

Students Enjoy 'Fun and Slippery Challenge' of Island Skiing

By Karen Gould

Experiencing their first winter on Mackinac Island, the school's two second grade students, Octavia McClintock and Keely Johnson, skied to school Tuesday, January 10.

"It was fun and slippery, and it was a challenge," said Octavia, who is the daughter of Andrea McClintock, the school's special education teacher.

Keely agreed. "It was really fun," she said. "It took a long time and I enjoyed it."

Her dad, Jeffrey Ferguson, the high school science teacher, followed the girls on their early morning adventure.

The two girls are among 23 members of the school's cross-country ski club, who meet once a week during the last hour of school to hone their skiing skills under the direction of Kris Clark, a registered nurse at the Mackinac Island Medical Center with more than 40 years of skiing experience.

"I have so much fun skiing with them," Mrs. Clark said of the students in the ski club. "It is a good way for me to be involved in something I love so much.

"My goal is to get them excited about skiing."

The program is offered to students from grades two through five. Mrs. Clark divides the students into two groups and is assisted by a parent or teacher volunteer. Students with at least three years skiing experience go

on long treks with Mrs. Clark.

"They are pretty proficient," she said. "It's really been satisfying to watch those kids. They've gotten really good on their skis. I don't want to get them too tired, but I want to get them to push their limits," she explained.

The younger skiers work on getting up and down hills and practice basic skiing skills. Mrs. Clark said she rotates working with each group from week to week.

The snacks she brings to replace some of the calories the students burn while skiing have become a big hit, too, she said, and a voluntary Saturday ski outing has also been successful.

"Generally, our Island kids are fit, they are pretty tough," said Mrs. Clark. "They're pretty physically fit because of their biking lifestyle."

All of the ski equipment the students use is donated. Initially, Mrs. Clark said, the Mackinac Island Community Foundation provided a grant to purchase items. Now, funding comes from Mackinac Island Recreational Development, which continues to purchase more equipment and replace skis, boots, and poles. Use of the equipment is free to the students, as is the ski program.

Some students now have gotten their own equipment, which is good, Mrs. Clark said.

"It means they are not skiing because they have to, but because they want to."



School's cross-country ski club members Octavia McClintock, 8, (left) and Keely Johnson, 7, take advantage of new snow.

8,500 Miles From Home: Exchange Student Comes From Bangkok

Gap Supechar Sapruang of Thailand Loves Daily Snowmobile Excursion

By Karen Gould

Home for Gap Supechar Sapruang is Bangkok, Thailand, on the other side of the international dateline and more than 8,500 miles from Mackinac Island, where she is an exchange student.

She arrived here in August and entered Mackinac Island High School as a senior.

Among the most notable differences between Mackinac Island and Bangkok, she said, are the populations and the weather. Mackinac Island has about 500 year-around residents, Bangkok has about nine million. The average temperature in July on Mackinac Island is 70 degrees. In Bangkok, the temperature rarely dips below 70 degrees all year.

A resident here for five months, Ms. Sapruang says she is

now acclimated to the cold weather, and winter on Mackinac has provided many new experiences, including her first encounter with snow.

"The first time I saw snow," she said, "I was excited because I'd never seen it before. Now it's just snow."

But if the novelty of snow has worn off, the enjoyment of snowmobiling has not, and this is now one of Ms. Sapruang's favorite activities. Her exchange program only permits her to be a passenger on a snowmobile, even though she has taken a snowmobile safety class, so after school, she is eager to hitch-hike a ride with one of her girlfriends so they can scoot around the Island.

"Oh, I love snowmobiles," she said. "I go for a ride with my friends almost every night."

Ms. Sapruang, 18, said she has many girlfriends on the Island, which is much different from life for a typical Thai girl. In Thailand, girls have one close friend and that person remains a friend through life, she explained.

Another big difference is shopping.

"I'm a big city girl," she said. "In my free time in Thailand, I'm going shopping, but here I can't. There's no mall here."

She also said that, unlike Mackinac Island, Bangkok is a dangerous city. She said that her mother no longer will allow her to ride in a taxicab and now drives her to places because girls have been kidnapped by cab drivers.

Back in Thailand, she has a 12-year-old brother. Her father is in the import/export business and her mother just opened a restaurant. She telephones home once a week, scheduling conversations



Mackinac Island Public Schools exchange student Gap Supechar Sapruang is from Bangkok, Thailand, and never saw snow before coming to the Island. Snowmobiling now is one of her favorite activities.

around the 12-hour time difference, and she has not become homesick, although she says her mother misses her and is looking forward to her return.

Ms. Sapruang once considered attending college in the United States, but now plans to continue her studies in Thailand. Of her career goals, she said, "I've tried to think about it, but I have no idea what I want to do. I just want to keep studying languages."

She knows English, Thai, Chinese, French, and Japanese, although she thinks some of her language skills have become a little weak from lack of use since she has come to Mackinac.

Her English, however, has improved.

"In Thailand, I thought my English was good, but when I came here, it was very bad. I'd rather be quiet and listen," she added. "Listening is easier."

Because of that, she said, people on the Island tell her she is quiet, but she argues that is not really the case.

"In Thailand, I talk a lot," she said. "Here, I worry about making a mistake, so I don't say anything."

She said studying and learning in English is not too hard, but

some words are difficult for her, especially those used in psychology class. Her favorite class is World History.

"Ms. [Jessica] Clark is my favorite teacher, ever," she said with extra emphasis on "ever."

Ms. Sapruang's sponsors are Elizabeth and Allen Burt and their 16-month-old son, Sean, of Trillium Heights. The Burts are expecting their second child in early April.

"We love Gap," said Mrs. Burt, who is the middle school science and mathematics teacher. "She is fun and pleasant and funny."

The Burts have hosted exchange students from Japan, China, and Germany and love the experience.

"After our Japanese student left, we went to Japan," Mrs. Burt said. "It was wonderful to see Japan through a family."

Now, they already have started saving for a future trip to Thailand to visit Gap Sapruang and meet her family.

Ms. Sapruang would like to compete in the Lilac Festival Queen pageant in June. She is scheduled to travel back to Bangkok in July.

"We won't want her to leave," said Mrs. Burt.

Record January Warmth Stalls Ice Bridge



A view from behind Grand Hotel looking out into the Straits of Mackinac, still devoid of ice in late January. January ended as a record-setting month for warm temperatures here. On January 27, Sault Ste. Marie set a record warm temperature of 44 degrees, and Traverse City's average January temperature of 31.9 degrees tied with 1932 temperatures, making it the warmest January on record, reported the National Weather Service. Colder days in February make an ice bridge to St. Ignace still possible.