



The Ancient Skier

P. O. Box 331 Kirkland, WA 98083

Summer 2013

SEATTLE'S MUNICIPAL SKI PARK 1934 - 1940

By John W. Lundin & Steve Lundin

Editor's note: John and Steve Lundin are lawyers who have done extensive research and writing about their family's history. Their mother, Margaret Odell, was part of Seattle's early ski scene in the late 1930s. John is a life-long skier who learned to ski at Snoqualmie Pass and has homes in Seattle and Sun Valley. Steve lives on Puget Sound outside of Olympia. Both are former members of the Sahalie Ski Club on Snoqualmie Pass. Thanks is given to the Lundins for permission to have this copyrighted history appear in the Ancient Skier Newsletter beginning with this issue. It will be printed as space permits. It is felt that many of our newer members who have skied any or all of the four Snoqualmie areas will be interested in how the modest beginnings at the Pass morphed into what is there now.

In the early 1930s, the sport of skiing was growing in popularity in the Seattle area, led by residents of Scandinavian descent. Only a relatively few hardy outdoor enthusiasts participated, going mainly to Paradise Valley on Mt. Rainier and Snoqualmie Pass, to hike up the hills before skiing down. In 1931, the Snoqualmie Pass highway was kept open all winter for the first time, providing greater accessibility for the region's skiers.

In the winter of 1934, Seattle made national news when its Park Board opened one of the first municipal ski areas in the country at the old Milwaukee Railroad stop of Laconia at Snoqualmie Summit and an indoor ski arena in downtown Seattle where residents could take free ski lessons to learn the new sport. The Seattle Park Board, under the leadership of Ben Evans, Director of Playfields, opened and managed the ski area through the ski season of 1940. Seattle's efforts were led by Mayor John F. Dore, a skier himself, who envisioned the project as one that could lift his city's spirits during the midst of the Great Depression. The story of Seattle's ski area operated by its Park Board is virtually unknown these days.

City takes on daring depression adventure

Opening the ski park was especially daring since this was the middle of the depression when funds for any activity were scarce, and the city was slashing its budgets. Yet, Seattle opened a new recreation area 60 miles from its city limits, accessible in the winter over a two-lane icy, snow-covered road.

The Seattle Times called the ski park "an unprecedented enterprise. ... It marks the first known time in America a city has ventured into the recreational skiing field in such a first-class manner." A Park Board report written in spring of 1934 explained the reason for the project: "Before the development of the municipal ski course, various clubs and outdoor groups maintained camps and cabins there [Snoqualmie Pass] but there were no facilities for the general public, and

only a small number of persons could be accommodated." The Municipal Ski Park was opened to address that problem.

On December 20, 1933, the U.S. Forest Service issued a Special Use Permit to the City of Seattle Park Department covering "28.4 acres more or less of land" near the Snoqualmie Pass Highway for a "Public Playground ... the permittee (sic) shall pay NO CHARGE."

It was valid for five years (until December 1939), although it could be extended. The Civil Works Administration donated labor to clear the land, and a crew of 40 to 50 Civilian Conservation Corps workers (loggers and a few carpenters) from North Bend spent five weeks clearing a 10-acre tract of land. They cut trees above a meadow for skiing and erected a warming shed the size of a double garage for a shelter.

Opening gala draws 1,000 skiers

Gala opening ceremonies were held on January 21, 1934, witnessed by 1,000 spectators, "most of them on skis," in

spite of the steady rain that fell. The Seattle Times announced Snoqualmie Ski Park at Summit Becomes a Unit in Seattle's Rapidly Expanding Ski Plan. "This park is yours," said Mayor Dore, addressing part of the crowd of 1,000 which witnessed the program. The rest were skiing, they liked the hill as well. "We hope to expand it, to take in more territory, make more of a clearing. We want to give you a ski instructor so that your children may learn to ski. There are other plans which need developing, and which we shall lend our assistance to."

Marguerite Strizek of the Seattle Ski Club was chosen Ski Queen after a skiing competition was held between girl skiers from the seven Snoqualmie

Pass clubs. "It was decided by the judges Miss Strizek had chosen a



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more difficult course to run." Junior jumpers gave an exhibition on a miniature hill, and 20 skiers raced down a "quickly devised slalom course, and the dedication broke up in a general rush of skiers to the hill," according to the Seattle Times.

Editor's note: Three months later, in April 1934, Marguerite Strizek was the winner of the women's downhill in the first running of the fabled P-I Silver Skis races on Mt. Rainier.

In February 1934, the Seattle Park Board opened an indoor school for skiers offering free courses in the old Westlake Skating Rink at 2229 Ninth Ave. in Seattle. Six classes were offered each day, with courses lasting Monday through Friday, and the final day on Sunday took place on the "snowy slopes of the municipal park."

The school included lectures on equipment, the use of it, and first aid, along with practice and training in ski walking, sliding, and various turns, the Times reported. Seattle's unusual indoor ski arena attracted attention throughout the country, with the Sarasota [Florida] Herald-Tribune of March 2, 1934, announcing "Seattle Skiers Learn to Ski on a Soapy Skidway," and the Christian Science Monitor saying, "Seattle Ski School Trains for Events on Municipal Field."

Winter Sports Week promotes new sport

The first week of February 1934 was Winter Sports Week in Seattle, designed to promote the new sport of skiing, which ended with the Seattle Ski Club's tournament at the Summit. A luncheon was held by the Seattle Chamber of Commerce honoring Portland ski officials, attended by the mayors of Portland and Seattle and three ski queens, including Queen Marguerite Strizek. This was Seattle's first Winter Sports Week, but Portland had hosted three successful ones, and the Seattle Chamber wanted to learn from that city's experience.

The Seattle Ski Club's Fourth Annual Jumping Championship was held at Snoqualmie Summit the first weekend of February 1934. In addition to jumping, for the first time there was competition in cross-country and the first slalom race sanctioned by the Pacific Northwest Ski Association. Motorists stopped by traffic in the pass were instructed to "park their machines, purchase tickets from the ticket sellers who follow traffic down the highway, and get free transportation to the Summit in the buses the ski club has retained for the tournament."

Tom Mobraaten of Vancouver, B.C., won the ten-mile cross-country race and the combined racing and jumping championship. Hamish Davidson of Vancouver, B.C., won the slalom race featuring 38 competitors, which was reported as "a test of racing skill which proved to be unexpectedly strenuous and spectacular." Attendance was huge, and there were 5,000 cars parked on

the highway left by spectators of the event.

Seattle's Ski Park turned out to be such a success that on March 19, 1934, Seattle's Park Superintendent wrote the Director of the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., seeking permission to expand ski facilities on Mount Rainier. In May 1934, the Seattle Park Department enlisted the help of local skiers to improve the Ski Park. "Skiers Wanted at Park Today," said Ben Evans, inviting all willing to lend a hand to help clear fallen timber on the

"ten acre tract hastily cleared at the Summit to permit skiing" last winter. Attendees were to bring their own ax and lunch. Evans hoped to get more land cleared and more trails cut for the next season.

A Park Department report prepared at the end of 1934 described the first year's operations at the Municipal Ski Park: "Each winter, skiing becomes more popular, and people of all ages seem to derive extreme pleasure from this unusual and health-giving pastime. We feel that the operation of the ski site at Snoqualmie

Pass was a very timely thought, and the people of Seattle and the territory from which this ski site may be reached owe a vote of thanks to the government for the permission granted to the Park Department to use the ground for this purpose, as well as to the Board of Park Commissioners for their interest in the matter.

"The site consists of a 45-acre tract [thirty acre is crossed out] turned over to the City of Seattle by the U.S. Forestry Service on a five-year lease grant for recreational purposes. C.W.A. labor constructed a building for the use of the people who frequent the ski course, and Park Department employees, with the assistance of other interested citizens of Seattle, donated spare time in clearing the ground for use preparatory to the work which was done by the C.W.A. workers."

Ben Evans continues active role

Ben Evans and others from the Park Board continued to play an active role in the Ski Park after it opened. The Seattle Times said the ski hill at Snoqualmie Pass had few more enthusiastic patrons than Ben Evans, who was in charge of the ski hill, noting that he took up the sport several years ago when most of the current skiers were content to read about the sport ... and now he goes to the ski hill nearly every Sunday. "Ben's lieutenant-in-charge is Tom Sedgwick, who teaches swimming at Seattle beaches during the summer.

Tom is 'traffic cop' at the ski course. He patrols the hill and megaphones warnings when thoughtless or slow-footed skiers 'park' in prohibited areas, such as in the middle of a ski track. The 'ski cop' makes no arrests for speeding, however. A skier can go as fast as his skill permits."

The premier issue of Ski Magazine of January 1936 discussed



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a plan to improve the Municipal Ski Park by cutting more trees and smoothing out terrain so several thousand skiers could enjoy themselves. The time had come that people must choose "whether a huge ski development shall take place and Seattle and neighboring communities reap the fullest reward both commercially and recreationally."

It went on: "We have to choose: does conservation mean to keep our ski hills in comparative idleness - unused through the ages - or to yield to the demand of your America that they be given an adequate winter playground? The high school boys and girls are the skiers of today and tomorrow. They cannot afford trips to distant places and to expensive hotels, but they must have physical activity to develop fully and to satisfy their love of adventure. The exhilaration of swift running skis, the purity of mountain air, the achievement of skill and the approbation of their companions, the feats of daring on skis ... all these give to young America an outlet of exuberant spirits. It is a youth movement worth while (sic). It teaches them teamwork, self control, good sportsmanship, ability to overcome obstacles, to endure and enjoy a mountain storm and to really know the outdoors in all its varying beauties and vicissitudes. Let us then work ceaselessly for the further development of skiing in Snoqualmie Pass."

The Ski Park Report for 1936 said the area operated from January 27 to April 20, 1936, opening from Friday to Sunday. The total attendance was 16,480 skiers and spectators, with 400 - 500 people on the hill on several Sundays. The hill was divided by ropes to allow more people to use the hill at once with less danger. There was a regular uphill route separated from the area on the left for those coming down. Lights permitted skiers to enjoy night skiing.

Ski races were not encouraged due to the lack of space, but the annual High School Meet was held at the Ski Park. Special buses brought skiers to the Ski Park, including the U.W. Girls, Sails and Trails, and high school students from Garfield, West Seattle, North Bend and Renton. Regular bus service was provided by the University Book Store. The report noted "With skiing's popularity growing every year, it seems advisable that the skiing area be enlarged for safety and really enjoyable skiing by the many who use the ski hill during the winter."

Huge snowfall offers long season

The Ski Park Report for 1937 said the area opened on Sunday, December 20, 1936, and closed Sunday, May 2, 1937. Snow conditions were good nearly every weekend, with 124 inches being the largest snow pack. The average depth was 85 to 90 inches. Excellent spring skiing lasted right to the end of the season. Total attendance was 19,865, with 2,800 the largest single day. Special buses came to the hill carrying high school students from Garfield, Roosevelt, West Seattle, Ballard, North Bend, and Franklin. The Sails and Trails Club and West Seattle YMCA sent groups to the area. Local sporting goods stores sent at least one bus load of skiers every Sunday in January and February.

A 1,000-watt floodlight on the hill in 1937 made night skiing possible and more popular than daytime skiing. A Seattle

High School ski meet was held at the ski park, which was won by Garfield. "It must be said that from the crowded condition of the hill and the falls some of the skiers took it is really a miracle that there were no broken arms, legs or bodies," the report said.



Improvements needed included a larger cleared area to accommodate the hundreds of skiers who overcrowd the hill each week; making the hill a little less bumpy; and running water so skiers could quench their thirst when they desired.

Seattle attempted to improve its Ski Park for several years, although it lacked sufficient funds to bring the facility up to the condition that the Forest Service and the public desired. In a letter dated July 16, 1937, the Forest Service criticized the lack of development of the Ski Park, saying Seattle had done little toward carrying out the original plan for development which was to be put into effect as rapidly as possible. The warming house and the latrines were makeshift structures approved by Forest Service representatives only until such time as it was demonstrated that the public use of the area required permanent structures. The buildings and the ski runs were inadequate, and increasing public use

would make it imperative that additional and better facilities be installed, not only for skiing, but also for the comfort of the skiers. It was reported that "Sanitary facilities always have been inadequate."

Funding limited for further development

The Forest Service recognized that limitations of funds and the difficulty of using relief labor made it hard for the City to carry out all of the original plans, but the project was started by the City, the public made use of the area and will continue using it, so both the Park Department and the Forest Service will be subject to just criticism if no further action is taken to meet the public's needs. "I wish to assure you of my interest in your winter sports program and to express my desire to be of assistance to you in this worthwhile undertaking," the federal agency noted.

Look for the conclusion of the Ski Park story in the Ancient Skier Fall Newsletter.

Photo information and credits:

Page 1: The municipal hill likely taken between 1935 - 1937. It is interesting because it shows how narrow and small the ski area was. The signs in the photo direct traffic - uphill stay left, downhill use the rest of the hill. This was done to avoid accidents. Photo courtesy Moffett Family archives.

Ben Evans, Director of Playgrounds for the Seattle Park Board in 1935, attempts a classic Arlberg turn. Photo courtesy of Seattle Municipal Photo archives, photo #31194PS.

Page 2: Four skiers with Guye Peak in left background. Photo Courtesy of Seattle Municipal Photo archives, photo #31166.

Skiers and warming hut. Photo courtesy of Seattle Municipal Photo archives, photo #30383PS.

Page 3: Ben Evans and then city clerk Al Erickson. Photo Courtesy of Seattle Municipal Photo archives, photo #199531387.

31st ANNUAL SUN VALLEY REUNION - January 18 - 25, 2014

Arrangements have been made for our next reunion. The reservation form for booking rooms in the Sun Valley Lodge and Inn was included with the Spring Newsletter. To book a room, call the Sun Valley Reservations Office, 1-800-786-8259. Tell them you are an Ancient Skier so the reunion gets a commission for your booking, which helps hold down our costs. Again, there is no distinction between prices for under age 60 or over 60.

Lift prices for a 5-out-of-6-day ticket are \$230 for all lifts on Baldy and Dollar and \$100 for Dollar only.

The form for the reunion events will be sent with the Winter 2013 Newsletter. The deadline for registration is Nov. 27, 2013. The program planned will be similar to the last reunion but with a few new features: snowshoeing; a drawing for a ride on the "Beast," Sun Valley's largest groomer; and a members' art and craft work display. Look forward to another fun week! Questions? Call Chairman Bill Price, 425-392-3927.

REMEMBERING

BETSY WITHINGTON, ASE 1917 - 2013

Betsy was born in Boston, Mass., graduated from Boston University, taught high school physics, started skiing in 1940, and met and married "Bob" Withington, an MIT aeronautical engineering graduate who took her on a honeymoon drive to Seattle for his new job at Boeing.

She and her husband and four children were actively involved in the winters in the mountains and in summers on the waters of Puget Sound and British Columbia on their sailboat, cruising and racing.

With her children participating in the Crystal Mountain Athletic Club ski racing program, Betsy officiated in many capacities from chairing races to timing to rule setting. From 1978 to 1990, she contributed to the United States Ski Association and the Pacific Northwest Ski Association, wearing many different hats relating to ski racing, and she became the first woman president of PNSA. She received many awards for her service to these organizations. She also worked on World Cup races and the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid.

With her husband, Betsy heli-skied in British Columbia and took many European ski trips. They also were faithful attendees at the Ancient Skier Reunions in Sun Valley.

Betsy was on the Board of the Ancient Skiers Association during the transition from the solo operation of Irv Pratt to management by a board, and she was a stabilizing influence during that difficult period.

Betsy was inducted into the Northwest Ski Hall of Fame in 1994 for her many contributions to the sport of skiing. She is survived by her children, Vincent, Victoria, Martin and Holden and their spouses and five grandchildren.

The following poem was written by Betsy Withington in 1978

*Why do we come to this wintry place,
With its incredible beauty and strenuous pace?*

*Endure fingers frosted and muscles in pain,
Learn to love strangers we'll see never again?*

*We've skied around treetops, felt frost on our cheeks,
Viewed many horizons of towering peaks.*

*A bit of pressure on the snow lifted our skis' flight,
Across sparkling expanses, through forests of delight.*

*We've known extremes of sight, touch and sound,
Felt the cruelty of avalanches and rocks under soft mounds.*

*The challenges of skiing, lure and remain,
We've thrilled, we've stretched, we've endured, we've gained.*



TRUDY STACK, ASE 1916 - 2013

Trudy was born in Snohomish, Wash., moved to Seattle, and graduated from Garfield High School and from the University of Washington in music education.

She taught briefly in southern Washington and then went to Hawaii in 1941. Skiing at Mt. Baker, she met Harold Stack, and they were married in 1943.

Trudy skied primarily in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and their family, Sally, Nancy, Robert and Katie. In addition to her four children, she is survived by six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

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