



Finding late season snow on the Indian Saddle crest.



Preparing to ski up to Our Lady of the Rockies.



Grooming Mount Haggin's ski trails.



Big snow with Dave Mueller at Mount Haggin in 1997.



With metal to jump.



In birthday suit.



1956 Butte High Ski Club. He's the miniature one behind the right shoulder of the boy on crutches.



2005 Ben Ali Haggin Mile High Nordic Ski Race, a race since renamed "Legends of the Wulf."

A Man of Many Interests, But a Skier at Heart

John Wulf cherished his Nordic skiing. Just days prior to his tragic and fatal heart attack in June of 2007, Wulfman gathered his followers to celebrate the Summer Solstice with a run on mosquito-infested Indian Saddle just below the crest of Fleecer Mountain. At that evening's post-run bonfire Wulfman explained, over fire-roasted sausages, beer, watermelon and s'mores, that his main reason for celebrating that solstice was that it signified that ski season was coming closer, rather than getting farther away. He considered running to be preparation for skiing, and he declared that his favorite place to run was the trails on his beloved Mount Haggin Nordic Ski Area, which were quite rough sans snow-cover. Rollerblading was another of his off-season ski fixes.

Wulfman's skiing partner, Joe Griffin, recalled sharing one comical rollerblading session. "Roger Miller's song *You Can't Roller Skate in a Buffalo Herd* comes to mind. We would rollerblade with our ski poles to train for Nordic skiing. Our favorite was the Wise River Road as it was relatively smooth and it is as close as you can get to backcountry on rollerblades. We would see moose, elk, bear, deer, coyote, craggy peaks and aspen turning gold. There were also cattle grazing allotments. One beautiful fall day, as we were descending a pretty steep section, we came around a corner and startled a herd of cows and calves in the middle of the road. The Wulfman was not adept at quick stops when going fast, and the last I saw of him for a while was his head sticking up above the, now running, herd as he madly slalomed to dodge cows and their pies. I could have died choking with laughter."

Wulfman eagerly awaited winter's arrival with his truck packed with all the requisite ski gear. He had all the important gadgets and expertise for waxing skis, and he also owned a portable "honey bucket" (a stool-sized plastic toilet) that he took anytime when he traveled far from home. His honey bucket emitted a sanitizer scent that he must have had a fondness for. Some of his traveling companions remember how Wulfman would walk out of his way to go near a fresh port-a-potty just to inhale the wafting antiseptic aroma.

When the snow did come, Wulfman volunteered Thursday nights to help groom Mount Haggin's 10-km ski loop. Devotedly, he would ride the *Mile High Nordic Ski Club's* snow mobile into the dark evening shadows of the snowbound forest, towing the grooming equipment behind. After the night's grooming chore he and his partners would have the fresh trails all to themselves for nocturnal skiing, sometimes under moonlight and sometimes needing headlamps. David Mueller who often skied those Thursday nights recalled that skiing alone into the deep murky woods in the middle of the night could generate frightful feelings, and so they formed a pact to never scare one another during those times. One night, a fellow skier broke the code. He hid in the darkness until Wulfman skied past, and then he jumped out while rattling branches in the air to scare Wulfman. The tactic worked as planned, but of course it also brought forth Wulfman's retribution. The next loop found Wulfman lurking mischievously awaiting payback, but he inflicted his retaliation upon the wrong skier. Wulfman leapt vengefully from the blackness in front of Mueller's innocent and unsuspecting silhouette and, wielding a large branch, he left Mueller abraded and reeling in a snow bank.

Wulfman considered any time of day to be a good time to ski and he also never missed an opportunity to extend his friendship. On a January Saturday in Wulfman's 67th and final winter, he went for an early morning 40-km (4 x 10-km loop) ski at Mount Haggin in preparation for the pending Yellowstone Rendezvous 50 K ski race, and during the last half of his penultimate loop that day he came upon a novice adult skier -- this story's author. At that time in my life I remained near my physical prime as a runner, but was still developing much needed skills and efficiency on skate skis. As Wulfman passed me that day, he beamed an inviting grin through his frosty gray whiskers, stimulating me to increased my unsteady rhythm to match his glide. As I trailed along, Wulfman gracefully slashed through the tight turns beautifully arching snow in his wake. I projected a more contorted image, as I wrenched my skis through the turns with a mighty effort to keep up. We then skied up a long incline, and I was sweating heavily from effort. After cresting we plunged back down-slope and I focused intently on holding my quivering skis in line. Amused and glad for the company, Wulfman coasted to the side and let me pass before repositioning his low, raspy voice near my ear where he proceeded to entertain me with stories of skiing. His final story described how our mutual friend, Sherry Vogel, was famous among his skiing circle for annihilating racing opponents by powering away from them with superior form on the same grueling uphill that lay ahead of Wulfman and me at that very moment. That hill led to the ski hut where the loop ended, and as we began to climb I realized that if I hurried I could finish my single loop under 50 minutes -- a PR for me. Feeling encouraged by my newfound ability to ski at Wulfman's pace, I pushed slightly harder and soon began feeling a "red-line" effort. Wulfman must have sensed my increase because he abruptly stopped talking and instead began howling wildly with delight. His playful chorus of gruff yelps pressed me all the way to the hut where he left me with a cheerful farewell and a lighthearted chuckle as he peeled off to begin his final 10-km loop.

I peeled off my sweat-soaked clothes and went home, but the jolly old Wulfman had seared a powerful memory of joyful camaraderie and achievement into my brain, and that was the same affect he had on many others, which is why we continue to pledge our allegiance to the Wulfman of the united Piss & Moan Runners of Butte America, one running club, under Our Lady of the Rockies, indivisible, with liberty and trail running for all.

On 3 March 2007 John Wulf completed his final Yellowstone Rendezvous 50K ski race in 4:28:59. He was DFL among 173 finishers, but 27 other skiers DNF. Joe Griffin remembered "It was very cold that day, well below zero, and they postponed the start of the race until temperatures rose to only 10 below. In those conditions, the skiing is very slow. I chose to change from the 50K skate race to the 25K classic -- it was a wise choice. Wulf of course just bowed his neck and beaded out on the 50K in snow with glide like sand. He was well worn down by the time I went out and skied the last few K with him. ...and he ate the whole big sandwich."