



# The Ancient Skier

Fall 2019

## RAGNAR ULLAND EXTENDED A GREAT KONGSBERG JUMPING TRADITION

The name may not register with all long-time Pacific Northwest alpine skiers, but anyone who has been close to a ski jumping hill is likely to recognize “Ragnar Ulland” and the Kongsberg jumping tradition.

Ragnar, now a Mt. Vernon, Wash., resident, was born into an extended family and community of ski jumpers in Kongsberg, Norway, a silver mining town, 55 miles southwest of Oslo. In the 1930s, Kongsberg was a place where ski jumping was a mainstay activity in winter and a home for jumpers who topped world and Olympic competition from 1928 through 1948. During that period, three of the four Olympic gold and silver medals awarded to winners of the ski jumping events went to Kongsberg athletes. Often, three members of a four-man ski jumping team representing Norway were from Kongsberg.

The guys with the red sweaters and white K’s on their chest were notorious throughout Europe and the United States in the 1930s and ‘40s. A list of the best-known Kongsberg jumpers of the era reads like a who’s-who of champions. They include Birger, Sigmund, and Asbjorn Ruud; Roy and Strand Mikkelsen; Hjalmar Hvam; Petter Hugsted; Arnhold Kongsberg; Nordal Kahldal; Tom Mobraaten; Henry Sodvedt; and Olav, Sigurd, and Reidar Ulland. The latter was Ragnar’s father.

### The Ruuds led the way

The Ruud brothers, the most well-known of the Kongsberg group, dominated international ski jumping for Norway in the 1930s, with Birger winning back-to-back gold medals in ski jumping in the 1932 and 1936 Winter Olympics. The three Ruud brothers won the World Championships five times between them. Sigmund won the silver medal in the 1928 St. Moritz Winter Games and Asbjorn won gold at the 1938 FIS Nordic World Ski Championships and the 1946 Holmenkollen competition.

The Mikkelsen brothers contributed greatly to development of the skisport in North America. Strand won the 1929 U.S. National Championships and younger brother Roy was a member of the 1932 and 1936 U.S. Olympic jumping teams.

Hjalmar Hvam grew up skiing in Kongsberg and came to Portland, Ore., in 1927. Five years later, he won the first U.S.

Nordic combined championship at Lake Tahoe, Calif., by taking first in Class B jumping and the 18-kilometer cross-country race. He won several Northwest alpine and Nordic events in the 1930s and ‘40s and also is widely known for inventing an early alpine ski binding that could release upon impact.

Petter Hugsted won the junior Holmenkollen championship in 1940 and went on to win a gold medal for Norway in the 1948 Winter Olympic Games.

To British Columbia came the trio of Nordal Kaldal, Henry Sodvedt, and Tommy Mobraaten, who left Kongsberg for mining and lumber town jobs in western Canada during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Known as the “three musketeers of ski jumping,” these three Norwegians not only dominated the top placings

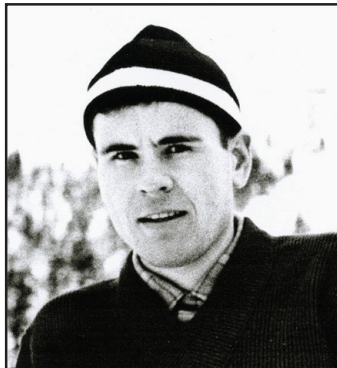
in Northwest ski jumping events, but they also helped organize, teach, and judge skiing competitions throughout British Columbia and other parts of Canada.

In 1932, Kaldahl won more than five Class A jumping tournaments in the Northwest, and, the next year, Mobraaten followed, winning most of the same championship events. Mobraaten represented the Canadian Olympic team in 1936 and 1948, taking a respectable 14th place in the 1936 Olympic jumping competition. Sodvedt was a champion in the combined Nordic events; was active in the Canadian Amateur Ski Association, serving as a vice-president; and became a renowned international ski jumping judge.

### Seven Ulland brothers competed

The Ulland family had seven brothers who grew up jumping in Kongsberg. Sigurd came to the U.S. in 1928 and set hill jumping records at Lake Placid and in the west at Mount Shasta. In 1938, he won the U.S. Ski Jumping Championships in Brattleboro, Vt.

In 1930, Sigurd’s younger brother, Olav, took third in the Holmenkollen junior championships. He moved on to coach in France, where he captured the 1935 French four-way combined championships. In the same year, Olav made jumping history at Ponte di Legno, Italy, where he soared 103.5 meters (339 feet) to become the first ski jumper ever to break the 100-meter barrier. One year after Olav coached the Italian jumping team at the



Ragnar Ulland as a young adult



Ragnar’s superior form

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1936 Olympics at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, the Seattle Ski Club arranged to have him come to Seattle to coach aspiring young ski jumpers.



*Olav Ulland in his Kongsberger sweater*

Deciding to stay in the U.S., Olav won several Class A jumping events in the Pacific Northwest, including the PNSA championships in 1939. Like many jumpers of his time, Olav also was an accomplished alpine skier and he took fifth in the Mount Rainier Silver Skis race of 1938. After years of teaching, he became coach of the 1956 U.S. Olympic ski jumping team, a role he continued for his adopted country through

the 1958 World Championships in Lahti, Finland. In 1960, he was named chief of competition for jumping events at the Squaw Valley Olympic Games. Olav is also widely known for his role in the Osborn & Ulland sporting goods stores, a dominant Seattle area ski business from 1941 through 1995.

Olav's younger brother Reidar had been jumping successfully in Norway, and, with Olav's encouragement, decided to join him in Seattle in 1947. Reidar immediately found himself a top finisher in several of the ski jumping tournaments of that era, and, four years later, his son Ragnar, age 14, came to Seattle to stay.

### **Ragnar continues the legacy**

Ragnar began ski jumping at age five in Kongsberg. Within three years, he started traveling to compete, and, at the time, he was said to have been jumping from 110 to 120 feet in competitions.

His first ski season in the Northwest was highly acclaimed for the 14-year old Ulland prodigy. He consistently placed in the top five in Class B regional jumping tournaments. At the 1952 National Junior Ski Jumping Tournament at Lake Tahoe, Ragnar took third and earned a prize for the most stylish leap of the day, a 127-foot effort.

Ragnar was said to get his amazing distances because he "held his float." He had learned the technique of carrying skis higher on the float, keeping the air pressure under the blades all the way, leaning forward, and then timing his landing to get the last yard, foot, and inch. Indeed, the Kongsberg jumpers, starting with his Uncle Sigurd, had refined a new style of leaning forward, bending at the hips, and keeping the ski tips high on the descent.

During the 1952-53 season, Ragnar notched five first-place finishes, and the next year, at age 16, he began jumping in Class A events -- consistently taking second in tournaments, with one first place title where he beat his legendary Uncle Olav. The National Junior Jumping Championships held in Duluth, Minn., in February 1954 were no exception. He placed second, with longer jumps than the local youth, Jerry Lewis, who still won the event based on the judges' assignment of style points.

In the 1954-55 season, Ragnar participated in a two-week training camp at Steamboat Springs under renowned coach Gordy

Wren. With three jumps over 230 feet, he took seventh in Class A events at Howelsen Hill in Steamboat. One month later, Ragnar won the National Junior Ski Jumping Championships at Leavenworth and tied the hill record with a standing leap of 284 feet. With that win, he was invited with 40 other jumpers to the tryouts for the U.S. Olympic ski jumping team in Iron Mountain, Mich., where he took fourth place, landing him a coveted spot on the U.S. team.

### **Olympic hopes dashed**

Going into the year of the 1956 Winter Olympics to be held in Cortina, Italy, Ragnar was age 18, a senior at Seattle's Roosevelt High School, and, at that time, the youngest member of a U.S. ski jumping team to compete in the Olympics.

Before heading for Europe to compete, the jumping team went to Lake Placid, N.Y., for training. The intensity there was high, as no American since 1924 had placed better than fifth in Olympic ski jumping. Ragnar's Uncle Olav, as coach of the team, knew European judges were tough on the landing and worked with the jumpers on their style.

With the six jumpers pushing hard based on high hopes of achievement, mishaps occurred. During practice jumps, Ragnar

took a terrible spill and badly hurt his lower back. He was one of six U.S. winter athletes hurt in one day in Cortina. While disappointed and recovering from injuries, Ragnar came back to the Pacific Northwest and still managed to compete in the local Kongsberger Ski Club annual event, placing 2nd.

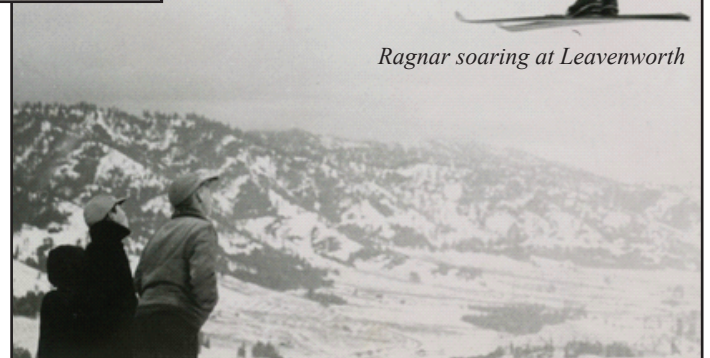
With the 1956-57 season, tryouts loomed to select the next U.S. team to participate in the F.I.S. World Championships scheduled for Lahti, Finland, in 1958. Ragnar, now 19, still was recovering from his injuries, and, while he had



*Sigmund Ruud (left) was celebrated in 1940s advertising*



*Ragnar soaring at Leavenworth*



several top 10 finishes, he finished 17th in the 1957 National Ski Jumping Championships in Berlin, N.H.

In January 1958, he participated at Ishpeming, Mich., in the final tryouts for the 1958 U.S. team. On the famed Suicide Hill, he repeated his 17th place finish from Nationals the year before. That effort, along with his previous record, was enough for him

## JUMPING TRADITION

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to qualify to serve as an alternate for the team going to Lahti in March 1958.

Later in 1958, he rallied and took 3rd in the PNSA Class A championships at Leavenworth, Wash., with a long jump of 283 feet, one foot shy of his previous hill record. Local skisport leader and judge Peter Hostmark was quoted in the community's newspaper saying that "the kid's form was beautiful, better than I've seen him display before. I've never seen such uniformly good jumping in a Northwest meet." Ragnar was said to have mastered the Finnish Torpedo style at this point in his career.

### Ragnar continues to soar

In the Mt. Hood area in March 1958, he soared 224 feet to set a Multorpor Hill jumping record and took first in the Class A Western Open Jumping meet.

At age 21, going into the 1958-59 season, the young Ulland was still in the running for the next U.S. Ski Team looking ahead to the 1960 Winter Olympic Games to be held at Squaw Valley. He had several first and second place finishes at tournaments in the Northwest but, unfortunately, in the National Championships held at Leavenworth, he took 14th. While he did not quite make the cut for the 1960 U.S. Team, Ragnar was able to attend the Olympic Games and serve as a trial jumper to test hill conditions prior to the official competitions.

### Skiing remains an important way of life

Ragnar continued to jump through the 1960s, often securing a top-10 finish, but, by then, he was married and had a young family, so he entered the sporting goods business with Osborn and Ulland on both the wholesale and retail sides. In 1964, he

was named manager of O&U's north Seattle store, and he continued to succeed in the ski business for many years.

### Now retired

Today, still in the Pacific Northwest, Ragnar is retired in Mt. Vernon, where he looks back favorably on his ski jumping days. He makes annual trips to Norway to visit his Kongsberg relatives and friends, to participate in cross-country skiing, and to reminisce about being lucky enough to recall the great era of Kongsberg jumpers. And his existing Multorpor ski hill record of 224 feet still stands.



*Ragnar proudly holds old jumping ski*

*~Kirby Gilbert*

## GET READY . . .

## FOR THE 2020 SUN VALLEY REUNION

Winter is coming and now it is time to mark your calendar for our 37th annual Sun Valley Reunion, set for Jan. 18-25, 2020. We have posted the Sun Valley room reservation form on our website – [www.ancientskiers.com/](http://www.ancientskiers.com/) The form gives information on booking rooms and provides information on lift package rates.

Lift rates for a 5-of-7-day pass on Baldy will be \$315. There no longer is a reservation code, but, to secure our special room rates, make your reservations directly with the Sun Valley Reservation Office.

Our Sun Valley week will start with registration from 3 to 6 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 18, in the Sun Valley Inn Continental Room. You will get your packet with name tags, reunion event schedule, and information about ticket exchange privileges. There also will be a no-host bar for all to enjoy while visiting with other Ancients, and sign-up sheets will be available for the week's various activities.

Highlights will include the Monday Western dinner night, so be sure to bring your Western wear. There will be activities each day and information on the weekday events will provided at the Saturday check-in.

With this newsletter are two forms: "REGISTRATION FORM" and "RETAIN THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS." Fill out the registration form, total the event charges, and send the completed form with your check made out to and mailed to ANCIENT SKIERS, P.O. Box 1295, Sun Valley, ID 83353, post-marked no later than Dec. 6, 2019. Please: no email responses.

Copy the information from the Registration Form onto the Retain This Copy for Your Records form and bring it to the Saturday registration in case any discrepancies arise. You'll also find copies of the forms at the Ancients' website: [www.ancientskiers.com/](http://www.ancientskiers.com/) (Click on "EVENTS" at the top of the screen and then select "Sun Valley trip.")

You will be able to purchase discounted lift tickets at the inside ticket counter at River Run Lodge.

Questions? Call Marlys Gerber at (206) 271-1575.

## SKI AND SNOWBOARD MUSEUM NEWS

The Washington State Ski and Snowboard Museum is celebrating its 4th Anniversary Party on Saturday, Nov. 9, from 1-3 p.m. at the museum on Snoqualmie Pass. The museum is typically open Thursday through Sunday afternoons and has become a fixture at the Pass. Plans are underway for updated exhibits and expanded open hours. The museum is always looking for volunteers. For more information go to <http://www.wsssm.org> or call 425-434-0827.

## SKI HISTORY WEEK

Another great event being held at Sun Valley this season is the US Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame Induction + Snowsport History Celebration. Scheduled for March 25-28, 2020, it will be a joint celebration of the International Ski History Association and the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame. For more information go to: <https://skihall.com/>.

**YOU'RE AN ANCIENT SKIER (WHO REALLY KNOWS SV'S EXHIBITION) IF YOU REMEMBER:**

... Hearing about – or actually seeing -- France's Georgette Thiolière taking Exhibition straight (reportedly adjusting her gloves as she took off).

... Realizing the truth of instructor Andy Hennig's words in his classic 1948 Sun Valley Ski Guide: "Exhibition Run. This is a perfect name for it. Every skier riding the lift can watch and criticize his counterpart below." The veteran Ancient Skier also is aware that, over the years, there may have been almost as many "Wow" exclamations as "Ouch" and "Awful."

... Riding up the Exhibition single chair early on a clear, frigid morning with fresh powder on the run and only one set of ski tracks visible. And wrapped around you to ward off the cold is one of the Valley's well-lined, heavy canvas capes.

... Watching Austrian legend Karl Schranz take Exhibition's few gates with apparent ease during the 1960 Harriman Cup downhill and then hearing he fell and took a DNF on Lower River Run.

... Spotting Ernest Hemingway with a group of his friends enjoying the same race from a choice vantage point well above the Exhibition chairlift lower station.

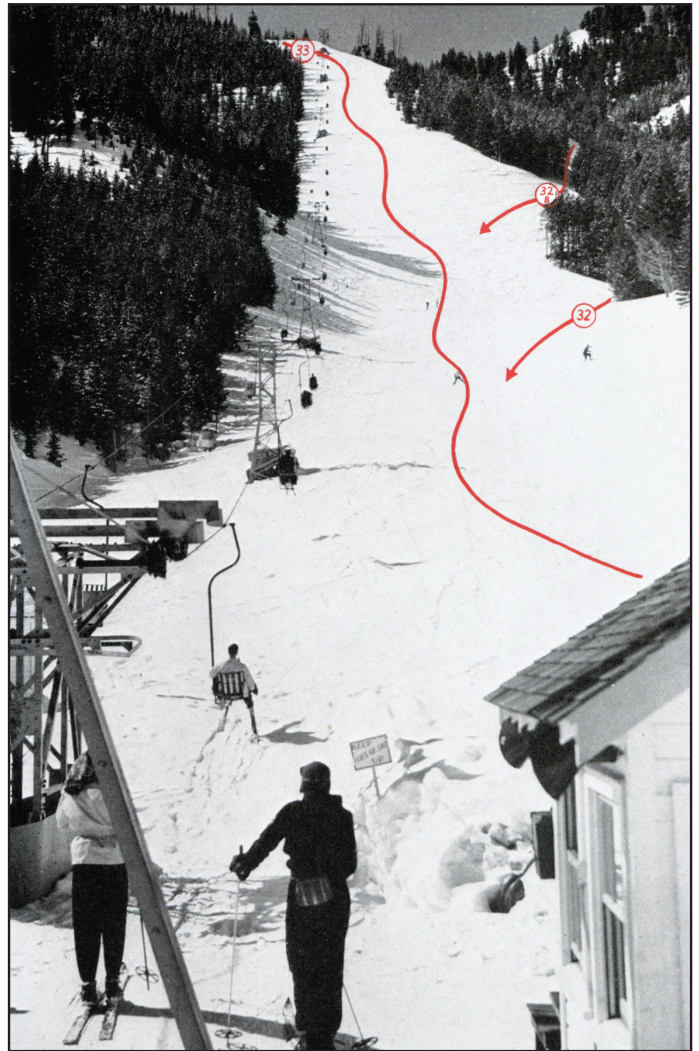
... Stopping for a mid-slope break on Exhibition, turning to see what's going on up the hill, and realizing the top of the last towering mogul you came around looms high above your head, and, mostly, you're just looking at a wall of snow.

... Making your way up the Exhibition chair while Dick Barrymore films a sequence for The Performers with most of the members of the K2 Demonstration Team of Charlie McWilliams, Pat Bauman, John Clendenin, Bob Griswold, and Jim Stelling flying over moguls and through deep, broken-up powder.

... Riding up the newer, enlarged Exhibition chairlift while Bobbie Burns, with poles on high, snakes his way at speed down the fall line.

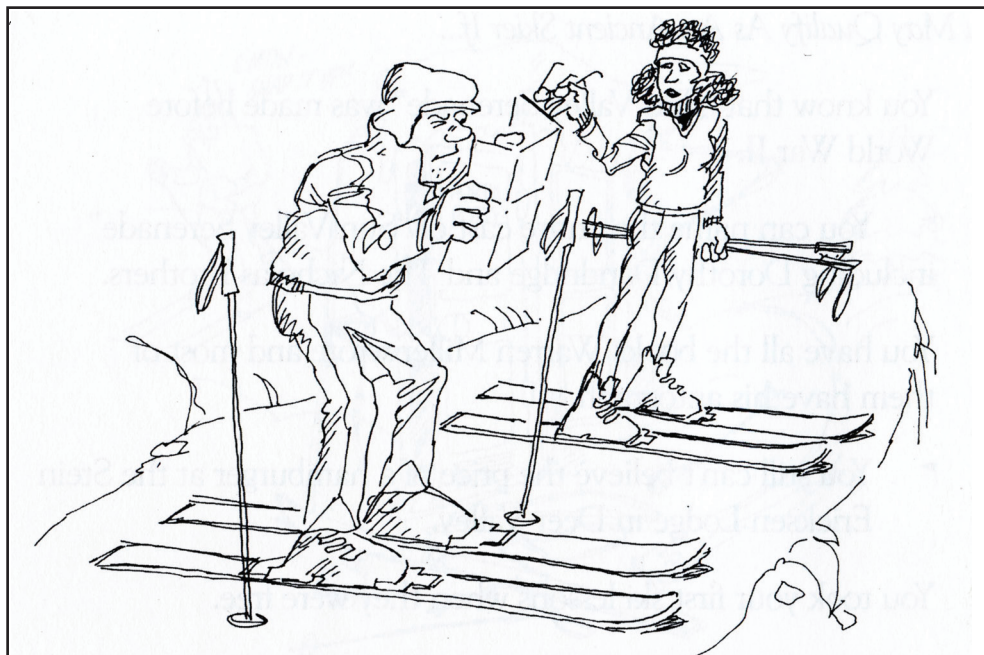
(And realizing that today there's no longer an Exhibition lift of any type. Even so, a string of gondola cabins glides over the crest.)

~Mike Dederer



Exhibition Run — From the Sun Valley Ski Guide, 1948, compiled and written by Andy Hennig of the Sun Valley Ski School staff.

Photo by Sun Valley.



You may qualify as an Ancient Skier if you have to borrow glasses to read the trail maps. ~Bob Cram

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