

Interview with Norman Juhola

Ishpeming, MI

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Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

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RM: I can call you Norm?

NJ: That's fine.

RM: What is your birthdate?

NJ: February 6, 1933.

RM: Could you tell us a little about where you grew up? You were from Ishpeming, and how you got interested in skiing.

NJ: I was born during the Depression days and there wasn't much money in those days. There wasn't television or any of the things kids go for now. So everybody went outside. We had three jumping hills right across the street from my house. There was a smaller one they called Kangasa Hill. It was a starter hill. There was an old rail road that went along side the bluff. You had to take off right from the railroad and that was ????. Then we had an old mining stock pile on the other side. We called that Stock Pile. Two of them came out to Jasper Street and the other came into ??? yard. All the kids in the location ski jumped. We had a lot of fun. We would even put candles along the takeoff at night and jump at night. The only thing on the radio at night back in those days was Jack Armstrong and The Shadow and stuff like that. So you didn't spend too much time inside aside from the fact that just about everybody had ?? back in those days too. Coal and in the summer time my Dad would order a load of wood and we'd saw it up and split it and stick it in the wood shed. We had a couple cows and a potato field. The ski trail actually goes through one of the fields we used to lease when I was younger. The kids were always out. We would play hockey down in the pit. Most of the kids didn't have skates, we'd just run around and find a stick out of the woods with a curve on it and take a saw and cut some pucks out of a maple tree or birch tree or something. Those were good times when we were younger.

RM: So you accidentally got into ski jumping.

NJ: Everybody did it. My Dad...the first skis I had my Dad got a short pair of pine skis and rubber inner tube for the bindings. Put one around your ankles and over your toe and that was the way it was. When we got a little fancier he would take some leather straps and put ??? on the sides. Real fancy was natural cable bindings. This was during the Depression days. There were 12 people in our family. There wasn't a lot to spend on frivolous things. It was necessities. But the kids all worked together and we had a lot of fun.

RM: Did your other brothers and sisters get into ski jumping?

NJ: Not really. My older brother and younger brother both jumped on the hills around the location, but never in competition.

RM: Did you get into competition?

NJ: No. Just jumping...I was the hill builder than the rider.

RM: Okay, but you had some experience jumping.

NJ: Oh yes. We even went out during the war year to the rocky ski jump we built one year. It was kind of a big hill for us. ???

RM: Let's talk about your involvement in developing ski hills.

NJ: I started going to ski meetings when I got transferred from the ??? to the research lab in Ishpeming on the day shift job and I could do things. I used to go to the ski meetings. When I went out to Suicide they had 3 hills at that time, Suicide, Intermediate, and Junior. The junior was kind of a big hill. If I was just starting as a kid, I would never have done that. We looked around and decided we could build some small hills off the...Start off with one hill first of all. We did that in '68 or '69. Then ??? thought I should get a ??? from the Central Hill Designer. So I wrote to him and he got me the specifications. I didn't have a transit or anything, but I had a 10 foot 2x4 and had some guys make me a bracket. I had the inches laid out and I started the ??? we marked the number of inches on the pipe every 10 feet. So I put that on the ground and ???. There was no way we could put his hill in because there was ??? and everything else there. So we compromised. Ralph Bietela was working out there with us with a bulldozer. He was pushing the dirt to the side by the scaffold. So that's what we had the first year. Then some lights by the landing, we ran power for the first time in 1970, the kids ran at night. When we did this ??? he said Dynamite Rail, I've never jumped on that one. That would defeat the whole purpose. We called Don Milimaki at 11:30 on Sunday morning and he said I'll be there at 1:00. We got a smaller hill built for the little kids. That's where my jumping is at. Besides when we rebuilt Suicide, we put scaffolding up there.

RM: Were you involved in the reconstruction of the new Suicide?

NJ: Oh yes.

RM: Could you tell us a little about how you were involved and what happened?

NJ: Somebody burned down the scaffold. We had to build a new one. We had a lot of volunteers. ??? drew up the design for it...I forget who the guy's name is, he's involved with Midway Rental. Anyhow, we put in the concrete footings and erected it ourselves. If you're wondering how we did that, well Coy Hill and two iron worker friends of his had a jim bolt with a fabricated beam. It had a top and bottom and we had a winch near

by. The scaffold was here, here and here. It kept going up the whole scaffold. We'd burn some of the ??? for heat. It wasn't an easy project by any means. The planking on the scaffold, we hauled that up by hand and pounded it in by hand. It was a tough job, period. But we got it done.

RM: This was all done during the winter of...

NJ: I would guess '69. Somewhere around there. I don't remember dates.

RM: What other involvement did you have?

NJ: Then I went from jumping over to cross country. In 1972 Coy Hill was supposed to be our delegate. In those days they had a central convention at a big town, usually Chicago or Detroit. This one happened to be at Detroit. We went down there and I was reading the cross country chairman's report. He had made the comment in there that at the last minute we had to move the cross country championships from Ishpeming to ??? and we had a coach by the name of ???. We got the Ski Hall of Fame right here in town and don't even have a cross country trail. I went to the next ski meeting and Ralph Bietela was the president. I told the guys I'd build the cross country trail at no cost to them because they were all jumpers at that time. All summer I hired an airplane for aerial photos and tracked out. I planned a lot of stuff before I knew what I really wanted to do. I asked Cliffs about it and they said Melvin Johnson was their head man. There was some question about the eastern side because it was close to the ore body, but I said even if we can get it for a couple years it would be good. That was in 1972 and we built the 5 and 2 ½. In '74 we added the 7 ½. I'll say this much, all the expenses for building that trail from 1972-'75 came mostly out of my pocket. The 7 ½ Northern helped me with that one. We built the trails and Northern used them and had a Central Championship there in 1973 and built up a reputation. We got the Nationals in '75, which was junior nationals. They call it junior Olympics now days. I don't think it's Olympics unless you have all the countries of the world involved. But it sounds better to the kids. I was having heart problems and figured I should get out of this business. In '75 in December, ??? called me up and said there was a race coming up and I was the only one at the meeting for cross country person. We just happened to have one of those dual track ??? and I got it and groomed the trails and one of the ski club members came up to me and said what are you doing here? We have our own person and don't need you anymore. There I am with a brand new machine. So I talked to CCI and said how about letting me build a recreation trail up in the Cleveland location. They said we won't let you build one but we would let the ski club. I said okay the ski club wants to build a recreation trail in Cleveland. I laid out a 3 ½ K trail up there. We built that. These were all recreational skiers now. They said we'd like a ???. I talked to Cliffs again. Cliffs was always real good about this. I've never had any hassle from them on these leases. So we got a lease for an eastern loop. Later on we added a sand east trail which is a tough hill climbing. It's got two big hills on it. Then we added a little sand loop in there. There's never been any grant money involved in any of this stuff. We built the connector trails. The whole reason for the connectors was we had junior nationals and they only needed a 5 K trail or a 7 ½ K trail. Double it and you have 15 K. The nationals run a 50 K race. So I thought

if we combined the Suicide trails with these Cleveland trails and put in a connector, we could get 25 K and run a national race. So that's what we did. I designed it and bulldozed it. They've always supplied the dozers. There was no ski club money involved in it at all. Everything Dave and I did was as a ski club member or as the ski club. I was a ski club member and proud to be in it. So was everybody else that's been there. That's the way they survive all these years. They've had a lot of different people through the years. Tom ??? is one of the big pushers right now.

RM: Was this the first time that cross country skiing...you started to get trails in Marquette County?

NJ: Part of my initial motivation was when we went down to Detroit and ??? was the new coach for Northern going down there for some reason. He came down with us. He told me that Northern would try to get some races, but all they had to race on was the ??? and nobody wanted to race there. That was part of my thinking too. All the trails I designed by Suicide Hill were for competition purposes. The ones at Cleveland were designed for a recreation trail. We did run the NCSA National Collegiate Ski Associates race in 1980. They had a conference meet the same time as a Suicide jump. They asked if they could run their meet on the Cleveland trails. I said sure. So we made the relays all on Cedar Lake. It was kind of pretty. They said Suicide has a big hill but it comes at you gradually. This one comes at you quick on Cleveland. You have to be pretty good if you're going to pass. The grooming part of it was kind of tough. I worked at the research lab and I'd come home sometimes and there'd be a snow plow and I'd hook my vehicles to the trailer and go groom trails and come home at 11:00 in the morning and then have to shovel the snowbank to get the trailer back in the yard. There were lots of tough days. It's kind of ironic, the Milwaukee Journal or something had an article for the Packers and made the comment that you have to make a commitment and do it heart and soul. I was in the cross country business, that was my commitment. That came ahead of everything. ???

RM: So you used your own money for a lot of this stuff.

NJ: Oh yes. The initial trails, the 2 ½ and 5 at Suicide came out of my pocket and so did the initial trail at Cleveland. Everything else came with the help...When we got the first part of the Cleveland trails done, the 3 ½ and the 5 done, he loaned me bulldozers for 6 straight years. He went to Escanaba and places to get these. They were construction dozers. He bought quite a bit of logging equipment. I'd say I need a dozer so we can work on our cross country trails and he could find them but it would cost lots of bucks to go down there and pick them up and haul them up and bring them back again. Then if I blew hoses or stuff like that...I'd go over to his shop and he'd help me make new hoses. He never charged the ski club one penny for all the work he did. It was...if I had to be proof of the cost of all the Suicide trails and the Cleveland trails and the connector trails...I would say 95% of it came from our pocket. The most we ever did was ask for equipment as the ski club rather than as individuals. I've never really found anything I've done was a ski club effort. Dave has been good here. He's been good at Suicide

with the jumping hills. He's a real sports booster when it comes to ski jumping and cross country. Good guy.

RM: What's happened to those cross country...wait a minute. Cross country ski trails, were those the trails that Northern used for it's biathlon?

NJ: I don't think there's been a biathlon race. We modified it...we had a fellow named Al Marrow, he was a United States Representative and Sandy Rose came out and I told him about a little biathlon race. It wasn't very much. I got the specifications from the biathlon people. He said what's your shooting range? You could put the ??? over here. He was talking about backhoes and graders and everything else. I was building this range and they came out to see how I was doing and I couldn't do it. The machine wasn't big enough for this job. Bill ??? came out and said clean that 450 up. You've got a 750 coming in another hour. He said you have it Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Monday morning they're going to come pick it up again. With that 750, that's a big machine and we were able to do it. Again, this was all strictly a donation. Dave's been a real good man.

RM: So the club was lucky to have him because he had the garage and the backup for repair.

NJ: These weren't necessarily his own dozers. I did use his machines every once in a while, but he could find me the machine because he buys equipment from these distributors. I'd hate to think of what it cost him. All the years. I made trails and groomed them for 18 years. There's a lot of man hours in that too. It was strictly the Ishpeming Ski Club doing this.

RM: What has happened to the trails today?

NJ: As far as the connectors and the Suicide trails, they are shut down because Empire is dumping on the connector trails already. They're done as far as Suicide is concerned. Sun Track takes all the credit for it, but they didn't do anything for it. They never spent money, never did construction on any of those trails. That was strictly Ishpeming Ski Club. That kind of irritates me a little. They could have used the money to develop the system on the Cleveland trails, but they took the money to Al Qual. \$250,000 and they never spent a penny for me. As I understand it they're good trails. Right here in Ishpeming we have good snow here. We have...it definitely helps Northern and everybody else. Maybe we'll finally get that Senior race here. We've never gotten it before. I'd like to see the seniors come here. I went to Minneapolis in 1973 when they had the nationals up there. They didn't have snow. They trucked the snow in for it to get 5 feet. They ran 10 times on the 5 k to run the 50.

RM: With trucked in snow.

NJ: With trucked in snow. That shows perseverance. They got oak trees there and leaves all over on the ground. In the warm weather you're running with blister wax.

They had logs laying across the trails so the skiers could try to scrape the leaves off. That was one tough race. I'd like to see a nationals here. Now with the equipment and everything else. Maybe I'll be lucky enough to see it in my lifetime.

RM: So you were the pioneer for cross country ski trails in this area.

NJ: Well years ago I got a bunch of those CCI leases and the ski club had a lease in 1955 where they had a trail that started at Cedar Lake. I remember when it ran over to Cleveland and to Lake Sally and then they came back out. They snow shoed. There was no grooming machines. When I got involved, even in '72, I had some movies of Norwegians when they ran the races in Norway. They side stepped the whole course. Around 25 K or whatever it was. But they didn't have any machines back in those days. I never had any of these fancy machines like today with a nice warm cabin and heater and a big snow plow you could take the drifts out and a power tiller behind you and a power track setter. That would have been heaven as far as I was concerned. It's like anything else, you've got to go with the time. It takes money and if you don't get grants...the city is involved in it now and Northern is involved in it. They'll get the grants. I'd like to see the Cleveland trails still groomed because I still think it's the best recreation trail in the county. It's not like the thing they've got at Al Qual. It's a fun trail. It's tough enough to give you a workout, but not too tough so you get discouraged.

RM: After that time in the late '70s the state started to get involved and they put in Blueberry and some of these other...

NJ: Anderson Pathway, Blueberry...that's fine, but having a trail of their own. ??? they sold skis and bikes and stuff. But our trail at Suicide was the first FIS sanctioned trail in Marquette County. It was designed for competition.

RM: Are you still involved with the Ishpeming Ski Club?

NJ: I had heart surgery back in 1978 and I had heart surgery again when I was visiting my brother in California in '99. I've got about half a ticker. As much as I'd love...I'd go out and groom for nothing if I could. I can't do it. But I sure wish I could because those were good days.

RM: So you enjoyed that whole time. You grew up in the Cleveland location with the Bietelas?

NJ: Ralph was 9 years older. During World War II they were in the war and I wasn't. I was in grade school. I remember when the European war hit. I was at the Ridge Street School up by the mine. They gave us the day off. They said the war is over in Europe. We were playing ball in the ball field we had in Cleveland and we heard the sirens and the bells started ringing. They said the war was over in Japan. We fished on Lake Sally and that's where the Cleveland ski trails were at. I know that country like the back of my hand. Cleveland was a good place to grow up. We swam at Cedar Lake and it was just good. When we were kids that was good times.

RM: Is all that area getting chewed up by the expansion of the mines?

NJ: No, that's on the other side of the lake. Cleveland trail is north of ??? lake and north of Lake Sally.

RM: Okay.

NJ: The mining hasn't any impact at all. There isn't any ore bodies right where the Cleveland Trail is. There's a bit of hematite or some soft ore, but there's no bodies of ore there.

RM: So that continues as a ski trail.

NJ: Well if somebody grooms it.

RM: Oh, so it's not being kept up.

NJ: I think their ideas of grooming are taking a track setter and pulling it behind a snowmobile and they call that grooming. I used to pack it first and I used to drag it. If you don't drag it, it don't set up. Then I would set the track afterward. I had 9 K up there when I was grooming it. We had a snow plow. I took and packed it first, then dragged it, then set the track. It took me 7 hours to do. It wasn't an easy thing. With these new machines it's a piece of cake. But it isn't wide enough for the big machines. I told them get me a dozer and I'll widen it for you. I don't think CCI actually wants to push that anymore. Nobody else wants to. That's a good trail. If we're going to be running races and everything else at Al Qual, it would be nice to have that as a secondary, strictly recreational, and no skating, no diagonal skiing, double tracks so if you've got snow skiers, they can stay on the right and the others can go by on the left. I don't have the power to do it.

RM: So things have...the cross country ski activity has decreased.

NJ: Every emphasis is at Al Qual. So as far as competition skiing is concerned anyhow. They used to have a blue trail and a red trail. I don't know exactly what...I haven't gone out. Apparently the guy who designed it put in some tough loops as far as competition is concerned. That says it all.

(looking at pictures)

NJ: She won every race that she ran in at Central. She was really good. We did some good while we were at it.

RM: From what I've heard, your legacy is remembered by people. When people mention cross country skiing up there, Norm's name comes up.

NJ: There's a lot of people that used to ski up there. That was built in '76. Somebody that was in their 50s very well could be gone by now. I still think it should be. That's the one thing I would like to see. Cleveland as a secondary recreation trail for the city of Ishpeming. No competition whatsoever. Just strictly people that like classic ski. No racers.

RM: I wonder, that's sort of strange. They have the trails there, so all you have to do is groom it.

NJ: If you wanted to take a big groomer out there would have to be some stuff done. I can get a bulldozer. I don't think the interest is there. Somebody said they discussed it at a city hall meeting for the city of Ishpeming. I don't know. The first thing they ask is who's going to pay for it. There's one more thing I'll comment on. If all the people through the years had paid a membership or a daily trail fee, we'd have plenty for machines. Cross country skiers, I hate to say it, but a lot of them are cheap skates. They don't want to spend any money. When we were grooming trails, I'd take sometimes 15 gallons of gas for a grooming session. I worked at the research lab one time, by the time I got out of work, the gas was all gone. Remember when there were rationing it? I had to go all the way to Norway to the station there and I filled up about half a dozen cans of gas just to get gas to groom trails. I don't know about Iron Mountain, but in Ishpeming we had a big construction thing going on and the contractor would use up most of the gas. They only allocated so much gas per area. I went all the way to Norway to get gas so I could groom the trails. We couldn't get it. I came home from work and they said I'm sorry it's all gone.

RM: So you really had to work against many odds to put these trails in and maintain them.

NJ: It is a lot of work. In 1983 or so, there was a coach and two skiers that came to the Olympic Training Center in Marquette and they were checking out the facilities in the county. We happened to be running a small race up on the Cleveland trail. Those two skiers entered our race and naturally he won the race. Ralph Bietela was talking to them and they told Ralph this is the best ski trail we've skied on in the United States this winter. That's pretty good praise. If you groom them good...I had a friend of mine say we could hold the Finnish nationals on our trails because we groom them good. We shovel drifts out and drag them. If you come there on a Saturday morning and we had a snow storm Friday night, there are skiers there thinking the trail would be groomed already. They're demanding a lot.

RM: That's quite a legacy.

NJ: I don't know if you've skied any of our trails, but I still think this is the best of the bunch.

RM: Years ago when it was open we skied on the Cleveland trail.

NJ: Who was it...he was a Northern professor...I even named one of our hills after him...Godell. Jim Godell. All the hills had names. I named one after my sister.

RM: now that brings back memories. We went out there a number of times. Then this friend of mine wanted me to go out on a day in the middle of April. You needed...it was like 32.

NJ: I usually quit grooming usually by the middle of March.

RM: It turned out to be a horrible time. We were using red wax and then I fell and almost got hurt. I told this friend of mine you only go skiing when it's a little below 32. It was going on 40. You were skiing on water.

NJ: We used to have an older guy in our location he used to go up there and ski. He'd go 5 times in the morning, 5 times in the afternoon, 5 times at night. He was a bear. He was in his 60s! One year he was trying to get 500 miles. I told him I'd groom as long as I can, but it's not a smart thing to do. He never once skied any of the other loops. That ??? trail is a huge ski trail. At the airport, I made a bomb run on it. You'd come there and there's a big straight. The second hill is pretty steep too. At the bottom there were bumps. I told the guys to scrape their skis and get the snow pile out of there and fill in the holes then it would be good enough for the next guy that comes by. These bumps would harden up and they'd come down and hit them and go for a mile. That was no trail for amateurs. We had it posted for experienced skiers only, but you know how it is.

RM: Is there anything else you want to add that I didn't bring up or talk about? Thank you.