



The Ancient Skier

P. O. Box 331 Kirkland, WA 98083

Fall 2014

SKI AREAS STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE IN OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

Alpine skiers living on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula have had their own ski area since 1936, but it has not been easy. Deer Park was the first location on the north side of the peninsula. It ran through 1957, when ski operations were transferred to Hurricane Ridge, which continues to operate under stringent conditions imposed by the National Park Service.

While, in past decades, downhill ski areas were allowed in eight of the 58 U.S. National Parks, today only Yosemite and Olympic National Parks still tolerate such facilities.

The Olympic Mountains rise steeply from the coastal towns of Port Angeles, Sequim, and Port Townsend, and the developed skiing terrain there always has been wholly on lands of either the National Park or the Olympic National Forest. Additionally, they always have been the only developments at the end of long winding roads requiring the local ski community to regularly plea for public funds to ensure consistent snow removal.

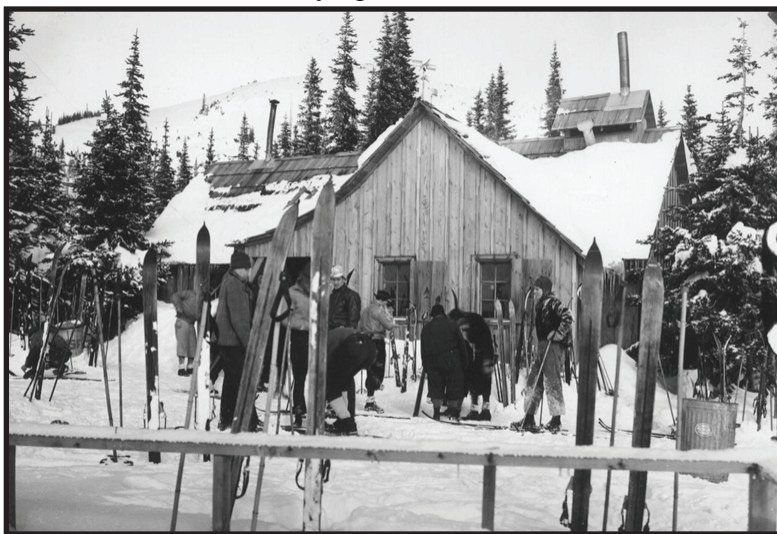
Like other areas in Washington, the early development and improvement of ski facilities at the skiing grounds have been the result of persistent promotion by local civic clubs. In the Olympic Mountains, much of the interest emanated from Port Angeles, although the Bremerton Ski Cruisers were active with their own ski outings in the Olympics, as described by Ancient Skier Paul Crews in his book, "Early Hiking in the Olympics."

Skiing begins at Deer Park

The first developed ski area, Deer Park, was about 25 miles from Port Angeles and on lands that were part of the Olympic National Forest. In 1934, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built a one-lane road to the top of Blue Mountain, the main ski hill at Deer Park. The first skiing facilities there were established through the

efforts of the Port Angeles Salmon Club. In summer 1936, this group converted a shepherd's cabin into a rustic day lodge for skier use.

The next year, the CCC built a ski lodge at Deer Park capable of handling 40 to 50 persons a night. By then, local skiers from Port Angeles, Port Townsend, and Sequim banded together to form the Olympic



The Deer Park lodge filled the need for day and (sleeping bag) overnight use.

Winter Sports Club, and, in 1938, their club became a member of the Pacific Northwest Ski Association (PNSA). In summer and fall 1938, the ski club installed a 1,000-foot rope tow up the slopes of Blue Mountain and developed a Class B ski jump.

When President Roosevelt signed a proclamation on Jan. 2, 1940, expanding the boundaries of Olympic National Park into the surrounding National Forest, the Deer Park ski area became part of Olympic National Park, and that change slowly led to tighter operating rules.

The Deer Park ski lodge served as a simple but

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ANCIENT SKIERS BIENNIAL BANQUET

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2014

**See story on page 4 for Banquet
details and registration.**

rustic base for skiers with a dormitory and kitchen. The old shepherd's cabin was used as a first aid station, and separate small buildings were set up to serve as a small ski shop, toilets, and woodshed. The ski area was at sufficient elevation to get regular snowfall, but the location was also partially in the Sequim rain shadow, often limiting the development of a good snowpack.

The ski season of 1937-38 saw lots of activity at the small ski area, with groups of Boy Scouts from Seattle learning to ski there and the Mountaineers Club making regular annual visits.

PNSA races hosted

In March, the Olympic Winter Sports Club held its first PNSA-sanctioned combined slalom and downhill races. Bruce Steere, father of Ancient Skiers brothers

Tex and Monte Steere, led a six-man team of Mountaineers to compete. The team included Sig Hall who, later, was killed in a crash in the fog while competing in the 1940 Silver Skis race on Mt. Rainier. Kjell Qvale of the Seattle Ski Club won the combined, with Vince Broze, brother of 1942 Silver Skis winner Matt Broze, winning the downhill. In the second annual Deer Park slalom and downhill races in March 1939, Don Fraser

took honors. In the third annual ski event in 1940, Sig Hall won the combined title, just one month prior to his tragic run on Mt. Rainier.

There were great expectations going into the next ski season of 1940-41. The Olympic Winter Sports Club secured the Pacific Northwest Alpine Championships from the PNSA, to be staged in March, and hired accomplished instructors Joy and Jim Lucas to manage the lodge and run the ski school. As Joy describes in her book, "It Started in the Mountains," it was a bit of a pioneering experience as they had to deal with an old, clogged cook stove, freezing water pipes, and frequent power outages.

At the end of the ski season, Joy and Jim calculated they made \$90 after paying a cook and a dishwasher to help them run the lodge. Unfortunately for Joy and Jim and the local ski club the winter was cold and light on

snow, so much so that the championships were postponed and rescheduled for May at Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood.

The war kicks off changes

During World War II, the little ski area had to close because of gas rationing, but the military continued to use the fire lookout on top of Blue Mountain to spot potential enemy aircraft that might come through the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Similar to the situation at Mt. Rainier right after the war, the local skiing community on the Olympic Peninsula lobbied the Park Service with PNSA help to keep the road open for the 1945-46 season, but to no avail. At that time, the Park Service also came out with new policies banning most competitive skiing events, thus providing a blow to the promotion and use of the ski area.

However, while the big ski tournaments became a thing of the past, the ski club was able to convince the Park Service to get the ski area back in operation for the 1946-47 season and another rope tow was installed. The small rustic lodge again provided limited overnight accommodations, and up to 1,000 people were skiing on good weekends. Even so, by the

late 1940s, the Park Service was in search of a better location to develop new summer and winter tourist facilities, favoring Hurricane Ridge, located even closer to Port Angeles and about ten air miles directly west of Deer Park.

Hurricane Ridge is the new answer

The original plans for Hurricane Ridge contemplated developing a Swiss-chalet-type lodge with overnight accommodations. Eventually, the Park Service settled on a more modern lodge building suitable for both winter and summer use. The Park Service's famed architect, Cecil J. Doty, drew up plans for the day lodge and, later, he used this same basic design to build the ski lodge at Rocky Mountain National Park's Hidden Valley Ski Area in Colorado.

Construction started on the Hurricane Ridge lodge



Scarce snowpack was sometimes a problem at Deer Park.

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in 1952 and was completed in 1954, but the new paved road to Hurricane Ridge was not completed until summer 1957. At that time, the ski operations at Deer Park were directed to close, and new ski facilities with overnight lodging were to be allowed at Hurricane Ridge. Later, however, the park superintendent determined no overnight accommodations were needed.

New ski facilities opening at Hurricane Ridge in early 1958 included two rope tows, which had to be removed each summer; and the old equipment and buildings at Deer Park were removed by the Park Service in the summers of 1961 and 1962.

Hart Lake Basin ski site proposed

While Hurricane Ridge was just getting started as the new place to ski, a group from Seattle and Port Angeles proposed a much larger ski area development to be located west of that north Olympic Peninsula city. The site at Hart Lake Basin would have been accessed by extending an existing primitive road past Sol Duc Hot Springs.

The proposal included a long aerial tramway and three T-bars designed to offer more intermediate and expert terrain than Hurricane Ridge. However, the National Park Service never gave any favor to this proposal, in spite of elaborate proposal presentations and a flurry of interest.

Hurricane Ridge became the new weekend ski hill for local skiers and has not greatly changed significantly since its opening in 1958. In 1968, a Poma lift was added, replacing two of the four rope tows. Thirty-four years later, in 2002, the Hurricane Ridge ski operator proposed installing a chairlift. But the Park Service held that ski facilities should not be changed and even considered phasing out the ski operation altogether in 2006.

Skiing hangs on

Today, it is remarkable this little ski area is still in operation. The winter plowing of the road is often difficult and expensive, and Olympic National Park is barely tolerant of ski lifts, as most of the Park lands now are designated Wilderness, and the Park itself has

been designed as a World Biosphere Reserve. But, as famed filmmaker and Orcas Island resident Warren Miller has noted, this little feeder ski area still serving over 3,000 ski visits a year provides great joy for all ages of winter sports enthusiasts and it is so important for the skiing citizens of the Olympic Peninsula.

~ Kirby Gilbert

ERIC LAMERS' SCARY SKI EXPERIENCE

It was mid-winter in 1990 and skiing and boarding were good. But snow always seems better far away, so three of us Seattle City Lighters drove to Revelstoke, Canada. This area was still a small development. Most of the area was served by a snowcat, which was driven by Clyde, who was both guide and driver. He used snow roads that he had created. We had already signed up for five days of skiing with him.

On the first morning, it was cold with lots of new fluffy powder. Clyde's mandatory talk covering what to do if caught in an avalanche seemed to take forever because we wanted to ski. But, these Avalanche Safety talks have probably saved many lives over the years.

There are generally no avalanches in forests but the trees can also be a hazard. For safety we skied in pairs. My partner was about 30 yards to the left of me and somewhat ahead. He could not see me. Suddenly the snow under me gave way. I disappeared below the snow level, upside down into a dark tree well.

In my panic I needed air and was forced to take a deep breath which sucked my lungs full of powdery snow. The pain of the snow in the lungs was the most miserable pain I ever had. I could not do this again. I just knew that I would die if I could not breathe. Then I remembered Clyde's safety talk to move your hands in, cup your hands, and cover your nose and mouth to keep the snow out. I did just that and I could breathe. The pain in my lungs was still there, but I also knew that I would be okay now that I could breathe. I used the branches of the tree to right myself and prepared myself to start skiing again.

When I arrived at the snowcat and explained what had happened to me, Clyde told us that the Heli-Skiers across the valley from us had lost two guides in tree wells in the past two weeks. It is known that tree wells kill almost as many skiers as avalanches do.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR SCARY SKI MOMENT?

Many of us, like Eric, have a scary ski story and we want to keep sharing those. If you have had such a moment, please submit it by email to: tinarieman@tumwater.net and look for it in a future newsletter.



Tying skis on top of car for the drive down the winding road from Deer Park.

REMEMBERING

Walter Page 1917 – 2014

Walter was born in Seattle and started skiing while attending Roosevelt High School. He was on the University of Washington ski team while studying to be an industrial engineer. He competed in 1937 with the team in the national collegiate championships against Dartmouth in Sun Valley. Their coach was Otto Lang. He also competed in the Silver Skis races, Camp Muir, 10,000 ft., to Paradise, 5,500 ft., in the late '30s.

Walt was always a man of action. Still an undergraduate in September 1938, he eloped with Genevieve (Gevie) Schroeder, his lifelong mate who survives him. He worked as a management engineer for a number of industrial firms in Salt Lake City and Seattle, the last of which was Gradline. The firm manufactured precision highway asphalt paving machines and his duties there required him to travel internationally to where the machines were being used, including such places as Europe and Japan.

Upon retirement, Walt assisted Gevie in her business, General Travel, with one trip in 1976 to the Innsbruck Winter Olympics.

He received the YMCA "Appreciation Award for Outstanding Service to Youth" in 1976 in Seattle.

Walt's lifelong dream was finally reached when he and Gevie moved to Sun Valley in 1989. He became active with the Ancient Skiers Sun Valley Reunion committee, serving as chairman several years. He also served on the board of the Ketchum/Sun Valley Heritage and Ski Museum.

In 2005, their final move was to the Rogue Valley Manor in Medford, Ore.

He is survived by his wife, Gevie; daughter, Leslie Moch; grandchildren Christopher, Alexandra and Sarah; and three great-grandchildren.

ANCIENT SKIERS BIENNIAL BANQUET - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2012 - 5 P.M.

Our banquet will be held at the Shrine Nile Temple Golf and Country Club in Mountlake Terrace just north of Seattle. We'll gather at 5 p.m. and socialize until 6 p.m. (Beer and wine, \$4; well cocktails, \$5; bottle of wine, \$18+. These prices should make for a happy time!). Dinner (salad, entree, dessert, and coffee or tea) will follow, and the program will be over in time for more socializing to talk with old friends and meet newer members of our Association. A great time to recall the tales of yore.

The main program activity will be the Hall of Fame awards for the new inductees: Susie Corrock Luby, Jim Martinson, Joe and Doris Harlacher, and Wini Jones. Their biographies were in our Summer 2014 Newsletter.

This will be a sit-down dinner with entree choices shown on the registration form included with this Newsletter. Please return the registration form for the banquet to Ancient Skiers, P.O. Box 331, Kirkland, WA 98083, not later than Sept. 30, 2014. This gives the Banquet Committee time to process registrations and dinner details.

Or register online! We now have a website and in lieu of sending the registration form by mail, you can register for the banquet and pay by credit card through PayPal. Go to our website at www.ancientskiers.com and click on Upcoming Events. Follow directions from there.

How to get there: The Nile Golf & Country Club is at 6601 244th St. SW in Mountlake Terrace, Wash. If traveling on the freeway, take Exit 177. Drive west a very short distance toward Edmonds on SR 104 (also called NE 205th Street). Stay in the right lane and take the first right driveway/entrance, where there is a Nile sign, shortly after exiting the freeway. Drive a narrow curving road up through the golf course to the large parking area next to the clubhouse. (Don't bother to look for 244th St., as that will only confuse things for you.)

SEE YOU IN SUN VALLEY IN JANUARY 2015

Don't forget, our 32nd annual Sun Valley Reunion will be Jan. 15-24, 2015. The Sun Valley room reservation form was sent with the Spring Newsletter, and we have only a limited number of rooms, so don't forget to make your reservation if you plan to stay in Sun Valley Company accommodations.

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