

SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTIONS INSIDE

Real estate guide

Bobsled and Skeleton World Championships

Weddings 2009

An Ad'k sleigh ride

Part of the Lake Placid scene for centuries

See Visiting Lake Placid, page 21



VISITING LAKE PLACID

A WEEKLY GUIDE TO THE OLYMPIC REGION



LAKE PLACID NEWS
INSIDE...
PLACID PLANNER — 22
CUISINE SCENE — 24
RELIGIOUS DIRECTORY — 25

DESTINATIONS • EVENTS • DINING • HISTORY • ARTS • ADIRONDACK CULTURE FEBRUARY 20, 2009

FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY

AN AD'K SLEIGH RIDE



HEATHER SACKETT/LAKE PLACID NEWS

Horse-drawn activity has been a part of the Placid scene for centuries

HEATHER SACKETT
NEWS STAFF WRITER

LAKE PLACID — The bells on bobtales rang, but it was a two-horse open sleigh dashing through the snow at the Whiteface Club and Resort Saturday afternoon.

Horse-drawn sleigh rides have been part of Lake Placid's culture of winter fun for more than a century. Old photos and postcards of the Lake Placid Club depict guests wrapped in blankets on horse-drawn sleighs.

The Ausable Chasm Equine Center began offering sleigh rides this winter on the golf course of the club. Although the center is based in Keeseville, the two Belgian horses, Bob and Nelly, remain at the club unless the weather takes a turn for the worse. The horses once worked for the Amish, pulling plows and doing farm work, but now enjoy a comparatively relaxing life of semi-retirement. The animals, at 2,000 pounds a piece, have been together as a pulling team for

13 years.

Many horses that come to live at the Ausable Chasm Equine Center were rescued from homes where they did not receive the best of care. But under the care of the center's manager Travis deValinger, the horses are treated with love, trust and respect and they are never resold.

"They have given us years of loyalty and they get that back," he said.

Bob and Nelly were cooperative as deValinger and Natalia Feidler, director of the equine center, outfitted the animals with harnesses and yokes, and hooked them up to the sleigh. But first, the heavy wind-blocking winter blankets had to come off.

"When we get a sunny day that gets up into the 30s, like today, they get too hot with these on," deValinger said.

Bob and Nelly have thick, shaggy hair all over their bodies to insulate them from

See SLEIGH RIDE, Page 23

Above, visitors can enjoy a sleigh ride on the scenic grounds of the Whiteface Club and Resort, with a view of snow-capped Whiteface Mountain in the background. Below, Natalia Feidler, director of the Ausable Chasm Equine Center, prepares Bob and Nelly to pull the sleigh. Bottom right, Nelly, the horse with the stronger of the two personalities, is the brains of the operation, Travis deValinger said. Bottom left, but Bob is the more friendly of the two.



HEATHER SACKETT/LAKE PLACID NEWS

At left, Nelly and Feidler. At right, deValinger stops for a few moments to talk to passengers and give the horses a break.

SLEIGH RIDE

Continued from Page 21

the cold, a trait that's a result of the lower UV index in the winter, deValinger explained. Horses sweat, and making sure they don't heat up or cool down too quickly in the cold winter air is a top priority.

We climbed up into the front seat of the green, 12-passenger sleigh, wrapped up in wool blankets and took off. The ride goes over the rolling hills of the club's golf course, with views of snow-capped Whiteface in the background. The horses follow a groomed path around the golf course because it's easier than pulling a sleigh through deeper snow. The sleigh is also equipped with tires that can be used on roads instead of runners.

There are red lanterns along the way that illuminate the path for nighttime sleigh rides. The ride stops at several points to give the horses a break and to allow riders to climb out and explore lean-tos on the course.

Lantern-lit sleigh rides are popular, deValinger said, and sometimes include a campfire at one of the lean-tos. And apparently, a sleigh ride is also a romantic setting for a marriage proposal. DeValinger said he's had two on his sleigh so far this season.



If you go:

Sleigh rides are available seven days a week by appointment until mid-March and last about 30 minutes. Rides on weekends are offered until 8 p.m. and private sleigh rides are also available. Call 834-9933 for more information.

Along the way, deValinger related bits of information about horses in general and Bob and Nelly in particular.

"These guys are pair-proof," he said of the pair. Although horses are stereotyped as being nervous and unpredictable animals that are easily spooked, Bob and Nelly barely batted an eyelash when one of the sleigh's tires blew out.

"They just took a couple of quick steps and that was it," deValinger said.

We passed frozen ponds and cross-country skiers and their dogs, and Bob and Nelly never showed any signs of distraction. Part of that may have been due to the blinders they were wearing.

can't tell how deep it is. But all this can be overcome by proper training, deValinger said.

Part of the mission of the Ausable Chasm Equine Center is promoting the gentle and humane treatment of horses. DeValinger and his trainers never use force, intimidation or punishment to make a horse do something it doesn't want to do.

"Horses aren't like dogs or cats," he said. "Punishment doesn't work. People think, 'Oh, it's just a dumb animal, it won't remember.' But horses never forget and they can harbor resentment their whole lives."

Fortunately, Bob and Nelly don't hold any grudges toward humans; they are very friendly and appreciate a good pat on the neck. The pair will work for the equine center for a few more years, pulling sleighs and wagons, and will then retire and let a new, younger team take over.

ADIRONDACK MEDICAL CENTER

