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Winter Notes: Skating provides icy exhilaration

By Meghan McCarthy McPhaul Special to the Union Leader Jan 10, 2019



{span}The McPhaul kids take to the ice at the Riverwalk Resort in Lincoln.{/span}

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During the winters of my childhood, I skated on the neighborhood pond, tucked in behind the backyards of our down-the-road neighbors and lined by cattails and weeping willows. My dad had played hockey in college, after learning to skate in Forest Park in his

hometown of Springfield, Mass., and he had my brothers and me out on skates when we were little more than toddlers, holding onto a small wooden chair for balance as we figured out how to push and glide on the ice.

Skiing took priority in those years, as it does now, so none of us became expert skaters, but it's still fun to lace up the skates and take a turn around the ice. There's something free and exhilarating about gliding across frozen water in the chill, fresh air of winter. There's power to the push and grace to the glide — even when I know I'm far from graceful moving around on those slender blades of metal.

My kids, too, are skiers first, but they welcome the rare opportunity to ice skate, whether at the town rink or one of the ponds nearby, so we were all excited to visit the Riverwalk Resort in Lincoln one afternoon early this week and take a few spins around the outdoor skating rink there.

Light snow fell as we stepped onto the ice, and as daylight faded on the slopes of Loon Mountain in the background, the lights around the rink glowed brighter. Although we'd already put in a long day on the slopes, and there were falls as the kids searched for speed on their laps around the ice, the joy of skating across frozen water was just as real as it was all those years ago on the neighborhood pond.

If you're lucky enough to live in a community with a rink, getting on ice should be a cinch. If not, there's probably a rink — or a great skating pond — not too far away.

Here are a few options for skating around New Hampshire. (Obviously, natural ice surfaces are subject to our unpredictable weather, so check first before heading out.)

Riverwalk Resort at Loon, Lincoln

Just down the road from Loon Mountain, this summer swimming lagoon-turned-ice rink offers après ski fun — or a skiing alternative. A cooling system below the ice helps maintain a smooth skating surface even in not-quite-wintery weather. Fire pits just outside the rink are lit Friday and Saturday evenings (or upon request). Open Tuesday-Friday 6-9

p.m. and Saturday and Sunday 1-9 p.m.; \$10 skating fee (with half-price skating for Grafton County residents Sundays); skate rentals available on site.
www.riverwalkresortatloon.com/riverwalk-ice-skating-rink

Schouler Park, North Conway

This center-of-town rink sits in front of the colorful and historic train station in the village center. Open Tuesday through Friday afternoons and evenings, with longer hours Saturday and Sunday; no fee. www.conwayrec.com/skating-rink/

Nestlenook Farm, Jackson

On the picturesque 3-acre Emerald Lake, skaters can glide under the arched bridge and warm up by the fire in the mid-pond gazebo warming hut. Twinkling lights around the lake and horse-drawn sleighs passing by enhance the Winter Wonderland scene. Open Monday-Thursday noon-6 p.m., Friday noon-8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-9 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; \$10 skating fee for adults/\$7 for children 12 and under; skate rentals available on site.
www.nestlenookfarmsleighrides.com/ice-skating

Occom Pond, Hanover

No need to be an Ivy League student to skate on this pond, where the ice is maintained by the Dartmouth Outing Club. The pond is open to skating day and night, although the lights go off at 10 p.m. There's no fee to skate, and rentals are available from the cross-country center in the lower level of the DOC House at the north end of the pond Tuesday-Friday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and weekends 9-5.
outdoors.dartmouth.edu/services/xc_ski_center.html

White Park, Concord

Home of the annual Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, scheduled for later this month, White Park features a skating pond and outdoor rink. While the new skate house won't open until spring, skating is available during regular park hours, 6 a.m.-11 p.m.; no fee. Concord also maintains ice skating areas at Rollins Park and Beaver Meadow Golf Course.
concordnh.gov/666/Parks-Recreation

Dorrs Pond, Manchester

This 25-acre pond in the city's Livingston Park is a longtime favorite with skaters. Benches around the ice offer a place to lace up the skates, and a warming hut next to the pond provides a place to step out of the cold between laps around the ice. Call (603) 624-6444 to check ice conditions. www.manchesternh.gov/Home/Recreation

Puddle Dock Pond, Portsmouth

The Labrie Family Skate at Strawberry Banke Museum hosts an array of activities through the winter, from open skate times and learn-to-skate lessons to pond hockey and a local Skating with the Stars event. Skating fees range from \$8-11 for adults and \$6-9 for children; rental skates available. Check website for open hours.

www.strawberrybanke.org/skate.cfm

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