ski klutzes

uld find the bathrooms. (That's other important fact that ski itzes need to find out early. Does ski area have a bathroom?)

e difficulty in finding the headarters — and for that matter the throom — should have given us a it that we might have some trou- with directions in the park, but it n't. Neither did our first look at Trail map the guy in the truck vided. Maybe that was because were looking for a route that uld take us along the most scenic tions on easy trails.

Cooke is nothing if it isn't scenic. e ski trails run on either side of St. Louis River and a spectacular ge called the Dalles of the St. is.

the summer it's an area of steep ges, numerous waterfalls and angely eroded rock formations. this winter day it was an area of ep hills to climb, numerous prat ls and strangely eroded confi- uce.

e trick is to get to the easy trails thout falling. We couldn't find any y there that didn't call for a tough mb up a steep hill. We consulted e map and picked a trail. Wrong o. We consulted the map and d again. Another steep hill. It was dent we were going to have trou- e reading the map.

hen we finally gave up and mbed one hill (with our skis off) d found a trail clearly marked for nners and set off.

e trail wound through a corridor tall pines and birch, a lonely land t almost made us feel like explor- s. But Lewis and Clark had Sa- ea; we had only the park map d we couldn't read it. There were veral maps posted at trail intersec- ns, but they didn't seem to match r park map — or reality. When ey showed three trails we could only find two. When the number of trails seemed right, they didn't go in the right directions. We ended up doubling back quite a bit until we found either a trail we recognized or the river.

We traveled eight kilometers, about five miles, in that way, although it seemed like we went much farther. We met very few people, perhaps because some of the better skiers abandoned the trails and made their own way through the woods. We didn't try that and missed seeing some of the wildlife that abounds in the park. One woman we met said she had scared three deer just ahead but we didn't see them. We didn't see any skis on her feet either. Maybe that's the way to find wildlife.

The only wildlife we saw was a couple wrapped up in each other as we returned to our starting point. They didn't see us.

On the way back we faced that same steep hill we'd climbed going out. It didn't seem any easier when we looked down it, especially since the end of the hill met the start of a narrow bridge across the river. We gathered courage for a while, then tried it. Were doing fine, too, but tripped on a large rock sticking out of the snow on the trail. The rock wasn't on the map either.

■

There's no way to get lost on the trails at the Pine Valley Ski Area in Cloquet. But finding the area is another story. We spent 45 minutes looking for it—45 minutes. In *Cloquet*. The guide said it was at Hwy. 33 and Armory Rd. But it wasn't quite that easy. For those who are haven't been there here are some directions that may help.

If you're coming from the north take Hwy. 45 to the intersection with Hwy. 33. That's at the corner guarded by a filling station said to have been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Turn east there and go for two stoplights. Ahead, on your left, you'll see the statue of the Voyageur and a fast-food franchise that

seemed to be designed by Frank Lloyd Wrong.

Turn right there. That road leads to a dead end, but on your left you'll see an ice arena. Pull into the arena parking lot and pretend you are going around in back to pick up the garbage. You'll find the parking lot for the ski area behind the arena. There is a hard-to-see sign on Hwy. 33, but that's the last and only one.

If you are coming from the south look for the statue and turn left. Whatever you do don't turn around. You'll miss a fun ski area if you do, one that's well worth the $2 trail fee. Pine Valley was developed in the 1960s by the people of Cloquet to encourage winter sports. It features, in addition to the cross-country trails, two ski jumps and a small downhill ski area with rope tow. If you're lucky, there may be some activity at the ski jump to watch. The day we were there boys as young as 8 were leaping off the smaller of the jumping hills. They didn't fall either. Amazing.

The trails have been used for many national and state high school races and thus are rated intermediate to advanced. But they really aren't that difficult, perhaps because they are very wide — freeways as cross-country ski trails go.

We were there on a Sunday afternoon and didn't pass anyone on the trails. Oops, let's amend that statement. We never pass anyone. This time no one passed us even though it took us quite a while to cover the seven kilometers of trails because of the hills. There are lots of them and they are long. But they aren't TOO steep and what goes up must come down. So the downhill runs made the climbs worthwhile.

Be sure to take a camera because the area is beautiful. Pine mostly, with large areas of birch. About a quarter of a mile after the start you come to the top of the downhill ski area and the ski jump. It's a good place to catch your breath and enjoy the view.

The trail gets a little tougher as you go along. But we rested often and were still fairly fresh when we hit 'Oh No' Hill, about a half-mile from the end of the longer trail.

We named the hill because "Oh no" is what we said after we topped a small hill and pushed off, only to find that this hill dropped off faster and was longer than any of the previous slopes. It had a sharp turn at the bottom, too, and none of us managed to make the turn.

But because the trail is so wide there was no real reason to worry — unless you'd worry about running over your dog when he decided not to make the turn either and plopped down in the middle of the track ahead of you.

We didn't worry. We bailed out. Got covered with snow. The dog provided a convenient excuse for those of us who probably wouldn't have been able to make the turn anyway and it provided another lesson for ski klutzes. Don't go down a hill without knowing what's ahead.

■

Cascade Lodge sits hards beside Hwy. 61 midway between Lutsen and Grand Marais facing Lake Superior. It features some of the longest and most varied ski trails in the state.

There are 33 miles of trails that start at the lodge and cover all sorts of terrain. Some of them are within the Cascade State Park and run beside the beautiful Cascade River and Cascade Creek. You ski free if you stay at the lodge, but if you just want to stop for a day of skiing they charge a $3 parking fee and provide lots of maps.

The expert skiers were following the trails along the river and the creek, but they ran mighty close to trees so we avoided them. Instead, in a moment of insanity, we decided to climb to the top of Lookout Mountain, elevation 1219 feet. Perhaps we were influenced by a lumpy man in his mid 30s who had just returned from there and recommended it. We should have been suspicious of a guy who wouldn't give his name but said, instead, "Jean Claude Killy I am not." But he was a bit portly and did look like a ski klutz.

The trail started innocently enough with a few gently rolling hills that led ever upward. But the higher we got the steeper and narrower the trail got. Forty minutes later, when we arrived near the top, there was barely enough room, it seemed, to get our shoulders between the trees.

The view of Lake Superior was spectacular. We turned to go back. The trail looked very steep and very narrow. We decided on another view of Lake Superior. We turned again. The trail looked even steeper and narrower.

Finally we pushed off. Quickly we built up speed. Quickly we sat down, not because of any real danger but because it seemed like there ought to be danger. Klutzes are allowed to do things like that.

Like a basketball being dribbled we went down the hill. Down, up. Down up. This was a fast break and we were down the hill in a flash. The scenery must have been gorgeous. We didn't notice. The rest of the day we spent on fairly flat terrain.

When we arrived back at the Lodge, Jean Claude Killy was gone. Getting away while the getting was good, we figured. We listened to the weather forecast. Clear skies and higher temperatures predicted for the next day. A good day to return home.

We awoke to heavy snows. The roads were terrible. All the way back we thought about that weather man. Bet he's a Nordic skier with a color-coordinated outfit.

Editor's note: Although Mike Cooney has been skiing for five years many people will testify he's a born klutz. He has skis that need to be waxed but says that's because he got them on sale.

Sportsman's Solunar