January 17-20, 2019
snö
flinga
The MONTANA STANDARD

Fourth annual fest ready to kick off

Snöflinga features skijoring this year

ANNIE PENTILLA
anne.pentilla@mtstandard.com

Snöflinga organizers are about to take Butte's winter festival to a whole new level.

That's according to Jenny Heglund and Corie Downey, who say the addition of skijoring to the festival's lineup this year is sure to be a crowd-pleaser. (See related story).

Downey

Heglund

The festival runs Jan. 17-20.

Downey has been competing in skijoring for several years. She's a self-described adrenaline junkie who has also competed in rodeo.

Downey said the planning for the skijoring event took about 9 months. She is the event lead for the skijoring competition, which she and other organizers are calling Skijor Butte.

On an economic development front, the two organizers are projecting the skijoring event will result in around 75 room rentals in Butte's motels and hotels and will increase the festival's profile and attendance, which has been growing ever since Snöflinga hit the scene four years ago.

WALTER HINICK, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Children take a turn at ice skating in this file photo of a previous Snöflinga event. Butte's winter festival run Jan. 17 through 20 this year.

Last year, the festival had about 3,000 attendees over the course of four days, Heglund said.

"We've expanded pretty broad locally for our ski races and bike events," said Heglund. "But this is really going to bring something that's next level."

The 2019 festival will also showcase Snöflinga's first-ever hockey demonstration Saturday, Jan. 19, at the Butte Community Ice Center, hosted by the Butte Amateur Hockey Association. There, beginners can learn to skate and beef up their hockey skills.

Other new events include a screening of the skiing documentary "Far Out" by sports media company Teton Gravity Research at the Covellite Theater, 215 W. Broadway St. The festival is also showcasing two screenings of the documentary "Beef Trail: A Pioneering Montana Ski Area" at 5518 Designs, 27 N. Main St.

As in previous years, admission to Snöflinga events will be free and attendees will be able to enjoy many of the same events they did in the past, ranging from night sledding, an ugly sweater fun run and a polar plunge, to Nordic skiing, ice skating and curling.

When Snöflinga got its start four years ago, it had the vibe of a grassroots event.

It was founded by the members of the Butte Community Fitness Organization and other Mining City residents who wanted to bring to the so-called "Festival City" a festival during the longest seasons of the year: winter.

Since then, Heglund said, the festival has evolved to include a lot more events and many more amenities. The Butte festival has even been named as a sanctioned World Snow Day event — a distinction it shares with just three other events from the United States.

But it's not just growth that Heglund and Downey are after.

They want the event to be something families and children can look forward to — something that can have an impact.

"If we don't encourage kids to get outside and discover new passions then they might not do it on their own," said Downey, adding that she hopes the festival will instill a lifelong love for winter recreation among the youngest of Butte residents.

snö flinga

For more info:

For a list of events, locations and times, visit snoflinga.weebly.com.

For more info on Skijor Butte and how to register, visit bit.ly/2Qgry28.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, JAN. 17

7 p.m. at 5518 Designs, 27 N. Main Street: Documentary film: "Beef Trail: A Pioneering Montana Ski Area."

FRIDAY, JAN. 18

1 p.m. at Skijor competition site, 2900 Hansen Road, Skijoring clinic.

5 to 9 p.m. at Butte High Altitude Skating Center, 1 Olympic Way: Opening ceremony, Polar Plunge pre-registration, free ice skating, bonfire, music, food and beverages.

7 to 9 p.m. at Best Western Plus Butte Plaza Inn, 2900 Harrison Avenue: Skijor Butte contestant check-in party.

SATURDAY, JAN. 19

9:30 a.m. at Butte High Altitude Skating Center, 1 Olympic Way: Elementary Skate Races

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Skijor competition site, 2900 Hansen Road: Skijoring competition.

Noon, returning **3 p.m.**, at High Altitude Skating Center, 1 Olympic Way: Free shuttle to Homestake Lodge.

9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Homestake Lodge, 520 Upper Rader Creek Road, Whitehall: Open ski.

10:30 a.m. at Homestake Lodge, 520 Upper Rader Creek Road, Whitehall: A valanche Awareness Demo Day.

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Homestake Lodge, 520 Upper Rader Creek Road, Whitehall: Nordic Ski Lessons.

1 p.m at Homestake Lodge, 520 Upper Rader Creek Road, Whitehall: Snowshoe treks.

11 a.m. at Mountain Con Mine, Foreman's Park: 5k Ugly Sweater Fun Run/walk.

Noon at Mountain Con Mine, Foreman's Park: Kids' fun mile.

Noon to 3 p.m. at Mountain Con Mine, Foreman's Park: Kids' afternoon.

1:30 to 3 p.m. at Community Ice Center, Clark's Park: Try hockey.

3 to 5 p.m. at Mountain Con Mine, Foreman's Park: Youth Skillz Session.

4 to 6 p.m. at Mountain Con Mine, Foreman's Park: Southwestern Polar Plunge.

4 to 8 p.m. at Mountain Con Mine, Foreman's Park: Open sledding.

6 p.m. at 5518 Designs, 27 N. Main St.: Documentary film: "Beef Trail: A Pioneering Montana Ski Area."

8 p.m. at Covellite Theatre, 215 W. Broadway St.: Film, "Far Out," by Teton Gravity Research.

8 p.m. to midnight at Best Western Plus Butte Plaza Inn, 2900 Harrison Avenue: Skjor Butte Calcutta.

SUNDAY, JAN. 20

Noon to 2 p.m. at Community Ice Center, Clark's Park: Curling.

9:30 a.m. at Homestake Lodge, 520 Upper Rader Creek Road, Whitehall: Homestake Hustle Nordic Ski Races (adult).

11 a.m. at Homestake Lodge, 520 Upper Rader Creek Road, Whitehall: Homestake Hustle Nordic Ski Races (youth).

11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Skijoring competition site, 2900 Hansen Road: Skijoring.

12:30 p.m. at Montana Tech Trails, Check-in for Fat Bike Winter Cross Race.

1 p.m. at Montana Tech Trails, Fat Bike Winter Cross Race.

1:30 p.m. at Montana Tech Trails, Fat Bike demo/expo.

WALTER HINICK PHOTOS, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Grade-school children warm up on the High Altitude Skating Center ice before the annual elementary school races at last year's Snöflinga.

School skating races set

The High Altitude Center will host school races Saturday, Jan. 19. The races are an ice skating competition among area elementary schools in which children are grouped by grade level. Race start time is 9:30 a.m. and the race is typically finished around 1 p.m.

Children will skate several distances (50-800 meters), with lower grade levels skating shorter distances and upper grade levels skating longer distances. First-, second-, and third-place trophies will be awarded to the top three schools. The meet is not limited to speed skaters. Any child who knows how to ice skate is welcome to enter, since the primary objective of the competition is to have fun.

Skater registrations are available at the High Altitude Center or by contacting Tina at tdonovan@bridgemail.com. Registration closes at 9 a.m. the day of the race, but the registration forms can be returned prior to that time by either dropping it off at the High Altitude Center or emailing to the address above. Pre-registration is appreciated.

To prepare for the races, skaters are encouraged to attend open speed-skating sessions from 6 to 7 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday.

Butte Central Elementary School children enjoy an afternoon of skating at the Butte High Altitude Skating Center as part of Butte's winter festival Snöflinga.

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Spectators get a treat with skijoring.

Skijoring comes to Butte

This year is the first year that a skijoring competition will be a part of Snöflinga.

The winter sport of skijoring — being pulled at fantastic rates of speed, on skis, behind horses — has a noble history.

According to "a brief history of the sport," by Loren Zhimanskova on the skijorinternational.com site, Laplanders have skied behind reindeer to cover vast expanses of snowy countryside for hundreds of years. In the early 1900s, Zhimanskova writes, skijoring behind horses was done frequently in Switzerland and France.

Downey

But the evolution of the sport in the United States can be credited largely to men from the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, who came home after World War II and wanted to keep skiing. With few ski lifts around, some of the former "Soldiers on Skis" got their cowboy friends to attach a long rope to their saddle horns, and held onto the other end as the horse was ridden, at high speeds, down a snow-covered roadway or across a field.

PHOTOS COURTESY CORIE DOWNEY

Skijoring produces spectacular action for participants and spectators.

The Butte competition features a junior division.

Each team consists of a horse, a rider and a skier.

Competitors are trying to complete the course in the lowest possible time.

Today, skijoring has developed into a very technical, competitive sport. Horses, reaching speeds of up to 30-40 mph, tow skiers over a series of jumps, through slalom gates and in pursuit of "capture rings" on both straight and curved tracks. Butte's course is a straight track, 800 feet long.

Corie Downey, who is organizing Snoflinga's skijoring event, scheduled Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 19-20, has been competing in the sport for three years. She says she's expecting as many as 60 teams — a team consists of a horse, a rider and a skier — in the Open Division and another 40 or so in the Novice Division.

The competition site is near the YMCA at 2900 Hansen Road.

The event, affiliated with the Skijor USA governing body, is expected to draw competitors from a wide area. Downey says she spoke to skiers from Alberta who are planning on coming, and she said participants from as far as Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Utah are also expected, in addition to Montanans.

The competition uses a "3D" scoring method. According to Skijor USA, the 3D system identifies separate competitive classes, maintains three levels of competition, but effectively places teams in the proper division according to their race results. All competitors, regardless of ability, run on the same track. The three divisions are then determined by time brackets.

No horse will run more than twice in a day, Downey said. "We ask a lot of our horses, to run as fast as they can, so we don't want to run them more than that," she said. "It's a hard and fast rule." Also, even if a horse does have two runs in a day, it will not pull the same skier more than once.

Downey encourages those who are interested in the sport and might like to try it to come to the event. She said there will be a skijoring clinic on Friday, Jan. 18, at the competition site, beginning at 1 p.m. The Mining City Trail Riders, a Butte snowmobile organization, have volunteered to pull first time skijor skiers. "That will allow people new to the sport to try skijoring behind a more controlled mode of transportation," she said, adding that it's a lot easier to stop a snowmobile in the event of a fall than it is to stop a horse.

Downey said she was also grateful to Butte snow removal contractors, who have volunteered to bring snow cleared elsewhere to the site to make sure that there's plenty of snow for the track.

"There will be food and drink vendors onsite. The race will begin Saturday morning at 10 a.m. and will likely end around 3 p.m. A Calcutta begins at 7 p.m. Saturday at the Butte Plaza Inn that the public is very much encouraged to attend," she said.

The race will begin at 11 a.m. on Sunday and again will likely end by 3 or 4. Skijor Butte is offering a youth division (12 and under) also Murdoch's Ranch and Home Supply of Butte has generously donated the prizes. Jeffery Contracting has donated the equipment and time to build the track and the Mining City Trail Riders have also donated the use of their Sno-Cat groomer.

"There really are so many people from the community who have stepped up to make this happen. It is a very large undertaking," Downey said.

Good Luck to All Athletes Participating in Sno-Flinga
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WINTER FESTIVAL SETUP IN BUTTE

Workers set up a large tent for the Snöflinga winter festival at Foreman's Park in the Mountain Con mineyard.

FILE PHOTO

CURLING CONTEST HEATS UP

A curling contest at the Snöflinga winter festival in Butte.

FILE PHOTO

GOOD SLEDDING!

A child cruises downhill at the Mt. Con mineyard venue for Snoflinga.

WALTER HINICK, THE MONTANA STANDARD

UGLY SWEATER CONTEST PARTICIPANTS

Butte elves Lynn Butala, left, and Marilu Rixford wear their Elf on the Shelf-inspired outfits just for the Snöflinga ugly sweater fun run in this file photo.

WALTER HINICK, THE MONTANA STANDARD

POLAR PLUNGE A MILE HIGH

Clowns take a dip in an icy pool of water set up in the Mt. Con mineyard during the annual Montana Special Olympics Polar Plunge held in conjunction with Snöflinga.

Your chance at royalty

Perhaps you'd like to be the Queen or King of Snöflinga. Sure. All that's required is a little winter sweat. And some talent.

For the first time this year, the festival is staging a three-event winter triathlon to determine just who deserves those crowns! The events in the triathlon include a 5k run, a 10k Nordic ski, and a fat bike race.

Even if you decide not to go for the royalty, you can come watch the hardy souls who do.

The 5k run will begin Saturday at the Mountain Con. The 10k ski is set for 9:30 a.m. Sunday at Homestake Lodge, and just as racers recover from that, the fat bike race will begin at 1 p.m. that afternoon on the Montana Tech trails.

Cost to enter is $30, and the very top finishers in the female and male divisions will be crowned Queen and King. In order to win, you must compete in all three events. Each place will receive a corresponding number, and the competitors with the lowest numbers at the end will win.

WALTER HINICK, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Runners and walkers in the Snöflinga fun run start the 5K foot race on Butte's Top of the World Trail at last year's event.

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