

SOIceFest is back at full speed



By Kristena Schutt-Moore

The Southern Ontario Ice Climbing Festival came back to the North Hastings area on Feb. 10 to 12. This year they hosted not only ice climbing events but also mixed climbing events. This year the Saturday and Sunday climbing clinics were held at Diamond Lake south of Combermere and near Palmer Rapids right on the frozen lake. This is also where the public could come to the Try-A-Climb workshops on Sunday afternoon. Equipment was available for the workshops, but those attending the clinics on Saturday and Sunday were expected to bring their own equipment. The events got started on the Friday at 6 p.m. at the Arlington Hotel in Maynooth where participants from out of town could check in, and all participants got introductions to the climbing guides, information on the conditions of the weather and climbing location, and thanks was given to all the volunteers. On Saturday morning participants were able to swing by the ANAF Barn hall for an ice climber's breakfast that included scrambled eggs, hash browns, home fries, sausage, bacon, and English muffins, and a choice of tea or coffee. The fee was \$10 at the door, and the breakfast lasted from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. so that participants could make it to their first Climbing Clinic at Diamond Lake on time. There were also special trips to Hidden Gems climbing area at Diamond Lake in Hastings Highlands, Papineau Roadside climbing area beside Papineau Lake in Hastings Highlands and Bow Lake off Hwy 28 in Faraday, hosted on the Saturday by the Toronto and Ottawa branches of The Alpine Club of Canada. These trips allowed more advanced climbers to mix their ice climbing or mix climbing with some top-roping or leading techniques. There was no cost to participate in the special trips as the Toronto ACC assisted with the cost. However, participants had to bring their own equipment including harnesses, helmets, rigid boots, technical crampons, warm clothing including spares, ice axes were optional. These special trips were for those with more experience in ice and mixed climbing. Lunch was had on Diamond Lake between Combermere and Palmer Rapids, giving climbers the chance to enjoy the beauty of the area over a picnic lunch. Then the afternoon clinics started. Each clinic was the same, with participants getting the same instructions and chances. The day ended at 5:30 p.m. at the ANAF Barn where participants were able to warm up and get a drink from the Bancroft Brewing Company. Supper was served from 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. to give participants time to travel from the lakes and stay and chat about their experiences. The night consisted of dinner, a guest presentation made by one of the guides that day, door prizes, and a silent auction and fundraising raffle for the North Hastings Children's Services. On Sunday the events repeated, with the addition of the ?Locals-Try-A-Climb? that let people with no experience in ice climbing or mixed climbing try their hand at a new experience. This year the clinic instructors included ACMG Alpine Guide, Climbing Gym Instructor Level 3 Scott McKay and ACMG/IFMGA/UIAGM Mountain Guide Shaun King who was originally from Bancroft, founder and lead guide for Elements Guiding Lorne Foisy from the Haliburton area, and founder and lead guide of Muskoka Mountainworks Jonathan Nuna. There were three different ice climbing clinics available, including Intro Ice Clinic, Intermediate Clinic and Advanced Clinic. The Intro Ice Clinic was an introductory lessons that bring climbers up to speed on how to climb the ice walls of the North Hastings

area. Lessons included what equipment was needed and how to wear it, safety calls and how to use the body to climb properly. Participants needed to know how to safely belay on a climbing rope so that they would know how to stop themselves if they fell. By the end of the clinic they knew how to use basic ice movement skills, use of crampons and other tools, be familiar with ice climbing setting and basic safety and be comfortable and efficient with the tips and tricks of ice climbing. The Intermediate Clinic was for those with more experience who were ready to learn more modern steep ice climbing techniques. Participants were taught how to move and climb on steeper ice walls and how to climb on mixed terrain when ice is melted or did not form in all areas of the ice wall, exposing rock or other sections of the mountain under the ice. Those with specific requests on items to learn could also request lessons from the instructors. At the end of the lessons the participants were able to climb more efficiently and safely and were even given the chance to try leading a group of ice climbers so they would gain confidence in leading other groups in the future. The Advanced Clinics combined modern steep ice climbing techniques with more leader-specific skills. They were expected to review steep ice climbing techniques, lead a group of climbers under watchful eyes of the instructors, review ice screw placement and cleaning and learn the best places to secure ice anchors and v-threads. As a leader of an ice climbing group it would be up to them where the anchors and security ropes would go during the climb so placement to ensure safety of all climbers is an important lesson. Climbers were also able to request lessons of the instructors if there was something specific they wished to learn. By the end of the lessons they would receive expert tips on how to be a more efficient, safer leader, and practice with following steep ice effectively. The goal of the SOIceFest is to connect and grow the Southern Ontario climbing community and to give back to the local communities in the North Hastings area. The festival started in 2015 by Andriy Kolos, Josh Smith and Peter Hoang. It was about celebrating all things about ice climbing, and brought the existing climbing community together in one place and promoted the climbing abilities in Southern Ontario. Since then the SOIceFest has built upon itself every year. Last year the festival was held virtually with people going climbing on their own and posting on the festival's website, www.soicefest.com, about their climbs. This year was the Southern Ontario Ice Climbing Festival return to the North Hastings area and they are excited to be back. To date the festival has brought many new climbers to the area and has raised over \$16,000 for area organizations. Those interested in more information about the SOIceFest are invited to visit their website or Facebook page, or email SOIceFest@gmail.com.