THE FIRST BLACK JACK LOPPET – FEBRUARY 16th 1985
AN HISTORICAL NOTE by Ken Holmes

I was on the executive of the Black Jack Ski Club in 1984 when it was suggested by Roger Chrisfield and Rob Grey that the club should host a loppet. They had been to a loppet in Eastern Canada and they came home full of enthusiasm.

At the first meeting of the 1984 executive, jobs were being volunteered for and, due to my reticence in volunteering, eventually there was only me without a job and the only remaining job was to organize a loppet. Everyone looked at me and I said "Sure, …. but what's a loppet?" I'm certain that Roger and Rob set me up!

After it was explained to me what a loppet was, I decided that the best thing to do was enter one and find out what goes on. I entered a loppet at Radium Hot Springs and duly competed. I was astounded when almost everybody, including me, completed the course in almost Olympic times. It turned out that the course setter had set the course thinking that the odometer on his snowmobile was in miles whereas it was in kilometres so in fact we had only raced 18k instead of 30k.

Donna Hayes from Vancouver was the Technical Representative for the B.C X-C Ski Association and I learned from her that they had done virtually everything wrong and would not be allowed to hold another loppet. For me this was a great learning experience and I returned to Rossland knowing exactly what **not** to do in organizing a loppet.

Our date was set for February 16th, 1985. It was one of 12 in the BC Swix Loppet series. We decided to hold a classic 40km race and then came the first problem. How to get 40km from the trails we had? It had to be multi-loop given the trail system we had at that time. It was decided to start across the road from the current practice field and include a loop which went south towards Cordiez's house and returned to the parking area and then up Gibbards. We used every trail, including Mugwump, which was a single-track trail at the time which terrified everyone with its steep downhill.

We were blessed with perfect weather and perfect snow. There were 62 entrants, which wasn't bad for an unknown club's first event of this kind.

We had a great team. Roger Chrisfield was Chief of Course Setting, Jim Delong took care of all the other course arrangements, my wife Rita was Chief Timekeeper, Carmel O'Flanagan was Treasurer, Ed Crape was Chief of Start/Finish and Alan Baker was Chief of Calculations. We also had many enthusiastic helpers.

For computing results, we set up a trailer with a generator, computer, and a copying machine. Donna Hayes was the Technical Delegate and told us we were the first club in B.C to use an on-site computer for results. People were really impressed! As skiers

finished the race, they were handed an interim results sheet all printed out. Final results were available within minutes of the last competitor finishing the race. (Remember that this was in the days before laptops when computers were not particularly user friendly).

Ken MacLean took photographs of every competitor, and the negatives were rushed down to Trail for processing at Cameracrafts. Everyone was handed a personal photograph at the end of the race. Medals were presented at a wine and cheese party held in the Uplander Ballroom in the evening after the race. Every competitor received a certificate of completion and over $1000 worth of prizes were handed out.

The winning male was Fred Bushell in a time of 2 hours 25 minutes 11 seconds and the first female was Debbie Daniels in a time of 3 hours 22 minutes 28 seconds. Mary Baker took the prize for the longest time (5 hours 47 minutes 9 seconds) and Steve Ash the prize for the most spectacular finish.

Steve was a great marathon runner but had never before been on cross-country skis and thought because of his fitness he'd have no problem. He was dead last when he saw Mary taking a snack break with her flask of tea and sandwiches towards the end of the race and this spurred him on to a spectacular second last place (5 hours 38 minutes 53 seconds), trying to run on his skis.

Helen Bouchier won the oldest female competitor prize and Istvan Soos the oldest male. He was 71 at the time. Many other locals took part including Cheryl Langille, Lesley Beatson, Debbie Daniels, Brenda Trenhome, Angie Steinruck, Carmel O'Flanagan, Mary Baker, Yvonne Tremblay, Terry Delong, John Walton, Gerald Klassen, Rick Ewings, Andy Talbot, Kelvin Saldern, Martie Steinruck, Philippe Cordiez, Kim Hay, Gary Bock, Dave Smith, Steve Ash, Roger Chrisfield, Brian O'Flanagen, Peter McIver, Dave Rusnell, Dave Butler, and Ben Thor Larsen.

The success of this event firmly established the reputation of the Black Jack Ski Club in the provincial racing scene and attracted many more racers from outside the area to future loppets at Black Jack.

The Al Fisher Loppet scheduled for March 9th 2024 will be the 40th Black Jack Loppet. We should try and get as many of the original local competitors as we can to enter the anniversary event.

Do it for Al!

Ken Holmes
Organizer of the first two Black Jack Loppets