



Photos by Nancie Battaglia

The author skis past Whiteface Mountain on his 60-kilometer trip along the Jackrabbit Trail.

# A one-man marathon

*Bill McKibben skis the Jackrabbit in a day*

BY **BILL MCKIBBEN**  
EXPLORER CORRESPONDENT

**5:45:** Wake up. It's late winter. I'm in my friends Jack and Mary Jean Burke's house on Keese Mill Road in Paul Smiths. More specifically, I'm in the bedroom their son Tim grew up in. He's off this week at the biathlon World Championships in some distant-Stan or another where they pay proper attention to skiing-and-shooting.

In the moonlight still filtering in the window I can make out the endless collection of ribbons, trophies, plaques that line his walls and shelves. Inspiration. Not that I'm trying to beat anyone but my own aging carcass—still, the plan for today is to ski the whole Jackrabbit Trail, almost 60 backcountry kilometers from here to Keene Valley, and I

know I'm going to be tired before I'm done. Maybe well before I'm done.

**6:15:** Oatmeal, and temperature check. A couple of degrees below zero, but not a cloud in the sky, and not much wind either. The forecast is for sheer loveliness; it's not been much of a winter for snow, but I don't remember more blue-sky days. And in the last week we've had a couple of three- or four-inch snow showers. No storms, but enough to let us finally set off on a trip we've been planning all winter.

**6:40:** Jack's neighbor Pete McConville arrives; he's agreed to ski with us as far as Saranac Lake. We wax up and head out the door. As we cross the road and climb a snowbank to enter the woods of the Visitor Interpretive Center, we can see the nearly full moon over our shoulder; the sun is near to rising ahead of us. We have a couple of miles to ski before the official start of the Jackrabbit, on the always-lovely VIC trails. The snow is squeaky-cold, but there's a bit of fluff on top that speeds us along.

**7:20:** We cross Route 30 and start down the Jackrabbit Trail proper. This trail, the brainchild of indefatigable path-builder Tony Goodwin, is named for Herman "Jackrabbit" Johansen, the even-more indefatigable skier who glided these woods for many decades. And for the first, oh, quarter-mile, there's just the hiss of skis on fresh snow as we kick along. Then, despite the large signs erected by the Paul Smith's College that read "Motorized Vehicles Prohibited," we're suddenly skiing on snowmobile tracks. This slows us down right away, because snow machines and skis are very different animals. The former like to bounce up and down, leaving behind a series of humpy wallows. The latter—six feet long—like smoothness above all; there's no way to kick and glide along a snowmobile track; it's a little like trying to ride a bike over an endless series of speed bumps

**8:00:** We cross Route 86 at the height of land above Easy Street and head off on another sweet woods trail. After about half a mile, though, it widens out, and the sin-

