

Skiers turn rescuers of snowbound travelers

What had been planned last weekend as the biggest trip in the history of the Huggers Ski Club turned into another snowbound chapter in the Winter of '77.

Numerous motorists probably owe their lives to skiers who rescued them from their automobiles, which were stalled for hours in mountainous drifts.

In one drama-packed mission, two club members, Irene Mele, a nurse, and Donna Durnher, a respirator technician, accompanied a heart-attack victim in an emergency vehicle to the Watertown Hospital with a snowplow breaking the way.

With all beer and sandwiches gone, club members made it back to Rochester yesterday. But they were still mindful of the state troopers warning "If you leave before we give the word, we'll throw you into the slammer."

The Club had chartered five Greyhound buses to take 200 members to Whiteface Mountain for a weekend of skiing. Only three buses with 120 skiers eventually got away, but they never made it to the ski area.

The first bus with 40 skiers started to take off at 1 p.m. Friday just as the blizzard hit. The bus reached the Thruway just as it closed to all traffic. The bus driver said he might be able to make it via Routes 96 and 88 and the happy skiers gave him the green light.

"It was a wild trip," said Rick Toot, chairman for that bus. "We ran into zero visibility almost immediately. The drifts were unbelievable. Then



Floyd King

we began to find cars stuck in the drifts. Some of the motorists were cold and panic stricken.

"Of course we were all dressed for the weather and when 40 of us piled out to push the car aside, it moved. Then we'd take the people into the bus with us. Once when the bus got stuck some of us got under it and literally dug it out with our hands."

As the bus neared Sacketts Harbor it hit a mountainous drift and obviously the end of the line.

"Pretty soon snowmobiles and other rescue vehicles showed up and began to shuttle us to the Sacketts Harbor Fire Hall," Toot continued.

"They took good care of us with a good meal and blankets and sleeping bags for the night. It was like a big houseparty and everybody was still having a lot of fun. But all through the night they kept bringing in other storm survivors."

On Saturday morning the Huggers still wanted to go skiing and with the bus driver agreeable they started out again. With two town snow plows leading the way, it took them two hours to go the six miles from Sacketts Harbor to Watertown. That was again the end of the line. With six feet of snow on the ground, Watertown was having the worst storm in its history.

Meanwhile back in Rochester and despite the blizzard, 36 Huggers showed up at the bus station Friday night all ready to go skiing. That second bus left at 7:30 p.m. and by some miracle made it all the way to Lake Placid. The bus got snowbound there. There has been no report on details except that everyone was safe.

The third bus with 41 Huggers aboard took off at 7 a.m. Saturday. Its trip was pretty much a repetition of the Friday bus with numerous adventures and rescues along the way.

"But when we got to Watertown that was it," said Don Rice, trip chairman. "Nothing was moving past Watertown. You wouldn't believe the drifts there."

The Huggers took over two motels, the Rainbow Inn and Crupis, sometimes four to six skiers sharing a room.

"They couldn't do more for us," Rice said. "It has been real North Country hospitality. We had a bar, lots of food and everybody stayed in good spirits."

Once when the Huggers thought they might be able to start back to Rochester the state troopers told them they had found one family eating cat food and drinking melted snow in order survive. That cooled the Huggers' enthusiasm.

Morerod widens World Cup lead

MARIBOR, Yugoslavia (AP) — Lise-Marie Morerod of Switzerland won yesterday's giant slalom and increased her World Cup lead over Annemarie Proell-Moser.

Miss Morerod, 24, covered the 1200-meter run, with 48 gates and a drop of 310 meters, in one minute 12.04 seconds. Monika Kaserer, 24, of Austria was second in 1:12.13, followed by Fabienne Serrat of France in 1:12.91.

Miss Morerod's victory brought her 25 points in the World Cup standings, giving her 238. Mrs. Proell-Moser, who failed to finish among the top 10 in Wednesday's race, remained second with 191, and Miss Kaserer, gaining 20 points, climbed to the third place with 156.

Viki Fleckenstein, 21, of Syracuse was the best-placed American. She had a low starting number, 30, but with excellent skiing clocked 1:13.70 to take seventh.

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