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John Paul II: Lifelong skier

With the passing of Karol Wojtyla, the sport has lost its most exalted devotee. A lifelong skier, the pontiff sneaked off to the hills as long as his health permitted. He was shot in 1981, which enforced a temporary layoff, and quit for good after the 1987 season, nine years into his papacy.



During his decades as Bishop and Cardinal of Krakow, beginning in 1962, Wojtyla spent two weeks each winter at Poland's largest resort, Zakopane (site of the 1937 FIS championships), lodging in a local convent. The sisters reportedly still have a pair of his leather ski boots.

In his youth, and into middle age, Wojtyla had a reputation as an earn-your-turns kind of guy. **An indefatigable hiker and kayaker, he scorned lifts and preferred to climb on his hickory skis.** In his 20s, he was an athlete, standing 5 feet 10.5 inches at 175 pounds, but suffered a number of injuries that caused him to stoop in later years.

When churchly duties cut into his recreation time, Wojtyla modernized, acquiring a pair of 195cm Head skis and taking his place in the lift line. He preferred to ski off-piste, and was quoted as saying "It's unbecoming for a cardinal to ski badly." He made his last runs at the Italian resort of Terminillo, a short commute from the Vatican.

Here follows a short piece from the March, 1979 issue of *SKI*.

The Vatican Skier

A Pontiff whose non-papal piety runs to the mountains, Pope John Paul II's next ski descent has already been labelled the 'Schuss of the Fisherman.'

Mammoth Ski Museum**ISHA needs reference books!**

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BY JOHN HOWARD

Vatican life has its protocol-and Vatican officials are not known to enjoy surprises. It was therefore with some astonishment that they greeted Pope John Paul II's pronouncement, just seconds after his inauguration as the 264th successor to St. Peter and Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, that "I will ski again when they let me."

The Polish Pope's comment to a well-wisher came as he descended into St. Peter's Square to meet his new people-and, so far as the former Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was concerned, it was in earnest. The Pope, his energies now devoted to papal affairs of state, would be missing out on those winter vacations he had regularly taken in Poland's Tatra Mountains. There was, he supposed, some consolation-the Pope would at least be able to see the ski mountains of Terminillo, 20 miles to the north of Rome, from the windows of the papal apartments, the same mountains he had been known to slip away to for some skiing while attending Vatican conferences in Rome as a Cardinal.

Karol Wojtyla is a humble man who confesses his one luxury in life has been "a pair of Head skis." His ski socks are initialed "K.W.", embroidered not so much in priestly affectation as to insure his getting his socks back from the laundry.

The Pope, at 58, is an excellent skier-those who have skied with him call him the "Daredevil of the Tatras"-who has skied for most of his life but did not take up the sport seriously until age 30. His favorite ski haunt is Kasprowy Wierch in Poland, the peak above Zaczapone where a wrong turn could send an inexperienced skier bodily over a sheer drop into Czechoslovakia. Hala Gasienicowa-called the Valley of the Caterpillar because of its zigzag terrain-is the Pope's favorite ski run.

Upon his arrival at the Vatican, Wojtyla told the Italian cardinals, "In Poland, 40 percent of the cardinals ski." When it was pointed out to him that Poland had only two cardinals, Wojtyla explained, "Cardinal Wyszynski accounts for 60 percent." He later expressed his love of skiing to a journalist by saying, "I wish I could be out there somewhere in the mountains, racing down into a valley. It's an extraordinary sensation."

Will Pope John Paul II ski again? Says Wojtyla, "It would be impossible for me not to."

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The International Skiing History Association is a not-for-profit corporation, whose mission is to preserve and advance the knowledge of ski history and to increase public awareness of the sport's heritage.

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