

Snow Swirls When Padre Passes

Dynamic Father Hochhaus Now Is the Spark Plug of Marquette University Skiing

FATHER RAPHAEL HOCHHAUS, S.J., breezed through the doorway of the Avalanche clubroom at Marquette university, playfully whacked a passing student where he sits down, slid into a wooden swivel chair, and told a visitor why he likes to ski. "You can sum it up in 13 words," said the priest. "Sport of the gods, by man designed, freedom of birds, earthbound ease combined."

"I didn't write that," said Father Hochhaus, firing up a thick walled pipe big enough to heat a ski chalet. "It was written by a high school boy in a contest I judged some years ago. Fine, isn't it?"

And he went on to tell his visitor about the Avalanche club and, in passing, a bit about himself.

The "Avalanche" isn't just a college ski club, he explained through a cloud of pipe smoke. Its members also throw themselves into camping, hiking, conservation, home economics, gardening, art, photography, masonry, mechanics and anything else of a constructive nature they feel like trying. Skiing, however, is the big attraction when the snow flies.

Talks at a Gallop

As founder and co-moderator of the Avalanche (the other adult advisor is Robert C. Blankenburg of 469 N. 50th st.), Father Hochhaus describes himself as a "second string father" to anywhere from 150 to 300 students.

At 49, the tall priest fairly radiates vitality. Sitting, he seems ready momentarily to leap to his feet, clamp on skis, and go hurtling down a head-wall. He walks and talks at a gallop. Students regard him with a mixture of affection and awe.

Father Hochhaus teaches theology and ethics; associ-

ates describe him as a fine Greek and Latin scholar. A former amateur boxer, he once taught judo to the marines. He has tried his hand at blacksmithing and tree surgery. When he got the archery bug a few years ago, he began making his own bows and arrows. He is an avid conservationist and his shelves are filled with books on forestry.

Have Own Ski Hill

Father Hochhaus knocked a rain of pipe ashes into an empty milk bottle, bounded from his chair, and led his visitor over to a mammoth composite photo of "Maryhill," Marquette university's 28 acre wooded tract near Sussex (Waukesha county). It has one of the best ski slopes in the Milwaukee area; four tows, eight runs, a verticle drop of nearly 200 feet and a growing "chalet" known as "the shack" by less reverent students). These facilities are open to the public, so long as it skies sanely and behaves itself. ("We don't

want any bums" said Father Hochhaus.)

Since the land was acquired in 1950, more than 200 generous friends have donated tools, materials and equipment to Maryhill, prodced by the crackling enthusiasm of Father Hochhaus.

'Champion Scrounger'

"He begs Peter to pay Paul," one friend said. "Somebody gives him cement but he needs blocks. So he trades the cement for the blocks. He could rustle up wood on a glacier."

Said Father Hochhaus, modestly: "I'm the greatest scrounger in Milwaukee."

The ski runs, the grading, the electrical wiring, the tow motor repairs, the chalet building — these projects are

handled by Avalanche club students, with Father Hochhaus flying from group to group like the shuttle on a loom, advising, helping.

Members get one "work point" for every hour they put in at Maryhill; they must accumulate 20 points every two months to remain in the club. All this is part of the Hochhaus creed of "work, pray and play."

On Barrel Staves

Friends describe Father Hochhaus's own ski technique as powerful, fearless, and slightly unorthodox. It is largely self taught. Back in

his boyhood in Milwaukee, around 1916, he strapped a pair of barrel staves to his feet and whooshed down the slopes of Milwaukee parks.

At St. Mary's Theological seminary, St. Mary's Kas., he and other students chopped down an ash tree and from it hacked (by hand) 16 pairs of skis. They made the bindings of barrel hoops and skied happily for three weeks, while the snow lasted. Father Hochhaus was ordained at St. Mary's in 1940.

At Maryhill several winters ago, he thundered down the slope an even 50 times in one day for a total of 18 miles.

The season before last, he managed to sprain his ankle five times. He still teaches skiing. Students, however, are used to seeing him vanish in the middle of a stem turn when a hoist motor breaks down, a water line springs a leak, or somebody can't find the ski wax.

"He's a wonderful teacher," said a friend, "but you can't pin him down — he's whirling all the time."

Skis Hold Their Curves

Skis, to put it mildly, have improved a bit since skiing tobogganed into a sport for the millions. That curved tip, for example, is built in to stay in a good pair of modern skis. It wasn't always so.

Back before World War I, the ski conscious residents of northern Wisconsin used to have trouble with their ash

skis; under continual use, the tips kept flattening out.

Ingenious skiers would dunk the ski tips in boiling water to make it soft and bendable. Then they'd wedge the tip in some handy niche and weight down the rest of the ski after stiffening it between two by fours. When it dried out, the tip had its curl again.