



Well Groomed for 50 Years

How Mt. Bachelor's Nordic Center came to be.

See page 2

Man of Words and Water

February's History Pub focuses on Robert Sawyer.

See page 5



The Homesteader

Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter—FEBRUARY 2026

Annual Members' Luncheon

Saturday, February 28, 2026

11:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Bend Elks Lodge: 63120 Boyd Acres Rd. Bend

The 2026 Members' Luncheon will take place at the Elks Lodge in Bend. Members are asked to **RSVP by February 14** with their preferred protein choice. *See p. 6 for options.*

Following lunch, the board and staff will provide updates to DCHS and Deschutes Pioneer Association programs, including crowning the 2026 Pioneer Queen. And back by popular demand: we will play a game of Deschutes History Trivia! You and your tablemates will play for fun prizes and bragging rights.

To reserve your lunch, please complete the form on page 6 and return to the Deschutes Historical Museum with payment by February 14 or members can pay online:

<https://square.link/u/PqvNWEB8>

Please be sure to select your preferred menu option.

Thank you members, we are looking forward to gathering with you again!

Meeting Agenda

11:00 a.m. Doors Open

11:30 a.m. Welcome

12:00 p.m. Lunch Served

12:45 p.m. Updates from the DCHS Board and DPA Committee

1:15 p.m. Program:

Deschutes History Trivia!

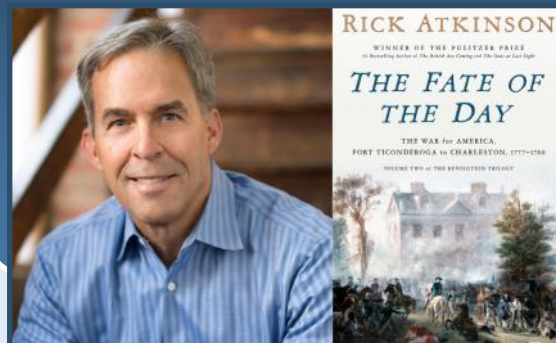


How well do you know your Deschutes County history? Compete with your teammates for prizes and bragging rights!

2:00 p.m. Adjourn

The Hatfield Lecture Series Presents

Rick Atkinson



May 13, 2026

The Tower Theatre

Deschutes Historical Museum is proud to host a special event with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Rick Atkinson. *Mr. Atkinson can most recently be seen on PBS in Ken Burns' The American Revolution.*

Tickets are \$25 for members, \$30 for non-members. (An additional \$8 Tower Preservation Fund Fee will be applied at check-out): [TowerTheatre.org](https://towertheatre.org)

To navigate the ticket process, place the member code in the redeem code box and click "Apply Code" **BEFORE** you click "Book Now." Once the code is applied you will be able to access the ticket selection page with the \$5.00 discount.

An email with the member discount code was sent on January 21. Please call the Deschutes Historical Museum if you need the code.

Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center's 50th Anniversary

By Glenn Voelz

Fifty years ago next month, ski instructor Bob Mathews wrote a one-page memo to Mt. Bachelor's president Bill Healy, proposing a new cross-country ski area at the resort. In the early 1970s, cross-country, also known as Nordic skiing, was gaining popularity. Still, only a few resorts in the United States had regularly groomed trails and basic amenities for Nordic skiers.

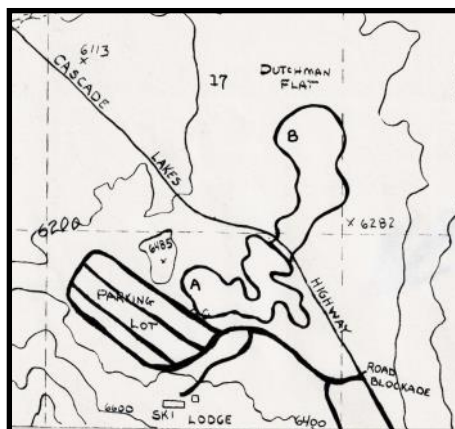
At the time, Mt. Bachelor had a few kilometers of snowmobile-groomed trails running between the Black and Green Chairs around the present area of the Skyliner lift. Ski school director Jack Meissner groomed the trails using his own snowmobile and pulling a track-setter behind him. Meanwhile, Virginia Meissner taught cross-country lessons out of the alpine ski school, taking her students on ungroomed trails around what is now the West Village parking lot.

Bill Healy supported the idea of a Nordic Center and sent Bob Mathews off to make it happen. Mathews developed two new loop trails for the 1976-77 season. The original Loop A was a two-kilometer trail along the Cascade Lakes Highway. Loop B was a five-kilometer trail tracing the edge of Dutchman Flat outside of Mt. Bachelor's special-use permit area.

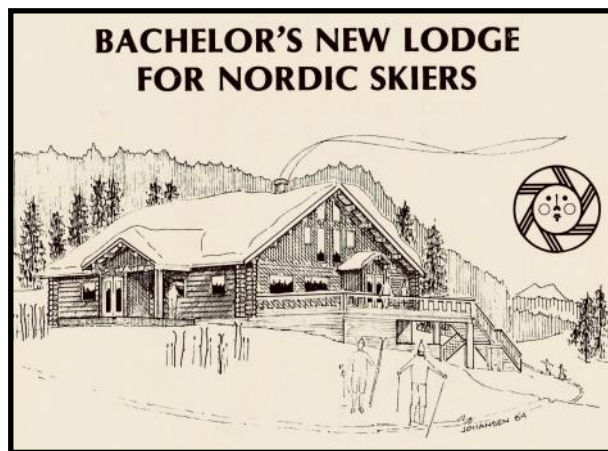
With those first two trails, Mt. Bachelor had the only regularly groomed Nordic system among Oregon's alpine ski areas. The following season, Mathews added a five-kilometer training loop circling the Old Maid Butte with the help of former Olympic biathlete Jay Bowerman, who used the route for his training during the



Virginia Meissner was Mt. Bachelor's first cross country instructor even before the formal program began



Cross-country trail map for the 1976-77 season.



Sketch of the Nordic Lodge designed by architect Vernon Sexton, completed in late 1983.

early 1970s.

During the first few seasons, profits from overall mountain operations helped subsidize the cross-country center. Mathews did most of the grooming using the resort's first snowmobile, a Rupp American model made in Mansfield, Ohio. The Nordic Center had around 2,000 skier visits during the first season, but that number increased steadily. With its early success, Healy continued to support the program's expansion.

The cross-country center eventually moved into a 400-square-foot trailer in the parking area. Mathews shared a Tucker Sno-Cat with the mountain manager, Cliff Blann, for daily grooming. Later, the Nordic department received its own Tucker Sno-Cat, which it used for several seasons.

By the early 1980s, the Nordic Center had approximately 20 kilometers of groomed trails, covering a footprint similar to today's network. The additional trails added in the early 1980s included Beginner's Luck, Jay's, Woody's Way, Easy Back, and First Time. The Zig Zag trail was added for the 1982-83 season, expanding the network to 25 kilometers. Devecka's was added the following year, increasing the length of the groomed trails to 32 kilometers. As the center expanded, so

- Continued on page 3

Deschutes Historical Museum

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Open Tuesdays-Saturdays
10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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Vanessa Ivey, Museum Manager
Rebekah Averette, Collections Manager
Donna Burklo, Development Director
Tracy Alexander, Membership Officer
Rashelle Maplethorpe, Support Staff



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Eric King, Secretary/Treasurer
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Complete minutes of the meetings of the Board of Directors are on file with the Museum office.
Tax ID# 51-0186079

Continued from page 2— Nordic Center's 50th Anniversary

did the number of skiers. By 1979, Nordic skier visits increased to around 7,000 annually. By the 1983-84 season, that number had nearly doubled to over 12,000 skier visits per year.

During his early years as Nordic sports director, Mathews hired another recent transplant to Bend named Bob Woodward. The two men ran ski camps and races, including the Cascade Crest Ski Marathon, which began in 1979 along a route from Bachelor Butte to Little Lava Lake and back. While working as a freelance sportswriter, Woodward wrote numerous articles in national publications that put Mt. Bachelor's Nordic Center on the map, attracting top-ranked skiers for training and competition.

Another member of the early Nordic staff was Dennis Oliphant, a former ski racer from the University of Oregon. Oliphant arrived in Bend in 1977 and worked various jobs at the center, from instruction to grooming. He was instrumental in developing the junior cross-country racing program and coached for many years. Oliphant later served as the first Nordic program director for the Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation and was a longtime member of the board. He was among the founders of Sun Country Tours, which he helped start in 1978 and later sold to Powder Enterprises in 2016.

As the Nordic Center grew, it gained a reputation as a premier training site for elite-level competitors. In the late 1970s, Mt. Bachelor began hosting the annual Fischer-Swix-Salomon cross-country ski camps, run by Woodward. Around the same time, the U.S. National Nordic team held its first spring training camp at the center in preparation for the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. To entice the national squad to Mt. Bachelor, Healy promised free grooming for the duration of the training camp. In the early 1980s, the center hosted several major race events, including the FIS Cross-Country Nor-Am Cup in 1984, a high-level competition just below the World Cup level. In 1985, the Nordic Center held the U.S. Cross Country National Championship.

By the early 1980s, the Nordic program had outgrown its cramped parking-lot trailers and moved into a dedicated lodge on the northern edge of the West Village parking area. Local architect Vernon Sexton designed the log-cabin-style lodge. Sexton helped develop the Pine Marten and Sunrise lodges, as well as the summit chairlift. The new 3,800 square-foot Nordic lodge opened in November 1983 and included a rental department, cafe, retail area, and a space for instructors and ski patrol. By that time, the network consisted of approximately 35 kilometers of groomed trails, with the addition of a new trail along the old catchline of the northwest side alpine ski runs. The following year, the center received its first dedicated grooming machine, a Pistenbully 170.

By the late 1980s, the Nordic Center's reputation was firmly established within the cross-county community. In 1989, Mt. Bachelor hosted the annual convention of the Cross Country Ski Areas Association, drawing industry leaders from around

the country. By that time, the network had nearly reached its current configuration. The last few trails were added in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including Oli's Alley, Leslie's Lunge, Rich's Range, and Easy Up.

When Bob Mathews departed as the Nordic director in 1991, the network was nearly 56 kilometers and attracted around 30,000 skier visits per year. Mathews credits much of the center's early success to Bill Healy's support of cross-country skiing when the sport was still a niche winter pastime and generating only a small portion of the mountain's overall revenue.

Today, Mt. Bachelor has Oregon's most extensive cross-country trail systems and one of the longest seasons of any resort in the United States, often extending through the end of May. It remains a frequent site for the spring training camps of the U.S. and Canadian National Nordic teams, as well as the U.S. Biathlon and Paralympic Teams. What began in 1976 with a one-page memo evolved into one of the premier Nordic Centers in North America and a beloved cultural institution in Central Oregon.

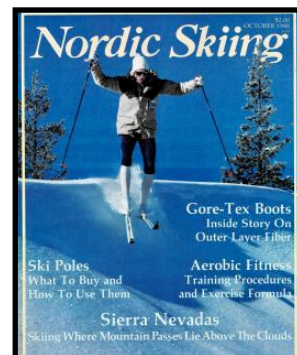


Photo of Bob Mathews skiing "Rich's Range" on the cover of Nordic Skiing magazine. Photo by Bob Woodward.

Trail Names Tell the History of Nordic Skiing in Central Oregon

Mount Bachelor's cross-country network has numerous trails and landmarks named after notable local skiers and individuals who contributed to the development of the resort's legendary Nordic Center. A warming hut, dubbed Bob's Bungalow, is named after Bob Mathews.

Several other founders are honored with trails around the network. The loop trail, Woody's Way, is named after Bob Woodward, and Oli's Alley is named for Dennis Oliphant.

The Nordic network's well-known gathering place, Emil's Clearing, is named after Central Oregon's iconic cross-country skier Emil Nordeen. Other trails are named in honor of noteworthy local skiers and Olympians, including Deveck's Dive, named after Mike Deveck, a four-time U.S. Olympic team member and the only U.S. skier to win national championships in all three Nordic disciplines. Leslie's Lunge honors Leslie Bancroft-Krichko, a two-time Olympian who trained at Mt. Bachelor.

Blue Jay's Way was named after Jay Bowerman, a two-time Olympian and U.S. biathlon champion who trained on a makeshift biathlon course near Mount Bachelor in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rich's Range was named after Rich Gross, a 1988 Olympic biathlon team member and head of MBSEF's biathlon training program during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Dan's Drop, formerly known as Old Maid, is named after Dan Simoneau, a member of three U.S. Olympic teams who later became the MBSEF Nordic program director.