Avalon Nordic Challenge Group

Family Handbook

Nov 2, 2025



About AN Challenge Group!

This is a group for young folks (age 11+) interested in training for ski racing and/or skiing together with friends (new and old). It meets year round, doing dryland training in the spring/summer/fall and on-snow training whenever we have snow. You can join at any time of year and with any experience level. A typical year involves a weekly hiking session from May -> August, bi-weekly dryland training September->first snow and bi-weekly on-snow training plus racing from first snow to last. There is an approximately 6 week break from early/mid-April to mid-late May depending on race timing (and snow!). Many athletes choose to travel with the team or their families to NL cup races across the province (Jan-Apr) and we host an annual race here in February each year. Whether you expect to finish first or last, travelling and racing is a fun team-building experience! We host several team social events throughout the year as well.

Activities



Rollerskiing



Ski-Striding/Trail Running

When there is no snow, rollerskiing is the closest alternative, and typically the group will do this at one of their two weekly sessions each week in the fall. The most common locations for this are along the bike path beside Prince Philip Dr and Kelly's Brook Path by the Remax Centre/St John's Curling Club. The Equipment needed is:

- bicycle helmet,
- Comfortable clothing
- Reflective clothing and lights during the fall/winter
- Skate-ski length poles with ferrule tips. Tips can be purchased where you buy poles (e.g. Outfitters) and can be changed. Most ski tips are hot-glued on, and you just need to dip the pole tip in a cup of boiling water until the glue softens, remove the old tip, then hot-glue the new tips on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBNVS29cdUs. Or Swix makes poles with changeable tips.
- Skate-ski boots can be purchased (at Outfitters) or the club has some pairs that can be rented

During dryland season, most weeks include a trail-running and ski-striding session at locations around St John's (typically either at Pippy Park or the Geocentre). Ski-striding is a way to practice the motion of skiing while wearing running shoes. Equipment needed is:

- Trail-running shoes
- Elbow length striding poles (most people use adjustable hiking poles)
- Comfortable athletic clothing for all weather conditions
- Reflective clothing and headlamps during the fall/winter
- Water pouch – some way to carry water without your hands. Most skiers have a water fanny-pack.

Most skiing activities happen rain/shine/snow/wind/hail! Being

- Roller-skis can be rented to be used for the season
- Padding (e.g. knee or elbow pads) is optional, but recommended for beginners
- Bicycle gloves are recommended, particularly for beginners
- Water pouch – some way to carry water without your hands. Most skiers have a water fanny-pack.

Rollerskiing can take some getting used to, particularly going down hills. All levels are welcome, and most skiers enjoy it once they get more comfortable.

prepared with appropriate clothing keeps this fun. That said, sometimes the weather does preclude outdoor training, in which case we either use "The Works" at MUN or occasionally go climbing at The Cove.

"Josh (coach), Luke (athlete) and I do not believe in weather."

—Claire M., current Challenge Group athlete



Skiing at SilverStar on a Cross-Country NL trip.

Ski Training on snow!

The snow part is the best part!! During the winter, the group meets bi-weekly for 90 minute sessions on snow, usually at the Pippy Park ski trails, although at the beginning of the season (or whenever snow is thin), we often ski on the golf course on Allandale Road, and at the end of the season we often ski the upper-Pippy trails. Typically one session is dedicated to classic skiing and one to skate skiing.

What you need:

- Comfortable warm-ish clothing (we are moving, so layers are recommended)
- Classic and Skate boots OR Combi-boots, which can do both. The club has some combi boots that can be rented. Having your own is recommended as you stop growing and advance. It's important

that your boots give you good support, so look for side-to-side ankle stability in skate/combi boots.

- Classic and skate poles – skate poles are longer than classic – coaches can help with sizing, as can the staff at The Outfitters and other ski shops.
- Classic and Skate skis. The club has some skate skis that may be available to be rented for the season. Again coaches and ski staff can help with sizing and coaches with what skis best suit your athlete.
- Bright headlamp for night sessions.
- Ski gloves – check that they work with your poles!
- Water pouch – some way to carry water without your hands. Most skiers have a water fanny-pack.



Hiking season!

Hiking

From May to August, the group meets once a week for a 90 minute hike normally on the East Coast Trail. Locations change each week and

all you need is trail runner/hiking shoes and water/snacks! Some of the hikes are a bit out of town (e.g. Cape Spear or Petty Harbour) but carpooling can be facilitated if your athlete ever needs a ride.

Social Events and Other Activities





Tour de Bell Island

Each year around the Remembrance Day weekend, we do a day-trip to Bell Island. We get on the ferry mid-morning, rollerski around the island (17+ km!), then stop for fish and chips before getting back on the boat late afternoon. Less experienced skiers can bring their bikes, and parents are welcome to join and run/walk/bike/skateboard/rollerski or drive a support vehicle. We always have a few vehicles (driven by parent volunteers) that athletes can ride in as necessary.

Parties!

We usually host a social event (e.g. pizza/lazer tag/climbing) before Christmas and in April. There are also ample social opportunities at the camps and races.

Bad Weather Alternatives

When the weather is too wet/windy we do switch to indoor training, either at “The Works” on the MUN campus or sometimes at “The Cove” to go climbing.



On-Island Travel

Racing!

Each year members travel to NL Cup races across the province. There are usually four or five sets of races on weekends from January to early April, including an event in St John's sometime in February. We typically organize ride sharing and group accommodations. Those staying in group accommodations help with

Camps

Cross-country NL runs several camps each year, some on snow and some dryland to train and learn together. A lot of athletes go to the camps to have fun! We normally train during the day and socialize in the evenings. For

cooking/cleaning for joint meals. Parents are welcome to come and share group accommodations and help with cooking etc. Some families also choose to stay separately. Races are typically in pairs with a skate and classic race in the same location in a single weekend. Typically, one of these is a sprint and the other a longer race. Travelling and racing are fun ways to be with the team – it's not necessary to be expecting to win to go and have fun!! Equipment/packing lists and plans are made for each event and costs are shared between those sharing a vehicle/accommodation with the club paying for coach fees. Parent volunteers are needed for driving, marshalling, timing and occasionally serving cookies/hot chocolate etc.

dryland camps, there is normally a rollerski and a run each day, as well as fitness tests, yoga, hiking, race-readiness, and other activities. Parent volunteers are needed at these events to organize food, time races etc! If you're willing/able to help we'll find something useful for you to do.

Cross-Country NL Team (XCNL) and Events

The Provincial sport body (Cross-Country NL) has a provincial team, for which our own Coach Erik is the head coach. Results at the NL cup races, and demonstrated commitment to the practices, determine who

is invited to join the provincial team. They organize additional training camps, for which a few 'extra' skiers are also often invited to attend. These events are by invite only, but all are encouraged to work hard on their skiing to try to make the team and get those invitations!

Off-Island Travel

Lab-Camp

Each year Cross-Country NL hosts an on-snow camp in Labrador (where the snow lasts longer)! This is by invitation and is usually a week in late November and/or early April. This camp involves a lot of on-snow skiing, sometimes races, and lots of fun. Skiers fly with coaches to Labrador, where they stay in group accommodations with shared responsibility for cooking/cleaning etc. There is a registration fee for this camp that covers most costs (some meals etc may be extra). Many years, there are subsidies for this camp from provincial sources.

Atlantic Super-Camp

Some years, there are Atlantic region camps hosted in NL or other provinces. Typically, these are by invitation and athletes will travel to the event with coaches. Again, athletes pay fees to cover joint accommodation, meals, etc, as well as a camp fee and travel costs. Although it is by invitation, athletes as young as 12 or 13 can be invited depending on interest and numbers

Regionals/Nationals!

Most years some members

Special Trips

Some years cross-country NL organizes group trips to places

qualify for regional and national competitions, which they travel to with team NL coaches. Equipment/packing lists and plans are made for each event and costs are shared between those sharing a vehicle/accommodation with the club paying for coach fees.

like SilverStar (in BC). These are typically by invitation, and families cover fees for athletes with the club covering coach costs.

Volunteers!

Like most kid's activities, this one requires parent volunteers to keep things running. There are many different roles, from as simple as ride-sharing to the team coordinator and other members of the Avalon Nordic or XCNL boards. Any of the 'away' activities require drivers, cooks, and additional chaperones. Races also require timers, marshals, and lots of fans!

Contact

Right Now, Scott MacLachlan is the parent-manager of the team. You can reach him (or the next manager) at:
avalonnordicchallengegroup@gmail.com