



Janet Urquhart
janet@aspentimes.com

January 5, 2012

Aspen nordic season yet to hit its groove



Janet Urquhart The Aspen Times Kim Master of Aspen takes her daughter for a spin on the Rio Grande Trail outside of town Wednesday afternoon. The trail, the route for the Town to Town Tour, a cross-country ski event scheduled Jan. 21, is currently devoid of snow in many places.

ASPEN - The first race of the Aspen Cup Nordic Series will take place Sunday on the only available cross-country ski terrain in the Aspen-Snowmass system, but the Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club Progressive Bonfire Dinner, a cross-country event that was scheduled for Saturday at the golf course, has been postponed.

"It's getting pretty skinny out there," said Toby Morse, nordic program director for the Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club. "We're still skiing - that's the good news."

Competitive cross-country skiers and locals who are jonesing to hit the trail are finding the options limited, but five kilometers or so of trail groomed for skate skiing at Aspen High School continues to hold up fairly well.

And groomed track on the road up to Maroon Lake beyond T-Lazy-7 Ranch is getting plenty of use. With no avalanche danger to speak of in the Maroon Creek Valley, track is being set all the way to the lake, reported Aspenite Howie Mallory, an avid cross-country enthusiast.

"I'm a little restless," Mallory said.

A glance at the grooming report at www.aspennordic.com says it all: Every trail except what's available at the high school is closed. The snow at Aspen's public golf course, headquarters for the Aspen Cross Country Center, has melted in enough places that grooming is no longer possible, and the ski club has postponed its popular progressive dinner until Feb. 18, Morse said. The event, typically a sellout, draws participants who cross-country ski or snowshoe from bonfire to bonfire to enjoy food and drink in the evening at the golf course.

Sunday's Nordic Series opener was to take place at the Moore Open Space, where there is currently more grass than snow. Instead, competitors will tackle a criterium of sorts - making a small loop at the high school as many times as they can in 45 minutes.

Organizers are hoping conditions will improve by Jan. 22, when the series resumes with a race at Ashcroft, a privately run area south of Aspen.

"All of the dates and locations are very much open to change this winter," said David Peterson, manager at the Aspen Cross Country Center.

The center, meanwhile, will wait until Monday to make the call on whether its annual Cross Country Extravaganza can take place as planned on Jan. 15, Peterson said. The event features food, ski waxing, free ski demos and lessons.

With no skiing at the Snowmass Club golf course in Snowmass Village, the Snowmass Cross Country Center has temporarily closed, Peterson said.

While skiers of all disciplines eye the daily weather forecasts, staffers at Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers are probably paying particularly keen attention to long-range predictions.

The group's Town to Town Tour fundraiser, a 19-mile cross-country ski tour from Aspen to Basalt (plus some shorter options), is scheduled for Jan. 21 on the Rio Grande Trail. The trail is largely devoid of snow at present.

Last winter, a lack of snow forced postponement of the January tour to a date in February. Just enough snow fell in advance of the delayed event to pull it off.

"That's a case where one snowstorm and we could be in business for that event," said Austin Weiss, trails coordinator for the city of Aspen. In fact, one decent storm could change the nordic picture dramatically throughout the upper valley, he said.

The Feb. 12 Owl Creek Chase, which draws athletes from around the country for a 21-kilometer race from Snowmass to Aspen, also depends on a reversal of snowfall fortunes. The Owl Creek Trail is presently closed.

"We were just talking about when to start worrying," said Kristen Drake, sales and marketing associate for the city. "We're kind of keeping our fingers crossed."

Nordic racers with Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club will head to Steamboat Springs this weekend, where man-made snow at the base of Howelsen Hill will be spread out on the cross-country course. Last month, the Aspen contingent was in Crested Butte for a Junior Olympic qualifier that the resort managed to pull off.

"They had 35 volunteers out for three days shoveling snow to make that happen," Morse said.

The club is scheduled to host its first nordic competition in mid-February.

The best cross-country skiing around may be on the Grand Mesa outside of Grand Junction, where the base remains 8 to 12 inches deep and trails are groomed for classic and skate skiing, according to its latest report. The terrain is at more than 10,000 feet in elevation.

Aspen's forecast into early next week calls for continued clear weather, but there's a chance for snow on Saturday night, according to the National Weather Service. The bloggers at aspenweather.net were cautiously mentioning a shot at 3 to 6 inches Saturday night, depending on how things out in the Pacific play out.

Unless Aspen receives a foot of snow in town this month, the November-through-January period will go down as the fourth driest on record, the website said on Wednesday.

janet@aspentimes.com">class="NormalParagraphStyle">janet@aspentimes.com

©2005 - 2015 [Swift Communications, Inc.](#)