

'Mite' as in Dynamite

The Story of The ABC Ski Mites

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One of the most unusual stories in the history of tournament water skiing is that of the ABC Ski-Mites of Angier, N. C., host club for the 1977 Southern Regional Championships. It is a story of struggling against odds, of tragedy, of dedication and of ultimate success never dreamed of by the handful of "Mites" who started it all. One of them was Jerry Hargis, the club president, who says he is "not much of a writer" but his own words tell a story of how an entire community can become excited over organized water skiing.

The idea of forming a water ski club started back in September of 1974. My wife Brenda and I met Lewis Fields, a member of the Tar River Ski Club in Rocky Mount, N. C., who was attending college near Angier. Just hearing him talk about competitive skiing and watching him trick ski [something we had never seen before) got us really interested in learning more.

Lewis invited us to a novice tournament that his club was putting on that same month, so my best friend, Fred Wade, and I decided to go. We had never seen a slalom course but we tried on our flat-bottom skis, falling, of course — not to mention almost freezing. [We usually quit skiing when the weather got a little cool.)

After that day, the bug had bitten. My wife and I began to kick around the idea of organizing a club. One night, we called up Fred and his wife Pat and told them what we were thinking. They were ready to go.

At that time, we were skiing on a small public lake and conditions were bad for trying to learn anything new, particularly competitive skiing. Early in 1975, we joined the AWSA and set about trying to get other people involved. We had seen so many people quit skiing because they became bored. We knew that once they saw what the slalom course and trick skiing were all about they would never quit.

We ordered a book from AWSA on how to organize a club, put up some money, rented a building, bought refreshments, borrowed some films and began to spread the word about a meeting.

With help from the Angier Independent newspaper and the local radio station, word really got around. We invited Lewis Field and his wife Marie to attend our meeting and explain tournament skiing. Our first meeting took place on March 22, and everything went great. After hearing the Fields and seeing films of slalom and tricks being performed by good skiers, everyone seemed to like the idea of organizing a club at our next meeting.

It took over a month to convince the owner of a private lake (Panther Lake) to let us have a meeting there and permit us to put in a temporary slalom course. On May 10, we held our next meeting and it proved to be a disappointment, not because people didn't come but because there was so much negative expression that a club like this would never make it. Besides, before the day was over, some people who didn't understand what we were trying to do, tore up our slalom course.

Disappointed or not, we weren't going to give up. So we founded our club and signed up four couples and their children. They included my wife and I and our daughter Tammy, Fred and Pat Wade and their daughter Karen, my brother Glenn and his wife Brenda, neither of who ski, and a friend, Tommy Guess, his wife Shirley and little Tommy. (They

hardly knew what a slalom ski was.) We named our club the ABC Ski-Mites [A for Angler, BC for Buies Creek and communities).

We bought some better skis and began skiing hard. Soon people became interested in what we were doing, especially our trick skiing, and began asking questions. We practiced whenever we could and got plenty of good advice from our friends in the Tar River club, Soon we were signing up more members.

On May 31, we took a group to our first tournament. It was at Edenton, N. C., and was sponsored by the Pembroke Water Ski Club. We got acquainted with some new friends in that club, learned a lot and even brought home a few trophies from the novice competition. Everyone was really excited now.

Our Angier newspaper kept track of our progress, printing stories of everything we did. The public in this way began to understand what our club was all about, and we kept growing. [One of the first awards presented by our club was a plaque to Jo Woodie, editor of the Angier Independent, for the fine support her paper had given us.)

We had kept on skiing in the private lake which was open to anyone who would pay the owner a fee to boat there. He did allow us to put in a permanent slalom course, but we were plagued with problems trying to practice and preventing others from tearing up our course.

All during the summer of '75, we kept looking for a place we could have all to ourselves. We attempted to get the owner of the lake we were using to lease it to us, or to permit us to hold a tournament on it, but the answer was no. We signed up many members.

One evening Richard Collins, one of our new club members, brought over an aerial photograph of a nearby millpond which was about the size of the lake we were skiing in. The size was ideal but the pond was covered with stumps and most of the shoreline was swampy and loaded with briars and trees.

It would take a lot of hard work to make the pond suitable for skiing but we had 35 members by now and they were brave and eager enough to tackle the job. So we leased the pond, drained it and went to work on Thanksgiving Day of 1975, wading in the mud to cut out stumps, underbrush and trees. After a long, hard winter's work, we finally put in a course and a jump ramp, and we were skiing by late March of '76.

We had raised the money for our lease and construction work by selling candy and begging and borrowing along the way. We also had the help and encouragement of members of the Tar River club.

On May 23, we put on our first ski show before more than 1,200 spectators, but tragedy struck that day. In a freak boat accident, one of our charter members, Pat Wade, was killed and several people were injured. We thought our club might break up after that, but everyone regrouped and decided to go on.

So we held our first full-blown tournament August 28 and 29. About 500 spectators were on hand, and the 125 contestants came from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. It was a great success, and everyone seemed to love our site because of the shade trees, calm water and complete privacy. Many people told us that we had an excellent site for a Regional tournament. This made us feel proud but we couldn't conceive of anything like that ever happening.

However, our friends in Edenton and Rocky Mount didn't figure that way. Sarvis Bass of the Tar River club and Mike Partin of the Pembroke club, both clubs having sponsored several successful tournaments, went to work and, almost before-we knew it, they had

succeeded in their bid for the 1977 Southern Regionals to be hosted by us at Young's Pond.

By now, we have drained the pond again, waded in the mud once more to put in a certified course, and we are well on our way to making this site one of the best that has ever hosted the Southern Regionals. With the sponsorship of the Tar River and Pembroke clubs, it can't miss.

To them, to AWSA and to all the other clubs and individuals who have helped us come such a long way in such a short time, we are truly grateful.

By the way, the "Mite" in Ski-Mites is like the "mite" in dynamite.

Young's Pond near Angier is 30 miles north of Fayetteville, N. C., 25 miles south of Raleigh, N. C., and 20 miles northwest of Benson, N. C., which is located on Interstate 95. In addition to the Southern Regionals August 5, 6, and 7, Young's Pond will be the site of the North Carolina State Championships (N. C. residents only) July 23 and 24.