

Trials have snow, skis, spuds

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There will be lots of action during the three-day Haywood Noram cross country ski trials and it will be fairly easy on the environment.

The use of cutlery, cups, bowls and plates made from potato makes Thunder Bay the site of only the second green ski event ever held in Canada.

Organizing committee representative Jean Pendziwol said the compostable material is better for the environment although it costs more.

"That's a cost we felt was important to absorb to minimize the impact on the environment.

"As members of the ski community we're out in the environment a lot and we want to respect it by making this as environmentally friendly as possible," Pendziwol said Tuesday during a press conference at the Prince Arthur Hotel.

The potato plates look and feel like normal paper but decompose faster.

The Lappe Nordic Ski Centre will host the trials on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday — with more than 300 athletes from across Canada registered to compete. The Lappe trails will be used for the World Junior and Under 23 trials, the World Senior distance trials, the Teck Sprint Series, the Canada Games trials and the Ontario Cup No. 2.

National Development Centre head coach Eric Bailey said athletes will have a chance to make the Ontario team for the Canada Games. They can earn spots on the World Junior and Under 23 teams and the overall winner of Thursday's pursuit competition will join Canada's senior team at the world cross country ski championship in Norway in February.

The World Junior and Under 23 championships will be held in Estonia later this month.

"Our team at the National Development Centre is all in really good shape — they're racing fast — and I think some of them have a really good chance of making the world championship team," Bailey said.

Thunder Bay skier Mike Somppi is excited to have home-trail advantage during the



Mayor Keith Hobbs cuts a ribbon Tuesday at the Prince Arthur Hotel to officially open the Haywood Noram cross country ski trials. (Brent Linton)

competition. It will help that the roughly 50 local athletes get to sleep in their own beds and already know Lappe like the back of their hands, Somppi said.

Cross country skiing wasn't always the 22-year-old's favourite sport. Somppi used to spend most of his time playing hockey; it wasn't until high school that he started taking cross country skiing more seriously.

He wanted a sport where he could excel without having to rely on a whole team.

"Pushing myself while training is exciting — it's liberating."

He's used to skiing for three or four hours and said it doesn't feel like a chore.

"I like the physical movement of skiing in both styles," he said. Somppi is hoping to do well during the trials.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the competition will be the continuous pursuit starting Thursday at 9:30 a.m., featuring both classic and skating styles of cross country skiing.

Competitors will do a lengthy ski, starting in freestyle and changing to the classic style for the last half of the race.

On Friday, skiers will have an opportunity to train and on Saturday the Teck NorAm Classic Sprints begin at 9 a.m.

On Sunday there will be distance races at 9:30 a.m. For more information go to www.skinoram2011.com.