

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

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Let it Snow by Eileen Stegemann

There's nothing better than a cold, clear, snow-covered winter day...at least according to my husband. Winter is his idea of heaven—a time to grab one of his many pairs of cross-country skis (all necessary, so I'm told, as one needs to match the correct ski to the location and current weather conditions) and head outside. And while my ideal day runs more in the low to mid-60s temperature range, and I'd prefer to be out canoeing and fishing, I have to admit that I thoroughly enjoy cross-country skiing on a beautiful winter day.

I was lucky—the first time I went cross-country skiing was one of those picture-perfect, almost magical, winter days. The sky was bright-blue, the temperature in the low 30s (perfect for cross-country as you often work up a sweat),

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and more than a foot of fresh snow had fallen the night before, blanketing everything in a thick layer of white. It was truly a winter wonderland. And despite the fact that I had never skied before and spent probably just as much time on the ground as I did upright on my skis, I couldn't stop smiling.

But it hasn't always been picture-perfect, and I confess that there have been many times when I have been less than enamored with the sport. This was especially true during my early skiing years when I would try and keep up with my husband and friends (all good, strong, seasoned skiers who were much faster—and in the case of downhill, much

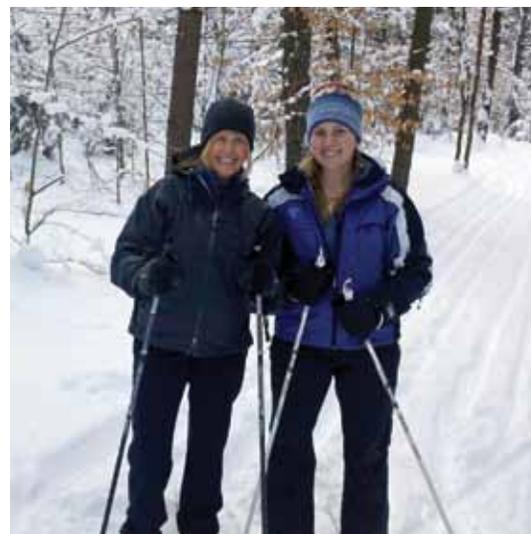
braver—than me). Let's just say that it wasn't always pretty and didn't always end well. It wasn't until I realized that it was okay to go at my own pace and that I could walk down challenging slopes (skis are removable, after all) that I truly fell in love with the sport.

When we started a family, we brought the kids along—first in a backpack, and then on their own skis. It's a great winter family outdoor activity, and while it required patience early on, it wasn't long before the kids were outskiing us (okay, maybe just me).

Cross-country skiing is also a great workout! But since you can choose the terrain (e.g. with or without hills), and set your own pace, you can make your ski as hard or easy as you'd like. While my

husband and son like to go fast and do lots of hills, my daughter and I generally like to take it a bit more slowly. Most of the time we're looking around—we've seen deer, fox, hawks and owls, as well as a myriad of animal tracks (including moose)—but there are always one or two flat stretches where she and I do a fast sprint! To me, that's the beauty of cross-country skiing: you can go as fast or as slow as you wish. Either way, you're still getting great exercise.

New York has countless places to cross-country ski—from ski centers with equipment rentals and groomed trails (with trail fees), to state or county lands and parks where you bring your own gear



The author and her daughter

and have to break your own trail. Golf courses that allow skiing make excellent cross-country ski sites; some even have groomed trails. My family also enjoys exploring the woods and fields near our house. There's something fun about strapping on a pair of skis (or snowshoes) and going right out the front door.

While a part of me longs for warmer days at this time of year, I celebrate blue-sky days with fresh snowfalls when I can take out my cross-country skis and head into the woods. (Just don't tell my husband or he'll want to go every day!)

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Author's note: Check out DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/353.html for places to ski.