

Head for the hills

When the snow finally flies, area cross-country ski clubs will be ready for it



COURTESY OF THE NEW MEXICO CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLUB Ski trips including overnight hut excursions are part of the New Mexico Cross County Ski Club program.

BY NANCY TIPTON OF THE JOURNAL

While word of the first snow in northern New Mexico was the first reminder for most of us that winter is just around the corner, members of local cross-county ski clubs have been eagerly awaiting the season since they hung up their skis last spring.

And they want to get more people involved in the sport.

The Sandia Nordic Ski Club, a new nonprofit organization formed this year, has a long-term goal to work with volunteers and the U. S. Forest Service to maintain and groom a network of cross-country trails in the Sandias specifically for skate-skiing.

" Our club is really focusing on improving the groomed trails in the mountains, " said Scott A. Dietrich

The club, open to skiers of all ages and abilities, not only works on trails, but hosts instructional clinics to help skiers improve their skills.

Dietrich says club members include one member who was a nationally ranked cross-country ski biathlete and other who is a certified U. S. Ski Association Level 200 instructor.

Trail grooming has been done in recent years by the Sandia Peak Ski Area (service road between Ellis Trailhead parking lot and the ski area) and the UNM ski team. But, Dietrich says, the equipment is old and often breaks down.

" So we're undertaking a rather ambitious plan to purchase new grooming equipment, " he said. That effort will cost about \$ 38, 000.

As part of that effort, the club is offering memberships and asking for additional donations. Information on donations to the 501 (c) 3 is at sandianordic. org.

Dietrich says the club also plans to sponsor skiing competitions for youths and adults this winter.

Another local cross-country ski club, the New Mexico Cross Country Ski Club, has a wider focus.

According to Bet Gendron, vice president of the group, the club (which has about 350 members) organizes day ski tours not only in the Albuquerque area but also in the Jemez Mountains and in the Santa Fe area.

Some of the members also do remote backcountry skiing and often take multi-day trips.

" We also maintain trails in the Sandia and Jemez mountains, " she said. " When a tree is reported to have fallen across a ski trail, the group removes it for the safety of all trail users. This group plays a critical role in the maintenance of our exceptional trail system. "

In addition to skiing, the group has social events such as a winter holiday dessert potluck, a summer picnic and a New Year's party in Silverton, Colo.

" We organize ski tours, ranging from flat and easy to more aggressively climbing mountains and skiing down. " Gendron said. " We also provide instruction for beginning and intermediate cross-country skills. "

The group has monthly meetings with guest speakers. Info : nmccskiclub. org.