

THE BLACK TIE AFFAIR: QUEBEC - MARCH 15-22, 2003

By Vicki Faulkner

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

It was a wonderful trip to another country; it was terrible that the war began.

It was sunny and beautiful; it was foggy and dreary.

It was... *not* your typical Space City excursion.

It was evident from the outset that this trip would be different when TC **Walter May** and ATC **Chip Stokes** manned the trip table, set with champagne and roses at SCSC meetings, garbed in their tuxedos. *The Black Tie Affair* was an extraordinary experience for all who joined us.

The trip to Quebec was a compilation of contrasts. Not only were we in a foreign country, we were in a part of Canada that seems foreign to the other provinces, experiencing the French flavor of that nation. Our trip participants included the most serious of skiers, who savor every moment on the slopes, like **Ivan Butterfield**, to the other end of the spectrum, participants who savor every moment running Main Street shops, like **Jo Butterfield**. Evening activities were not excluded from these great extremes, either. On what ski trip have you worn a tuxedo or sequined cocktail dress to a party where entertainment was classical music? Or where have you run a toboggan course, for the sake of charity, next to a five-star hotel?

And unlike other trip articles, this one will start at the end. Quebec was the Final Showdown for Texas Ski Council with 225 participants representing eight clubs from Texas. SCSC had the largest contingent with 79 travelers. Yet with less than half of our participants racing, we still managed to out-score the other clubs to win the top club award. The Friday night awards banquet was held in the lovely ballroom of the Chateau Frontenac. Congratulations to all of our top racers:



Gold – **Kayleen Kill, Janet McKenzie, Karin Schidlowski, Helmut Zenger, Kurt Schidlowski, Dale Allbritton**
Silver – **Diane Baker, Barb Ehrlich, Ellen Eastham, Ann McIntyre, Carmen Mikhail, Sharon Smith, Cheryl May, Eric Guldenzopf, Ron Rambin, Ross Baker, Jeff Sarff, Bob Cloutier, Jim Edwards, Merrel Smith, Don Macken**
Bronze – **Martha Zenger, Lotty Gautschi, John Rice, Charles Butler, Ivan Butterfield**

Travel day was long and, in some cases, confusing. We flew on two different carriers, departing from separate terminals. **Llona Doubet** and **Linda Licarione** were listed on the manifest at incorrect terminals and had to quickly switch before boarding times approached. We all finally arrived in Montreal and climbed aboard two buses for the drive to Quebec City. En route, we dined on très bon souper de boîte (very good box suppers) that Walter and Sportours' Judy Fjeld arranged, providing an introduction to future fare. ATC **Vicki Faulkner** introduced Hot Nuts to the heavenly nectar novices Merrel and **Sharon Smith**, Jeff and **Nancy Sarff**, **Charles Butler**, and **Gary Butler**. Some had to be saved for the mountains!

How many ski resorts have you heard of with their own "sugar shack?" Many wanted to partake! This is maple sugar country and the sap was beginning to flow. At Mont Sainte Anne, where we skied our first day, maple syrup was poured

onto ice blocks, scooped up into pops, and licked like candy. Maybe it was the sugar rush that caused Janet McKenzie and Carmen Mikhail to enter the men's room that day. On some restroom doors there was an "F" (femme) or an "H" (homme) designation, but, ladies, there were stick figures on the doors you entered! **Karl Gautschi** joined us at the Summit Lodge for lunch and was totally surprised when **Brigitte Litz**, who joined us from San Francisco, greeted him with a big hug. Seems they're long-time friends. Ron and **Robert Rambin** both had on slick new ski outfits – had to have more pockets to accommodate their walkie-talkies.

Sunday evening, **Ron Hayes** escorted **Judi Schiro**, Barb Ehrlich, **Marsha Lutz**, **Peggy Schillinger**, Linda Licarione, and myself to a quaint French restaurant that the concierge said was just a short walk from the hotel. After meandering through the neighborhood and 30 minutes later, we finally reached Le Chaude for a wonderful dinner, which, in the French manner, took quite a while to enjoy. Unfortunately, we missed the TSC welcome party, but we saw murals, cathedrals, and interesting shops along the winding route.

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Where have you been that the bus delivers you to the top of the mountain and you ski down to catch your first lift ride? Le Massif, our second-day destination, offered, we were told, the most beautiful views in the country, if it's a clear day. IF is the operative word. At the top of the mountain, the fog was so thick that the lodge was barely visible. The adventurous gave it a try and actually saw some of the views as the skies cleared a little, now and then. Mountain guide, Pierre, helped lead **John Cook**, Marsha Lutz, and Peggy Schillinger through the thickness, saying he was "chasing the devil." **Pilar Gonzalez**, who joined us from Washington, DC, proved a good leader in the dense fog, heading up the Thuy-Amigos ski posse, named for **Thuy Tran**. This wild and crazy bunch included **Roger Holzman**, Janet McKenzie, Carmen Mikhail, and **David Eickhoff**.

Because folks wanted to clear out of the fog, the après ski started early, first with a bartender tossing and juggling bottles and filled glasses a la Tom Cruise in "Cocktail," then with a live band, Deadlock, playing 60's and 70's music. Smiling big, **Jeri Wilson** and Bob Cloutier kicked off the dancing, soon followed by the Thuy-Amigos ski posse.

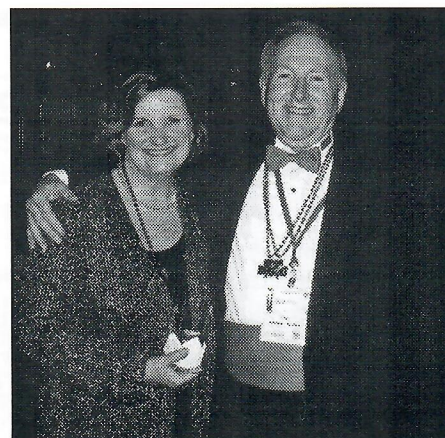
The bright part of the day was the "Magic Bus" ride back to the hotel. In the hour drive, dancing in the aisles to a CD brought by Jane Fair, a Los Amigos ski clubber, were David Eickhoff, Vicki Faulkner, Roger Holzman, Linda Licarione, Marsha Lutz, John Cook, Janet McKenzie, Carmen Mikhail, Chip Stokes, Thuy Tran, and Don Macken. Don was in the back of the bus, partnering turns that were enhanced by the swerving bus.



Hurrying to make that last bus, Chip Stokes forgot his street shoes and for a couple of days had to get around in only his ski boots.

The glowing part of the evening was our **Black Tie Affair** in the Bellevue Room of the hotel. You've never seen such an elegant crowd on a ski trip! Dressed to the nines were Dale and **Alice Allbritton**, Alex and **Judy Azzo**, Allen and **Linda Simpson**, who brought their teenage daughter, **Anne**, on the trip. Everyone looked smashing! Or was it smashed?

The beautiful salon with a view of the St. Lawrence was appropriately festooned for St. Patrick's Day and the luck of the Irish was with us. A classical concert was on the program. Walter May performed piano selections by Grieg, Chopin, DeBussy and, his personal favorite, Rachmaninoff, to lend the evening a further



touch of elegance. Cheryl May and Kayleen Kill, TSC Trip VP, performed a flute duet. Who knew such talent was so prevalent in SCSC? The bar has been raised. And the bar was a preferred destination following our musicale!

Enthusiastic dancers, **Ray Villareal** and **Susan Blome**, practiced their whip steps to the rhythm of Walter's classical piano music. Susan had not removed her purse, and upon twirling, knocked Thuy squarely on the head. The next day, Ray announced that he had been hit on his well-protected, helmeted head by a misguided skier. Refusing this off-hand apology, Thuy exclaimed, "I don't accept revenge by proxy!"

Where can you ski all day, stop for happy hour, return to the slopes until 7:00 p.m., and then dance until midnight? At our third ski destination, Stoneham. Thankfully, the weather was clear and bright. Although the mountain's regular night skiing had ended for the season, the lights were switched on especially for the Texas skiers. Not many skiers stayed around for this treat, opting to bus back to the hotel and change for the evening's entertainment, back at the same mountain. Cheryl May, Barb Ehrlich, John Cook, and I were accompanied by Kurt Schroeder from Sportours to take a few more runs before the lifts closed. We were enthralled by the most beautiful full moon, large and golden, just rising on the opposite slope as we exited the lift at the top. Across the valley was another night-lighted ski area, looking like a crown nestled atop the snowy hills. We paused to drink in the view, plus drink a bit of Hot Nuts!

Meanwhile back at the lodge, preparations were under way to transform the pedestrian cafeteria into an elegant

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black-draped, table-clothed, candle-lit dining room for our Canadian Madness dinner. Lights still shone on the ski runs, providing a fitting backdrop for the event. Following the buffet, we dispersed to the bar for more dancing to a super live band that came up from Montreal. Ray Villareal really earned his reputation as dance king, displaying expertise in every style of dance. Chip was another story on the dance floor. He was given a wide berth as he still had only his ski boots to wear. Nancy Sarff tried to sway a little to the music, but a first-day-out accident made it easier to sit and listen and watch Sharon Smith and Gary Butler dancing on the outside deck where it was a little cooler. Also shaking a leg were **Dona Ayre, Laura Naistadt, Sandra McCunis, and Christina Anderson.** **John Rice** and **Kayleen Kill** kept up with the band's successful attempts to engage the crowd by joining the musicians at the microphones for a favorite tune. New members, **Carmen** and **James Newton**, seemed to be catching on to mad mountain behavior, with James sporting a crazy Viking horn helmet and tiger tail, worn by the Los Amigos club. We continue to witness more displays of SCSC talents.

Have you ever been to a frozen water park? Or to a giant ice house, er, hotel? Valcartier Ice Park was the destination for most of us on Wednesday. Marsha described us as "a bunch of 40-60 year olds acting 16 again!" What a fun playground. Laughs, screams, and oh-nos were heard all morning! We tubed down greens, blues, and progressed

to blacks, then moved onto rafts and spinning tornadoes. **Caroline Grunewald** and **Ann McIntyre** said the runs reminded them of their bobsled ride earlier this year in Lillehammer. The real challenge was hopping into the tube lifts that dragged us up the hills – there were too many spills and stumbles and I promised not to name names. Chip broke all the rules, especially when he belly-rode the tube head first. The go-cart races on the ice track drew a crowd, with

Lynn Burch, Penny Chancey, Leona Schroeder, and Sue Bohnert spotted in the line. Competition was tough in the heat with Thuy, Chip, Cheryl, Marsha, David Eickhoff, and **Melanie Morin.** It seems the white car always won, as Barb Ehrlich was in that vehicle with Lynn, Peggy, Don, and Linda in hot pursuit. One of the blue cars, the one I was in, was way too slow. After lunch, the extreme adventurers hit the Himalayas, tubing down Everest. **Susan Saily**, a new member taking her first trip with SCSC, has added tubing to her list of favorite outdoor activities. A hiker and backpacker, she was already on blue runs after her first ski lesson.

The visit to the Ice Hotel, which some kept calling ice house, was totally unreal. Very cold, it is made entirely of compressed snow and ice. People actually stay overnight, sleeping on icy beds covered with deer skins. **Judy Hendrix, Marianne Pearce, Sue Moehring, and Janet Pickell** wandered through the structure gazing at the embellishments – ice columns, ice

chandeliers, ice furniture, ice sculptures. Some of the suites had friezes (no pun intended) carved into the walls that were



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quite provocative. **David George's** favorite room was the 007 Suite, where the bed is a huge ice swan. Jeff Sarff's favorite room was the Ice Bar with the 15-foot tall ice vodka bottle where vodka shots were served in ice cube glasses. **Bill Lodato's** favorite was the disco and casino.

Meanwhile back at the hotel, anticipation brought on high anxiety prior to the Charity Toboggan Races, to be run on a recreational track behind the Chateau. Teams of four began organizing following the Sunday night announcement that entry fees would benefit Canadian injured athletes. SCSC teams included Gary Butler, Susan Blome, Jeff Sarff, and **Jim Edwards**, representing TSC officers; the "T&A" team of Linda Licarione, Cheryl May, Nancy Sarff, and Sharon Smith; and last minute entrants Merrel Smith, Barb Ehrlich, **Sue Edwards**, and Vicki Faulkner, with the team name "3 Ts and a P." Having to win 2 out of 3 runs, the "3Ts and a P" beat the Le Massif team in the first heat and then got serious. Sue gave the team pep talks as we climbed the incline to set up for each run, chanting "We are a bullet!" and instructing us to be streamlined and sleek. It worked! The "3 Ts and a P" won; the best of 8 teams!

More races followed the next day – the ski kind. A tragic, not magic, bus incident occurred that caused some of our skiers to barely make it in time. The suspension fell off the bus halfway to Mont Sainte-Anne and another bus had to be summoned. Diane Baker, our race director, was checking names as each SCSC skier arrived, assigning racing order. Ross Baker was checking the gates, planning the best racing strategy. We were fortunate to have excellent skiers like Helmut and Martha Zenger and Kurt and Karin Schidlowski on this trip to beef up our racing point tally. Roger said that Helmut's time is no surprise since he rarely makes turns when he skis.

Where else in North America can you go that has been around for so long? Quebec was settled by the French in 1608. With so much to see and do, it was too tempting to skip time on the slopes and take advantage of the many tours offered in the area. Friday was a popular day off for many. Even though it was a rainy day, that didn't keep anyone indoors.

Kayleen Kill and John Rice took the bus tour of Quebec City offered by the tourism bureau that highlighted features of the walled city. **Maureen Webb** browsed shops and galleries found at the bottom of the Funiculaire, the cable car that operates from bluff to riverside. Penny Chancey, Sue Bohnert, and Christina Anderson took the ferry across the St. Lawrence, dodging chunks of ice in the waterway. Chip, Linda Licarione, Lynn Burch, Barb Ehrlich, and I took a tour to St. Anne de Beaupre, a cathedral north of Quebec City, following the route originally built in 1620. Along the way was a stop for home-baked bread slathered with maple butter at a bakery that's been in the same family for over 300 years. **Sharon** and **Victor Graff** related their experiences at the



reservation of the Algonquin Indians (here long before the Europeans) and how enlightening their tour guide was.

The Canadians were very hospitable and welcomed us to their country. Some moments on the slopes or in the shops might feel like we were in the western U.S., yet we were soon reminded by the culture, cuisine, and currency that we were away from what is familiar. Canada charmed and captivated us.

It was not your typical SCSC ski trip. It was, after all, ***The Black Tie Affair.***