

Korkki Nordic Ski Center Fall 2010 Newsletter

Clockwise

I take off from the Korkki chalet on a late August day that stayed overcast and humid. It had been a few months since I last saw the trail and skiers and snow so I'm anxious to see what I find on an afternoon walk. I inhale the freshly cut grass that is slowly making its way into hay as I exit out of the field, framed to my right by brown fern fronds and stalling clover. The first bridge – normally the first trial in the wintertime – is rushing with brown runoff. The leaves are still too green and vivid to be September.

Juxtaposed to winter's kickwax are mosquitoes swinging by my ears as I stop to take notes while puttering up the first herringbone hill. I don't go much faster in the winter. Pesky dead rotten birch limbs that often fall on trails about this time of year are removed as gratitude for this opportunity. Currents of water flow across the trail and I know it, finally, what I've intrinsically set out to be inspired by as I reach the second bridge.

Ever since I was a young lad skiing the trails – working my way up quickly from the 6k to the 7.5 and finally the big show – I've wanted to see what the trail was like – backwards. At twenty-two, entering what I hope to be my sixteenth season at Korkki, I finally took the watered-down version of this ambition and decided it allowable to walk backwards on the trail during the late summer.

So I reverse course from where skiers normally continue out and bank left towards Tanner's Hole. My timing is practical (a minimal chance of injury) as I expect no skiers coming at me down the rolling hills after Fryberger's Curve as I would in wintertime. I hope my choice is pragmatic, too (as the admonishment from the Assistant Chief of Trails (aka Mark) would surely bring ruin to the family for many generations), so I've never done it – until now.

Even if you're the only car parked in the lot on a cold December afternoon, don't go out and attempt to fulfill your own ambition upon the first solid snowfall and grooming if you secretly harbor the notion of going clockwise yourself...

Liability behind me, I proceed amongst the frogs and knee-high grass. I admit, Korkki is a completely different place this time of year. Trouty-looking hideouts. A river that flows, quite predominantly actually, throughout much of the trail. Maximized deciduous growth that tells me there are only a few more weeks until Bangin' in the Brush. The leaves will clock out soon afterwards, inviting the misty, foggy autumn view that I admit is less glamorous than a crisp blue ski in the winter.

During the Erik Judeen, where taking an undue amount of writer's pause isn't possible, the river is stoic and the focus for me was always to stay within earshot of the heavy breath of any competitors as the sightlines continue to remain "rustic." And, of course, finish. One obstacle to doing so is usually the "Big Hill." Surprisingly to me, as I walked backwards in rebel glory, the opposite summit of the Iso Maki was anti-climactic. I guess the course goes as it has always gone for a reason. So I turned around, went back the way I came up and slogged my way to a conclusion.

Let those muddy currents dry up to form frost on the brown leaves and let the snow fall, timelessly. Let the runners pound out the trails, I say, atop the deer tracks and orange mushrooms and let the weather dictate September's decree of a muggy finish. When the snow falls, enjoy the "classic Northwoods ski experience" as it is meant to be – counterclockwise – and encourage others to join you on the trail that continues to inspire, no matter the season. —**Will Mitchell / 2010**

