



# The Ancient Skier

Summer 2018

## ANCIENT SKIERS BIENNIAL BANQUET SET FOR SUNDAY, OCT. 14, 2018

Please come! Our Oct. 14 banquet will be held at the Nile Shrine 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, wine, and cocktails all at reduced prices). Dinner will follow, and the program will be over in time for more socializing.

Atop the agenda will be awards for new Hall of Fame inductees Joe Jones, LeRoy Kingland, Laurie Penketh Kaufmann Miller, and Lou Whittaker – all with biographies in our Spring 2018 newsletter.

This will be a sit-down dinner (salad, entree, dessert, and coffee or tea) 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, no later than Oct. 6, 2018.

A registration form also can be found at: [www.ancientskiers.com](http://www.ancientskiers.com). Look under "Recent Posts" and follow the stated directions. How to get there: The Nile Shrine Golf & Country Club is at 6601 244th St. SW in Mountlake Terrace, Wash. If traveling from either south or north on the freeway, take Exit 177. Drive west a 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. Drive the 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.)

## STEVENS PASS BECOMES PART OF THE VAIL SKI RESORT EMPIRE

Many Pacific Northwest skiers were surprised in June to learn of Vail Resorts' plans to purchase the Stevens Pass Ski Area. Stevens always has been one of our most dependable ski sites, with lots of snow and basic resort-type amenities.

It's not that there weren't recent ownership changes, as we had seen several in the past seven years. Two years ago, Ski Resort Holdings, LLC, an affiliate of Oz Real Estate, purchased the resort from CNL Lifestyle Properties, which ran it the five previous years after purchasing it in November 2011 for a reported \$20.5 million from the Bullitt family's Seattle-based Harbor Resorts, ending 35 years of ownership for them to concentrate on its urban development projects.

Vail's purchase, which just closed in mid-August 2018, was recorded as a \$23.7 million transaction by King County. However, Vail Resorts indicated the purchase was for \$64 million, which reflected "adjustments for certain agreed-upon terms."

While it's hard to track and understand the conglomerates and values being reported, many of us will continue to think of Stevens Pass just the way it always has been – a ski area built by skiers who continue to love it for its consistently deep snowpack, busy day lodges, great night skiing, and past home to some local legendary ski heroes, including Jack Nagel, Dave Faires, Jannette Burr, and Dorothy Surgenor. And that's not to mention serving as home base for numerous ski schools and longtime local ski clubs, including the Penguins and Bremerton Ski Cruisers.

Now, with Vail Resorts in the driver's seat, maybe local skiers

will get outpriced, maybe see more big resort-type amenities, and, likely, get some upgrades. But it's hard not to reminisce about this crown jewel day-use area Northwest skiers have flocked to for 81 years.

### Skiers build Stevens

Stevens Pass ski area ownership began with avid Mt. Rainier skiers Bruce Kehr and Don Adams and Wenatchee sporting goods retailer Del McCracken forming a loose partnership in the summer of 1937 to obtain a permit from the Forest Service, with McCracken bowing out two years later.

Bruce and Don strung up a rope tow on lower Big Chief Mountain using a Ford V-8 engine for its drive. With lots of back-breaking efforts, the two spent many days clearing



Base Area, Spring 1948

photo by Dr. Birkeland

the wooded slopes known more for berry picking than skiing.

The ski area attracted only small numbers of skiers in those first years, inasmuch as the highway was closed on the west side in winter at Scenic. Perseverant Puget Sound skiers drove to Scenic to catch the morning Great Northern passenger train through the eight-mile-long Cascade Tunnel to Berne on the east side, from which they made their way up to the ski area by hitchhiking or by riding in a motor coach. They completed their day by skiing west -- back down to Scenic on the unplowed roadway to reach their cars.

According to Kehr's written accounts, ticket sales netted out at \$88 that first season of 1937-38. Also that same year, they built

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### EARLY HISTORY REVEALED AS STEVENS PASS BECOMES PART OF THE VAIL SKI RESORT EMPIRE

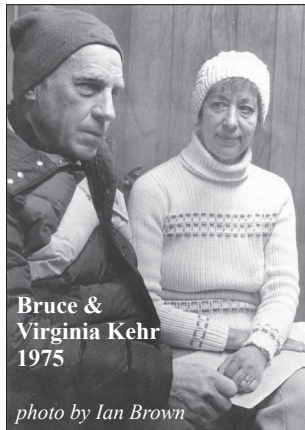
and operated a rope tow at the American River Ski Bowl east of Chinook Pass, with Bruce running operations there and with Don in charge at the Stevens' tow.

#### A lodge goes up – then another

Skiers on the east side of the Cascades were instrumental in helping start the fledgling ski area. With the aid of Nordic-tradition skiers Walter Anderson, Magnus Bakke, and Earl Little of Leavenworth, the U.S. Forest Service, using Civilian Conservation Corps labor out of Leavenworth, built the first government ski lodge in the Stevens base area during summer 1938. Sadly, that original lodge, including a dormitory and hand-crafted Alaska cedar furniture, was used only one full ski season. In early January 1940, the lodge burnt to the ground, said to be the result of a smoldering cigarette left after a busy Sunday.

It didn't take long with the help of the active ski clubs to erect a new lodge at the same location. What first was called the Government Lodge and later became known as the "T-bar Lodge," also included dormitory-style sleeping accommodations for up to 82 people.

With the growing interest in skiing, the little ski area flourished, and, by 1940, a "Sno-rotor" plow was used to keep the highway open from the west side to the summit. Skier visits doubled to 1000 persons per weekend day.



Bruce & Virginia Kehr 1975

photo by Ian Brown

The Wenatchee Ski Club hosted ski carnivals that drew more skiers. In this period, Bruce and Don got married, with new wives Virginia Kehr and Blanche Adams jumping in to run and improve the lodge, ticket sales, and food service operations.

#### WWII interrupts growth

Don and Bruce had plans for installing more tows, and they did manage to get Tow No. 2 installed on Big Chief, while also extending No. 1 Tow from 600 to 800 feet before the United States fully entered the war. However, in 1942, both men began military service, leaving their wives to run the operations.

With ski facilities at the Milwaukee Ski Bowl, Mt. Baker, and Mt. Rainier closed for the war, the Washington Department of Highways was able to bring snow removal equipment down from Mt. Baker, with a mandate to keep the Stevens Pass highway open so it could serve as a potential, alternative escape route for Puget Sound residents in case of an air raid. Bruce's friend Bud McGee, who had hurt his leg skiing and was ineligible for the draft, took over tow operations. The Army and Navy ran recreation busses to the area on weekends, which helped ensure a steady ration of 800 gallons of fuel per year was available to run the tows. During the war, top American skier Dick Durrance skied Stevens on breaks from war-effort photography work at Boeing



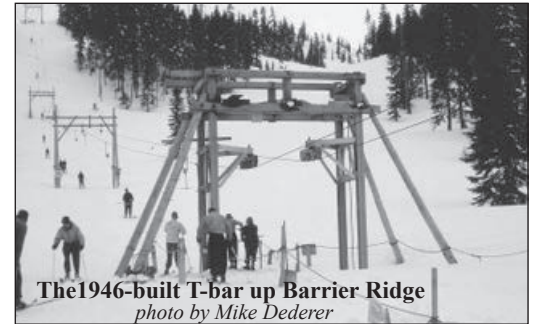
1938-39

and taught local skiers his dipsy-doodle style of skiing through heavy snow.

#### A post-war skiing jewel takes form

After the war, Stevens Pass attendance really boomed, partly because the National Park Service could not keep Paradise

regularly open in view of difficulties with concessionaire accommodations and obtaining funds for road plowing. At Stevens, Don Adams, with Hans Grage's help, erected two more tows - No. 3 and a beginner rope opening new terrain.



The 1946-built T-bar up Barrier Ridge photo by Mike Dederer

In the summer of 1946, work started on the 5,000-foot-long Constam T-bar up Barrier Ridge on Cowboy Mountain, and more rope tows were installed. Don brought in Seattle attorney John Caley to help with financial backing, and Seattle's Osborn & Ulland converted the lodge's wood shed into a ski shop and began regular weekend operations.

By the 1947-48 season, skiers flocked to Stevens. The T-



A big day on Big Chief 1940

photo by B. Ellis

bar was operating and the road was consistently plowed; the Penguin's clubhouse was completed and the club moved the annual running of its increasingly renowned giant slalom

races from the Milwaukee Ski Bowl to Stevens; and both collegiate and PNSA alpine ski championships were held there in the late '40s.

Bob Brambach, Ancient Skier Meg Barto's brother, who had served in the 10th Mountain Division and had skied for the University of Washington, returned in 1947 from Chile, where he trained under the direction of French champion Emile Allais. Bob taught the new French technique for parallel turns with use of long thongs for ankle support and controlled side-slipping as well as ruade-style turns. The French influence he brought made a lasting impression on Stevens Pass skiers.

#### UW ski operations move close to Stevens

In 1949, University of Washington ski coach Buster Campbell got permission from the U.S. Forest Service to clear 160 acres three and a half miles east of the pass. Two years later, the "University Ski Area" opened, with three rope tows relocated from Martin on Stampede Pass, plus a student-run ski shop and a lodge for sleeping. Campbell's successor as coach, Gene Gillis, with John Woodward's help, ran the small area in its beginning years. The previous UW Martin facility was discontinued, as was this new area a few years later.

#### The '50s were boom years

The 1950s brought significant growth and some notoriety to Stevens. Emile Allais came to Stevens Pass in February 1951

## EARLY HISTORY REVEALED

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to serve as course setter for the PNSA downhill and slalom championships. By 1953, Bruce and Don were operating 10 ropes tows and the T-bar, with annual attendance topping 75,000 skiers. That summer, another big step was taken with the installation of the first chairlift, a Riblet double replacing the T-bar, but using the T-bar's H-frame wood tower structures to keep costs down.

Sportscaster ski-wear founder and owner Marvin Burke built another ski lodge at the pass in 1952, the two-story Summit Inn Resort, located across the highway. Rope tow installations continued, with up to 20 operating on weekends. In 1955, night skiing was introduced on the No. 1 Tow hill. Adding to the improvements was the Blue Chair for intermediate-level skiers, built in 1956.

By the end of the decade, the lure of a growing number of chairlifts in the West and the Rockies was palpable, but Stevens' rope tows No. 1, 2, 3 and 4 still were top draws for the region's hardy skiers.

### Kehr leads the growth

In 1960, Don Adams sold his ownership shares to Kehr, Caley, and other minor shareholders, who included Ray Tanner, owner of Ski Acres, and Don Christianson, who had managed Mt. Pilchuck and later served as GM at Crystal Mountain. Bruce and his new owners undertook significant expansions with the installation of the Seventh Heaven Chair in 1960, Big Chief Chair in 1964, and Brooks Chair in 1968.

With Big Chief Chair in place, Kehr removed Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 rope tows, but, after a loud cry of despair from many skiers who said they could not afford the \$4 chairlift ticket, he reinstated the No. 1 Tow and operated it another two seasons.

In the early '60s, Stevens hosted pioneering pro races each spring with such notable skiers as Stein Eriksen, Christian Pravda, and Anderl Molterer competing for prizes. Stevens also was the scene of the U.S. regional Olympic Tryouts and Northwest Alpine Championships in March 1963.

In 1967, Kehr brought on Merle Brooks, an experienced Mt. Baker operator, who eventually became general manager at Stevens. Brooks left a legacy at the pass by greatly improving slope grooming, lifts, and skier services. Night skiing was added on the Barrier lift, No. 1 chair, in 1968 and, in the following year, neighboring Brooks Chair was lighted. Night skiing became very popular at Stevens Pass.

### Distractions and new opportunities come along

With annual skier visits consistently topping 150,000, Kehr worked hard to gain approval for a desperately needed new day lodge, but Stevens was put under a construction moratorium by Chelan County and the U.S. Forest Service until a new sewer system was built. With the formation of a Sewer District in 1972, a new treatment plant was finally in place by 1976 thanks to the help of state and federal grants.

Just prior to that, in 1969, Everett skiers Wendell Carlson and

Art Granstrom opened the Yodelin Ski Area 1.7 miles east of the summit. Two Riblet chairlifts were installed and a Bavarian-style lodge constructed. On nearby private land across the highway, cabins were built. But, just two years later, tragedy struck. A massive avalanche destroyed cabins near the east side of the highway and killed four people. Then, more difficulties arose the next year when another damaging avalanche hit. The area became the subject of lawsuits and closed in 1973.

At Stevens, however, expansion continued, with installation of the Daisy lift, Washington's first triple chairlift. And, in 1976, Kehr and Caley purchased what was left of

the defunct Yodelin Ski Area, including one of the two Riblet chairlifts. (The other was purchased by Don Christianson, who, in 1979, installed it in Crystal Mountain's Campbell Basin.) Kehr relocated his Yodelin lift to Stevens, where it was erected in the upper part of the basin leading to the top of Tye Pass. This lift, Tye-Mill, became extremely popular with intermediate skiers.

### Harbor takes over

In December 1976, after 39 years at the helm, Kehr and

Caley sold the area to Harbor Properties, a Seattle firm headed by Stimson Bullitt, an avid skier as well as a civic and business leader.

Following the tradition of expansion and growth, Harbor constructed a second day lodge (Pacific Crest) in 1978. The following year, the hard-working Hogsback triple chair was added to ease growing weekend lift lines. To gain use of the open, advanced terrain of the Mill Valley area, the Double Diamond lift, providing access, and the Southern Cross chair, rising out

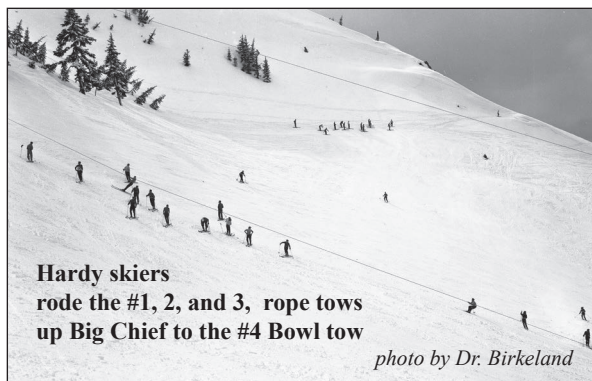
of the valley itself, were added in 1987, which enlarged the skiable terrain by 70 percent, dramatically changing the mix of slope variety at Stevens Pass.

A third day lodge (Tye Creek) was constructed in 1988 to further enhance skier services and add needed office space. In 1989, 23 small huts housing the many area ski schools were replaced by a large Ski School Center building.

In the 1980s, snowboarding took off and the area became a college for snowboarders. Renowned boarders Matt Goodwill and Monty Hayes sharpened their skills at Stevens.

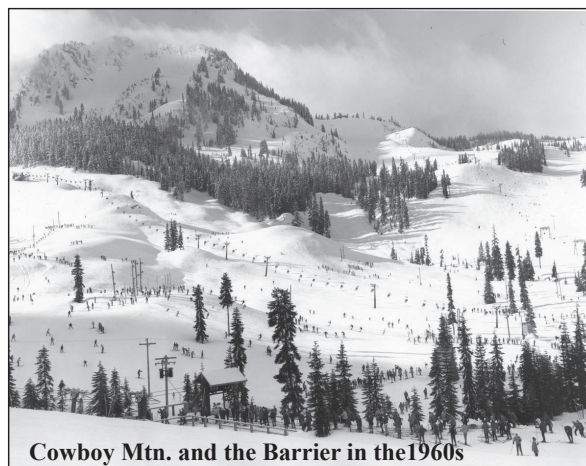
The 1992-93 season saw the opening of the Nordic Center, located five miles east of the main area. Also in the '90s, Harbor expanded its resort ownership footprint by joining forces with avid skier Keith McCaw, who, with his brothers, had built McCaw Cellular and its Cellular One system, which they sold to AT&T in 1994. Keith's McCaw Investment Group already had ownership of Mission Ridge Ski Resort, and the combined

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**Hardy skiers rode the #1, 2, and 3, rope tows up Big Chief to the #4 Bowl tow**

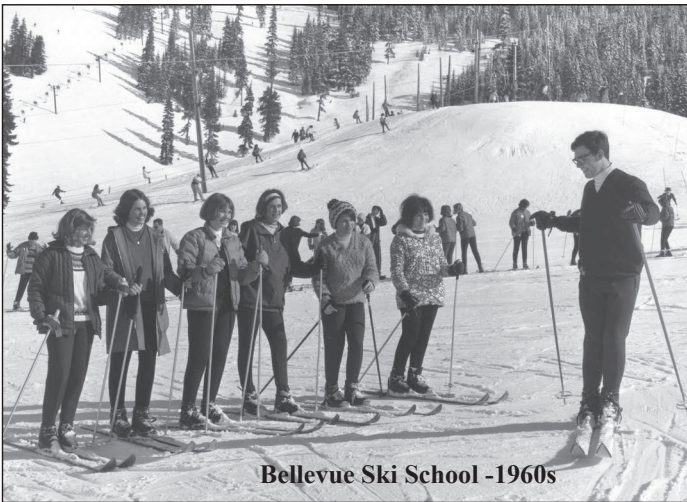
*photo by Dr. Birkeland*



**Cowboy Mtn. and the Barrier in the 1960s**

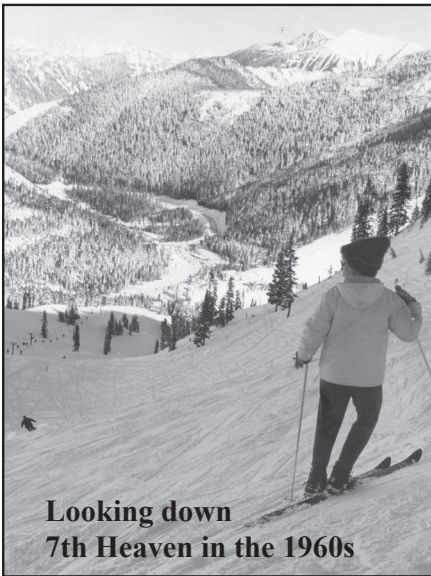
**EARLY HISTORY REVEALED** *Continued from Page 3*

Harbor/McGaw group, under the name Harbor Resorts, went on to purchase Schweitzer Ski Resort in Idaho before the decade was out.



**Bellevue Ski School -1960s**

Back at Stevens, the Skyline Express, the first high-speed quad chair at Stevens, was added in 1996, and, two years later, the Hogsback chairlift was switched out for a high-speed quad.



**Looking down  
7th Heaven in the 1960s**

Then, in 1999, Harbor Resorts embarked on a major base expansion at Stevens, when the old T-bar lodge was torn down and replaced by the \$8.2 million Granite Peaks lodge. Harbor continued to make improvements and enjoy success.

Tragically, in 2002, partner Keith McCaw, at age 49, accidentally died in a hot tub accident. In view of that and because it was primarily a real

estate company, Harbor decided to get out of the ski business and sold Stevens to CNL Properties in November 2011. At that time CNL Properties also owned several other notable resorts such as Crested Butte and Northstar-at-Tahoe.

Even with the recent ownership hopscotch, improvements continued at Stevens. In 2013, CNL installed an all-new high-speed quad to replace the Jupiter fixed grip quad that Harbor had added to Mill Valley on the back side of the area in 1993.

CNL then sold off to Oz Real Estate, and, that, in turn, segued to the current Vail acquisition.

**More changes expected**

The past several decades have brought great change at Stevens, and it is expected that Vail will bring even more change and improvement. The original owners and visionaries of Stevens Pass are gone, but hardy Northwest skiers can expect to continue to enjoy the generally reliable snow cover and the considerable open terrain at Stevens Pass.

*~Kirby Gilbert*

**REMEMBERING**

**Frank Leibly**

Thirty years of ski teaching at Crystal Mountain and 15 years enjoying Sun Valley after retirement suggest the level of Frank Leibly's love for the mountains and skiing. At age 83, Frank passed away May 5 in Reno, where he had been attending a memorial service for a sister.

Born and raised in Seattle with a brother and three sisters, he graduated from Seattle Prep and Seattle University, where he also earned a Master's degree. A U.S. Army commission gained through the ROTC led to two years' active duty in West Germany. Frank's professional career then began in Seattle with The Boeing Company and the University of Washington – followed by a 1974 jump to Olympia, where, for 30 years, he was a finance director for the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

Marriage to his beloved Linda came in 1967, and he is survived by her, a daughter and son, three grandchildren, two sisters, a brother, and many nieces and nephews.

Frank served as Ancient Skiers treasurer for several years and helped with many of the Sun Valley Reunions. He also was a life member of the Seattle Yacht Club.

**Don Raymer**

Ancient Skier Don Raymer passed away July 31 at age 88. Don grew up in Wenatchee and attended both Eastern Washington University and the University of Washington, where he earned a degree in business. He and his wife Victoria raised four children at their beachfront house at Woodmont Beach on Puget Sound and Don started a successful auto parts and machine shop in Des Moines.

After many visits to Sun Valley, he and Vicky moved to Hailey, where they built a home in East Fork. He started Don's Auto Parts in Ketchum (later moved to Bellevue).

After selling the store, he went to work for the Sun Valley Corporation -- first in the River Run maintenance shop, then at the golf course, and, finally, as a lift operator atop Baldy on the "lift to nowhere" (aka "the Lookout triple").

Don was an avid skier but also was known for his love of cutting firewood.

He is survived by four children, eight grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

**PLAN NOW FOR THE JAN. 2019  
SUN VALLEY REUNION**

Another event to mark on your calendar is the 36th annual Sun Valley Reunion, Jan. 19-26, 2019. Enclosed with your mailed newsletter is the Sun Valley room reservation form for booking rooms and providing information on lift package rates. There no longer is a reservation code, but, to secure these room rates, make your reservations with the Sun Valley Reservation Office by Dec. 7, 2018.

**---- Membership Applications & Roster Chair ----**

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