

Making Tracks: the History of the Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club

Notable People

Throughout its history, the WCCSC has seen many notable people contribute to the building and shaping of the club, and to skiing in the Yukon in general. These have included tireless volunteers, staff members who went far and above the call of duty, international calibre skiers, and members of the media who contributed to the promotion of the sport. While it is impossible to name everyone who has left their mark on the club, the following is a small sample of people who made great contributions to the development of skiing in Whitehorse.

Monique Waterreus

With the establishment of TEST in Whitehorse in 1968, it did not take long for the program to see international success. Monique Waterreus began skiing with the program in 1970, coached by Selwyn Hughes. She went on to represent Canada at the World Junior Championships in 1979 and 1980 and in 1991 was inducted into the Sports Yukon Hall of Fame.

Don Sumanik

The legacy of Don Sumanik is ubiquitous, from the ski chalet and trail system to the road up to the Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre which now bears his name, to the Don Sumanik Memorial Races. His many contributions to the club are scattered throughout this history. These, of course, include the development of the trail system and bringing the World Cup to Whitehorse. In addition to this, he had been the Chairman for the TEST board of directors for eight years prior to the formation of the WCCSC.

For his contributions, Sumanik received many honours. In 1981, he was named Kiwanis Club Citizen of the Year and he and his wife Elsie received the Commissioner's Award. Sumanik was also named an honorary member of the National Ski Team. On December 1, 1982, Sumanik passed away. In 1983, he was posthumously inducted into the Sport Yukon Hall of Fame. Additionally, Sumanik Drive and Mount Sumanik were named in his honour.

In December 1982, the first recipients of the Don Sumanik Memorial Trophy were Grant Meekins and Tara Paulson.



Mayor Flo Whyard with the new sign for the newly named Sumanik Drive.

Credit: Elsie Westervelt

Selwyn Hughes

Selwyn's loop, made by Selwyn Hughes, is one of the most popular trails maintained by the WCCSC. In addition to his work with the ski trails, Hughes coached many young skiers as they passed through the TEST Program. His involvement with TEST extends to the early years of the program, when it was establishing its roots in Whitehorse. In 1995, he was inducted into the Sport Yukon Hall of Fame in honour of his contributions to TEST. This included chaperoning and coaching TEST skiers during their annual trip to France as well as chaperoning two hiking trips across Wales.

Lucy Steele-Masson (nee Steele)

Many who have skied the Olympic Trail have probably seen the name "Lucy Steele-Masson" along the side of the trail. Steele got her start with cross country skiing while in TEST. As she progressed in the sport, she became determined to make the Olympics. In 1992, her dreams became a reality when she competed in the Albertville Olympics. On her way to the Olympics, Steele spent two years racing for the Junior National team before joining the Senior National team in 1989. In 1991, she represented the Yukon at the Canada Winter Games where she won three gold medals and a silver medal. This included anchoring the Yukon's women's relay team consisting of Martina Frostad, Marie-Odile Raymond, Robyn Findlater, and herself to a gold medal. In 1994, in spite of the fact that Steele was the top female skier in Canada she was unable to compete in the Lillehammer Olympics due to the stringent qualification requirements of the Canadian Olympic Association. Meanwhile, Steele competed in an American Olympic trials race in Anchorage, Alaska and posted a fast enough time to qualify for the US team. This prompted a series of editorials against the Canadian Olympic Association by numerous Yukoners and even resulted in Yukon MP Audrey McLaughlin asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Michael

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Dupuy, to change the Olympic standards prior to the next Olympics. Steele went on to compete in the world championships the following year in Thunder Bay, Ontario and was the top Canadian female. In 2000, Steele-Masson was inducted into the Sport Yukon Hall of Fame.

Ron McFayden

Many long-time Yukoners who participated in almost any sporting event in the Yukon will remember Ron McFayden as a fixture at many of these events. Many were likely interviewed by him.

McFayden first became involved with radio broadcasting in 1958 in Cranbrook, B.C. In 1969, he moved to Whitehorse to work with CKRW, where he worked until 1971. In 1973, he got a job with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which had been a lifelong dream of his and in the mid-1980s he began doing Radio Sports for CBC. This development involved a sharp learning curve. In covering sports, he made a point of not covering national sports, figuring that there were enough sources for that. Rather, he focused on what Yukon athletes (and, more specifically, young Yukon athletes) were doing. When interviewing athletes, he needed to learn to avoid receiving cliché answers to his questions, such as “I gave it 110%.” Additionally, when interviewing young children he found it best to kneel so he did not tower over them. This was to make the children more comfortable while being interviewed. Moreover, he made a point of interviewing more people than simply the winner and made efforts to ensure that there was gender equity in the reporting.

In order to ensure that he knew what types of questions to ask at a ski race, McFayden took up skiing himself and participated in Wednesday night 5 kilometre races. In 1991, McFayden was Cross Country Canada’s media person of the year and in 1996, he was inducted into the Sport Yukon Hall of Fame.

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Ron McFayden in the commentator's booth, possibly for the Yukon Gold Loppet.

Credit: Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club

Alain Masson

Approaching seventeen years of coaching the Yukon Ski Team, Alain Masson is the longest serving ski coach that the team has had. Prior to coaching, Masson was a multi-sport Olympian. In 1984, he competed in the Los Angeles Olympics for cycling. However, as his focus shifted to cross country skiing, he soon excelled in the sport and went on to compete in the 1988 Olympics in Calgary and the 1992 Olympics in Albertville. In 1995, he replaced Alain Parent as the coach of the Yukon Ski Team. As he was living in Whitehorse at the time, this marked the first time that the Yukon Ski Team had hired a local as a coach. With Masson at the helm, the Yukon Ski Team has experienced remarkable successes, including many medals at National Championships and Canada Games as well as multiple Yukoners representing Canada at various international events, such as the World Junior Championships. Most recently, Graham and Emily Nishikawa have been named to the Canadian National Senior Team.

Mike Gladish

Mike Gladish has almost become synonymous with the ski club. After moving to Whitehorse in 1981, he immediately became involved with the club. He met Peter Saar, who was coaching the Yukon Ski Team at the time, and was asked if he would like to participate in a Jackrabbit leaders clinic. And this was how Gladish spent his first weekend in Whitehorse! He spent most of the 1980s volunteering as a coach and Jackrabbit leader. In addition to this, he served on the WCCSC board and in 1988 became president. However, this was short lived as a manager's position opened up with the ski club. He resigned as president and took the position. With the exception of a short period on which Karen Thompson was employed as manager of the ski club, Gladish held this position consistently as it grew in involve more and more duties. In addition to

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his paid duties with the club, he has put in many volunteer hours for the club and, between his paid duties and volunteer work, may be considered the most significant contributor to the club.

There have been many other significant contributors to the club over the years (too many to mention them all here) and with a large and growing volunteer base, the list will continue to grow. These volunteers are the critical component to the clubs' success – here's to them all, past present and future!