps I'll ski the approaches into the Range.

But I will always remember 50-plus years

of volunteering and the most exquisite skiing.

Today and Tomorrow

The ski club, **The Penokee Rangers Trail Corps**, enjoys a close relationship with the Iron County Forestry and Parks

Department. Their equipment and staff, combined with the Ranger volunteers, continue to work hard to maintain Uller, the classic ski trail through the Penokee Range. The Department was the motivating force in the creation of a series of loops on the western end of the trail in 2017.

Uller continues to be a logistical challenge. Getting equipment and personnel out to where things need to be done takes serious time. Equipment such as side-by-sides on wheels and tracks helps immensely. After all these years, there are still many places that need to be hardened, drained, or crossed. Some of those places can only be worked on by hand (shovels, Pulaskis, and wheelbarrows), and then only if things have dried up some. Two trail shelters exist, mostly thanks to the efforts of ICF. The shelter on the West Loops is quite comfortable.

The Rangers are looking seriously at purchasing an electric trail groomer and are raising funds. We'll see how all that goes. It's nice to have the next generation involved and looking toward the future.

We used to guarantee snow by Thanksgiving, big snow. After last year's wimpy winter, we can't do that anymore. I spent my professional career looking 25 to 50 years into the future of our local woods. I don't see a lot of change going on with the Range itself. I dream of finding a small, powerful dozer and 2 to 3 Rangers to follow along and harden up the 19K of trail through those hills. There's a new generation out there that believes in classic tracks and narrow trails, where you feel like you're in the woods. I hope they can find a living up here. It's hard sometimes.

After all, when we get snow off the Big Lake, there's no skiing like Uller skiing. 🐾



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PENOKEE RANGERS AIM TO GO ELECTRIC

Mike Ivey

The Penokee Rangers, who maintain the Uller and Montreal cross-country ski trails in far northern Wisconsin, want to go electric.

To that end, the volunteer group has launched a \$50,000 fundraising drive to purchase a new rechargeable machine to groom some 40 kilometers of singletrack classic trails in the Lake Superior snow-belt. If everything comes together, it could become the first U.S. Nordic ski trail system with a dedicated electric snowcat.

After two years of researching its options, the Rangers have set their sights on a **Pickman XR UTV** and are working with the manufacturer on a collaborative relationship. The group's gasoline-powered vehicle is nearing the end of its life and is badly in need of replacement.

"We are always looking for ways to reduce our emissions, not only for the obvious climate-related reasons but also for the health of our operators," **Karl Zinsmaster** said, who, with his father, **Charlie**, provide much of the grooming.

In addition to cutting fossil fuel use, Zinsmaster said that the Pickman XR will operate more quietly and require less maintenance while running up to 90 miles on a single charge.



**Mockup image of the electric
Pickman XR Ute.**

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE PENOKEE RANGERS.

"It's actually got more towing capacity than our current gas-powered Gator and we're pretty confident it will do everything we ask without the noxious fumes," Zinsmaster said. "I've been working with Pickman for a few years now to ensure their truck will work and not leave us stranded out in the woods somewhere."

Pickman has pledged a significant discount to move the electric groomer project forward. The Rangers have also secured funding from the Sisu Ski Fest, Xcel Energy, an Enbridge Fueling Futures grant, and the Ironwood/Hurley Rotary Club. In a typical season, the Penokee Rangers put in some 1,000 hours grooming the Iron County trails, which are open to the public on a donation basis. Hence the group's motto: "Ski Freely."

The Montreal Trails run through remnants of the historic Montreal Mine and

are open for silent sports activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking. The Rangers have developed interpretive signs along the trails, which once hosted the Stormy Kromer Pursuit race.

The Uller Trail is considered *the most remote ski trail in Wisconsin that is regularly groomed*. Volunteers have teamed with Iron County officials over the past several years to expand the trails closest to the Weber Lake trailhead near the Whitecap downhill ski resort.

"I've worked with the Rangers in the past and I know Charlie and Karl do a wonderful job," said Kelly Klein, economic development director with Iron County. "They've really created some new energy in the community with the trail system."

While there is some e-grooming on cross-country trails in parts of Europe, Karl Zinsmaster hasn't heard of anything in this country yet. "I found one guy out in Vermont who's been using a retrofitted smart car with tracks," he said. "And there's a precedent at some alpine resorts now with the big Prinoth and PistenBully electric cats. But we would be the first group as far as I'm aware to utilize an electric Kei Truck or UTV for Nordic trails."

For more information or to donate to the new groomer visit penokeerangers.com/electrifying. ☞

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Getting Those Skis Prepped for the Season

Dan Clausen

Editor's Note: Dan Clausen is the Ski Pro of the Minocqua Winter Park Ski Shop, a long-experienced ski prep tech, and certified instructor with 43 Birkies under his belt. He provides these important cautions for you and your ski prep process: Whether ironing in wax, brushing or roto-brushing, scraping, applying base cleaner or liquid wax, or at any stage of the ski prep process that expels fumes or particles into the air, be sure to wear a quality respirator mask. After all, you trained for a reason so there's no need to challenge your lungs with airborne gunk. Also, whenever you have finished ironing in a glide or kick wax, be sure to thoroughly wipe off your iron, even if dedicated to only glide or kick wax, to avoid unwanted mixing of waxes.

Deciding what to do about your skis for the upcoming season depends on how much love you gave them before setting them aside last ski season. It is like taking good care of our body or car service maintenance.

- Your top boards must also be healthy. Did you clean and kiss them with a general layer of soft yellow or base prep wax layer for summer storage?
- The ski bases need to be hydrated, just like your skin, with wax ironed into the ski bases' pores. The wax iron must have been set well below 125°F, or the wax manufacturer's suggested temperatures, as the soft wax melts at a low temperature.

Do those steps still need to be taken? Then join us in the back shop to set them up like this:

- Clean the tips and tails with a special glide wax cleaner. Consider that there is exhaust from the grooming equipment; air pollution mixes with new falling snowflakes; there's dirt from the road crossings; skiing in the forest pine tar and sap collects on the base. Accordingly — *the bases of your skis are dirty from last season's use!*



Some key gearing-up to keep your skis in shape: Fiberlene (or Fibertex), quality iron with a precise temp. readout, soft and harder glide waxes, sharp plastic scraper, and brushes. Of course there's more and make sure you get all that you need! Please do not forget that well-fitting respirator!

ALL PHOTOS BY DAN CLAUSEN.



Scrape that warm wax with a sharp plastic scraper in a near-vertical position, thumbs firm, when the wax is still wet in order to clean out old wax and dirt, and to open base pores. This makes your bases receptive to new wax applications. Tip for liquid wax users: to increase your liquid wax applications' effectiveness, it's best to hot wax a few times during the ski season.

- A hot scrape is the way we like to clean if the bases are not too infected. This is the easiest way to flush them. Apply a warm soft wax on the ski bases; iron and scrape *when still wet*. The warm wax will peel just like creamy butter. This easy method will pull the dirt out of the ski base pores — and more than that if you want to comply with the fluoro ban of nearly all races these days, including the Birkie, therefore ...
- Your bases need to be flushed and scrubbed free of fluoro wax. You may need to grab some new, uncontaminated brushes and equipment to comply. Brush the skis with a copper, brass, or

metal brush to cut the microscopic hairs and smooth and open up the pores of the base.

- Next, add a generous layer of soft wax ironed into the base of the skis. When ironing, move from tip to tail using a smooth pulling motion with the *iron moving at all times*. If the wax is smoking, that means the iron is too hot. Try *not* to over-iron. Please note that on classic *wax-able* cross-country skis, do not iron glide wax into the skis' wax pockets or grip zones. Leave the grip zones bare until all the scraping and brushing have been completed. Glide wax itself makes a great base for the next glide wax application, but not a good base for grip wax. This step opens and softens the base for better wax penetration.
- Let the skis relax for at least 45 minutes or, preferably, overnight.
- Scrape the skis with a sharp acrylic scraper from tip to tail, removing the surface wax. Start the pushing motion with your thumbs at a sharp angle, then move the scraper near vertical. This technique will peel the wax effectively.
- Brush the skis from tip to tail with a stiff nylon bristle brush. When brushing, put one hand over the other and do not tickle it; push like you mean it, to flatten the brush bristles. Try not to over-brush, but just enough with the goals of removing excess wax, opening the ski structure, and pushing the wax deeper into the base.
- The Ski Groove: The most efficient way to clear the ski groove of wax is with a groove pin. Use this tool while the wax is still wet.

Hardening the Base

At that this point, we now need to harden the base of the skis:

- Iron in a hard, cold glide wax. The temperature of the iron will need to be warmer as this wax is harder to melt; often, setting your iron at 140°F is the norm with hard waxes, but be sure to carefully follow the manufacturer's iron temperature instructions.
- As before, let the skis rest for 45 minutes or overnight.
- Repeat the scraping and brushing process as you did with the first soft wax layer or layers.



Don't be timid with your brushing, push that wax in, but pay attention for when the surface wax has been well-removed.



Use a groove pin as the inexpensive but effective tool to prep your ski bases' groove.

Wax of the Day

Now the tips and tails are prepped properly, the next step would be to repeat the process using the wax of the day or the wax you will start skiing on in December. Or whenever your ski season begins.

If skis get **stoneground**, the hot-waxing portion of soft and hard waxes would still apply. The grind shop usually applies a special wax recipe after the grind. In our shop, we use the roto brush with Merino wool for top coats. But for general brushing, the roto kicks up too much junk in the air and is noisy. Accordingly, it's best to wear a mask when using a roto brush. So, for most tasks, we use hand-brushing techniques.

Back to Those Classic Skis: Get a Grip!

The grip wax pocket needs to be prepped with grip wax.

- Use a hard, cold grip wax such as a special green or base binder. Grip wax makes the best base for grip wax. If you only have one iron, wipe it clean with Fiberlene while the iron is warm.
- Lightly touch the wax to the iron and spread a thin, uniform layer on the zone.
- Iron the kick wax smooth (making sure to have first wiped off the previously applied base binder or grip wax from the iron).
- Next, polish with a waxing cork to a uniform layer.

You are now ready to add three layers of the grip wax of the day. The wax will crayon on easily and cork out nicely. Three *thin* layers of wax will perform better than one thick gobby layer. You can see whether the ski has enough wax if you can make squiggly lines with your fingernail. Corking problems spreading grip wax usually occur because this base prep step was not completed properly.

Patterned No-Wax Skis

On our patterned no wax skis, the glide-zone prep uses the same procedure as wax-able skis' glide zone. But in the patterned grip area, unlike wax-able skis, use a wipe-on glide wax and let it dry for 10 minutes or longer. Brush and polish with a soft polishing brush.

This step is the most important because often when skiing, from dry to wet conditions, snow will stick to the pattern and ruin your day. You will want to use the product regularly on the no-wax skis' pattern. Remember, with patterned no-wax skis, it's the pattern that provides the kick, not the wax.

Skin Skis

On skin skis, a liquid anti-ice is used for the purpose of avoiding sticking snow. It's a good idea to use it regularly to protect the



Use a liquid de-icer to clean and fluff-up those skins, but not directly on the skins themselves. Wet some Fiberlene and wipe skins with that. Also, during a race or outing, carry a pastic baggy with some Fiberlene with de-icing liquid on it for when the skins lose effective grip. You'll be glad you did!

skin. Shake it up and wet it on the skin *the night before your outing* so it's more hydrophobic.

You may need to clean the skins at least once a year depending on how flattened and dirty the skins are. At some point, the fur of the skin gets matted down with use. The skis will start to lose grip. Grooming machine exhaust, man-made snow, and tree debris or klister will contaminate the skins.

In cleaning the skins, remember that the cleaning agent is too harsh to directly apply to the skins themselves! Instead, shake the bottle vigorously and pour some on a piece of Fiberlene textured toweling. Wipe back and forth to clean and fluff up the skin. You should see dirt on the toweling.

Last season, with the wet, man-made snow at the Birkie, some skins started to fail with over-saturation of water. When this happens, skiers should stop and fluff and clean the skins to get the grip working again. Here's a tip on this: Just like with skiers using wax-able skis, taking an extra wax tin and cork with them, the skin skier should pack a sandwich bag with a wet toweling soaked with cleaning solution. On a tough day, if the skin skis start to slip and lose grip, stop and quickly fluff to rejuvenate the skins for a minute and save the day by being prepared.

Liquid Glide Waxes

Even when using liquid glide waxes, it's still best to hot wax the skis beforehand



Three thin layers of kick wax, not one gloppy one. You can see whether the ski has enough wax if you can make squiggly lines with your fingernail.

using the hot wax base prep procedure that was covered above. Your wipe-on products will perform at their best and last for more kilometers.

And remember, despite the convenience and success of today's liquid waxes, it is still best to hot wax your ski bases a few times during the ski season. Doing so helps keep your liquid waxes working and lasting at their optimum.

Overall Goals

The ski prep question is, *Do you want your skis just waxed or prepared correctly?*

Have fun with the process and remember that waxing can be as easy or as complicated as you like. And if you take care of your skis from the start going forward, the experience will be enhanced and you may get hooked even more on the sport.

Understand that with ski prep, first the base needs to be softened! Then it needs to be hardened! At the Minocqua Winter Park Ski Shop, we also use our Toko Thermo Bag for the best wax penetration. This tool is most effective because it has a sophisticated thermostat that keeps the set temperature consistent. It has been proven that this temperature wax goes deeper into the base. We will read the skis a bedtime story and tuck them into the bag for about an hour's nap for their treatment. Come by the shop and have a chat about this option.

Today, many options are available for ski-waxing equipment featured by all the companies. Many types of brushes are used to smooth or structure the ski bases. Here is a start kit of stuff, or **Tools for Base Prep101**: Wax bench profile and /or ski vises; Iron; Scraper; Grove Pin; Stiff Nylon Brush; Brass, Copper, or steel brush; Fiberlene or Fibertex Toweling; Your Waxes of Choice.

These tools are a perfect start for your waxing — leading to skiing — pleasure. ☺

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Johannes Klaebo speaking with the kids from the Loppet Foundation when he visited Minneapolis this past summer. PHOTO BY HAAKON KLAEBØ.

The Winning & Welcoming Ways of Johannes Klaebo

Luke Bodensteiner

In the days following **Kikkan Randall** and **Jessie Diggins'** golden victory at the Olympics in Pyeongchang, the drive to bring the FIS Cross Country Skiing World Cup back to the United States, and to Minneapolis no less, was in full swing. Almost as quickly as they had finished, what was once a concept — to bring the World Cup back to the U.S. after a nearly 20-year hiatus — became a now-or-never moment. Harnessing the star power of Jessie, the groundwork that had been laid by then-Loppet Foundation executive director **Jon Munger** to develop Wirth Park as a venue for major events, and the fervor for cross-country skiing in the greater Minneapolis area, created the sense that if we couldn't bring the World Cup back to

the U.S. now, we might never again.

The idea had been bandied about in international skiing circles for many years. What about Alaska, which hosted World Cups in 1983 and 84? Maybe Manhattan's Central Park? Many across the global skiing community expressed their interest in bringing the World Cup to the U.S., the world's greatest sports market, to expand the interest in the sport worldwide. But when push came to shove it invariably ended up being preferable to the decision-makers to remain in Europe, despite the obvious downside of not expanding the sport beyond their local borders. Even when a solid plan finally emerged and was presented to the International Ski Federation, those involved had to elbow their way to get the event onto the international calendar.

Even the chairman of the FIS

cross-country committee, himself a genuine advocate for expanding the sport into new markets outside of Europe, said he felt like "This will be a one-night stand." He worried that squeezing Minneapolis into the calendar at the last minute would just be a disruptive nuisance. As it turned out, the World Cup in Minneapolis was a rousing success, with Jessie Diggins and other headliners drawing in tens of thousands of spectators.

Norway's Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo

Simply put, Johannes Klaebo is the greatest cross-country skier of all time, winning 80 World Cup races so far. He's also one of the rare competitors whose ambition goes beyond simply winning races; his vision is to use his platform to raise the interest in cross-country skiing worldwide.

Not simply a ski racer, he's also an entrepreneur with a business — **Hufs** — that stretches well beyond his home borders of Norway.

Klaebo devotes much of his crucial training time to his "second home," as he calls it, in Utah, engaging with young ski racers while he's in the U.S. through events aimed to inspire kids and raise the profile of his sport. He aligns with global brands that are willing to use their reach to promote cross-country skiing into ever-widening circles. And he's fully embraced his position as a global ambassador for the sport.

While the gravity of this upcoming winter will focus his attention on something hyper-local to him —the skiing world championships this winter will take place just a short ski away from his current home in Trondheim, Norway — Klaebo clearly sees the opportunity that a championship in his hometown can provide, to create a platform for him to raise the profile of his sport worldwide. He envisions that as the "next phase" of his career.

In 2016, while Klaebo was still a junior, he signed his first sponsorship. It was with an app development company, which also signed two other athletes, one of his Norwegian teammates and emerging

American skier, Jessie Diggins. "Being in a sponsorship along with an American skier was the first time I started to think about skiing as a global sport," Klaebo said.

Just a year later, Klaebo was selected to compete at the World Under-23 Championship, which would be held at Soldier Hollow in Utah. That race was his main goal for the season and it put American skiing solidly onto his radar. "I was stoked to come to the U.S. and see what cross-country skiing was like here," he said from his training base near Deer Valley, Utah. "Often, we don't think about cross-country skiing as a worldwide sport and I was curious about how it was beyond Europe."

However, during that same season, Klaebo was quickly promoted to Norway's World Cup squad, which meant that he was unable to travel to Utah for the U23 Championship. As a young athlete, though, he was also planning for his future and considering his next steps, which included enrolling in college. "I considered going to college in the U.S.," he said. "I had friends skiing NCAA at Denver University and they said it was a really cool experience." Ultimately, with his World Cup career just beginning, he decided to forego skiing in the NCAA and opted instead

to enroll in classes near his home at Trondheim's NTNU.

U.S. Interest Remains

When Klaebo reached the point in his career where he wanted to introduce altitude training into his program, he thought again about the U.S. He had "heard good rumors about training in Utah" and was searching for a place that had "more flat roads, more reliably good weather, more of a community than many of the remote high-altitude sites in the Alps, and a place where I could train right from my door."

When he first came to the U.S. to train, Klaebo wasn't sure what to expect in terms of ski culture. He got help from the U.S. Ski Team, which welcomed him to train at their **Center of Excellence**. Aside from a handful of U.S. national team athletes, he didn't expect to meet any skiers out in the local community and didn't anticipate that people here would know who he was. But he quickly saw people out on the roads rollerskiing, people on bike rides recognizing him and saying hello, and a general enthusiasm for helping him discover places to train and giving him support like a local. "I'm really impressed with the ski culture in the U.S.," he said, "with the facilities, the people who are involved,

With all his past and ongoing success, Johannes Klaebo, third from right, enjoys his time inspiring youth to pursue their Nordic dreams as shown by the smiling young skiers from the Loppet Foundation.

PHOTO BY HAAKON KLAEBO.



and their passion for the sport. I've felt very well taken care of and I've been pleasantly surprised that people have welcomed me into their community and greeted me as one of their own."

Because of his passion for popularizing cross-country skiing around the world, Klaebo has spent time skiing with and speaking to many hundreds of young American skiers. "I know when I was young and got to meet the great skiers," he said, "it made a big difference in how I viewed the sport, and it made me recognize that it's a big deal. And I feel like it's a great opportunity to share a little international ski culture with the young skiers over here."

After three years of training in the U.S., he's pleased with his decision. "I feel very at home here, as much as I do in Trondheim. And as a World Cup skier, I'm glad no one else has discovered this place because being here is a real advantage!"

Sweet Home Minneapolis

When Minneapolis was announced as a

World Cup venue for the 2023/2024 season, many of the world's elite skiers became curious. "Jessie and some of the other U.S. skiers really hyped the event and helped us understand how big it really could be," Klaebo said. Still, when he first arrived in Minneapolis, he said he wasn't sure what to expect. "The city was very quiet in the winter. When we arrived and went for a run, the town seemed deserted. Having been back now in the summer, I see that it's much more active; but when we arrived it was not at all busy. When we arrived at Wirth Park, though, it was so much bigger than I expected. The noise from the crowd was huge, even during warmups. I had a similar feeling to being at Holmenkollen in Oslo, which is one of those very special venues on tour. Many of the places where we compete are far from people and here, we were in a major city full of people who go skiing. And Americans cheer for everyone! It made me feel appreciated and at home. I decided to come back to visit Minneapolis and the

Loppet Foundation this summer because of the feeling I got from Minneapolis' skiing community. They did a great job, and it felt great to go back and visit everyone."

Reflecting on his experience, Klaebo said, "The World Cup in Minneapolis was more important than we can even imagine. The people who came to the race saw that watching cross-country skiing can be fun. And competing there showed all of us on the World Cup that there's an appreciation for cross-country skiing globally, in a place we as World Cup skiers don't normally think about. It felt great to be in a big urban environment. Everyone on tour had their eyes opened about the potential of the sport worldwide and would love to go back. *The World Cup should be in the U.S. every year*, the same as Davos or Holmenkollen. It was a great race in a great venue, with fair competitions and a good track. To continue to grow skiing as a global sport, we need to be in North America every year."

Johannes Klaebo roller skiing in Park City, Utah. Kevin Bolger wearing an orange helmet is among the group.

PHOTO BY HAAKON KLAEBØ.



Looking forward, Klaebo believes that the sport holds huge potential in the U.S. "Cross-country skiing is something that people fall in love with, that can change the health of the population. When people get excited about skiing, they learn about health and fitness. They measure what they do. Let's continue to make it more accessible, let's introduce more kids. Let's link more trails, and let's bring skiing to more schools."

In many ways, Johannes Klaebo feels like he's becoming a part of the U.S. skiing community. "I've gotten to know many people in the U.S. skiing community," he said, "who appreciate what I do as an athlete and with whom I have a lot in common. All the experiences I've had in the U.S. are part of my journey and a nice part of my identity."

From a community that Klaebo finds welcoming, the community says Welcome! in return. ☺



This image almost was our December issue cover photo. Johannes Klaebo competing at the World Cup last 2023/2024 season. He made the event a clean sweep with a third win in three days: Golds in sprint, skiathlon, and 10K event, all on home Norwegian snow in Trondheim.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAFT SPORTSWEAR NOR/CHRIS THOMAS JOHANSEN.

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Getting Klaebo's Autograph

Mike Gibbs

Until Sunday, February 19, 2024, all I'd really known about **Johannes Hosflot Klaebo** was that he was considered the greatest cross-country skier of his generation, if not all-time. He had his own coach and training program, separate from the Norwegian team. He had a competitive killer instinct that made him seem unapproachable. He was so extraordinarily focused that he seemed to wear an invisible DO NOT DISTURB! sign over his racing bib. He was, in other words, a man apart.

You do not mess with Klaebo.

At least this is what I'd learned from reading about him and watching his racing on YouTube.

That was all about to change as he walked across the street from the racecourse to the waxing houses during the **World Cup races at Wirth Park in Minneapolis**. It turns out, this is where the real action at this race was taking place.

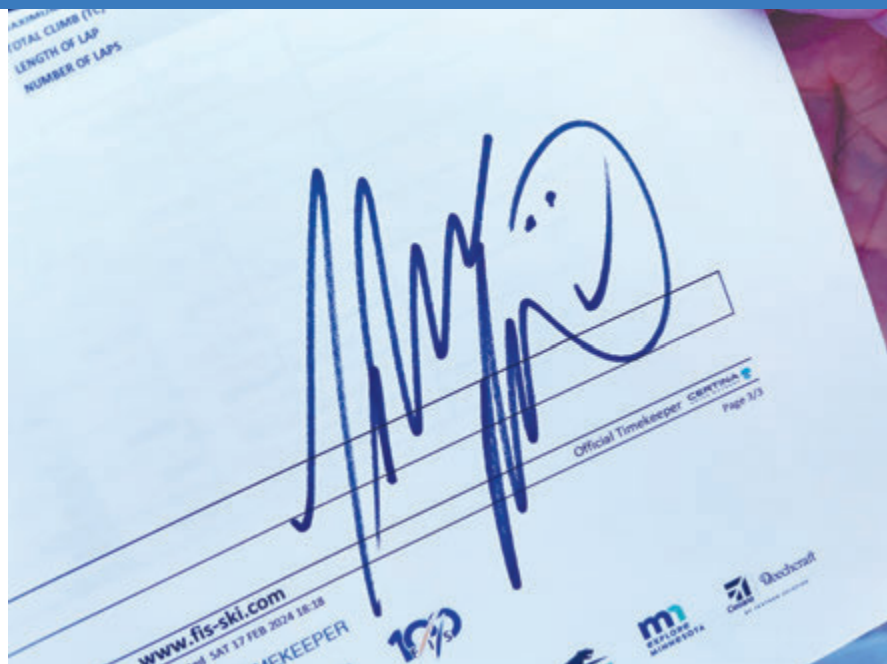
A line had formed where surprised and delighted fans were getting autographs from every athlete they asked. I was there in that line with my friend **Blair Hawkins**, a skiing pal since the late 1970s, a 78-year-old, rabid, well-educated sports fan, and a treasure hunter of unique memorabilia.

And he was there for Klaebo's autograph.

We didn't know what to expect when The King suddenly appeared and began moving down the line. We watched, somewhat awestruck, as he signed every autograph requested and chatted kindly with others.

He approached us.

Aside from being a devoted, lifelong cross-country skier and endurance athlete, Blair is also an excitable and emotional guy. He stood firmly, quietly, and seriously—holding his position among the others, many of them young kids, with



Johannes Klaebo's autograph, and a touch of artwork. There are far too many out there to gain much value on the Antique Road Show 100 years from now, but priceless proof of the man's generosity of his time to the sport and its fans.

PHOTO BY MIKE GIBBS.

his start list outstretched, ready for inking. Then, without fanfare, Johannes Hosflot Klaebo was there. He nodded to Blair, gently took Blair's offering, and signed his name near his own printed name on the start sheet.

In a dreamlike instant, the crazed crowd disappeared around us as Blair and I gawked at the signature. Blair looked up and thanked Klaebo. Klaebo locked eyes with Blair and said, "My pleasure."

And then he moved on to sign dozens of more sheets, shirts, bibs, warm-ups, and scraps of paper.


"That man is a professional and a gentleman," Blair stated appreciatively.

I'll be damned if I didn't see a tear in his eye.

Later in the day, I was chatting with

U.S. Nordic Ski Team head coach **Matt Whitcomb**. I asked him about Johannes as a person. Matt replied, "Johannes is a world-class skier and world-class human. He's very generous with his time and has invested much of it in pumping up American skiers, especially kids. He is the type of athlete we need at the top; he's interested in far more than just his own success."

For Blair and me, his autograph will always stand as testimony to the heart of a true champion. And add to the humanity of many elites this other wonderful highlight: We saw world champion sprinter **Federico Pellegrino** take off his bib, sign it, and give it to a 12-year-old fan.

Inspiring sportsmanship ruled the day. 

silentSPORTS

Inside

**HOLIDAY GIFT
IDEAS FROM:**

WENONAH CANOE

GEAR WEST

NEW MOON SKI & BIKE

AND MORE...



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HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

from

WENONAH CANOE

Brian Day

The holiday gift-giving season is right around the corner. If you've got a canoeist on your list, you might be looking for a few good gift ideas. Here at Wenonah, we like equipment that helps us paddle and portage farther, with more comfort. That might be a featherlight paddle, a set of comfy portage pads, or a padded cover for your canoe seat. And a T-shirt or hat is always a safe bet.

Here are our top picks for holiday gift ideas.

Chosen Valley Solo Yoke (\$225.95)

You can shoulder-carry your solo canoe for short distances, but long portages call for a serious yoke. Our solo yoke comes in two configurations: One that attaches to a sliding pedestal seat and provides ample clearance between your head and the pedestal, and a second that secures to any flat webbed or cane seat. Both are outfitted with Chosen Valley sling yoke pads for maximum comfort.

Gear up for next season's adventures with a proper yoke for your Wenonah solo canoe.

Black Lite Elbow Paddle (\$224.95)

The Black Lite Elbow is our favorite canoe paddle. This graphite, bent-shaft paddle isn't just for racing or workouts. Its light weight and efficient shape make it the perfect companion for everything from recreational paddles to wilderness adventures. This is our everyday paddle, and if you try one, we think it will be yours too. It's hard to go back to a heavy paddle once you've tried the Black Lite.

Note: Plan on sizing a bent shaft paddle 4 to 6 inches shorter than a conventional canoe paddle. The most common size is 52, followed by 50.

- Blade: 8 and 7/8"
- Offset: 10°
- Weight: 13 oz.

Quetico Elbow Paddle (\$149.95)

The Quetico Elbow Paddle is the perfect choice for canoeists who prefer the beauty and warmth of a wood paddle. This superbly balanced, beautiful, and durable elbow paddle was designed by Wenonah Canoe founder and owner **Mike Cichanowski**. It's our top recommendation for canoeists looking to explore the efficiency of an elbow paddle at an affordable price.

- Blade: 8"
- Offset: 12°
- Weight: 22 oz.

Black Lite Elbow Paddle. This graphite, bent-shaft paddle is a customer favorite.

This T-shirt is an affordable gift that goes great with the hat and, you have to admit, it's a cool design!

ALL PHOTOS
BY BRIAN DAY.



CVCA Solo Pedestal Yoke. A yoke solution for serious portages.



Slip-on seat pad. Your giftee will appreciate the ease of use and added comfort.

Chosen Valley Sling Yoke Pads (\$86.95 Bolt-On, \$95.95 Clamp-On)

Wenonah's ultralight canoes take the sting out of long portages—and a set of quality yoke pads makes the journey even more comfortable. Our sling yoke pads are the optimum combination of comfort, light weight, and durability. The sling-like design of our pads flexes to adapt the load to your shoulders and cushions the ride with ample padding.

Available in two styles: a bolt-on version for maximum security and a clamp-on style that allows you to swap pads between different canoes. Both are adjustable for width so the pads will hit your shoulders in just the right place.



CVCA Clamp-On Pad. Comes in a bolt-on version too. Make the portaging more comfortable with these pads.

Bucket Seat Cushion (\$34.95)

The only thing better than a contoured bucket seat is a *padded* contoured bucket seat.

Wenonah's slip-on padded seat cover is an easy way to add a little more comfort to your favorite canoe. This thick foam seat cushion was designed to fit perfectly over our bucket seats. An elastic band keeps this slip-on seat cushion solidly in place, providing all-day, no-hassle paddling comfort. Note: This cushion *does not work* with the floor-mounted bucket seat on our Wee Lassies.

Cushgear BackSavers (\$109.95)

Paddle with comfort for hours! The CushGear BackSaver is a favorite of wilderness travelers and long-distance adventure racers. Adjustable for height and angle to fit any paddler. BackSavers fold down on the seat for storage or portage and feature spring-loaded hinges that hold the backrest upright in use. The open-back design lets your back breathe on hot days. CushGear BackSavers are available to fit both bucket and bench seats and are offered in both black and silver trim.

Wenonah Team Hat (\$24.95) & Dimensions T-Shirt (\$19.95)

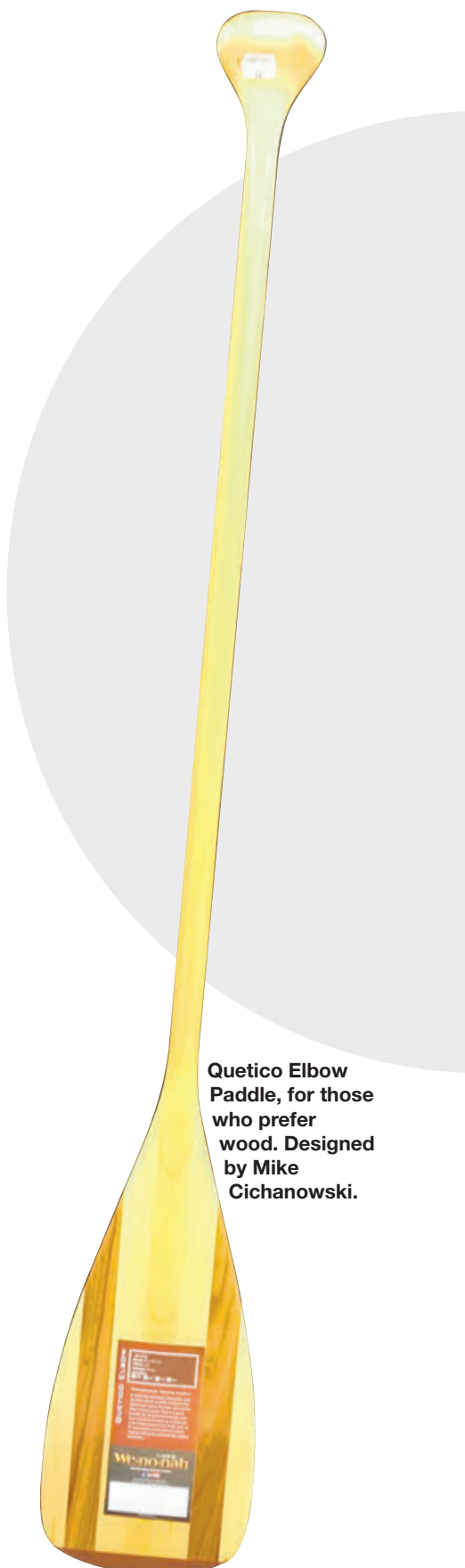
Here's the perfect gift for the Wenonah canoe fan on your list! This low-profile, structured cap sports the classic Wenonah Canoe logo and is available in brown with tan mesh.

And to compliment the team hat, can your favorite paddlers on your holiday list ever really have enough T-shirts? Wenonah's newest logo T features the modern Wenonah logo front with a CAD drawing of the Minnesota II on the back. 100% cotton. Black. Sizes Small-2XL.

A great combo gift in themselves and to add to the others!

While this list isn't exhaustive, it does hit our favorites. An ultralight paddle helps you travel farther with less effort. Portage pads take the sting out of that 200-rod portage. And a Cush Gear BackSaver will give you all-day comfort on the water. Whether paddling or kicking back afterward, your favorite paddlers can be in canoeing style in the distinctive hat and T!

You'll find all these accessories and more at wenonah.com. \$



Quetico Elbow Paddle, for those who prefer wood. Designed by Mike Cichanowski.

The Silent Sports Holiday Gift Guide

NORDIC SERVICES

- *STONEGRIND - - - - - \$95
L30 · L32 · PL3 · PL4
LC0 · LC2 · LC4
- *STONEGRIND SKINSKI - - - \$105
- *HOTBOX + HARDENING - - - \$50
- *RTS (READY TO SKI) - - - \$35
- *GLIDE WAX - - - - - \$22
- *MOUNTING - - - - - \$20
- *MOUNTING IFP + NIS - - - NO CHARGE
- *POLE ALTERATION - - - \$15
- *POLE TIPS - - - - - NO CHARGE
- *PINE TAR - - - - - \$35
- *SKIN REPLACEMENT - - - \$30
- *FLEX ANALYSIS - - - 3+ PAIR / \$25
- *ROLLERSKI SERVICE AVAILABLE
- *REPAIRS AVAILABLE
- *RACE WAXING AVAILABLE

QUESTIONS? ASK A
SALES ASSOCIATE!

The Silent Sports shops you know and love offer great service gift ideas, even for the ones who love woodies. Yes, give a call and, Ask a Sales Associate. We're all Nordorks here!

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEAR WEST.

Who has not been there? The moments when you are struggling to think of gift ideas for your friends and loved ones. Stocking-stuffers can come easily, but the Under the Tree Gift that is thoroughly thoughtful, meaningful, and inexpensive is much harder to come up with. Especially for your own silent-sports oriented loved one.

Well then — *Here comes the Gear West staff to the rescue!*

Instead of just listing out some products carried by Gear West, when we talked about this project, the thing we kept coming back to was **experiences over equipment**. Below is what we came up with.

Our Parameters as Follows

- First, we tried to keep our ideas under \$200.
- Next, we tried to identify those tricky gift recipients, the ones who are the hardest to come up with ideas for.



You know your bestie silent sporters want something from the local shop of experts but you don't know exactly what. Show them you care with a gift card!

From Those You Know at Gear West!

• Last, we wanted to make sure that these ideas were not just something you could search for and get delivered via your favorite giant online retailer.

We'll step up on our soap box for a moment and talk about your local specialty sports retailer. The people who work there, who own these businesses, *are the people that you see at your local events*. They are the people who live and breathe the same activities you do. They need your support in these changing times, *if* we want this way of life to continue. In exchange, your specialty sports retailer gives you the knowledge you need not just to see the choices, but to help you make the right choices, and to then help you and your friends and loved ones make what they unwrap work well for them. Local staff are there where you need them to provide the goods *and* the services in expert, caring



No matter how much your favorite cyclist is all geared up, the gift of a spa day for their bike(s) will always be appreciated.

ways you won't get through big-box stores or big-box e-tailers.

And now to expand this list a little bit for you!

The Has-It-All Cyclist:

Are you trying to buy a gift for that cyclist who lives by N+1? Did they do an event such as Lutsen or RAGBRAI? Is their garage filled with a bike stand and tools that only have one purpose? Chances are these silent sporters enjoy working on their bike themselves. For them, you could buy that cool bearing press tool (because they destroyed all their bearings in their mountain bike in the mud from this spring). Or — you could do something they would *never* pay for themselves. For example:

You've heard about gifting a spa day for a friend or loved one, right? Well, how about you get one paid for, for the Has-It-All cyclist's favorite *bike*! From most shops, a full bike tune-up will be a little bit under \$200. Call the shop, tell them what you want to do, and they might even have a winter special going on. While your loved one will still probably have to pay for any parts that need to get replaced (that's up to your generosity to pay for that unknown too, or up to a certain price point), or if the loved one or shop notices anything wrong, the bike spa might have to move up to "The Works Tune." (Ahem, Lutsen riders!) But once your giftee gets their bike back with a waxed chain or dialed-in shifting they will be extremely happy and think fond thoughts of you and your gift, at least until they ride through the mud again.

The Nordork (Nordic-Dork)

This term is used lovingly, mostly because we are very familiar with these types and tend to be joyfully that way ourselves! Nordorks do the Birkie and do it often, nerd out about the latest waxes, and think nothing of driving 45 minutes each way



You can't go wrong gifting a subscription of your favorite Silent Sports magazine. You never know who will show up on the cover! [Ed's Note: Thank you, Gear West!]

— or double — just to ski on a 1K hamster-wheel loop as soon as it's cold enough.

Your local ski shop (and since we're biased, we think Gear West does a pretty good job) loves to get people outfitted for new equipment. For that person who has a fleet/quiver/stable of skis, poles, and boots, but perhaps hasn't gotten themselves a new pair in a few years, instead of paying for a new ski or binding, they can utilize the "Fleet Analysis" service provided by most serious shops. *And what a great, affordable gift idea that is!* Normally priced around \$50 to \$100, your gift recipient can bring in all of their skis, have them analyzed, and, with the help of the shop's resident Nordork, they can either pick out a new ski, or get their fleet professionally serviced (or both!)

And back to that Birkie, what a great gift idea to buy a lucky friend or loved one a gift card earmarked for the Birkie "wax of the day" come February 22nd. How cool would that be to have your favorite skier, heck skiers, thinking of how you thought of them and their Birkie day?

The My Boots-Hurt-My-Fee Skier

Nordic ski boots are no longer just leather shoes with a toe piece attached. They are highly engineered pieces of equipment made from hundreds of different materials. Yes, there are a lot of different models out there, but nothing is going to fit your foot perfectly and be warm, comfortable, and supportive unless you do all the right things.

The first step of that process is a great traditional gift, but your skier will be elated



Gift beyond the human and get the doggies all the skijoring gear they need to do it right.

to find a **Good Wool Sock** in their stocking! Ah, the joy of warmth and wicking, these days without old-wool itching! For under \$100, often well under, you can gift some great designs and a range of thicknesses to help make your skiing favorites feel comfy in style at different ski day temps. Let them know you care with quality to replace those golden-holies they just haven't yet thrown out.

Then, once you have the right sock, the next step of the process is to manipulate the boot and insole to fit you better. For around \$200, **custom insoles and/or a boot fitting** can make the difference on Birkie day or any ski day. An experienced boot fitter will heat up and punch out problem spots on the upper part of the boot and build a custom insole perfectly fit to your foot. Helping your friends ski as though their feet are one with the ski and trail can be the greatest silent sports ski gift of all.

For The They-Changed-My-Shoes Runner

We get it. You could hunt down last year's model on eBay or take a shot at the latest "new and improved" version. But instead of gambling on outdated shoes, why not give the gift of a **Gait Analysis** or **Shoe Fitting**?

A proper gait analysis is performed by someone who understands both footwear and the mechanics of the body. They'll assess how you move, then guide you

toward shoes that match your anatomy and specific needs—not just the latest color trend. By prioritizing fit over fashion, you're setting your favorite runner up for a smoother, more comfortable run with fewer aches and pains. And going beyond the brand to help make their shoes fit right will only foster gratitude for a reasonable price!

For Your Dog Lover Friends

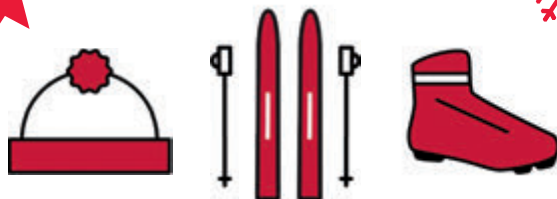
Do you have that friend with an energetic, medium to large dog? Well, canine joring comes in many forms, including skiing, running, biking, and scooter, but you want to make sure it's right for your friend and their dogs.

- Skijoring equipment includes harnesses for both skier and dog, along with proper leashes and more. You want to make sure they're equipped with emergency releases and that nothing puts pressure on the dogs' necks!
- As with other events, check out lists of Upper Midwest joring events, coaching, and lessons and get the lucky duo gifttees a gift card or certificate. Make it fit, too. If your friend and their dog are beginners, make it a beginner lesson. And if you've got an experienced joring friend, go big with some elite coaching.



Get your friends analyzed! Well, at least their feet and gait. Help them help themselves get the right running shoes and insoles, not just the ones they've been buying.

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The I-Need-Motivation Silent Sporter

As a final exercise, we came up with a list of some cool, thoughtful gift ideas for the ones who need some get-up-and-going:

- Paid training plans/coaching.
- Training logbook or Strava Premium Membership.
- A destination event race entry.
- How about an annual subscription to *Silent Sports Magazine*! shopmmclocal.com/product/silent-sports-magazine.

Making it Right & Memorable

In case you are uncertain, there is always the overall gift card from your favorite local silent sports retailer. But the point of the above is to make your gift-giving unique, thoughtful, memorable, and fitting for that particular favorite silent sporter without breaking the bank. And along the way, don't forget that one special person who could really get into any number of these gift ideas. And that is ...

You! ❄️



Get those besties' tootsies comfortably toasty, without the itch, with modern wool socks and insoles.



January 18, 2025

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NEW MOON SKI & BIKE HOLIDAY SEASON GIFT GUIDE



Great boots for your giftee's backcountry, Rossignol XPLORE XP 12 Ski Boots. PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSSIGNOL.



Poling with quality and style - Nordjork Partycrashers Pole Collection. PHOTO COURTESY OF NORDJORK.



Combine the best of snowshoes and backcountry skis with the Altai Hok Ski. PHOTO COURTESY OF ATLAI.

Presented by New Moon's Experts & Expertise

The holiday season is here and we're excited to help you with your gift-giving. The New Moon team has handpicked some of our favorite options. Whether you're shopping for skiers, bikers, or hikers, we've got plenty of great ideas to make your loved ones smile. Our experts at New Moon Ski & Bike have put together the ultimate gift guide for your favorite Nordic skiers and cyclists. Take a look at our top staff picks—we promise they'll bring joy and excitement on Christmas morning. Happy shopping!

Backcountry: Rossignol BC XP 12 Boots

Joel Harrison, Owner and XC Expert: "A fun backcountry boot on my 80mm wide tele skis, and I also use them on my 135mm

wide Altai Hok shorty skis for skiing in the tight woods of Northern Wisconsin. Warm and supportive, the boots use the new Rottefella Xplore binding system."

Elevate your skiing experience with the Rossignol XPLORE XP 12 Ski Boots. Whether gliding over rolling hills or conquering adventurous backcountry routes, the XP 12 offers a wide platform and exceptional support for navigating untracked snow. Exclusively compatible with the XPLORE binding, this boot enhances your mobility for touring while ensuring precise control for thrilling descents. Plus, the innovative dual lace system allows you to easily adjust the upper and lower boot tension, perfectly tailoring your fit for any terrain or condition. Don't just ski—explore beyond limits!

KV+ Alaska Mitt

Mikayla Dale, Ski & Bike Technician: "I like that they keep my fingers warm on those frigid winter days but without all the extra bulk. They fit great in my pole straps. Also, a great mitt for spectators."

Experience the ultimate protection in extreme conditions with KV+ Alaska mittens. These heavyweight mittens are engineered for extremely low temperatures and shield you from wind, frost, and moisture. Crafted with advanced windproof and waterproof materials, including a Pro Wind Tech™ membrane, they deliver unbeatable defense against the elements. Surprisingly lightweight and luxuriously comfortable, the plush interior ensures warmth without bulk. Plus, silicone strips on the palm guarantee a secure grip, making these mittens the perfect companion for outdoor adventures. Don't let the cold hold you back.

Altai Hok Ski

Kristy Harrison, Head of Operations: "Ski from your door. Backcountry feel in a short, maneuverable ski. It's a great way to explore anything from open fields to stands of trees. A snowshoe with speed."

The Hok is an easy-to-use backcountry ski designed for maneuverability and traction. Its short, wide dimensions enhance



To protect your giftee's hands from those extremely low temps, KV+ Alaska mittens.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KV.



Lill+Sport Retro Fleece Glove; warmth and comfort on a leisurely day.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LILLSPORT.

control, while the integrated climbing skin aids climbing. Combining the benefits of cross-country skis and snowshoes, the Hok allows for efficient sliding without the need to lift with each stride. It features a synthetic climbing skin, durable steel edges, and lightweight construction. Sustainably made with paulownia wood and reinforced with organic fibers and fiberglass, its simple graphics reflect design themes from the Altai Mountains, giving it a unique appearance.

Specialized Romin EVO Comp Saddle with MIMIC

Hannah Burch, Ski & Bike Technician: "Specialized's unique MIMIC technology takes the pressure off soft tissue without creating extra pressure at points of contact, no matter your gender. Seriously, this was my secret ingredient to riding 530 miles across Iowa."

Are you dreaming of the next cycling adventure? How about giving your old, worn-out saddle a much-needed upgrade? The Specialized Romin Evo saddle with Mimic Technology would make a thoughtful Christmas gift. It's perfect for road and gravel rides and allows easy adjustments to find that sweet spot. With comfy level 2 padding, it's just right for a leisurely Sunday afternoon ride, but it's also built to smash KOM/QOM goals or conquer those multi-day journeys without any discomfort.

Icebug Arcus Women's BUGrip GTX Studded Running Shoes

Lori Somerville, Marketing Manager:

"These are my favorite winter shoes. Whether I am going for a run during the day or a walk in the evening, the Icebug Arcus running shoes make me feel much more confident on those icy Northwoods roads and trails."

The Arcus 2 BUGrip GTX features a BUGrip outsole with thirteen dynamic studs for reliable traction on winter surfaces. Its waterproof GORE-TEX® ePE Invisible membrane offers a comfortable fit, unlike traditional bootie constructions. The lightweight nitrogen-infused SuperC midsole reduces pressure on the forefoot and heel, promoting a smooth stride and exceptional comfort for longer runs. With high responsiveness and dependable traction, the Arcus 2 is perfect for all winter conditions.

Nordjork Partycrashers Pole Collection

Judy Young, Buyer: "Finally, glitter on poles — what took them so long? These racing poles are as fast as they are cool."

Discover the Partycrashers Pole Collection. Elevate your cross-country skiing with these exceptional poles that feature unique paint finishes and dazzling holographic glitters. Crafted with World Cup-level carbon shafts, these poles undergo a meticulous hand-finished paint application, delivering a breathtaking, stylish design that stands out on the set track. The holographic glitters and color-shifting paints transform the ordinary into a stunning statement piece. These poles are not

just gear; they're a personal expression of a unique style as a skier, all while providing top-notch quality and performance from a premium product. Welcome to the party—no invitation required!

Lill+Sport Retro Fleece Glove

Julie Lindblad, Shipping Manager: "This glove fits perfectly and keeps my hands so warm. It feels like I'm slipping into my favorite pajamas."

The Retro Fleece Glove is the ultimate insulated ski glove designed for those who cherish the experience over speed. With a cozy knitted acrylic lining, these gloves offer warmth and comfort for a leisurely day on the slopes and trails. The back features a windproof, 3-layer fleece, while the palm is crafted from durable, genuine goat leather, ensuring a snug fit and excellent grip. Key features include knitted insulation, windbreaking protection, and a classic cut.

Rex NFX Wax BLOCKS

Daryl McNutt, Head of Marketing & Analytics: "I'm excited about this brand-new product from Rex this year. This non-fluoro racing top coat is definitely a must-have for the Birkie. I've always found working with powders a bit tricky, but using this rub-on block with an iron and roto brush makes waxing my skis so much easier at home. Plus, it gives my skis that World Cup speed, even if I'm still working on my own skills."

Discover the latest breakthroughs from Rex Product Development. The innovative

NFX N-Kinetic blocks redefine the standard for racing top coatings in the post-fluoro era. Featuring advanced N-Kinetic3 additives and cutting-edge NANO-TK nanoparticles, these blocks deliver unparalleled performance and durability. Simply rub the block onto the ski base, heat it with an iron, and finish with corking, felting, or a roto brush.

Ye Olde Local Shoppe Expertise

Why Christmas shop, or anytime shop, silent sports stores as opposed to Big Box retailers? The answers are the selection

and the *people*.

At New Moon Ski & Bike, we are more than just enthusiasts; we're a family of dedicated cross-country skiers, cyclists, and outdoor lovers who are passionate about sharing our expertise with you. Understanding the specific skiing, biking, or outdoor activities you enjoy, along with the conditions in your area, is key to helping folks choose the best products for their adventures. Let our team of experts guide you in finding the perfect gear to elevate your experience. ☘



Have your favorite cyclists sitting in comfort with the Specialized Romin EVO Comp Saddle with MIMIC.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SPECIALIZED.



Post-fluoro solution with speed, for application and at the race.

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Icebug Arcus Women's BUGrip GTX Studded Running Shoes will have your runner safe, comfortable, and secure through the winter season.

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The Practical Gift Guide for the Cyclists in Your Life

Chris Schotz

The first rule of gift buying this year is that you're not allowed to buy anything from an online ad with the word "tactical" misused in it. No tactical hoodie, for example, and not the tactical walking stick I saw the other day. Santa will load a tactical Snuggie in his tactical sleigh about the time he dons his tactical red hat. Santa is real enough to know there are no such things. They will not boost your adulthood or take the world by storm.

That doesn't mean our gift buying can't be tactical. Tactical and practical.

Some Practical No-Tacticals

If your cyclist loves bib shorts but you don't want them getting half naked in the woods for a nature break, look into the **Drop-Tail Bibs** with leg pockets recommended by all-day cyclist **Jennifer Youngwerth**, now the only person ever to complete the Iron Bear 1000 challenge.

Al Jozwiak from **Bikes N Boards** told me that it's a great time to treat your cyclist to a breathable outer shell or long-sleeve layer. A cyclist also needs a post-ride beanie for their sweaty head this winter. Jozwiak

claims that riding with **Darn Tough socks** was a "life-changing event," and he's been around long enough to see just about anything.

There may be nothing less practical than refurbishing an old Schwinn from the coaster brake era. Jozwiak uses an adapter for those large bottom bracket shells to replace the hunky steel one-piece cranks with alloy and gives rusty steel wheels an update including tires that haven't rotted away. Leather beer holders and Brooks saddles are a bonus for your well-behaved cyclist. These vintage machines come out around Rhinelander once a year to race the Mullett 500.

Days are getting short enough to make a next-generation light essential. I'm loving the **Outbound Lights** engineered in Chicago, which are still fairly light with built-in batteries. I've learned to avoid any light with a cord that can kink in freezing weather. Get a nice light for your all-weather commuter or buy some black ice insurance in the form of studded tires, which are now available in all widths down to two inches such as the **Gravdal** from **45North**.

Start your own end-of-season tradition before the snow flies, and don't forget to

ask Santa for some white stuff while you're at it. A group effort should make it happen.

Personal Favorites (Am I On Your List?)

- Waffles and ISO gels.
- Gummy bears and peanut M&Ms. (Some good-tasting energy boosters in a pinch!)
- Subscription to *Silent Sports Magazine*. Hey, you like reading it, and so will 10,000 of your closest friends!
- A 6-pack from your favorite cycling destination; pleasant reminders of great places while relaxing among the best of your cycling friends.
- In Wisconsin, local cheese (of course!) but also locally made Wisconsin maple syrup.
- Locally roasted coffee. Nothing against Starbucks (well, maybe something), but did you know about **Nicolet Coffee** (nicoletcoffee.com)? Or the Birkie's own **Backroads Coffee** (backroadscoffee.com)? Both have online purchase options as many local shops do. Support local! And your gift package will have the best aroma under the tree.

For the practical cyclist who doesn't hang holiday lights, this is a perfect time for a fresh bottle of **sealant** that tubeless tires will need in spring. Beefy **Pedro's tire levers** are a treat for anyone who has ever tried to pop the bead on a tubeless set-up without one. Off-season is also the time to send in shocks so treat your cyclist who puts up with a slow, creaky suspension to a rebuild that will make their bike feel new in spring.

My sweetheart told me that she doesn't want anything but me for Christmas. Sweet! Still, I'm suspicious of anyone who says that, so she's getting a 6-pack of Keweenaw (**kbc.beer**) anyway. I'm tactical.

Santa's Helpers

As you can see, this Secret Santa likes to seek guidance from other elves. For **Corey Kronser**, it's **South City Stitchworks** (southcitystitchworks.com) for his bike bags, saying, "Owner **Zach Smith** has an ethos in life and a business that I really jive with and South City Stitchworks bags can be fairly economical compared to generic models that may or may not survive hardcore adventure." Kronser rode a singlespeed for days on end this year in events like the Arkansas Doom and Olympic 420. Weary as he appears on camera, he always claims to be having the time of his life. Maybe it's the bike and bags that keep him in a state of relative comfort.



Al Jozwiak brings good cheer to all with a well-crafted leather beer carrier on a gift from another century. PHOTO COURTESY OF AL JOZWIAK.



The Thule RoundTrip duffel organizes your disorganized cyclist.

PHOTO BY CHRIS SCHOTZ

Beyond bags, Kronser said, "My gear list is pretty reductionist right now. Initial thoughts are: a **bike fit** by someone who understands how you ride and what you are doing. So many people are held back from truly enjoying cycling because their bike is not set up right. Next, pay attention to **touch points**, [meaning] grips, bars, good pedals, appropriate shoes, and a well-fitting saddle. A fit can help with all of this and lots of people are surprised by how much room for improvement there is."

From Santa's Helper **Shane Hitz**, who comes with a resume that includes being a self-proclaimed adventure cyclist, the Red Granite Grinder Race Director, bikepack route designer, and the Midwest Bikepacking Summit founder: He would put a **Salsa Anything Cage** anywhere a bike has the right bolts. These are the durable cages that I've seen carry tents, jugs, and chairs. Hitz also showed me his **Thule RoundTrip** duffel, and I just had to have one. Before a trip, I usually throw everything into a pack so that I'm constantly churning my clothes as I dig for something clean. I might have given up and worn the same socks again before I got the Thule bag that has compartments for every item, including tools, shoes, helmets, and dirty laundry. I'll at least be organized at

the start of a trip with my glasses in their own scratch-free compartment. I might even get myself some nicer glasses than the ones I've been buying at flea markets and Fleet Farm.

By the way, the Thule duffel has compartments for my **Rip Van Wafels** and **Science in Sport Isotonic gels** that have been keeping my tummy happy on rides lately. I've found both to be the easiest to handle on the fly, but I'll still save a compartment for my comfort food: Peanut M&Ms that are perfect on the long ride to Grandma's house where stockings are hung by the chimney with care and filled with my favorite Gummy Bears.

Juggler **John Kilgust** recommends a unicycle for everyone before graduating to juggling clubs and torches. Unicycles? Santa says, "Yes." Modern unicycles are ready for every terrain, but they aren't as practical as a subscription to *Silent Sports Magazine* for your cyclists.

Andrea Larson of IRONBULL, with her Adventure race team victories, FKTs of all sorts, and oft-contributor to this magazine, recently became the first woman to ride the entire Marji 200 this year. (Take that, Todd Poquette!) Thirty-six-plus hours in the saddle meant that a waterproof phone case, backup power banks, and good lights were essential. Andrea also



Trek BellBeats Digital Bike Bell and Speaker. Music and safety combined.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HALEY LUDWICK OF TREK.

recommends a chariot for the kids. Make sure to check out Andrea's Adventurer's Gift Guide also in this issue, and another reason to gift a magazine subscription or three.

Marquette rockstar, ultra-runner, and obstacle course racer **Kristy McBride** loves the hydration pack from **Orange Mud** that sits high on the shoulders to keep her lower back from getting hot (orangemud.com). She also recommends the **Nite Ize HandleBand Universal Smartphone Bar Mount**. Andrea Larson and I rode the RAMBA Epic loop over Cry Baby and Jasper Knob with McBride and we were amazed that she navigated those ridiculously technical trails with a phone mounted on her handlebars. The Nite Ize HandleBand was the secure and economical solution that got her to the Marji Gesick podium again this year.

"For an expensive gift," Kristy said, "I would put a **Wireless AXS Dropper** on every bike that I own if I could. [These are wireless remotes to initiate saddle height adjustments]. It makes it simple to switch to a rigid seat post since you don't have to run wires; the battery lasts for months at a time and fixing them is easy." Wireless means no internal cables to thread tediously through the frame.

"For bike packs," Kristy said, "we have a local guy by the name of **James Morrow** who makes really sweet packs. He just made me this awesome top tube bag. Some of the local shops here sell his products and I think he might also have some

available online. His brand is **Morrow Packs.**" [Check them out at [instagram.com/morrow_packs](https://www.instagram.com/morrow_packs) / morrowpacks.myshopify.com.] Michigan's Morrow Packs made Kristy's sweet top tube back. She might be running or riding the trails for hours so she needs hydration, but a backpack can get irritating over time. Morrow Packs offered her the solution.

It took me a while to get used to riding with **Nick Holzem** and **Carter Purvis** from **Trek**. Their **Car Back Radar Rear Bike Light** would have them warning me about cars before I had any idea they were on the road at all. Nick's light talked to his Garmin and Carter's was connected to a Wahoo, which would give audible warnings and on-screen range information while cars were still a hundred yards away. They also told me about the Trek **BellBeats Digital Bike Bell and Speaker** which can Bluetooth to a phone's music files and give eight different alerts for any situation from a friendly greeting to an urgent warning.

If you don't want your favorite cyclists to get run over by a reindeer, definitely take a look at Trek's amazing radar blinky light that would make Rudolph jealous.

For your bestie silent sporters, reject the tactical and go with the practical. It's about their safety, comfort, and creative ways to gear up while also indulging in some guilty eating/drinking pleasures during and post-cycling. And for all your silent sports best people, you can be just the right Santa to make the practical happen. 🦌



Ryan Roeser balances a unicycle for every terrain. Santa approves!

PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAN ROESER.



CarBack Radar Rear Light. Bright rear light and advanced, distant warning to protect against distracted drivers. Show your Christmas-gift silent sporters that you care!

PHOTO COURTESY OF HALEY LUDWICK OF TREK.

The Adventurer's Gift Guide

Andrea Larson

Author's Note: Since I have never been a sponsored athlete, I am free to make less biased recommendations. However, I have never officially tested gear (but have put plenty to the personal-experience test), I only have a single data point for most of the gear I have used. I've also been apprehensive about specific recommended products, so I'm going to be forward about the pluses and minuses about the products I have, the governing reasons I selected them, and any regrets I have. Admittedly, I'm not a gearhead and I'd much rather spend my time training than sitting at my computer reading gear reviews. So, if your silent sports giftees are like me, then a well-researched gift is even more appreciated!

Whether you're spending hours outside during all four seasons in the wilderness, commuting on roads, or gathering the family for a weekend outing, all these products fit the active lifestyle. None of these products shoehorn into a single sport, so no matter your level of fitness or preferred mode of exercise, many of these products will fit your lifestyle.

All prices are approximate based on where you buy them. Please support your local silent sports retailer, for their gear and their expertise.

Nitecore NU20 headlamp (\$30)

It's amazing to see the advances in lighting. Consequently, the price for a quality rechargeable lightweight headlamp is very affordable; even some high-lumen headlamps are quite affordable. My husband bought a couple of inexpensive Nitecore NU20 headlamps a couple of years ago. He purchased them to mainly serve us for family camping outings and for remodeling, to get some light in various nooks and crannies.

However, I've found these headlamps more than just a checkoff for mandatory gear lists. Weighing in at only 47 grams, this headlamp is one that I often grab for night running,



Trekking poles have saved me from more falls than I can count, especially over the winter months.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDREA LARSON.

even in races, and for bike commutes that may end after dusk. The battery life is still great with my only gripe being that, over the years, like past headlamps, the headbands have stretched out. (I'm not sure if that's because of my husband's big head or me using it too many times on my bike helmet!)

Most of the time, I use the medium setting, providing 40 lumens with a nearly 8-hour battery life, even to read in the tent to prevent me from stumbling at my campsite. However, when I'm trying to run fast on the trail, I need the high setting: 220 lumens with a 6-hour battery life. The 100-hour battery life at the lowest setting, 1 lumen, is a good option for a backup in a pinch but not useful for reading or hiking.

Motion Heat Heated Glove Liner (\$180)

Heated gloves have been a game changer, particularly for winter fat biking. I also wear them while snowshoeing and ice skating with the kids since my hands go numb daily in the winter months due to Raynaud's Syndrome. My husband loves the long battery life for sitting all day in the tree stand. He especially likes the option to stash the battery packs in a pocket connecting to the gloves via wires rather than on his wrists. This can be helpful if you plan to use a compass, which interferes with the magnetism, or want to wear a watch. This option is more environmentally friendly than disposable hand warmers, especially if you only need them for an hour or two, or intermittently. (I often start winter adventures cold then heat up, only to over-sweat and get cold again.)

These are also nice when grabbing the frozen steering wheel while starting your commute home from the trailhead. The liners can be hand washed. We're two years in and the battery life is still solid. On the lowest setting, they can last nine hours; on the highest setting, they still last for the duration of most outings, about 3 hours.

Rail Riders Adventure Top (\$84)

I began wearing this long-sleeve top to protect my arms during bushwhacks for adventure races, but I fell in love with it so much that I now wear it more than any other top in my wardrobe. (Including sometimes to bed!)

The lightweight and flowy fabric makes



The single-serve Mullins Protein Packets are handy to throw in a pack for a day's adventure.



Although all my photos have me wearing my Rail Riders Adventure Top, no test was greater than Rat Jaw on the Barkley Marathons course.

this an option during the summer months. The SPF protection made it the obvious choice as my only top for a week-long thru-hike. After seven years, the top is nearing retirement, but I blame the saw briars of Rat Jaw during three Barkley Fall Classics.

Caltopo (\$0/\$20/\$50/\$100 Per Year)

There are tons of apps out there with

mapping capabilities, such as AllTrails, Guthook, Gaia, and RideWithGPS. However, Caltopo offers so much for the explorer. Whether you want to practice your map-and-compass skills, plan an overnight paddle route, or take a family hike, Caltopo is my go-to for planning.

Also with Caltopo, you can easily upload GPS data from other apps such as Strava. The free version offers so much more than other free apps, including the ability to make detailed notes on the map, print out a hard copy with a scale of your choosing, and offers more map layers than other apps. The paid subscription allows you to see even more extra layers, including landowners and current satellite views, plus the ability to print larger maps. The depository of data allows you to check out other people's routes for ideas too. The only downfall compared to other apps is that heatmaps are not readily available.

Bag Balm (\$8)

Although not much more exciting than receiving underwear, this stocking stuffer will still be greatly appreciated for months and even years to come. Although you as the gifter may not be rewarded with much more from the giftee than a forced *thank you* behind a fake smile, Bag Balm will come in handy for anyone who has dealt with the misery of blisters or chafing.

Slathering Bag Balm onto my feet prior to a long effort has been a game-changer. Bag Balm is particularly good at creating a water barrier for adventurers when one's feet may be wet for hours on end. This gift is best paired with a copy of the book, *Fixing Your Feet*, which brings us to the next category.

Books

While I would much rather be moving than curling up to read a book, here are some books that even an almost-always-on-the-go silent sporter can appreciate. *Fixing Your Feet: Injury Prevention and Treatment* by Jon Vonhof and Tonya Olson (\$20.99) incorporates decades of the good, the bad, and the ugly firsthand experiences concerning foot care for outdoor adventurers. It's in its 7th edition so the recommended products and the information are current. The authors have taken the diligence of removing old-school practices, but also offer decades of knowledge with remedies that have withstood the test of time.

Comfort Crisis: Embrace Discomfort to Reclaim Your Wild, Happy, Healthy Self by Michael Easter (\$17.59) is a book that is for the adventurer as well as the not-yet-into-it adventurer. In fact, a read of this book may ignite a fire for some lifestyle changes just in time for the New Year. After reading this book, you may pause before grabbing your phone during a free moment to allow your mind to wander or you may become one of the 2% that opts for the stairs instead of an elevator.

Go Ruck Sack (Rucker 4.0) (\$255)

The recommended book *Comfort Crisis* will help motivate the giftee to see the utility of the Go Ruck Sack and as a gift to appreciate. Rucking is one of the best activities for all-around strength for those on a tight schedule that also puts them on the move.

This pragmatic approach to training couples a cardio workout with building strength that you can do while walking Fido, pushing a stroller, hiking with your slower training partner, and while doing chores. Additionally, the risk of injury is reduced by walking instead of running, especially when employed in combo with the next gift idea.

Trekking poles (Black Diamond Distance Z poles) (\$140)

For the casual hiker, avid hiker, trail runner, and everyone in between, trekking poles are a silver bullet. Trekking poles increase stability on all surfaces during all four seasons, reduce the stress on joints and muscles, and provide a more holistic workout.

The Black Diamond Distance Z poles offer a lightweight option at a more budget-friendly price than carbon poles. Not only does the aluminum version tip the scales at only 2 ounces more than the carbon version (which is among the lightest options on the market) but also the poles are extremely robust. I've seen plenty of broken carbon poles, but my Black Diamond Distance Z poles have withstood two laps of the Barkley Marathons, an Everesting, thru-hikes on the Superior Hiking Trail and North Country Trail Wisconsin segment, and all the training in-between. Over that time, it's saved me from twisted ankles, stitches, and likely a concussion.

Mullins Whey Protein (\$20 for 1 lb. and \$80 for 5 lbs.)

Offering a variety of flavors to appeal to



My handlebar bag is great for outings to stash my phone, car key, and a snack for the kids.



Ready for field-testing my REI Beyonder Handlebar Bag through 37 hours of non-stop rattling on the Marji Gesick 200 course with my crew, Candy Schotz. Candy swapped out a total of a dozen bottles of protein drink over the course of the event resulting in my muscles staying fresh all the way to the finish line.

any palate, this Whey Protein Isolate is a high-quality protein to rebuild muscles from all sorts of adventures and training. The unflavored option is, in fact, surprisingly unflavored. But I have to admit, the chocolate and chocolate mint taste so good that I use them as hot cocoa

desserts to satisfy my sweet tooth cravings after supper on cold evenings!

Other flavors include salted caramel, orange creamsicle, strawberry, and vanilla. Single-serve packets are especially useful to throw in a pack. Since Mullins Whey Protein is made in Central Wisconsin, you can support the local dairy industry with your gift (and for-yourself) purchases.

Handlebar Bag (REI Beyonder Handlebar Bag) (\$40)

After years of sewing and duct-taping my handlebar pouch from the Huffy I received for my 12th birthday, I finally needed to invest in a new handlebar bag this summer. The small pouch has been handy to put my car key and cell phone in when biking since I rarely have clothes with pockets. I've also used the pouch to store a snack for the kids during commutes or a couple of hours' worth of snacks for adventure races.

With the advent of bikepacking, most bags were overkill for my needs. But I found the REI Beyonder Handlebar Bag and, after about forty hours of use over the first two weeks, I have fallen in love with my investment. The bag is compact enough to still allow me to mount a GPS and light on my handlebars. It's also lightweight and secure with zero bounce on mountain bike trails (validated during 37 hours of non-stop rocks and roots on the Marji Gesick 200 course. [Editor's Note: Congratulations, Andrea!]) The two zippered pockets are an upgrade from my prior pouch, so I can put my phone and snacks in separate pockets. I look forward to pulling out the strap when reaching a destination on commutes. This transformation to a purse would have come in handy, allowing me to free up a hand a few weeks earlier when we had to go to annual pediatrician appointments and I stored my phone, bike lock key, and some snacks for the kiddos in the bag.

No matter your adventure, from commuting to the grocery store near dusk to rounding up the kids for a camping outing to a dark bushwhack through the woods, these items will no doubt fit the arsenals of some of your favorite silent sporters. And even though you may be gifting these items for Christmas, the great thing, too, is that they may be used throughout the year! 💰

Solve Your Silent Sports Holiday Gift Guide by Celebrating Local Shops



Ben Jones

If there's a runner, paddler, skier, or biker in your life, you'll likely face the same challenge every year: holiday shopping. So, what to get the gearhead who has everything and doesn't stop moving long enough to give you a few gift ideas? The pain you feel can be worse than mile 22 of a marathon. Hang in there. I've been on my own holiday hunt for gift ideas this year, combing the shelves and aisles of some of the best Midwest retailers. Here are a few things I've found that you might want to put under the tree this season.

Crescent Moon 9 Snowshoes (\$199)

For a lot of us during the winter of 2023/24, the snowshoes we wore looked a lot like regular running shoes. But let's hope this year is a little different on the trails. When the snowstorms return and winter trails open, your favorite snowshoer will be ready to trek with these great snowshoes that are sold by the **Chequamegon Adventure Company** in Woodruff. The company's new store is located on Highway 47 north of Minocqua and it also sells high-quality paddling gear, canoes, kayaks and more.

Crane Bell (\$24)

There's nothing worse than becoming a silent (and unwelcome) surprise on a bike path. These cheerful bells fix the problem. They are crafted in Japan, are built to last, and you can pick them up in the Northwoods. While Tomahawk is the home of the "Fall Ride" motorcycle rally, it's also home to **Coaster Cycle Works**, a great local bicycle shop. It's a great place to duck in if you're riding the nearby Bearskin State Trail. It's a wild trail – these bike bells can also work for deer and turkeys!



Andrew Teichmiller, owner of Chequamegon Adventure Company, holds a snowshoe that's ready for winter, a Crescent Moon 9 Snowshoe featuring a high-quality binding.

ALL PHOTOS BY BEN JONES.

Clarijs Double Sided Bike Bag (\$150)

These cows might look like some you saw on the last ride you did out in the country, but these fun panniers come from a little further afield. Clarijs bags are produced in the Netherlands by a company that was founded in 1948 as a saddlery. The bags are simple and heavy duty but they deliver plenty of dairy style. Other colors and patterns are available and they are sold by the **Cargo Bike Shop**, a cool niche bike shop in Madison on Williamson Street; it shares a building with **Domestique Cafe**, a coffee shop that's popular with the city's cyclists.

The Urban Arrow (\$6,000-\$7,000)

Did you gasp at the price? Well, perhaps for an upcoming, deserving college graduate, a spouse for a special anniversary, someone truly in need, or even for your own deserving self, if someone needs to haul a little more than what fits in a pannier and you're still looking for that perfect Dutch style, this carbo bike could be the answer. It's a little pricier than the cow panniers, but it would look great parked in the driveway on Christmas morning with one of those giant red bows; and it burns a lot less gas than a luxury sedan. There's plenty of room for a couple of small kids, some groceries, or whatever else you might carry. Price varies, depending on specs. Contact the **Cargo Bike Shop** in Madison for details.

OG sunglasses (\$25)

You can look good and protect your eyes with these affordable sunglasses that are perfect for outdoor fun. You can pick them up at **Movin' Shoes**, a fixture in Madison since 1973. The Park Street store has a



The Urban Arrow is ready to haul your family and anything else you want to take on the road. The Cargo Bike Shop in Madison will walk you through it.

big selection of shoes and apparel. Need more ideas? Its wall of running and hiking socks includes SmartWool, Balega, and Feetures.

The Glory Pullover (\$72)

If you're shopping for an active woman, you might want to check out the apparel in **Prosper Fitness Apparel**, a new Wisconsin (Milwaukee) company started in 2024. It was founded with a purpose:

"The mission is to motivate women to believe in their God-given potential and we wholehearted believe that everything you need to achieve is embedded in you," said owner **Angie Losiniecki**. The small company donates 10 percent of its profits to charity and the Glory Pullover is the company's best seller.

"People like the colors and it's the perfect jacket for those in-between (weather) days," Angie said. The Glory Pullover is available online at prosperfitclothing.com.

Marathon Prep Boco Pro Elite Run Hat (\$35)

If there's a marathoner in your life, they're probably logging their winter miles in trusted cold weather gear. But warmer days are coming so get them dreaming of those days with a lightweight hat. The Boco Pro Elite Run Hat, sold at **Performance Running Outfitters**, is light as a feather and it's a stylish way to knock out your next P.R.

"It's a great running hat," said Jen Schweinert, the buyer for Performance Running Outfitters. "It's lightweight and washable; it's breathable. It's just a great running hat."

Santa may want to also fill out the Christmas stocking with a few **Maurten Gells**, from \$3.90 to \$5.40. These items and more are available at Performance Running Outfitters locations in Brookfield, Delafield, Shorewood, and Milwaukee's Third Ward.

Destination Race: Midwest Marathons

If you're a marathon family, you might want to treat the crew to a 2025 destination race that can be a gift for the whole family, although it might not feel like it in the final miles. I'm an event photographer and I've shot some picture-perfect races. A few of my favorites include: The **Charlevoix Marathon** (Michigan) in June, which passes through beautiful neighborhoods and traces the Lake Michigan shoreline; the **Milwaukee Lakefront Marathon's** course offers spectacular



Race Ready Obstacles had what you need to make your home gym Ninja-ready. They are just like the rigs you'll find on event courses.



Angie Losiniecki of Milwaukee holds her bestseller, the Glory Pullover. She started her activewear company, Prosper Fitness Apparel, this year.

Lake Michigan views from the iconic Hoan Bridge; the **Whistlestop Marathon** in Ashland, WI, takes runners through a tunnel of October color. While a destination race can be a great gift, handle this present with caution: it might be good to not keep this gift a surprise. After all, marathons need training!

Home Obstacle Course Training Bundles (\$120-\$245)

Is there a Ninja in your life? Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) can be a lot of fun and there are races throughout the Upper Midwest, including national events such as Savage Race, Tough Mudder, and Spartan, as well as some great regional events such as Midwest OCR and Abominable Snow Race (featured in the January 2024 edition of *Silent Sports Magazine*). For a lot of endurance athletes, covering the distance of these courses is no problem, but the hanging rigs are no joke and can require next-level grip strength.

Race Ready Obstacles in northern Illinois has everything you need to complete an OCR training gym, including a big variety of hanging grips. The owners, **Aaron and Dana Sabia**, are experts in building race courses, and they host their own event in Marseille Illinois, the **Midwest OCR**. Products are available at racereadyobstacles.com. \$



The Clarijs Double Sided Bike Bag features a full dose of dairy style. You can find them via the Cargo Bike Shop.

We'll help you find the perfect gift.



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Gifts That *Will* Delight Outdoor Enthusiasts



Dave Foley

Holiday shopping poses a dilemma. The genuinely appreciated present may seem simple: a gift the giftee doesn't already have that actually fills a need. But in practice, that's a needle we often find difficult to thread. Even though having silent sporters among your friends and loved ones may expand the gift-giving opportunities, you still don't know what they could use versus what ends up in the gathering dustbin.

This year's gift guide is all about products that folks might later wonder how they lived without. And, as a consequence, cause them to remember you and your thoughtfulness throughout the year.

Arm Warmers

I'm often cold at the start of a bike ride or run, so I wear an extra layer. Of course, once I start working out, I generate some heat and soon I'm getting too warm. Typically, I either let myself overheat or stop and pull off a layer. The solution? A pair of arm warmers.

These are sections of tight-fitting cloth that extend from the end of a short sleeve to your wrist. When you start to warm up, you just pull these off or you can slide them down to your wrist without having to get off your bike.

These are available in various fabrics, including those that wick away moisture to keep you from getting wet and chilled. Prices range from \$25 to \$40.

Water Shoes

Kayakers have been wearing these for years to protect their feet and the neoprene shoes help keep their feet warm as well as uncut and chafed by river-bottom stones and sand if they end up



Camping comfort: water shoes, pogies, arm warmers, and fire tube.

PHOTO BY DAVE FOLEY.

swimming. In kind, the presence of zebra mussels in lakes have made these a necessity for walking or swimming. The sharp shells of these aquatic invaders easily cut the feet of those who tread on them. Prices on a pair range from about \$20 for a pair of rubber ones to \$40 to 80 for the more durable neoprene shoes.

Fire Tube

If you have ever found yourself kneeling beside a dying campfire or wood stove, blowing air to try and coax the embers to flame, or are trying to keep wet or green wood burning, you will love a fire tube. And they are easy to make.

At a building supply store, purchase a three-and-a-half-foot

section of 1/2" X 5/8" vinyl tubing and a one foot section of copper tubing. Shove the copper piece into the vinyl tube and hammer the copper end to flatten it somewhat to concentrate the air flow. For the cost of a few dollars, you will be able to nurse anemic fires to life without ever leaving your seat.

Make sure to demonstrate how to use this item to your giftee so it makes sense. It may draw some odd looks Christmas morning, but there will come a time when its use becomes vital and your creativity and thoughtfulness *will* be appreciated, that you put this together for them for a time in need!

Reflective Vest

Since we don't glow in the dark, walking along a road or road shoulder, we are practically invisible to traffic. And sometimes during our walks, hikes, and runs, darkness falls unexpectedly soon. While we hope drivers will be aware, the existing and likely increasing number of distracted drivers might not see you until it is too late. Unfortunately, this has increasingly become a danger even when it's not so dark outside. Yet, if you are wearing a wind-breaker or vest trimmed with reflective material, an automobile's headlights will illuminate you several hundred yards away.

When you are out at night or start out during daylight with the chance that the sky will darken before you return home or to your car, wearing reflective clothing is a must. Many sport warmups and wind jackets now come with reflective piping. However, if you don't have those items, purchase a slip-over reflective mesh vest. When you are wearing one, you may look like you are on a construction crew, but at least the traffic will see you.

Let your Christmas giftee know you care. Give them this simple gift of singular safety importance.

Head Net

When the buzzing of mosquitoes fills the air or a cloud of black flies descends upon you, having a polyester mesh head net to slip on can be a lifesaver. Any store with a decent stock of sporting goods will have these on hand during bug season. Selling for two to five dollars, the cost is cheap and the relief provided is priceless.

Given the pricing, in combination, the gifts of a head net and a reflective vest are a one-two punch of showing you care!

Kryptonite Kryptolok

I bought my first really good bicycle in Seattle and when I asked about the best lock for thwarting serious bike thieves, I was told to buy a Kryptonite Kryptolok. Made with hardened performance steel, the manufacturer says it resists cutting and leverage (pry-bar) attacks. It's heavy and not fun to carry around when you're on a bike, but I rest easy, and so will your giftee, when I know my bike is locked up with one of these. Expect to pay \$35 to \$45.

OnGuard 6-foot Doberman Coil Cable with Combination Lock

I imagine a guy with bolt cutters could make quick work of this, or it could be done in from a hammer blow to the combination lock, but for short-term security outside of high crime areas, I'll probably be safe locking the bike to a car carrier, tree, or bike rack while I'm having a meal or doing quick shopping errands.

I also use this to lock a canoe to the car roof rack. OnGuard says the combination is unpickable and I was able to select the code



For your protection: OnGuard combination lock, Kryptonite KryptoLok, bug head net, and Deerfly Patches.

PHOTO BY DAVE FOLEY.

numbers. Those are plus features. When we're cycling, this is the lock I carry because it's lightweight and fits in a fanny pack. These usually sell for about twenty dollars.

Deer Fly Strips

By mid-June, the deer flies own my running trails. In the past, from then until the first cold snap of autumn, I used to stay out of the woods. Not anymore. A sticky deer fly strip on the back of a ball cap proves irresistible to these winged biters and I can run without harassment. I don't even realize there are flies after me, that is until I take my hat off at the end of the run and find it crammed full of flies. I know it sounds illogical, but it really works. Each strip costs just under a dollar and lasts for several runs until it is full of flies.

Pogies

For me, the paddling season doesn't end until the lakes are frozen. But using a kayak paddle bare-handed can be excruciating once air and water temperatures dive into the forties.

I've used neoprene gloves, but I prefer the direct contact of skin on the paddle. If I slip my hands into Pogies, which are like mittens that wrap around the paddle shaft, my hand grips the paddle. And the neoprene Pogies give protection from the chill and most of the water. Once it gets cold out, I keep the Pogies attached to the paddle shaft and just slip my hands into them when I am ready to take my first stroke. Most styles are sold for thirty to fifty dollars.

Put Them Together!

I hope this selection helps take some of the anxiety out of choosing the right gift for your favorite silent sporters. And while all of these can be purchased online, consider buying these items locally to support your local economy.

Many of the above gift items are highly affordable but are also valuable and practical as they-will-use-them items. This allows you to buy several and put them together in one gift bag to create an I-care gift package for those who matter most to you. They will be wishing you Merry Christmas year round! 🎁

When Santa Showed Up on a Cycling Trip

Everybody loves a good Christmas story.

2023 will be remembered as the year we had a green Christmas. Very little snow fell in Cadillac. Many days, the temperature shot up into the 40s, occasionally reaching 50. If you were a snowmobiler, ice fisherman, snowshoer, or cross-country skier, you were out of luck. Instead of getting a daily dose of winter sports, we had spring-like weather. What there was of Lake Mitchell's ice melted, so I launched my canoe, and the roads were clear so I brought out my road bike.

Christmas Eve was a bright sunny day. It seemed like a great opportunity for cycling. Janet McKellop and I set out on our road bikes to pedal the 17-mile loop around Lakes Mitchell and Cadillac. At one point along Lake Cadillac, you need to cross over a dirt patch going from a sidewalk to the road. Rather than dismount and walk my bike through the soft spot, I pedaled across it. My skinny tires swiveled in the loose soil but I stayed upright and continued down the road.

About a minute later, I looked back expecting to see Janet right behind me. She wasn't there so I stopped to wait. Janet, meanwhile, instead of riding through, dismounted and walked her bike across the dirt. Getting back on her bike, she clipped into her pedals. Something didn't seem right and when she tried to unclip, she discovered the mud on her shoes had locked her feet onto her pedals.

Standing in the road looking back, I saw Janet pedaling toward me. As she approached, she yelled, "I can't unclip my feet from my pedals!" For her, it was either pedal or drop.

I immediately dismounted, leaned my bike up against a tree, and stepped into the bike lane, shouting, "Come in slowly and I'll catch you!"

As she neared, I first grabbed her handlebars, then put my arms around her, and held her up-right. Unable to unclip, her only way off the bike was to pull her foot out of her shoe. Because of

the cold, she was wearing shoe covers, which made it even more difficult to free herself. While Janet awkwardly struggled to get her shoe off, I did my best to keep us both from toppling over. To motorists driving by and staring, we had to look peculiar. Were they witnessing a spontaneous moment of romantic affection in a most unromantic spot or perhaps a medical emergency?

And there we clumsily held on, like a Jenga block tower the moment before a fall.

Whatever they were thinking, the motorists drove along, until an SUV pulled up behind us with its hazard lights flashing. The door opened and...

With his white beard, not glued on but naturally grown, his red stocking cap with a white tassel, and the big red coat cinched by a gold-buckled black belt, this guy could make Scrooge believe again. From the SUV, Santa emerged — the real deal.

"Here, let me help," Santa said. He reached out so the two of us could support Janet, allowing her to slip out of her bike shoe and off her bike onto firm ground. "When I saw you two," Santa said, "I thought someone might be having a stroke or heart attack so I pulled over."

Noting we were looking at him, he added, "I'm doing Santa's work today. I just came from one party and am heading to another up near Manton."

Maybe so, but, as the poem goes, *And laying his finger aside of his nose, and giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.* [Well, his SUV.] Then he was gone before we could wish him a Merry Christmas.

Janet and I still talk about this incident as our Christmas miracle, when Santa came to our rescue on a bike lane along the shore of Lake Cadillac. In this spirit, I wish you and yours:

*Happy Christmas to all,
and to all a good-night!*
\$





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