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Sit-skiing goes Nordic at Hartley

For years, skiers with disabilities have been cruising downhill on adaptive equipment called "sit-skis." Now cross-country skiers can use similar devices on cross-country ski trails at Duluth's Hartley Park.

By: Sam Cook, Duluth News Tribune

For years, skiers with disabilities have been cruising downhill on adaptive equipment called "sit-skis." Now cross-country skiers can use similar devices on cross-country ski trails at Duluth's Hartley Park.

Hartley Nature Center will make the new cross-country sit-skis available starting this week and will hold an event Saturday to showcase Nordic sit-skiing.

Reid Hietala of Cloquet tried one of the new Nordic sit-skis at Hartley on Thursday, double-poling powerfully down a groomed, level trail.

"It's a lot of work. Holy cow!" said Hietala, 21. "But trying it now, it's a lot of fun. The last time I tried it, I wasn't much into cross-country skiing."

Hietala, 21, was born with Spina bifida. He has been mono-skiing downhill for 17 years and also uses hand cycles, both activities through Courage Center Duluth.

Making the adaptive ski equipment available at Hartley is a cooperative project of Courage Center Duluth, Hartley Nature Center, the Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club and the Central Cross-Country Ski Association in Hayward.

Courage Center Duluth has offered Nordic sit-skiing for more than a decade, but not many people with disabilities have tried it, said Eric Larson, program director at Courage Center Duluth.

Moving uphill using only your arms for propulsion can be tough. But cross-country sit-skis have a place, Larson said.

"On the flats, you can propel yourself fairly easily," he said. "It is a way to get out. If you're using a wheelchair and have limited mobility in the snow and ice season, this is an option."

Mark Horlocker, public program director at Hartley Nature Center, said sit-skis will serve a need for the public.

"We're getting more and more requests about what programs and equipment are available for people with disabilities," Horlocker said.

Nordic sit-skis may be checked out at no charge and used on the level or less hilly portions of

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Sit-ski

Reid Hietala of Cloquet tries out a Nordic sit-ski on a trail at Hartley Park in Duluth on Thursday. Sit-skis will be available to use free for people with disabilities at Hartley Nature Center. (Bob King / rking@duluthnews.com)

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Event at Hartley for disabled skiers

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Hartley's five kilometers (3.1 miles) of groomed cross-country ski trails, said Pete Gravett, executive director of Hartley Nature Center.

The Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club will help promote the availability of sit-skis on its Web site and hopes to recruit volunteers to help cross-country sit-skiers, said the organization's Anne Flueckiger.

Hartley is one of 11 sites around the Midwest that will receive the new adaptive equipment for cross-country skiing, said Scott Wilson, director of adaptive skiing for the Central Cross-Country Skiing Association. With a grant and donations, CXC is having 150 cross-country sit-skis made.

Each sit-ski weighs 18 pounds and can accommodate people of all sizes, including youths, Wilson said.

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