

Tradition of Freshman Trip Endures

"So many good times …"

This is how Craig Badger, Associate Dean of Students and Head Boys Hockey Coach, begins when asked to share memories of the annual Freshman Trip to Lake Placid. His recollections were like postcards from the past: Faculty breakfasts when Senior Master Ed Small would order "the Growler." Former math teacher Jarrod Sisk showing off his bowling skills in the annual faculty vs. prefect match. Tobogganing onto Mirror Lake with science teacher and Head Baseball Coach Jeff Trundy. Summiting Whiteface when the temperature was 25 degrees below zero. Skating and speed skating and falling on the Olympic Oval. Drinking hot chocolate and hot cider in the hotel lounge.

In late January, 57 freshman, eight prefects and six faculty members boarded a coach bus, a minivan and a Gunnery bus for what was, according to Freshman Dean Ryan Cotter, the 24th annual class trip to Lake Placid. Although some aspects of the journey have changed from one year to the next, the three-day trip remains largely the same. After nearly a quarter century of skiing and skating, bad weather and wrong turns, glimpses of Olympic history and slices at Mr. Mike's, it's still a great Gunnery tradition, and one of the most treasured memories of four-year seniors on graduation day.

"It was a lot of fun," said Trundy, who was a chaperone on the freshman trip for 10 years and drove one of the six or seven Gunnery buses that were needed to transport students from campus to Lake Placid. "We did different things each year depending on what was open and the weather. I always thought it was a great trip to bring the freshmen together."

One year, the wind was blowing so hard and it was so cold, they closed Whiteface Mountain, so students couldn't ski or ride the gondola. Another year, students and faculty left campus early on Saturday morning to get ahead of a big snowstorm that was predicted. They spent a night in Lake George and went shopping at the outlets nearby before continuing on to Lake Placid on Sunday morning. "The kids really did seem to enjoy it," Trundy said, and the added stop became part of the itinerary for several years.

Gunnery students have gone tobogganing off a jump onto Mirror Lake and snow tubing at Saranac Lake, Trundy said. They have free time to visit the village of Lake Placid, which is well known as the site of the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, and the historic "Miracle on Ice" hockey game between the United States and the Soviet Union. "You're kind of in a different world up there," Trundy said.

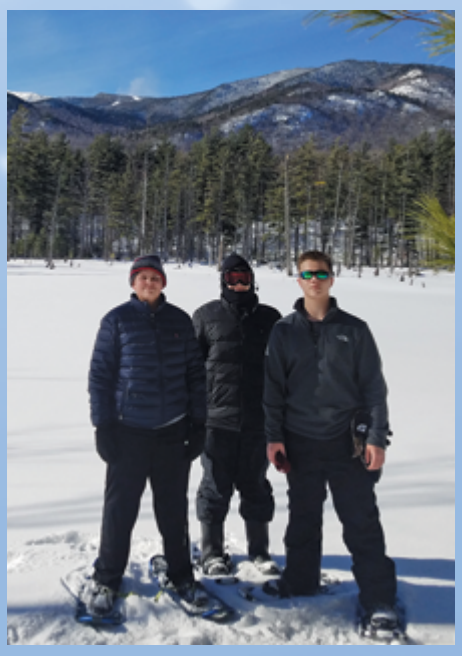
Kori Rimany '14, who went on the

trip as a freshman in 2011, as a prefect in 2014, and this year as a faculty member, said the trip comes at a time of year when social groups have already formed. "It's usually a turning point socially. Even the trip down, spending that much time in the 'toasters,' students have an opportunity to bond," she said, using the affectionate term faculty have for The Gunnery vans.

As a freshman, Rimany said the trip offered her a first opportunity to interact with the prefects, other than seeing them running School Meeting each week. "Prefects have a lot of responsibility on the trip. It's a huge learning experience for them and if they went as freshmen, it's such an awesome, full-circle experience to come back as a prefect," she said, recalling that all of the prefects in 2014 had been on the trip as freshmen and were excited to relive that experience, just as she was as a faculty member this year.

"The town stays the same, looks the same," she said, acknowledging the sense of nostalgia that surrounds the trip. Upperclassmen and alumni like to talk about it. "Friends remember it as a positive, quintessential Gunnery experience," she said.

Associate Head of School Seth Low said the trip is a great bonding experience for the freshman class, and a welcome change of pace in the winter term. "There are not many things like that that stay the same," Low said. "For first-year students to have a really fun experience and reconnect with classmates, it's really important."





This year, students stayed at the Crowne Plaza Lake Placid and had opportunities to go skating at night at the Olympic Oval, where Eric Heiden won five Olympic gold medals in 1980. Students could take lessons or go skiing or snowboarding at Whiteface. "It's sometimes referred to as Iceface," quipped Becca Leclerc, Director of the Outdoor Program, one of the chaperones on the trip. "It's a tall peak and when the wind blows, it blows the snow right off."

Leclerc led a group of 11 students on a winter hike to Copperas Pond and along the River Trail portion of the Flume Trail network.

Students had dinner one night at Mr. Mike's Pizza & Italian Restaurant, which bills itself as "the longest running pizzeria in Lake Placid," and a second night at Dack Shack, which is located in the former Howard Johnson's.

Over the three days, Cotter said he observed how the students seemed to enjoy "being in the moment. They were good about sitting down together. You didn't see phones out. There was this feeling that the kids were there and they were there with each other, which is hard to replicate on campus."

There were also opportunities for them to engage with each other, test their independence and figure things out on their own. One of these "growth moments" happened when four freshmen who were not confident skiers took a wrong turn onto a trail that was more difficult than they could manage. Another freshman, and a more experienced skier, stayed with them and helped them retrace their path back up the mountain to the gondola, which they rode back down.

Leclerc said each freshman trip is unique, but it's also part of a shared experience that students from one class to the next can draw on. "The whole student body is very excited for the freshmen to go to Lake Placid. They've got stories from the trip and things that they did that were just fun. It's similar to School Walk in that sense. Even if you had a different experience on School Walk, you know what people are talking about because you have also done that. It's a very fun connection that people have had with each other for the last 24 years of school history." ■

Clockwise from facing page:

Skating on the Olympic Oval, left to right: Kierstin Shelters '22, Kyra Briggs '22, Kayla Clark '22, Serdar Kaltalioglu '22, Matt Piazza '22, Liam Stewart '22, Michael Burns '22, Anthony Pernerewski '22 and Paul Clement '22

Faculty members Craig Badger and Jeff Trundy on a toboggan run in January 2011

Snowshoeing on Lake Placid, left to right: Hudson Brown '22, Carter Payne '22 and Simon Rhodes '22