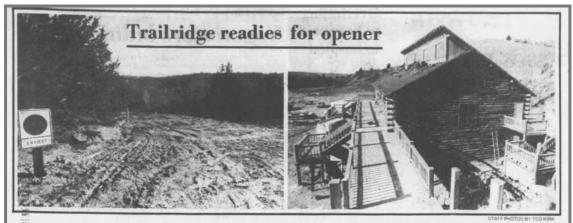
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Walkmen are busy putting the finishing touches on **Trailridge**, the new ski area located between Omaha and Lincoln. The gentle slope at the left is designed for beginners. Trailridge owner Tom Valasek will keep the area open

year-round, with the lodge at the right serving as the hub of the seasonal

By Gary Svoboda

The phrase "Ski Nebraska" used to be a laughing matter, a poster showing a shapely young lass with skis in the middle of a cornfield.

middle of a cornfield.

Then, with a growing awareness of cross-country sking and a series of trails developed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on state parks land, Ski Nebraska became a more viable proposition.

Nebraska became a more vi-able proposition.

And now, thanks to Oma-han Tom Valusek and his Trailiridge ski area, the phrase is taking a downward turn, and that's all for the better for Lincoin-area skiers who-enjoy gliding down the slopes instead of taking off on level terrain. on level terrain.

Five trails

Valasek, a 37-year-old restairant man, is sinking \$450,000 into Trailridge, developing a series of five trails with varying degrees of difficulty, with a two-story log lodge the focal point of non-sking activity.

on-sking activity.

The facility — located about 20 miles from Omaha and 30 miles from Lincoln along the bluffs north of the along the bluffs north of the Platte River — has a proj-ected opening date of Dec. 15, and, weather permitting, the public will have its first op-portunity to view it during an open house Dec. 12th from noon to 5 p.m.

"I've always been at-tracted to these hills," Vala-

sek explains, but the Omahan didn't rush into anything. Other Midwestern states Other Midwestern states have supported similar facilities. "After all, Iowa has six areas (including Crescent Hills outside of Council Bluffs), The more I looked into it, the more I liked it," Valasek savs. Valasek says.

economic standpoint, including the availablity of good used equipment from ski



Map points the way to Trailridge ski area

areas which enjoyed an ex-cellent year in 1981-82 and were therefore able to purchase new machinery gear this season. The cost of gas also should be a positive factor for the new ski area, Valasek feels, with fewer people able to afford the more costly trips out west

New park helps And the Game and Parks Commission development in the Trailridge area, including the new Platte River State Park, made the venture even more feasible, according to the Omaha man.

He's been working "eight-day" weeks, and Valasek says things are coming along well. Already in place are two Hedeo snow-making ma-chines capable of pumping out 250 gallons of water per minute which are capable of producing enough of the white stuff for all five trails, a large pond has been built to hold the water until it is

up the trails for night-time sking are up and ready to go. About 80 percent of the 5.600-square foot log lodge — "patterned after those in the Colorado areas," Valasek ex-plains — is done, and power lines for a T-bar lift and four wire rone handle lows are

rant on the second floor.

90-day season

the Omaha man.
Valasek says the beginners' trail features a modest
10 percent grade, while, the
longer advanced trails are a
quarter-mile long and have
grades of 22 percent.
He's been working "eightday" weeks, and Valasek
says things are continually

hold the water until it is chilled enough for the snow-making operation, and about 21 1,000-watt light bulbs and a dozen 1,500-watt bulbs to light up the trails for night-time

nines for a 1-dar int and four wire rope handle tows are now being put in.

The lodge, by the way, fea-tures fireplaces top and bot-tom, and a lounge and restau-

Valasek envisions a 90-day ski season, with the slopes open seven days a week until 11 p.m., and is hoping the lodge will be the hub of year-round activity. He's tenta-tively thinking about install-ing water slides for the sumand might offer horse-

back riding.
Sandy Monico, Omaha,
who has worked for Cresent Hills, will head up the eski in-struction staff, which will be filled out via an "on-snow" test of 35 applicants. Tom De Shazo, a retired colonel from Offatt Air Force

colonel from Offatt Air Force Base, is in charge of the Na-tional Ski Patrol which will patrol the slopes with an eye out for unsafe sking and medical emergencies. The Gretna Fire Department and Rescue Unit will serve Trail-ridge, and Omaha's St. Jo-seph's Hospital will make its helicopter lifeline service available. Trailridge is not the first

such facility in Nebraska, and in fact will be one of two in operation this year. John Weber opened his Prairie Hills Golf and Ski Club last year near Pleasanton (north of Kearney) to some success. It features one slope of about 1.400-feet and a rope tow.

Crescent Hills

And, of course, eastern Ne-braskans have gone to Cres-cent Hills — located north and a little east of Council Bluffs — since 1961. Crescent Hills offers four runs of up to 2,000 feet and stays open until

9 p.m. Like Trailridge, it features

man-made snow, so it's open for business whenever the temps fall to about 20 de-grees at night. This year owner Russ Lindeman is planning to open the doors around Dec. 15, "maybe a lit-

around Dec. 1s, "maybe a lit-tle earlier"
He's taking an optimistic stance concerning Trail Ridge. "Sure, it may take away some business, but it may add some, too. Having two areas will get more peo-ple skiing," he says.

Numbers to call

Colorado Ski Infor-mation: 488-2722 Nebraska Snow Re-ports 800-642-2222 Crescent Hills 712-545-3850

