



the entire course, roughly 40 yards, with your wife in the air. How you do it is up to you. I put my wife on my shoulder in a fight style, as did most of my friends, but I ran into trouble right at the end. Blinded by swirling snow, I put my hands between the legs of the wrong person. At least, that's what I told my friends. In the time I finally got my bearings, I corrected my wife, the start signal had already sounded. We were caught at the rear of the pack. Nevertheless, I sprinted down the hill, managed to make a sharp left turn that claimed a number of other competitors, and landed over a 5-foot-high jump (the equivalent of carrying the anaerobic threshold), and finished in line to take fourth place by the nose of my wife's nose. I heard that the winner received a medal and a free exam by a Finnish doctor. I was envious. It's hard to see how anything like the excitement of St. Urho's Day, which also offers some of the best try skiing in the Northeast. Most of the vacation center's ski trails are groomed and equipped with skating lanes. Affordable accommodations in rustic *tupas* are available.

—Joe Kita

For more information about St. Urho's Day '99 or the vacation center, call (518) 863-4974.

Utah • FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER

IT WAS Eddie the Eagle, the British Olympic ski jumper, who provided the definitive description of a first-time ski jump: "I was so frightened, my bum shriveled up like a prune."

With Eddie's encouraging words in mind, I took my bum to Park City, Utah, to try out the country's only public Nordic ski-jump course. The brochure assured me that the ski-jumping program has a "surprisingly low rate of injury," which was less reassuring than intended. Chuck Heckert, who coaches the \$30, 2-hour course for the Utah Winter Sports Park, complained that the sport had been viciously maligned by the famous *Wide World of Sports* "agony of defeat" clip of a jumper bouncing off the in-run like Raggedy Andy. Then Heckert told me to grab a helmet and sign the waiver.

After a brief introduction to the five ski-jumping basics (the in-run, taking off, the flight, landing, and stopping), I and about 10 others took a short hike up the hill and skied down to prove we could hold a straight line in a modified tuck. Then we headed for the 10-meter baby jump. (Olympic jumps are 90 and 120 meters.) A good leap off the 10-meter could net us 33 feet of air.

The first rule of ski jumping is deceptively simple: When you hit the takeoff point, jump. This is not like freestyle aerobics, where a 68-degree lip sends you skyrocketing straight up. In Nordic jumping, you follow the contour of the hill and rarely come more than 5 or 10 feet off the ground as you fly downward. If you ski off without jumping, you don't even make it to the steep landing area.

When my turn came, I pointed my skis down, tucked deep, placed my pole-free hands at my sides, and prepared to snap out of my tuck at the precise moment I hit the

takeoff spot. My spring was okay. I flew just fine. But I leaned too far forward on landing and planted my helmeted head in the snow. The crash wasn't too bad, though, so I tried again. And again.

One by one, we were promoted to the 18-meter jump. Once again my first attempt ended by augering in on the landing, but soon we were all flying between 40 and 50 feet, looking up the hill with trepidation at the 38-meter jump, where we could expect to hit 40 mph and fly up to 120 feet. The snow was falling steadily, though, and Heckert vetoed the higher jump. I pretended to be disappointed.

Still, the day was exhilarating, and our small flock of fledgling eagles tromped back to the day lodge to relive our first moments of flight. And Heckert told us one other thing about that *Wide World of Sports* guy: He jumped again the next day.

—Daniel Glick

For more information, call the Utah Winter Sports Park at (435) 658-4200.



Jump Start

Fly like an eagle, or a chicken, in Park City, Utah.